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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 4 February 2019

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

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

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 654

TWENTY-NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

House of Commons

Monday 4 February 2019

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Post-16 Education: Funding

1. **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on funding priorities for post-16 education in the forthcoming spending review. [908952]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): The Department works closely with Her Majesty's Treasury on the challenges that the further education sector faces. We are currently considering the efficiency and resilience of the sector and assessing how far current funding and regulatory structures enable high-quality provision.

Ruth Cadbury: We know that the Government want to bring in T-levels, but the funding for that is almost immediately offset by the ongoing £3.3 billion real-terms cuts for our colleges and further education. Will the Minister's review include addressing the 38% cut in construction skills training and the 68% cut in engineering courses that have been experienced recently?

Anne Milton: The hon. Lady is right that T-levels will bring in an extra £500 million a year when fully rolled out. I know the Construction Industry Training Board is putting a substantial amount of money into improving skills in that industry.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): We certainly need more money for schools in my constituency, but does the Minister accept that funding for further education colleges has been the worst hit of all the parts of the education system? Will she give my constituents some assurances that there will be more money for Shipley College and Bradford College in the very near future?

Anne Milton: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I know the sector faces significant challenges—indeed, we had a Westminster Hall debate on the issue and I think 53 colleagues from across the House contributed to that. We are putting in £500 million of disadvantage funding and £127 million of discretionary bursary funding. Money has been going in, but I am aware of the fact that although the base rate for 16 to 19-year-olds has been protected, that still leaves the FE sector with challenges.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Staff at Lewisham College had not received a single pay increase for 10 years, despite rising living costs in London. While they were able to secure a pay deal in November, college teaching staff across the country have seen their pay fall 25% in real terms since 2009. When will austerity end for our FE teachers and students?

Anne Milton: I am aware of the issues that the hon. Lady raises. I have to say, I am always disappointed when staff take strike action—however good the cause—because it is young people who suffer. I understand that Capital City College Group has offered a 5% pay rise. Some colleges are able to do that. I am very aware of the challenges that colleges face, but as I say, I think resorting to strike action is disappointing.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I hope to approach the Backbench Business Committee tomorrow to get a debate on funding for education, because so many

colleagues across the House have the same narrative. It is vital that we look at that, especially for pupils with special educational needs. Post-16 and special educational needs are absolutely suffering and we have to look at this in the spending review.

Anne Milton: My hon. Friend was one of those who intervened in the Westminster Hall debate. I am very aware of this issue. I visited a college a couple of weeks ago where 400 students have special educational needs. Colleges do a fantastic job. There has been a focus over the last 15 to 20 years on higher education, and it is great to see Members across the House all campaigning for their local colleges.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): As 16 and 17-year-olds attract 23% less funding than pre-16 students and young people, is it not just time to raise the rate and tackle this problem?

Anne Milton: The Raise the Rate and Love Our Colleges campaigns have been very successful and, to a large extent, led to the number of hon. Members who attended that debate to raise the issue. I will continue to raise this with the Treasury. It has to be said—I have to continue to point this out to hon. Members—that there is over £2 billion available in apprenticeship funding from 2020. It is there now. Currently, colleges are not doing that much of that apprenticeship training. I look forward to seeing them getting more involved in those opportunities.¹

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the Minister outline to the House what support is available, and will be made available, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to remove the barriers to their participation in further education?

Anne Milton: We have a pilot project running in five areas across the country specifically to target young people in disadvantaged areas who might be less willing to take up an apprenticeship, particularly in sectors they would not traditionally look at. We have £500 million of disadvantaged funding in the sector and £127 million of discretionary bursary funding, and there are other projects focusing particularly on apprenticeships to encourage young people who might not have thought of them as an option.

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): It is clear that the Chancellor has dashed FE's hopes massively in his Budget, but the Prime Minister, when told in Prime Minister's questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) last week that FE funding was in crisis, replied complacently that he "could not be more wrong"—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2019; Vol. 653, c. 811.]

MPs debating FE here recently all said otherwise. One Member said

"it is clear that funding for...16 to 19...has fallen"—[*Official Report*, 21 January 2019; Vol. 653, c. 20.]

Another said:

"The bottom line is that the...sector needs more money"—[*Official Report*, 21 January 2019; Vol. 653, c. 23.]

Those are the words of Conservative Members in that debate. Will the Minister get the Education Secretary to

1.[*Official Report*, 12 February 2019, Vol. 654, c. 6MC.]

pledge to tell the Chancellor that increased FE funding in the spending review is his top priority, to keep at it and to not take no for an answer?

Anne Milton: I notice the hon. Gentleman pointing his finger across the Dispatch Box. The Secretary of State is very aware—because I have not ceased to point it out to him—of the challenges that FE colleges face, and I did hear the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) raise this in Prime Minister's questions last week. It is good to hear people across the House talking about further education, because sadly the House collectively, including under the last Labour Government, did not talk about it very much.

T-levels

2. **Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** What recent progress his Department has made on the introduction of T-levels. [908953]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): We are making very good progress. We are working closely with providers to deliver the first three T-levels from 2020 and have launched a £38 million capital fund to support that initial roll-out.

Mr Cunningham: I thank the Minister for that answer. I recently tabled a question and got an answer back saying there had been a 30% cut in adult education, particularly in relation to T-levels, as part of a wider effort to increase the numbers in adult education. What will the Secretary of State do about that, bearing in mind that Hereward College in Coventry, which teaches people with disabilities, and Coventry College badly need funding? Can he give us a positive answer on that?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Gentleman is a great advocate for further education in general, and for his colleges in Coventry in particular, and for the important role that adult education plays in social mobility and improving life chances. On T-levels, we are initially focused on getting the roll-out done, but we will look at adult provision in the future, and of course there was also a big boost in the Budget for the national retraining scheme.

18. [908969] **Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Alongside T-levels, will my right hon. Friend take measures to enforce the Baker clause and to support the embedding of skills and careers in the curriculum for all ages?

Damian Hinds: I will and I have. I was grateful for the opportunity to discuss some of these matters the other day with my right hon. Friend's Select Committee. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills has written to large multi-academy trusts and will be writing to local authorities to remind them of the importance of the so-called Baker clause in making sure that children and young people have information about all the options available to them. I also agree about the importance of embedding careers information deep in the curriculum.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): Only about 10% of 16 to 18-year-olds on a full-time level 3 course are currently studying a technical qualification. The proposed

investment in T-levels will not benefit the vast majority of sixth-form students in schools or colleges. FE and sixth-form funding has fallen by one fifth since 2010. Do not all young people deserve to have FE properly funded, irrespective of the qualifications they choose to study?

Damian Hinds: Yes, clearly further education—and indeed all 16-to-19 provision—has to be properly funded, but I do anticipate that more young people will do T-level qualifications in the future, because they will be very high-quality qualifications, with those extra hours, the maths, the English, the digital content, and that high-quality industry placement.

13. [908964] **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Over the years, I have heard a lot of employers complain that vocational courses do not adequately prepare young people for the workplace. Will the Secretary of State commit to including business in the development of T-levels so that they can provide that service?

Damian Hinds: I will. In fact, about 200 employers have already been involved, in one way or another, in their development. Business is at the heart of this major upgrade to our technical and vocational education, including T-levels.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Obviously T-levels are still a couple of years away, and colleges are expecting funding now. What can the Secretary of State do to assure me that when T-levels do arrive, colleges such as Stoke-on-Trent sixth-form college, which will be delivering them, will not have to use some of that additional money to cross-subsidise underfunded courses in other parts of the colleges? Is not the best way to stop that money being misused simply to raise the rate for everyone else?

Damian Hinds: The money that the Treasury has committed to T-levels is new money to finance more hours for young people studying these subjects. I think that that is incredibly important, but, as the hon. Gentleman says, there are other people studying for other qualifications, in Stoke and elsewhere, and they too must be properly resourced.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, a south-east London knight. Sir David Evennett.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I warmly welcome the introduction of T-levels, but what action has been taken to upskill the teachers and lecturers who will be delivering them? That process is vital to the success of the project.

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We must engage in a number of preparations, such as setting up relationships with businesses for the industrial placements and also, as my right hon. Friend says, relationships with people working in our sector. We created the T-level professional development offer for precisely that purpose.

Further Education: Economic Sustainability

3. **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): What recent representations he has received on the economic sustainability of the further education sector. [908954]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): My officials and I have regular and frequent discussions with representatives of colleges and college sector bodies, among others, about the sustainability of the sector. I get out and about as often as I can to find out precisely what funding problems some colleges are facing.

Toby Perkins: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am sure that the Minister does get out there, and I think we all have a strong sense of the sympathy with which she is attempting to make the case for colleges, but she has a Chancellor and a Prime Minister who seem to be entirely deaf to that case rather than responding to it. What more can Members on both sides of the House who recognise the scale of the financial crisis facing colleges do to ensure that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor start taking the action that is so desperately required?

Anne Milton: I do not think that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are deaf to the case, and, in fact, in the first 15 minutes of this Question Time we have focused largely on the further education sector. I think that Members on both sides of the House are doing well in making the case to ensure that we have a sustainable and resilient FE sector in the future.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): How will the Department assist the businesses that will offer the placements which will be such an essential part of the T-level qualifications?

Anne Milton: We are doing a lot of work in that regard. For instance, we organised a pilot project, run by The Challenge, which highlighted some of the needs of employers. We are working closely with the sector, because it is crucial to the success of T-levels for us to get the industry placements right, and that means building relationships between colleges and those delivering T-levels and local employers.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): A while ago, like many Members, I was lobbied by staff and students in further education who told me that they and their institutions were at breaking point. At 16, the average further education student receives £1,500 less than the average student aged under 16. When will the Government understand that this investment in our communities needs to happen, and it needs to happen now?

Anne Milton: This member of the Government does precisely understand some of the challenges facing the sector. Some of the money that goes into further education does so through a variety of funding streams. For instance, I have not yet mentioned the £330 million that went into the restructuring of colleges, which has brought about substantial financial savings in some colleges undertaking mergers. However, I am very aware—and the Chancellor is very aware, and the Prime Minister is very aware—of the circumstances of FE colleges.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I welcome the doubling of funding for apprenticeships, but what conversations has the Minister had with colleges such as Heart of Worcestershire in Redditch about how they can gain a greater share of such funding?

Anne Milton: I could probably bore for England on the issue of apprenticeships. I talk to every college, and ask every college what it is doing. The National Apprenticeship Service will work with any college that wants to set up new apprenticeship training. It is not always easy for colleges to do that, but plenty of support is available if they want to do it, and plenty of money is available.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): At our last Question Time I raised the case of Greenhead College in Kirklees, which has warned that continued cuts in post-16 education are threatening standards. The Minister said that the Department was

“looking at the resilience of the sector.”—[*Official Report*, 12 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 14.]

Since then, however, it has been revealed that colleges will be landed with a pensions bill of £142 million by the Treasury. When will the Department stop looking at the resilience of the sector and actually provide further funds?

Anne Milton: We are proposing to fund the teacher pension contribution increase for those FE providers obliged to offer the scheme. I am very aware of that, and I have recently been to Kirklees and have seen the fantastic work that goes on up there. We will continue to raise the issue both with the Treasury and within the Department. The resilience review of FE funding will come forward fairly shortly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I think, if memory serves me correctly, and after due consultation, that post 16 the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) was at cadet school. I feel sure that I speak for the House in saying that we are all convinced he was a very athletic fellow. I call Sir Nicholas Soames.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Different days, Mr Speaker, I am afraid. May I thank my right hon. Friend for the incredible work and leadership that she has offered, together with officials in her Department, in the reopening of the sixth-form college in Haywards Heath in my constituency? Will she pay tribute to the work of Mid Sussex District Council, whose leadership in this matter has been absolutely exemplary?

Anne Milton: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, and I am very happy to join him in his tribute. Mid Sussex District Council has shown remarkable leadership, and it just goes to show how much can be achieved when the local authority, colleges and schools in the area—all those with a vested interest, including the county council—get together to find a solution for a problem. I wish them every success.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): The shambolic roll-out of special educational needs and disability reforms has meant that nearly 9,000 learners

who previously would have been eligible for education and healthcare plans have been denied that support. As a result, college principals have warned the Government that support for learners over 19 is now being met from their college budgets. Surely the Minister knows that, after years of budget cuts, that could push many colleges to the brink of collapse. More than funding, learners with SEND need a Government who are genuinely on their side. When will that happen?

Anne Milton: I reject the suggestion that we are not on the side of young people with SEND. It is disappointing that the hon. Lady put it in those terms. I am very aware of the fantastic work that colleges do with young people with SEND. I have said that I visited a college recently where 400 students had SEND, and the results that they achieve are remarkable.

STEM Take-up

4. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to increase the take-up of STEM subjects. [908955]

10. **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to increase the take-up of STEM subjects. [908961]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): The Government are committed to encouraging more young people into STEM education training. We fund a number of programmes to improve teaching standards and participation in those subjects, including the new advanced maths premium and an £84 million programme to improve the teaching of computing.

Luke Graham: Since the SNP would remove Scotland from international maths and science tables such as TIMSS—trends in international mathematics and science study—may I ask my hon. Friend how my constituents can assess STEM education in Scotland to make sure that we are performing in line with the UK and internationally?

Chris Skidmore: As education policy is devolved, issues relating to SAMs in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Government. However, according to the latest OECD programme for international student assessment from 2015, while performance has remained stable in England and Northern Ireland since 2006, there has been a sustained decline in science in schools in Wales, and in maths in schools in Scotland. Since 2012, Scotland has also experienced a significant decline in its science score.

Mary Robinson: Two software engineering apprentices from Cheadle-based Thales, Nadia Johnson and Jessica Wong, created an outreach campaign designed to provide free engineering resources for young people, teachers and parents. It is hugely important to support young people in these areas. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a fantastic example of how degree apprenticeships can not only help apprentices to earn and learn but enable them to develop STEM qualifications for the benefit of the wider community?

Chris Skidmore: I congratulate Thales on the work that it does on outreach campaigns for local schools. I was at Thales in Northern Ireland on Friday, and saw for myself the work that it does to raise ambitions for STEM participation in schools. The engineering community does a fantastic job of passing on its passion for the profession, and I welcome the opportunity to hear a further example of that enthusiasm.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. In calling the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), I wish him a very happy birthday—a mere stripling of 35, I believe. I cannot say that I remember such a time in my life.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. As you can tell, I had a tough paper round. I am very keen for youngsters in my community to take up STEM subjects, but Park Vale Academy is struggling because Carillion went bust a year ago and its school work stopped. A year later, it remains unfinished. This is having a significant impact on the quality of provision for those young people. Different Departments are discussing who should resolve this issue but not agreeing. Could a Minister please step in and get this resolved?

Chris Skidmore: I should also like to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his birthday. I was there not too long ago. Life comes at us fast, but we have to start somewhere. I would be happy to meet him to discuss the problem he has raised. The Government are committed to supporting STEM teaching in schools, and we have seen £7.2 million-worth of funding annually going into our network of 35 maths hubs. We are also determined to improve science teaching with a national network of 46 science learning partnerships, but let us sit down, perhaps with a celebratory cup of tea, and discuss the issue that he has raised.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Having started surgery when there were hardly any women surgeons and having been told that it was not possible for me to be a surgeon, I have been delighted to speak at Ayrshire College at the #ThisAyrshireGirlCan and Girls with Grit events. Has the Minister read the report by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, “Tapping all our Talents”, which is about getting more women into STEM, and if so, has he considered any of its recommendations?

Chris Skidmore: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the importance of increasing female participation in STEM. Since 2010, we have seen about 26% more women entering STEM A-levels in England, and our efforts to increase skills participation include the Stimulating Physics Network, which delivers on a series of innovative gender-balanced interventions. I would be happy to read the report that she mentions and to discuss it with her. We are determined to ensure that we work together with the science community to raise participation in these crucial subjects.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Will my hon. Friend tell us how maths hubs have helped to increase the teaching of mathematics and to enable its better appreciation by students?

Chris Skidmore: The key thing to note about the maths hubs is that we want to spread good practice across the country and increase participation and attainment in post-16 mathematics. In addition to the £7.2 million funding for the 35 maths hubs, we have introduced a £16 million advanced maths support programme and an £83 million advanced maths premium for 16-to-19 providers of up to £600 per additional student. This Government are absolutely determined to increase maths uptake at GCSE and A-level as well as in higher education. It is important for our industrial strategy that we increase maths participation.

Universal Infant Free School Meals Policy

5. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the universal infant free school meals policy since 2014. [908956]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Take-up is a key measure of success for universal infant free school meals, and it has been strong since the introduction of the policy. According to the latest figures, 1.5 million infant pupils—excluding those eligible for benefit-based free school meals—took a lunch on census day. That represents a take-up rate of 86.2%.

Diana Johnson: Some 15 years ago, Hull led the way by pioneering the policy of free healthy school meals to fight poverty and childhood obesity and to improve attainment in the classroom. When the Liberal Democrats came to power in Hull, they scrapped that scheme in 2007, but this was followed by the Labour Government’s pilots and the announcement from the coalition on free school meals for the earliest years. However, given the continuing link between poor nutrition and childhood obesity, is it not disappointing that just-managing families in Hull are seeing a doubling of prices for school meals, all because the austerity funding squeeze on school budgets and councils has not ended in deprived areas?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for that question. Giving free school meals to infants encourages children to start on the right path to nutritious meals. Those who are eligible will go on to claim free school meals, and it is worth noting that the new eligibility criteria and the protections introduced last April mean that we expect more pupils to be entitled to free school meals by 2022, by contrast to the scaremongering that took place in this place and outside when the policy was introduced.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Does the Minister now accept that it was a mistake for his party’s last election manifesto to propose abolishing free school meals? Will he promise that there will be no such proposal ahead of the snap election that looks like it is about to happen and to which his Back Benchers are looking forward so much? Indeed, will he commit to matching Labour’s manifesto commitment to extend universal free school meals to all primary school pupils?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for that question. It is good to see the shadow Front-Bench team intact after the weekend speculation that they were about to split with the leadership. It is worth reminding the House

that we have extended eligibility for free school meals three times while in government, and we continue to be committed to that policy.

Leaving the EU: Tertiary Education

6. Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): What assessment has his Department made of the effect on tertiary education of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908957]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): Leaving the EU with a deal remains the Government's top priority and that has not changed, but as a responsible Government we are preparing for every eventuality. We are considering all aspects of how exiting the EU might affect tertiary education. That includes consideration of participation in EU-funded programmes, future arrangements for migration, and access to student finance support.

Douglas Chapman: The Minister will be aware that, per head of population, Scotland's universities have won more Horizon 2020 funding than any other part of the UK as a whole. It has also outperformed Germany, which has won the biggest overall share of the programme investment. Will the Minister give those successful Scottish institutions a commitment and guarantee that funding for academic research will, at the very least, continue to be maintained at current levels?

Chris Skidmore: On the Government's commitments on Horizon 2020 funding, I point to my recent appearance at the Select Committee on Science and Technology. We have not only issued a Government guarantee but a guarantee extension to ensure that we protect all current programmes throughout their duration and, in fact, beyond 2020. We are working very closely with other programmes, such as the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, which still need to be netted into the guarantee. I absolutely empathise with the hon. Gentleman's point that we must ensure that the science community is protected under all eventualities.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, deal or no deal, we must ensure that we get the right balance of funding for tertiary education, universities and further education? Universities have done very well, but further education has experienced an 8% cut in per learner funding since 2010. That has had an adverse effect on East Kent College Group, which teaches 13,000 learners.

Chris Skidmore: In 2017, the Prime Minister instigated a review of post-18 education, which is being led by Philip Augar. That report will be published shortly, in due course. As my hon. Friend says, it is important that we look at the entirety of the post-18 education world, and above all at the opportunities that need to be available for the student. This is not about pitching HE versus FE, but about ensuring that we create learning pathways so that when students wish to achieve a degree or level 4 or 5, the funding and opportunities are in place for them to succeed.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): This year my son, like very many others, has had the privilege of studying in Europe as part of the Erasmus programme. Last Wednesday, the European Commission gave a guarantee that in the event of a no-deal Brexit, current Erasmus students would be able to complete their studies, "provided that the United Kingdom continues to honour its financial obligations under the EU budget."

Will the Minister confirm that in the event of no deal, his Government will honour their obligation and that our young people currently abroad will be able to complete their studies?

Chris Skidmore: We are in close contact and working with the UK National Agency and the European Commission to ensure that in the event that the UK leaves the EU with no agreement in place, the Government's guarantee on Erasmus will cover the payment of awards to UK applicants for all successful Erasmus+ bids submitted before the end of 2020. Successful bids are those approved directly by the European Commission or by the UK National Agency and ratified by the European Commission. On 29 January, we published on the gov.uk website an updated technical notice stating the current position.

Carol Monaghan: I thank the Minister for that answer. However, Universities UK has expressed serious concerns that, in the case of a no-deal Brexit, the Government will not commit to funding students who plan to study in Europe for the 2019-20 academic year. Unlike the Government, these young people are trying to plan what they are doing next year. Will the Minister confirm, first, whether Universities UK is right to be concerned? Secondly, how can he justify denying our young people such valuable opportunities?

Chris Skidmore: I work closely with Universities UK and with Universities UK International and its director, Vivienne Stern, to allay their concerns. When it comes to the Government's guarantee, all successful bids that have been approved by the European Commission will be guaranteed funding.

When the House comes to vote again on a deal that will protect Erasmus students not only under the withdrawal agreement but under the political declaration, perhaps the hon. Lady could say to Universities UK that she will now vote for a deal that will protect all Erasmus students.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I, too, welcome the fact that half the questions and half the time today have been spent on further education, and I also welcome the new higher education Minister to his place. I believe he is a scholar of Tudor England, which I suspect will serve him well considering how long higher education Ministers last in this Government—it is about the same as Henry VIII's wives.

Will the Minister confirm that figures show there are 36,000 academics from other EU countries working in UK higher education, nearly one in five of the total academic workforce? Given the damage that a disastrous no-deal Brexit would clearly do to the sector, will he promise the House today that he will never be part of a Government who allow that to happen?

Chris Skidmore: I refer to myself as a scholar with a small s, but when it comes to Henry VIII's wives, I hope to see myself as more like Catherine of Aragon, who managed to last, I think, 27 years, rather than one of the later wives.

When it comes to ensuring protection for EU students, we have announced guarantees on student finance for EU nationals irrespective of the EU outcome. We have also provided a reassurance that everyone on a course will continue to be eligible for home fees status and student finance support from Student Finance England for the duration of their course. I believe that, even with a no-deal outcome, the Government have done the responsible and right thing, and I hope the hon. Lady will now do the responsible and right thing and walk through the Lobby with me on 14 February in support of the Prime Minister's deal.

Underperforming Children

7. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to identify children who perform well at primary level but underperform at higher levels of education. [908958]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): The Department, of course, measures the progress that pupils make between the end of primary education and their GCSEs, and those data can help schools to identify where and when to put additional support in place.

Mr Sheerman: This is nothing short of a national scandal and a national disgrace, because we all know where we lose these talented children. We lose them in this transition period, and who do we lose? Poorer children from deprived backgrounds. When will we have a big beast on the Government Benches who will see this as a national disgrace and do something about it?

Damian Hinds: I assume the hon. Gentleman means the transition between years 6 and 7, to which I acknowledge we have not paid enough attention—both before and after 2010. That is one of the reasons why we are looking at this in the Opportunity North East programme, and in other piloting opportunities, but it is not the only thing to look at. I am pleased to be able to say that the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers has shrunk both at key stage 2 and key stage 4, but there is much still to do.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Commiserations for yesterday's football, Mr Speaker; I am sorry.

The recent University of Bristol report shows that 40% of so-called underperforming secondary schools would actually be out of category if the progress 8 measure were more rounded. That is in addition to the Education Policy Institute study that found a very strong correlation between the number of deprived children and a school's Ofsted rating. Given the high-stakes accountability regime in schools, is it not about time we had a much more profound and deeper understanding of what makes a good school, instead of just hammering, time and again, the most challenging schools that are doing a very good job in difficult circumstances?

Damian Hinds: Not at all. The progress 8 measure is materially better than the main measure in place during the last Labour Government, the "five-plus C-plus" measure at GCSE. Progress 8 measures the progress of all children, and it is right that we have high expectations for all children. Progress 8 is a much better measure.

Higher Education: Quality and Choice

11. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase quality and choice in higher education. [908962]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): The Office for Students holds providers to account for delivering well-designed courses that offer successful outcomes for all students. The teaching excellence and student outcomes framework—TEF—is supporting student choice, and we are developing new digital tools to help prospective students make choices based on graduate outcomes data.

James Cartlidge: Does my hon. Friend agree that parents probably now take for granted the fact that we have Ofsted, which makes public and readily available the performance of schools, enabling parents to make choices for their children's futures? Does he agree that we want the OfS to have a similar role, so that we embed the idea of potential students making choices on the basis of clear data and so drive up standards at the higher education level?

Chris Skidmore: Absolutely. I look forward to working with the OfS in future, above all to help deliver the best possible outcomes for students, based on the publication of transparent data. The OfS requires providers to meet high-quality standards, which are assessed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. As I say, we have introduced the TEF to identify and reward institutions that deliver high-quality teaching and positive student outcomes.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): How many universities are currently considered at risk of insolvency? Does the Minister agree that allowing universities to fail would improve neither quality, nor choice? If he does agree with that, will he give us a categorical assurance that that will not happen on his watch?

Chris Skidmore: All universities are autonomous institutions that have the independence to be able to govern their own finances. The OfS is currently going through a process of re-registration of certain institutions, and I hope that all institutions have put in place sound financial measures to continue for the future. If that is not the case, the Government are working with the OfS towards establishing student protection plans, to ensure that all students' education will not be harmed.

School Efficiency Advisers

12. **Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of school efficiency advisers in helping schools manage resources. [908963]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Through a pilot project in 72 schools and trusts, our new team of school resource management advisers have so far identified

more than £35 million of potential savings and revenue generation opportunities. We are continuing to work with these schools to help them realise these savings.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Do any of these pilot areas include rural parts of the country, such as south Shropshire, where my constituency is? We are suffering from declining school rolls as a result of the birth rate, and the school efficiency advisers could be very helpful in aiding schools to cope with that problem.

Nick Gibb: Of course we recognise the importance of rural schools, the role they play in their communities and the challenges they face. That is why the national funding formula includes £25 million specifically to provide support to small schools in sparse areas. Early evidence from the pilot projects shows that school resource management advisers can help schools to review their longer-term budget and curriculum planning approach to help them adjust their costs over the long term if income falls due to declining pupil numbers.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Schools in my constituency say there are simply no more efficiencies to be made—there are no more savings to be made, and there are no more teachers they can sack or make redundant without affecting children's education and care. So what does the Minister have to say to schools in my constituency about the efficiencies they are supposed to make to keep functioning?

Nick Gibb: Since 2017, we have given every local authority more money for every pupil in every school. We are spending record amounts of money on our school system—the figure will be £43.5 billion next year, which is a record for those schools—but we do understand the cost pressures that schools are under, which is why we have this cadre of school resource management advisers, who can help those schools. We also have a series of national buying schemes, whereby we can buy things such as insurance, energy and computers far more efficiently to make savings in the non-staff expenditure that schools have to incur.

Education in Essex: Funding

14. **Priti Patel (Witham) (Con):** What steps he is taking to increase funding for education in Essex. [908965]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): By 2019-20, schools in Essex will receive 3.3% more funding per pupil compared with the level in 2017-18—this is an additional £141 per pupil or £48.7 million in total. In 2019-20, therefore, Essex will receive £855.8 million in school funding—a record amount.

Priti Patel: Notwithstanding the Minister's response on the funding that Essex will receive, the county council is seeking to transfer funds from the schools block to the high-needs block, as there is not enough money for children with special educational needs. My right hon. Friend the Minister knows that any transfer of funds will have a knock-on impact on educational funding throughout Essex, so will he work with me and the county council to address this issue?

Nick Gibb: I am very happy to do so. I know that my right hon. Friend takes a particular interest in special-needs education in her constituency. High-needs funds for Essex were increased to £139.1 million this year, and will rise to £141 million next year, but she is right to point to the increase in pressures on the high-needs budget, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in December an extra £250 million over two years. We will work closely with the Treasury as we prepare for the next spending review to ensure that we secure the best funding settlement possible to address this and other school funding issues.

Mr Speaker: I am very glad to hear it. I should add, in parenthesis, that the county is of course also home to the life-transforming University of Essex, of which I am very fortunate to be chancellor.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): And it is also home to the Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford.

Schools in my constituency in Essex were delighted to see in the NHS long-term plan that the NHS intends to help schools with funding for mental health support. How do my local schools access these funds?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We take young people's mental health very seriously, which is why we recently published the Green Paper on mental health for children and young people. We will fund and place in every school a designated mental health lead, supported by mental health support units, which we are rolling out to trailblazer areas as we speak. That is how my hon. Friend's local schools will be able to access those funds.

Childcare Settings: Financial Viability

15. **Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's policy on funded childcare on the financial viability of childcare settings. [908966]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): We plan to spend £3.5 billion this year to deliver our funded early-years entitlements. We recognise the need to keep our evidence base on costs up to date, and continue to monitor the provider market closely through a range of regular and one-off research projects.

Dr Huq: According to the Sutton Trust, 1,000 children's centres have closed over the past decade. Now, West Twyford children's centre, which is a small centre in an isolated area, cannot continue under the current funding arrangements. That will leave the 295 families it helped last year, 123 of which are among the 30% most deprived families in the country, in the lurch. Will the Minister come with me, along with headteacher Rachel Martin, to see the great work that the centre does—it is not very far from here—and can we thrash out a way forward from this unsatisfactory situation? The area has had local government cuts of 64%. We need to spare these vital centres the axe.

Nadhim Zahawi: I will happily meet the hon. Lady, and even join her, if my diary permits, to have a look at that work. I have seen many local authorities throughout

the country deliver outreach programmes to the most disadvantaged families, who actually do not necessarily tend to come into bricks-and-mortar buildings. There are models that deliver a better outcome for those families than just investing in bricks and mortar.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Two of my childcare providers have closed, citing the requirement to pay business rates as the final nail for them. In Scotland and Wales, private childcare providers are not charged business rates. Will the Minister look to see what can be done, because it surely cannot be right that we tax space which is beautiful for young people to grow and be nurtured in?

Nadhim Zahawi: To my knowledge, two local authorities have done the same thing in England, and I urge other local authorities to look into what they can do to help childcare providers to cope with business rates.¹

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab/Co-op): Since 2010, the number of state nurseries in deficit has soared. One in five is now in the red and dozens have had to close. Transitional funding will soon run out and they face serious uncertainty about their future. Last week, I visited Harewood nursery, a much-loved maintained nursery in Pontefract. I was deeply troubled when the headteacher told me that without a cash injection the nursery faces imminent closure. Parents are running a GoFundMe page to keep the doors open. Will the Minister give us an assurance today that maintained nurseries will get funding, at least to tide them over until the spending review, before the end of the current financial year?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady will know that we had a very good debate on that matter last Thursday, when 13 hon. and right hon. Members spoke from the Back Benches about the provision of maintained nurseries. We are considering how best to handle the transitional arrangements for a number of areas, including for maintained nurseries. My message again is that it would be premature of local authorities to make decisions on maintained nurseries before the spending review, but we are considering transitional arrangements.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Question 17, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman would shoehorn his inquiry into question 15, because he cannot leapfrog question 16, which would displace it. I thought that if he applied his little grey cells he would realise that the subject matter of his own inquiry was pertinent to that of question 15. I should have thought that a scholar of his repute was capable of making that mental calculation, but if he wants to wait, he will have to take his chances. *[Interruption.]* Oh, very well.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): And it's his birthday.

Mr Speaker: I do not know whether it is his birthday, but he has made a bit of a mess of the matter. Never mind, we will seek to accommodate him at a later stage in our proceedings.

Multi-academy Trusts: Governance

16. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the governance of multi-academy trusts. [908967]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Our expectations of effective governance in multi-academy trusts are set out in the governance handbook, and they include the skills, knowledge and behaviour that boards need to demonstrate to be effective. We are supporting trustee effectiveness by allocating a higher level of funding to train multi-academy trust boards and by having regular governance conversations with multi-academy trusts.

Daniel Zeichner: In Cambridgeshire, as elsewhere, the world of multi-academy trusts is opaque and wholly unaccountable with schools looking over their shoulder to see whether they are the next to be picked off. These trusts receive large sums of public money, but are effectively self-perpetuating oligarchies. When will the Secretary of State do the right thing and pass back control to the people who pay for them—the local citizens?

Nick Gibb: These multi-academy trusts are driving up academic standards. In primary schools, disadvantaged pupils in MATs make significantly more progress in writing and maths than the average for disadvantaged students, and the gap in progress between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged primary school pupils is smaller in MATs than the national average. I could go on with more examples of how MATs are raising standards in our country. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the MAT performance table and he will see which MATs are the highest performers.

Mr Speaker: I hope the House now keenly anticipates Mr George Freeman.

Disadvantaged Children: Attainment Gap

17. **George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): What progress he has made in closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged children. [908968]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): I am pleased to say that the attainment gap is down by 13% and 9% respectively at ages 11 and 16. This year, almost £30 million in pupil premium is allocated to schools in Norfolk, and schools, of course, have the work of the Education Endowment Foundation on which to draw.

George Freeman: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. Chapel Green School in Norfolk is one of the country's finest institutions for the teaching of those with the most severe educational needs. I am grateful that I can put on record the thanks of the school and all its governors for the major funding from the Government to move from its cramped facilities to its state-of-the-art facilities. The school has reported that one problem is that, because of a lack of skilled staff in the mainstream sector, it is massively oversubscribed. I invite the Secretary of State and our former Minister, Mr Timpson, who I know are working on this, to come to Norfolk, meet the team and discuss that wider problem.

1. *[Official Report, 21 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 9MC.]*

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend has touched on a really important and wide-ranging issue. First, I am grateful to him for mentioning Chapel Green School and the excellent work that it does, and also our investment in its new facilities, but he is also right that, in thinking about high needs and special needs, we also need to think about how teachers and others in mainstream schools are equipped. That is one reason we are looking at what happens in initial teacher training and with the specialist qualification, and also the key role of educational psychologists in that regard.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Figures released last week show that only 15% of school leavers in the Furness area go on to higher education. That is the lowest in the country. Will the Secretary of State or the Universities Minister meet me to see how we can address that gap? We are really proud of our apprenticeship scheme, but a generation of talent is being lost to the country because of this.

Damian Hinds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question and he is absolutely right that we all need a blend in our local areas—apprenticeships, further education and higher education. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) or I would be delighted to meet him. I will just mention, though, that universities these days have very large sums of money available for access and participation plans, and they should be reaching out into all communities, including in Furness, to make sure that all children have the opportunity to make the most of those if they can.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We will accommodate the hon. Lady in topical questions if we can.

Topical Questions

T1. [908977] **Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): Last week, we launched the Department for Education's integrated recruitment and retention strategy for teachers to attract and keep even more inspirational people in this most vital of careers. We continue to make progress on the major upgrade of technical and vocational education, including through higher-quality apprenticeships and T-levels. This week is Children's Mental Health Week, and I am pleased to be able to announce the start of a major trial to look at ways to improve support for young people's mental wellbeing. The trial—part of our integrated and wide-ranging approach on mental health—will take place in up to 370 schools across England and will be one of the largest such trials in the world.

Sir Nicholas Soames: I thank my right hon. Friend for that comprehensive answer. I have already spoken to the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), about the excellent St Wilfrid's Catholic Primary School in Burgess Hill in my constituency, which I visited recently. The school has an outstanding reputation for supporting pupils with special educational needs.

It takes in more children with SEN than it is properly funded for and thus finds itself with a budget shortfall through no fault of its own, other than the desire to do good. What further help can my right hon. Friend give to that school, given its outstanding work in this vital field?

Damian Hinds: I pay tribute to the school for its work and I would be happy to meet my right hon. Friend to discuss the matter further. There was some extra funding for high needs in the package of measures that we put forward in December; I also committed to looking at some of the wider issues, including the way funding works structurally, to ensure that the resourcing for those needs is fairly spread among schools. I will also address some of the training and development issues that I mentioned in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman).

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree with today's call from the Children's Commissioner for new powers to deal with the alarming number of pupils falling off schools rolls? May I politely suggest to him that he implement Labour's proposal to ensure that schools are accountable for the results of pupils who leave their rolls until they find a new permanent place?

Damian Hinds: There are a number of interrelated issues in the subject that the hon. Lady has rightly raised and that the Children's Commissioner was talking about today. I am, of course, concerned whenever there is off-rolling, which is not legal. These things must be done properly. I am also concerned about the extent to which we may not know how some children are being educated, and so on. That being said, there are children who are being home educated brilliantly by amazingly dedicated parents, and we have to acknowledge and respect that. As the hon. Lady will know, a review of exclusions is under way. We will report back on that in due course, as well as on some of the wider issues.

T5. [908981] **Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): My constituency is seeing a significant and sustained improvement in key stage 2 results. Will the Minister join me in thanking the hard-working teaching staff who are responsible for this, and will he say what more we can do to ensure that all the schools in my constituency are performing well above the national average?

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I am delighted to warmly congratulate the teachers in my hon. Friend's constituency of Nuneaton on the significant improvement in key stage 2 results. Of course, we need to do more to raise standards further, which is why we are investing £76 million to raise the standard of maths education through the 35 maths hubs referred to earlier by my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation. We are also spending £26 million on developing 32 schools across England into English hubs, which will take a leading role in supporting schools to improve their teaching of early language and reading.

T2. [908978] **Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): During a Westminster Hall debate on social mobility last month, the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), boasted

of the Government's early-years pilots. He even visited the local pilot in Wigan. However, Leigh—part of the Wigan borough—has recently been ranked 533rd out of 533 for early-years provision in the country. When will the Minister and this Government wake up? Their sticking-plaster schemes are not working. If we want to improve social mobility, we first have to address child poverty.

Damian Hinds: The hon. Lady is absolutely right about the central importance of the early years when it comes to social mobility. We know that the gaps between the rich and the poor develop very early on, which is one reason this Government are spending more than any previous Government on early-years education and childcare. There are 154,000 two-year-olds benefiting from early-years education in a programme that was never available to any child before 2010. But we can do more. I want to ensure that we integrate our approach with helping to support parents in what happens at home because, particularly in the very early years, what happens at home is crucial to what happens later at school.

T7. [908983] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): The Secretary of State has said many times that school funding is increasing, but what reassurance can he give to the teachers and parents of Squirrels Heath Infant School in Romford, who have told me only today that, among many other schools in the London Borough of Havering, they are having to take drastic measures just to stay afloat? Will he meet me to try to resolve this?

Damian Hinds: First, I thank the staff at Squirrels Heath for what they do. I totally acknowledge the pressures there are on school budgets and I know that it is difficult managing these budgets. It is also true that, compared with other countries in the world, we spend relatively high amounts on state education at both primary and secondary levels. However, I will of course be very happy to meet my hon. Friend.

T3. [908979] **Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Because of their religious character, Catholic sixth-form colleges such as the nationally renowned St Dominic's in my constituency cannot, even if they wanted to, take advantage of the financial inducements available that converting to an academy might offer. What steps, then, will the Secretary of State take to end the double discrimination against Catholic sixth-form colleges and allow them access to the extra financial resources that academies get?

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): I visited St Dominic's only last week, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, and was astounded at the brilliant work it is doing. I am very aware of the problem facing Catholic sixth-form colleges, as is the Secretary of State, and we are considering it.

T9. [908985] **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Eythorne Elvington Community Primary School in my constituency, where 100% of pupils met the expected standard of reading, writing and maths—up 23% on last year? Does that not show how school standards are rising?

Nick Gibb: I would of course be delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the teachers and pupils at Eythorne Elvington Community Primary School on their exceptional performance in last summer's standard assessment tests. Ensuring that 100% of its pupils are reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths will help those pupils to be ready for the demands of secondary school. In addition, 56% of pupils at Eythorne Elvington qualified for free school meals at some point in the past six years, showing that high expectations and great teaching can deliver high standards for all pupils, regardless of background.

T4. [908980] **John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): The Construction Industry Training Board has revealed its intention to sell off sections of Scotland's national construction colleges. Will the Secretary of State outline what impact this decision will have on apprenticeships?

Anne Milton: It is absolutely critical that we get the construction workforce we need. We are very aware of that. The Construction Industry Training Board, now with a new chief executive and chairman, is doing great work in this sector. It is absolutely critical that we use apprenticeships to encourage young people to go into construction—not just at levels 2 and 3, but also progressing upwards.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Schools in Cheshire are still underfunded compared with more urban counterparts, especially in London. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me and a number of Conservative councillors from Cheshire East Council, and Cheshire West and Chester Council, to discuss how we can fix this historical inequality?

Damian Hinds: There are differences between Cheshire and London, including in the composition of the population. For example, the proportion of children on free school meals is materially higher in London than in Cheshire, and there are some cost considerations, but I will of course, as ever, be more than happy to meet my hon. Friend.

T6. [908982] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): This morning, Chief Superintendent Ade Adelekan of the Metropolitan police's violent crime taskforce described the factors common to many young people involved in knife crime and gangs, the foremost of which is exclusion from school. What action is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that academy schools, which are accountable not to local authorities but directly to him, stop illegitimately off-rolling pupils to boost those schools' exam results, to the ultimate cost of vulnerable young people and our communities?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Off-rolling of pupils is illegal. Edward Timpson's review is in progress and will report very soon. Exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education. Our priority in the Department is to make sure that AP—alternative provision—works for those children who cannot go to mainstream school.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Halesowen College in my constituency recently held an apprenticeship awards evening to celebrate apprenticeships in the Black Country. With projects such as High Speed 2 and the extension of the metro coming down the line in

the west midlands, does the Minister agree that we need to redouble our efforts to get young people into apprenticeships, to take advantage of those opportunities?

Anne Milton: May I take this opportunity to wish my hon. Friend a very happy birthday? New industry-designed standards, increasing off-the-job training, rigorous end-point assessments and strengthening the register of apprenticeship training providers all mean that doing an apprenticeship these days gives young people the opportunity to get high-quality qualifications, with a great life and a fabulous career ahead of them.

Mr Speaker: On the matter of birthdays, it is also the birthday of the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), and I see that he is seated next to another birthday boy, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), which is very encouraging—birthday boys sitting together.

T10. [908986] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): In response to my recent Adjournment debate on the relationship between exclusions and youth violence, the Minister for School Standards failed to address how the Government's strategy links to the vital role that education plays in the public health approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) just asked a similar question, which was also not answered. I have since sent the Minister a copy of the Youth Violence Commission's report. Has he read it, and if so, can he update us on what he will do?

Nadhim Zahawi: My right hon. Friend has read the report, and there is cross-Government work through the serious violence taskforce. As I said, exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education. It is vital that pupils who enter alternative provision following an exclusion have a high-quality education, which is why we are reforming AP.

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Yate Academy on its outstanding progress on its Progress 8 scores, which are now at 0.69—its best ever result? Will he meet me and a delegation of headteachers from south Gloucestershire to talk about how we can continue to drive up educational standards across our area?

Nick Gibb: I certainly want to congratulate Yate Academy on the improvements it has made in the progress of pupils at both primary and secondary phases, and particularly its significant improvement in the proportion of pupils taking the EBacc combination of core academic subjects. We are committed to ensuring that support is available for schools that require it, and teaching schools are strong schools that work with others to provide high-quality training and development for teachers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Taking into account the immense pressure that staff are under, torn between a desire to enhance their children's education through after-school clubs and their obligation to the unions, will the Minister outline what steps the Department is taking to strengthen the teaching profession?

Nick Gibb: On 28 January, we launched the teacher recruitment and retention strategy, which was designed collaboratively with the education sector. Its centrepiece

is the early career framework, which will underpin a fully funded two-year package of structured support for all teachers in the first two years of their career. We are also building a career structure for teachers who have more experience. It is a very good package, designed to increase retention and help with recruitment.

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): Will the Secretary of State look again at school funding in rural areas, particularly Cheshire, and push for further funding at the spending review? Will he commit to come to Tatton, to meet some of my headteachers?

Damian Hinds: I am conscious of the issues around rural and smaller schools. We have made adjustments for that in the national funding formula, but I am happy to visit Tatton and meet some headteachers.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Over 50% of York children from disadvantaged backgrounds are not school-ready by the age of five, and only 46% of those qualifying for free school meals are ready by the end of year 1. York has the highest attainment gap in the country. We also receive the worst funding for our schools. What correlation does the Secretary of State draw between the two, and will he meet me to discuss how we can improve the chances of children in York?

Damian Hinds: I am taking a lot of meetings today, but I will take one more, because if the hon. Lady has some good ideas, I am happy to hear them. She is right to identify the issues around school readiness, and this is at a time when there is more early-years nursery provision than ever before. We need to work harder on this, and I would be delighted to hear from her.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I know the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills is aware of concerns in Mansfield about the future of West Nottinghamshire College. Despite its strong record historically, it now finds it has overreached financially and made capital investments that were not sustainable. Will she assure my constituents that we have seen good changes in the management and new governance there, that the core purpose of the college in delivering local provision is secure and that we will see accountability for the problems that have happened?

Anne Milton: I know that my hon. Friend has campaigned very hard for West Notts College, and the Skills Funding Agency and the Further Education Commissioner's office are working very closely with it. What matters now is that West Notts College has the opportunity to do well what it should do, which is offer excellent further education to local people.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): The excellent school food plan recommended in 2013 that Ofsted inspectors should consider the way a school promotes healthy lifestyles. We have had two childhood obesity reports that talk about Ofsted evaluating how schools support children to keep themselves healthy, yet there is no mention of that in the Ofsted inspection framework. Will the Minister commit today to implementing an Ofsted-led healthy rating scheme as soon as possible?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are working with Public Health England to update school food standards. This will focus on reducing sugar consumption and include guidance to caterers and schools. We are testing delivery models

as we continue to explore the most effective way to deliver the healthy schools rating scheme, building on the successful resources that are already available.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders

3.41 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary if he will make a statement on knife crime prevention orders.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed further on this matter, let me say this. I warmly welcome the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, and I am sure I speak for colleagues in saying that we look forward to her characteristic competence and commitment at the Dispatch Box. That said, let it be crystal clear that the Secretary of State for the Home Department should be in this Chamber answering this urgent question.

I know the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), and I have known him since he entered this House in 2010. For what it is worth, I am sure he is a very clever fellow, and on a one-to-one basis I have always found him unfailingly courteous. However, for him to fail to be in the Chamber on Thursday to make a statement about his new anti-knife crime initiative was at best ill judged and at worst rank discourteous to the House of Commons. If the right hon. Gentleman was able to find time to brief or to ensure that others briefed the newspapers on his behalf, and he managed to scuttle off to do a radio interview and then to pop up on “The Andrew Marr Show” yesterday to give viewers and the nation the benefit of his views, the right hon. Gentleman should have been here.

If the Secretary of State for the Home Department aspires to something a little more elevated than to be a jobbing functionary of the Executive branch and wants to be a serious and respected parliamentarian, he has to develop antennae and respect for the rights of the House of Commons. In the circumstances—and he has had notice that he should be here—it is both ill judged and rude of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to send his, admittedly brilliant, junior Minister into the Chamber when he should be here. I am sorry; I take no view on the policy because that is not for the Speaker to do, but in procedural terms it really is time that he upped his game.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Mr Speaker, if I may, I will address that point before we move on to the very important issue at hand. I know that the Home Secretary means absolutely no discourtesy—he is a regular and assiduous Minister. I hope that I will be able to answer questions today in a way that meets with the House’s approval. Please do not think that this in any way undermines our commitment to this important topic. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will hear what you have said, Mr Speaker.

Knife crime is devastating for victims, families and our communities. The Government are determined to do all they can to tackle it, along with our partners across civil society, including local government and those in education, health, policing and the charitable sector. We have a comprehensive programme of action set out in the serious violence strategy to tackle knife crime and prevent young people from being drawn into crime and violence. This public health approach includes support for prevention projects through the early

intervention youth fund and the anti-knife crime community fund, support for police weeks of action under Operation Sceptre, and our ongoing media campaign #knifefree to encourage young people to understand that there are alternatives to carrying knives.

We will also be building on longer-term intervention work, with the new £200 million youth endowment fund, and consulting on a new legal duty to underpin multi-agency work to tackle serious violence. However, it is also vital that the police have the powers they need. That is why we listened when the police—those on the frontline in confronting knife-carrying young people—told us that they required additional powers of intervention to deal more effectively with people being drawn into knife crime, and we have acted.

The police asked us to introduce knife crime prevention orders to reach young people before they are convicted of an offence. These orders are aimed at young people who are at risk of engaging in knife crime, at people the police call “habitual knife carriers” of any age, and at those who have been convicted of a violent offence involving knives. The orders will enable the courts to place restrictions on people, such as curfews and geographical restrictions, as well as requirements such as engaging in positive interventions. The intention is that the new orders will be preventive and will support those subject to them in staying away from crime.

We have therefore tabled amendments to the Offensive Weapons Bill, which is currently before the other place. The amendments were tabled last Tuesday, and in line with parliamentary convention, a letter was sent to all noble peers who spoke at Second Reading, as well as to the Chairs of the Home Affairs Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Delegated Powers Committee, and to shadow Ministers from Her Majesty’s Opposition and the Scottish National party. A copy of the letter was placed in the Lords Library, and a copy is being placed in the Commons Library.

The amendments to the Offensive Weapons Bill, which introduce these orders, are due to be considered in the other place in detail this Wednesday. The Bill will, of course, return to this House after it has completed its passage through the Lords, and I hope all Members on both sides of the House will lend their full support to this important new preventive measure when the Bill returns to this place.

Vernon Coaker: I appreciate the Minister being here, but this is a matter of national significance, which has been raised in this House by Members on both sides. The Home Secretary has one of the most important positions in Government; he is looked to by the public of this country to be a lead in tackling these issues—not just in London, but right across the country. Time and time again in this Chamber, I and others have asked where the Home Secretary is. I tell the Minister this: the British public will look at this, and they will find it incredible—absolutely incredible—that the Home Secretary can appear on the television and go to various places to address meetings, but that he cannot turn up in this Chamber to explain an initiative that he has put forward. The public of this country will be asking the simple question: where is he? I said on Thursday that he was invisible; he is not just invisible—he has vanished from this Chamber. It is not good enough, and something needs to be done.

According to the police, 10,000 children are involved in county lines. Knife crime offences across the country are at record levels. Homicides are at record levels. Children are being slaughtered on the streets and these orders are what the Government come forward with. It is simply not good enough.

Why is it necessary to have knife crime prevention orders when it is already a criminal offence to have a knife in public without good reason? The Minister talked about “habitually” carrying a knife. For goodness’ sake, it is not habitual. Something needs to be done! Instead of introducing new laws, why does not the Minister, with others, support the police to enforce existing laws? Why have we seen a reduction in police numbers, when her own evidence tells her that they make a difference in tackling this issue? Is it not the case that knife crime prevention orders merely paper over the cracks? Of course we want to prevent young people from becoming involved, but where are the youth services? Where are the street workers? Where are the people out there working with young people who have been excluded from school to prevent them from getting into trouble in the first place?

How will knife crime prevention orders tackle the huge crisis facing our country? Instead of introducing the orders, the Home Secretary should be chairing Cobra. This is a national emergency. This is a national crisis. Up and down the country people will wonder why the Government are not using the full force of the state to tackle it. They need to help the young people who are having problems with knife crime and tackle the criminal gangs who ruthlessly exploit them.

MI5, GCHQ, MI6 and the National Crime Agency, led by the Home Secretary, should be reporting regularly to Parliament. Anybody would of course welcome serious crime prevention orders if they helped, but the British public and Members will all want to know, from the Minister and from the Government, why the state will not respond with ruthlessness and determination to take on the criminal activity that is putting so many of our young people in danger and ruining the lives of countless people in communities across the country. If there was a terrorist act, the state, quite rightly, would respond. I tell the Minister this: this is a national emergency. The lives of countless families and young people are being ruined. We need to step up to the mark. The British public demand no less of all of us.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his impassioned question. He will know, from the discussions we have constantly on this topic, that the Home Office is a team. Colleagues will have noticed the Policing Minister sitting next to me. This is a team effort, not just in the Home Office but across Government and across civil society.

We are introducing the orders because at the very end of August last year the police asked us for a preventive order to get to a very small cohort of children, who have not yet been convicted of criminal offences but on whom the police have received intelligence, in an effort to intervene before they get a first conviction, with all the terrible repercussions that can have both for the victims of any crimes they commit but also for their own life chances. These orders are about prevention. We want to give the police the power, through the Bill, to seek an order from a court, on a civil standard of proof,

so that the state can wrap its arms around children if schools and local police officers think they are at risk of carrying knives frequently. The orders mirror similar prevention orders we have, such as sexual harm prevention orders, by placing negative and positive requirements on children who do not necessarily have a criminal conviction, to try to drag them away from the gangs that the hon. Gentleman rightly identifies as being central to this criminality.

Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) invited me to his constituency. I heard from a group of people who are on the frontline tackling these crimes how young vulnerable children are being targeted by criminal gangs. This is why we have the serious violence strategy. This is why we have the cross-party serious violence taskforce. This is why we have the serious organised crime strategy. We want to tackle not just the exploitation of children, but the criminals behind it. We can agree on one thing, which is that we all want this to stop. We will achieve that by working together and by intervening early.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and the Home Secretary on what they are doing to tackle this very difficult problem. There are no easy answers, but I remind her that 11 years ago, the Met instituted Operation Blunt 2, which, in the course of about 18 months, took 11,000 knives off the streets of London and was one of the factors that led to serious and sustained falls in knife crime and indeed, in the murder rate. Does my hon. Friend agree that the biggest supporters of stop and search are the families who might otherwise face a lifetime of pain, and does she not agree that the present Mayor of London is therefore grotesquely pessimistic in saying that this will take 10 years to resolve?

Mr Speaker: I think the right hon. Gentleman is telling us that he was doing jolly well.

Victoria Atkins: I am bound to say that I agree with my right hon. Friend, if he is congratulating himself. I thank him for his contribution and of course recognise the work that he did as Mayor of London. I sit here alongside the Policing Minister, who is also the Minister for London, and the joined-up work between the Government and the Mayor of London’s office is critical in tackling this. Stop and search is a vital tool in the police’s armoury, but it is not the only answer. That is why our approach on early intervention—including the Home Secretary securing £200 million from the Chancellor recently to set up the long-term youth endowment fund—will, I hope, absolutely give the results that the House expects. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is absolutely right: there is no room for complacency, which is why, in addition to these very long-term projects, we also have much shorter-term, immediate projects such as knife crime prevention orders, which will have a very real effect very quickly on the streets of our cities and rural areas.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that with knife crime at record levels, the public at home will be very disappointed that the Home Secretary could not find the time to be in the Chamber today for this urgent question? Opposition

[Ms Diane Abbott]

Members appreciate that knife crime prevention orders are an attempt to intervene without criminalising, but does the Minister accept that the problems of knife crime and other types of violent crime are as much about capacity as the law? When we say “capacity”, it is a question of not only the number of police officers, which has dropped under this Government, but the capacity in the youth service. I was in Wolverhampton last week, where the youth service has been decimated. People said to me over and over again that they report those they believe to be drug dealers and what they believe to be young people carrying knives, and they get no response because of a lack of police capacity.

Does the Minister accept that although the announcement of knife crime prevention orders was preceded by the Home Secretary’s declaration in October last year that the Government are adopting a public health approach to violent crime, it is simply not clear how knife crime prevention orders fit into that? How is this a public health approach that is supposed to address the underlying causes as well as tackling criminals? We are told that suspects as young as 12 will be on curfew and deprived of their liberty and access to social media. These are only suspects. Are any of these measures based on evidence? If so, what is that evidence? Will the new orders be subject to appeal or review? In addition, what measures are in place to ensure that those deprived of internet access do not simply open up another account using different personal details?

The head of the violent crime taskforce said

“we cannot enforce our way out of this—prevention and intervention is the key”.

We do not reject out of hand these knife crime orders. The House will study them when they come to Committee, but we want to see more from Government than token changes in the law. We want to see real intent and real resources behind prevention and intervention, because the lives of young people in our cities depend on that.

Victoria Atkins: I am pleased the right hon. Lady appears to support these orders. The Mayor of London also supports them. This is what I mean when I talk about a cross-party consensus. People out there, including the bereaved families I meet, such as the Goupall family, whom I met last week, are not interested in the back and forth over the Dispatch Box; they want us to work together to stop this happening, and so I welcome her support for the orders.

As I am sure the right hon. Lady knows, having read our serious violence strategy, we have set out the factors that we believe underpin the rise in serious violence. We note, for example, that other countries across the world have seen similar rises. Last year, we held an international conference to discuss with other law enforcement agencies and healthcare providers across the world what they were doing to tackle serious violence, because of course we want to learn from other people’s experiences.

On intervention, we are as one; we want to intervene earlier. Families worried about their children and young people walking around, whether in London or further afield, want us to deliver results. That is the absolute reason for the strategy and the serious violence taskforce, which, as I said, is a cross-party initiative—I am extremely grateful to Members across the House for helping us with it.

I should have said to the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) that I very much take on board his point about the House being updated more regularly on what we are doing. I am conscious that we are busy working quietly in the background with our partners, and I agree that we should inform the House more, so I undertake to do so.

Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend’s answer to the urgent question. We need to be unflinchingly robust on enforcement, but we also need to draw youngsters away from the risks of knife crime in the first place. Having served as a volunteer and later a trustee at Fight For Peace, a groundbreaking charity in Newham with a stellar record of getting at-risk NEETs into training and work, can I ask the Minister what work is being done across Whitehall to invest in the preventive expertise and experience of groups such as Fight For Peace in order to cut the risk of knife crime in the first place?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, partly because, in highlighting the work of his charity, he gives me an opportunity to correct a misreport in *The Sunday Times* this weekend about the early intervention youth fund. It erroneously stated that we had cut the amount available to that fund. We have not. We have spent the first tranche—£17.7 million—on 29 projects across the country, and the rest of the money is to be invested in due course later this year.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for highlighting the work of his local charity. Many charities large and small do invaluable work, and we very much hope that their knowledge and intelligence will feed into applications for knife crime prevention orders, where those are in the best interests of the child and the local community, so that we can draw them away from criminality before it is too late.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): We all agree that the surge in knife crime in England and Wales is harrowing, and our hearts go out to everyone affected by this epidemic, but these disproportionate measures cannot be the right approach to tackling this issue. Why is the Home Secretary introducing these orders to the Offensive Weapons Bill at such a late stage, when the opportunity to debate them will be limited?

In Scotland, we have taken a different approach. Under a public health approach, which views violence as a disease, the goal is to diagnose the problem and treat the causes. Officers in Scotland’s groundbreaking violence reduction unit work with teachers and social and health workers to prevent young people from being drawn into a criminal lifestyle in the first place. Only by tackling the causes of violence, and not just its symptoms, and by taking a whole-systems approach, can we break the cycle of violence. As a result of this approach, recorded violent crime in Scotland has fallen by 49% since 2006-07 to one of its lowest levels since 1974.

Does the Minister agree there is much to learn from Scotland’s approach to violent crime, and can she confirm whether the Home Secretary is actively considering the public health approach, which has been so effective in Scotland, but with which these measures do not fit?

Victoria Atkins: I am afraid that I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman's use of the word "disproportionate". I recognise that he may not have had time to read the detail of the orders, but they are civil orders imposed by a court on a case-by-case basis following a careful presentation of facts by the police. It will be for the court to determine whether an order is appropriate in all the circumstances of individual children. Those under 18 will be reviewed periodically, which will involve the placing of orders, positive and negative. An order may impose a geographical curfew or prevent children from having access to social media, and it may require them to seek help from youth workers.

As for the timing, the police approached us with this idea on 28 August, and we have worked hard to reach a stage at which we can insert an amendment in the Bill during its passage. I appreciate that we were not able to do so while it was being considered in this place, but if the hon. Gentleman does not have knowledge of the workings of the other place, I can promise him that its Members are very good at scrutinising measures.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I draw the Minister's attention to a disturbing report in yesterday's edition of *The Mail on Sunday* about the ability of a 16-year-old "test" youngster used by the newspaper to buy an oversized Rambo-style knife online in about two minutes flat? How will the legislation stop knives being delivered at home?

Victoria Atkins: That is exactly the point of the Bill. We are very conscious that, while most retailers do what they should by obeying the law that has been in place for more than 30 years to stop the sale of sharp knives to under-18s, online retailers are not doing so well in that regard, so the Bill is intended to ensure that online as well as shop retailers meet their obligations. That is just one of the ways in which we are trying to prevent young people from getting their hands on these very dangerous weapons in the first place.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Does the Minister not realise that the Home Office appears just to be tinkering while children and young people are dying on our streets, families are being devastated, and parents are worrying about whether their teenagers are safe on their way home? She has talked about an endowment fund, but it is spread over 10 years. She has also talked about an early intervention fund, but it amounts to only £22 million, and there are reports that it is being cut.

This proposal stands against cuts of hundreds of millions of pounds in our youth services. Does the Minister not recognise that any chance of preventing young people from being caught up in dangerous gangs, drug networks, exploitation or county lines requires investment in people who can work with those young people? Will she now commit herself to meeting the scale of the huge and serious problem that we are facing, and to presenting a much bigger, much more ambitious plan that can actually save lives?

Victoria Atkins: Let me, if I may, correct the right hon. Lady on a couple of points. The endowment fund is spread over 10 years deliberately to ensure long-term investment in prevention and intervention, and it will be

leveraged as well. It is in the process of being launched. As I said earlier, reports of cuts in the early intervention youth fund are mistaken: it remains at £22 million. As for scaling up our response, the serious violence strategy encompasses all of Whitehall, it encompasses local government, and it encompasses the various agencies and arms of the state that it would be expected to encompass.

Our plan to consult on a legal duty to take a "public health" approach to this issue goes further, dare I say, than what is being done in Scotland. If the consultation reveals that there is an appetite for it, all the arms of the state will have a legal duty to prevent this violence. So I do believe that we are scaling up our approach. I do not for a moment underestimate the scale of the task that we face, but we must ensure that all the various levers are pulled in a way that is consistent and will deliver results.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Young people need to fear the probability and severity of being caught in possession. How close is the Minister to delivering that?

Victoria Atkins: My right hon. Friend brings a frankness to the debate which, if I may say so, does not recognise shades of grey. For example, a young man who my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service recently met described his fear of walking outside his front door without a knife, and how that fear was greater than the fear of meeting a police officer. We need to be sensitive to children who behave like that, because they are very, very afraid. That is why early intervention work, knife crime prevention orders and other tools available through the strategy and the Bill will, I hope, give confidence to those young people that knives are not the answer—that there are alternatives. We cannot just give a harsh response; we also need to take a public health approach.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): One of the Home Secretary's closest colleagues said of antisocial behaviour orders that

"they were too time consuming and expensive, and they too often criminalised young people unnecessarily, acting as a conveyor belt to serious crime and prison"

Given that it is the Prime Minister who said that, what is different about the proposed new ASBO, and will it genuinely help to tackle this appalling rise in knife crime?

Victoria Atkins: These orders are preventive orders. They can be applied for before a child is convicted of carrying a knife. They can also be used after conviction. For example, the young man whose sentence was raised last week at the invitation of the Solicitor General in Croydon would have been eligible for a knife crime prevention order on serving his prison sentence. The orders are targeted at an admittedly small cohort of people but, none the less, we are worried about them, as they could cause great harm if they continue to carry knives and use them. It is about targeting prevention directly on them in a way that is not available at the moment in the eyes of the police. We are trying to prevent crime at a stage before harm is done.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): When knives have been used to wound or kill, what is the association with the supply of illegal narcotic drugs?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend knows that the illegal drugs market is considered to be the major driver of serious violence. These gangs deal in drugs for nothing more than money—money is their sole motivation—and they exploit children to carry those drugs around the country. The way in which they exploit those children is terrible, which is why we are tackling the organised crime gangs behind the drugs market, and sending out a message to anyone who may have a wrap of cocaine at the weekend or dally in drugs almost as a hobby that they are part of the picture of violence and exploitation. They need to be aware of where their drugs may very well have come from.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I have a few questions for the Minister that I hope she can answer, especially given that the Home Secretary is not here. How much does she expect the roll-out of knife crime prevention orders to cost? Will there be extra community police officers? How does this fit with the Government's public health approach? Will there be extra resources available for programmes such as Divert, which I visited at Millwall in my constituency last week and which has proved successful in reducing reoffending by over 20%? Reoffending costs the UK up to £10 billion a year, so should our focus not be on early intervention programmes such as that, rather than gimmicks that risk criminalising our young kids?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for all the work she does on this issue. She knows how important intervention is in the Government's approach to tackling this serious violence. In terms of reoffending and preventing offending from happening in the first place, that is precisely what these orders are about; they are called prevention orders. We want to prevent children and young people from carrying knives in the first place, and that is consistent with our approach on, for example, the #knifefree campaign on social media. In terms of the costs, I do not have that figure to hand but I am sure that it will make its way across to me at some point.

The orders have been put in place at the request of the Metropolitan police. We have listened carefully to its analysis that there is a small cohort of young people that these orders may help, and we have drawn inspiration from similar prevention orders that are used in other regards. It will be for the police to decide how they use this tool as part of their operational toolkit. I would argue that this is consistent with the public health approach, because the positive and negative requirements within the order will enable the young person to receive help from other state organisations that will be able to draw them out of the criminal gangs that they might well be frequenting.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Following the excellent comments by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), I should like to point out that the one group of people he did not blame were the parents. Parents have to take more responsibility because, ultimately, anyone who has a child has a responsibility to take care of that child. I say to those on my Front Bench that I have campaigned for a long time for more police officers

on the beat. As more officers are taken to fight online crime, which we all understand, we are losing officers on the beat. As an ex-soldier, I know that that is where intelligence and prevention are used to great effect. Can my hon. Friend reassure me that more police officers will be put on the beat?

Victoria Atkins: Whether there will be more police officers on the beat in my hon. Friend's constabulary is a matter for his police and crime commissioner. We have quite rightly devolved decisions about local policing to commissioners who are elected locally, because they best understand the needs of their local community. Tomorrow, we are debating the new police settlement grant, in which the Government are proposing to deliver a further £970 million to the police, with the help of police and crime commissioners, and I am sure that my hon. Friend and colleagues across the House will support that extra money.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): In 2015, amendments were introduced to the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill by my constituency predecessor with, I think, the best of intentions. They stated that anyone caught carrying a knife twice would face a mandatory sentence. Since that time, knife crime in London has reached an all-time high, with a total of 14,987 such offences. In the past year alone, Enfield has seen a 20% increase in knife crime and we now top a league table that we never wanted to top because of our level of serious youth violence. I am not opposed to these powers, but I do not think that they are the solution. As many have said, the massive reduction in our neighbourhood policing teams and the huge cuts to local authority budgets, which have decimated our community safety units and youth services, are where the biggest part of the problem lies. The police need those partners to be properly funded. If they are not, we are not going to solve this problem.

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who has questioned me assiduously through parliamentary questions on the prevalence of county lines. In relation to the mandatory minimum sentence, 65% of offenders sentenced under the new second strike legislation receive an immediate custodial sentence. Before the legislation, the figure was 48%. It is important that, even with the mandatory minimum sentence, the courts should have the ultimate discretion, and they are obviously using it in particular cases. On her wider point about funding, Opposition Members will know that I do not like to labour this point, but we had to make some very difficult decisions in 2010 because of the economic situation that we inherited from the last Labour Government—*[Interruption.]* I say that as a fact, because those spending decisions are made over a long term and we had to make some very tough decisions. However, I hope that she will gain confidence and that she will help to inject a further £970 million into the police accounts when we vote on our police settlement tomorrow. We hope that, with the help of police and crime commissioners, that funding will make a real difference to policing locally.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on bringing forward the order. What else could she have done if the police were asking for it? It is clearly not the solution to the whole problem, but it is part of the solution. Is she concerned,

as I am, that some children feel that they should carry knives for their own protection rather than using them against people? What can she and the Home Office do to promote campaigns such as #knifefree, to demonstrate that children should not carry knives for defensive reasons?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend, who absolutely sums up the situation. This is but one part of the Offensive Weapons Bill, which is but one part of our overall strategy. We have never pretended that this deeply complex and worrying crime can be solved with one tool or one approach, which is why this is just one small part of the overall picture. He is particularly right to identify those children who carry knives not because they are members of gangs but because they feel they need them for their own protection. That is why the orders are important—because gang injunctions, which are available at the moment, apply only to children whom the police can prove to be members of gangs. The orders will also help those children who are not members of gangs but who, as he says, carry knives out of a misplaced sense of security. The fact remains, however, as a visit to the Ben Kinsella Trust or any of the charities we work with will show, that if someone carries a knife, the risks of being hurt with their own knife are considerably higher.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Knife offences in Leicestershire have risen by 63% since 2010, yet Leicestershire received no funding from the early intervention youth fund, and neither did the two other largest forces in the east midlands—namely, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Some £5 million from that fund has still not been allocated, so if the Minister really believes that early intervention is the key to tackling knife crime, may I urge her to put her money where her mouth is and give the east midlands the resources we need to tackle this appalling problem?

Victoria Atkins: I note in passing that the reserves of Leicestershire police have risen by £3.8 million since 2011, so just a fraction of the £27.6 million currently in reserves may go a very long way. I hope the hon. Lady will vote with the Government tomorrow to give Leicestershire police and other police forces up to a further £970 million on top of last year's increases, with the help of police and crime commissioners.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I welcome this initiative, which I think will make a difference, but we must go further. The Minister knows that since entering this House I have campaigned for both first aid education and weapons awareness education to be on the national curriculum. We are halfway there, with first aid entering the curriculum. What steps can she take to ensure that weapons awareness appears on our national curriculum?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has indeed campaigned so much, not just on serious violence in general, but on county lines in particular, representing as he does an important town in Essex. The Government's work through the serious violence taskforce has included sending out lesson plans before last year's summer holidays, because we listened to youth workers who said to us, "Before children go off on their summer holidays, please can we help teachers

teach them about the risks of carrying a knife?" We also support the work of charities such as the St Giles Trust, which goes a very long way to helping children. The Department for Education plan to introduce relationship education in schools will, of course, help, because it is about ensuring that children are not exploited and know what behaviour they should expect from their friends and older mentors. That is all part of a joined-up package.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) is almost uncontrollably excited. I think we must hear from her.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have to run to a Delegated Legislation Committee, but I am keen to take part in this debate.

The Minister is right when she says that people living with this in communities like Walthamstow do not want a back and forth across the Dispatch Box. They are not interested in who got sent letters or in the parliamentary process. They do not really care about hashtags.

A few short weeks ago, Jaden Moodie was murdered by knife crime in my constituency. On Saturday, another young man almost lost his life after being stabbed while in my constituency. What people in my constituency see is an absent Home Secretary. What they see is Labour Members dragging Ministers to the Dispatch Box and holding Westminster Hall debates about the issues of knife crime and youth violence. What they see is an absence of police on our streets, having lost 200 in the last couple of years alone in our borough. They see an absence of youth workers in a struggling community, and they are asking me who cares about this. They are asking whether this place cares about the lives of those young people. When they see corporation tax being cut and no funding for youth services, I fear they see the answer.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for introducing me to Jaden's mother after last week's Westminster Hall debate. Jaden's mother showed extraordinary strength in staying in what must have been a very difficult debate for her to listen to.

In terms of resources, we would argue that it is not just about police funding, although that is important. We have rehearsed the impact of the illegal drugs market, and from the work we have discussed, the hon. Lady knows the vulnerabilities of young people, such as how the prevalence of domestic abuse can make young people vulnerable to exploitation outside the home. There is a great deal of work going on in government on the effect of adverse childhood experiences. If she feels so strongly about police funding, I hope that she will support the Government tomorrow on the police grant settlement, under which the Met receive a further £172 million on top of the £100 million-odd it received last year.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome the statement and my hon. Friend's work on this issue. To use a well-known phrase, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." We know that 40 children are excluded from our schools every day, and we know that excluded children are twice as likely to carry knives and

[Robert Halfon]

that 60% of prisoners had been excluded from school. Will she work very closely with the Department for Education on measures to stop these exclusions, which are almost becoming an epidemic in our country's schools?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend who, with his expertise from the Select Committee on Education, hits the nail on the head when it comes to the role that exclusions and alternative provision seem to play in the lives of so many young people who are either the victims or perpetrators of serious violence. I am already working very closely with the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), particularly through the serious violence taskforce. I look forward to Edward Timpson's review of good examples of alternative provision, because we need to ensure that children who struggle in mainstream education do not become targets for these criminal gangs that seek to exploit them as they attend alternative provision. We are very much working on that, and I would be delighted to meet my right hon. Friend to discuss our work further.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the birthday present of calling me to speak this afternoon. I very much appreciate it.

A famous boxer once said, "You can run, but you can't hide." The fact of the matter is that there is a shortage of policemen, and the level in the west midlands is only 75% of what it should be. I have met different groups in Coventry, some from affluent areas and some from not very well-off areas, and the common denominator is the lack of police and the increases in burglaries, knife crime and drugs. Over the weekend, the police used a dispersal order in the centre of Coventry after a young man was badly stabbed. There have been a number of stabbings in Coventry. Let us have the police; let us do something about it; and let us stop shadow boxing.

Victoria Atkins: I understand and hear the hon. Gentleman's concerns about police funding. I hope that he will encourage his police and crime commissioner to spend some of the £85 million he has accrued in reserves as of March 2018 and that he will support the Government's funding settlement tomorrow. West Midlands police stand to receive an extra £34 million through the settlement with the help of the police and crime commissioner, and presumably the commissioner will be able to use that money to good effect.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) for tabling this urgent question and you, Mr Speaker, for granting it. As with antisocial behaviour orders, what is to stop these new knife crime prevention orders from becoming a badge of honour in the gangland culture, which makes those upon whom they are served even harder in the eyes of fellow gang members?

Victoria Atkins: Across the course of human behaviour, no one can guarantee that gang members will not come to view orders in that way. However, I must point out that one of the strongest parts of the prevention orders is that the court will be able to prohibit a young person

from using social media and from meeting families who have lost loved ones, including the family of Jermaine Goupall, who have done so much work to highlight the impact that social media had in the murder of their beloved son and brother. The social media measure will help to stop the ways in which these gangs can communicate and spread their evil.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Knife crime has risen by 19% in the west midlands in the past year alone. Young men are dying on the streets, some weeping as their life ebbs away. Let me ask the Minister a specific question: are the Government seriously suggesting that there is no link between the cutting of 2,000 police officers in the west midlands—21,000 nationwide—and rising knife crime?

Victoria Atkins: I assume the hon. Gentleman has read the serious violence strategy. He will see in that the ways in which Home Office officials have analysed the data and set out the chief drivers of serious violence. There are correlations with other countries that have seen rises in serious violence, which is why we have looked to see what they are doing differently and whether there are any commonalities between their experiences and ours, but we have to look at this in the round. The public health approach, which has support across the House, is very much focused on prevention and early intervention, and that is what the strategy and the taskforce seek to achieve.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I warmly welcome these knife crime prevention orders, but does the Minister agree that we need to tackle head on the cultural sickness that glamorises knife violence in the first place? That must include taking a robust approach to those social media platforms that host material that is distasteful and downright irresponsible.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I note that he represents Cheltenham, which plays such an important part in our national security. We have invested £1.4 million in a social media hub with the Metropolitan police precisely to help the police identify those images and bring them down as quickly as possible. Frankly, the tech companies were not doing what they should be doing. They are getting better, although I do not think that they are there yet by any means. It is through the campaigning of not just the Government, but people such as the Jermaine Goupall family, who have suffered so terribly at the hands of gangs, who spread their evilness via social media, and through tech companies waking up to the harms that their sites can do to ordinary families across the country that I hope we will get some real action on this and get these sickening materials taken down.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Police numbers slashed and youth services and other services that support troubled families and vulnerable individuals cut to the bone will be a familiar tale to many in this House. The Government were warned that cuts have consequences. Did the Minister think the consequences of these cuts would be an increase or a decrease in knife crime and other serious violence?

Victoria Atkins: I am sure the hon. Lady knows that I was not in this place in 2010, when those very difficult decisions had to be made in the light of Labour's leaving us with "no money"—I think that was what it said on the note. I remind the hon. Lady that I am sure that families watching this do not understand this back and forth across the Dispatch Box; they want to see measures that help to protect their children and deal with the causes of serious violence. That is why these knife crime prevention orders are just one tool to help the police to intervene on children whom we think are at risk of carrying knives.

If the hon. Lady is so concerned about funding, I am sure she will support the police funding settlement tomorrow. It will see up to £970 million more fed into policing this year, on top of the nearly £500 million last year and on top of the protected spending since 2015.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): A significant number of weapons seized in London are supplied by a wholesale manufacturer named Anglo Arms. It supplies blades described as "First Blood", "Fantasy Hunting Knife" and "Predator". I recently purchased a maritime instrument that contained a blade. When it came to me, the person who delivered it did not ask for my identification or how old I was. The Minister says that she wants the responsibility to be put on the suppliers, but once someone ticks a box to say that they, as the purchaser, are 18, the responsibility leaves the supplier and the onus falls on the deliverer. I am sure she would not expect anyone who delivers these goods to take responsibility for enforcing the law.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend makes the point that it is the responsibility of retailers to check the age of the people to whom they sell these knives. That is precisely why we structured the Offensive Weapons Bill as we did, making it absolutely clear to retailers that the onus is on them to conduct these checks—it cannot just be a tick-box exercise—so that they are sure that the person to whom they deliver the item is over 18. That is also why we are requiring people to go to the local post office or to the delivery depot and show ID before they can pick up the item. Again, that means there is an extra check in the system. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that ticking a box simply is not good enough.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): As we speak, Live Your Life Drop The Knife is doing some excellent work in schools in the Runcorn part of my constituency. The community could do an even better job if the Government reversed the £56 million of cuts imposed on Cheshire police. When are they going to do that?

Victoria Atkins: We have the vote tomorrow, and I assume the hon. Gentleman will vote in support of the police settlement grant, which will give £970 million to policing. I hope he will put his money where his mouth is and support the Government.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): May I commend to the Minister a charity in my constituency called Stand Against Violence? It does some excellent work through anti-violence workshops in schools. I would really welcome a meeting with the Minister to talk about that work, because I think we could roll it out nationally. Prevention is the key, which is why I support

the new orders. Parents want to know how children are getting hold of all these knives in the first place. Will the Minister assure the House that we will clamp down on retailers that sell them to children, who are under-age?

Victoria Atkins: I am always happy to meet my hon. Friend, and that sounds like a great charity. Through our various funds we are supporting large and small charities. The knife-crime community fund is aimed specifically at the smallest charities working on the frontline with young people in their local area. I hope that the charity my hon. Friend mentioned has applied to that fund. We also have the early intervention youth fund for larger charities and police and crime commissioners, and of course the youth endowment fund, which is £200 million that will be leveraged up over 10 years to support innovative projects.

In respect of where children are getting their knives, buying them over the counter is but one way in which they get them. We of course acknowledge that some children have simply taken knives from their kitchens. That is why we all—mums, dads, schools—have to work together to send the message out to children that it is not normal to carry a knife and that they face much greater risk and harm simply by carrying one.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): We need to think about the worth of a person's life when it comes to funding. We need to think about putting in the resources and the money to save people's lives, because those lives are what really matter. I attended a school council meeting this morning and was told by the children how some of them were being chased after they left school. They said that they were being manipulated, targeted and bullied by older children. This must stop. To deal with it, the schools need resources, the parents need support and the community needs resources, as well as local police on the ground doing their job. We need to consider whether a life matters enough to put in those necessary resources.

Victoria Atkins: It was a pleasure to address the hon. Lady at the all-party group on knife crime last week, when we were providing a little more detail on what we are doing to tackle serious violence. No price can be put on the loss of a son or daughter, so I am always hesitant to agree that one can put a price on life; it is almost impossible to put a value on the emotional cost of the loss of such lives.

Of course, we must look at the effectiveness of the programmes that we are investing in to help prevent such crimes. The youth endowment fund is important, because, over a 10-year period, it will gather evidence on what has the best effect in preventing young people from being ensnared in serious violence. I end by saying that I am very grateful to the all-party group for all the work that it does in this regard, and I hope that it agrees with the orders, because they are about preventing young people from being ensnared in carrying knives, and all the consequences that that can have, before they receive a criminal conviction.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): What percentage of people who carry out a crime and carry a knife go to prison?

Victoria Atkins: A total of 65% of those who are caught under the minimum mandatory sentence legislation receive terms of immediate imprisonment, but that is always at the discretion of the court. We are mindful, especially when it comes to the first offence of a young person, of not fettering the hands of the judge who is considering that case if he or she believes that forms of intensive community work may help that child out of the cycle of violence and into a much happier, safer adulthood.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Before joining the Home Department, the Home Secretary was responsible for local government, where he authored significant cuts that have translated into a decimation of youth services in this country. We are losing the battle for the hearts and minds of our young people because we have no one out there trying to engage with them. These cuts will continue tomorrow in this place. If the Home Secretary and the Home Office are really serious about tackling youth crime and violent crime, why are they not banging down the door of the Treasury with their colleagues from local government and saying that youth service cuts not only need to be stopped, but must be reversed through the service being properly and fully funded?

Victoria Atkins: I know that the hon. Gentleman will have welcomed the news announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government that there would be a specific concentration in the troubled families programme on tackling knife crime. That is precisely because those two Secretaries of State wanted to have a united approach to tackling knife crime. I gently point out that although youth services are really important—of course they are—we have a wealth of amazing charities across the country, which provide services. For example, the charity Redthread sits in accident and emergency departments to try to reach children and young people at the teachable moment. A mixture of youth services and charitable work is one of many ways in which we can help to tackle this matter together

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I strongly support the package of measures announced by the Minister. How receptive have the social media companies been to the Government's plans, given that their co-operation will clearly be vital if we are to block social media accounts? What particular benefit will this measure bring?

Victoria Atkins: Some gangs use drill music and certain forms of social media to incite violence. Just this week, I have heard examples whereby orders to assassinate were put out on social media. I know that everyone

across the House abhors that sort of behaviour. The tech companies are under a lot of scrutiny at the moment—not just regarding serious violence, but in relation to tackling the awful scourge of child sexual exploitation and terrorism material on their channels. They have not been great in the past, but they are getting better. The Home Secretary is absolutely clear that there is much more to be done, which is why he is focusing so much attention on the tech companies when it comes to addressing serious violence and stopping child sexual exploitation.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answer to the urgent question. She will be aware that zombie knives, Rambo blades, lethal knives, and even samurai swords and knuckledusters can be bought online and delivered to home addresses. Who will have the responsibility to enforce knife sales provisions online? Who will check the retailers—the police, local councils or the Department?

Victoria Atkins: In relation to online sales, it will be a combination of the police and trading standards. Retailers are not supposed to be selling knives to under-18s; that is the law at the moment. We therefore see the measures in this announcement as merely solidifying that commitment in a way that will bring about results.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): There will be £20 million a year for the very welcome youth endowment fund, but the Minister knows that far more than that has been cut from local authority budgets, while four billion quid is being made available in three months to slosh up the wall for a no-deal Brexit that the Government have the power unilaterally to stop. I welcome the Minister's focus on prevention, but do she and the Government not accept that we are a world away from the kind of investment that would be needed to take away the market for drugs and that, unless we can take away that market for drugs in Barrow and other areas, our young people are going to continue to carry knives, be stabbed and be enslaved by these evil drug gangs?

Victoria Atkins: Let me say what a pleasure it was to visit Cumbria on Thursday. I made only a fleeting visit through the hon. Gentleman's constituency on my way to Copeland, where I discovered the great work that the Copeland hub is doing to bring together all the agencies involved in helping young people, and tackling antisocial behaviour and other types of crime.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about money for Brexit; that is a debate for other times. I very much hope that we can count on his support tomorrow for the police settlement, which will see up to £970 million more being invested in policing nationally—something that his local crime commissioner welcomes.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

4.48 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to make a statement on the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty.

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): As if to prove that lightning does sometimes strike twice, even in this unnatural world of politics, I am here to address this issue again, as I was on 25 October, deputising for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas, who is once more gallivanting globally. This time he is in Ottawa, where, I am delighted to inform the House, he is in the grip of an even colder spell than we are here—it is minus 7° centigrade, for the record, or so he assured me earlier today.

When I last had the opportunity to respond on this issue in the House last October, President Trump had just announced that it was the intention of the United States to end the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty unless Russia returned to full compliance. Let me once again set out the context. The INF treaty was a 1987 agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union that eliminated nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with a range of between 500 km and 5,500 km. For over three decades now, the INF treaty has played an important role in supporting Euro-Atlantic security, initially removing an entire class of US and Russian weapons, thus making a significant contribution to strategic stability.

While the UK is not a party to this bilateral treaty, we have always made it clear over the years that we ideally wish to see the treaty continue. However, for that to happen, the parties need to comply with its obligations. Sadly, this has not been the case. Despite numerous objections raised by a range of NATO allies going back over five years, Russia has developed new missiles, in direct contravention of the treaty. This includes the covert missile testing, producing and fielding of the 9M729 ground-launch cruise missile system. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said:

“These...missiles are hard to detect. They are mobile. They are nuclear capable. They can reach European cities”.

The US, under both the Obama and Trump Administrations, has made extensive efforts to encourage Russia to return to full and verifiable compliance. It was indeed the Obama Administration who, in 2014, first strongly called out Russia’s non-compliance with this treaty. It is important to acknowledge that, while doing so, the US has continued to meet its obligations under the treaty. However, the US, with the full support of its NATO allies, has been very clear that a situation where the US fully abided by the treaty and Russia did not was not sustainable. On 4 December last year, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the US would suspend its participation in the INF treaty within 60 days—that is, by 2 February 2019— unless Russia returned to compliance.

This constituted an opportunity for Russia to address our shared concerns and to take steps to preserve the treaty. Allies took the opportunity to reiterate this point last month to the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, during the NATO-Russia Council meeting. I have to inform the House that Russia has not taken

that opportunity. It has offered no credible response, only obfuscation and contradictions designed to mislead. This of course fits a wider pattern of behaviour from Russia aimed at undermining our collective security. We and all NATO allies therefore support the US decision to suspend its participation in the treaty and to trigger the formal withdrawal process. NATO is unified on this process.

It is Russia’s fault alone that we have arrived at this point. President Putin’s statements in the last few days announcing that Russia, too, will suspend its obligations was unsurprising given the fact that it has violated the treaty over the years. Nevertheless, even at this late stage, we urge Russia to change course. The treaty’s six-month withdrawal process offers Russia a final opportunity to return to compliance through the full and verifiable destruction of all its 9M729 systems. That is the best—indeed, the only—way to preserve the treaty.

We remain committed, as do the US and other NATO allies, to preserving effective arms control agreements, but we are also clear that for arms control to be effective, all signatories must respect their obligations. In the meantime, we are working closely with all our NATO allies on the implications for European security. We remain committed to ensuring that NATO has a robust defence posture to deter all threats. As NATO allies said on 2 February:

“NATO continues to closely review the security implications of Russian intermediate-range missiles and will continue to take steps necessary to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of the Alliance’s overall deterrence and defence posture. We will continue to consult each other regularly with a view to ensuring our collective security.”

If this treaty falls, we and other NATO allies will hold Russia alone responsible. We urge Russia now to take a different course and to return to full and verifiable compliance.

Fabian Hamilton: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his statement.

During the weekend, one of the main pillars of nuclear weapons treaties was suspended when first the United States and then Russia withdrew from the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty. As the Minister said, it was only in October last year that I stood here asking an urgent question on this matter. Back then, the United States was only expressing its initial intentions to withdraw from the INF treaty, citing Russian non-compliance. Regrettably, it has now fulfilled that action. Since then, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has decided to maintain its so-called doomsday clock at two minutes to midnight. In a statement after the US Administration’s decision, the Bulletin noted that we are living in

“a state as worrisome as the most dangerous times of the Cold War”—

a sentiment with which I sadly agree.

What we see in these actions by the United States and Russia is the erosion of the system of multilateralism and the rules-based international order which underpins global peace and security. Leaving the INF treaty is a dangerous unravelling of part of the architecture of trust and understanding that has prevented nuclear conflict—an architecture that was begun 50 years ago with the signing of the non-proliferation treaty, which I

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

strongly support. Indeed, this comes only weeks before the 2019 NPT preparatory committee meeting in New York at the end of April.

Along with climate change, nuclear conflict and the devastating environmental impact that it could unleash are two of the most pressing threats to our lives and the future of every living creature on this planet. The suspension of the INF treaty is a sure sign of a dangerous breakdown of trust between the two nations with the vast majority of the world's nuclear warheads. This has serious implications for future negotiations, including those on extending the new strategic arms reduction treaty, or New START, which is due to expire in 2021. What we see may be the beginning of a new arms race, even more dangerous and unpredictable than the one we saw during the cold war. We now live in a multipolar world in which the US and Russia no longer have a monopoly on the weapons proscribed in the INF treaty, even if they have the majority of warheads.

What assurances has the Minister received from our American allies that suspension of the INF treaty will not begin a new arms race between the United States and Russia involving weapons once again being based on European soil? What contact has he made with other countries that have developed INF-proscribed weapons, including China, so that a future multilateral framework may be developed that could supersede and replace the INF treaty?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I will touch on two aspects of what he said. The first is what losing the INF treaty means for extending New START, which is a bilateral treaty between the US and Russia that expires in 2021. We were pleased to see both sides meet the New START limits by the deadlines, by the end of last year. We believe that that treaty contributes to international stability. All allies support continued implementation and early and active dialogue on ways to improve strategic stability. It is, of course, for the US and Russia to take forward discussions about extending that treaty.

The hon. Gentleman also raised perfectly legitimate concerns, which I think we all share, about the broader range of challenges for the multilateral system. We will continue to work closely with the US across a wide range of multilateral organisations and issues. He touched on climate change, for which I have Foreign Office responsibility and on which we work closely—if not necessarily as closely as we would like with the federal Administration—with a number of important state governors and others.

May I just say that we, like the US, believe that a number of multinational institutions are in need of reform? On the matter at hand, a situation in which the US is respecting the INF treaty and Russia persistently and consistently is not simply not sustainable. The UK and all other NATO allies have made clear our support for the US position.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): In his memoirs, Mr Gorbachev makes it absolutely clear that the reason he signed the treaty was that NATO deployed cruise and, especially, Pershing II missiles, which he greatly feared. Given that this was the most successful example in history of multinational disarmament, as

opposed to one-sided gestures, it would be a shame to lose the treaty if there were any chance of saving it. Will the Minister use his best endeavours to persuade the Americans to take to an international forum, such as the United Nations, the evidence they have for Russian non-compliance so that the world as a whole can be convinced, if the treaty is being broken, that the Russians are responsible for doing it?

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend, who has great knowledge of and great interest in these matters. He is absolutely right that there needs to be an evidence-based approach. I have to say that we are confident, and I think all NATO allies have been confident in the discussions that have taken place with our American allies, on this matter. I should also point out, as I did in my initial comments, that the announcement on Saturday 2 February actually triggers a six-month withdrawal process, so there is a chance for Russia to come back to the table and, indeed, as he points out, for all of us to work internationally to try to salvage aspects of this treaty.

Ultimately, to return to the point I made earlier, I would say to my right hon. Friend—as I say, he has a great passion for denuclearisation and for such treaties—that these treaties can only work if they are complied with on all sides. There has been a persistent and consistent sense from Russia, going back many years, that it has not been willing to do so, and that makes such a treaty unsustainable.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Nuclear weapons are a dangerous and expensive folly. As well as taking away valuable resources from public services, they are not fit for purpose in meeting the security challenges of the 21st century. That is something SNP Members believe, and I know that there are even some Labour party Members who still believe that.

There is a need for full compliance, but there could also be dangerous repercussions for a security treaty that has guaranteed European security, so does the Minister agree that any US withdrawal could do more harm than good? How can we work towards getting rid of these weapons for good and—the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), made a very good point here—will the Minister inform the House what work he is doing with international agencies? We want to see the back of nuclear weapons forever.

Mark Field: I think there is little doubt that all of us feel it would have been better had nuclear weapons never been invented, but the fact that the capability is there does make it difficult in such a world simply to disinvent them.

Let me just say that we, along with allies, have monitored Russia's programmes very carefully. The hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot go into great detail about matters of intelligence, but we do agree with the US that Russia has been in violation for some considerable time. That is a judgment on which other allies have come to a similar conclusion, and it is therefore our collective position on this issue.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the broader implications for UK-European security of not having such a treaty. I take the view that a situation in which Russia is illegally

developing new missiles that could target Europe simply is not acceptable. I think that is part of Russia's broader pattern of behaviour, which is intended to weaken the overall Euro-Atlantic security architecture. It does undermine Russia's claim that it is a responsible international partner upholding the rules-based system.

We will obviously have to take whatever action is necessary, but one thing about which I would reassure the House and the hon. Gentleman is that there is absolute unanimity among NATO members on the steps that have been taken. As I said earlier, it is not simply an issue of the Trump Administration; this was brought to the fore back in 2014 under former President Obama.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): On the subject of disarmament, I am reminded of Belloc, who wrote:

“Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight,

But Roaring Bill, who killed him, thought it right.”

I just wonder whether, when we look at the treaty, which was signed in 1987, we remember that President Reagan managed to convince Gorbachev to sign it by matching him with a worthy strategic deterrent and capability. What would the Minister offer today in terms of persuasion to stop Mr Putin from similarly breaching the agreement and using these nuclear weapons at least to threaten, as he is doing today?

Mark Field: I think I speak for everyone in the House when I say that no one wants to see a return to an arms race. It is also worth pointing out that broader Russian interests extend well beyond the nuclear; they go into cyber-attacks, disinformation and influence peddling more generally. I think that is the bigger concern that many have in mind—I am slightly quoting the formidable Edward Lucas, who had an interesting article this morning in *The Times* on that issue and who knows Russian affairs to a great extent.

In terms of the bigger concern, yes, it is not in anyone's interest to see an escalation of an arms race on European or other soil. Equally, it is very undesirable to see the moves that have been made by Russia consistently, as I say, over half a decade or more. The allies had very little choice other than to trigger this withdrawal, as we have done today. As I say, there is still time for Russia to come back to the table, and I very much hope it will do so.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Russia is in violation of the INF treaty, it seems, but when someone breaks the law, the answer is not to repeal the law and, in the case of the UK Government, to support another country in walking away from that process, but to look at the well-established methods for bringing an offending nation back into compliance—in this case, through the Special Verification Commission mechanisms. Will the UK Government be doing that, and will they make it clear to the US that if it is now suspending its obligations under the INF treaty, it should not assume that it is going to start putting cruise missiles back in the UK?

Mark Field: It does not “seem” that Russia has breached its commitments; there is absolutely no doubt, and there is absolute evidence, of that—evidence that is understood and supported by each and every NATO

member. We will continue to work with partners across the international community to try to prevent the proliferation that, understandably, the hon. Lady is very concerned about and to continue to make significant progress, as we have, in the UN and elsewhere on multilateral nuclear disarmament. However, that can happen only when we are in a position to build confidence and trust between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states and to take tangible steps towards a safer and more stable world. That trust, I am afraid, is at a very low ebb with the Russians, not just for this reason, but, as she will be aware, in other areas. However, we are determined to try to discuss these matters, and we will continue to do so in whatever forum we can.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I served in the British Army during the cold war, and I was present in this House at the time of the deployment of the INF weapons and the subsequent treaties, so I know the value of them. I entirely support our American allies on this issue, as well as the statement of the Secretary-General of NATO. If we are to move into an era of a lack of arms control agreements, thus leading to a continuing and most dangerous erosion of trust, would the Minister consider encouraging NATO to really press on with its fundamental review of nuclear deterrence—as I suggested, incidentally, to the Secretary of State for Defence only a week ago—to diminish the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation and to avoid returning to the worst days of the cold war?

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for his wise words. I do not think there is much that I can add to what he said, other than to say that I wholeheartedly agree with it and that it is something we should take up, as he rightly says, with the Secretary of State for Defence, the Foreign Office and others.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): As the Minister said, the Russians are in clear breach of the INF treaty. The development of the 9M729 missile is a clear breach, and there is evidence for it. In addition, the Russians are developing things such as the Kalibr sea-based cruise missile and other technologies. Russia is clearly taking an aggressive stance. Taking up the point that the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) made, would sharing this information and intelligence in an international setting—I accept that some of it is highly classified—help to persuade those who somehow want to give the Russians the benefit of the doubt?

Mark Field: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his thoughts on this matter. He will be aware that we have to deal with security and intelligence-rated issues carefully, but I am confident that discussions have been taking place within NATO for many months, if not years. We will do all we can. I do not think anyone wishes to see the treaty ripped up. We would like Russia to come back to the negotiating table. We clearly need the sort of international-level discussions he refers to and to which my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East referred earlier. That is certainly the message we will put to our representative at the UK mission in New York.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): I represent Greenham Common. I saw in the 1980s how Russia responds to strength and how it will not respond to weakness. Even in the darkest hour of the cold war, the finest minds

[Richard Benyon]

across the alliance and particularly among our American allies, were devoted to strategic arms limitation efforts. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that is still the case now? We really need to understand that we can be strong with Russia, but we also need to reassure and negotiate with it to try to get a safer world and a safer future.

Mark Field: My right hon. Friend puts it very well. I should perhaps say that decisions on US nuclear weapons policy are obviously fundamentally a matter for the US Government. However, the US “Nuclear Posture Review” published last year represents a continuation of previous years’ nuclear policy and indicates a measured and proportionate approach to nuclear deterrence, which I think the whole House would welcome.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): It is alarming to see how, piece by piece, the security architecture that was assembled to keep us all safe after the cold war is being dismantled. Looking ahead to the NPT—the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—review conference next year, how can the UK help to foster a shared understanding among all major powers in the new world order that rules and restrictions on nuclear weapons are of mutual benefit?

Mark Field: I think we all recognise that these are dangerous times. The questioning of the rules-based international system from all sorts of quarters should give rise to very grave concerns. Specifically on nuclear proliferation, I have spoken at the UN Security Council on a couple of occasions. Not least with what is happening in North Korea, this issue is of great importance. I think we all recognise that any further proliferation in nuclear weapons is incredibly undesirable, particularly in this relatively uncertain world. We will continue to make strong representations, working within the international community. I would try to reassure the hon. Lady that many members of the UN Security Council, both permanent and non-permanent, feel very similarly. I suspect that this issue will be quite high profile in the months to come.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): My father was a leading expert in nuclear non-proliferation in the 1960s. It is depressing to see a lot of his work, which led to Gorbachev’s decision to work with Thatcher and Reagan, being reversed by Putin. We are one of the closest partners of the US and the leading military European country in NATO. Can the Minister reassure the House that the Government will do everything they can to ensure that the USA is not dragged into a dangerous arms race again?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady’s father was clearly an extremely clever bloke.

Mark Field: I think it is hereditary, Mr Speaker. Others can perhaps judge that. I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I hope she does not feel that her father’s work was in vain. My late father was also in the armed services. In many ways these problems and issues do not entirely go away, but the patient use of diplomacy, even within the military, can make a real difference over a period of time.

My hon. Friend asked about the issue of an arms race and the concern about whether the United States would be held back by allies and, in particular, the UK. It is worth stating again that any situation where the US is respecting its treaty obligations and Russia is not is simply not sustainable. NATO has been, and will continue to be, consistent in calling out Russia and making clear the importance of this issue for broader European security. In many ways, other nations closer to the Russian border feel that more acutely than we do, but the US has made clear its continued commitment to effective and enforceable arms control.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The essence of successful arms control is trust and verification. Will the Minister confirm that there has been no trust of the Russians because, as the Obama Administration were saying for several years, there was no effective way of verifying that, and Putin has lied and cheated on the obligations that the Soviet Union and then Russia signed up to under the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question—I know he takes these matters very seriously. Yes, trust has clearly broken down. It is difficult to try to restore trust. It is worth remembering, as he mentions, that the Obama Administration had a clear goal from the moment they came into office at the beginning of 2009 to re-cast their relationship with Russia. Even within that context, they concluded, during the course of their time, that Russia could not be trusted on these matters because simply, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, there was no evidence of verification. I am afraid that that situation has not improved over the past two and a half years.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Tension over nuclear forces is clearly highly dangerous. NATO experts argue that the Russian Federation seeks overmatch in four areas: political warfare, conventional forces over its neighbours, European theatre conventional missiles and European theatre intermediate nuclear missiles. What is being done to reassess the balance of power in eastern Europe and the level of forces needed to deter Russia? Will the Minister endeavour to keep the House informed? I get the sensation that not enough is being done or talked about on this extremely dangerous issue.

Mark Field: I reassure my hon. Friend that Ministers will keep the House up to date, not just on this issue—and obviously, it affects other Departments, including particularly the Ministry of Defence. My last overseas visit, only 10 days ago, was to Warsaw. I spent two days in Poland and we discussed some of these issues, which are clearly far closer to the hearts of our Polish counterparts, as well as those within Baltic and Nordic states, who are very concerned about the proliferation and potential threat of Russia in this regard. My hon. Friend also rightly made the point that in many ways, as I mentioned earlier, Russia’s nefarious work extends well beyond the nuclear sphere. The campaigns of disinformation and the use of cyber-attacks in a very aggressive way are all very modern ways—well beyond the nuclear—in which there are major threats. Obviously, those are issues that the whole of Government have responsibility for, and we shall do our best to keep the House informed about them.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): If we are on the subject of our parents' contributions to nuclear non-proliferation, I should put on record that my mother was a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament campaigner who took me, at the age of four, to RAF Molesworth—

Mr Speaker: That probably put the hon. Gentleman off for life.

John Woodcock: We have both changed our views since then.

Is there not a responsibility on everyone in the House not to hand Putin another PR coup by suggesting that the breakdown of this treaty is in some way the fault of America and the west, or even that there is some sort of false sense of equivalence between the two parties? Must we not put the blame firmly on Russia and do whatever is necessary to re-strengthen NATO to ensure that we can get to non-proliferation, and ultimately disarmament, through the strength of our allies, not their weakness, which Putin will exploit?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his brave words, and I agree entirely, but that makes it all the more important that we continue to work with the international community. The UN is the obvious vehicle for doing that, but we recognise that the Russians would veto a Security Council resolution, so we are working to build a coalition of interests among many UN members, both those directly impacted and others who, if we do not deal with this now, could be impacted in the decades to come.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Everyone agrees that we should get Russia back within the provisions of the INF treaty. Intermediate range means up to 5,500 metres. Will the Minister confirm that the INF treaty does not include sea or air-launched missiles, which would be sad if it did?

Mark Field: I believe that is correct. If I am incorrect, I will correct it in writing to my hon. Friend, but I believe he is correct.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What assessment have the Government made of the impact of this breakdown on other nuclear powers, such as Pakistan, India, China and North Korea, and what can the Government do to get international diplomacy back on track in relation to the importance of the framework of inspections, which, without a treaty, could get lost?

Mark Field: The hon. Lady will be aware that this is a specific treaty within Europe between the US and Russia signed some 32 years ago, but she makes a valid point that these issues are not entirely isolated, and obviously therefore rogue states—for want of a better phrase—such as North Korea and states such as Pakistan that have nuclear capability will be watching from afar and making their own decisions. That is one reason I support the idea, before we rush headlong into lifting sanctions on North Korea, that we see verifiable evidence of denuclearisation, which, I am afraid, we have not had to date. That said, we are working closely with our partners in the region, and clearly the US is doing its best to make progress in that regard.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Appeasing non-compliance would increase the probability of our being vaporised in a nanosecond, would it not?

Mark Field: By my right hon. Friend's standards, that was rather a long question, but let me keep the answer short. He is correct.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Minister is right that the world would be better without nuclear weapons—they kill innocent people indiscriminately; they are weapons of mass destruction. If he is sincere about not wanting to return to an arms race, is it not time that the UK stopped building new ones, cancelled the Trident programme, saved a couple of hundred billion pounds the UK cannot afford and set the lead internationally?

Mark Field: The issue is about deterrence. As I said, if these weapons had never been invented, or if they could be mysteriously or mystically dis-invented, we would all be grateful, but that is not the case. In the practical reality of the world in which we live, we need that deterrence, so I absolutely support the Government's policy, which has been the policy of all British Governments since 1945.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): The Russian economy is doing very poorly, partly as a result of falling oil prices and partly as a result of crushing economic sanctions, and one wonders why they want to engage in another arms race in such a state. Could it not be a sign of weakness on the part of Russia—the dying gasp of a bankrupt regime?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for his arguably slightly optimistic view on these matters. I will not speculate about the state of the Russian regime, but I am not convinced that this will necessarily lead to an arms race. For the reasons I have pointed out, my concern is with what one might call the 21st-century aspects—the disinformation war, cyber-attacks and the like—on which the Russians' main efforts will be focused in the future. As he rightly points out, however, the state of Russia's economy is grisly—to put it mildly—and it might well be, as he says, that it is behaving in this way out of weakness rather than strength.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I must say that I was somewhat surprised by the Minister's statement that the United Kingdom seems to be unequivocally supporting the United States rather than trying to pursue more legal and trade measures first. Russia's actions are of course very worrying, and they must be to blame in large part—[HON. MEMBERS: "But."] Wait a second. But Russia has pledged that it will not place INF material in Europe unless the United States does so first. Will the Minister reassure me that we will not permit the US to place such armaments in the UK and will discourage it from placing them in Asia, which could spark, inadvertently, an arms race with China?

Mark Field: I am not going to become involved in speculation about arms races in other parts of the world, and, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, issues concerning the location of weapons are a matter for the Ministry of Defence. However, an escalation of

[Mark Field]

these matters would be in none of our interests. I think that, in one sense, the treaty has worked well for 30 years—at least it has led to some peace on European soil—but trust and verification are required, and I am afraid that those have been lacking for some years. In many ways it is the Trump Administration who have grasped the nettle, with the support of all NATO allies.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I clearly remember the treaty being signed when I was 11 years old. That pretty much inspired me to take this career course, and it is with great honour and pride that I am now a member of the NATO parliamentary assembly and international vice-chairman of the Conservative party.

International relationships are very important, and today it is with a real sense of tragedy that we see where the treaty has ended up. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this shows the absolute importance of counterbalances? May I remind people who say that Russia promised that it would not put anything into Europe that it is a country which, less than 12 months ago, launched a chemical weapon attack on this country, and showed what its means were and what it was willing to do? Tragic as today is, does my right hon. Friend agree that we must continue our full support for NATO, our full support for our allies, and our engagement on the international stage with all countries to ensure our safer future?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for his youthful engagement in these matters. I am not sure that even at 23—which was my age in 1987—I realised quite what was going on when the INF treaty was signed. Levity aside, however, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we need to work on this continuously. We should remind ourselves, as he has reminded the House, of events in Salisbury during the past year following the use of chemical weapons by a Russian state source on UK citizens, with fatal results.

I think that all Members who have expressed concern will agree that we need to keep lines of engagement open as far as possible. While trust has broken down and while we want to see verification, we need to talk. One of the criticisms made of international diplomacy is that it is notionally a talking shop. [Interruption.] As several of my right hon. Friends are saying from a sedentary position, we need to talk from strength, but, equally, we need to keep those lines of engagement as open as possible when it comes to these very important matters.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): If, ultimately, there is a request from the United States Administration to relocate US nuclear weapons on UK soil, what will be the response of the British Government?

Mark Field: As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, I am not going to speculate on too many hypotheticals for the future. This issue will obviously be discussed at very senior levels, and I think that it would be wrong for me to say any more at this stage.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Minister's response to the urgent question today has been clearer and more assertive than his response to the same urgent question in October, and I welcome that. There is no point in being a signatory to an international arms treaty if the other side is not going to stick to the rules. The problem seems to be what I think the Minister described as the 9M729 missiles that the Russians have been developing. Can he tell the House how long they have been developing that capability, how many weapons we think they have, and what their capability is?

Mark Field: I fear that I will disappoint my hon. Friend by not going into great detail on these matters, as they are issues of secure intelligence. I confess that when I was at the Dispatch Box 102 days ago I was pretty robust. Perhaps he is getting harder in his old age, or perhaps it is the other way round. These are important issues, and we are full square behind our US allies on this matter. I am glad to say that, overwhelmingly, as far as I can see, although the House thinks it is regrettable that the treaty has been suspended, it recognises where blame rightly lies.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps parliamentary pressure has produced a force field. I call Dr David Drew.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): John Bolton has referred to the INF treaty as a cold war relic, and in its place he says that he intends to negotiate directly on behalf of the US with the Russians and Chinese. If that is the case, what is the role of the UK?

Mark Field: We are, and remain, a very active member of the United Nations in the Security Council. We are a committed member of NATO, and will continue to be such a member. Our role is important, but this is a bilateral agreement between Russia and the US that was signed three decades and more ago. Obviously, we have interests as a fully engaged NATO member, and will continue to do so.

The idea that we have no say on this matter could not be further from the truth. This issue has been festering, as I pointed out, for five or six years, right from the early stages of the Obama Administration, and it has finally come to a head. As I say, there is one message that will trickle out loud and clear to the Russian authorities. They have a chance to come back to the negotiating table. The US Administration have triggered a withdrawal, but that takes effect over a six-month period. I hope that before 2 August Russia will come back and recognise the importance of the treaty, but it can do so only if it shows the international community that it can be trusted and is willing on the verification of the outcomes.

Nissan in Sunderland

5.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about Nissan. The House should know the background to the decision that the company announced yesterday. In July 2016, the allocation decision for the next model of the Nissan Qashqai was about to be made, and it was set to be awarded to a European plant other than Sunderland.

Nissan had located in Sunderland in 1986, having been persuaded by Mrs Thatcher that the combination of British engineering excellence and tariff-free access to the European Union made Britain an ideal location. So it proved, and the Sunderland plant grew to be the largest car plant in the history of Britain. The firm invested nearly £3.7 billion in it, and it currently employs about 7,000 people, with approximately another 35,000 in the supply chain.

The prospect of losing easy access to the EU market was the principal concern of the company at the time. It was clear that if Sunderland lost the Qashqai, which accounted for over half its production, mostly for export, the medium and long-term prospects for a plant losing scale would be bleak. Determined not to see the 30-year success of the plant come to an end, we set out over the coming months a strong case for backing Sunderland that centred on four areas, all of which were about highlighting the success of, and our strategy for, the British motor industry.

First, we would continue our successful and long-standing support for the competitiveness of the automotive sector, which has been available to all firms for skills and training the local workforce and for innovation. The regional growth fund has supported over 30,000 companies—large, medium and small—since 2010, with £2.6 billion of public support. Some £335 million of that has been invested in the automotive sector via the regional growth fund since 2010. All proposals are assessed independently by the Industrial Development Advisory Board and are subject to UK and EU rules. In 2016, Nissan initially considered applying for a total of up to £80 million in support over nine years for skills training, research and development, and environmental improvements, and it was eventually awarded £61 million—around £7 million a year over nine years.

The second commitment was that we would work with the automotive sector to ensure that more of the supply chain could locate in the UK, in close proximity to manufacturing sites. Since 2016, as many hon. Members know, our automotive sector deal has established with the industry an ambitious programme to do just that.

The third was that we would make a strong commitment to research and development, particularly to the development of new battery technology and its deployment in connected and autonomous vehicles. Our joint industry-Government £1 billion advanced propulsion centre R&D programme, along with our £250 million Faraday challenge, is putting Britain at the leading edge of battery technology and manufacturing. We have introduced testbeds for autonomous vehicles across the country. Indeed, the longest autonomous car journey in the UK will take place in November this year from the Nissan site at Cranfield to its site in Sunderland, covering more than 200 miles on public roads.

Our fourth commitment was that, in our negotiations to leave the EU, we would always emphasise the strong common ground that exists between the UK and other EU member states and pursue a deal that could ensure free trade unencumbered by tariffs or other impediments.

These commitments proved persuasive, as they have subsequently for investments by Toyota at Burnaston, BMW Mini at Oxford and PSA at Luton. Indeed, every competitive allocation decision taken since 2016 in this industry has gone to Britain. Although the discussions had been around the Qashqai, Nissan proposed towards the end of the discussions to add a further model, currently produced only in Japan—the X-Trail—to Sunderland. On 27 October 2016, Nissan announced that both the Qashqai and the X-Trail would be built in Sunderland, securing the plant's future and adding 741 new jobs.

Last Friday, I was informed by Nissan that following a global review of its capital investment, future capital was needed to accelerate the shift in Europe from conventional to lower-emission vehicles. The Qashqai and the Juke will in future have petrol and plug-in hybrid variants made in Sunderland, and as a result, more capital will be invested in Sunderland than was originally planned in 2016. However, this was accompanied by a decision to maintain Japan as the sole production location for the X-Trail model, rather than to establish a new production line in Europe. The consequence of this is that the existing jobs in Sunderland will be maintained by the increased investment, but that the 741 additional jobs that would have been created in Sunderland will not now be available. Nissan confirmed that production of the new Qashqai, Juke and Leaf will continue at Sunderland, and that the decision has no implications for the existing jobs at the plant.

Nissan also pointed out, as it has done consistently since 2016, that the risk of a no-deal Brexit was a source of damaging uncertainty. While I am pleased that the decision taken in 2016 to build the Qashqai and secure the Sunderland plant is unchanged, it is deeply disappointing to me and to the workforce that the extra jobs that would have come from the X-Trail will no longer be created. I told the House that I would publish the correspondence with Nissan at the time of its original decision, as soon as the company advised that it was no longer commercially sensitive. I have previously shared it with the then Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, but I have now agreed with Nissan that it is reasonable to publish it in full today. Colleagues will see that it sets out exactly what I told the House in October 2016.

Grant support for training and development and for environmental improvements were applied for and approved by the Industrial Development Advisory Board on the basis that both the Qashqai and the X-Trail models would be built in Sunderland. Given yesterday's announcement, if the company seeks to participate in those industry funding schemes—as I hope and expect it will—it will submit new applications in the standard way and undergo a process of independent assessment.

I am disappointed that the new jobs associated with the X-Trail will not now come to Sunderland, but I am pleased that the plant will benefit from substantial new investment in the existing models and that the decision to continue with the vital investment in the Qashqai,

[Greg Clark]

Leaf and Juke, and the jobs associated with them, is unaffected. These decisions were made on broader business grounds, but Nissan has commented on the need for us to come together to resolve the question of our future trading relationship with the EU. I believe that its advice should be listened to and acted upon, so that our automotive industry—which will undergo more change through innovation in the decade ahead than it has for most of the past century, in areas such as battery technology and artificial intelligence—can seize the opportunities for Britain to be a world leader in state-of-the-art car making, providing great jobs and careers for hundreds of thousands of people across our country during the years ahead. I commend this statement to the House.

5.34 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Yesterday's announcement by Nissan that it has reversed its decision to build the X-Trail at its Sunderland plant and move it to Japan instead is a bitter blow to the north-east, the automotive sector and Britain's industrial strategy. Of course, Brexit was not the only reason for that, but it was pretty prominent in Nissan's decision. To quote its initial statement,

"the continued uncertainty around the UK's future relationship with the EU is not helping companies like ours to plan for the future."

The Secretary of State's opposition to a no-deal Brexit is, of course, well known, but still the Government juggernaut chaos hurtles on. Even he must be suitably frightened today by the uncertainty being created by his Government's negotiating strategy.

This week, Nissan has reversed commitments to invest in the UK. Last week, we saw that car production is down 9% to its lowest level in five years, and fresh investment in the sector halved in 2018, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

When Nissan made the commitment to produce the X-Trail and Qashqai models in Sunderland, the Government provided certain assurances, as the Secretary of State has outlined. After the Government's refusals to publish the letter, even in response to freedom of information requests, today we have finally seen a copy. The letter acknowledged the

"uncertainties as the UK prepares to leave the EU",

and in particular the

"fear that potential future trade arrangements could affect the business case for...investments",

and it promised that Nissan would not be "adversely affected".

Although the letter made no firm commitment to a customs union or single market deal, there was a pretty strong assurance that manufacturers would still be able to trade without barriers. However, Nissan clearly does not have any confidence in those assurances today. Can the Secretary of State confirm why those assurances no longer stand and what has changed in the Government's approach since those commitments were made? Is it now Government policy to accept that there will be significant trade barriers as we leave the EU and potentially a no-deal situation? If not, can the Secretary of State rule out the possibility of no deal?

The letter went on to offer support of about £80 million towards Nissan's investments at its Sunderland site, in return for the expansion of SUV production. The Secretary of State noted that £61 million was eventually applied for. Can he confirm whether any of the conditions surrounding that £61 million were written into any formal agreement? Can he also confirm whether Nissan will still receive the £61 million, despite the move? He intimated that it may have to reapply for certain forms of grant funding. What assessment has he made of the impact of yesterday's decision on the wider supply chain, particularly those companies that might already have decided to start investment?

The Government's letter to Nissan also said:

"It will be a critical priority of our negotiations to support UK car manufacturers, and ensure their ability to export to and from the EU is not adversely affected by the UK's future relationship with the EU."

Yet it is important to note that Nissan's announcement came days after a free trade agreement was signed between the EU and Japan whereby tariffs on Japanese car exports to the EU will begin to taper towards zero over the next 10 years. What assurances can the Secretary of State give today to British automotive sector companies that there will be no tariffs on British-made vehicles entering the EU?

Similarly, in relation to cars exported to non-EU countries where the EU currently enjoys preferential trading terms, the International Trade Secretary has suggested that we can simply replicate those terms and Tipp-Ex out "EU" and replace it with "UK" on the front page of nearly 40 free trade agreements. How is he getting on with that? What assurances can the Business Secretary provide that Britain will continue to enjoy those trading terms?

Furthermore, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the real risks of a temporary, Brexit-induced slowdown in British manufacturing? Has he examined any temporary support measures he could offer, such as examples in the German industrial sectors following the financial crash?

Finally, it is clear that we have reached a tipping point. I know that the Secretary of State agrees with me that a real industrial strategy is designed to give businesses the confidence to invest for the long term, but his Government's handling of Brexit is undermining our industrial strategy. Businesses are no longer speaking out simply to highlight the future dangers of a badly handled Brexit; they are now losing confidence in the Government and taking real action to protect their businesses. Without real assurances from the Secretary of State and a firm commitment to take no deal off the table, it is hard not to think that managed decline is indeed the Government's plan.

Greg Clark: If the hon. Lady had spent time talking to employers in the automotive sector, she would have come to a different set of conclusions. First, she should welcome the fact that Nissan has committed to Sunderland. After the referendum, before any negotiations had taken place and even before article 50 was triggered, the plant was in jeopardy, and the workforce, the unions and the Government worked closely and hard together to secure its future. At the time, her former colleague, the then hon. Member for Hartlepool and Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, hailed it as

“a welcome example of targeted Government commitment to a successful company in a strategically vital sector”.—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2016; Vol. 616, c. 684.]

That commitment continues.

The hon. Lady asks whether the financial support that Nissan applied for continues, and I hope that I was clear in my statement that the support is available to the sector and has been for many years. Nissan will be invited to resubmit an application in the light of its changed investment.

The hon. Lady's second point is that we need to conclude our Brexit negotiations, but what she spectacularly ignores is that Nissan and the UK automotive industry back the deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated. The deal achieves what they need: no disorderly Brexit on 29 March, a transition period and a commitment to no tariffs, no quotas and no rules of origin checks at the border.

The Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association has welcomed both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, and it has called for this House and the European Parliament to ratify the agreement swiftly. If the hon. Lady wants to rule out no deal—if that is her concern and her motivation—she should back the calls from the industry to ratify the agreement.

The continued uncertainty I referred to in my statement, as the hon. Lady will acknowledge, is a reflection, in part at least, on the Opposition's failure to come to a decision and back the deal. During all Nissan's 30 years in the UK, it has been able to count on constructive support from all parties, yet Labour Front Benchers have evaded having a policy on this vital issue for our country, hiding behind six tests that are a fake and a sham designed expressly to avoid a deal, and they know it. They claim to represent the workers of this country, but the livelihoods of millions of workers are being jeopardised by the machinations of the people occupying the Labour Front Bench.

In a call from Japan yesterday, a senior Nissan executive told me, “Please pass on the view to your Opposition that they need to meet in a way that forms a deal.” I think all of us in this House should act on that.

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): Whatever the complex rationale behind this decision and, despite my right hon. Friend's considerable efforts to work on it, is it not a stark reminder that our exporters still have no idea whether, at the end of the implementation period, they will require new certification, whether they will carry tariffs or whether, indeed, they will be able to trade frictionlessly? Given the fall off in business investment in each of the last three quarters, is it not now time for us all to come together to end the uncertainty and agree on the terms of our future trading relationship with the European continent?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He has experience of dealing with businesses that are making investments in this country. It is the view of investors in this country and around the world that they want to see us live up to the traditions of this House in providing a stable environment for investment to take place. That includes having certainty on our future trading relationship. It is incumbent on us all in this House to deliver that for the investors who are placing faith in our economy.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. I echo the sentiment that our thoughts should be with the workers at Nissan and elsewhere who are unsettled by this news.

The Secretary of State has put a brave face on this bad news. We all know that the issue of diesel and the change to petrol is part of it, as is the global review, but the cancellation of X-Trail has his Government's handling of Brexit at its heart. Brexit, in itself, is bad enough, but it is being bungled beyond belief by a Government who have failed to listen to business. He talks about business wanting to back a deal, but he omits to say that they all say that any deal is worse than what we already have with the EU. Professor David Bailey, from Aston University, is an expert in the car industry, and he has pointed out:

“The Japanese carmakers came to the UK to access the single market”.

He went on to say that Brexit is

“a big shock for the Japanese producers.”

Nissan's European chairman has been clear:

“The continued uncertainty around the UK's future relationship with the EU is not helping companies like ours to plan for the future”.

Nissan's decision shows that international investors have no faith in this Government's assurances about the economic impact of the Prime Minister's rotten Brexit deal. If Brexit uncertainty is too great for one of the world's best resourced manufacturers, what hope is there for small and medium-sized businesses, which are the backbone of the economy? This Government's continued failure can be demonstrated by the failure to top up the Tay Cities deal to support Michelin workers, so will the Secretary of State urge the Chancellor to make the spring statement a fiscal event that increases funds to support businesses impacted by Brexit? Will the Secretary of State, once and for all, rule out participation in the foolish game of failing to rule out no deal?

Greg Clark: First, let me remind the hon. Gentleman that a greater amount of financial investment is going into Sunderland than was anticipated in 2016; this is a long-term commitment that has been made by the firm. He should welcome that and reflect that the future jobs of those employed in Sunderland have been secured by that investment in the Qashqai. That is a welcome factor.

The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that the company has expressed an urgent concern that we should resolve the question of Brexit, but he is wrong to say that the deal the Prime Minister has negotiated does not command the positive confidence of the industry. I have talked about Nissan, but let me mention the head of Ford in Europe, who said:

“It's important that we get the agreement ratified that's on the table at the moment”.

The chief executive of Aston Martin has said that it is “obvious” that the deal that we see

“meets the needs of all the requests we put forward as an industry and as Aston Martin.”

Toyota has said that it welcomes the announced deal, which

“would provide business with the certainty of a transition period and help avoid the significant production disruption a ‘No Deal’ outcome would have for ‘Just in Time’ supply chains in the automotive industry.”

[Greg Clark]

I share the hon. Gentleman's view that we should bring the uncertainty to an end, but the only way to do that is by backing a deal, and I commend to him the deal that has the support of every one of the employers in the automotive sector that I have quoted to him today.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The big increase in vehicle excise duties, the squeeze on new car loans, and the general tax and regulatory attack on new low-emission diesels has had a predictable effect, in greatly reducing the demand for and sales of new diesel cars in the UK. Will the Government reconsider these damaging policies, given the strong bias in our industry to produce those Euro 6 diesels?

Greg Clark: I say to my right hon. Friend that, in fact, the extra investment is going into new Powertrains—cleaner Powertrains. Far from being critics of this, Nissan, as people who know the industry well know, is among the principal advocates for more ambitious environmental standards and has been a pioneer in establishing electric vehicles in this country. It is recognising that that is the way consumer demand is going, but it recognises that this is a positive step.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Nissan in my constituency, together with the supply chain, employs almost 40,000 people, many of whom will be extremely concerned at this decision. This Government's chaotic approach to the Brexit negotiations, concerns about diesel and a new free trade agreement between Japan and the EU have created a perfect storm. With just 53 days until we are due to leave the EU, no Brexit parliamentary business scheduled for two weeks, the Prime Minister currently engaged in fantasy politics over the backstop and the sweetheart deal on the rocks, what immediate steps is the Secretary of State taking to reassure the whole UK automotive industry?

Greg Clark: One of the pleasures of dealing with the automotive industry in the UK is that it is one of the most advanced and most capable in the world in innovation. We are working with the sector, through our industry strategy, to be the leading place in the world, and our work not just for the discovery of new battery technologies, but for manufacturing, and the testbeds that we have put in place for connected and autonomous vehicles make Britain the place in the world that people come to for innovation. This Government back that, and I know it enjoys support across the House; it is a source of confidence around the world. However, it is true that an international business such as an automotive one wants to know, perfectly reasonably, what its trading relationships will be with the rest of the European Union in the years ahead. That is why these companies have been so clear that this House should come together and back the deal. I hope that the hon. Lady, with the care for her constituents that I know she always has in mind, will see fit to do so too in the days and weeks ahead.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): In 2016, my predecessor as Chair of the Treasury Committee, who now sits in the other place, wrote to the Chancellor asking what money had been promised to Nissan in order for it to make its commitments. Today we find out

that a letter was sent to the former Chair of the Select Committee on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, but it has only been released today, after the press had got hold of it. First, does the Secretary of State think it right that the company should decide that something is still commercially sensitive two years after the event? Secondly, how much of the £61 million is not going to be paid over?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her question. What I said in my statement and what I said at the time was that the programme of support for the automotive sector is very long standing and has been very successful. As it happens, the application that Nissan made was concluded relatively recently; it was putting forward a case, through the independent scrutiny processes, for funding. I shared the letter with the previous Chair of the BEIS Committee, and the Comptroller and Auditor General had also seen it at that time. I said in my statement that because the terms of the application, which is independently assessed and reviewed, have now varied, the company will of course need to resubmit on the grounds of the new information that it has. However, this remains a programme that has been very effective in supporting the skills in the wider workforce, environmental improvements and the research and development for which our automotive industry is now so renowned.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): After the announcement at the weekend by Nissan—for the first time publicly saying that the insecurity around Brexit was impacting business decisions, which in real terms means jobs—what assurances can the Secretary of State give the workers not only at Nissan, but in the supply chain and wider manufacturing, that the Government will come up with an agreement that will secure jobs as we leave the EU? As he knows, the Prime Minister's deal is not going through this House, and we need real decisions and real movement on the customs union and the things that will protect jobs.

Greg Clark: I say to the hon. Lady, whose constituents depend on successful future investments, as well as the ones that have been secured, which she rightly welcomed when they were first made, that this whole House has a responsibility to come together, put its differences aside and find a deal that can be agreed and ratified, and can be ratified by the European Parliament, so that we can have precisely that certainty that Nissan and other investors have called for.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, rather than being about Brexit, a fundamental reason for the decline in demand for diesel cars—not only in Sunderland, but elsewhere in the UK and throughout the whole of Europe—is the imposition of EU regulations, which will continue in UK law under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, to reduce emissions and diesel particulates, which are harmful to health? So what on earth are the anti-Brexiters complaining about?

Greg Clark: First, the company sells most of its output into the rest of the European Union so will need to maintain its ability to meet the requirements to which my hon. Friend refers. Secondly, as I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood),

Nissan in particular has been among the prime advocates of the drive towards cleaner vehicles. That has often been to this country's benefit, because the Leaf, which is made in Sunderland, is the best-selling electric vehicle in Europe.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his comprehensive statement. May I follow up on the question from the Chair of the Treasury Committee, the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), about the £61 million? In view of the statement apparently made by the Department an hour ago, which contradicts what the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), said this morning, apparently in good faith, will the Secretary of State clarify how much of the £61 million was actually paid to the company and how much is now due to be repaid?

Greg Clark: I made it clear that the £61 million was approved by the independent process, with which the right hon. Gentleman is very familiar. To date, there has been a payment of £2.6 million, about half of which was for training of the workforce and the community, and half of which was for environmental improvements to the plant. So £2.6 million has been paid to date.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): A matter of minutes before I came to hear this statement, I had the wife of a car worker on the telephone and she was very distressed by the threat to her husband's job. Does the Secretary of State agree that, for the long-term security of the car industry, the political declaration needs to secure a stable customs arrangement with the EU and the House needs to get behind the deal?

Greg Clark: I do agree with my right hon. Friend that the House needs to come together and enter into a deal that can provide that confidence. When it comes to the customs arrangements, as she well knows, the motor industry has been absolutely clear, as I set out in my statement, that it wants to make sure that the agreement involves no tariffs, no rules-of-origin checks and no frictions added to what has been a spectacularly successful trading relationship.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Nissan has been clear that uncertainty around our future trading relationship with the European Union has been a factor in this decision. Is it not the case that even if the Government's deal is passed, we will still face years of uncertainty and negotiation, which will put jobs and investment at risk at Nissan and throughout the country?

Greg Clark: No. The industry has been clear that the deal that has been negotiated meets its requirements to continue what has been a very successful investment programme. One of the opportunities that we have and one reason I really do think it is in the country's interest to come together on a deal is that I am familiar with investment plans into what is a very successful environment of innovation and excellence on the part of the workforce, and people are poised to make investments if we can settle the question of the terms of our exit and our future relationship. That is why I hope that in the weeks ahead the House will come together to provide that certainty.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I agree completely with what the Secretary of State has said about the need to provide certainty as soon as possible, but I take issue with those who want to turn this all into an issue of Brexit. The House should be clear that there has been a 14% reduction in the sale of Nissan products into Europe over the past year, which explains a lot of the context of this decision. Will my right hon. Friend clarify that no jobs are being lost as a result of this decision and, crucially, that production of the Juke, the Leaf and the Qashqai is entirely unaffected?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but it is also right to reflect that for more than two and a half years now the industry, and Nissan in particular, has been worried about the consequences of Brexit. That is why many Members, both Government and Opposition, as well as the trade unions, made such a determined effort to ensure that we got the investment that was so vital. That investment is there, it continues, it has been made, and it has saved the plant in Sunderland and ensured that the more than 40,000 jobs—people's livelihoods—that depend on it are there and secure. I want to see more investment in future, which is why I want the House to agree a way forward with the rest of the European Union.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The Nissan Washington plant is less than 5 miles from the edge of my Gateshead constituency, where we have 3,325 people unemployed—1,000 more than at the same time last year. Nissan has laid off many hundreds of agency workers in the past 12 months, so will the Secretary of State commit to do something tangible for the north-east of England? The north-east of England is in danger of being left behind, but parts of it, like my constituency, are being left behind already. In the light of this very harmful decision, will he do something tangible and work with Members from the region to establish a taskforce to rescue the north-east economy?

Greg Clark: I am a north-easterner myself by birth and upbringing. We should celebrate the resurgence of industry across the north-east in recent years, including the expansion of Nissan. The hon. Gentleman should know—Members from all parties certainly know—that I worked closely with Members on both sides of the House to pursue investment opportunities. Had we not done so, we would not have had the investment that Nissan made two and a half years ago that secured those jobs for the future. I will continue to do that, all the time.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I have many constituents who work at Nissan in Sunderland. They are highly trained and committed workers who do a long commute every day to work in such an extraordinary and fabulous place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) said, the changes to the EU rules—and therefore the UK rules, too—on diesel emissions have put real pressure on Nissan to move away from diesel engines in the longer term. Will the Secretary of State set out clearly what the Government will do to support not only Nissan but the car manufacturing industry as a whole to move fully to electric vehicles over the next 20 years?

Greg Clark: In my statement I mentioned the Faraday challenge, which we established as part of the industrial strategy. Not only is there a quarter of a billion pounds to fund the latest research on the future of batteries, but we have established in the west midlands the national battery manufacturing centre to make sure that we not only invent the technology but deploy it. We have a reputation as one of the places in the world with the greatest prospects for the new types of propulsion that the industry is moving to rapidly. Nissan is of course one of the prime exponents of that and one of the prime beneficiaries.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Many of my North Durham constituents work at Nissan or in the supply chain and were very disappointed by the announcement at the weekend. Will the Secretary of State refute the allegation in yesterday's Sunday papers that because of this decision the Government will somehow penalise Nissan in respect of future Government grants? Also, will he be an advocate for the clean diesel engine? That would help not only Nissan, but the entire UK motor industry.

Greg Clark: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said, and I can certainly refute that. He knows that I have given particular attention to the expansion of prospects for the automotive industry, including by establishing the programme for battery technology and connected and autonomous vehicles. I travel the world to make the case for Britain as the home of the vehicles of the future. Of course, Nissan is a hugely valued investor, employer and innovator in this country, and we will work closely with it in future.

On clean diesel, I have said to Members from all parties that the country will undergo a transition to fully electric and zero-emission vehicles, and a new-generation clean diesel is a perfectly reasonable choice for people to make, especially those who, for example, use it regularly for long journeys. People should be clear about that.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): My right hon. Friend has very clearly shown his enthusiasm for the future with the Advanced Propulsion Centre and the Faraday challenge. On the issue of diesel, however, changes in diesel legislation have resulted in a significant slowdown in the second-hand car market for diesels. That market is incredibly important to the financial sector that finances the car market in the whole of the UK. Has he done an analysis of what is going on in the second-hand diesel car market and its implications for the whole of the financial market in the UK?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; as the House knows, there has been a slowdown in the market for new diesels. People are hanging on to their existing ones and values have fallen in the second-hand market. It is something that is reflected across the whole of Europe, and indeed in many other parts of the world. We need to make sure that we are clear that the next generation of diesel is a perfectly reasonable choice for people, and that we accelerate the deployment and the uptake of electric and zero-emission vehicles. That has been our determination in the past two and a half years, and that is recognised by the industry right across the world.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I was at Nissan just recently meeting the fantastic workforce, some of whom are my constituents who had lost their jobs in the steelworks and subsequently been recruited by Nissan. It was made very clear to me when I was there just how important the EU market and the integrated cross-border just-in-time supply chains were. In their letter to Nissan, the Government say that they fully recognise

“the significance of the EU market to your presence in Sunderland.”

Why then are the Government keeping no deal on the table and playing fast and loose with my constituents' jobs again?

Greg Clark: Everyone in this House has a responsibility: we need to protect the jobs of our constituents and to give them opportunities for the future. One way or another that involves this House agreeing on a plan for our relationship with the rest of the European Union. It might involve Members from all parts of the House leaving their comfort zone and being willing to compromise. Internationally, we have had a reputation for being willing and able to do that—to be a pragmatic and dependable place in which to do business. Now is the time to demonstrate that to the rest of the world.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I say to the Secretary of State that many people would compromise. If a customs union were put to the vote, some of us would vote for it, but the Prime Minister has made it very clear that that is not available. I suggest to the Government that they might start the compromising in Cabinet and with the Prime Minister. I had the great honour—and it was an honour—to go to Sunderland and visit the Nissan plant shortly after the EU referendum result. Having spoken to the management and workforce, this decision comes as no surprise, as there were very serious concerns then about Brexit. I gently say to him that, in my opinion, this Government, far from allaying those fears, have exacerbated them, because they refuse to take no deal off the table. Given the catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit, I would have expected the Cabinet to have discussed it, based on a careful assessment of the risks of a no-deal Brexit by officials. If it has not, why not? If those discussions have taken place, when will this House see the documents that have been made available to the Cabinet so that we can all understand the dangers of a no-deal Brexit, and so that the next time it comes to a vote, Conservative Members, who are supposed to represent the party of business, will vote overwhelmingly against no deal instead of, like last time, voting overwhelmingly in favour of a no-deal Brexit?

Greg Clark: I say to my right hon. Friend that no deal is fully acknowledged—certainly by me and the industry—as being ruinous for our prospects, but in order to avoid no deal, we need to come to an agreement in this House in the weeks ahead. She is right that this is something that affects all parts of the House. To put off the decision, or not to come to a conclusion, would be to continue the uncertainty. We need to bring it to an end, because that is what the investors are looking for.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that big multinational companies want to enter the transitional period detailed in the withdrawal agreement to work out whether they are going to stay

or leave? They can make that choice—the transitional period is their breathing space—but the small and medium-sized companies and our constituents do not have that choice. They have to stay and suffer the consequences of whatever Brexit brings. Is it not about time that the issue was put back to the people so that they can decide whether what is on offer today measures up to the promises that were made back in 2016?

Greg Clark: The views of businesses up and down the country—not of all of them, but of the majority of them—are clear that having a transitional period is something that they regard as important. The small businesses as well as the large businesses have called for that. It is one of the features of the withdrawal agreement that has been negotiated and it is why businesses specifically and through their representative organisations have called on this House to back it.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): My first experience of Westminster politics was as the parliamentary candidate for Birmingham Northfield when Rover closed the Longbridge works and 6,000 people lost their jobs. It takes years to build a car factory, and one phone call to close it. Our car manufacturers benefit from frictionless trade with Europe and being part of the cumulative rules of origin regime. The withdrawal agreement keeps those. Does the Secretary of State agree with me that those who seek to vote against the withdrawal agreement or to try to rewrite large swathes of it are playing a deeply dangerous game?

Greg Clark: I do agree with my hon. Friend. She knows the industry well and she knows that, time and again, the leaders—the chief executives—of the players, big and small, in the industry have called on us to back the deal for precisely the reasons that she gives.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Many of my constituents work at Nissan, and many more at the Port of Tyne in my constituency, which is a large part of Nissan's supply chain. The Secretary of State has failed to answer what assessment he has made of the impact of this decision on the wider supply chain, but he keeps saying to us, "Back the deal". He and the Government are offering zero clarity on the true impact of that very deal, so will he share that with us now?

Greg Clark: I think that I have been clear that the investment that is being made into the Qashqai is an expanded investment, which will have opportunities for the supply chain, but that the supply chain will lose the prospects of supplying the new model that we had hoped would be there—that is clearly understood. Again, I say to the hon. Lady that I want, as much as she does, to resolve the question of our future relationship. The leaders of the automotive sector have said that the deal that has been negotiated would do that and they have urged us in this House to get on and approve it.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Nissan itself has noted a significant decline in demand for diesel-powered vehicles due in no small part to changing EU regulations over emissions in the wake of the VW scandal. Is it not the case that it is that decline in demand that was the primary reason why Nissan decided that it was simply uneconomical to expand the production of the X-Trail outside Japan?

Greg Clark: The company gave its reason, and it said that it was owing to business conditions. One was the accelerating take-up of low-emission vehicles for which it has been one of the strongest proponents, and indeed it has an advanced position in that. It has been clear about that, but it did comment, as my right hon. Friend knows, that the context of uncertainty around Brexit was a negative factor. When an employer communicates that information as clearly as it has done, I think that we should act on it.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The jobs of many of my constituents will be affected by this decision. We all know that the Secretary of State is a man who does not want to see a no-deal Brexit, so can he explain to the House and the country why it is that in this morning's *Financial Times* he said that the crunch point was the end of February when the big votes will be on 14 February?

Greg Clark: I do not quite understand the hon. Lady's point, but I think that she might be referring to the fact that we should not regard the period until 28 March as the time available to us to negotiate. Manufacturers place orders for components with suppliers and they are doing so now. They have to buy components now and these decisions are being taken at the moment. Manufacturers that are exporting to the far east, for example, have to make decisions about what they are going to ship during the weeks ahead. We therefore do not have the luxury of waiting until 28 March; we need to conclude this matter very quickly.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Secretary of State has some historical connections with my region, so he will be aware that we have lost the coalmining industry, the steelworks and the shipyards. I hope that he is also acutely aware of how vital the car industry and the supply chain are not just to Sunderland, but to the whole region. Given that many thousands of my constituents work in the supply chain and directly at Easington, has the Minister considered introducing some incentives to drive the take-up of all-electric vehicles also manufactured by Nissan on Wearside, such as a car scrappage scheme? That would help to reduce emissions and promote employment in my constituency and in the region.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman will know that there is no one in this House more familiar with the importance of the car industry across the country and in the north-east. Within 10 days of having been appointed Business Secretary, I flew to Japan to meet the chief executives not just of Nissan, but of the other investors. I have always had a clear understanding of their requirements regarding future prosperity, and I have always applied that. If he looks at the automotive sector deal that I negotiated with the whole industry and at the investment that we have made in the Faraday challenge, he will see that we are working well and closely with the industry to do what it says is necessary to drive the take-up and innovation in the sector that will secure the future of the motor industry in the north-east and right across the country.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): North East England chamber of commerce tells me that, as the Prime Minister's deal does not nail down our future

[Dr Paul Williams]

trading relationship, Brexit uncertainty could continue for years. What certainty can the Secretary of State give now to the 600 workers in the Nissan supply chain at Nifco in my constituency, for whom this decision is a massive missed opportunity to improve their job security?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman should, in fairness, reflect—as I have done—on the renewed commitment that Nissan has made to Sunderland by putting more cash into the plant than was originally intended in 2016. It has made a decision not to expand out of Japan the production of a model that does not have any other production lines around the world, and I regret that, but it has made a big commitment to Sunderland. That is something that we should respect and recognise the importance of.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for referencing my predecessor, the former Member for Hartlepool, who was quite right in his observations at the time. Specialist companies in Hartlepool, such as Helios Precision Engineering, have invested heavily in new technologies as part of the supply chain. What will the Secretary of State do to protect local manufacturing suppliers to Nissan and the wider automotive industry post Brexit?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman will know that the automotive sector deal, in which Nissan was an important partner, has a significant programme of investment in the skills and capabilities of the supply chain. In fact, the increase in opportunities for the supply chain domestically is one of the principal components of the sector deal that was so widely welcomed by the automotive industry.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Unemployment in my constituency is double the national average, and there are hundreds of people in the constituency who are employed at Nissan and at supply chain companies. These supply chain companies also provide goods to other car makers and across the EU. What is the Minister going to do about a customs union that will protect those jobs in the longer term?

Greg Clark: To protect those jobs in the longer term, we need to secure our ability to trade without tariffs and without impediment across the whole of the rest of Europe. As I have stated very clearly to the House, it is my view that the House needs to come to a decision within the next few weeks. We need to make compromises with each other to be able to provide that certainty and security to important employers.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): When it could soon cost less, in terms of tariffs, to import a car to the EU from Japan than it will to export a new car from the UK to the EU in the event of a hard Brexit, is it not easy to see just what impact Brexit uncertainties have on decisions like this? Could not the Government minimise those uncertainties—first, by jettisoning the customs union as a red line for the Government and, secondly, by ruling out no deal?

On diesel, is it not the case that the problem is not with the latest emissions standards, but that Government vehicle excise duty rates hit the newest, cleanest diesels

hard and leave the oldest, dirtiest diesels untouched? Will the Secretary of State have a word with the Treasury to do something about that in the spring statement?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the importance of tariff-free trade. The European Union has agreed, and put into operation last week, a free trade agreement with Japan that provides advantages for companies in being able to import and export directly with Japan. In my view, it also increases the urgency that we face to conclude our agreement with the European Union that should allow us to continue to trade with it and with other countries, without interruption.

We have had many conversations about diesel. It is the case that companies, including Nissan, are accelerating their investment; they are investing more than they previously intended to in ultra-low emission vehicles. This is giving the supply chain opportunity. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should not send a message that the current generation of diesel engines is a choice that needs to be avoided by consumers thinking about their next car.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): While the Conservative party tears itself apart over the Irish backstop and border, the fundamental problem that we face is that we still have absolutely no clarity about our long-term relationship with the EU. Is it not the truth that it is this uncertainty that is causing huge problems for companies such as Nissan, that the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement does not solve that uncertainty—it just prevents us from immediately falling off a cliff—and that, if we go ahead with the Government's blindfold Brexit, we will back here with more damaging statements and announcements that hurt people's jobs and livelihoods for years and years to come?

Greg Clark: The policy that the Prime Minister has proposed has commanded the support and endorsement of the employers that the hon. Lady is concerned about. I am not aware of any policy proposal from the Labour party that commands any degree of consensus across the Opposition Benches. I have said very clearly today and previously that all Members of this House who were elected in 2017 following the referendum the previous year always knew that this was going to be the most important decision that we would take. It is time to find common ground and to settle on an agreement that commands a majority of support in this House that will provide the confidence and stability that the rest of the world looks to.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Nissan decision is sadly following a developing trend of disinvestment by foreign companies not just in the north-east of England, but north Wales. I appreciate the Secretary of State meeting me later to discuss that. I am a proud member of the all-party parliamentary group on Japan, of which the Minister for Asia and the Pacific, the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), is also a regular member, and Japanese representatives say clearly to me that there are two strengths to investing in the United Kingdom: the loyal and unionised workforce, and a strong single European market. I ask the Secretary of State to urge his Cabinet colleagues, for a start, to ensure that we have that strong unionised workforce and a strong European single market?

Greg Clark: I gently correct the hon. Gentleman when he talks about disinvestment in Sunderland. It is very important that the House understands that far from being a disinvestment, the commitment that has been given actually involves an increase in the capital investment into the plant. Given that that comes from a company that has other uses for its capital, we should recognise that it is putting more money into Sunderland and into securing its future. With regard to the future, he is right to draw attention to the fact that the reason companies have located very successfully here in this country is partly because of the excellent workforce that we have, partly because of our track record of innovation, and partly because they have had access to a large market that has come from the European Union. It seems to me that we need to continue with all of those.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Have any of the other large car manufacturers in this country sought and gained similar-sized packages of support—I am thinking about Vauxhall—and if they have been refused, why?

Greg Clark: As I said in my statement, there has been a regular and long-standing programme of support for companies right across the automotive sector. It is conducted independently. Companies make applications either through the Advanced Propulsion Centre or through the scrutiny of the Industrial Development Advisory Board. This has been a success. Nissan has applied for it, and many other companies have done so as well. For example, I commend the investment that Toyota made in its Burnaston facility. I had the pleasure of opening the production line for the new Corolla there a few weeks ago.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State and his like-minded colleagues for what we read they are trying to do to avert a ruinous no-deal Brexit, as he just described it, but I gently suggest to him that when the moment of truth arrives again in 10 days' time when the votes come back, they will be judged on their deeds and not just their words. I say to my own Front Benchers that if we have a Whip that ignores the unanimously agreed policy of our own party in opposing a no-deal Brexit, they will be judged just as harshly.

Greg Clark: I cannot speak for the right hon. Gentleman's Front Benchers, but he has heard me say that it is incumbent on the whole House to keep the national interest in mind and to reflect our traditions of doing that. I recently looked at the speech that Margaret Thatcher gave when she opened the Nissan plant in Sunderland. She commented that Nissan had chosen the UK because

“within the whole of Europe, the United Kingdom was the most attractive country—politically and economically—for large scale investment and offered the greatest potential.”

That political stability, confidence and pragmatism, which was so important then, is important now, and we should return to it.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): In his speech in the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill debate, the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), who has just left his place, said that the political declaration was “vacuous”, so I gently point out to the Secretary of State that

opposition to his Government's withdrawal arrangements is not confined to the Opposition Benches. When a country like Japan is looking to invest, and when companies such as Nissan export up to 80% of their products into the single market, will he just acknowledge that being within the single market provides an advantage over the countries that are outside it?

Greg Clark: Of course, it depends on the terms of trade that are negotiated. Clearly, being a member of the European Union unquestionably allowed Nissan and others to trade without thinking about tariffs or impediments. We need to secure a deal that allows us to continue to offer Britain as a place of innovation and skills, and a place that can be confident in exporting to the rest of Europe.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): This weekend's news clearly demonstrates the damage of continued uncertainty about our future relationship with the EU. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has been warning for many months about the very grave dangers of a no-deal Brexit, but in recent weeks numerous Nottingham employers, including Paul Smith, East Midlands airport and Siemens, have all contacted me to raise exactly the same concerns. The Secretary of State has just admitted that a no-deal Brexit would be ruinous, so when does he think the Prime Minister is going to recognise the damage that she has done by insisting that no deal remains a real option, and instead act to protect jobs and investment by ruling it out?

Greg Clark: I hope that when the hon. Lady has been having her discussions with those employers, she has listened to what they have said. The SMMT, for example, has been very clear that in order to avoid the consequences that she talks about, it is necessary to accept the deal that has been agreed. The SMMT said that it is “a positive step” that should be backed. The chief executive of Siemens in the UK has also commended the deal. So if she wants to avoid the disruption that I agree would be caused, she needs to listen to the other part of what people say to her and follow their advice in that respect too.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Given the uncertainty that the announcement by Nissan has caused, the job losses announced at Jaguar Land Rover, the worries expressed by Honda, and the Hitachi decision when the Prime Minister of Japan had barely taken off following his visit to our Prime Minister, what worries does the Secretary of State think have arisen in his Department? Does he agree with his junior Minister, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), that we are going from

“a crisis into a catastrophe”?

Greg Clark: I visit Japan a lot and speak both to the leaders in the Government and the leaders of important investors there. They regard Britain as a place with which they have enjoyed good relationships and in which they have invested with prosperity. They admire the ingenuity of our scientists and our engineers. They are keen to work even more closely together in future. But is true to say that they look at the uncertainty around Brexit and think that after two and a half years

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it is time that it is resolved and comes to a conclusion. When they say that, we should listen to them and act on their advice.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Secretary of State is a nice man, but I honestly feel as if we are going to hell in a handcart. The only people who can genuinely stop this conveyor belt towards a no-deal Brexit in a few weeks' time are people like him sitting in the Cabinet. They have got to go back to the Cabinet and say to the Prime Minister, "We will not put up with this. This will do lasting damage to our country, to our people, to our jobs and to our standing around the world, and we must put a stop to it; otherwise we will resign." I suggest that he does that before next week's votes.

Greg Clark: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's advice. I think it is matter of public record that I have constantly and consistently advocated the need for us to be able to secure the trading relationship that we need to make sure that the jobs in his constituency and all around the country continue. It is important that I should do that.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The automotive industry, employing 850,000 workers, is the jewel in the crown of manufacturing excellence. We have had 4,500 jobs going at Jaguar Land Rover and we now have the news about Nissan. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders is warning that the industry is now "on red alert" as a consequence of Brexit uncertainty. Does the Secretary of State agree, on the one hand, that we should rule out any question of a no-deal Brexit, and crucially, on the other hand, that this House needs to come together at the next stages to negotiate a deal that will provide much greater and longer-term security, at the heart of which must be the customs union?

Greg Clark: The success last week of the amendment that the hon. Gentleman tabled with my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) demonstrated that the majority of Members of this House are determined not to see a no-deal Brexit. Indeed, to avoid that, we need to come together in just the way that he says to reach a deal, making compromises with each other that can provide the certainty that investors need to continue the period of great success that we have enjoyed in this magnificent industry.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): In response to the 2008 world economic crisis, the Labour Government tasked the Automotive Council, which they had established, with putting together emergency measures to sustain our important automotive sector. We are in a similar situation, and we need action. The Labour Government introduced the scrappage scheme, which led to me, as the last Labour automotive Minister in 2010, announcing the Nissan Leaf going to Sunderland—that is the type of action we need. Will the Minister task the Automotive Council with putting together emergency measures that it will support to sustain not only Sunderland but all the other plants, including at Bridgend, Dagenham and Ellesmere Port, to ensure that the strong automotive sector we have all built—Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative—over the past 15 years is maintained at this dangerous time?

Greg Clark: It is important for the hon. Gentleman to recognise that the investment being made in Sunderland is greater than was planned two and a half years ago. The company is investing more of its capital in Sunderland than it originally intended. That is significant because the pace of change in the sector means that there are great opportunities for investment right across it. We have a reputation because of a long-term commitment to the sector that started before this Government for being at the leading edge of innovation. If we can resolve the question of our future relationship with the European Union, I believe that substantial investments will be made very quickly, to the great benefit of this country and the people who work across it.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): When I started my career in manufacturing, I had the great benefit of being taught by experts in lean manufacturing from Nissan, Toyota Burnaston and Airbus. One thing that was drilled into me from a young age was the concept of the seven wastes: transportation, inventory, motion, waiting, over-production, over-processing and defects. The worst of those wastes was inventory. As a result of the uncertainty facing British industry, inventory levels are increasing, putting British industry at a permanent competitive disadvantage. Does the Minister recognise that the absence of a customs union will put British industry at a permanent strategic competitive disadvantage?

Greg Clark: I am impressed at the hon. Gentleman's recall of the principles that he was taught. He is right that one of the benefits and sources of efficiency in our production system is that companies do not need warehouses or inventory. It is clearly a matter of huge regret that companies are having to invest in inventory and warehouses and divert capital from more productive uses. I agree that we need a deal and an agreement that allows just-in-time production to continue. I strongly share his analysis of that.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): This is clearly a terrible decision for not only Nissan Sunderland and the whole north-east but the entire automotive industry, given how much of it depends on scale and component suppliers working to scale. The Secretary of State understands this sector particularly well. Does he accept that the industry wants a customs union and a single market? Does he accept that the Government have a responsibility to remove the diesel levy that they introduced two years ago?

Greg Clark: Obviously the hon. Gentleman has great familiarity with the industry, from his constituency perspective. The industry has consistently expressed itself satisfied with the deal that has been proposed. It has said so in terms at the overall level, through the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, and individual companies have said so. The industry is concerned that this House has not come to a resolution to turn that agreement into something that it can depend on. I hope he will join colleagues from across the House in advocating the kind of compromise that will enable the whole House, not just by a slim majority but wholeheartedly, to agree a deal that can send confidence to investors in this industry and others around the world.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There is no doubt that this is bad news. At Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port, we have had more than our share of bad news in recent times—we have lost over half the workforce in the last year. Now that we know what the Government are prepared to offer to encourage investment in car manufacturing, can the Secretary of State confirm that the same or very similar terms will be available to any other applicants?

Greg Clark: When I first made the statement to the House on 31 October 2016, I described the programme of support that has been operated for many years, in which investment in training the workforce, environmental improvements and R&D can be applied for, and those applications are subject to independent scrutiny. We have a good record of providing that. It is available to large, medium and small firms and is well known in the sector.

Points of Order

6.45 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware of reports that the Government were offering Labour MPs in economically challenged areas financial support for constituency projects in return for support for the Prime Minister's Brexit deal. I oppose the Prime Minister's deal, and there are no circumstances in which I would support it. If reports are correct, my area would therefore not qualify. Can you confirm that targeting individual constituencies in that way raises issues of hybridity, if targeted offers are accompanied by legislation?

"Erskine May" states that the House resolved on 22 June 1958:

"That it is contrary to the usage and derogatory to the dignity of this House that any of its Members should bring forward, promote or advocate in this House any proceeding or measure in which he may have acted or been concerned for or in consideration of any pecuniary fee or reward."

Will you consider whether a reward includes a benefit to a Member's constituency? It is arguable that a Member may be under pressure from constituents to accept a reward in the form of targeted support and may thereby be under pressure to vote in a particular way to secure the Government's offer of reward. Must the offer be made to all economically challenged areas, irrespective of the way a Member chooses to vote on the Prime Minister's deal?

"Erskine May" states on page 265:

"Conduct not amounting to a direct attempt improperly to influence Members in the discharge of their duties but having a tendency to impair their independence in the future performance of their duty may be treated as a contempt."

Surely the Government's offer breaches that principle. Will you consider that matter?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of her intention to raise this subject, though not of the particular question that she had in mind. About that latter fact I make no complaint whatever; I simply say it for the benefit of people understanding the context. I knew that she wished to raise the subject, but I did not know precisely what she wished to put to me.

What I will say to the right hon. Lady off the top of my head is as follows. I am not altogether clear that the criterion of hybridity is satisfied by the circumstances she referred to, but I am happy further to reflect on the matter. On the matter of contempt, which is an extremely serious charge, if any right hon. or hon. Member seeks to level that charge against any Member, including a Minister, allegations of contempt have customarily to be raised with the Chair in writing. If the right hon. Lady is moved to allege contempt on the basis of her own conviction and from her study of "Erskine May", she is perfectly welcome to write to me about the matter, and I will consider it.

It is obvious to me that the right hon. Lady regards the circumstances she has alluded to as, at the very least, very smelly, and that point of view will be shared by many people. That is not necessarily the same as a procedural or other impropriety, but it is very clear that she regards it as malodorous behaviour. It is for individual Members to decide how they vote on these important

[Mr Speaker]

matters. As ever in this House, it is not unusual for others to seek to persuade Members to vote one way or another, or for Members to seek to negotiate political outcomes or ministerial undertakings.

I must say that the notion of a trade is a source of concern. I have not witnessed it in this way previously in my time, and it is a matter of concern. I weigh my words carefully because I do not want to make a hasty judgment. The right hon. Lady has raised an extremely serious matter, and she does so on the basis of very long experience in the House. I am not sure—I say this with caution—that she is alleging any specific financial impropriety, but if she were, that would again be a most serious matter. If she does have such concerns, beyond what I have already said to her, she may wish to seek the advice of the Comptroller and Auditor General. I will leave my response to the right hon. Lady there for now.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Some of us freely voted for the withdrawal agreement but also represent seats in the north, and I similarly wish that we are not discriminated against because we freely gave our vote without any money.

Mr Speaker: Well, I note that. Without any pejorative reference to any other right hon. or hon. Member, I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that he is veritably a sea-green incorruptible. The idea that the right hon. Gentleman would vote for any reason other than his personal conviction is, to me, unimaginable, and that is quite a striking statement from the Chair because my imagination is quite vivid. However, it is unimaginable that the right hon. Gentleman would do other than vote in accordance with his conviction. Indeed, I think he would be rather offended by the suggestion that somebody would try to procure his vote by what he might regard as an improper influence. I think we will leave the matter there for now. I saw somebody else brow-furrowed, but not rising.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In business questions on Thursday, I likened my local town to Aleppo. The *Official Report* unfortunately described it as “a leper”, which, as you can imagine, is somewhat different from the message I was trying to get across. Although it was probably righter than me, may I ask your guidance? I am happy for the record to stand, but it was not in fact what I actually said.

Mr Speaker: It could be quite difficult now for the hon. Gentleman to correct the record, although if he wanted to consult the Table Office about a written question he might put down, he could probably find his own salvation. For the avoidance of doubt, the hon. Gentleman, as I understand it, was referring to a place, the title of which begins with an A and, because it is a place name, with a capital A; he was not referring to someone suffering from a very serious and regrettable disease. I hope that that is helpful to him, in so far as he is communicating with the “Bridgwater Bugle” or some other organ of note in his constituency. I am sure he will want to ensure that the facts are known, and I have the impression from his grinning countenance that he is satisfied with that reply.

Social Security

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I propose that we debate motions 1 and 2 together. There are motions this afternoon, and I do not want Members to be confused. More importantly, I do not want people outside this place or viewing our proceedings to be uninitiated. There are two motions, both on the matter of social security. The first is the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2019—oh dear, oh dear; just as I say this, the Gallery starts to empty—and the second is the draft Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order 2019, and the pace of departure is hastening as I speak. I suggest, with the leave of the House, that we debate motions 1 and 2 on social security together. To move the first of the two motions, I call the Minister, who has some audience in the Chamber and at least some sort of dedicated and loyal following upstairs.

6.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): I beg to move,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.

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

That the draft Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.

Guy Opperman: Thank you, Mr Speaker—what an introduction. I will not take the departure personally. With your permission, I will address both the orders at the same time.

The reality is that automatic enrolment is one of this country’s biggest and quietest success stories. It is a cross-party success story that has reformed private pension saving, with nearly 10 million people now signed up to a private pension. Our thanks are due to the 1.4 million employers up and down the country that have supported automatic enrolment.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I am very pleased by the development of automatic enrolment in East Renfrewshire, but while the Minister is at the Dispatch Box, will he take the opportunity to update me on the progress in relation to collective defined-contribution schemes?

Guy Opperman: The good news is that approximately 5,000 jobholders in East Renfrewshire are now benefiting from a workplace private pension, and our thanks are due to the 1,270-plus employers in my hon. Friend’s constituency.

On collective defined-contribution schemes—I know the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who speaks for the Opposition, is very passionate about them as well—I can confirm that, following the closure of the Government consultation on CDCs last week, the Government intend to proceed with CDC legislation, subject of course to the formal response to that consultation. It is right that I recognise on the Floor of the House the fantastic work my hon. Friend has done in bringing forward a ten-minute rule motion and then a private Member’s Bill to prompt and trigger the consideration of CDCs. This will play a massive

part for the Royal Mail postmen and women who work in all weathers—I know there is interesting weather in East Renfrewshire—to support local businesses and the local economy.

The guaranteed minimum pensions increase order is a technical matter that is debated by this House on an annual basis. It provides for defined-benefit occupational pension schemes that are contracted out to increase members' guaranteed minimum pensions that accrued between 1988 and 1997 by 2.4%, in line with the increase in the consumer prices index to the previous September.

The automatic enrolment order reflects the conclusions of this year's annual review of the automatic enrolment earnings thresholds, as required by the Pensions Act 2008. In conducting the review, the Secretary of State has considered both the automatic enrolment earnings trigger, which determines the point when someone becomes eligible to be automatically enrolled into a qualifying workplace pension, and the qualifying earnings band, which determines those earnings on which the enrolled employee and their employer have to pay a proportion into a workplace pension.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The Minister will know that the upper threshold is linked to the higher rate threshold for income tax. Will he explain to the House why the Government are prioritising this £1.3 billion tax cut for higher earners over reversing cuts to universal credit or ending the benefits freeze a year early?

Guy Opperman: The hon. Lady will understand that the trigger and the earnings limit are in line with national insurance figures. The level was £6,032 in 2018-19, which has gone up to £6,136. The upper limit was £46,350, which has gone up to £50,000. There will be more people saving by way of automatic enrolment by reason of these changes, and those enhanced by this will be numbered in the tens of thousands.

With respect, automatic enrolment is supported on a cross-party basis. It is a successful policy, with 10 million people in various constituencies up and down the country now benefiting from it. In February last year, the last group of smallest employers took on their duty to enrol all staff, and we now have 1.4 million employers. In April this year, we go to 8%, and individuals and employers will therefore be saving a substantial amount. The crucial statistic is that only 9% of individuals have opted out of, or ceased to have, an automatically enrolled pension on an ongoing basis.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): I welcome the order. In considering the earnings trigger staying at £10,000—I note that that brings about another 40,000 people in, with an inflationary reduction—did the Minister think about the auto-enrolment review and the various recommendations that the trigger should be reduced to the lower earnings threshold, or should at least be extended so that someone could add up all their jobs to determine whether they qualified over that trigger? Is he tempted to make a change down to £6,000 or to a cumulative total, or is he thinking that next year, when we do not have to do the escalation, would perhaps be a better time to do that?

Guy Opperman: My hon. Friend asks his customary astute question, with his deep knowledge of this issue. The reality of the Government's approach is that we wish to address the increase to 8%, get to April 2019, address the degree of opt-outs that follow from the increase to 8% and, at that stage, consider where we are. We have already had the 2017 automatic enrolment review, which agrees that the limit will go down to the first pound, and that we will go down from 22 to 18 in terms of the working population. The key point is that we should get to 8%; we should get this country up to a situation where we have ever larger numbers of people being not only part of automatic enrolment, but in a situation where they are up to 8%. That is possibly not the entirety of where we should be going, but, without a shadow of a doubt, it is a massive step forward.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): If I may follow the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), who is a member of the Work and Pensions Committee, the Government clearly should be worried about people opting out when there are big changes. However, would the Minister and his Department argue to his colleagues from the Treasury, who are sitting just by him, that we could more profitably use some of the huge subsidies that go to higher rate taxpayers for their pensions to pay the contributions of those who are low paid?

Guy Opperman: I am in absolutely no doubt that my esteemed colleagues from the Treasury will be taking due note of the right hon. Gentleman's advice and recommendations on pension tax relief, as he is the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee. *[Interruption.]* They have encyclopaedic memories; they do not necessarily need to write particular words down, and they also have the benefit of *Hansard*. However, I am sure that the Chair of the Select Committee would agree that the primary purpose of auto-enrolment is to get to 8% and then to gain a proper understanding of where we are at that stage. There is a perfectly legitimate debate to be had across the House, on what is a cross-party policy formulated over 10 years, about where we then go in terms of employer contribution, employee contributions, the rates that one must go to and the tax relief that applies. That, I would suggest, is for another day. In those circumstances, I commend the orders to the House.

7.3 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): First, in relation to the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2019, we note it. Secondly, in relation to the Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order 2019, I would like to speak to it briefly.

I am the first to accept that, as the Minister has said, there has been cross-party support over the past 10 years for auto-enrolment, but he will forgive me a commercial for the last Labour Government. It was the last Labour Government who commissioned the 2006 Adair Turner review—I actually chaired some of the policy discussions that led to that decision. The review produced an excellent report, and I was one of those who was pleased indeed that our Government acted on it. However, the success of auto-enrolment subsequently could not have been achieved had it not been for the cross-party approach to which the Minister referred.

[Jack Dromey]

There is no question but that auto-enrolment has led to a significantly better workplace pensions landscape, with an additional 10 million workers estimated to be newly saving or saving more as a result of auto-enrolment into master trusts. That has led now to almost £20 billion of pension saving, mostly by low-income workers. The Opposition also welcomed the moves by the Government to reduce the age of eligibility, which was an important step in the right direction.

However, for all the immense benefits attached to auto-enrolment, it is not a perfect system, and there are many issues that need to be acted on at the next stage if we are to make the pensions landscape better. First, the threshold at which workers are automatically enrolled is too high. According to the latest figures from the Department for Work and Pensions, 37% of female workers, 33% of workers with a disability and 28% of black and minority ethnic workers are not eligible for master trust saving through auto-enrolment.

Secondly, auto-enrolment does not cover the self-employed or workers in the gig economy. It is welcome that the Government are now taking steps in relation to pilot projects to seek to identify the problems and overcome them. It is particularly welcome that, as part of that, they are including at least one or maybe two joint initiatives with trade unions representing workers in sectors where there are large numbers of self-employed.

Thirdly, 8% cannot be the summit of our ambitions—that there is no doubt. Labour commenced down this path when in government, and this Government have done things subsequently, so of course we have moved step by step. The Minister was right to say that, as we reach 8%, we need to take stock of where we go from there. We will need to build on that at the next stages, and, commensurate with getting the balance right, we will need, dare I say it, more of an emphasis on employer contribution, although employee contributions will of course continue to be crucial as well.

I have just one final point. I was grateful that the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) raised the matter of CDC. A wider point in relation to auto-enrolment is that it has been a positive move towards many more workers saving. We have always said that we do not want, in any way, to threaten good DB schemes, and we always defend good DB schemes first and foremost, but I am afraid that the direction of travel on that has been depressing in recent years. If one falls back on a defined contribution arrangement, however, the problem is, all too often, the inadequacy of such arrangements. The hon. Gentleman was therefore right that the agreement reached by Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union was a significant breakthrough. I pay tribute to them, because it is a groundbreaking agreement, which covers in excess of 140,000 workers.

I also welcome the Government's preparedness, having consulted, to legislate. The Opposition will certainly work with the Government—on other issues, we may have differences, but on this we will work with them—to give effect to this groundbreaking agreement as soon as possible. That is not least because it will offer significantly better savings and a significantly better standard of living in retirement than would be the case if the workers concerned fell back on simple DC schemes. That, for us,

is a particular landmark. I confirm that the Opposition stand ready, whenever the Government are ready, to bring forward the necessary legislation in this House. Some 143,000 workers will benefit, so the sooner we can introduce the legislation, the better.

7.8 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this debate. I concur with the hon. Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), as well as the Minister, in what I am sure will be a largely consensual debate. The SNP will not oppose these statutory instruments this evening, but it is right that I outline some areas where we still have concerns.

First, with regard to the guaranteed minimum pensions increase order, we should acknowledge the context. The UK state pension is one of the most miserly in Europe. We lag far behind other European countries in the cash amount paid and the pension to earnings ratio. When we consider that alongside the proposed cuts to pension credit, the scandal of the state pension age increase for 1950s women, and the public sector workers who have been ripped off to the tune of £4 billion, we can see that the UK Government have been letting our pensioners down.

The GMP was supposed to provide a minimum weekly pension roughly equivalent to the amount of additional state pension that would have accrued if they had not been contracted out. The scheme operated until 1997, and although rights do not continue to accrue, they continue to be protected either by the general level of prices or 3%, whichever is less. However, the changes to the state pension mean that the rights accrued between 1978 and 1988 are not protected or subject to this statutory instrument. That is worth bearing in mind. Many pensioners will be getting much less than was anticipated when the scheme was operational. People who were contracted out were not made aware or did not understand what the implications could be long term, and were given the impression that their retirement income was protected at comparable levels. I would be interested to hear what the Minister is doing to ensure that people are properly advised of potential pension changes and that the pension entitlements accrued by workers are better protected in future, with particular regard to the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—the WASPI women—I am sure.

The SI also highlights why it is so important that the UK Government speed up the pension dashboard process. Having one simple dashboard would make it much easier for people to know exactly what their anticipated retirement income should be. Right now, about 47% of UK adults do not know what is in their pension pot. A dashboard would provide that knowledge. One person in five has said they would be more likely to save if they had more information about their pension savings. When people are better able to plan for retirement, that saves the Exchequer. Once again, I suggest that an independent pensions commission would help to ensure that the complexity and vastness of pensions policy could be effectively studied and improved. I hope the Government will finally consider such a commission.

I turn briefly to auto-enrolment. We welcomed auto-enrolment and the Minister described it as a success story. I will explain briefly how he could make it even

more so. What we are talking about this evening is the earnings trigger at which auto-enrolment comes into effect. This band sets a minimum contribution level for money purchasing pension schemes. The minimum of the band is also relevant for defining who can opt in if they earn under the earnings trigger. We had hoped the UK Government might have looked at expanding the workforce who would be eligible under auto-enrolment. Considering historical gender pay gaps in lower-paying industries and the fact that women are more likely to take career breaks to care for children, women have always had lower pension savings even though they need bigger pots due to longer life expectancy.

We also know that a large number of those falling below the income threshold will be women. It is therefore disappointing that the Government have not brought forward their welcome proposal to lower the threshold to £6,136, which under current plans will not come into force for some years. It is also disappointing that inclusion of 18-year-olds under auto-enrolment is also not expected for many years.

Finally, I would appreciate the Minister's guidance on why these two SIs were not consulted on ahead of being presented this evening.

7.13 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The pensions system is overly complex. People no longer work in one job for life; they have multiple jobs over a career. Keeping on top of lots of different pension schemes over a number of decades makes it incredibly difficult to plan for the future. Some people find it very difficult to make savings due to other financial pressures—indeed, before I came to this place my pension contribution was minimal as a huge chunk of my income went instead on paying nursery fees. I am sure that many younger women will have found the same. We are storing up problems for the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) said, the Scottish National party has long argued for an independent pension commission, because this issue is too important to be kicked around by Governments of different political persuasions. People need to be able to make plans and future Governments need to be ready for the challenges that an ageing population will bring.

This Government have acknowledged the complexity of the pensions system, but they have not really done enough about it so far. Many of my constituents have contacted me as part of the campaign to show their support for a Government-funded pension dashboard, but the Government are still dragging their heels. The Department for Work and Pensions has indicated that it would prefer for the project to be led by industry, but there are many reasons why that is problematic. It would lead to a patchy system that would not encompass everything. If the Government do not step up and supply data from the Treasury on state pensions and non-contributory public sector pensions, that effectively renders the project useless.

The public's relationship with the Government relies on a series of contracts. When people trust Government bodies such as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to give them accurate information about the tax that they owe and then in good faith pay that amount, they do not then expect there to be all kinds of hoops to jump

through to access their state pension. Stay-at-home mums, for example, need to be aware that they have to be registered for child benefit to clock up credits towards their state pension record. That is not well enough understood. The Government need to take extra steps to ensure people understand what their entitlement rests on.

People expect—this is not unreasonable—that a competent Government will inform them of their obligations and allow them to effectively plan for the future. You only have to ask one of the 3,400 WASPI women in my constituency how devastating it is to find out, and not because the Government have made any special effort to tell them, that retirement will come much later than planned. Rosemary Dickson, a leading light in the WASPI campaign in the west of Scotland, has been out on the streets. That will continue with a demo on 23 February to let people know, because too many women still do not know about it. There have not been 3,400 women at my constituency surgery to complain about it. The UK Government at the time waited 14 years before beginning to tell women that their retirement would be postponed. Women have been let down across the board by successive Governments in this place and that needs to stop now.

The WASPI women cannot retire when planned and they cannot spend time with their grandchildren as they planned. Many now struggle to make ends meet. The impact of this policy is already bearing out in labour market figures. According to the annual survey of hours and earnings, the gender pay gap for over-60s has increased by nearly 3% in just one year. The gender pension gap is nearly 40% in Scotland. The system is clearly failing women. If the Government are not willing to act to close the gap, they should devolve the powers and let the Scottish Government do it for them.

I am sure there will be those on the Government Benches who would say that the gender pension gap does not really matter, because it is the overall household income that counts. However, there are many reasons that a woman may not want to rely wholly on her partner for financial support. Relationships can and do break down, and it is most often women who are left worse off when they do. There is also a failure to recognise that many more women will be in same-sex relationships and may be doubly losing out as a result. They are reliant not on a man's income, but on two female incomes in the household. That needs to be recognised, too.

Auto-enrolment has increased the number of people saving for retirement, but the policy needs some work to be more inclusive of those who need it most. With the trigger frozen at £10,000, those earning below that threshold—again, mainly women working part time—are missing out on auto-enrolment. The scheme is of even less use to those women working in insecure employment, such as zero-hours contracts, who do not have consistent earnings and perhaps have additional pressures relating to childcare.

Worse still, there is an incentive for employers to suppress wages to avoid contributing to these schemes. The figures show that 43% of self-employed people do not have a pension and that there are 4.8 million self-employed people in the UK. More work needs to be done to reach out to those self-employed people and to make sure that they do not store up problems for the future, too.

[Alison Thewliss]

According to the UK Women's Budget Group, auto-enrolment perpetuates the gender gap in pensions. As with all private pensions, it makes no allowances for the disproportionate caring responsibilities that many women still have. Pension inequality is not a new problem, nor is it going away any time soon. I would like to hear more from the Government about how they are going to have a serious, targeted strategy to address that, particularly for women.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Resolved,

That the draft Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.—(Guy Opperman.)

Sport in the UK

7.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies): I beg to move,

That this House has considered sport in the UK.

I am delighted that the House has the opportunity to discuss this important subject today. This debate takes place just over three years on from the publication of our sport strategy, "Sporting Future". I will shortly be laying a written statement in the House on the progress we have made on implementing that strategy. "Sporting Future" set out a radical new vision for sport and physical activity. It reassesses how we value and measure the nation's health and wellbeing. It prioritises tackling inactivity as well as engaging people from under-represented groups. It places five outcomes at the heart of everything we do: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): On economic development, although the Minister will appreciate that, in essence, sport is devolved to the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government, does she welcome physical regeneration, as has happened in the Llynfi valley in my constituency in the community of Nantyffyllon? It has redeveloped an entire rugby ground, including new facilities for a sports club. This has brought about community cohesion together with whole area regeneration, so sport can not only play a big physical part in improving people's fitness, but bring about real change in a wider community.

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. Indeed, I have met my counterparts in Wales and will have further such meetings. I absolutely agree that when communities come together around sport, it is really important that economic regeneration plays its part as well. I think that those in his community are benefiting greatly.

I spent my first three months as Sports Minister meeting people in the sector and seeing at first hand the fantastic work that is going on across the country, as we have heard. This is mainly a devolved policy area, so a lot of what I will talk about this evening relates to grassroots in England-only, but there are some reserved aspects in my policy brief, and we share themes and common goals across the UK. As I have said, I met the home nations Ministers at sports cabinet and I plan to build on relationships during my tenure and have further visits and meetings planned.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Frodsham junior football club in my constituency has done a remarkable job in fundraising for a needed 3G facility. My concern is that the premiership is not doing its bit. What is the Minister doing to ensure that those vast funds—those vast profits—are used for grassroots football?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. It is something we have heard across the House, and in my first three months in this job, it has been raised time and again. I looked into the eyes of the premiership leadership last week and spoke about many

issues with them, such as how the Football Foundation is doing and how that £100 million that the league gives actually works. I am hot on their heels on this one and it is absolutely right that we continue to work together for all our grassroots sport.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I know that the Minister shares my concerns about financial transparency in the Premier League so that we can see not only how money is being used to support grassroots, but to enable the continuing economic benefits that the Minister spoke about so eloquently. Newcastle United Foundation in my constituency does fantastic work in using the power of football to inspire young people. Unfortunately, the Premier League clubs' financial transparency does not enable us to see what is really happening to the money in the club itself.

Mims Davies: I hear the hon. Lady—she always wears the outfit of the day when mentioning her football club. It is absolutely vital that when sports clubs are doing well, the economic benefits are felt in the city. Southampton has had a difficult time recently and I know that the city, which is close to me, has felt those pains. I absolutely hear the hon. Lady about the transparency issue and the Premier League. There is work to do to keep those conversations going, but I hear her loudly, once again.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I know that a lot of what the Minister wishes to say will not apply to the devolved region of Northern Ireland, but I recognise that she has indicated how important sport is as an economic driver. Given that no devolved Government are currently operational in Northern Ireland, will the Minister encourage and pick up on those strands and push those issues, so that the North West 200, the biggest motorbike race and festival on the island of Ireland, and the Ulster Grand Prix, the fastest motorcycle road race in the world, are given encouragement and support by central Government?

Mims Davies: I hear the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, my officials and I have had conversations about making sure that we do not forget our links to Northern Ireland. In the sports cabinet, it was said very clearly that we cannot forget to focus on areas where there may not be that push right now. I will take that away as an action, and I am very happy to continue to look at that area.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the army of volunteers who support mass participation in sport? In Cheltenham, we have a parkrun every Saturday in Pittville park—it is a 5k run—but it simply would not be possible without the volunteers who make it happen. Will she join me in paying tribute to their valuable contribution?

Mims Davies: I am being given a workout with the interventions this evening and I have absolutely no problem with that. I thank my hon. Friend for raising Parkrun. I will come on to that later in my speech. There are junior parkruns and local parkruns. Frankly, by half past 9, people can get their weekend exercise done because of volunteers, rain or shine—or snow, as we have seen recently. It is absolutely right that we thank our local volunteers for that.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con) *rose*—

Mims Davies: I am going to set out my thoughts on participation, but I give way first to my hon. Friend.

Maggie Throup: My hon. Friend talked about junior parkruns, which reminds us that habits formed in childhood often last a lifetime. Initiatives such as the Erewash school sport partnership do just that. They start in primary schools and hopefully, some of those children will continue with sport throughout life, which is so important. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mims Davies: I feel that my hon. Friend has read the next part of my speech. Participation and a culture of participation within families and communities is absolutely vital. I would be delighted to set out some of my thoughts on that, so let us talk about participation. We are making good progress on getting more people active. We want half a million people to be more regularly active across England by 2020, with at least half of those being women. Over 470,000 more people are already active compared with when we launched the strategy in 2015, but delivering long-term change in habits requires persistence. We know that we need to do more to get and keep people active.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): In the three months that my hon. Friend has been in post she has been an absolute champion for women's sport and women's participation in sport, and we welcome that. In that spirit, will she join me in wanting to see women's T20 cricket at the Birmingham Commonwealth games? It is a fantastic sport and we want to see it there in the west midlands.

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend tempts me on that point—he knows it is very tempting and I have recently been hoping to visit his constituency—but that is not fully down to me. However, I have made it very clear that participation, particularly of women, and broadcasting opportunities are absolutely vital, so this is on my radar.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister think that in the 21st century it is a scandal that only 10% of television sport coverage is dedicated to women's sport? If she does share that view, what will she and the Secretary of State do to get Ofcom to take action against the free-to-air broadcasters on this issue?

Mims Davies: I spoke to the Rugby Football Union just this afternoon, praising it for its women's Six Nations opportunities and for making sure that there is a chance for women to be seen doing that sport. We also talked about the events list. If we want to inspire people, it is absolutely right that we get chance to see them on the telly or indeed that we can see them play and take part in our local communities. The Secretary of State is sitting next to me and we are very keen—he has had meetings with broadcasters and I have some coming up—that the elite are seen on our TVs and ultimately, that people feel that they can aspire to be part of sport.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful case and I had to intervene on this point, because statistically, one might say that

[Rebecca Pow]

women in rugby—in terms of the Six Nations—are destined to do better than the men, and the same can be said of the England women's football team. So, to follow the point made by the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), why are we not seeing more coverage of women's sport on our screens?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): On a point of clarification, the hon. Lady was talking about rugby union. I say that because there is rugby league as well.

Mims Davies: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Member makes an important point about how women in sport are inspiring others. I was talking about participation and the people we should be inspiring: everybody. If we are to do that, women and girls need the opportunity to be seen on our televisions, so I will absolutely take that away with me tonight.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The gender reward gap between women's and men's sport is often reported on and is a serious problem. The BBC has reported that 83% of sports have better gender parity, but does the Minister agree that seeing more women's sports, such as rugby union, rugby league and football, on television will help to close that gap?

Mims Davies: Indeed. The hon. Lady points out that 83% is getting there, but it is not good enough. In some of my brief conversations with sports journalists so far, I have been keen to point out that this is "sport", not "women's sport", and once we think of it as sport for all and see everybody participating, on the TV or on the pitch, as equally valuable, we will have made real progress, and part of that is equal pay.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend rightly associates people being inspired to take part in sport with seeing sport on television, but she must be aware that a lot of sport now has to be paid for before it can be viewed and that subscription to channels such as BT Sport can be in excess of £30 a month. Therefore, will she encourage more free-to-air sport as part of the strategy to encourage more people, be they men or women, to take part in sporting events and to enjoy a more active lifestyle?

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend makes a good point about free-to-air sport—indeed, I made that point to rugby union representatives today—but if we are prepared to pay for Netflix, we should also be prepared to pay for great sport. We should have the broadest opportunity for people to be seen participating and inspiring at the highest level.

On participation, I was talking about everyone, and I am pleased that the Chamber feels the same. We must ensure that everyone can benefit from sport. I also want to ensure that we reach harder-to-reach groups and get them active and staying active.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure the Minister knows that basketball is the second most played team sport in the UK and reaches hard-to-reach groups in urban communities. I pay tribute to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and

her predecessor, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), for giving £500,000 to GB Basketball. It meant, in particular, that the women could stay on court and qualify for EuroBasket top of their league. It is important to look at UK sport funding to ensure that basketball can make its Olympic dream come true.

Mims Davies: Basketball is a sport that has been helped by the aspiration fund, which makes it possible to turn the dial, become medal winners and so continue to inspire. I am delighted about the fund, and I, too, pay tribute to my predecessor.

I was talking about harder-to-reach groups, and some of those have just been described. We want more women; more black, Asian and minority ethnic women and men; and more disabled people taking part in sport, as well as those who might have a hard time finding the cash for exercise and wellbeing. We want everyone to have the opportunity to take part, including those who struggle to find a family activity that they enjoy—we have heard about that this evening as well. These are often the people facing the biggest hurdles to being active, and they are the people we need to support most. I want to tackle those hurdles and make sport fun.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of the work being done by the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association not only with seniors—I think I qualify as a senior, but then so does Ronnie O'Sullivan—but with people with disabilities, particularly people with autism? Despite that, Sport England does not give snooker any funding. It gives a lot of money to bowls, archery and angling but none to snooker. Would she be prepared to look at that?

Mims Davies: The hon. Lady makes a great point. We need to work with Sport England to reach everyone who can take part in sport in whatever way possible. I was lucky enough recently to speak at an event marking the 30th anniversary of the Paralympics, and it made me think of my young children, who do not see any barriers to participation because of London 2012, which changed so much. It is absolutely right that where there is an opportunity for people to take part in sport we give them that opportunity. That is the focus of my speech this evening.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The Minister is making a strong case for participation in sport, but there is also a clear case in terms of preventive health, given that evidence suggests that being involved in sport reduces by 30% people's incidence of stroke, cancer and other illnesses. Today being World Cancer Day, does she agree that there is a long-term public purse benefit to getting people fit and healthy through participation in sport?

Mims Davies: Absolutely. I will build on that thought in my speech. It is vital that we work with health bodies and communities and through social prescribing. It can help to keep our communities fitter, healthier and more connected.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Does the Minister agree that this is about not just physical but mental health, and will she join me in celebrating the work of Elaine Wyllie, the founder of the daily mile? All over the world,

more than 7,000 schools and nurseries practise the daily mile, and the evidence of the benefit that comes to the children who participate is immense. Would she encourage all our schools and nurseries to engage with the daily mile?

Mims Davies: The daily mile has been a revelation in getting youngsters involved. I recently visited a school that was getting involved but which did not have much green space, only tarmac. It was difficult for that school, but the inventive ways in which the daily mile is being used across the country is a sight to behold. I congratulate Elaine on her work.

Stephen Kerr: I forgot to mention that it all began in Stirling at St Ninians Primary School—the most important thing of all!

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have no problem with interventions. The problem is that the people wanting to speak later are cutting down their own time. The time limit was 10 minutes, but it is now down to eight.

Mims Davies: I will plough on, but thank goodness for Stirling!

I want us to find different ways of doing things. I want to find the next parkrun or daily mile. I thank the fabulous parkrun family for all they are doing. Building strongly on the success of the This Girl Can campaign, we need to be smarter about how we use data and new technologies to get people moving and—more importantly—staying moving. I want us to make being active easy and fun for everyone and a habit for everyone.

December's Sport England's active lives children's survey will help us to understand how children in particular engage with and think about sport and physical activity. This world-leading study represents a big step forward. We now have robust data that tells us which changes will make the biggest difference to our children's lives. The first set of results was published late last year, and the evidence it set out was a wake-up call for the sector. Our children are simply not active enough. We all need to address that head on.

I will work with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, and I am delighted that we will be publishing a new cross-Government plan to focus on getting kids active in and out of school. I particularly want to focus on after-school periods when children should have the opportunity to be active and safe in enjoyable environments. I want to make sure that all children have access to the right sporting offer and that they enjoy physical activity and therefore can reap the benefits of an active lifestyle. Sport needs to be fun, inclusive and engaging. There is a world of options out there, as we have heard, and I want us to work harder to make sport and physical activity appealing to everyone.

Why does this matter? Being active brings many benefits not just to children but to people of all ages. Working with the Department of Health and Social Care, I want us to embrace the use of sport and physical activity in improving health outcomes. Being active can reduce chronic diseases and health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, and it can ease pressures on our health and social care systems. Given our aging society, we must do everything we can to help people to enjoy healthy, independent and fulfilling lives for longer.

With my loneliness Minister hat on, I must add that getting people active, where that means people being connected, is also vital, and the enjoyment and sense of belonging that can come from taking part in sport and physical activity can be a huge part of that. Real change is already happening in that regard. As part of the NHS long-term plan, NHS England is hiring 1,000 new advisers to expand social prescribing and help patients to lead fitter, healthier and happier lives. About 50% of GP appointments are not directly related to medical conditions, and pills are prescribed. Evidence shows that referrals to, for instance, exercise classes, sports groups or, indeed, ballroom dancing classes can greatly help people's health and wellbeing.

However, I want to go further, and work with ministerial colleagues to use the power of sport to make lives better. Physical activity can help us in so many ways. Getting more people walking or cycling reduces congestion, improves air quality and can revitalise our high streets. Sport can bring people together and reduce social isolation, and the discipline and teamwork that it encourages can also be an important tool in cutting reoffending rates in the criminal justice system.

My second priority is protecting the culture and integrity of high-level sport. What matters is not just what we do to win medals and create sporting success, but how we go about it. It cannot be right for athletes such as Kelly Sotherton to receive their medals six years late and behind closed doors because the systems are not right. Since taking up my role, I have had discussions with UK Anti-Doping, UK Sport, the World Anti-Doping Agency and representatives of athletes in order to understand what has gone wrong in some quarters, and to make the UK's position clear.

How can we inspire more people through sport by preserving and strengthening its integrity? People must have faith in sports that they know and love. Our athletes deserve to know that they are competing on a level playing field. We must continue to operate robust anti-doping and governance regimes, both domestically and internationally. We must continue to lead the way.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a superb speech and an important point. Does she agree that if fans cannot trust what they see, the integrity of sport will be permanently damaged, and that we need a multi-agency approach, information sharing and, very importantly, much more player education, so that those who are tempted to cheat know that they will be caught and punished?

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend has walked in my shoes in this role, and she knows how important that issue is. When I have spoken to athletes, there has been compelling evidence that the integrity of their sport, the hard work that they demonstrate, and everything that they do to lead the way is undermined when people feel that sport does not have the integrity that they hold so dear.

Dr Poulter: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; she is being very generous with her time. She is making a good point about the integrity of sport, but will she also look into some of the often questionable medical exemptions of recent times? There has been reference to a level playing field. It sometimes seems that it is the athletes who have the best doctors, and can obtain the

[Dr Poulter]

best medical exemptions and certificates, who can benefit from medications that may enhance performance. In the context of other sports people, that may not be correct when the medical conditions involved do not reach a threshold that I, as a doctor, would consider to be sufficient to require such medications.

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend has made an important point. When sport is being led by the question of who has the best doctor, it is likely that we have a problem.

People need to feel that it is safe to take part in sport, and ensuring that children and those at risk are protected as much as possible is a top priority for me. I have been speaking to my ministerial colleagues in the Ministry of Justice about putting sports coaches in a position of trust to give additional protection to 16 and 17-year-olds, and that work continues. We need to inspire children to take part in sport, to make them feel welcome, and to let them have fun. That golden thread runs through all that we do.

As we have heard, if we do not get this right over time, it will affect our love for our sport. It will affect those who take part in it, and also those who watch it. There are huge benefits to be had from watching live sport. London 2012 showcased to the world the UK's enthusiasm for that, and we see it week in, week out in our sporting fixtures and at our local sporting clubs. Today our sports grounds attract a wider and more diverse range of spectators than ever before, and it is important for those experiences to be enjoyable and safe for all who attend. I know that many of my colleagues are interested in stadium safety and the long-standing commitment to an all-seater policy. I am expecting a report reviewing existing evidence on that topic very soon, and, along with the Secretary of State, I will consider its findings carefully.

As a new sports Minister considering the experience of attending football matches, I have been immediately struck by the racist and other discriminatory behaviour that has been reported over the last few months. I am sure that all Members have been alarmed by the worrying number of incidents about which we have all been hearing. We can take heart, because people feel more confident about reporting such experiences, but we must not tolerate a return to the worst days of sport. Football is the national game, which people of all ages and from all backgrounds should be able to enjoy and play. It should bring people together, not foster division. Those involved in abuse are not football fans; they are using football as a cloak for discriminatory and often criminal behaviour. They are not welcome in our stadiums. In the coming weeks, I will bring together football authorities and other organisations with an interest in the issue to discuss what action must be taken to stamp out all forms of discrimination at sports events. Together, we must find a way of tackling such unacceptable behaviour.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): As the Minister may know, I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on homophobic chanting in sports stadiums—sponsored by colleagues on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee—to bring it within the remit of the Football (Offences) Act 1991. When will we hear from her whether the Government will support the Bill?

Mims Davies: I think I have made it clear tonight that I am determined to deal with this matter, but I will reserve judgment until I have heard from the authorities. I will write to the hon. Lady.

Football reaches every community in the country, and it can play its part in helping to champion the values that we want to see in our society today. However, we need to get tougher on those who refuse to play by the rules. Zero tolerance means just that. We cannot allow the minority to ruin the sport for the majority of us who love it. I look forward to reporting back to the House on the actions taken as a result of my discussions.

Let me now turn to more positive matters, because I am very conscious that I need to move on.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister include the fit and proper ownership rules in her discussions with the football authorities? My club, Forest Green Rovers, has had a run-in with Bolton Wanderers because Bolton refused to pay the money that it expected for the transfer of a player. So many of those at the lower levels of football are not, dare I say, fit and proper people to run football clubs. Will the Minister look into that?

Mims Davies: I would be happy for the hon. Gentleman to write to me about it. As I think I have made clear tonight, trust and integrity are paramount in sport.

Our sport, internationally, has a massive part to play in our global reputation. We can travel the world and meet people who do not know much about our home town, but they will know if our local football club is in the Champions' League or has been in an FA cup final. As we leave the European Union, we will work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Trade to ensure that the incredible contribution of sport can be part of our international profile, and part of our vision for global Britain. I recently met the Japanese Sports Minister, who is keen to learn from our experience of hosting major events so that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics and Olympics can be an inclusive experience for everyone.

We can continue to deliver major world events, and this summer we will host the cricket world cup, with an expected global audience of 1.5 billion people. It will be a wonderful opportunity to showcase our country, bring communities together and get more people to be active. It is not just cricket—I will rattle through the other sports. The world wheelchair curling championships take place in Stirling in March; Liverpool host the netball world cup in July; the world road-cycling championships take place in Yorkshire in 2019; UEFA 2020 Euro fixtures take place at Hampden Park and Wembley; and the UEFA women's Euros and rugby league take place in 2021, with matches hosted all over England. I am delighted that the benefits will be experienced across the country.

Our investment in major events will deliver opportunities for everyone. Everywhere, people will be able to see at first hand that sport is great. Of course, we look forward to hosting the 2022 Commonwealth games in Birmingham, which will be the biggest sporting and cultural event in the west midlands ever. All those global sports events offer a fantastic opportunity to showcase the UK to the world, and give us an opportunity to showcase our

commitment to fair and inclusive sport, which is why we must take steps to protect the culture and integrity of elite sport.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): In that long list of sports, the Minister failed to mention one particular sport that I am particularly keen on—rowing, which is important not just for the high-class activity that takes place in Henley but because it contributes to the better appreciation of the sport by young people in that area. Will she give credit to those companies for attacking sport, as it were, at both those levels?

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend mentioned high-class behaviour in Henley—I expect nothing less. Absolutely—it is fantastic that rowing is thriving, and I have promised to visit.

The Commonwealth games will take place 10 years after the Olympic and Paralympic games, and I want to build on the success of 2012, and make them an event that is remembered for bringing people together, celebrating diversity, and promoting inclusivity across the Commonwealth and beyond. Its legacy will go further, and embrace trade and investment, culture, sport, employment, housing and tourism. Later this month, I will set out the strategy with UK Sport beyond 2020, the Olympics and the Paralympics, supporting our athletes and all competitors for the next stage. As we heard, UK Sport has recently launched its aspiration fund.

I want to conclude, because I am sure that you want me to do so, Mr Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption.*] I want the number of people enjoying sport and engaging in physical activity to grow; I want sport to be embedded in Government thinking on health and social care; I want this country's amazing reputation for hosting the world's biggest sporting events to continue; I want our sporting bodies to demonstrate strong leadership and a duty of care to all participants; I want Team GB to continue its medal success; and I absolutely want to make sure that everyone can benefit from the power of sport.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): To reassure the House, it was not me who wanted the Minister to conclude—it was all the Members wishing to speak, if that helps.

7.53 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I would like to begin by sending all our best wishes to Cardiff City FC and its fans, who sang continuously throughout the match against Bournemouth on Saturday, in memory of Emiliano Sala. There is no doubt that he will for ever remain in their thoughts.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to put on record my disgust at the situation of Hakeem al-Araibi, the footballer who fled Bahrain and appeared in court today in Thailand, facing forced extradition. The Opposition strongly urge the Government to lean on Thailand and Bahrain with maximum force to drop those charges. The United Kingdom has a proud history of assisting those fleeing political persecution, and we should not stay silent on this matter.

Supporters should always be at the heart of sport. Sport should be run in the interest of fans, not the privileged few, which is what I want to focus our debate on. In a

world of ever-growing commercialisation, fans are rarely part of the decision-making process; instead, money talks. Nowhere is that more apparent than in our national game—football. The premier league has undergone a transformation in the past three decades, and without a doubt is now the best sporting league in the world, admired around the globe. Wherever we travel, whether Hollywood Boulevard or refugee camps in Bangladesh where I have worked, premier league football shirts are commonplace. It is incredibly moving to know that the UK football scene has such an incredible fan base, which we must nurture.

Fans are desperate for small changes: they want a better atmosphere in stadiums; they do not want to be at the mercy of billion-pound TV deals; they want a say in how their club is run; and they do not want their children to be bombarded with betting adverts. Those form our pledges for supporters, because we believe that fans must have a greater say in the sport that they love.

Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend accept that many fans want to see premier league football clubs doing the right thing by all their staff? Does she share my view that it is highly disappointing that only four premier league clubs pay the living wage?

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent intervention, and I share his thoughts, views and feelings that everyone should be paid the wages that they deserve, particularly when they work hard, out of hours, supporting the beautiful game of football.

Returning to football supporters in stadiums, the current system simply is not working and is not safe. Standing happens frequently, sometimes in steep tiers where the seat in front barely goes above the ankles of the person who is standing behind it. When I brought together 50 supporters' trusts for a parliamentary roundtable, they made clear what they were asking for: small sections of a stadium that can be converted to accommodate those who want to stand, allowing them to stand safely, while giving those who want to sit the enjoyment of watching a game without people standing in their way. I am a football fan, and I attend matches regularly. I know the dangers that can arise for a young family when there are people standing in front of them. Children often have to stand on their seats to watch the game.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. There was a good reason for redesigning our sports stadiums at one time, but does she agree that the introduction of safe standing areas makes watching live sport in person more affordable for many people?

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. We have made it clear that we need to take the decision away from Whitehall. What the Labour party is proposing with the safe standing system is a one-for-one seating and standing arrangement. There is no plan to cut the cost of a ticket at this point. It is about enjoyment and safety, which is paramount.

We need to take the decision away from Whitehall and devolve it to clubs, fans and local safety authorities, because they know their stadiums better than any of us. To any supporters watching, let me say that we will continue to push for the introduction of safe standing. The Government cannot kick the can down the road on

[Dr Allin-Khan]

this one. Our second pledge is on the introduction of a “fans fare” travel scheme. It is not right that fixtures are constantly rescheduled, so fans miss out on the cheapest train tickets. In the opening three weeks of the premier league season this year, five matches were rearranged for TV, which made it impossible for supporters to travel to or from the match in time. Fans deserve better—they must be part of the conversation. The Football League, the Premier League, the Rail Delivery Group and fans’ groups are all in favour of the introduction of a “fans fare” scheme, but the Government are dragging their feet. A Transport Minister agreed to meet me, but then cancelled our meeting.

Labour will not sit still. We will continue to push for this. Supporters should not be at the mercy of billion-pound TV deals. The “fans fare” travel scheme would allow them to change the date on their ticket if a match was rescheduled, so they would not miss out on the cheapest train tickets. Those who have tried to attend a match with their partner and two children will know the cost of buying four new tickets to attend a match and see their much-loved football team.

Our third pledge would give fans a say in how their club was run. Overseas investment has revolutionised the Premier League and brought remarkable success for clubs, both domestically and in Europe, but supporters are desperate for a greater say. At the moment, fans are involved in supporters forums, but with clubs increasingly becoming solely owned by rich investors, those forums are becoming meaningless when it comes to making decisions. We would make it mandatory that, when a club was sold, a proportion of the shares being sold should be offered to fans to buy. We would allow supporters trusts to appoint board members who would hold full voting rights, ensuring that fans had a place at the table.

Our fourth pledge relates to gambling. A staggering 55,000 children are problem gamblers, and this is being fuelled by an increase in sports betting. Football stadiums, football shirts and advertising boards are filled with gambling logos and names. This is fuelling a worrying epidemic in children, and not enough is being done. We are pleased that the industry has listened to our calls for a whistle-to-whistle gambling ban across all sports, but we would go further and ban gambling companies from sponsoring football shirts. People who are susceptible to gambling-related harms should be able to enjoy football without having to battle the demons of addiction. That addiction tears families apart and ruins lives. Today and always, our message to the industry is loud and clear: prove to us that you take this seriously by taking real action now, because in government, the Labour party will come down hard.

I have highlighted some of the issues being faced by fans today, but I also want to spend a few minutes talking about the future of sport. We need sport to be run in the interests of those who participate in it at grassroots level, not just of the privileged few. I ask Members to take a moment to imagine two children who were born in the same hospital on the same day. Let us imagine that they were born equal, with the same abilities and potential as each other. The barriers that they might face in life will start the moment they leave the maternity ward. This will be no truer than when it comes to their making a success of any sporting talent

they might possess. One child will go to an underfunded state secondary school where PE hours have been cut and the grass field is waterlogged for four months of the year. The other child will go to a private school where there is provision for a cricket coach to come in once a week and for the children to practise indoors during the winter.

Stephen Kerr: Is not the hon. Lady missing a significant factor in the encouragement of children—namely, their parents? I am not convinced that the circumstances she describes are definitive when it comes to whether a child excels in sport, but the encouragement of parents makes a huge difference.

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. Of course parents’ encouragement is a factor, but we cannot run away from the fact that this Government have cut 35,000 hours of PE from secondary schools. Children do not have a level playing field in this country, and the sooner this Government accept that and do something about it, the better off all our children will be.

Going back to the maternity ward, let us imagine that one of those children is a girl. She will be actively discouraged by society from getting involved in sports. Does she possess the qualities to be a professional coach, a commentator, a physiotherapist or an athlete? Will she grow up to be a role model for other girls? Many girls will never know whether they have the ability to make it to the top of their sport because of the barriers placed in front of them. If she makes it to the top in rugby, football or cricket, will she get a proper contract? Will that contract give her the security to feed her family and reach her potential without having to focus on finding additional work? Will she be given a role on a national governing body that enables her to make the changes necessary to break down the barriers that she herself has faced?

Mrs Helen Grant: The hon. Lady is making an important point. Does she agree that there is still a lack of diversity in the broadest sense when it comes to representation on boards and in senior management positions, notwithstanding the fact that we have a really healthy talent pool? Does she also agree that we need to reach a position where people from every background can not only knock on the doors for the very top jobs but actually get them?

Dr Allin-Khan: The hon. Lady makes a most excellent point. If you can see it, you can be it. I firmly believe that, and in my position as shadow Minister for Sport I have always pushed for equality in the boardroom, not only based on gender but across socioeconomic divides and for the black, Asian and minority ethnic community.

While I celebrate our wonderful Olympic success in London and Rio, I question whether we should be pumping millions into niche sports to gain a couple of gold medals when sports such as basketball, which is ever so popular in the UK, are going through a funding crisis. Should our success be measured by the number of gold medals we win?

Alex Sobel: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning basketball. I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on basketball. The UK and Team GB are on track for Olympic qualification, which will

happen at the world cup this summer, but we will need the funding from the National Basketball Association and the Women's National Basketball Association to get our players into that qualification tournament and into the Olympics.

Dr Allin-Khan: I know that my hon. Friend has been tireless in his pursuit of ensuring that basketball gets the funding it deserves. I also know that, like me, he was staggered to discover that shooting is getting £6.9 million while basketball, a popular grassroots sport that can be played by all, has had its funding cut.

Should our success be measured by the number of gold medals we can win, or by the millions of people we can motivate to get fit and active and take the opportunity to play the sport they love? Just £23 million a year is being put into grassroots sports by the Government, and half of that was put in under Labour. Local government cuts have resulted in more than 1,000 grass pitches, swimming pools and sports halls being closed over the past two years. The discussion surrounding the sale of Wembley stadium sparked an interesting debate about the funding of grassroots sport in the UK. We believe that the Football Association answered all our questions and had the best intentions, but did we really need to consider selling our national stadium to build grassroots facilities fit for the 21st century?

Mike Amesbury: Since 2010, more than 110 publicly funded swimming pools have closed, denying working-class children the opportunity to get active and to excel. The Minister has talked about her aspiration to get the nation moving more. She has the right aspiration, but actions—and money—speak louder than fine words.

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank my hon. Friend for making that valuable point. If we do not invest in our young people at grassroots level, we will be fuelling our obesity crisis even further. If the Government are serious about taking a public health approach to active lives, they could support local authorities and national governing bodies in building sporting facilities.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Lady talks about sports funding and the funding of facilities. Is she aware that the Scottish Rugby Union, based at Murrayfield in my constituency, feels that it has not benefited from lottery funding in the way that other sports have done? For example, it has had no lottery funding to help it to improve the stadium. Does she agree that it can have an ongoing impact on grassroots sports such as rugby if those bodies do not get the lottery funding that will enable them to invest?

Dr Allin-Khan: I agree. No sport should be left out and no one should feel that they are not part of the conversation and benefiting from pots of money that may be available.

I am going to make progress and get to the end of my speech, because I am aware that many Members want to speak. How can the Government support local authorities? They could broaden the Treasury's infrastructure guarantee scheme to include the building of sports facilities. Currently, just £2 billion out of £40 billion has been allocated. If our public health approach truly wants to consider preventive measures, it is essential to underwrite schemes to build pitches,

swimming pools and athletics tracks. We have a national obesity crisis. The Government could revolutionise grassroots sports if they looked carefully at that scheme, so I encourage them to do so.

We can boost funding for our most popular sports, help build the necessary facilities and give everyone the opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of where they live or how much money their family earn. We can level the playing field and ensure that sport is run in the interests of all those who love it, not just a privileged few.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): If Members speak for up to six minutes each, that would really help us. Some Members may pull a face, but that is because of the Front Benchers, not me.

8.10 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), who spoke on behalf of the Opposition. She made a powerful speech, but I have to say that it was quite negative. She talked about all the things she does not like—including betting, big football clubs and sitting down at the football—but we should be talking about the positive things that sport can achieve and what it brings to all our communities. Let us not be dour; let us be positive about the power of sport.

The Minister gave a brilliant speech. We were lucky to have the Tour de France visit Yorkshire not so long ago, and she gave us a tour de force today about all the benefits of sport.

As well as being the home of brewing, my constituency of Burton and Uttoxeter is also the home of the English football team. We are delighted to have in Burton—I share it with my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant)—St George's Park, the home not just of the English football team but of all 28 England national football teams, including the disability teams, the women's team and the blind team. It is a truly inspirational facility. I took some credit from the Bring it to Burton campaign, which I ran when I was a candidate. That was obviously instrumental in the £105 million being spent in my constituency to develop that state-of-the-art facility. The 13 pitches have attracted teams such as Barcelona and Monaco, and the Irish rugby union team have trained there. We are a magnet for sporting excellence and it is a great pleasure to have the facility in my constituency.

We also have Uttoxeter racecourse for the sport of kings. I am delighted that we play host every year to the west midlands grand national, which attracts some 16,000 people to my constituency on the day and puts £1 million into local businesses over that weekend. We talk about the power and benefit of sport, but its financial benefit to my constituents and those businesses is really important.

John Lamont: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about horse-racing, which in terms of attendance and revenue created is the second biggest sport in the United Kingdom; it is a great shame that it has not been mentioned so far in the debate. My constituency has Kelso racecourse, which contributes greatly to the local economy. Does my hon. Friend agree that horse-racing is very much an underrated sport and that it does so much to promote sport and physical activity?

Andrew Griffiths: Absolutely—my hon. Friend is spot on. I am lucky enough to know very well David MacDonald and his team who run Uttoxeter races, and it is thriving. Horse-racing is a great sport that inspires people and gives a great day out. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we should not underestimate the real benefits of horse-racing to the United Kingdom.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): May I seek clarification on the previous intervention? In what terms is horse-racing the biggest sport? It may be in terms of betting revenues, but it is certainly not in terms of participation.

Andrew Griffiths: I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) may have been referring to attendance, but I understand the hon. Lady's point.

Football is at the crux of the point I really want to make. We have had a great sporting weekend, with some fantastic sporting triumphs, including England's success over Ireland in the rugby—[*Interruption.*] I will not mention the cricket. I was lucky enough to attend another sporting giant of a match on Saturday: the thrilling nil-nil draw between Burton Albion and Oxford United. I was delighted to be there.

Burton Albion is a small club. It was only promoted to the football league in 2009, yet by 2017 it had been promoted to the championship. That is a Roy of the Rovers-type success story for a club that is embedded in the community. Thanks to the hard work and determination of the chairman, Mr Ben Robinson, and Nigel Clough, our inspirational manager, who has a huge sporting history behind him, the club has done incredible things. We talk so often about money in sport, but Burton Albion is a shining example of what heart and passion, rather than just money, can do in terms of delivering.

Mrs Helen Grant: On the commercial benefits of and money in sport, does my hon. Friend agree that women still lag behind men in commercial sponsorship and that sponsors should become more alive to the benefits of association with some of our fantastic female role models?

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Women's sport, such as women's football, is thrilling to watch, and the advertisers should get on board and realise how powerful it could be for their brands.

Burton Albion Community Trust is a shining example of what many clubs up and down the country are doing. It is not just about elite sport; it runs grassroots projects throughout my community. Every week, it touches some 7,000 people through the programmes it runs, including the Fit Fans sessions for, shall we say, the more mature fan, to get them fit; walking football; disability teams such as Able Too and Powerchair; and, importantly for me, Head for Goal, which is a mental health and wellbeing programme, using the power of sport to improve mental health. Given that this is Children's Mental Health Week, and with my own appreciation of the issues of mental health, it is really important to acknowledge the power of sport to be able to improve mental health. The community trusts of lots of clubs up and down the country, working with children, old people and the disabled, are making a real contribution.

Finally, I hope that the Minister has heard what I have said about the power of community trusts, and that she will agree to visit the mighty Pirelli stadium, where she will be able to see the work of Burton Albion Community Trust in my community.

8.17 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): For those of us who stayed up into the wee small hours last night to watch the Superbowl, it has already been a long day. The game itself could have got sport stopped, to be honest, but it would be remiss of me not to thank the Renfrewshire Raptors, the Flag American Football team, for hosting the Superbowl party last night.

I should also say at the outset that Scotland currently head the Six Nations table, a position that I fully expect them to stay in until the end of the competition. I will also use this opportunity to praise my own club, Paisley rugby club, which after a slow start is now unbeaten since October, probably because I retired a number of years ago.

It is good to see the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) in his place, given that he was running the line at the St Johnstone-Celtic game yesterday. As a St Johnstone fan, I am hugely disappointed that he did not find a way to disallow the two Celtic goals in their 2-0 victory. In recent years, with European qualification and a Scottish cup win, it has been easier to be a Saints fan than a Scotland fan. However, recently we have had cause for optimism, with Shelley Kerr's women's team backing up qualification for the Euros by qualifying for this summer's World cup in France, for the very first time.

In my first shameless plug for the all-party parliamentary group on Scottish sport, which I chair, I draw attention to the fact that on 13 March both Shelley Kerr and Ian Maxwell, the chief executive of the Scottish Football Association, will give a presentation to the APPG on the women's game and the recent UEFA report on the social benefits of football to Scotland. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Sport offers so much in personal development, self-confidence, discipline and social skills, and it plays a vital role in building strong communities and a healthy society. For many, sport can be all-consuming, whether simply as a fan of a local football team, as someone who enjoys a game of golf at the weekend—when the weather permits in Scotland—as a linesman or as a performance athlete who dedicates their life to be the best at what they do. It would be a grave mistake indeed to understate the importance of sport to people's lives.

Thanks to the media, when we think of performance athletes, we tend to think of multimillionaire football players, but professional athletes come from a wide range of varying disciplines that are all unique and as important as each other. The vast majority certainly do not provide people with the opportunity to retire to a life of wealth and comfort while still in their 20s.

For many athletes, including those who bring home Olympic medals, transitioning to a life beyond professional sport can be a challenge. That challenge often includes uncertainty in establishing a viable career beyond sport, but it can also include poor mental health and battles with depression and anxiety.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): On mental health, a survey by the Rugby Players Association in England reveals that 62% of players suffer mental health issues after retirement and 52% feel their life is out of control after two years. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, UK-wide, the Government need to take a better, more holistic approach to helping people not just in rugby but in professional sport to be able to cope when they come out of sport by injury or by the end of their sporting life?

Gavin Newlands: I could not agree more. As the hon. Lady is a former international rugby player herself, her point is even stronger, and I will echo that in my later comments.

I have been seeking an Adjournment debate on this issue without success, so I will outline some of the issues now. The Glaswegian Olympic silver medallist Michael Jamieson spoke about the difficulty towards the end of his fantastic career as he battled depression caused by a gruelling training regime. He made the decision to retire, and it was the right decision for him. After some difficulties, he is now an example of an athlete who has made the transition well, as he has now built a successful career as a leading coach, but his story is by no means the norm. Such difficulties have been relatively common in football, but, since the advent of UK Sport lottery funding, they have become more widespread in other sports, and the current cliff-edge approach to UK Sport funding in no way helps the scenario.

Last year, the BBC reported on examples of athletes finding the transition difficult. Rower Mark Hunter competed at three Olympic games, winning gold in Beijing and silver in London:

“It doesn’t matter how good you are, how much money you earn—you have to learn to cope with that loss of purpose. Athletes think everyone cares about what you are doing but most people don’t care until you are performing at the highest level.

In Athens in 2004 I came last and that was my darkest point. I had no money, I had nothing. I used to drive down back roads thinking, ‘if I crash I wouldn’t care right now.’ I didn’t tell my parents but I was lucky I had so many friends around me to help me escape. I’d gone to the ultimate event and come last. We came last, the funding is cut and it’s like ‘get out’...I had no money, I had nothing.”

Ollie Phillips was world rugby sevens player of the year in 2009:

“Because I had to retire through injury, it felt as though I had been robbed of my rights and the dreams that I was hoping to achieve. Once I realised that ‘right I am now not a rugby player any more’, there was a really tough period. It’s such a destructive experience on a personal level—everything is affected by it. That experience of feeling valued and adored. Suddenly you’re not as good; you’re not in the limelight. And as a result you chase highs and ego boosts. They give you a kick in the short term, but the highs are high and the lows are very low and you don’t know how to get out of them.

There were times when I looked at myself and thought, ‘I don’t want to be here.’ I’ve probably accepted not being a sportsman but have I truly accepted that it’s not me anymore? Maybe not entirely.”

Switch the Play, which has presented to the all-party parliamentary group on Scottish sport, is an excellent social enterprise—it is shortly to become a charity—dedicated to improving the support offered to elite and aspiring athletes as they transition to a life outside sport, and it has done excellent work on this issue.

One of those athletes is Beth Tweddle, who most Members will know. She is an Olympic bronze medallist, a triple world champion, a six-time European champion and a Commonwealth champion—the list goes on. Beth made the decision to retire after a glittering career, but she was seriously concerned about what she would do with herself after focusing on gymnastics for 21 years. Switch the Play helped to provide her with training, and she found the confidence to become a company director for Total Gymnastics.

Research by Abertay University’s Professor David Lavalley shows that athletes who engage in planning for their future feel less stressed and are better able to focus on their sporting performance. The study also found that the levels of support provided to athletes in planning their retirement can also influence their performance. Switch the Play and others do excellent work, but we cannot expect such organisations to give that peace of mind and care alone.

Sporting bodies and, of course, the Government therefore have a duty of care to our athletes and must ensure that they have all the support, training and opportunities they require to live life and build a career after retirement, whether that be in their sport or in any other sector. I hope the Minister will meet Switch the Play and me to discuss this issue further.

Most Members, and particularly Mr Speaker, could not have failed to be moved by Andy Murray’s press conference, in which it was clear he is very much struggling to come to terms with his possible upcoming retirement. I am sure the House will join me in welcoming his recent successful hip operation, which at the very least will give Andy a much better quality of life, without pain, to spend with his children. Of course, we all hope the operation will enable Andy to continue playing top-level tennis, but, if it fails, he has an astonishing career to look back on. He is a two-time Wimbledon champion, a US Open champion, a Davis cup winner, twice Olympic champion and, probably most impressive of all, a world No. 1 in the era of Roger Federer, Nadal and Djokovic.

I can only hope that Andy is as proud of himself as Scotland is of him. Without a shadow of doubt, Andy is Scotland’s greatest ever sportsman or sportswoman. What can we say to Scotland’s, and probably the UK’s, greatest ever but thank you? Thank you for the memories, the inspiration and the sheer joy that he has given to the nation.

Stephen Kerr: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Newlands: I give way to Andy Murray’s Member of Parliament.

Stephen Kerr: Sir Andy Murray is the pride and joy of Dunblane and the Stirling district. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, to commemorate an extraordinary career and an amazing contribution to Scottish sport, some form of statue to Sir Andy Murray should be erected in Dunblane?

Gavin Newlands: There is a danger that we might get a bit ahead of ourselves but, yes, I agree that, in the time to come, there should be a statue to Andy Murray in Dunblane, perhaps to sit alongside his gold post box. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will commission the statue himself.

[Gavin Newlands]

That brings me on to the Murray legacy. The staggering success of the entire Murray family is and will continue to be a positive thing for Scottish tennis, as well as tennis across the UK, yet their rise to become the best tennis players in the world has exposed funding and governance imbalance issues that need to be taken seriously, lest we risk squandering the opportunities that their success could provide us with: opportunities not only to nurture future champions, but, just as importantly, to give more people the opportunity to play tennis. To achieve that, we need to be frank about where we are going wrong.

At the age of 15, Andy was advised by one Rafael Nadal that he would have to move away from the UK if he wanted to become a professional. That was 16 years ago, and not much has changed. Scotland is one of the world's leading nations for tennis, thanks to the success of not only the Murrays, but Gordon Reid, the former world No. 1 in men's wheelchair tennis, and others. However, it is an indisputable fact that Tennis Scotland has been drastically underfunded by the Lawn Tennis Association. Despite Scotland's enviable success, the LTA gave Tennis Scotland just £650,000 in 2017, from a budget of £60 million UK-wide. That means that Scotland, with some 8.5% of the UK's population—and the UK's best players, Davis cup coach and so on—received just 1% of the revenue funding available from the LTA. In 2018, that allocation was slashed to just £582,000.

John Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about the funding for sports development. Does he therefore agree that it is unfortunate that shortly before receiving the extra revenue from the sugar tax from the UK Government the Scottish Government slashed funding for sportscotland by a fifth?

Gavin Newlands: Far be it for me to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but last year the Scottish sports budget grew by £2 million—more than 7%—and Derek Mackay offered to underwrite any loss from the lottery sports funding of up to £3.5 million. So I will not hear any Scottish Conservative nonsense about the Scottish Government on this issue. This debate at least should be a consensual one.

The perfect example of this problem can be seen in the availability of the indoor courts that make the game possible, particularly in Scotland, given our weather conditions. At the last count, there were 102 facilities in Scotland, compared with 1,484 in England. Of course, this is not just the fault of the LTA; government at all levels, as well as non-governmental bodies, have also to address issues of access. But what a shame it is that, particularly in Scotland, the biggest issue that young people who wish to get into the game may face is finding somewhere to play. Speaking to the Scottish context, Murray said:

“I know in Scotland that there have not been many indoor courts built in the last 10 years. That seems madness. I don't understand why that is. You need to get kids playing; you need to have the facilities that allow them to do that.”

The all-party group on Scottish sport has looked at these missed opportunities, taking evidence from the then chief executive of the LTA, Michael Downey, Judy Murray and Blane Dodds, the chief executive

officer of Tennis Scotland. Following this investigation, the LTA loosened its purse strings somewhat and, along with sportscotland, delivered a capital investment fund specifically for tennis facilities in Scotland.

Andy Murray has criticised the LTA for not doing enough to build on his and his family's success, recently saying:

“Maybe it's something I should have given more thought to while I was playing but I never felt that was my job to do that.”

He is right. It is not his job—it certainly should not be—to be getting involved in the governance of his sport; our athletes, in whichever sport, should be able to put 100% of their concentration into their game. But the Murrays have felt the need to intervene as, staggeringly, tennis participation numbers continue to drop, despite the success of top-level tennis players across the UK. Two things must change: we need a sharp increase in the number of facilities available across Scotland, and the UK as a whole; and we need parity and fair funding between the game's governing bodies. That means that the LTA needs to provide Tennis Scotland with the funding it needs to do its job properly.

Over the past few years—I say this from speaking to other Scottish sporting bodies—it has become increasingly clear that the issues we see arising within tennis are very common in the governance of other sports. Many of these non-governmental bodies feel strongly that there is a lack of “equal status” and “equal standing” between the Scottish bodies—this applies to other devolved bodies, as this is not simply a Scottish issue—and their English counterparts, with many UK-wide NGBs functioning as extended versions of their respective English bodies.

One chief executive I spoke to said that their respective English body acted like they were the “GB” organisation, rather than one of four separate bodies. That too often leads to the organisations responsible for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland being cut out of processes, with no say in crucial decision making. That leads to the kind of situations we have seen in UK Athletics, where a shambolic leadership team are trying to ride roughshod over the devolved athletics bodies. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) seems to have a cough, but I will come back to him shortly.

A recurring concern of all Scottish NGBs is that there is a lack of systematic process, with the English bodies often unilaterally taking action over the others on UK-wide decisions. That is not to say there is not some excellent practice that we can learn from; the governance of swimming has been cited to me as an example of a better system working between the UK's countries. I look forward to raising this issue with Dame Katherine Grainger, who, in addition to being one of the UK's most decorated Olympians, is also the chair of UK Sport, as she will be attending a meeting of the all-party group on Scottish sport on Monday 25 February.

On devolved sports, another area that needs to improve is broadcasting, and the all-party group has been looking at this subject. The level of media coverage awarded to Scottish sport is regularly a contentious point among sports fans, with claims regularly being made that individual sports in Scotland do not receive the coverage they feel their sport is entitled to. For example, early last year, Scottish football fans took to Twitter to complain that ITV/STV aired the England v. Malta game but did not

air Scotland's crunch game against Lithuania. STV responded to those complaints stating that it did not have the rights to the match, as they were sold on a UK-wide basis. At the time, STV responded on Twitter by saying:

"Scotland, we hear you.

We'd love to bring you the match, but as football rights are sold UK wide it's sadly out of our reach!"

The current list of events was drawn up in 1998, more than two decades ago. I fully appreciate that, because of England's size, the rights for England internationals are commercially viable for commercial public service broadcasters, and that is not the case for Scotland. If Scotland games were added to listed events, the Scottish game, which is not exactly flush with money, might be forced to accept a smaller rights fee package. I hope to address several other issues to do with broadcasting in an upcoming roundtable with partners and broadcasters in Scotland.

Finally, next Tuesday Glasgow Life will present on the impact and legacy of the Glasgow 2014 games. With Birmingham 2022 on the horizon, Members from the midlands may find that interesting. I hope the Minister will confirm that the Scottish Government will receive the full Barnett consequential that should flow from the Birmingham 2022 spending commitments.

In conclusion, the great American football coach Vince Lombardi once said:

"It's not whether you got knocked down; it's whether you get up."

And with that, I'll get down.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. As colleagues will see, a large number of people want to speak in the debate. The Front-Bench speeches were quite long and I have to impose an immediate five-minute limit. I urge people to be considerate, because that limit may well have to come down.

8.36 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): In the spirit of the sporting values of keeping to time, being efficient and delivering on goals, I will try to keep to my five minutes. It was originally going to be a 10-minute oration, of which I was terribly proud, as the new chairman of the all-party group on sport, but that has now obviously bitten the dust.

We are a great sporting nation. We all remember the super Saturday of the 2012 Olympics and Archie Gemmill versus Holland in 1978. I was fortunate enough to be at the World cup semi-final last year. It is obvious that we are sports mad. Some 27 million of us do more than two and a half hours of sport a week. For the nation, sport probably ranks as the No. 1 pastime, I suppose, outside of work and bringing up children, and it has always troubled me somewhat that sport has not played a greater part in Government policy.

When I had the pleasure of being a Minister, for those two glorious years at the Ministry of Justice, I embarked straight away on trying to introduce sport into the criminal justice system as much as possible. To say that when I suggested this I encountered some resistance—a degree of inertia at the Ministry of Justice—would be an understatement. It took me six months to

convene my first meeting on sport and its value in the criminal justice system. What was fantastic about that meeting, when it actually took place, were the people who attended—people who were already deploying sport effectively in the criminal justice system. They were trying to help often vulnerable adults and young people to turn their lives around.

There were such inspiring characters at that first meeting, including David Dein, who used to be a director at Arsenal and who, along with Jason Swettenham from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, is embarked on a project twinning professional football clubs up and down the country with prisons. There was also John McAvoy, an infamous armed robber from an armed-robbing family, who discovered while he was a prisoner that he was an outstanding indoor rower, set a load of world records and is now a Nike-sponsored endurance athlete; and Jane Ashworth at StreetGames, which works in the community to try to dissuade people from committing crime in the first place. These people were putting into practice, via their own hard work, charity and so on, something that I think the Government should have been doing for a long time.

Off the back of that first meeting, we had a second, and I managed to eke together the massive sum of £70,000 to commission a report on the value of sport in the criminal justice system. That report, by Rosie Meek from Royal Holloway College, is worth a read. Anybody who is interested in the value of sport and the impact it can have should read it. It is particularly interesting on the impact of contact sports such as rugby, including the work of Saracens at Feltham, and boxing. Unfortunately, the Government, and No. 10 in particular, took a rather odd view of the introduction of controlled boxing into controlled circumstances. That view was not backed by any evidence whatsoever, but was driven by the fear of silly headlines in tabloid newspapers.

Boxing in the community—Fight for Peace is a particular example of a charity—is undeniably doing remarkable work in trying to dissuade young people from participating in a life of crime. Anthony Joshua, a classic example of someone who was on remand, turned his life around through boxing. The list of examples of where sport has changed people's lives is long and continues to grow. If we can bring about a change in our prisons whereby sport plays a significant part in a typical prisoner's life, we would be doing something remarkable. If we could take prisoners out of the environment in which they find themselves—often locked up, drugged up and so on—and put them into a sporting environment, I am utterly convinced that we could address the rather woeful reoffending levels that we have in the adult male estate, and particularly in the youth estate.

In summary, I am a passionate sports fan. I was alright at sport as well once upon a time. It has made a huge impact on my life, and I just wish that we could use the sporting values of fair play, participation, resilience, hard work and the pursuit of excellence in every aspect of Government policy—in healthcare and education—but I feel particularly passionate about changing the lives of offenders and giving them a second chance.

8.41 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee)

[Jo Stevens]

whose evidence at the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on the report on sport in prisons I very much valued and enjoyed.

My constituency of Cardiff Central, and our capital city as a whole, had the most amazing sporting year last year: Cardiff City got promoted to the premier league; Cardiff Blues won the Challenge Cup; Cardiff Devils won the Elite Ice Hockey League; and Cardiff's Geraint Thomas won the Tour de France. At the age of 11, Anna Hursey, my constituent, became the youngest competitor in the Commonwealth games, playing table tennis for Wales.

Cardiff University and Cardiff Metropolitan University in my constituency have, for many years, produced world-class sportsmen and women. In cycling, we have Olympic gold medallist Nicole Cooke. In athletics, we have Lynn the leap, the long jumper; and Aled Davies, the Paralympic gold and bronze medallist in the discus and shot. In cricket, we have captain of the World Cup-winning England team Heather Knight, and in basketball, we have Steph Collins, Great Britain's captain and the most capped basketball player in British history. Of course, in Rugby, we have: Gareth Edwards, Jamie Roberts, Non Evans, JJ Williams, Ryan Jones, Heather Price and my brilliant hon. Friend, the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), who got her first cap for Wales while at Cardiff University and went on to be capped a further eight times. Chwarae Teg—"Fair Play" as we say in Wales—is a woman of many talents and she throws a mean set of darts, too.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I would like her to join me and the House in congratulating an ex-pupil of mine, a lady called Alex Callender from Bryngwyn School in Llanelli, who got her first cap for the Wales women senior team this weekend in France.

Jo Stevens: I am delighted to add my congratulations to Alex, and I hope that she will have a long and illustrious career playing for Wales.

I could probably spend my entire five minutes talking about the incredible success of those two universities producing sportsmen and women, but I want to touch on two other issues in my contribution. First, I wish to mention the many people who help make sport happen in my constituency, and, secondly, the low-paid workers in our clubs and stadiums whose hard graft allows us to enjoy live sport so much.

Every week, my constituents of all ages and all abilities are able to participate in sport because of people working in our leisure centres, clubs, universities and schools and the very many volunteers who dedicate themselves to keeping sports clubs going year after year. There are clubs run by volunteers who provide improved health and well-being for people every single day. I want to take the opportunity today to pay tribute to every single volunteer who gives up their free time to keep sport at the very heart of our city: referees, coaches, first aiders, fixture and membership secretaries, and parents giving lifts, fundraising and making hot drinks and hot dogs. They keep our city happy and healthy, and I thank them very much.

There is another group of people without whom our sporting venues and professional clubs could not operate, including, in my view, the biggest and best sporting venue in the world, the Principality stadium in my constituency. These people are a group of predominantly younger, low-paid workers—the pint pullers, catering staff, programme sellers, cleaners, stewards and security guards. We get fed, watered and looked after safely by them every time we go there to watch rugby, football and cricket, to see bands and to watch other sporting events.

Sporting stadiums and elite sports clubs, particularly premier league football clubs, are deeply rooted in our communities and they have huge commercial success. But despite the money flowing to the owners, players and agents, most stadium workers—including cleaners, catering staff and security guards—are paid less than the real living wage and are struggling to keep their heads above water financially. Today, Citizens UK has published its report on money in sport and the real living wage; it is a happy coincidence with our debate.

Last week, I welcomed living wage campaigners to Parliament to hear more about how sports clubs and stadiums that have become accredited living wage employers can lift people out of in-work poverty, bringing benefits not only for those workers, but for the organisations and local economies. Those who work in sports clubs and stadiums are disproportionately affected by low pay; about 42% of them are paid below the real living wage.

These large clubs and stadiums are anchor institutions like universities, local authorities and hospitals. They are major private sector employers with strong social and historical links to their areas. I cannot imagine my constituency without the Principality stadium, or my city without Cardiff City stadium or Glamorgan County cricket club. The significance of these institutions lies in their ability to play a leadership role when it comes to driving take-up of the real living wage and generating that shared economic growth. That is why I, and nearly 30 Welsh MPs, are writing to the chief executive of the Welsh Rugby Union tomorrow, asking for a meeting to discuss how the Principality stadium could also become an accredited living wage employer.

The Welsh Rugby Union pays each of its players a £5,300 appearance fee, and on Friday night, against the French, I reckon they were worth every single penny. But the Six Nations games at the Principality stadium could not happen without those stadium workers, some of whom are earning as little as £7.50 an hour. A cleaner at the stadium would have to work for four and a half months just to earn the equivalent of that match appearance fee.

It is not radical to say that every job in Wales and across the UK should pay enough to live on. Welsh rugby upholds the highest standards on the pitch and off the pitch, and during the Six Nations the Principality stadium has the chance to make a massive difference to the lives of people who work so hard to make our experience and the Six Nations tournament a success, so I am asking the Welsh Rugby Union to step up and become a living wage employer.

8.47 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), particularly because she mentioned a number of people involved in sport, including volunteers. As a referee,

I was very pleased that she mentioned referees, although she then mentioned others involved in sport, including hotdog sellers. Many things are said before and after “referee” when people describe me, but I have never heard “hotdog seller” before, so that is a new one. At this point, I remind the House of my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, as a qualified Scottish Football Association referee; I also officiate for UEFA and FIFA.

I want first to focus on a point made by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) about facilities, because facilities are extremely important to all our communities. In the last week, I have raised a number of points about budget cuts, so today I do not want to get into the politics of the budget cuts, who is to blame, and how we can fund things more or less centrally in Scotland or through Westminster. I want to highlight the major impact that budget cuts are having on facilities in Moray. When our swimming pools in Keith and Lossiemouth are under threat, I stand with the hundreds of campaigners who went to a public meeting in Lossiemouth and are signing petitions to save their swimming pool in Keith.

The Active Schools programme is hugely important in Moray, and a number of parents and others have contacted me since Moray Council has decided to axe the programme. The programme is a partnership between councils and sportscotland, with the aim of promoting more and higher-quality opportunities to take part in sport. In 2017-18, over 90,000 participant sessions in Moray were held through Active Schools, with 35% of all school pupils in Moray participating in the sessions. Some 50% of those in my former council area of the Milne’s associated school group were involved in the Active Schools programme. There are 487 people involved in delivering these sessions, 93% of whom are volunteers.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about budget cuts. In Clackmannanshire, we are facing cuts to Alloa leisure bowl, which is the only remaining public swimming pool in the county. Does he agree that we should be saving and investing in these facilities to give these opportunities to our young and old people, not taking them away?

Douglas Ross: I fully endorse my hon. Friend’s point.

If the Active Schools programme is taken away, that will devastate our communities and our young people. Sportscotland is giving £272,000 in the next financial year to Moray Council to run this and other sports programmes, and that funding is under threat if we ultimately do away with Active Schools.

In speaking about facilities in Moray that face potential closure, I also want to highlight what will be a great addition to our facilities in Moray—Moray sports centre. It will be built in 364 days, and delivered on time and on budget. It will cost £8.4 million, with £8.15 million of that investment coming from the Moray Sports Trust and £250,000 from sportscotland. It will be a great facility with eight courts allowing for regional-level competition in many sports. That is really needed in Moray, as I am sure it is in other communities. Athletes young and old often have to travel to Inverness and, more often, further afield to Aberdeen, to train several times a week, so having a facility like that is a huge breakthrough for sport in Moray. It is more than 30 years

since a major new public sports facility was built in Moray. I really pay tribute to Sandy Adam, Kathryn Evans, Grant Wright and everyone else involved in constructing this outstanding facility, which will be opened later this year and will be a huge benefit to the local area.

There are many things that I would like to have spoken about, but time is clearly constrained, so, as a football referee, I want to focus on football and refereeing. We have already heard about the Scottish women’s team qualifying for this year’s World cup in September. That was a great achievement for Scottish sports stars and for our women’s team. I know that everyone in the country will be getting behind the team later this year at the finals. There will also be a derby match between England and Scotland that will, I am sure, allow for interesting debates across the Chamber as it is being played. It is great to see women’s football doing so well in Scotland and across the UK. If I may, I will make a quick pitch for the reception I am hosting on Wednesday night to promote opportunities for women and girls in the football industry. I hope that the Minister, the shadow Minister and the SNP spokesperson could perhaps come to that event. Many people are going to be speaking there, and we really have to do everything we can to promote having more women in football and in sport generally.

On football refereeing, I could speak not just for five minutes but for five hours and maybe even for five days. We do not mention refereeing enough. Without the referees, and indeed the other officials, there is no football. We are quite often derided for our decisions, but it is quite simply the fact, in any sport, that without officials that sport cannot take place. Without a Deputy Speaker in the Speaker’s Chair, this debate cannot take place. That shows how important it is to have someone neutral keeping an eye on the time and on the behaviour of the participants. When I was a Member of the Scottish Parliament, I led a debate on our Scottish officials who had been selected to represent Scotland at Euro 2016. It is important when our sports stars—the men and women who play the sports—qualify for international tournaments, but when we have officials who are selected to represent their country, whether they be tennis umpires or snooker referees, we should celebrate that as well.

8.53 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross). Many community organisations in England would recognise his concern about funding cuts. I come from the constituency that produced Sir Roger Bannister. Members of organisations such as Harrow Athletic Club, Metros Running Club and Jetstream Tri Club pound the paths in Harrow that Sir Roger once trod. I am only too well aware of the funding constraints facing Harrow Council and, indeed, other local authorities.

I want to concentrate the bulk of my remarks on two issues, and if time allows, I will raise one other issue at the end. The first issue is the one I raised in my intervention on the Minister, which is the coverage afforded on television and in the media more generally to women’s sport. As the father of a four-year-old daughter, I have been struck by how little coverage of women’s sport there is on mainstream television. There has been some

[Gareth Thomas]

improvement of late, and it is certainly true that there is a spike whenever a major women's championship takes place. However, the highly commendable organisation Women in Sport, which did research into this issue, notes that only 10% of TV sports coverage is dedicated to women's sport at the moment, compared with 7% across all media. When it looked at a number of countries, it identified that there were more hours of women's sports coverage in the media in Romania than here in the UK.

It is not as if there is not substantial interest in seeing more coverage of women's sport. Recently released figures show that there is a growing appetite for watching women's sport. Indeed, research from specialist data measurement company Nielsen shows that almost 50% of people would watch more women's sport if it were accessible on free-to-air television, while almost 40% would watch it if it were available online.

If we are to see a significant change, it will come down to Ministers holding the feet of the free-to-air broadcasters to the fire. It would be good to hear more about what the Minister is willing to do in that area. If the free-to-air broadcasters are not willing to move quickly, changes to the licence arrangements may be required to apply the appropriate financial pressure.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) that reform of the premier league is overdue. There is not enough financial transparency. Our fans do not have enough power to hold owners to account. There certainly is not enough investment from premier league revenues into grassroots sport. If the Football Association has to think about selling our greatest sporting asset—Wembley stadium—to get substantial investment into grassroots sport, that is an indicator that the Premier League is not doing enough. A 10% share of the TV rights that the Premier League secures every year would have raised more than the amount of money that the Football Association hoped to generate for grassroots sport from the sale of Wembley stadium.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) is right to say that not only the Welsh rugby union but a whole series of premier league and championship football clubs could do a lot more to tackle the issue of paying the living wage to the poorest paid workers in sport.

Lastly, there are Indian elections coming up shortly. I raise that in a debate about sport because it would be wonderful to see an Indian premier league match hosted here in the UK. Many of my constituents would welcome the opportunity to see that just as much as American football is enjoyed at Wembley stadium.

8.58 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas). It will come as no surprise to the Minister that I am making the case tonight for a stadium for Cornwall. Dr Caroline Court, director of Public Health Cornwall, said in Cornwall's physical activity strategy:

"Physical activity is a key component in improving the health of the local population... Working together with sectors such as education, sport and leisure, planning, transport and economic development, we can achieve a step change for the health and prosperity of all of Cornwall's residents."

Mike Thomas, the director of Cornwall Sports Partnership, wrote:

"Inactivity is a stubborn long standing problem, which without intervention is not going to go away. We cannot afford to be complacent and the situation could get worse. Opportunities to be active in everyday life are engineered out of our lives and older residents in Cornwall spend longer in ill health than in other parts of the country."

Mr Thomas—no relation—concluded:

"Never has the need to reduce inactivity levels in Cornwall been more urgent."

The vision statement for Cornwall Sports Partnership reads:

"The vision is a future where everybody in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is active as part of daily life, regardless of age, gender, culture or circumstance."

Its 2020 target is that 50,000 more people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will be more physically active as part of daily life by 2020. Its strategy has five key themes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development, and economic growth. At the time of writing the strategy in 2016, 42% of children aged five to 15 in Cornwall were described as inactive—42%—and 28% of adults were described as inactive.

Hon. Members can see why so many of us in Cornwall are working so hard to deliver the stadium for Cornwall project. What is the stadium for Cornwall? It will be a multi-use sports and education facility, and a centre for the promotion of health and wellbeing across the duchy. It will be the permanent home of Cornish Pirates and Truro City FC, with an accessible location, all-weather pitch, improved facilities, and the sharing of costs will put both clubs on a long-term sustainable footing. There will be 180 days of community-based sport on an all-weather pitch. Meanwhile, a new sports and leisure suite, to be managed by Greenwich Leisure, will meet the strong and growing demand in the surrounding districts.

What have we been doing to deliver the stadium? In 2009, I was involved in and part of a working group on developing the scheme. In 2015, we caught the attention of the Conservative Government, and we were promised Government support to deliver the stadium. Direct central Government funding is needed. This ambitious and much-needed stadium for Cornwall project is requesting just £3 million of Government money to unlock a further £11 million. The Minister has been clear this evening that this Government are committed to the health and wellbeing of everyone and to reducing demand on NHS and care services where possible.

It is important that the Government get behind this stadium because the Cornwall Sports Partnership is nowhere near delivering the extra 50,000 more people in the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly being more physically active as part of daily life. It is already accepted that the geography of Cornwall presents challenges for access to sport and that Cornwall is not receiving its fair share. Sport England acknowledged just last month that there is a rural location factor and that access to and between facilities is a real issue in Cornwall. It also acknowledged that there has not been the same investment in Cornwall as in other parts of the country.

The stadium for Cornwall project is committed to delivering better health outcomes, improving the lives of vulnerable adults and families, improving the physical and mental health of children and young people and

increasing the aspiration of young people, especially those who are disadvantaged. Those of us who have been engaged in the project for some time recognise that there is significant political will for the stadium to be built. We are also confident that this is a sound investment for the Government, because it provides an opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of tens of thousands of people of all ages across the duchy.

Those who have been involved in the stadium for Cornwall project for a long time believe that the Government would welcome the opportunity to back and fund this initiative, but we are also perplexed. Given the positive case I have set before the House today, I cannot pretend that the stadium for Cornwall partners are not frustrated by the hurdles we are having to jump over and perplexed by the hoops we are having to jump through to secure just 20% of the funding for an initiative that delivers on something at the heart of Government funding.

I remind the House and the Minister that never has the need to reduce inactivity levels in Cornwall been more urgent. Will the Minister please take note of this challenge and do whatever is in her capacity to deliver this sound investment for Cornwall's health and wellbeing?

9.3 pm

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). I look forward to going to see Yorkshire play Cornwall, one day in the future, at that new stadium in Cornwall. I intend to take as my mantra for my few remarks tonight the words of the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), who is no longer in his place. He charged us all to be cheerful and look on the bright side tonight, so that is what I want to do.

As you may remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, I warned the House during the Christmas Adjournment debate that the future of Keighley Cougars rugby league team was at stake. The team that first brought razzmatazz to rugby league was in danger of going under. However, the first good news that I can bring to the House is that Keighley Cougars are now back in safe hands, having been sold to Mick O'Neill and the consortium that first brought that razzmatazz with it 20 years ago. Keighley are an example of a community club that really helps to define a town. I hope that the years to come are good ones and that we can redevelop the site as a whole sporting site, with the Cougars next to Keighley cricket club.

Various speakers have mentioned the soft power of sport. We have heard about the soft power of the premier league. I speak as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Mongolia, as you well know, Madam Deputy Speaker—you have entertained Mongolian visitors on my behalf. There are 1,000 members of the Liverpool supporters club in Mongolia who will be gripped tonight watching West Ham and Liverpool—*[Interruption.]* I have not yet heard the score, although someone mentioned that it was 1-1 slightly earlier on.

Parkrun has also been mentioned, and that is soft power as well. It started in the United Kingdom, and it has now spread to 20 countries. It reached Keighley last year. The average time for the average parkrun has gone up to 29 minutes and 30 seconds, as more people, and different members of the community, have embraced the parkrun. My average time is slightly faster than

that, even though we have three hills to climb on our parkrun in Keighley. So that is another reason to be cheerful.

Canoeing has not been mentioned tonight. I can reveal exclusively that, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and colleagues from across the House, I will be tabling an extremely important motion about canoeing tomorrow. In Scotland, people can canoe wherever they like. In England and Wales, there are 42,000 miles of inland waterways, but people have uncontested access to only 1,500 of them. That is unfinished business from the right to roam legislation. In many countries in the world people can canoe, and canoeing is also a great Olympic sport. I would like Ministers to have a look at that issue.

I want to finish on sports broadcasting, which has been mentioned quite a lot tonight. Incidentally, we can look forward to the women's netball world championships and the women's football world championships live on free-to-air TV later this year. However, one thing we should be proud of in our country is the listed events regulations. They are an intervention in the market, and I think they are supported by all parties. There are reasons to look again at them to see whether we need to extend them. For example, there is not one women's team sport on the list. The women's World cup is on free-to-air TV this year, but as it becomes more popular, it may become tempting to subscription broadcasters.

The Six Nations has been mentioned very much tonight. Last week, it appeared that it was under threat and that it could have gone off to Amazon or Google, in a deal that would have created a new world rugby championships—I thought we had the world cup in rugby and that we did not really need a new one. The good news is that, over this weekend, the chief executive of the Six Nations has confirmed that he wants to keep the tournament on BBC and ITV. He sees value in that in terms of uniting the nations. I commend the Sports Minister on speaking out about this at Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions last week. I hope those on the Labour Front Bench—there was no mention of listed events from Labour Front Benchers earlier—will mention them in summing up.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a national tragedy that we will have an Ashes series this year—14 years after the magnificent 2005 victory—that will not be on free-to-air television? Is it not about time that cricket realised how much interest it has lost by making that very bad decision?

John Grogan: My hon. Friend makes a great point. To be fair to the England and Wales Cricket Board—the cricketing authorities—I think it is now beginning to realise how much this has cost cricket since that summer in 2005, when the Ashes were, I think, on Channel 4. There was a spike in the number of people participating in cricket. I think the latest figures from Sport England suggest that there are now a third fewer participants in cricket, and that is because it has disappeared. A photo of Joe Root—despite the weekend's results, perhaps the greatest living Yorkshireman—was shown to a group of schoolchildren not so long ago with that of a World Wide wrestler. Very few of them recognised Joe Root; they all recognised the World Wide wrestler, and that is because of the power of television. One good thing, however, is that some T20 cricket is coming to the BBC next year.

[John Grogan]

Finally, there is one commitment the Minister could give, either now or in the future, in relation to free-to-air coverage. There has been a lot of talk about bidding for the men's 2030 World cup. The last time there was a bid for the World cup, the Government headed by Gordon Brown was pressurised by FIFA. It was insistent that for England to have any chance of getting the World cup we would have to scrap our listed events legislation as it applied to the World cup whereby every game would be free to air. But FIFA is now under new management and I hope Ministers will make it clear at the very start of the negotiations that if the World cup is to be in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, it will be live and free on free-to-air TV.

9.10 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I had written a 300-page speech to bang on about sports, so I have had to cut it down significantly. Nobody has mentioned my favourite sport of hockey, so I will take the opportunity to do so. In 20 years as a player—I used to be all right, but my knees cannot take it anymore—as a coach and now as a chairman of a hockey club, I have seen the changes that have taken place in the sport. England Hockey has worked to make the sport more inclusive and accessible, with initiatives such as “Back to Hockey” for older players, Quicksticks and walking hockey. In recent years, there has been a massive growth in participation. Hockey is not unique, but it is a rare example of a sport played equally by both men and women, and with equal coverage.

There has been a huge growth in the number of under-16 players, particularly girls. That is no doubt due to the massive success in the 2016 Rio Olympics, where the GB ladies won the gold medal. Since then, participation has gone through the roof. In my mind, that gold medal and England's netball success in last year's Commonwealth games are huge sporting highlights. It was a great privilege to see how that affected people—watching sport live and free to air on TV had an impact across the piece. I talked to people about hockey who would never normally have taken an interest. I have had the great privilege of playing alongside some of the ladies at junior level at Belper hockey club, including Hollie Webb who scored the winning penalty in the final. They are an incredibly inspirational bunch of people.

I would like to raise with the Minister the big challenge of playing surfaces. There has been a massive expansion in the number of 3G pitches—the Football Foundation's investment in Mansfield is very welcome—but hockey cannot be played on a 3G pitch. A lot of local authorities do not seem to recognise that. My own club is looking at bids and planning permission for three 3G pitches in the community where our hockey pitch is gone—it is dead, it is old. We need a new pitch, but there is no support for that. We will be forced out of the town by the lack of facilities. The sport could end up being increasingly centralised. Big clubs have the money to drag players and resources out of small clubs that cannot afford to maintain facilities. I just wanted to flag that with the Minister.

I want to raise a couple of points in the second half of my remarks. Mansfield is a massive football town. I could not not mention the Stags, Mansfield Town football club. I have my tickets for Notts County away next week. Mansfield Town have never lost when I have been there, so I am very hopeful—I am a lucky charm. Since John and Carolyn Radford took over at Mansfield Town, they have been an amazing influence on both the club and the town with the success they have had on the pitch and the positive atmosphere they have brought to the club. We are second in League Two at the moment. If we manage to get promoted, increased attendances could have a huge economic benefit for the town centre. The Radfords have brought forward hotel plans to try to maximise that benefit. That could be incredibly positive, so I wish Mansfield Town the best of luck in the remaining games.

I want to raise a couple of points about football and the English Football League. The arguments are well-rehearsed so I will not go into great detail, but safe standing has been mentioned. It seems strange to me that we can have existing terraces in football stadiums, but new ones cannot be brought in. Scotland has allowed clubs to introduce safe standing. Celtic trialled it and did so successfully. I would love to be able to see that in EFL clubs across England. It would provide the opportunity to bring in more revenue, which is so important for the clubs. We should definitely look into that, and I welcome the Government's willingness to review it.

The other thing is alcohol served during games. The opportunity for smaller clubs, and the Chancellor, to bring in that additional revenue could be really positive. In rugby, we see—even when games are in the stadiums that are shared with football teams—that the money spent in the club is more than double the amount spent for football. Some of that is based on being able to purchase alcohol in the stadium. I do not see how it is that much safer to tank up before a game and down a pint at half-time than it is to be able to drink sensibly throughout a game.

I also want to mention Powerchair football, which we have in my constituency at West Notts College. It involves electric wheelchairs controlled, in some cases, only by a thumb. It is an incredible, life-changing thing. Ricky Stevenson, who is now chair of the international Powerchair football federation, is from Warsop in my constituency. I urge the FA and the Government to support that sport—it is a real inspiration—as much as possible. There is an awful lot more that I would like to say, and I have a vast list here—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

Ben Bradley: But I am forced to stop, so I will not say it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: After the next speaker, I will take the time limit down to four minutes.

9.15 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Since I have hardly got any voice, I might not make the five minutes—and I do have a cough, I might say to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). I am only going to speak about concussion in sport.

My doctor has told me that I should not really be here tonight, but I care about this issue passionately, so I want to speak about it.

On 19 January 2002, Jeff Astle died. He was a very famous player for West Bromwich Albion. When the coroner came to examine his brain, it was decided that he had died from heading the ball. It was termed an industrial injury and yet, still today, we have made remarkably little headway.

Ben Robinson died on 29 January 2011. He was just 14 years old. He had had concussion and then went on to play again, and later that day, or two days later, he was pronounced dead at the local hospital because he had suffered from double impact syndrome, where effectively, the brain sort of explodes inside the head. His family have done an amazing job, as have Jeff Astle's family, in trying to keep the issue of concussion in sport alive.

There have been many recent issues. Last May, the 17-year-old Adrien Descrullhes died after a head injury in France. Also in May last year, the 18-year-old Canadian, Brodie McCarthy, was killed in a rugby match. In December, Nicolas Chauvin, an 18-year-old student at Paris Descartes University—he was a flanker in the academy at Stade Français—was also killed following a similar accident. That is one of the reasons why the French rugby union is campaigning for changes in the sport, which I think we need to listen to very carefully.

If anybody saw the Chelsea versus Bournemouth match the other day, they would have seen David Luiz, the Brazilian player, receive the ball very hard on the head. Interestingly, some of the spectators sort of revelled in the violence of that moment. One person wrote:

“Poor old David Luiz getting a bullet in the mush seems very popular with a lot of your following”—

meaning the opposite team. He said “Terrible” and then he added:

“Must admit did a thumbs up myself”.

This is one of the problems. In some sport at the moment, there is a kind of glorification of such violent moments, and we need to think very carefully about that.

In the United Arab Emirates match against Australia in the Asian cup quarter final, Fares Juma Al Saadi clashed heads with Mathew Leckie, and then he went back on. He then played a few days later in another match and even the players' union, FIFPro, questioned whether the protocols had been properly adhered to.

The significance of this, first and foremost, is that there is still remarkably little understanding of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which is the steady acquisition of more damage to the brain by virtue of lots of small concussions. Individual events may not have done an enormous amount of harm, but they may over time. I have a terrible fear that many of my constituents who have played rugby many, many times and have been concussed many, many times, who are now in their old age or in their middle age and who worry about fatigue, depression, anxiety, memory loss and early onset dementia, may have acquired this because of the successive concussions that they suffered in sport. The thing is that concussion, in many people's minds, is what happens when someone is knocked unconscious, but that is about 10% of concussions. There are a lot of other different symptoms from concussion, so it is very misunderstood.

In youth sport, concussion rates are 18 times higher in rugby, five times higher in hockey and twice as high in American football—those are USA figures. Unfortunately, when I asked the Government for statistics for this country, I was told there were none, which means we have no idea how many concussions there are in sport at the moment. Some sports are getting better, but the Government do not keep the information. It is important that we change that.

My impression is that football is making progress only because it is terrified of litigation, which is a terrible mistake—it should care about the players for heaven's sake! Research funding is minimal in this field, and as for the protocols in football, it is preposterous that, although the Football Association and the premiership have made some strides in recent years, FIFA still does not allow subs to come on, as happens in rugby. Subs are necessary because it takes 10 minutes to do a proper assessment at the pitch side. It cannot be done in three minutes, and any ref who thinks it can is living in cloud cuckoo land, and dangerously so. Players and coaches often think they know best, but the only person who knows best is a doctor, who knows what they are talking about. If in doubt, sit them out. We can save lives and people's brains.

9.20 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

Sport has many forms. As far back as 1770, a racecourse was established in Ayr, and the sport of horse-racing has remained a local economic driver to this day. The present day Ayr racecourse is a modern venue with approximately 24 race meetings each year, including the prestigious Ayr gold cup and the Scottish grand national. It is Scotland's premier racecourse. The racecourse and the sport of horse-racing generates income for the town, creates employment in the stables, grounds, catering outlets and so on, and affords invaluable work experience in various disciplines.

Today being World Cancer Day, it is interesting and a pleasure to note that Ayr racecourse has in the past supported race days for the local hospice and, I am sure, will do so in the future. It is also a changing venue. It holds ladies' nights and special themed days for families, and so on. It has become a very enjoyable day out.

Scottish Racing's economic impact study in 2016 established that more people went to racing than visited golf tournaments and rugby matches. The total attendance at Scottish racing in 2016 was over 300,000, with almost a third attending Ayr racecourse. Ayr racecourse generates more than £25 million per annum for the local economy—not an insignificant sum—and supports a significant number of local jobs in the community.

My constituency has a proud sporting tradition. Annually, we host the bowls Scotland national championships at Northfield and there is Cambusdoon cricket club, a very healthy cricket club. Former England cricket captain Mike Denness was from Alloway and educated at Ayr Academy. Ayr United football club is currently excelling in the league, although its pursuit of the Scottish cup came to an abrupt halt when a healthy and robust local junior team, Auchinleck Talbot, knocked them out—a wee red face for Ayr United, but well done to Auchinleck Talbot!

[Bill Grant]

We also have golf, not least Turnberry—now known as Trump Turnberry, after its famous owner—which held the 1977 open championship and its famous “duel in the sun” between Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus. We have a healthy rugby scene in my constituency, at Cumnock and Millbrae and Ayr. I commend Carrick Academy, in Maybole, for its range of healthy young rugby teams, covering all ages and genders. I give full credit to that school for bringing on the young ones in sport, particularly rugby, a sport that, through the British Lions, brings our UK nations together every four years to tour Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

My constituency also has swimming. Cumnock pool, New Cumnock pool, Britain’s newest, finest and warmest open-air pool, and Girvan and Ayr pools have gained popularity with locals, and it is a lovely area for cycling, too, while Scotland, being quite unique, also has curling, a sport suitable for all ages and genders. As a Scot, it would be remiss of me not also to mention the successes of Andy Murray, an exemplar in the field of tennis. Along with, I am sure, the whole House, I wish him a full and speedy recovery.

Such sports give people an ideal opportunity to engage with each other at a time when Governments and the NHS fear that some sections of the population are becoming insular and isolated to the potential detriment of their health, not least given the challenges of obesity.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman’s time is up.

9.24 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Let me begin by mentioning a great sports club in my constituency, Glasgow Warriors, which is currently second in the Guinness Pro14 League. No doubt it will take the top spot very soon. It shares its ground at Scotstoun, which is round the corner from my house, with Victoria Park athletics club. Both clubs are involved in great schools outreach activities in an attempt to engage young people who would not normally have experience of their sports.

I am now going to make a rather controversial statement which may cost me some votes: I am not a fan of football. There are many reasons for that, but one thing that bothers me is the reporting of it, which dominates television and the print media. I heard a Member say earlier that 10% of written reports were about female sport. I find that hard to believe, because I regularly look through the sports pages just out of principle to see how many articles there are about women. The reporting is pretty much all about football, and it is almost entirely male.

That has serious implications for the health and wellbeing of girls in particular. We know that teenage girls are far more likely to drop out of sport than boys. They are not seeing role models. They are not seeing girls like them succeed in various sports. It is great to hear about the increased participation of women in, for instance, football, rugby and cricket, but more traditional girls’ sports such as gymnastics, dancing, swimming and athletics do not receive much coverage.

Many people will not know that I was a gymnastics coach for a number of years, and coached at elite level. The hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) spoke

of the difficulties experienced by those who did not have support. That is absolutely true: without parental and financial support, it is almost impossible for young people to participate in elite sport. They need their parents to run them to the venues, and to pay the costs of lessons and competitions.

However, there is also a big role for recreational sports, and sports for people with additional needs. As the Soviets knew when they were great at gymnastics, the more people participate in sport, the more excellence rises to the top of the pyramid, so we need to increase participation. There is a very special club in my constituency, the Glasgow Eagles sports club in Drumchapel. Its specialities are basketball and table tennis, but it is a club for people with additional needs, and it has done a great deal of work with autistic adults. It deals with mass participation, but the mass participation of people with special needs.

I think it is important for us also to recognise the dark side of sport. We know that in the past paedophiles have used sports coaching to groom young children. I urge every Member to support the Close the Loophole campaign by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which is ensuring that 16 and 17-year-olds are given the same protection as younger children, particularly in areas such as sport, in which relationships can develop over a long period.

9.29 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Sport has always been an integral part of my life, and I hope that I have passed that on to my children. I first picked up a tennis racket when I was 11, and I hope that I will play until I am 80. That is one of the great aspects of such sports.

In the few minutes available to me, I want to focus on women in sport. For too long, women have been the underdogs. In schools, boys got all the glory—the blazers, the badges, the awards—but I am pleased to say that that has started to change. Women’s participation in the Olympics increased from 23% in 1984 to 46% in 2016. In Rio, women won more medals in a great many sports than the men, including, rowing, swimming, taekwondo, field hockey and judo. Winning gold in the women’s hockey in the London 2012 Olympics gave a huge boost to women’s hockey. Taunton Vale hockey club is testament to that. It is the eighth largest hockey club in the country, with six women’s teams. The talented women in our UK netball team, by winning gold in the Commonwealth games in 2018, have stimulated women to play netball: 130,000 women have taken up netball since April 2018, which has led BBC and Sky to announce a deal to broadcast every minute of the world cup. Taunton boasts a very good netball club—Taunton netball club—which I cannot let pass without a mention.

I was extremely heartened at a recent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on cricket, of which I am a proud member, to hear Tom Harrison, chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board, say that women’s cricket is the biggest growth area in cricket—howzat, Mr Speaker! I have a daughter who played for Somerset, so I have spent a great amount of time following cricket. Well done to Clare Connor, director of England women’s cricket, who really is proving that we can move on in this area.

I am very proud to say that Somerset county cricket club will host the women's Ashes this year. All my colleagues are invited, but I would particularly like to extend an invitation to the Minister. The matches will bring untold riches to the economy in Taunton Deane, and introduce many more people to the amazing style and performance of the women's game.

I must not forget rugby. Taunton Titans have a growing girls' sector. Women's rugby has been helped by the announcement by the Rugby Football Union of the first full-time professional contracts for the 15s side. That is a big step forward, and will help to achieve a pipeline of players from now into the future. Staging women's rugby internationals on the same day as the men's has increased audiences, but I have been told that to go to the women's match, spectators have to buy a ticket for the men's match first. Is that fair, gentlemen colleagues? Perhaps we should do it the other way round. The gentlemen should buy a ticket to the women's match, then get the men's match free. That would entice them to watch the women. We have a long way to go, but we are definitely on the way. We need to give people the choice of buying a ticket for a women's match on its own.

I want to give a big nod to the professional reporting in media coverage of women's sport, with people such as Gabby Logan and Sue Barker. It is unbelievable that it was not until 2018 that we had the first female commentator for a live TV World cup match broadcast in the UK. The position is improving, but we have much further to go, as with equal pay.

To sum up the value of sport, particularly to women, according to the World Economic Forum, girls who play sport stay in school longer, suffer fewer health problems, enter the labour force at higher rates and are more likely to land better jobs. I call that ace, Mr Speaker.

9.33 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I am going to do something completely different from all the other speakers and speak about country sports and shooting. That is the subject that I want to put on record in *Hansard*.

As well as supporting those sports, I am a dedicated conservationist. Back home on the family farm, I am always thinking of new ways to conserve the habitat. I have planted over 3,500 trees, and dug two duck ponds. There is a purpose in that, to be honest, and we also maintain the hedgerows. Not only does that maintain the natural habitat but it encourages new habitats. In the past few years, we have seen the return of the yellowhammer, a bird that is much sought after in the UK, and birds of prey.

Surprisingly, shooting is worth £2 billion to the UK economy and supports the equivalent of 74,000 jobs. In these uncertain times, it is a sector that is proving its popularity and it is important to participants. It is estimated that shooters spend £2.5 billion each year on goods and services, and shoot providers spend around £250 million each year on conservation. People who participate in shooting manage 10 times more land for conservation than the country's nature reserves. Undoubtedly, for many people, country sports play an integral part in society.

In Northern Ireland, we excel at many sports, but at two in particular: boxing and shooting. I am never sure why that is—perhaps it is because they are contact sports, but perhaps it is for other reasons. I am proud of the shooting sports in the UK and of the benefits that they bring for individual discipline as well as for group participation and team building. Shooting is not only a hobby but a necessity for many jobs. It is also a competitive sport for the shooters from the UK who take part in a variety of domestic and international competitions. At least 600,000 people in the UK shoot live quarry, clay pigeons or targets every year, including some 280,000 people who take part in clay pigeon shooting and 168,000 people who take part in small or full bore rifle shooting. They are a tremendous group of people who enjoy the sport and the community of being involved in the sport together. I often feel that many people do not give the sport the respect that it deserves. My local shooting club, at Carrowdore in my constituency, hosts a charitable event called the Swaziland cup, where amateurs and professionals come together to win the cups and raise hundreds of pounds for the children of Swaziland. The club also hosts the little choir when people come for an afternoon of safe fun and good food. I have never won the Swaziland cup, but maybe next year I will.

There is so much good being done by the shooting community and the sport is a way of keeping body and mind healthy and together. I recently read an article that listed some of the benefits. For example, it builds core strength. The Minister said earlier that sports can make us physically fitter and more mentally alert. Shooting builds core strength and helps us to build our centre. Adjusting our body weight to the balls of our feet and remaining still in our shooting stance is great exercise for our core muscles, which support proper posture. Arm strength, mental processing and efficient problem-solving are major components of shooting. It encompasses all the things the Minister referred to, including adrenaline, mental focus, stamina, running through stages, carrying heavy gear and often navigating over uneven terrain with challenging props. Practical shooting requires fitness and stamina to run between arrays, to focus on our front sight, to think about our trigger press and to control our breathing. Stress relief and a vision training mindset are all things that the Minister referred to in her introduction, and they can all be achieved through participating in shooting sports.

Shooting is certainly a sport at which we can excel. Northern Ireland does well in it, as do Scotland, Wales, England and the Isle of Man, when given the opportunity. I want to use this opportunity to express my disappointment that shooting was not included in Birmingham 2022 as an essential part of the Commonwealth games. Shooting is a great sport, whether out in the countryside or at a range, and we must send the message to the Commonwealth committee that its inclusion is vital to the integrity of the Commonwealth games.

9.37 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): In 1979, David Jones, the janitor at St Cadoc's Primary School in Newton Mearns, coached his team of 14 primary 7 schoolboys to the first of three consecutive mini world cups at Overlee playing fields in Clarkston. That was the beginning of a remarkable local legacy, which over the next 20 years saw the team grow to include around 50 pupils from three year groups. By 2004, teams included

[Paul Masterton]

all seven years of the primary school. A couple of years later, the primary school team had evolved into a local club, with more than 250 registered players from over 10 different schools. Continuing its growth beyond those foundations as a school football team, the club converted to a registered charity, whose aim is

“to encourage public participation in sport”.

As of December 2018, 900 registered girls and boys now play netball or football for the club each weekend. Recognising the value of sporting activities to local kids, fees are kept as low as possible and the club also operates a hardship policy to ensure that every child can participate, no matter what their family circumstances might be.

Backed by an incredible team of volunteers, the club continues to go from strength to strength. St Cadoc’s is an incredible example of a small school team growing into a true community-wide organisation benefiting hundreds of local kids each week, but it also needs a bit of help. It has exhausted local facilities and, with its size and ambition, it has reached the limit of what is possible. This has meant putting on hold its community outreach programme, which it had hoped to launch as soon as possible. The programme will take St Cadoc’s to the next level in its work in the community, providing wheelchair football at the local special needs school, walking football for the elderly, and specialist sessions for children and young adults with Down’s syndrome.

On 28 April 2019, the club will attempt to complete 5,000 miles in 12 hours at Eastwood high school in Newton Mearns to raise the money it needs to deliver its outreach programme for the entire community, and that is where I and—whether by agreement or force—my wonderful constituency office team will be helping out, completing a few miles ourselves to help the club to reach its goal. St Cadoc’s youth club rightly has a place in the heart of the East Renfrewshire community, and in my view it is precisely the sort of grassroots club that underpins the health and wellbeing of our young people, and the success of our great nation in sport.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention an important professional sporting event taking place this week. For the first time in 26 years, Great Britain will host a home tie in the Federation cup, the women’s equivalent of the Davis cup tennis competition. The team of Jo Konta, Heather Watson, Katie Boulter, Harriet Dart and Katie Swan, captained by former British No. 1, Ann Keothavong, will compete against seven other nations between Wednesday and Saturday this week at the fabulous facilities at Bath University. With a dozen top 100 players competing for their country, this is a fabulous opportunity to witness world-class tennis. I am sure that the whole House will join me in backing the Brits and wishing Team GB every success in their bid for promotion to the world group.

9.40 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), and may I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) how much I enjoy watching him perform his duties as an assistant referee?

We are very proud of what he has done to carry Scotland’s saltire into international arenas. I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that that is also true of Opposition Members.

It is an enormous privilege to be the Member of Parliament for Stirling, and that privilege takes on even more gloriousness when we consider the contribution that Stirling makes to the sporting life of the United Kingdom. We have already heard about Sir Andy Murray, but Stirling has also produced other great competitors, such as the legendary Billy Bremner. Who can forget how fierce a competitor he was in football? We also have Gary and Steven Caldwell, the famous brothers—by the way, we bought their parents’ house from them. We also have the renowned jockey, Willie Carson, who is also a star of “A Question of Sport” and “I’m a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!”

Anna Sloan is also from Stirling, and she is Scotland’s pride in curling, which I am glad to have heard mentioned so often. The Scottish National Curling Academy is based at the Peak in Stirling and has produced Olympic and Commonwealth gold for Team GB and for Scotland. The Stirling Smith Museum has the oldest curling stone in the world, dating from 1511, and we also have the oldest football in the world, which was found in the rafters of Stirling castle and dates from the time of Mary Queen of Scots.

That is the history, but Stirling also has a proud football tradition. We have Stirling Albion and other great clubs, such as Milton football club, which is based in Bannockburn and plays in the Scottish Amateur Football Association’s Caledonian League and does fantastic work with the community.

When it comes to swimming, Stirling is a superpower. If Stirling had been a country at the Commonwealth games, we would have been in the top five for medals in swimming and 17th in the overall medal table, ahead of 23 other countries.

Basketball has been mentioned a few times. The Stirling Knights have won 19 national titles and produced 30 players for Scotland. They are winners. They have won the Scottish cup, the league cup and a youth tournament in Spain.

Stirling County is an incredible rugby club with an incredible legacy and tradition. It has produced great players for Scotland and has a big Scottish cup game with Hawick, I think, a week on Saturday.

Let me pause on Stirling county cricket club, because I have an affection for that particular institution. My son Jared played cricket for Stirling county. I pay tribute, as did the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), to the people who make sport happen in our communities. I want to mention specifically Raymond Bond, who for years and years nurtured the talent of young people in Stirling to play cricket. It is people like Raymond Bond whom I pay tribute to in my speech tonight. They are the people who make this country the superpower that it is when it comes to sport. We should nurture that in our constituencies.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about people who volunteer and get things going. Will he also congratulate Ammar Ashraf, the community engagement co-ordinator for Cricket Scotland, who is doing an awful lot to bring people into the sport in communities?

Stephen Kerr: Cricket is a fantastic sport for developing so many of the qualities that one needs to be successful in any avenue in life, so I am only too happy to join in that tribute. We should celebrate those who make sport happen—the volunteers, the coaches, the people who give selflessly of their time and their talents in order to foster the talent and enjoyment of others in sport.

Mr Speaker: I call Kevin Foster, who must sit down before 9.48 pm.

9.44 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): That is noted, Mr Speaker. Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, and it is a pleasure to have a short time to make some observations about the varied role of sport in Torbay. Sport is the life of the constituency I represent.

It is worth starting with Torquay United who, bluntly, after some rather lean seasons have recently been enjoying more pleasant times for them and their fans. A potential move from Plainmoor—the historical stadium still has a terrace, on which I sometimes stand—to a new stadium is being debated. One thing that disappointed me when we met the club, which will be of no surprise to anyone at the local paper, is the lack of even the most basic details about exactly what it plans to do. It is right that the council has indicated it will engage constructively, but councillors have been right to resist a formal agreement until the plan is much clearer on a range of issues, including whether the indicated site, Nightingale Park, can be built on. Surprisingly, that issue has not yet been rectified.

Speaking of new stadiums, the Minister will know that my background is in Coventry, where the Ricoh arena was built. I have heard the comments this evening about whether people should again be able to sell alcohol in the stands at football matches, or whether we should revert to new forms of standing. I would give the cautionary tale that many Coventry City fans will recall an infamous FA cup fixture at Hillsborough a couple of years before the disaster that followed. Many of those fans feel they had a pre-experience of the disaster, and the lessons were not learned. Any changes to the rules that were brought in after the disaster must be carefully considered and evidence-based—we should not just debate what might sound good on the Floor of the House. I am confident the Minister will follow the approach I suggest.

I have a great deal of time for a raft of voluntary sports clubs in Torbay. Paignton rugby football club, the Cherries, are doing a great job of getting more youth teams playing and getting involved in rugby. Cary Park tennis club is doing a lot of work on the intergenerational experience of sport by having days for grandparents and grandchildren to come and play on its new facilities. The clubhouse has been expanded, and the club is making tennis very accessible. I am sure the club would welcome you, Mr Speaker, if you fancied popping down for a game.

We have Barton cricket club, where Agatha Christie kept score under a tree that we have sadly lost in storms over the years. The club is still there and is still playing a vital part in the local community. The former editor of the *Herald Express*, Jim Parker, has dedicated decades to supporting the club.

When most people hear about rowing, they will instantly think of a lake, but the guys and girls at Paignton and Torquay rowing clubs go out on the sea, which is a remarkable spectacle.

Finally, I pay tribute to the army of volunteers across Torbay who help to make many of these clubs function by giving up their time to help people develop towards their goals, and only for the satisfaction of knowing they have made a difference to local people. Without them, the sporting life in our bay would be a lot less and our community would be a lot poorer.

9.48 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the many Members on both sides of the House who have contributed to such an important debate. On my own side, my hon. Friends the Members for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), for Keighley (John Grogan) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) each gave heartfelt speeches focusing in particular on giving a bigger voice to fans and on equalities issues in sport, from pay to participation.

I cannot take part in this debate without mentioning Crystal Palace football club in my constituency. It is known as a club that reaches out and plays a full part in the wider community. This winter, with homelessness soaring to record levels and temperatures plunging below freezing, Crystal Palace have opened the doors of Selhurst Park to provide food and shelter for people sleeping rough, which shows us that our top clubs offer much more than just sport. They are part of the fabric of our society, and they deserve recognition for that fact.

We have heard much this evening, and rightly so, about the importance of grassroots sport and sport for all, yet this is an area where funding cuts have had the greatest impact. ITV News reports that local authority sports funding is down by £400,000 in London alone over just five years. Councils are struggling to cope with Government funding cuts of up to 80% since 2010, at a time when demand for high-cost statutory services like social care is rising, the result of which is severe cuts to non-statutory services, including grassroots sports.

The Government's latest plans to remove deprivation levels from what they are, I presume, ironically calling the fair funding formula will slash what remains of grassroots sports in our most deprived communities. These are the communities where violent crime is rising fastest. There is ample evidence that diversionary activities for young people prevent those most at risk from getting involved in crime, yet this Government run the risk of further driving up violent youth crime with a perverse approach of targeting their harshest cuts on our very poorest communities.

Towards the end of last year, the Government trumpeted their new loneliness strategy. Sports are some of the most effective ways to tackle loneliness among young people, yet grassroots sport funding is facing yet more cuts. The simple truth is that the Government will not make any impact on issues such as loneliness if they keep cutting the very things that allow communities to tackle loneliness.

Last summer, the Government published their obesity strategy. The King's Fund points out that about a third of children under 15 in the UK are overweight or obese. It tells us that children are becoming obese at an earlier

[Mr Steve Reed]

age and staying obese for longer and that children from lower-income household are more than twice as likely to be obese as those in higher-income households. The Government's reaction to that so far has been negligent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting has previously pointed out, in the past two years alone, Government cuts have seen 100 swimming pools drained, 12 athletics tracks closed, 350 sports halls shut and 800 grass pitches sold off. How are we, as a country, to tackle this health and inequalities crisis if the Government allow grassroots and community sports to disappear at this rate?

Sport has the power to tackle some of the great challenges of our age, whether loneliness, obesity or mental ill health, yet the Government have chosen to cut sport to the bone. Sport can help to prevent these problems. Spending on grassroots sport is not money down the drain; it is a sensible investment that saves money in the long run by keeping people healthy and bringing our communities back together. The Government need to match their warm words tonight with action. They need to get serious about the power, impact and importance of sport for all of our communities.

Mr Speaker: Has the hon. Gentleman finished his contribution?

Mr Reed: I have, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: It was very brief. I call the Minister, who need not feel obliged to speak until 10 o'clock, as I know she made a very full contribution earlier.

9.52 pm

Mims Davies: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members and friends from around the Chamber for their contributions this evening. We heard 36 contributions, excluding those made from the Front Bench. I know some were very full, but I felt, three months into the job, that they were important in putting matters on the record, and I took 21 interventions. I hope therefore that Members will feel that they have had a chance to participate this evening.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) rightly pointed out the need to focus on school sport, and our new school sport plan will look at the quality and quantity of sport in schools. The Government give £320 million a year to the PE premium to support PE and sport in primary schools. I want to make sure that that is used well. We also heard about the closing of swimming pools and facilities. Facilities are extremely important, and Sport England is investing £40 million in its strategic facilities fund and £15 million in its community asset fund to help local communities and local people find the facilities they need. She mentioned our Foreign and Commonwealth Office colleagues and the concerning issue regarding Hakeem. FIFA, too, has expressed concerns, and I know that we will be working with colleagues to hear these worries about his treatment.

Concerns were raised about gambling advertising, and I want to address this very broadly. Since I have taken on this role, I have had roundtables with both the banks and gambling industry, and I have met the Gambling Commission and Gambling with Lives. We are making sure that a responsible gambling message runs through all our messaging, so we make sure we are protecting

our vulnerable people and make sure the industry listens and works with us. We have seen that with the whistle-to-whistle changes. The Gambling Commission has toughened up and will be using sanctions. It does have the teeth and needs to use them. We have had several conversations about that.

The SNP's retired rugby man, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), talked passionately about not only the power and value of sport but what happens in retirement. That is very important. I had the pleasure of meeting Lizzy Yarnold earlier this year. It is important that such ladies come back in and use their power. Dame Katherine Grainger's role at UK Sport is also important. The hon. Gentleman also talked about perhaps our greatest ever sportsman, Sir Andy Murray. If retirement is where he is headed, we wish him well, but I am sure that he will not be kept quiet.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) spoke about the power of sport and physical activity and the good that they can do for mental health. Sport England has funded the Get Set to Go programme, in partnership with Mind, and it has received £3 million since 2014. We also launched the mental health and elite sport action plan last year to help to bolster the support for our top-level sports people and allow them to think about their future. I will be part of the Bring it to Burton campaign, because I will be coming to Burton, as requested.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the importance of country sports and their practicality and about how we can all excel at sport. That just shows the power of sport: there is something there for everyone, and we should not rule anything in or out. Give it a go, because we do not know what we do not know. It is absolutely right that we talk about the whole breadth of sports in the UK.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) told us about the superpower of swimming and about Stirling Knights basketball club. Again, that shows how, up and down the land, we demonstrate all different powers and abilities through sport.

I could go on, and I will, because I feel it is important. I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) talk about the importance of body image and thinking beyond that to the power of sport for women and girls. I have previously spoken about the need to focus on opportunities for those with special needs and autism, and I will be taking action on that in my new role. She also mentioned the concern about predatory behaviour. I opened my remarks on that issue and I salute the NSPCC campaign. It is absolutely right that we keep sport safe and enjoyable.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) about her love of tennis and what sport can do for women who get involved. I have the Vipers cricket team near to me, and I know that Somerset does its bit. Sport for girls equals success. Those points were incredibly well made.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) made some key points about the stadium in his area and the fact that inactivity in rural areas needs to be tackled. I will continue to encourage developers to work with Sport England and my Department on a

robust business case for the needs in his area. There has been some positive discussion, and I am delighted that we can build on that.

Members have talked about how important it is that broadcasters and sponsors give women's sport the profile that it deserves, and I will work on that. Women's sports' media profile has grown since London 2012, but we all acknowledge that there is more to do.

The hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan) was an active participant in the discussion about free-to-air coverage. On the possibility of the 2030 World cup being broadcast free-to-air, the process is in its early stages, but we are an active partner in that bid and any related discussions.

We have heard how sport absolutely has the power to change lives up and down the land. We have heard how important it is in different ways. We have heard about our local heroes—our referees. Without our officials and volunteers, how do we inspire? Volunteers absolutely do that work at the heart of our communities up and down the land. We have also touched on the serious side to sport and talked about some of the issues. We need to make sure that sport is run with safety and fairness at its heart. We have spoken about sport at the top level, and we should be very proud of our sporting successes. In the coming years, we look forward to welcoming sports fans to all the amazing events that we will host here in the UK. Ultimately, as I said, sport needs to be fun. It needs to continue to bring people together, and I look forward to working with all Members to help more people to enjoy the benefits of being active.

Finally, let me touch on loneliness. Some £11.5 million has been given out to all different types of groups across the land to tackle loneliness and keep connectivity. Sport absolutely has the power to reach all communities. I will keep the remarks made by the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) under review, and I absolutely concur with him on the need to make sure that we support all sports and ensure that activity is there for everybody, young or old. That is my absolute priority in this role.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered sport in the UK.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I propose to take motions 4, 5 and 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FAMILY LAW)

That the draft Civil Partnership and Marriage (Same Sex Couples) (Jurisdiction and Judgments) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 12 December 2018, be approved.

That the draft Jurisdiction and Judgments (Family) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 10 December 2018, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Collective Investment Schemes (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 17 December 2018, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118 (6)).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Long-term Investment Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, that were laid before this House on 17 December 2018, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 6 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118 (6)).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ROAD TRAFFIC)

That the draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 20 December 2018, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Closure of St George's Cross branch of the Bank of Scotland

10.1 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): There are bank branch closures happening up and down the country from a large number of different outlets. Today's petition concerns the Bank of Scotland in St George's Cross in my constituency. Bank of Scotland is one of the banks that is still part-owned by the taxpayer, which is why it is even more disappointing that these closures continue to happen and continue to have such a negative impact on local communities and economies.

The petition states:

The Petition of Residents of Glasgow North,

Declares that proposed closure of St George's Cross branch of the Bank of Scotland in Glasgow 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 Bank of Scotland to take in account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of this branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002323]

Orkambi

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Iain Stewart.)

10.2 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Last week, one of my constituents, whose daughter suffers from cystic fibrosis, came to see me. He explained that every year that access to Orkambi or other such similar drugs is delayed takes 10 years off the life of his daughter.

My constituent explained how the long hours in hospital and in treatment mean that cystic fibrosis defines his daughter's life. However, clinical trials by Vertex seven years ago marked the start of a new hope. Vertex's amazing progress suggested that he might not outlive his daughter, that she could have the fullest life now possible, and that he would not have to tell her that she was likely to die when barely into adulthood. The whole House will understand that never in his worst nightmares did he consider the fact that these drugs would succeed yet be unavailable to his daughter.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Orkambi, which is manufactured by Vertex, is licensed and available in Ireland and the Netherlands where there are only 1,000 cystic fibrosis sufferers, but not available in the UK where there are more than 10,000 sufferers? Does he agree that that is a terrible shame?

Bill Wiggin: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman hears the rest of the speech before he expects to draw any conclusions.

Cystic fibrosis is a life-limiting genetic disorder. Patients with cystic fibrosis experience a build-up of thick mucus in their lungs. This can have a wide range of effects on their respiratory, digestive and reproductive systems. The disease is widespread in the UK. One person in 25 carries the faulty cystic fibrosis gene. Statistically, that is 26 Members of this House whose future generations could be affected by this cruel disease.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this debate to the House; there is such a good crowd in the Chamber tonight due to the importance of the issue. I also thank him for being an advocate of Orkambi not because I have had any dealings with the company, but because I have many constituents who are affected. One grandmother in particular has asked me to make a plea because the life not only of their grandchild, but the lives of the whole family, have been turned around by this drug. I want this drug to be available for families throughout Northern Ireland and the whole United Kingdom. Does he agree that this Crown licence is a way to get around the stalemate that is preventing CF sufferers throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from accessing this drug, which is proven to deliver tremendous improvement in quality of life?

Bill Wiggin: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be grateful to him for raising the issue in the House this evening.

Every week, five babies are born with the disease, according to Great Ormond Street Hospital, and every week two young people die as a result of cystic fibrosis. The disease accounts for 9,500 hospital admissions and

over 100,000 hospital bed days a year. There are two main ways to treat cystic fibrosis: conventional treatments target the symptoms, and precision medicines such as Orkambi tackle the cause of the condition. For conventional treatment on the NHS, the average waiting time to be admitted to hospital is 45 days.

Orkambi presents a relatively safer, more effective and clinically meaningful alternative. In treating the root causes, it reduces lung damage and cystic fibrosis-related diabetes, and improves pancreatic function. The drug has been approved by the European Medical Association, and the Food and Drug Administration in the United States. It avoids the high risk associated with organ transplants.

Orkambi treats the F508del mutation, which around 50% of people with CF in the UK carry. Essentially, the drug permits more chloride ions to pass into and out of the cells. This helps to keep a balance of salt and water in affected organs. Ivacaftor is one of the active substances in Orkambi. It increases the activity of the defective cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator protein, thereby making the mucus less thick. Decline in lung function is the most common cause of death for people with cystic fibrosis and, although not a cure, Orkambi has been found to slow the decline in lung function by 42% and reduce hospitalisations by 61%.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Before coming to this place, I was a respiratory physio and worked with many people with cystic fibrosis. The cost of hospitalisation and treatment far outstrips the cost of this drug for many people with cystic fibrosis. Should not the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence change its criteria and look at the value of life, instead of only the day-to-day cost of this drug?

Bill Wiggin: No, I do not agree. The purpose of this debate is to show an alternative that allows NICE to spend taxpayers' money on drugs for other conditions while still allowing cystic fibrosis sufferers to have access to this vital drug—and not just to Orkambi, but to the next generation of the same sort of drugs. Bear with me because we have not got to the good bit yet.

In July 2016, NICE recognised Orkambi as an important treatment, yet was unable to recommend the drug for use within the NHS on grounds of cost-effectiveness. The drug is estimated to cost around £104,000 per patient per year and must be taken for life. Orkambi is not provided by the NHS, except in rare cases on compassionate grounds. It remains patent to its manufacturer, Vertex Pharmaceuticals, under UK patent law. In July 2018, NHS England made what it said was its best and final offer to Vertex of £500 million over five years. This was described by the NHS as the "largest ever financial commitment" in its 70-year history. Tragically, Vertex rejected the offer.

We all know that it is essential that a solution is found as soon as possible to make the drug available, as every day counts in slowing the progress of the disease. In an email to me, Vertex states that it

"is committed to finding a sustainable solution for access to our medicines for Cystic Fibrosis patients, including Orkambi".

That is not quite the impression I have received so far. I sincerely hope that that is indeed its highest priority.

The drugs that constitute Orkambi—Ivacaftor and Lumacaftor—can be synthetically developed at low cost, yet their price remains inaccessibly high.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As some of my colleagues will know, I have a 14-year-old niece with cystic fibrosis, as well as many constituents who have it. I obviously know people within the community, too. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in 2017 Vertex earned £2.5 billion from the sale of Orkambi and the chief exec was paid more than \$17 million? I think that the Department of Health and Social Care probably has to go some way towards meeting Vertex on this, but it seems to me that there is an awful lot of money sloshing around and both sides are in a position where they could compromise.

Bill Wiggin: First, let me say how sorry I am to hear about the hon. Lady's niece. We should take this very seriously. The figures that I have are even worse than the ones that she has laid out.

The price remains inaccessibly high, and this is entirely due to the powerful patent laws that allow pharmaceutical companies to monopolise drug production. Vertex expects to retain monopoly intellectual property protection on its cystic fibrosis drugs well into the 2030s. Analysts conservatively estimate that it will generate profits of \$13 billion on Orkambi and another related drug, Kalydeco, alone. This could be used to fund further research and development—to reward its shareholders for its brilliant breakthrough and perhaps to encourage it to do more. But no, Vertex has spent \$500 million on buying back its own shares. Well, that should certainly boost executive remuneration.

I am aware that provisions exist under the Patents Act 1977 for the Government to take independent action against Vertex. Crown use licensing is a powerful legal tool that can be used to safeguard public health. It can ensure the availability of fairly priced medicines in a competitive pharmaceutical market. Section 55(1) of the Act states that the Government can be granted non-authorised use of patents

“for the services of the Crown”.

That can be granted at all stages of manufacture, use, importation, sale and retention of a product. This is a legal opportunity to break the lethal deadlock that eats away at the youngest sufferers who stand to gain the most from this medicine. Crown use licensing has been used by the UK Government before, to great effect. They can suspend a patent and thereby force down the high price of particular pharmaceutical or medical equipment. For example, in 1991 the Government authorised the supply of machines known as lithotriptors for treating kidney stones. More recently, breast cancer patients have lobbied the Scottish Government to implement a Crown use licence on the drug Pertuzumab. Crown use licensing could similarly be used to overturn the patent monopoly on Orkambi by Vertex.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): I applaud the hon. Gentleman for his initiative and guarantee him my 100% support. Does he not agree that this drug should be supplied on the NHS? We are all born equal in this country, but unfortunately if you are a millionaire you can pay for it but if you are working class like my constituents you cannot get it. I have constituents—Emma and Chris Corr and their young daughter Harriet—who are considering leaving England so as to be able to get the care that they need. Does he agree that this country is unfair?

Bill Wiggin: I tragically allowed the hon. Gentleman's intervention one sentence too early. I was about to say that Crown use licensing would make the drug available to cystic fibrosis sufferers at a reduced price on the NHS, so I absolutely agree.

Those are just a few examples of how Crown use licensing can set the ball rolling on increasing public access to precision medicine. The UK Government have a powerful policy mechanism already behind them. They are now in a position to make a huge difference to many people's lives. A bio-generic version of Orkambi manufactured at a lower price would save our NHS time, money and resources. The majority of medicines already in use by the NHS are generic versions of originator products.

I have a daughter whom I love unconditionally. Putting myself in the shoes of my constituent, I can only imagine the anguish that he faces, let alone the suffering of his daughter. We know that young children stand to gain the most from access to Orkambi, and I am sure that the Minister wants to give the taxpayer the opportunity to access this drug under the NHS and NICE.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Has my hon. Friend looked at the cost and time delay involved in producing the generic alternative that he describes? Has he factored into his argument the potential cost of litigation, which I assume Vertex would pursue? I wonder whether his proposal might actually be less cost-effective and speed-effective than trying to put a bomb under the two parties to reach agreement.

Bill Wiggin: I have. This drug would cost £104,000 if bought from Vertex and about £5,000 if it were made generically, so there is a huge saving.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is making an excellent case. Those of us who have been active on this issue—it is wonderful to see so many of them in the Chamber—have faced the argument from the company that it wants to have a licence for a whole class of these medicines, so that it can plan that future investment. He seems to suggest that that is not necessarily a valid argument. I wonder if he could respond to that argument, which has been used against those of us who have suggested that there should be a fairer way of proceeding.

Bill Wiggin: I am not quite sure I follow. I would have been much more sympathetic to Vertex if it had not been doing share buybacks. If a company expects to make \$13 billion of profit, it will have factored into its calculations a reasonable profit margin. I believe that Vertex has an unreasonable profit margin. I support the private sector, and I like the idea of that R&D going on to benefit the shareholders, but I also recognise that we have a responsibility. As people who want to see patients cured, we want to see this deal done ideally by Vertex and NICE. This is a £500 million gamble for Vertex, because it will not get the money if it does not do the deal.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He mentioned the R&D that is going on. That R&D does

[Liz McInnes]

not exist in a vacuum; it is done on patients, with input from doctors. Does he agree that the company, no matter how much profit it might want to make, has a moral obligation to cystic fibrosis patients?

Bill Wiggin: I absolutely agree, which is why I am suggesting that the Crown use licence ought to be used and taken seriously. I imagine that people working for Vertex are listening closely to this debate. They will have heard the hon. Lady's point, and I think they need to move on from this attention to profit margin.

As a Conservative, I understand the importance of managing the expectations of private companies. We in Parliament have a responsibility to people with cystic fibrosis to stand up to the greed. That is what we are doing now, and it is lovely to see so many Members here. I urge the Government to consider enacting a Crown use licence, to break the deadlock on this patented drug and reduce the price of Orkambi and the suite of medicines that go with it, which are so desperately needed not only by our constituents, but by their children.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair for the Adjournment debate, Mr Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) and all Members who have contributed to the debate, some of whom I recognise from previous debates, have spoken on behalf of constituents from the heart as usual, regardless of political persuasion, with one voice. That is good to hear. I had a school here this morning, and the students asked me what the biggest misconception about this place is. I said that we get on far more than we do not, even at the moment. If they tune in this evening, they might see that happen. Adjournment debates are always a good example of that, in my experience—and as Public Health Minister, I have significant experience of the Adjournment debate, as does my poor Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Everyone has been speaking without political bias and with one voice, and that voice wants patients to benefit from effective treatments for cystic fibrosis. So do I, and the Government wholeheartedly share that view. We have urged Vertex to accept the fair offer that NHS England has made to the company, which would guarantee immediate access for NHS patients to all Vertex's cystic fibrosis treatments. I hope that the pleas we have heard from my hon. Friend and other Members once again this evening will go some way to persuade Vertex—I agree that it will be listening intently—to consider NHS England's fair and best offer.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind) rose—

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab) rose—

Steve Brine: I will give way once—and that is it—to the hon. Gentleman who rose first.

Mr Lewis: I thank the Minister for giving way, and I congratulate the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) on securing this Adjournment debate. We have been debating this in this place for months, and the fact is that our constituents and patients still do not have access to Orkambi. May I say to the Minister that

it is time that Ministers themselves took over these negotiations and responsibility for sitting face to face with and eyeballing the company so that our constituents get the justice they deserve? These negotiations between NHS England and the drug company have got us nowhere, despite the efforts of right hon. and hon. Members in this House. Will Ministers now directly get their hands dirty, roll up their sleeves, participate in these negotiations and bring this matter to a conclusion on behalf of our constituents?

Steve Brine: Okay, the hon. Gentleman has got his press release with his intervention. Perhaps I should go back on what I said at the start. All he has done is to take away time, on what is a very complex issue, from my trying to set out a response to my hon. Friend's Adjournment debate.

My hon. Friend has called on the Government to consider making use of the legal provision in UK patent law of Crown use licensing to break, as he rightly puts it, the current "deadlock". As the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said, in a reasonable part of his intervention, it is a deadlock and it has been going on for some time. I commend my hon. Friend's efforts in raising this. Indeed, it is right that we consider every possibility. Every effort must be made to ensure that effective medicines are made widely available to cystic fibrosis patients. There is no doubt and no debate about that.

I can assure my hon. Friend that we, too, have considered this option. Indeed, I have received initial advice on Crown use licensing. While the use of these mechanisms is not our preference, we are looking at all options. Crown use licensing is complicated, and it would not represent a quick solution to ensuring patient access to Orkambi. My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) mentioned that in her intervention and, sadly, she is right.

The UK is one of a limited number of countries that actively protects the role of intellectual property in medicines development in international forums. We believe, however, that there is a balance to be struck between providing incentives to create and commercialise new medicines and ensuring that they remain affordable to the taxpayer—our constituents.

The 2019 voluntary scheme for branded medicines pricing and access, alongside the statutory scheme for branded medicines, are two mechanisms that are in place for ensuring branded medicines are affordable to the NHS. The 2019 scheme provides for flexible commercial arrangements between companies and NHS England—in other words, the customer in this scenario.

In theory, Crown use licensing could be utilised with respect to Orkambi. However, in the past Crown use has only really been intended or designed to deal with emergencies, where a particular patented product is not available in the UK at all. Crown use has not historically been intended to circumvent commercial agreements or to create a mechanism for the production of medicines at a lower price.

The relevant legislation on Crown use states that compensation would need to be provided to the original patent holder—in this case, Vertex, and that would stick in the throat of many of us—which would need to take into account any loss of profit from not being awarded a contract to supply the patented medicine. Unless an

agreement could be reached with Vertex, it would be for a court to decide on an amount in this instance. This would of course need to be paid from the public purse. If a Crown use licence were issued, then there would be a subsequent, critical question about how the medicine would be produced and authorised as the usual licensing requirements would apply, with approval required by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency.

Vertex has protections in the form of both data and marketing exclusivity for Orkambi, and it will continue to have these for a number of years. As such, unless another manufacturer conducted its own clinical trials, there are no realistic alternatives at this time to produce it and the NHS does not hold such a capacity. Using this route, it could take several—many—years before the drug was available on the market, and it would, in all likelihood, be very expensive for another manufacturer. The total length of time and cost of manufacturing and licensing—plus the compensation to the patent holder and a potential appeals process through the courts, which seems inevitable everywhere we turn these days—could be potentially significant.

We also do not know what impact Crown use would have on the other medicines that Vertex supplies to the NHS or the pipeline of products that it is developing. We should remember—and my hon. Friend reminded us of this in his opening speech—that around 50% of people with CF would benefit from Orkambi; in other words, 50% would not.

Crown use could have the effect of putting patients at a disadvantage, jeopardising access to future medicines and potentially setting a precedent of issuing further licences at very high cost.

Ian Austin: Will the Minister give way?

Steve Brine: Just because I cannot resist the hon. Gentleman, I will give way to him.

Ian Austin: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He is setting out all the arguments against Crown use licensing. I agree with the point that he has made in the past—that Vertex needs to show flexibility on this—but I think we all think that the Government also need to show flexibility and to think carefully about whether the NICE guidelines work when evaluating these new, precision medicines. What we would all like to hear from him tonight is what he proposes to do, and what the Government are going to do, to break this deadlock and bring these negotiations to a conclusion.

Steve Brine: In response to the hon. Gentleman and to one of the other interventions about compromise and meeting in the middle—there is lots of talk about compromise at the moment—I suggest that the £500 million offer is a pretty good first step from the Government. I suggest that that is a pretty good attempt to meet in the middle. That is our constituents' money.

Mr Hepburn: Will the Minister give way?

Steve Brine: I will not.

The hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) talked about breaking the impasse and breaking the deadlock. I said in response to the point from my hon. Friend about Crown use that I have not closed the door on it tonight. I am not trying to put obstacles in the way. I have been asked a question at the Dispatch Box about

the practical realities of making this policy move, and I am setting out for the House's benefit—on the record for everybody listening and for Members—the practicalities.

My hon. Friend talked about use of similar mechanisms by other countries. It is always interesting to understand what other countries are doing and what they are considering and implementing in their health services—there is much that we can learn from each other. However, I cannot comment on the circumstances that would prompt another country to take these steps; other countries have different health systems, and they do not have NICE. We have said—the hon. Member for Dudley North touched on this in his intervention—that we are looking to review the NICE processes, but we should also remember that NICE is respected around the world. If we did not have NICE, we would probably have to invent NICE—that is the truth for Ministers in this Government, as it would have been for Ministers in the previous Government.

I understand the sense of frustration in this Chamber.

Mr Hepburn: Will the Minister give way?

Steve Brine: I said I would not.

I think the House gets a minuscule sense of my frustration about the situation. I want this sorted. I have constituents who contact me about this too. I am sure the key question we are all thinking about is, where does this leave us now? I suppose that is the point of the intervention that the hon. Member for Dudley North made. I just want to be clear that we are still taking a very close interest in this matter.

The reason I responded so robustly to the earlier intervention about Ministers getting their hands dirty is that I do not think that is particularly helpful. Ministers are not the customer here; NHS England is the customer, Vertex is the seller and NICE is involved. Ultimately, we have made a very, very generous offer to this company, and I think that it should look again, and look long and hard, at its moral obligations as much as anything else, as somebody mentioned in their intervention.

Of course I recognise the impact that these protracted discussions are having on the daughter of my hon. Friend's constituent. I heard the lady on the "Today" programme this morning on Radio 4, and it breaks our hearts to hear these stories. Of course we want this sorted. For many of the patients who suffer from this debilitating disease, including constituents of my own, it is extremely disappointing that Vertex rejected the final offer made by NHS England, as well as rejecting the opportunity for NICE to appraise its new medicines.

I have talked about the £500 million over five years; it is the largest ever commitment of this kind in the 70-year history of the NHS—it is not insignificant. It is a huge sum of money and of course NHS England must also fund other drugs for other distressing diseases. My hon. Friend made reference to that. I do not often get asked to come and answer Adjournment debates about spending less on precision drugs for other conditions. There are many, many other drugs that demand our funds. Vertex must re-engage with the NICE appraisal process. We understand the frustration of the CF community. However, it has been made crystal clear to Vertex that its drugs need to be priced responsibly and that any reassessment of Orkambi's effectiveness must be carried out by NICE's established process.

[Steve Brine]

The position of Vertex is unreasonable. It is unacceptable to us, to patients and to our constituents. I know that other countries also worry for their patients because of Vertex's unfair pricing of this drug, so let me put on record once again that Vertex should and must take up the very generous offer that NHS England has made. That offer will improve the lives of eligible cystic fibrosis

patients and their families. For all the reasons I have set out, it is far and away the quickest and simplest way to resolve this matter.

Question put and agreed to.

10.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 4 February 2019

[DAVID HANSON *in the Chair*]

Leaving the European Union

4.30 pm

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 224908 relating to leaving the European Union.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. This is certainly not the first petition that relates to leaving the European Union; it is not even the first this month, and nor is this the first debate on such a petition that I have led.

David Hanson (in the Chair): I chaired the last one as well.

Paul Scully: Exactly: we return to it. I will read the petition, entitled “Brexit re article 50 it must not be suspended/stopped under any circumstances”, into *Hansard* so that it can have its full say:

“The full details are well known to everyone the media has covered it fully, the British people MUST be given the Brexit they voted for anything else is not acceptable to the British public ARTICLE 50 must not under any circumstances be hindered/suspended/stopped for any reason whatsoever the time is here to take action as there has been excessive feet dragging/delaying tactics by those opposed to Brexit.”

The petition ran for six months and received 116,470 signatures.

Obviously this issue continues to exercise members of the public, just as it exercises Members of this House, and it will continue to do so. In recent debates, we have seen that passions run high and that there are different opinions in the House. Similarly, I am sure, colleagues’ inboxes will reflect the number of people saying a variety of things. Although I am a London MP and my situation will be different from that of MPs for other parts of the country, the number of my constituents who want to have a second referendum or stop Brexit entirely is probably equal to the number of people who do not want to go through the process and who want to leave tomorrow with no deal. A whole load of people are in the middle, including myself. I voted leave and campaigned for Vote Leave.

I was happy to support the Prime Minister’s original deal because it did most of the things that I required, although clearly not all of them. It allowed us to leave the EU’s political institutions, to stop paying the huge membership fees to the EU each year, to end freedom of movement—not so we can stop immigration, but so we can have a controlled, better managed immigration system—and to start the process of striking trade deals with countries around the world, and even to ratify them. The deal was imperfect because we would not have been able to get started on putting those deals into place until after the implementation period and we had that future relationship agreed with the EU.

The main sticking point that seemed to trouble a number of colleagues was the Irish backstop. Other issues concern some people but, as we saw in recent votes,

the Irish backstop seems to be the main sticking point. Having questioned the Prime Minister, Ministers and civil servants, I concluded that I was a bit more relaxed about the backstop than other Members were, because I believe it is not comfortable for the EU to have it, any more than it is for the UK. I do not buy the line that the EU would want to keep us in the backstop forever, through a pseudo-permanent customs union, because if the backstop were ever to come into force, Northern Ireland would suddenly become the most competitive region of the European Union. It would have full access to both the UK market and the EU single market. Economically, that would be very uncomfortable for the EU because it would allow us to cherry-pick. The EU said, right at the beginning of the negotiations, that we would not be able to cherry-pick and break down any of the pillars, but actually the backstop would allow us to do it, because it would allow us to have access to the single market and customs union, without freedom of movement. Imagine a member state such as Hungary allowing that arrangement to stand for any length of time.

The backstop would allow us to have access to the single market and customs union without paying the membership fees. Imagine France, who would bankroll us, allowing that to stand for any length of time. Looking at new trade deals that the EU would want to happen, those countries looking in would say, “Well, hold on a sec. What is happening with the UK?” It would suddenly become Europe’s backstop, because those countries would not be sure about the relationship they had with the UK for any length of time.

That was my thought process, but unfortunately not enough colleagues agreed. The one good thing about that evening’s vote was that it did not take me long to vote and get through the Lobby—there were not enough colleagues with me. Clearly, the House has had its say. Following the second set of votes, including on the so-called Brady amendment, I am pleased that we now have a clear signal to send the Prime Minister back and say, “Okay, fine. I know we spent a long time negotiating this, but if you”—the EU—“just shift a little bit we can get this done.”

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Why did the hon. Gentleman’s leader—the Prime Minister—say for months and months that there will be no deal that does not include a backstop? Why would she have said that, and was she wrong?

Paul Scully: At the time, she was not wrong. We will have to wait and see whether there is a backstop or an amended backstop, which is the whole point of negotiation. As we speak, Members are meeting to discuss alternative arrangements. The key thing about the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) is that it seeks discussion of alternative arrangements to the Irish backstop, which might include the ability to leave unilaterally, a time limit or sunset clause, or what has become known as the Malthouse compromise, proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse).

All those sorts of thing need to be discussed over the next couple of days, so that we can go to Brussels with a clear ask. However, as I was saying, the amendment stating that we need to investigate alternative arrangements

[Paul Scully]

to the Irish backstop, and that the chances are that it would then go through, passed the House and has now given the Prime Minister a strong hand to be able to say to Brussels, “If we can get this right, we can do what I hope both sides want: enable the UK to leave in an orderly fashion as possible.” It would be of benefit to the UK to respect the referendum and the will of the 17.4 million people who voted leave while taking on board as many people from the UK who did not vote leave but who acknowledge the result of the referendum, and to ensure that the EU can continue to trade seamlessly with the UK. We can discuss ad infinitum the importance of UK markets to the EU, just as many EU markets are important to the UK. All these things are important.

The vast majority of us who campaigned to leave simply want to be friendly neighbours with the EU rather than its awkward tenants. This is not just a power struggle. The vast majority of people, including me—my main motivation was to leave the EU’s political institutions—wanted to tell Brussels, “You are going in a direction that we do not want to go as a country. Let’s step aside and allow you to develop in the way you want in terms of an ever-closer political union, but let us go in our own direction. We still need to co-operate and collaborate.”

That is why a deal is so important. We can talk about whether a no-deal scenario is a World Trade Organisation scenario, but I am sure the shadow Minister will make the same point that he made last time. He is correct to say that a no-deal scenario covers just trade, which is the whole point of WTO. It does not cover security, education, medical research and so on, which is why a sensible, collaborative deal would be so much better for this country and would allow us to continue relatively seamlessly in the coming months.

Given that the Prime Minister’s hand has been strengthened, I believe that if we develop a clear ask over the next few days, Brussels will give us a bit of flexibility. We are not saying to Brussels, “We’re going to go toe to toe with you.” I still believe that, with a reasonable amount of flexibility, we can get this deal done within the timeframe and will not need to extend article 50.

It would be a democratic travesty were we to follow the line of some of the amendments proposed recently and extend article 50 for months and months. That would let people down. If there is a deal on the table and we just need to dot a couple of i’s and cross a few t’s, I could see it being extended for a week or two, but some people are saying that it should be extended for nine months.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): It has already been two and a half years since the people instructed us to leave. Does my hon. Friend agree that extending article 50 any further would be treating them with contempt and would be a slap in the face for democracy? People expect us to get on with the job now.

Paul Scully: I absolutely agree. All I am saying is that if we had a deal and just needed to dot the i’s and cross the t’s—if there were a technical reason to extend article 50 for just a week or two—it would be churlish not to do that. I and a number of my hon. Friend’s constituents have taken this decision for 40 or 50 years, not for the short term, so let us get it right. I do not

mind an extension of a few weeks, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that it would be a travesty to say, “Let’s extend article 50 so we can start the discussion again. Let’s have a second referendum and extend the uncertainty and division that this country finds itself in.” People expect much more of us.

Wera Hobhouse: I always welcome people trying to come together to discuss things openly and honestly, and perhaps come to an agreement. I only regret that the other parties are not involved in this coming together; it seems to be something that is done just within the Conservative party. I am a member of the Brexit Committee, and the proposals that seem to be on the table, such as trusted trader schemes or equivalences, have been looked at over the past two and a half years. The Committee has listened to many experts who have ruled them out, and the European Union negotiators have done so, too. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that something that has not been agreed in the past two and a half years can suddenly be agreed with the European Union in the next two and a half days or the next week?

Paul Scully: There is a good reason why I believe it can happen: Michel Barnier himself said recently,

“My team and I have done a lot of work on virtual, decentralised controls, which will be useful in all hypotheses...Even in the absence of an agreement, we will do our utmost not to create a hard border in Ireland”.

If it is good enough to use decentralised border checks that do not require a hard border in a no-deal scenario, why is it not good enough to use them in a deal scenario? Michel Barnier is trying his best to use the existing processes to avoid putting in a hard border in the event of no deal. It will be the EU’s responsibility to do that, because the Government have said clearly that we will not put in a hard border, and so have the Irish Government. It will have to come from Brussels. The EU will be the final arbiter if it insists on a hard border. Michel Barnier is clearly saying that he will do everything he can, should we leave with no deal, to ensure that does not happen. Let us hope he can give us a bit of flexibility and does everything he can to make that happen if there were a deal. That would help us with so many other issues.

There is more to be done. We just require more flexibility, not wholesale change. When the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, went to the EU to negotiate ahead of the referendum, he did not get a lot to bring back; in my view, he did not ask for enough, but if he had got a bit more from the EU—if the EU had showed a bit more flexibility at that time—I believe that the referendum result would have been very different. We would almost certainly have voted to remain. I hope the EU will look back at that, reflect on it and say, “Let’s not make the same mistake again. Let’s not dig in our heels in at the end of the process.” As my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) says, this has taken two and a half years. We have come all this way, so let us not trip up at the last step.

The EU just needs to show flexibility. We are not asking for wholesale change. I know that, in all negotiations, people need to save face. There is always a dance at this point in negotiations. We will dance around a bit so the Taoiseach can appeal to his domestic audience; I know he has a difficult balance to strike. I am sure our Prime Minister wants to be able to say that she has delivered

on the promise of the referendum, and all parties in this House will want to say that they have done their best for their constituents and their country. Germany, France, Belgium, Hungary, Spain and Greece—all the member states and the negotiating team in the middle of Brussels—all want to take the credit for it. Frankly, I do not care who takes the credit for it. Some of us have been working on this for 20 or 25 years. We just want to leave the EU now. If we all keep our heads and use the right language, I see no reason why we cannot do this within the timescale.

On the point that the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) made about collaboration in this place, people—the media, especially—often say that the Conservatives are arguing among themselves. There is a simple reason why there are often two Conservatives on panels. The Labour party leadership effectively wants a general election. I have made the point several times that if the Leader of the Opposition wrote a deal, gave it to the Prime Minister and had it presented back to him, he would vote against it because he wants a general election. There are many in his party who have a different view. The Lib Dems want a second referendum, and SNP Members have made the honest point that they do not want to leave. Fine—that is probably the most straightforward and honest point. I fundamentally disagree, but that that is nature of debate. Effectively, the Conservative party is the only party saying, “Yes, we want to leave, but how do we do that? Is it with a deal? What kind of deal is it? Or is it with no deal?” That is the vibrant—often tense—discussion that we are having within our party.

I will finish where I started: we must get together and keep our heads. Another reason why we need to keep no deal on the table is so that we have all the options. If Brussels thinks that the options are that we accept the deal or do not leave at all, it will obviously want to keep us in the EU. Imagine someone going to an estate agent and saying, “I don’t want to pay full price for the house. I want at least £20,000 discount, please.” If the estate agent looks over the person’s shoulder and sees their spouse measuring the curtains, that somewhat undermines their negotiating position. That is why keeping no deal on the table is really important. If we just have a bit of flexibility and allow people to pivot and reflect on the alternatives, I truly believe we can do what the petitioners want. We can get a decent deal that allows us to leave in as orderly fashion as possible within the article 50 timescale. We will not have to suspend article 50, and we can leave on 29 March.

4.48 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a real honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Hanson. You will not be surprised to hear that I am going to put forward the opposite view to that of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully).

We are seven weeks away from Brexit and we have no agreement. There is no agreement in Parliament or, as I can see from my mailbox, among the people.

Brexit supporters, including the Prime Minister, say that 17.4 million people—a small majority—voted for it. So why do we not have an agreement? Why was the Prime Minister’s deal not voted through? If Brexit means Brexit, if 17.4 million people voted for it, and if the Government and the two main parties are committed to it, why are we still arguing? Why has everybody not

voted for the Brexit deal that the Prime Minister brought to Parliament? It is because the fundamental flaw of the referendum was that “Brexit” was not defined. Some who voted for it wanted or had no deal in mind; some wanted something like the Prime Minister’s deal. Some wanted to be a lot closer to the European Union—staying in the customs union, for example.

Mrs Murray: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Wera Hobhouse: In a minute.

Brexit was not defined, so how many of the 17.4 million voted for the deal that is now on the table? How many voted for a no-deal Brexit? Six million? Eight million? Never as many as the 16 million who voted to stay in the European Union, which was a defined proposal.

Mrs Murray: I thank the hon. Lady for generously giving way. Does she accept that members of her party voted to have a referendum? Indeed, the former leader of the Liberal Democrats was the first person to say that he was going to give the British people a say on whether to remain in or leave the European Union. He did not say anything about there being different choices. Can she explain that, please?

Wera Hobhouse: I am a new Member of Parliament. Obviously, I followed the discussions about the referendum for many years. Yes, we are a party of democracy—I always believe that we should give people a say. Since the vote was so narrow and we are still arguing about what Brexit should look like and how we should leave the European Union, what is the problem with saying, “Now we have a defined Brexit proposal in the Prime Minister’s deal or we have a no-deal proposal, but we also still have the option of staying in the European Union”? That is the most democratic way of dealing with the issue.

I cannot for the life of me understand why more democracy should mean less democracy. Why can we not honestly put that to the people, now that we have so much more information about what leaving the European Union would actually mean? People can continue to vote for what they voted for in 2016. I do not mind that—I am just looking for some clarification.

Mrs Murray: Could the hon. Lady please confirm that, as far as she is concerned, the former leader of the Liberal Democrats had no intention of honouring the result of the referendum that he was the first to promise the British people?

Wera Hobhouse: I think I answered that question before. We—myself included—honour the referendum result in saying that Parliament cannot cancel Brexit: we had a referendum and we, as parliamentarians, cannot just stand here in Parliament and say, “Let’s not do Brexit.” That is why I believe that we need to put it back to the people. That is most democratic way of going about this. I cannot see a reason why putting something back to the people and letting them have the final say is less democratic; I believe that to be democracy in its full sense.

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that we have had two votes on Brexit? The first was the referendum and the second was the general election, in which 80% of votes cast were for parties that wanted us to leave the European Union.

Wera Hobhouse: I do not agree. In the 2017 general election, many other elements played their part. For the people, it was not clear what leaving the European Union would mean or what the Brexit deal on the table would be, and we knew nothing about the backstop. We now know what that all looks like.

I truly trust in people and I believe that when I put things in front of them, with the honest options on the table—outside the heat of the media and the competition of political parties—they will make good decisions. That is why, by the way, I am very much in favour of citizens' assemblies. If we get to the point of extending article 50—I believe that we must because we are simply running out of time—we should precede that with several citizens' assemblies where we put the options to focus groups and where people can discuss them honestly.

I have said time and again that I believe that people will make very good decisions. I trust in them and, if they confirm their former opinions—whether that is a no-deal Brexit or the Prime Minister's Brexit—and there is a majority of more than 50% for a specific Brexit deal, I will accept it. That is a final say. We have always said that the people must have the final say and that we must give it to them.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I note that the hon. Lady said that the people should be asked whether they want a no-deal Brexit or the Prime Minister's Brexit. She was very clear. I have heard other Liberal Democrats add another option. Has she left off her list a staying put option? Can she clarify? I hear both versions and I am absolutely not certain about what the Liberal Democrats are asking for. There could be an argument for asking about the two versions of Brexit, but there certainly is not one for putting the issue back to the people as a three-way referendum.

Wera Hobhouse: To clarify: absolutely. The ballot paper has to have the option to remain, because in the previous referendum, 48% voted for that. When I consult my mailbox, and when we consider polling, a majority—

Damien Moore: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Wera Hobhouse: I want to make progress. Now that we have defined Brexit options on the table, a majority of people—if we trust the polling—would vote to remain. How many people actually voted for a no-deal Brexit? Eight million people? Certainly not as many as would vote to stay in the European Union. How many people would vote for a no-deal Brexit or the Prime Minister's Brexit? The fundamental flaw of the 2016 Brexit vote, as I insist on saying, was that "Brexit" was not defined.

In all honesty, if we leave and want to do Brexit properly, we have to give the final say to the people, because Parliament is divided. That is why we are here; I believe in Parliament. There is no majority for a no-deal Brexit, yet the people who write to me the most seem to be those who want us to leave without a deal. If we strip the numbers down, however, we see that they are a minority of 30% maybe—not an all-out majority. We need to clarify things with the British people. That is why we need an extension of article 50.

I understand that the European Union will agree to an extension if either a general election or a people's vote is on the table. I hope that an extension of article 50

would give us and the British people time to properly discuss all the options. That would mean discussion in citizens' assemblies—as proposed by the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), which I supported—so that we can properly discuss the things on the table, rather than being drowned out by media hysteria and by political interests.

People visiting the Electoral Reform Society website will see that it held a citizens' assembly in Manchester, post-Brexit, with mostly Brexiteer focus groups. The choice of that citizens' assembly was for a very close relationship with the European Union—including single market and customs union membership—that I would call "Brexit in name only". That is what people think we should do because, in the end, we do not want a Brexit that damages our economy or our security prospects. If people want a Brexit that truly serves their interests, they will come to the conclusion that the best deal is the one that we already have: membership of the European Union. But hey-ho! Let us put the choice to the people: a painless Brexit, a painful Brexit or a pointless Brexit.

I believe that people will come to the conclusion that the best deal is membership of the European Union and not the deal on the table. Let us ask the people again; let us have an extension of article 50; let us have proper grown-up discussions with members of the public in proper focus groups; and let us have a referendum and see what the people say. Let us ask for an extension of article 50, to which I think the European Union would agree.

4.59 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I am pleased to be called to speak in this debate, Mr Hanson, because sometimes those in the main Chamber are so crowded that it is difficult to get in. This is wonderful—I am told we have hours, which is great—because we can really explore the options.

The important thing for me is to look at the petition. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), who spoke with great passion. The Liberal Democrats contested my seat hotly at the last election, making it a Brexit election, but to be fair, they have a fixed view: they do not want to leave the European Union. However, as the hon. Lady said, they offered a referendum and—this is on my wall as a poster—Sir Nick Clegg featured in a leaflet saying, "Only the Liberal Democrats offer you a true referendum, in or out." I thought, "Fair enough, that's a fair question." Now, and this was confirmed by the hon. Lady—I wanted to check—the "in or out" talked about in that leaflet is not the referendum that the Liberal Democrats want to offer; the new referendum, if that were to be considered, would be a three-way choice, which would split the vote considerably.

Wera Hobhouse: A democracy is a place where things move and are dynamic. The hon. Lady is not being helpful if she keeps harking back to what was said in the past. We are where we are, and we are in a very difficult situation. Is it not important to look at the present, instead of always harking back to the past?

Mrs Main: I completely agree, but we have to learn from the past, which forms part of our future trajectory. All I am saying is that the in-out referendum that the House promised the British people is the only way to go.

The three-way referendum now supported by the hon. Lady's party and others would ask people to choose between what she would describe as a hard Brexit—a no-deal Brexit, perhaps—the Prime Minister's Brexit, and staying in. That could not be countenanced as democratic.

As I understand it, the EU would have no truck—I do not blame it—with us wanting to kick the whole thing into the long grass during a long drawn-out process. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) said that the British public would never forgive us; certainly they would never forgive us for trying to twist the arm of the EU, and saying, "Please can we extend article 50, so that we can offer a three-way referendum?"

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): The hon. Lady says that the British people would never forgive us for asking them again, but would they ever forgive us for a serious economic collapse as a result of a no-deal Brexit?

Mrs Main: That is interesting. The other day in the main Chamber, I tried to intervene on the Leader of the Opposition many, many times. I wanted to know whether the policy of the Labour party is to offer another referendum. The economic collapse, I believe, is a much-hyped fear factor.

The British public had 40 years of trying out the European project, which is certainly not the Common Market that my late parents voted for. That was a vote for one thing. After 40 years of ever closer political integration, the British public were asked if they wanted to re-endorse that membership, or if they would like to say, "We'd like to leave."

It is not as though we have not discussed the possibility of leaving, or our unhappiness with having treaties foisted on us. The British public have a lot of experience—the history that the hon. Member for Bath does not want to draw on—of looking at how they were treated, how they were talked to, and how they were being sucked into closer integration, which they were not happy with. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), who opened the debate, said, that is what many people were unhappy with. The British public knew that they did not like it, so they decided that they wanted to leave and be an independent, self-governing and sovereign nation again. That is the argument that was made.

I campaigned to leave, and I made it very clear to my constituents that I was for leaving—I did not hide that, or take the easy option—although most of them voted to remain. I made it clear that I believed in leave, but that I was only one vote. Those members of the British public who were of voting age that first time around, however, had seen the direction of travel, which was towards ever closer integration, and they did not want to go there, so they decided get off that bus.

I do not like to talk of winning or losing, but the only way to describe a referendum is in those terms. The leave campaign won because there was more heart in the campaign to get back our sovereignty than there was in saying, "We know the EU's not perfect, that it should change, that lots of you have had grumbles and complaints over the years, and that we keep trying to change things and it never gives us much—but I am sure it will at some point in the future." That did not cut it.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The hon. Lady makes the important point that people knew what deal we already had, but I take her back to the wording of the petition:

"the British people MUST be given the Brexit they voted for".

Can she tell me what the Brexit that they voted for was?

Mrs Main: It was made very clear and, for my sins, I watched so much of the debate—

Wera Hobhouse: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Main: The convention is to answer an intervention before giving way again, and I would like to do that. I am sorry.

It was made clear that there would be no second asks—I remember hearing that several times during the campaign—and that if we left, we would take back control of our borders and so make our own immigration policies. I am quite relaxed about numbers, although some people are not, but leaving would mean a level playing field on immigration policy. Also, it was clear that we would deliver on the vote of the British people; Parliament would not tinker and water it down. The referendum was about bringing back a level of control to Parliament—eventually, not right this second—from the European Union. We have got caught up in the argument that that means going back to parliamentarians having control over the people, but the people voted to bring back control from Brussels to Parliament; it was very clear, and they expect us to deliver on that.

Lilian Greenwood: The hon. Lady's answer to my intervention was not what I hoped for. Do not all of us in the House of Commons have different versions of what an acceptable Brexit deal would look like? Some advocate a close relationship with the single market and a customs union; some support the deal that the Prime Minister made; and many in her party say that that is not the Brexit that they voted for. Surely the British public are just as split, if not more so, than parliamentarians here in the Palace of Westminster. If we are to have the trust of the public, we have to present them with a deal and check whether that is the Brexit that they feel that they voted for.

Mrs Main: To me—unless someone would like to iterate a different view—it seems that the official opinion of the majority of Labour Members is that they support the view of the Liberal Democrats. They want what they describe as a people's vote; some would call it a remoaner's ask. There seems to be a growing chorus of, "It's in the 'too difficult' box, so let's put it back to the public." If that happened, I would be the first to call for the best of three, particularly if the wording was not exactly the same as last time, and did not ask, "Do you wish to leave or stay?". If the wording was different or three options were offered, I would say, "You're not asking the same question." To get to the nub of what the petition is about, the public are beginning to be fearful about whether we will honour and do what we said we would do.

I was at Prayers this morning—I am pleased that we have Prayers, because it concentrates the mind for a few moments—and one of the things that we are asked to do in Prayers is not be concerned with the desire to please. In this place, we can try desperately to please everyone, but the reality is that we cannot. We can,

[Mrs Main]

however, come to a settled opinion and try to do our best. The difficulty is that Members of Parliament overwhelmingly voted to remain, and are trying to deliver something that they do not really believe in. We cannot get away from the fact that that is a tension. But we have to deliver what we said we would deliver, and not just try to please, which would be the easy option.

Wera Hobhouse: The hon. Lady is generous in giving way. She will be pleased to know that I agree with her, and I go to Prayers, too. Irrespective of religion, I very much believe that it is important to discuss things honestly, accept our differences and come to a conclusion together. If we are delegates, we are just delivering what the people have said, but if we are not delegates, we are representatives. Is it not for us to make a decision according to our conscience and to what we believe is best for our country? That is exactly what we are all grappling with, including the Liberal Democrats. It does not help to denounce one another all the time and to call some people remoaners.

David Hanson (in the Chair): Order. Interventions must be short.

Mrs Main: The hon. Lady has made her speech and interventions; if she does not mind, I will leave it there and we will have to agree to differ.

My concern is that we may end up looking weak because we cannot get behind a deal by the Prime Minister. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam said that he could settle for the withdrawal agreement. When I went to see the Prime Minister before Christmas, I said, “I truly believe you are trying to do your very best on this.” Whatever anyone from any political party thinks, the Prime Minister has a very difficult job. Her tenacity is astonishing. I said, “At the moment, whether people believe in leave or remain, we have the absolute right to walk out the door, shut it behind us and say, ‘We will not put up with any more interference in our legislation from a group of countries.’ We can choose, but we will not be obliged.” We have the absolute right to do that, but I said we were like a load of nervous sheep in a pen.

I cannot hover around the idea of a backstop that 27 other countries may hold the key to. We are trying to get back sovereignty; we must not dilute that sovereignty by giving 27 other countries the whip hand over us. They have their own agendas. Each country would have a veto. It may well be that Gibraltar, or our fishing, comes up on the agenda. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam: I do not think the EU will want to keep us in the backstop, but I fear what they will exact to let us out.

Mrs Murray: My hon. Friend has been extremely generous in giving way. Does she agree that the myth that people did not know what they were voting for must be dispelled? Prime Minister David Cameron spent more than two years trying to negotiate a better deal for the UK by going around and speaking to the European Commission and all the other member states. He got a deal and put it in a leaflet that was delivered to every single home in the UK. We know that the majority of people—17.4 million—voted to reject that.

Mrs Main: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the time, I was very worried about whether there was some undue influence, whether we should have purdah and other things that were taxing our brains at that point. The European Union was advocated for by the leader of the Government at the time; a lot of big names tried to make the case for it, and a lot of money was associated with that. Even so, the British public had 40 years of knowing what they had, and they did not like it. People want to call them stupid or deluded—those are some of the things thrown at my constituents who voted to leave—but they were prepared to take the opportunity to leave.

There was a split decision, but did anyone ever think it would be more decisive than it was? It struck me how many people participated in the referendum—it was overwhelming. When I was out knocking on doors, people told me they had not voted for many a year, but they were going to vote. The referendum galvanised and engaged people in a way that we often struggle to. If we do not get on with this, the public will ask, “What is the point of taking part in any votes whatever? We got ourselves out the door for that special occasion; we were motivated.”

I do not know what motivated some people; they may have had different motivations, but they still wanted to leave the club. That is why they got out the door that morning in vast numbers and went to vote. This petition reflects a frustration; people think that we are cloth-eared in here and did not wake up to the sheer number of people who decided they had to vote to leave. This was a topic that had engaged them, if nothing else, for decades. No party, leaflets or knocking at their door had got them out, but this did. The former Prime Minister would not like to hear that some people did not bother to read his leaflet, but some people felt they had enough personal experience to make up their mind; the leaflet was not going to change that. They were glad of the opportunity of the vote.

I do not believe the European Union will want a “kick the can down the road” delay to article 50. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam: if it were for a few weeks, that might well be tolerated, so long as it was just to dot the i’s and cross the t’s. In that respect, I disagree with the petition, but I have sympathy for where it is going.

I could not vote for the withdrawal agreement, and 240 people felt the same way. When I went to see the Prime Minister after the big defeat, I said, “Will I want to pay £39 billion? No; it will stick in my craw, but it is a one-off. Do I want the European Court of Justice to have jurisdiction over us during the implementation period? No, but I can stand it. Can I lock us into a backstop? No.” I have gone through the debates, arguments and thought processes; that has to be fixed.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam: Brussels said that it will not tell us what we want to hear, but I believe and hope that it will listen, now that things have been distilled down. I do not wish to be the teenager trashing the flat, as someone said; I wish us to have a good relationship. I do not want us to be rancorous. I hope the people who have signed this petition will accept that we have not ignored the fact that 17.4 million people, many of whom said they had not voted for a very long time, got out the door that day because this was the one thing they wanted delivered. It is up to us to deliver it.

David Hanson (in the Chair): In the absence of any further Back-Bench contributions, I call the hon. Member for Glasgow North, who, with the two other Front-Bench speakers, has approximately two hours and 20 minutes to speak.

5.17 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson, and a rare pleasure to be back in Westminster Hall. Before I was appointed Chief Whip for the SNP, I covered a lot of Brexit debates in here; in fact, we called it the Brexit Minister hall, because we discussed the subject so frequently. It is good to see that has not changed. I do not think I will speak for two hours, but as a Whip this is a rare opportunity for me to speak. As the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) said, the Chamber is usually so busy.

The petition is quite intriguing. It jumps out at me that article 50 must not “under any circumstances” be extended, whether for technical reasons, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) said, or for a general election, a zombie apocalypse, alien invasion or any circumstances. Brexit must go ahead on 29 March. But that date is not some sort of geological fixture or part of the fundamental laws of physics. It is a date that was put in to a piece of legislation, largely as a sop to Back Benchers. The original European Union (Withdrawal) Bill talked simply of “exit day”, which would be defined by statutory instrument. I wonder if we might be in a much calmer place if the original clause had stood. People are becoming fixated on 29 March—at least that is what the people who signed the petition seem to think must happen.

I want to dwell on the point made by the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). We hear that the British people must be given the Brexit they voted for and that anything else is not acceptable, but what is the Brexit they voted for? All the ballot paper said was, “to leave the European Union.” That might simply mean leaving the political institutions, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said and I suspect a lot of people thought. The hon. Member for St Albans said people had had 40 years of Europe and they did not like it. I have had slightly less than 40 years of European membership—only slightly less—and I have quite liked it.

Perhaps some of the people who voted to leave did not like the bogeyman that the European institutions had become. Perhaps they did not like the political institutions. Perhaps they did not like the political establishment that argued for remain, of which many of us in effect find ourselves a part. It is more difficult to make the case that they did not like their European health insurance cards, which allow them to access medical treatment wherever they go in Europe, that they did not like being able to travel visa-free across the European continent and take advantage of sunnier climates and cheaper holidays, that they did not like the medicines they get access to through the European Medicines Agency and that they did not like the safe regulation of nuclear materials.

Mrs Murray: May I give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of my experience? I voted to stay in the European Union when Labour held the referendum in 1975, but I

voted to stay in a trading partnership, which is what it was sold as. Of course, this time I voted leave, and I know that a lot of my constituents, and probably a lot of his, feel the same way. As he said, he did not know anything other than the European Union, I thought he might like the benefit of my experience and age. Life did not end before 1972, when we were not members of the European Union.

Patrick Grady: I absolutely take that point. Of course, if we want to keep going back into history, the European Coal and Steel Community was founded in response to the second world war to link European economies, and peace has prevailed on this continent for longer than at any other time in the past several centuries largely as a result of closer European integration. The hon. Lady says the Common Market back then was very different from the European Union today, but rejoining the Common Market—or Common Market 2.0, which some Members are discussing—is not what the House is currently being asked to vote for. If anything, we are being asked to move further away from that.

Let us look again at what people voted for. They were told by the now former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), that there would

“continue to be free trade, and access to the single market.”

The current Environment Secretary said we would be

“redefining the single market, not walking away from it.”

The current International Trade Secretary said in 2016:

“The free trade agreement that we will have to do with the European Union should be one of the easiest in human history.”

All that is collapsing in front of our eyes. Shortly, the business in the main Chamber will move on to a statement about Nissan in Sunderland and the consequences of our plunging off the cliff with a no-deal Brexit on 29 March.

Mrs Main: Does the hon. Gentleman not wonder why Nissan has chosen to relocate not to Spain, where it has factories, but to Japan?

Patrick Grady: Well, that is where its parent company is and where it currently has factories it can easily locate to. The point is that it is not choosing to stay here in the United Kingdom precisely because of all the uncertainty.

Mrs Main: I have to correct the hon. Gentleman. I think anyone from Nissan would say it is staying in the United Kingdom, and I am sure people in the constituencies concerned would not like to hear that he is closing it down.

Patrick Grady: I take that point. Nevertheless, jobs are at risk and there is massive uncertainty, and it is in large part to do with the cliff edge that we face because of Brexit.

From the SNP’s point of view, three things should happen, two of which are related. One of the effects of extending article 50 would be to rule out a no-deal Brexit. As I said, 29 March was just picked and written on a bit of paper. Frankly, that is true of all the Brexit negotiations. All this comes down to people in a room being willing to talk to one another. It is not rocket science. It is not changing the fundamental laws of

[Patrick Grady]

physics. It is about there being political will among the negotiating parties to speak to each other and reach an agreement.

Of course, we are still in the European Union. We will continue to be members until such time as something called Brexit does or does not take effect. The easiest option—the simplest, safest and best option—is to continue on those terms. As the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) said, by definition, the best possible relationship with the European Union is membership; otherwise, nobody would want to be a member. Everybody would want the better deal. Everybody would want those terms and conditions. The point of leaving has to be that somehow we will have more benefits because of our relationships with the rest of the world, but there is absolutely no evidence of that. All the trade treaties we were told we would have simply are not in place.

Mrs Murray: The hon. Gentleman will correct me if I misheard him, but did he not say that we should stay in the European Union no matter what? He is sending the message to all those people in Glasgow North who voted to leave the European Union that he knows better and we should stay in.

Patrick Grady: Well, 22% of the people who voted in Glasgow North voted to leave the European Union. Some 78% voted to remain, and recent analysis suggests that figure will be even higher if and when we get a people's vote.

Damien Moore: The hon. Gentleman said 78% of people in his constituency voted to remain. Was it a soft remain or a hard remain?

Patrick Grady: That is highly amusing. They voted to remain under the conditions we currently have. I will come back to what the relationship between Scotland and the European Union should be.

I believe we should remain—I believe that is the best option—but the point is that people should now be given a choice, because we now know what leave looks like. The Prime Minister set red lines—incidentally, I think she did so without the agreement even of her Cabinet; she announced them at the Mansion House or somewhere equally grand up the street. She did not set them after consulting on a cross-party basis, as she is now trying to do, or after putting forward a proposal or a Bill for the whole House to agree. They were set arbitrarily. Having set those arbitrary red lines, the deal now is probably, more or less, the only deal that could have been got. The Prime Minister wants to leave the ECJ, to stop free movement of people, to be able to negotiate our own independent trade deals, and whatever the fourth one is. Those red lines are very restrictive, and they inevitably lead us to a much more damaging relationship than the one we have or one we could have. Nevertheless, if we set those red lines, that is the deal we get.

That deal should be put to the people. Why should they not have the opportunity to have their say? What are the Brexiteers afraid of? If the Prime Minister's deal is so glorious—if it is going to launch mother Britannia into a new position of ruling the waves, global leadership and all the rest of it—why are they so afraid to put it

back to the people? Why would people not vote for it? The Environment Secretary said to me in the main Chamber a couple of weeks ago that other countries would be looking enviously at the United Kingdom's deal. If that is the case, why would the people of the United Kingdom not back it in a people's vote?

Damien Moore: Can the hon. Gentleman say that, in such a campaign, the remain side would be honest about some of the things the European Union has in store, such as further integration and a European army? Some of those things would be terribly unpalatable to people—even those who want to stay.

Patrick Grady: The United Kingdom has consistently negotiated derogations, alternative arrangements, opt-outs and so on throughout its history. The point of membership of the European Union is that, within the Union, a country can help to shape its direction and its future. Brexit will take us out completely.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, “We want to become a sovereign country again,” is a completely misleading phrase? All of us in the European Union are sovereign members; we are sharing and pooling sovereignty. That is the whole point about the European Union.

Patrick Grady: I was going to make that exact point in my peroration. Members can probably guess what that will be.

The problem is that this deal is not good enough. It has already been rejected by Parliament, and the Prime Minister has had to accept that it needs to be renegotiated so that we have these magical alternative arrangements. That in itself demonstrates that if the House—if parliamentarians, whether we are delegates or representatives—cannot agree on the shape and form of Brexit, then it has to be put back to the people, either in a people's vote or in a general election. I assure the House that the Scottish National Party fears neither of those.

Mrs Main: I was encouraged to hear the hon. Gentleman talk about the deal. If there were amendments to the deal, could he support it?

Patrick Grady: No, because we support remaining in the European Union. That brings me to my final point, which is about the treatment of Scotland in all of the debate. As I said to the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), 78% of my constituents voted to remain, which was one of the highest proportions in the United Kingdom. I want to listen to and understand the people who voted to leave, but I am not afraid or ashamed to stand up for the vast majority of my constituents. Some 35 residents of Glasgow North signed this petition—it is interesting to look at its geographical spread.

The day after the 2016 referendum, the First Minister of Scotland said that we had to respect the results of both the 2014 independence referendum and the 2016 UK-wide referendum on the European Union. The Scottish Government have consistently put forward alternatives, compromises and ways forward that could respect the result of the Brexit referendum across the United Kingdom. I meant to say at the start that the SNP voted against having the Brexit referendum, as we did not think it

was necessary. We are not in the position of the Liberal Democrats, who now want to revisit an answer that they did not like.

The Scottish Government have not been listened to at all. For example, we proposed ways of retaining single market or customs union membership for Scotland—and potentially for Northern Ireland and parts of the United Kingdom that had voted to remain—and none of that was paid attention to. The promises made to people in Scotland, both in 2014 and 2016, have been broken. The major promise in 2014 was that voting no to independence guaranteed that Scotland remained a member of the European Union, which has proven to be false.

In these circumstances, the people of Scotland will come to the conclusion that it is not the European Union that is failing, but the Union of the United Kingdom; they will choose their own course, whether through a referendum or at a general election, and choose to take back control for themselves. As alluded to by the hon. Member for Bath, independent countries nowadays are defined by their interdependence; a country is known to be independent precisely because it is a member of the United Nations, because it has chosen to pool sovereignty through the European Union or because it has chosen to join any number of international organisations. That is the positive trend that the world should be aiming for, but instead Brexit represents a retrograde step.

Mrs Main: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Patrick Grady: I was coming to a conclusion, but if the hon. Lady is very keen I will give way.

Mrs Main: The hon. Gentleman talks about having a second referendum and potentially asking Scotland to go into the European Union again, stay in or whatever, so would he want a wall?

Patrick Grady: No. I am sorry, a wall?

Mrs Main: Would he want a wall for the hard border, or does he think other mechanisms could be brought about where a wall does not need to be built?

Patrick Grady: I think that would be completely unnecessary. Clearly, there are going to have to be arrangements made for the border with Northern Ireland. If it is possible to do that in Northern Ireland, then it ought to be possible to do when Scottish independence comes. The best solution would be to revisit the whole issue through a people's vote and ultimately give the people of the United Kingdom the option to remain in the European Union.

5.34 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to wind up for the Opposition with you in the Chair, Mr Hanson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) on his introduction to the debate. I did not agree with absolutely everything he said, which he will not be surprised to hear, but he set the framework for the discussion in his characteristically thoughtful way, so I thank him.

The hon. Gentleman was right when he talked about the passions around this debate. The number of Members here today reflects the fact that we have had days, weeks and months exercising those passions, and there is an

important statement in the Chamber at the moment. There are many issues that we could discuss—many have been touched on—but I will focus on the specific issue of the petition in relation to the extension of article 50.

We need honesty in this discussion. The Prime Minister could have given a lead in her answers over recent days by recognising the complexity of the issue and the different challenges that we face, but on this—as so often before—she has reduced things to a simple binary yes or no: we will or we will not. She has been digging herself into a position, as she has so many times on Brexit over the past couple of years, that will change when she is confronted with a cold dose of reality.

It all started with the phasing of the negotiations. As Members will remember, the Prime Minister insisted that there would be no separation of the discussion on withdrawal from the discussion on our future relationship. Back in 2016, the first Brexit Secretary, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), promised the “row of the summer” on that issue, until he rolled over without dissent because he recognised that that was the way that things would inevitably go.

Then there was the transition. Recognising the risks of a cliff-edge departure on 29 March, we argued back in August 2017 that there should be a transitional period and that business should not have to adjust to different sets of regulations as we left. “No”, said the Prime Minister: No. 10 said that was

“a weak attempt to kick the can down the road.”

That comes from the can-kicking experts. When she secured the transition in March 2018, she claimed that it—or, as she then described it, “the implementation period”—was one of the great achievements of her negotiations. Then we had the mantra of “no deal is better than a bad deal.” Some of the nonsense around that has fuelled the idea that we might crash out on whatever terms, or in the absence of any terms, on 29 March. It was nonsense, but it was endlessly repeated—“no deal is better than a bad deal”—until the Prime Minister struck a bad deal, which will shrink the UK economy by 4%. Then she slipped into reverse gear, with a new mantra, which said, “Support my deal, because the alternative of no deal would be disaster for the country.”

Mrs Murray: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the leader of his party would take no deal off the table? Is that not a bit like a trade union going over to Europe and leaving strikes at home as an option, when they were negotiating?

Paul Blomfield: We are very clear why we would take no deal off the table. As the Prime Minister now acknowledges, as the Chancellor has spelled out and as the Treasury analysis has demonstrated, it would be a disaster for the economy.

Mrs Murray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Blomfield: If the hon. Lady lets me finish the point, she can intervene again. By the Government's analysis, no deal would shrink the economy by about 10%. The impact would be particularly negative in manufacturing areas, many of which have been left behind in the period of economic change we have seen over the last generation.

Mrs Murray: As I understood the Government figures, they said that the economy would not grow as much as it would have done, in the short term—not that it would shrink. Secondly, when someone is entering into a negotiation, surely taking their main negotiating lever off the table means they will roll over and cave in. That seems to be the message we are getting from the Leader of the Opposition, and his party.

Paul Blomfield: The hon. Lady is right, although she is playing with words, on the Treasury analysis. It is not that the economy would shrink 10% from the point where it is now; it would shrink 10% from the point where the Treasury projects it would otherwise be. The net effect is that we would be 10% worse off through a no-deal Brexit.

David Hanson (in the Chair): Order. The Chair is here, and the dialogue is there. I should prefer it if both Members addressed the Chair, as part of their dialogue.

Paul Blomfield: Thank you, Mr Hanson.

Mrs Murray: Apologies, Mr Hanson.

Paul Blomfield: There would be 10% less money for public services, 10% fewer jobs, and we would be 10% less wealthy than we would otherwise be. The Treasury was right to share that with the British people.

As to a no-deal Brexit as a negotiating lever, it has value only if those on the other side of the negotiations believe that it is meant seriously. No one thinks that a no-deal Brexit is in the British interest, and no one believes it will influence the outcome of the negotiations.

Mrs Main: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way—and his tone is very emollient. I want to reassure him. I was terrified when the Chancellor said each household would be £3,000 a year worse off if we voted to leave, but the economy has done very well. Just have a little faith: that is what I am really trying to say. Such predictions are often way out of kilter.

Paul Blomfield: It is always fascinating to hear Conservative Members rubbishing their own party's Chancellors and former Chancellors. The economy may not have lived up to the former Chancellor's worst expectations, but the pound has crashed and we have moved from being one of the fastest growing economies to one that is growing less quickly. There has been a negative impact already but, as the hon. Lady will recognise, we have not left the European Union yet.

Wera Hobhouse: It is clear that all Brexit scenarios leave the economy worse off. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the negotiating position of keeping no deal on the table is a little bit like a cartoon that I saw the other day, with the caption "Unless you give me what I want I am going to shoot myself"? Is not that the idiotic negotiating position, which no one believes in anyway?

Paul Blomfield: I did not see the cartoon, but I think that was a line from a Mel Brooks movie, and the hon. Lady is right to characterise things in that way. That is why the idea that threatening no deal would be a great negotiating card for us never had any credibility.

Damien Moore: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the economy and the pound, but the pound is pretty much at the same level against the euro as it was in 2012, and people were not talking then about the economy crashing out.

Paul Blomfield: We could measure the pound at different points, but the hon. Gentleman will know that the pound has fallen since we took the decision to leave. That produced a short-term benefit in additional exports, although the consequences are now beginning to have an effect, because the component parts of many of those exports are now coming in at higher prices. We could debate these issues for a long time. However, I do not think anyone has yet argued successfully against my contention—the Chancellor's contention—that no deal would be a disaster for the country. That, of course, is why Parliament has voted twice now against leaving without a deal.

After what happened with the phasing of the negotiations, the transition and the ridiculous mantra on no deal, we are here again, with article 50. Every time the Prime Minister is confronted with the growing reality that 29 March may not be a feasible departure date, she insists that we are still leaving. She seems to be in some sort of parallel universe, which is not occupied by many of her Cabinet. The Foreign Secretary said on Thursday that we might need some extra time. The Justice Secretary told *The Daily Telegraph* that he agreed, and it reported that nine Cabinet Ministers believe it, too. The ever-thoughtful Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), wrote yesterday that "we have to grasp the nettle of an extended article 50 period".

I shall be interested to know, when the Minister responds to the debate, which side of that argument within the Conservative party he is on.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): You have to ask?

Paul Blomfield: We will come to that shortly.

When she is questioned, the Prime Minister just keeps hitting the repeat button. She knows it is nonsense and, what is worse, she knows that everybody knows she knows it is nonsense. It did not have to be like this. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) has highlighted the original drafting of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. There was provision for multiple exit days for multiple purposes, which was sensible. It was the Government's proposal.

However, to throw some red meat to those whom the Chancellor described as the Brexit "extremists" of the European Research Group, the Government fixed 29 March on the face of the Bill for all purposes. It was a gimmick, and a time-consuming and irresponsible one. The Opposition told the Prime Minister that it was a legislative straitjacket and that the Act would have to be amended. We tried to help her out, and tabled amendments to that effect, but the Government rejected them. They rejected proposals that would have given Parliament control over the dates.

The Prime Minister is now preparing to return to Brussels, following last week's vote. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam talks about the EU giving some flexibility. Let us just remember what the Prime Minister

is returning to do. She is going to ask the EU27 to change the backstop that they did not want, but that she pressed them hard to accept. The backstop is a UK Government proposal. We can imagine their bewilderment when, having conceded it when pressed by the Prime Minister, they will face her telling them “You know that backstop? We have got to change it.”

Sandy Martin: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Prime Minister had made a little more effort to secure a deal among her own Members of Parliament it might have been easier for her to get a decent deal with the European Union?

Paul Blomfield: I shall be echoing my hon. Friend’s point in a moment.

The immediate task that the Prime Minister has set herself is to reopen the deal that she said, two weeks ago, was unreopenable. On 15 January, she said:

“Some suggest that there is a fourth option...to vote this deal down in the hope of going back to Brussels and negotiating an alternative deal. However, no such alternative...exists.”—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1112.]

It is worth remembering, too, with all this focus on the backstop, that the backstop was not the primary objection for the majority of us who voted to reject the deal. It was the impact that the deal would have on jobs and the economy. The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) is right to say that we have the right to walk away, but we also have the responsibility to the British people to outline the consequences of taking that sort of step, and we have exercised that to some degree in terms of the impact of no deal.

With the country currently despairing of our politics and with business confidence collapsing, the Prime Minister might reflect—to return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin)—that it did not have to be like this. At the outset, she could have said, “The British people have voted to leave the European Union, but by the closest of margins; it is a mandate to end our membership of the EU, but not a decision to rupture our relations with our closest neighbours, our main trading partner and our key allies.” She could have added, “Therefore, we will seek a deal that reflects that position: a deal that is right for people’s jobs and livelihoods, in a customs union, close to the single market, in the agencies and partnerships”—some of which the hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned—“that we have built together over 45 years, retaining the rights and protections for workers, consumers and the environment, and keeping up with those rights and with the EU as we move forward.” If she had said those things, she could have secured a majority in Parliament. She could have united a country that had been so bitterly divided by the referendum, and the issue of the Northern Ireland border would never have existed.

Paul Scully: I set out a brief list of the reasons why I voted to leave: leaving the institutions, stopping the payments, stopping freedom of movement and being able to do trade deals. In the customs union that the Opposition are suggesting, can the hon. Gentleman outline which of those would be available?

Paul Blomfield: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that freedom of movement has nothing to do with membership of the customs union. Our position is that we cannot be a member of the customs union of the

European Union, because we will no longer be a member of the EU, but we should have a customs union that replicates those current arrangements. That means having a common external tariff; it means recognising that we would not be able to negotiate our own trade agreements, but that we would benefit from the trade agreements, which we were part of negotiating as a member of the European Union, that exist with 70 countries, and hoping to have a say—not a deliberative say, but a say—in future trade agreements. Does that answer his question?

Paul Scully: What about the institutions and the fees we might pay?

Paul Blomfield: The hon. Gentleman raises a much broader question. There would not be fees in relation to the customs union, but, as the Government have acknowledged, there clearly will be payments for other schemes and partnerships that we might want to be part of; the Minister might want to comment on that. There are no fees in relation to the customs union, but there would be if we were to be part of the Horizon 2020 framework programme 9 on research across the European continent. We would pay something in and we would get something out.

There are many other schemes, if we were part of the agencies and partnerships: take Euratom, the European Atomic Energy Community. We are spending an enormous amount of money replicating arrangements that we could have continued to benefit from as a member of Euratom. There is no additional benefit to the UK in that; it is just a separation of functions because of the obsession with the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, which has never ruled on anything relating to Euratom that would be of any concern to the United Kingdom.

My point is that, at that juncture after the referendum, there was an opportunity to reach out to the majority that existed in Parliament for a sensible Brexit. I campaigned to remain, but I recognise the outcome of the referendum. Instead, the Prime Minister let the ERG set the agenda, set the red lines and box her in, leading to the deeply damaging proposal that the House so overwhelmingly rejected a couple of weeks ago. She is putting her party before her country, just as David Cameron did before her, and the country is facing the consequences.

It is not too late. As an Opposition, we are willing to talk about that sensible Brexit deal—a relationship with a customs union, single market, rights and protections, agencies and partnerships. To answer a question that I was anticipating the hon. Member for St Albans would ask, although she did not: if the Prime Minister will not go there, we will consider the option of a further public vote to break the impasse. Nevertheless, whatever happens over the next seven weeks, we cannot and should not rule out an extension of article 50.

5.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. You have obviously heard my speech many times before; I believe that is why you are just about to scoot off to do better things. I thank you for the generous way in which you have chaired the debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully)

[Chris Heaton-Harris]

for the thoughtful way in which he introduced the debate. He, like me, campaigned to leave; he, like me, knows that there are many different ways of leaving, but that the British people gave an instruction to their Government, and he, like me, knows that the Government are intent on delivering on it.

I should answer a couple of the points raised in the debate. It is always a pleasure to hear the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) telling us that we cannot cancel Brexit; in general, the Lib Dem policy is, “We can’t cancel it, so we’ll try any other means whatever, parliamentary or otherwise, of undermining that result.” Realistically, I struggle with the Lib Dems when they say pretty much anything, because I remember in 2010 their campaigning vehemently to get rid of tuition fees and then, as soon as they got into Government, doing exactly the reverse. She says she is not campaigning to cancel Brexit now, but I absolutely know that she is, so I think she should be a bit more honest in the debate.

Wera Hobhouse: The Liberal Democrats, including me, have never made any bones about the fact that we think the best deal we can get is staying in the European Union, but we acknowledge that we have had a referendum, so what I am saying is: “We have had a referendum, and we now have a deal, so we need to clarify with the British people whether they think this is actually what they voted for.” That is a very democratic way of going forward. But if there were such a referendum, of course I would campaign to stay in the European Union.

Chris Heaton-Harris: That is remarkably clear for a Liberal Democrat. The hon. Lady mentioned that of those writing to her, the biggest group are people arguing for no deal. That is no surprise, when they have seen the political class argue as we have done. What those on the outside see is people trying to stop Brexit, and that is why they get frustrated.

Mrs Main: On a point of clarification regarding the answer the Minister had from the hon. Member for Bath, can he remember any group that campaigned saying, “And when we’ve got the answer, we’ll make sure we come back again and double-check”? I do not think anyone thought we could unpick all this without doing some form of negotiation. Did anyone make the case that we would double-check and then go back to the EU again?

Chris Heaton-Harris: To the best of my knowledge, I did not hear anybody mentioning that in the campaign, or in the debates in Parliament that led to the referendum being granted. I can honestly say that I never heard that until possibly the day after the referendum result. I was going to come on to my hon. Friend’s contribution; as there are now two Chairmen in the room, I should make the point that they both need to go back to Mr Speaker and ensure that my hon. Friend gets higher priority on the speakers’ list, because more people need to hear what she has to say on this subject. She made a huge amount of sense, and I think she underestimates her value to this place and this debate. She said that she campaigned to leave, and that she was but one vote, but she was joined by 17,410,741 others, of which I was one, and that is a decent-sized number.

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

I completely take my hon. Friend’s point, and that is why I get slightly anxious in some of these debates to ensure that we are not seen to be cloth-eared here. We have a referendum result that we are delivering on. I agreed with pretty much every word that she said, including about my contribution to whatever debate there was around the deal. I absolutely voted for the deal the first time around. With my personal experience of the European Union, I trust it to deliver on matters that it signs up to, so I was happy to go into the Aye Lobby. However, I can guarantee her that the Government will not ignore the fact that 17.4 million people voted in the way they did.

It is always a pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who, as the Scottish National party’s Chief Whip, is now too silent. It was a pleasure to deal with him when I was a Government Whip. He is always courteous, polite and completely on the money. He will never go back on his word, and that is true in this case, too. He wears his heart on his sleeve in these matters, and he articulated very well that he is a passionate pro-European. I guess I should ask him to forgive me for being exactly the same, but coming from the reverse position.

I would love to quote parts of the hon. Gentleman’s speech back to him—perhaps I can do so over a beer some time—including the bits about how staying within a Union gives people a chance to shape its future and all that sort of stuff. However, we will leave that for another day.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the Minister question my honesty about being a passionate pro-European?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I absolutely do not. I just wish that the hon. Lady’s party was as honest as her.

I always enjoy debating with the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), as I do with anybody from the Labour party Front Bench, because it is interesting to see which part of the Labour party they are from. Is he from the bit that wants a second referendum? Does he agree with his party’s leader that article 50 should have been activated the day after the referendum? Is he part of the democratic socialist movement, which actually believes that the result of the referendum should be respected? Or is he from the authoritarian or the metropolitan intelligentsia parts of the Labour party, which believe that the people got this completely wrong?

The hon. Gentleman is a wise pro-European of long standing and is principled on these matters. I do not doubt his sincerity. However, again, I struggle with his party’s position, which seems to be ever changing. [*Interruption.*] Those outside must have heard that I had started speaking; I like to get that sort of response.

It is fascinating to see people talk about taking no deal off the table, as the hon. Gentleman did. That is not the wisest thing to do in any negotiation.

Paul Blomfield: If the Minister thinks that that is not the wisest thing to do, why did the Chancellor reassure businesses that that is exactly what is happening?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Because we are working towards a deal. There is a deal on the table. When Parliament took back control last Tuesday, it actually gave some indication that there is a possible deal out there. The Government

want to deliver a deal, but a responsible Government plan for all eventualities. We are planning for a no-deal eventuality, just as the European Commission and the 27 other EU member states say they are in all the announcements that they make about what might happen in a no-deal circumstance. That should give the hon. Gentleman some limited comfort that a no-deal situation will not be as bad as he fears.

The hon. Gentleman wants to take no deal off the table, for the reason that it would be disastrous for the economy. To extend that logic to its obvious conclusion, I take it that he will try to persuade fellow Labour MPs not to contest the 2022 general election. We all know that Labour Governments lead to worsening economic conditions and make people poorer in general. If we should not do anything that makes people potentially poorer, the obvious conclusion is that he should not stand as a candidate in that general election. I thought he might want to rise to respond to that, but I understand if he wants to go for a cup of tea.

I thank all those who participated in today's debate, and Clive Grenville, who set up the petition. He should be pleased with the number of people who signed it. Fundamentally, it asks the Government to respect the outcome of the 2016 referendum and deliver our withdrawal from the European Union, which millions voted for. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam and those who signed the petition that the Government remain committed to delivering on the instruction given to us by the British people to leave. We remain clear that our policy is not to revoke article 50, or to extend it, delay or hold a second referendum on exit.

Paul Blomfield: For the sake of absolute clarity, is the Minister saying that there are no circumstances whatever in which the Government will seek an extension of article 50?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I will carefully repeat what I just said: we—the Government—remain clear that our policy is not to revoke article 50, extend it, delay or hold a second referendum on exit. Perhaps it will help the debate if I re-outline the now very familiar reasons why the Government have taken this position. I remind hon. Members of the immense progress we have made towards delivering the exit that we, as a Government and as a Parliament, were entrusted to deliver.

First, let me deal with the overarching question of revoking article 50. As I have made clear, the Government's policy remains that we should not and will not revoke our article 50 notice to withdraw from the European Union. To revoke article 50 would betray not only the vote of the British people in 2016, but the mandates on which the majority of us were elected at the last general election. I emphasise again to hon. Members the strength of the mandate and the clarity of the instruction given to us by the 2016 referendum, which illustrates why we must respect the result and why the Government's policy is not to revoke article 50.

In the summer of 2016, millions of people came out to have their say, trusting that their vote would count and that, after years of feeling ignored by politicians, their voices would be heard. The referendum enjoyed a higher turnout than any previous referendum, with 17.4 million people voting to leave the European Union. That is the highest number of votes cast for anything in

UK electoral history, and the biggest democratic mandate for a course of action ever directed at any UK Government. As I have reminded the shadow Minister and the House, the passion with which people voted was quite extraordinary. Those of us who toured polling stations on the day will remember pencilgate: people refused to put their cross in the box using a pencil, for fear that the Government would rub it out. The battles over trying to get a pen into a polling station to vote with were quite extraordinary.

Mrs Main: I went round various areas campaigning to leave, and I talked to people who said that one reason why they were voting was because the referendum was a nationwide vote. Some said they did not usually bother voting because there was no way to change the Member of Parliament, so there was no point, but at the referendum, their vote was counted nationwide.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I heard that many a time. *[Interruption.]* No, it is not a call for proportional representation. Members should be careful what they wish for. I was elected under proportional representation for the first time in 1999. While it was a lovely system for getting me elected to the European Parliament, it is not a good system for voters who want democratic choices to be delivered.

Parliament overwhelmingly confirmed the referendum result by voting with clear and convincing majorities in both Houses for the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017. Parliament, informed by the will of its electorate, voted to trigger article 50 and leave the European Union. Further still, in the 2017 general election, more than 80% of voters voted for parties committed to respecting the result of the referendum. Not only Government Members but Opposition Members were elected on manifestos committing to respecting the decision of the people.

We made promises and commitments to the people we represent from when we held the referendum to when we as a Parliament voted to begin the process of implementing its result. The British people must be able to trust in their Government to both effect their will and deliver the best outcome for them. As the Prime Minister said:

“This is about more than the decision to leave the EU; it is about whether the public can trust their politicians to put in place the decision they took.”

To do otherwise would undermine the decision of the British people and disrespect the powerful democratic values of this country and of this Government. We therefore cannot and must not frustrate the will of the people by revoking article 50.

Despite that, I understand that there are those who advocate revoking, extending or otherwise delaying our article 50 notice. Parliament is clear that it does not wish to deliver no deal; it expressed that last week in the House. The obvious conclusion is that we must secure a deal to deliver the exit for which people voted. The only alternative, as the Prime Minister has laid out, is revoking article 50. That is not Government policy and it would, as she said, disrespect the biggest vote in our democratic history. The Prime Minister has also been clear that other delays, such as through extending article 50, would not resolve the issue of the deal with which we leave the European Union. Moreover, as she reminded the House

[Chris Heaton-Harris]

this week, the 29 March 2019 exit date is the one that Parliament itself voted for when it voted to trigger article 50. The Government are clear on their notice to withdraw under article 50 as instructed by the British people.

I reiterate to hon. Members that this Government are committed to delivering on the result of the referendum. It remains our policy not to revoke article 50 and not to frustrate the outcome of the 2016 referendum, which I trust will please the petitioners. Instead, we continue to work to overcome the challenges and seize the opportunities to deliver on the result of the vote by the British people in the summer of 2016 to leave the European Union.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Paul Scully has one hour and 20 minutes to sum up the debate.

6.10 pm

Paul Scully: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I will get my 40-slide PowerPoint presentation ready, if you do not mind. No, I just want to take a few minutes to say thank you to everyone who has contributed to the debate. Yes, there has been some knockabout fun, shall we say? But on the whole, this matter has been dealt with in the right spirit—in the knowledge that people are looking to us in this place to hold such debates in this way. We can differ, but we can hear and, more importantly, listen to one another; we can hear a lot of things, but unless we listen, we never learn.

We have to look to the time when this process is finished. Yes, the result was 52% versus 48%. We have to work out how to heal the divide—in Parliament, but most importantly, out there in the country—and ensure that we can secure a Brexit that works for everyone. With regard to securing that Brexit, the petitioners and the 116,000 people who signed the petition can rest assured: the Government and a lot of Government Members certainly do not want to revoke article 50, but we do not want to extend article 50, either.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) agreed with my view that no one is going to die in a ditch about a couple of weeks, if there is a technical position to consider—a few of us have talked about that—but people saw what happened in the voting Lobbies a few weeks ago. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) were in the same voting Lobby, celebrating the same result. If we do not end up with a deal, one of those people—they are colleagues—is going to be sadly disappointed. They cannot both be right, given the positions that they took at that time. The obvious way to get through this in time to be able to leave on exit day, 29 March, is to ensure that we secure a deal.

I hope, as I said at the beginning, that we put forward a reasonable proposal to Brussels, in a reasonable way that allows people there the space that our colleagues in this place have had over the last week or so, ahead of that vote. That is what I urge. What changed over the previous weekend was that there was more emollient language from people on all sides of the debate, which allowed people to calm the temperature down a little. The hope is that we can do the same with Brussels. If people there are looking at alternatives in order to avoid a hard border and no deal, surely they can just look at this again and give us what we need on the Irish backstop to ensure that we can get a deal through. That would help us, clearly, but it would also help the EU—and without encouraging other people to leave. All we want is to be able to do our thing and to allow the EU to progress in the way it wants to. Let us be friendly neighbours—let us not be awkward tenants—and let us do that in the most clear way we can, so that we can all progress and move on.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 224908 relating to leaving the European Union.

6.14 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 4 February 2019

EDUCATION

Race Disparity Audit

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): I am pleased to make this statement jointly with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

At the launch of the Race Disparity Audit in October 2017, the Government committed to “explain or change” the ethnic disparities on the audit’s website *Ethnicity facts and figures*.

Since October 2017 the Government have taken action in education, employment, health, criminal justice, including most recently in October 2018, taking action to see employers adopting fair employment practices which ensure all staff, particularly those from an ethnic minority background, do as well as they are able in terms of recruitment and progression in the workforce.

The audit’s website *Ethnicity facts and figures* has been continually updated and extended to allow the public to see if ethnic disparities are improving or not across over 160 important areas of public life. This has included the publication of data on undergraduate degree results and entrants at different higher education providers with high, medium and low entry tariffs.

On Friday, the Government announced action to tackle disparities in access to, and successful participation in, higher education for ethnic minority students; and disparities in recruitment and progression for ethnic minority academics. Friday’s announcement aims to tackle challenges that we know are particularly acute for ethnic minority students in higher education, such as their levels of non-continuation, the degree class they achieve compared to their peers, and their progression on to good quality employment.

In addition to the steps already taken to address this, including establishing the Office for Students and legislating for greater transparency and scrutiny through the Higher Education and Research Act, these actions will include:

Asking the Office for Students to ensure higher education providers demonstrate how they are tackling differences in access and successful participation for students from ethnic minorities—the Office for Students will be expected to hold providers to account, in particular through access and participation plans, which set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for under-represented groups, to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. The Office for Students will be expected to use its new powers to challenge providers failing to make progress.

Asking league table compilers to consider performance on tackling inequalities between ethnic groups in university rankings—working with a wide range of experts, stakeholders and league table compilers.

Encouraging higher education providers to eliminate ethnic disparities in their workforce—using tools such as the race at work charter and race equality charter.

Supporting student choice through better information, advice and guidance—by reforming the Unistats website using evidence from research with students from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

Building the evidence base on ‘what works’ for improving ethnic minority access and successful participation—encouraging the winning bidder of the newly established Evidence and Impact Exchange to make improving the evidence around addressing ethnic disparities a priority.

These actions will be supported by the Office for Students in its role as the regulator, Advance HE which will launch a review of its race equality charter, and UKRI which will signal its support for reducing ethnic disparities in research and innovation funding.

[HCWS1297]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DFID’s Work on Safeguarding

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): Ahead of the forthcoming anniversary of the first media stories about the Haiti case, and further to my ministerial statement of 25 October, I would like to update the House on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector.

Delivering 18 October summit commitments

My last statement was shortly after the international summit I hosted in London on 18 October where donors representing 90% of global official development assistance, NGOs, suppliers, multilateral organisations and others agreed robust actions to deliver root to branch change in the way the international aid sector tackles these issues and I announced specific initiatives supported by DFID.

The five-year project with Interpol to stop perpetrators of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment moving around the aid sector is getting under-way. It will strengthen and digitise criminal record checks, improve information sharing between countries and train staff, so ensuring a more robust law enforcement response against predatory individuals.

The disclosure of misconduct scheme will prevent individuals with a record of misconduct from moving around the NGO sector undetected. Fuller details were published in December and more NGOs are signing up.

DFID is supporting work to verify that our partners meet the global standards on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse as agreed by donors in October.

The resource and support hub will provide guidance, training and support on safeguarding to smaller charities which are those most likely to need it. There has been strong interest from potential suppliers and DFID expects to sign a multi-year contract by August.

We are working with the UN Victims’ Rights Advocate to develop a statement of victims’ rights for publication this year which will help survivors of abuse and exploitation better understand the redress and support available to them.

In November, the UK NGO platform Bond incorporated the UK NGO summit commitments into the Bond Charter, so covering over 450 organisations.

DFID is working with Dutch counterparts on an action plan for the ombudsman proposal.

Recent cases

The case at the International Planned Parenthood Federation underlines the value of the much tougher safeguarding standards I introduced last year. Those standards have required the reporting of this case and robust action to be taken. The case is ongoing and DFID's Safeguarding Investigations Team created last year is looking at it in more detail.

Charity Commission figures show an increase in safeguarding cases reported by charities last year. I expect to continue to see more reports as people feel safer to speak up and organisations take their obligations seriously.

DFID continues to co-ordinate closely with the National Crime Agency on shared objectives. The draft Domestic Abuse Bill proposes that more types of sexual offences committed abroad by a UK national can be prosecuted in England and Wales. We have recently seen other countries take action against suspected criminal sexual activity in the aid sector.

Looking ahead

DFID continues to meet regularly with representatives from across the aid sector and is working with them to develop appropriate accountability mechanisms for the commitments announced at October's summit.

I plan to participate in meetings on safeguarding at the UN Commission on the Status Of Women in March, the World Bank spring meetings in April and the UN General Assembly in September to drive forward progress. DFID is leading a process in the OECD to agree a mechanism this year to monitor the performance of all 30 major global donors on safeguarding.

I welcome the International Development Committee's continuing focus on safeguarding and look forward to my discussion with them in May. DFID continues to work across Government to drive a coherent approach to safeguarding in ODA projects and to improve the capability of staff.

I sent a clear message a year ago that the whole sector must make zero tolerance on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment a reality. Today, I repeat that message.

Work led by DFID in the past year has generated good momentum, domestically and internationally. But there is much more to do, and we will continue to lead the way and work with others in the months and years ahead.

[HCWS1294]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE**EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement**

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The Government wish to inform the House that on Friday 1 February, the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and Japan came into force. This date was confirmed by the European Commission to EU member states on 12 December 2018.

The UK has been a long-standing supporter of the EU-Japan EPA, which was approved overwhelmingly by the UK Parliament after it was debated on the Floor of the House of Commons on 26 June 2018 with 317 votes in favour and only 1 against.

The EU-Japan EPA was signed on 17 July 2018 in Tokyo, Japan.

The coming into force of the EU-Japan EPA is positive for the UK, the wider EU and global free trade. At its entry into force, 91% of tariffs will be eliminated, rising to 97% over the long term.

Japan and the UK are the world's third and fifth largest economies respectively and are committed to working together in support of global free and fair trade. In line with this both Prime Ministers have reaffirmed their commitment last month to use the Japan-EU EPA as the basis for our future economic partnership and to work quickly to establish this. Under the withdrawal agreement, the UK would continue to benefit from this agreement during the implementation period.

[HCWS1293]

JUSTICE**Parole Board: Reconsideration Mechanism and Rules Review**

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): The Parole Board decision to release John Worboys, and the subsequent legal action taken by the victims to challenge that decision, revealed the need to improve the way the system works. I have been determined to address fully the issues that case highlighted and to continue to make improvements to the system of parole.

An initial review I commissioned into Parole Board decision making, which reported in April 2018, has led to a programme of reform—in particular to increase transparency and to improve the way victims are engaged and communicated with.

I conducted a public consultation on proposals to create a new mechanism to allow for Parole Board decisions to be reconsidered in certain circumstances and ordered a review of all the Parole Board rules. I am pleased today to announce the outcome of that work and to launch a tailored review of the Parole Board which will examine further options for longer-term reform.

The Government's response to the consultation on a reconsideration mechanism is published today and I can confirm that I intend to proceed to bring forward changes to the Parole Board rules which will introduce such a mechanism. This will make it possible for Parole Board decisions to be looked at again and, if necessary, re-taken where it appears there may have been a legal or procedural flaw with the original decision. It will not be necessary to bring a judicial review, as happened in the Worboys case, making it easier to challenge decisions.

Victims who believe a decision may be fundamentally flawed, rather than having to resort to the courts and engage legal representation to argue their case, will be able to make a case for reconsideration to my officials.

Officials have access to all the information and evidence—as well as legal resources—and therefore are best placed to put together a fully-informed application to the Parole Board where there appears to be an arguable case for reconsideration. This will also make the process as simple and straightforward for victims as possible. Judicial members at the Parole Board will determine the reconsideration application and how the case should be dealt with—whether the decision should be re-taken and whether a further hearing is required. Reasons for their decisions will be provided to victims.

This new mechanism, together with the introduction of decision summaries provided by the Parole Board from May last year, brings much greater transparency and scrutiny to how and why parole decisions are made; and a means of challenging those decisions where it appears there may have been a fundamental error that requires the case to be looked at again.

I am also publishing today a report on the outcome of the review of the Parole Board rules.

The report sets out the measures taken by the Department and the Board itself to ensure the issues highlighted by the Worboys case were addressed and which deliver on the commitments made by last year's initial review. The report also explains what more will be done to further increase the transparency and openness of the parole system and to improve the experience of victims. Improvements have been and will continue to be made to the Victim Contact Scheme (VCS), training and approaches to the way Victim Liaison Officers (VLOs) communicate with victims; and the commitments in the Government's victims strategy published in September will further strengthen the entitlements and support victims should rightly expect to receive.

Changes to the Parole Board rules will be brought forward by way of statutory instrument in the coming months. This will implement the new reconsideration mechanism and the other changes identified by the review that have the potential to improve the system. Between now and then we will be making preparations for the implementation of those reforms—in particular by putting in place the resources, guidance, training, and documentation needed to operate the reconsideration mechanism.

Other key changes announced in the report include:

A series of Standard Practice guidance documents will be published by the Parole Board. This will improve transparency and public awareness of the approaches the Board follows in reaching its decisions—and will support greater consistency in how the Board reviews cases.

A new operational protocol between the Parole Board and Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) which will clarify roles and responsibilities within the parole system and set out how the two organisations work with each other.

A new policy framework on the parole process will be published, setting out the HMPPS policy and approach, which will include improvements to the timescales the review found could make the process more efficient.

The review has examined how the rules, parole processes and practice can be improved over the short term within the current primary legislation governing the parole

system and the existing constitution and functions of the Parole Board. It has been important to take swift action to address the immediate issues and concerns and to restore trust in the system; I believe the reforms announced in the report published today will help to achieve that.

But I would like to examine what further, more fundamental measures might be possible over the longer term, including the possibility of primary legislation. A tailored review of the Parole Board provides the opportunity to do that. I am required to undertake a tailored review of all the arms-length bodies sponsored by my Department once every Parliament and I have decided that now is the right time to launch such a review of the Parole Board.

The tailored review will explore, in light of the rules review changes, whether there is a case for more fundamental reform that requires primary legislation—including whether to change the powers or responsibilities conferred on the Parole Board or whether it should be reconstituted to deliver its functions in a different way. I aim to publish the outcome of the tailored review in the summer.

Copies of the Government's response to the consultation on reconsideration of Parole Board decisions and the report on the review of the Parole Board rules have been laid in both Houses and are available on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS1295]

TRANSPORT

Lighthouses: Light Dues 2019-2020

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): A strong and growing maritime industry is vital to the economy of the United Kingdom and it is critical that we treasure and protect this vital artery if we are to remain a world-leading maritime centre.

The work of the general lighthouse authorities, which provide and maintain marine aids to navigation and respond to new wrecks and navigation dangers in some of the busiest waters in the world, is crucial to underpinning that vision while maintaining our vigorous safety record and continuously improving standards of safety.

Reductions in the three general lighthouse authorities' running costs have enabled the UK to reduce light dues for four successive years. For 2019-20 intend to freeze light dues rates at 37½ pence per net registered tonne. This will mean that light dues will have fallen by 28% in real terms since 2010.

Light dues rates will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the general lighthouse authorities are challenged to provide an effective and efficient service which offers value for money to light dues payers.

[HCWS1296]

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