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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 13 October 2016

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Norwich.

Introduction: Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate

11.06 am

Timothy John Robert Kirkhope, Esquire, having been created Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate, of Harrogate in the County of North Yorkshire, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Lord Hunt of Wirral and Lord Freeman, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Retirement of a Member: Lord Tordoff

Announcement

11.12 am

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, I should like to notify the House of the retirement, with effect from today, of the noble Lord, Lord Tordoff, pursuant to Section 1 of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014. On behalf of the House, I should like to thank the noble Lord for his much-valued service to the House.

Housing: Vulnerable People

Question

11.12 am

Asked by Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they plan to ensure that there is an increase in the level of supported housing across England so that the needs of vulnerable people are met.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government and Wales Office (Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth) (Con): My Lords, this Government value the important role that supported housing plays in protecting vulnerable people and are committed to encouraging further development to meet future demand. That is why we are boosting supply, with more than 14,000 new homes in this Parliament.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the Minister's assurance that the Government understand the need to provide adequate support and funding for this vital specialist service. Unfortunately, the Government's recent announcement has not provided the level of certainty that tenants and the sector need and had been hoping for. It is vital that local authorities receive enough devolved funding and that there is a long-term ring-fence around this money to pay for housing costs. Can the Minister clarify how all vulnerable groups will be protected in a system where priorities will be different in each local authority? How can providers and lenders have the certainty they need to

build much-needed new specialist housing, and how can we make sure that money is not lost to services and spent on complicated administration?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the noble Baroness is obviously well acquainted with this area. I congratulate her on the role that she fulfils as chair of the National Housing Federation, which we regard as a valuable ally. She will know that we are going out to consultation specifically on the local housing allowance cap, which I think is what she refers to. I hope very much that she and others will engage in that because we are putting the same amount of money in there to ensure that we protect this sector. It will be ring-fenced and we can discuss in the consultation the particular nature of that ring-fence.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD): My Lords, at the Rethink mental health hostel in Somerset people are allowed to stay for only nine months, and then moved on despite their mental health not having improved. Staffing levels are one member of staff to 55 units of accommodation. Can the Minister please reassure the House that he is aware of and working actively to remedy this situation, which exists across the country?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the noble Baroness is certainly right to accentuate the fact that there are particular challenges in relation to mental health. We work closely with Mencap and I can provide her with the reassurance she seeks: we are seeking to ensure that that area is protected.

Baroness Masham of Ilton (CB): My Lords, how many of the new houses will have suitable accommodation for people who use wheelchairs—for instance, lavatories downstairs—if they have had a stroke or become disabled, so that they can stay in their own homes?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the noble Baroness is right to address the protection of people with vulnerabilities. Eight thousand of the new supported homes are for people who are vulnerable, elderly and with disabilities, so that will be at the forefront of our mind. More than 6,000 specialised homes are being provided by the Department of Health's care and support specialised housing programme. I am sure that the noble Baroness's message will be heard very loudly and taken care of.

Baroness Gardner of Parkes (Con): My Lords, while it is good news to hear that we are encouraging more of this, can the Minister assure us that everything is being done to ensure that where a property that has been adapted with special aids is no longer required because the person has died or moved on to long-term care, someone else with special needs gets it and it does not just get lost to this sector?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, noble Lords will appreciate that a lot of these issues are dealt with at a local level, so this is not prescribed centrally. It is for local areas to ensure that their particular needs are taken care of. What my noble friend has referred to appears to be common sense. I will seek to assure her

[LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH]
by letter that this is common practice. I am sure it is, but there is diversity and it is a matter for local authorities.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, last year Her Majesty's Government decided to delay the 1% reduction in social rents for supported housing in order to assess the impact it would have on the sector. The move was widely welcomed around this House. Now that Her Majesty's Government have decided to press ahead with largely the same proposal—there are one or two exceptions, I grant—will the Minister consider publishing the detailed analysis of that assessment to allay fears that the reduction threatens the viability of present and future supported housing schemes?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the right reverend Prelate is right that there are exemptions. They are perhaps more far-reaching than he suggests. They cover refugees, almshouses, co-ops, fully mutuals and community land trusts. On areas that need particular care, we have been working very closely with Polly Neate of Women's Aid in relation to refugees and Katherine Sacks-Jones of Agenda. I will take away the particular point he referred to, but we are content that we have protected the areas that need protection.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (CB): My Lords, will the Minister clarify whether during the consultation stage there will be a thorough analysis of the potential disbenefits to the NHS if there is insufficient supported housing for quick discharge for a range of people who are currently waiting for suitable accommodation and who are therefore dependent on the NHS?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the noble Baroness is right to address concern that this is interactive with the health area. This is something we touched on in a debate earlier this week. The consultation that will open shortly in relation to the cap and the way that we ensure that the additional costs are taken care of will be transparent and collaborative. It will be a very open process, so I ask noble Lords to ensure that they, as well as outside organisations, participate in it so that we get this right and are able to protect the sector and the variations that exist between different local authorities.

Lord Beecham (Lab): My Lords, what discussions have taken place between the noble Lord's department and the Department of Health about the impact on social care budgets that is now being felt throughout the country? Clearly, the work of social services and adult care is closely related to the conditions under which the residents of sheltered housing live.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the noble Lord is right to say that there is interaction with the Department of Health. We discuss this with it, as we do with the Department for Work and Pensions. There is interaction across a lot of areas and, as we found earlier in the week when we debated this, this of course has great impact on the health and well-being of tenants, as well as in education and many other areas. We have to take this in the round and have a holistic approach.

Syria Question

11.20 am

Asked by **Baroness Cox**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of recent developments in Syria.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Baroness Anelay of St Johns) (Con): Since the Syrian regime declared on 19 September that the cessation of hostilities was over, the regime and its backers, including Russia, have carried out brutal assaults on eastern Aleppo and on other fronts, killing hundreds and hitting a humanitarian aid convoy. Humanitarian access is severely restricted across the country. We are urgently working with international partners on what can be done, diplomatically and practically, to reduce the violence and improve humanitarian access.

Baroness Cox (CB): I thank the Minister for her reply. Is she aware that I visited Syria with my noble friend Lord Hylton and Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, at the invitation of Christian and Muslim leaders? We visited many places, including Aleppo, and met a wide variety of people, including the Syriac Patriarch and the Grand Mufti, opposition Ministers, professionals such as the doctors' society in Aleppo, and IDPs who had fled to Latakia from ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and other rebels, who use cluster bombs and chemical weapons and perpetrate atrocities, including beheadings. Everyone we met is profoundly disturbed by the commitment of western Governments, including that of the UK, to impose regime change, as they believe that there is no viable moderate armed opposition and so there would be a takeover by extremists, leading to a chaotic situation such as exists in Iraq and Libya. They plead for respect for their right to determine their own future. What assurances can the Minister give to these people?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I am aware that the noble Baroness and one or two other parliamentarians, against the direct advice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, travelled to Syria. I put my trust in the evidence gathered by the independent UN commission of inquiry and other credible reporting, such as that by Human Rights Watch, which makes clear that the Assad regime bears overwhelming responsibility for this crisis. Indeed, his regime is responsible for between 85% and 90% of the deaths. We should not fall for the Assad regime's spurious argument that it can protect minorities—it cannot. Assad's actions have fuelled sectarian violence, and his regime is ultimately responsible for the deaths of about 400,000 civilians. He has shown that he is incapable of maintaining control of his country or of effectively countering the threat from Daesh and other extremists. So long as Assad is in power, the fighting will not end. The Syrian people do indeed deserve a more accountable, inclusive, representative form of governance—but it is one that Assad cannot offer.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, does the noble Baroness agree that there must be a better way of influencing the Russian Government than demonstrations outside the Russian embassy? Has the Minister made an assessment of a proposal from the UN's Syria envoy to personally escort 1,000 jihadist fighters out of eastern Aleppo? Would that not better address the issue of Russian behaviour in bombing eastern Aleppo than demonstrations outside the embassy?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, in this country we have a proud history of having the freedom to demonstrate peacefully on public property to express our views. I hope that that will continue. We have the great privilege here of being able to express views which are then recorded. That is not the case for many, and it is not the case for those in Syria. We should bear that in mind.

I will continue by answering the particular point about the offer by the UN special envoy. We welcome de Mistura's ceaseless efforts to find ways to address the situation in Aleppo. His latest update did include the suggestion of escorting fighters from Aleppo; that was heartfelt. The prelude, however, would have to be a genuine ceasefire. That is what we are seeking, and there will be meetings this weekend to resume diplomatic exchanges.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, has my noble friend seen the report that the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, has drafted about her visit? When she has, will she accept my view—without endorsing it—that it at least suggests that we may not be getting from our media an entirely balanced view about the full horrors of what is going on in both east and west Aleppo? Will she undertake to have a look at it and maybe circulate it to some of her colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I have made it clear that we are in possession of very clear evidence of the brutal attacks by Russia and Assad. I will not comment on media balance; I know that it is a matter that this House has pronounced on in relation to many issues, and it is right that it will continue to do so. There is no doubt that the credible evidence gathered by the United Nations points to the fact that Assad is not the solution for the future. We should remember that.

The Lord Bishop of Norwich: My Lords, the Minister will be aware that just 1.5% of those admitted so far under the Government's Syrian refugee resettlement scheme from refugee camps are Christians, despite Christians making up 10% of the Syrian population, largely because Christians find the refugee camps themselves far from safe for them. What will the Government do to prevent their own scheme unfairly discriminating against one of Syria's most persecuted and desperate and fastest-disappearing minorities?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I last met the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, in Geneva on 13 September to discuss

the refugee crisis, and I raised these issues then. I am grateful to the right reverend Prelate for doing so again today as it gives me the opportunity to say that when we work with the UNHCR we make sure that the priority is to give assistance to those most in need. I am also aware that it is important that those who feel that they may be at risk if they register may be assisted to feel that they are secure to do so. We will continue to look at these issues.

Noble Lords: My Lords—

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): My Lords, I know that there is a lot of interest in this issue but we have not heard from the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Lord Dholakia (LD): My Lords, I had the privilege to read the draft report produced by the noble Baroness, Lady Cox. I would like to supplement the question just asked by the noble Lord, Lord Howell. In the report a number of observations are made relating to faith groups, religious groups and other voluntary groups working in Syria, and there are some very interesting recommendations. Will the Foreign Office please look at it very carefully and respond to that part of the report?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, at the Foreign Office we look at evidence that has been collected in an independent manner that can be verified. I always listen to evidence gathered by noble Lords because I know that noble Lords, from all parties and none, take their responsibilities to this House very seriously. I will continue to look at evidence but I would say that the weight of international evidence is clear: Assad is responsible for 85% to 90% of deaths.

Disability: Football Stadiums *Question*

11.28 am

Asked by Lord Faulkner of Worcester

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that the Football Association Premier League fulfils its commitment to make all its clubs comply with the accessible stadia guidance by August 2017.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester (Lab): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, and in doing so I declare an interest as vice-president of the charity Level Playing Field.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Ashton of Hyde) (Con): My Lords, the Equality and Human Rights Commission is monitoring progress against the pledge made by Premier League member clubs to comply with the accessible stadia guidance, and has asked for regular reports on progress from the Premier League. The EHRC will write to each club to ensure that it does

[LORD ASHTON OF HYDE]
not renege on its commitment. If insufficient progress has been made, the EHRC will consider using its legal powers to ensure that clubs comply with their legal duties.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that helpful reply and I welcome his reference to the involvement of the EHRC. On 10 September 2015, partly in response to pressure from this House, the Premier League issued an unequivocal statement which said:

“All Premier League Clubs have agreed to make their stadiums compliant with the Accessible Stadia Guide by August 2017”.

This summer, Premier League clubs spent more than £1 billion on transfer payments for players and the league as a whole sold its television rights for a record £5.14 billion. That is more than £10 million a match. Can the Minister think of any possible reason why the clubs should miss the deadline they imposed on themselves, as clearly shortage of money is not a factor?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: No.

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, does the Minister agree that whatever happens now, the point at which we should be asking and suggesting has long since passed? We should actually be telling, and relying on an independent body to take legal action without government backing may not be sufficient to tell loudly enough.

Lord Ashton of Hyde: My Lords, the Premier League made a commitment, and that commitment, as the noble Lord, Lord Faulkner, said, goes only to 2017. The Premier League will make a detailed report in January and we expect it to comply with its promises. That is the best way forward at the moment.

Lord Mawhinney (Con): My Lords, will my noble friend undertake that, given the importance of this issue, if that January report shows any clubs not complying with the commitment, legal action will be taken against them and/or against the Premier League to demonstrate how important this issue is and how seriously it should be taken?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: Of course. I repeat that it is the Government’s view that this is very important, not least because it is their legal duty under the Equality Act 2010. Under that Act, the EHRC has been given the authority and duty to do that, and it would be up to it to abide by its responsibility in this matter.

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab): My Lords, the EHRC, although it is doing a good job, is not the only player in the game—excuse the pun; we were up late last night. The Minister and I were here until long after you guys had left. Premier League clubs of course have to obtain a licence to operate on their present premises. Why do the Government not insist that licences will not be awarded if clubs continue to be in default of their obligations under the accessible stadia guidance?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: I think this was the subject of the Private Member’s Bill of the noble Lord, Lord Faulkner. The problem is that the statutory basis for

the Sports Grounds Safety Authority did not cover this area. Parliament has decided under the Equality Act that the EHRC should be given responsibility for this. I take the noble Lord’s point, and we are very concerned about this. We are waiting anxiously to see what will happen and whether the Premier League will abide by its commitment. I assure the noble Lord that Ministers are in contact frequently with the Premier League and the English Football League on this, among other subjects.

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con): My Lords, I declare my interest in the register. Does my noble friend agree that there is no realistic prospect of all Premier League clubs complying with the guidance by next summer? Best estimates demonstrate that probably more than one-third of clubs will still not be compliant with the guidance. Does the Minister agree that the Government and the EHRC should take another look at this because it may be the richest football league on the planet, but on disability access it is morally bankrupt?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: The noble Lord speaks with experience as a commissioner of the EHRC. I was not aware of the information that he has. The Premier League has written to the DWP and the DCMS giving its half-time reports on this subject, which will be released to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee soon. As I say, we expect a more detailed report in January and we will see whether what the noble Lord has said is true then.

Baroness Gould of Potternewton (Lab): My Lords, I fully appreciate that it is important that Premier League clubs provide adequate facilities, but an awful lot of people watch other clubs as well that are not in the Premier League. We ought to encourage clubs in the other leagues to provide similar facilities. Does not the Minister agree? Perhaps I should declare an interest as a supporter of Brighton and Hove FC, which has some of the best facilities in the country.

Lord Ashton of Hyde: I completely agree with the noble Baroness. Of course, the duty under the Equality Act applies to everyone. The English Football League wrote on 8 July to the Minister of Sport and the Minister for Disabled People setting out a plan to improve facilities, so it is doing that. I agree that other sports have a duty under the Act.

Yemen Question

11.35 am

Asked by **Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty’s Government whether, in the light of the killing of 140 people following a Saudi air strike on a funeral in Yemen, they are reassessing the licensing of United Kingdom weapons sales to Saudi Arabia since the conflict in Yemen began.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Baroness Anelay of St Johns) (Con): My Lords, the UK Government are deeply concerned by the conflict

in Yemen, including recent events in Sanaa. As part of the careful risk assessment for the licensing of arms exports to Saudi Arabia, we keep the situation under careful and continued review. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms and export licensing criteria, taking account of all relevant factors at the time of the application.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Following the deaths of the 140 people attending a funeral last week and the 4,000 civilians who have died in Yemen and fearful of being indicted for complicity in war crimes, our allies in the United States have ordered a full review of their arms sales policies to Saudi Arabia. Given that the United Kingdom has licensed £3.3 billion of weapons sales to the Saudis since the conflict in the Yemen began, will the Minister explain to us why we are not also having a comprehensive review?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, as I sought to outline, although I did not go into detail in the first response, we look at these matters thoroughly every single time, so we have consolidated criteria by which we operate every single application. That applies to all export applications, not only to those where it would be at first sight obvious that any material might be involved in conflict. I can add for the noble Lord that my honourable friend Tobias Ellwood, the Minister for the Middle East, has travelled overnight to Saudi Arabia to have meetings with Yemeni and Saudi leaders, including Yemeni President Hadi, as the UK along with others have expressed our concerns over the continuing conflict. Discussions will focus on the air strike on the funeral hall in Sanaa on Saturday and on the attempts to revive the political process.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, what action will be taken against those civil servants and officials who deliberately misled Ministers into believing that arms being sold by British companies were not being used in Yemen when they knew the contrary to be true and they were deliberately misleading Ministers? In so far as they cannot be held in contempt, because they did not give that evidence to Select Committees of Parliament, what action will be taken against them?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I am not aware that there was a misleading. I am just guessing, but I think that the noble Lord may be referring back to a Written Ministerial Statement in September that sought to correct a series of PQs and Westminster Hall debates about alleged breaches of humanitarian law. The noble Lord shows his assent to my assumption. I read out as a Statement here an Answer to an Urgent Question in another place which made it clear that policy was not changed; the fact was that changes were made to ensure that the parliamentary record was consistent and that it accurately reflects policy. There was no need to change the information that I gave to this House, and I stress that. I am not aware that I have been misled by officials at any time.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, we welcome Mr Ellwood's visit to Saudi Arabia. We all understand the dependence of the British arms industry on sales

to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf—of course, that dependence can only increase as we leave the European single market and walk away from co-operation in European defence procurement—but the Saudi Government seem to be becoming increasingly sectarian in terms of the split between Sunni and Shia, and Saudi money continues to flow to places such as Pakistan, Indonesia, and Britain to support radical Islamic views, rather than moderate Muslim views. Is it not time that the British Government conducted an overall review of their rather dependent relationship with Saudi Arabia and took more control of it?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, the noble Lord, with whom I enjoyed working on these matters, always has a really strong global view of issues, and I value that. What I can say is that when we were at the Human Rights Council—I hasten to add that that is not the royal “we”; the UK Government were there and I attended for a week, courtesy of the Chief Whip giving me a slip to do so—we were pleased to be able to reach strong consensus on the Yemen resolution, when a resolution had been brought forward by Saudi Arabia that would have been counterproductive. So there are ways in which the UK can work with the like-minded in places such as the Human Rights Council to focus attention on the need for Saudi Arabia to take account of wider views of its actions.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB): My Lords, bomb fragments found at the scene of the funeral carnage were those from an Mk 82 American guided bomb. Saudi Arabia is one of the most barbaric countries in the world, with beheadings, amputations and the enslavement of women, while, at the same time, exporting its medieval version of Islam to neighbouring countries such as Syria, Sudan and Yemen. Can the Minister give me a good reason why the West—principally the United States and ourselves—supplies some £7 billion-worth of arms to Saudi Arabia each year? I might add that boosting our trade by exporting the means of mass killings is not a good reason.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, we comply with international humanitarian law, but I say strongly that I understand the sense of outrage felt by the noble Lord about the killings being suffered by the people of Yemen. I undertake that the UK will continue to press as strongly as we are able in the diplomatic sphere to achieve a peaceful resolution but, in the meantime, continue the aid that we provide there.

Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills

Membership Motion

11.42 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That, in accordance with Private Business Standing Order 69 (*Appointment of Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills*), Mr Daniel Greenberg be appointed an Examiner of Petitions for Private Bills in place of Mr Peter Davis.

Motion agreed.

New Southgate Cemetery Bill [HL]

Third Reading

11.43 am

Bill passed and sent to the Commons.

Grammar Schools

Motion to Take Note

11.44 am

Moved by Baroness Andrews

That this House takes note of the Government's proposals for the extension of grammar schools and selection in education.

Baroness Andrews (Lab): My Lords, I start by thanking all noble Lords who have made time for this debate today. We have a very distinguished cast of speakers; I am particularly glad that the noble Baroness, Lady Vere of Norbiton, has chosen this debate to make her maiden speech. We very much look forward to that; indeed, I look forward to the whole debate, particularly the Minister's contribution.

At a time when, both at home and abroad, the country faces massive uncertainties and deep social divisions, there has never been a more important time for clear thinking, clever solutions and humane policies. The Prime Minister has decided that the answer lies in a nationwide expansion of grammar schools, described in the title of the consultative document before us today as:

"Schools that work for everyone".

This, she says, is the way to create not just a meritocracy but—with capital letters—a Great Meritocracy, to be launched from the narrow ledge of educational and social selection. This is a controversial policy; it is a failed policy. It is a policy that was abandoned by all political parties as not fit for purpose more than half a century ago.

We have to take its resurrection and indeed the extension of systematic selection very seriously indeed. This has been made much more difficult by the terms in which the debate has been conducted so far. We live in an age where politicians are distrusted, language seems to have lost its meaning, and evidence can be simply ignored as irrelevant. There is a clear link between each of these. Language really matters. Grammar schools, whatever else they do, are not intended to work for everyone. By definition and design, they select and groom a small minority of academically inclined children. Other children pay a high price for this. Likewise, the term "meritocracy" has been turned on its head. Grammar schools were always seen by the man who coined that term, and indeed who wrote the book—Lord Young of Dartington, a good friend and much missed in this House—as the enemies of meritocracy. A true meritocracy follows only when every child in the early stage, irrespective of background, in every school has the same chance to succeed and access the curriculum.

Evidence for a massive reversal in education policy such as the deliberate reintroduction of grammar schools really matters. But, instead of evidence we are, I am sad to say, presented with a series of myths about the

virtues of grammar schools, which have been rebooted for political purposes. We are told, for example, that parents want grammar schools, that they close the attainment gap between rich and poor children, that they accelerate social mobility, and that they galvanise all schools to do better. These claims are widely challenged already, not by the usual suspects but by a unique coalition, in my opinion, which has brought together previous Secretaries of State for Education—who see their records seamlessly undermined—the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, trade unions, Opposition politicians, academy trusts, networks, think tanks, educationalists and, of course, the Chief Inspector of Schools himself.

Most important of all, the myth of a golden age of grammar schools is being publicly dismissed on a daily basis, not least in parts of the conservative press, by people of my generation who know from bitter experience what it meant to be declared a failure at 11 and to have to live with that failure all their lives, packed off to secondary modern schools before they even had a chance to know what they were good at. It is true that polls suggest that many parents may like the idea of grammar schools in theory but, when pressed further, they certainly do not want a return to selection. Unfortunately, the two go together. As Peter Kellner, the pollster, put it:

"Many of us want the best possible schools, but hate the idea of children being sorted into sheep and goats".

Let us also be honest about the language of choice. Where grammar schools still exist, in that small enclave of wholly selective areas, it is the schools that do the choosing, not the parents. The head of educational assessment at the OECD said recently that schools were very good at social selection, but less good at academic selection. He makes a very important point because, when grammar schools were at their height, research at the time estimated that 70,000 children were wrongly failed.

I turn now to the available evidence in the light of the proposition. Working-class children across the country as a whole are losing out specifically because they are being denied the unique opportunities of a grammar school education. Certainly, the evidence shows that, where they exist, grammar schools get better results than other schools—and so they should. It might have something to do with the fact that, as a recent IFS study found, entrants to current grammar schools are four times more likely to have been educated outside the state system than to be entitled to free school meals. It may also be something to do with the fact that many children who are entered for the exam are being methodically coached for that exam. Professor Frank Furedi of the University of Kent has said that the notion of the meritocracy has been "subverted" by "hard cash", as parents pay for coaching to ensure a place. It is not so much a meritocracy as possibly a plutocracy. With this demography and these advantages, it would be scandalous if grammar schools did not do better.

So for me, therefore, the most irresponsible claim the Prime Minister has made is that grammar schools close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils. Yes, indeed, they do, but only within grammar schools, and even then the evidence needs to be treated with

extreme caution. What the consultative process will do, I hope, is to throw more light on the performance of grammar schools, because contemporary research from 1967 shows that even then, at the height of the grammar schools, the small proportion of working-class children who passed the exam were more likely to leave early and with fewer O-levels. Sixty years later not much has changed. Contemporary research on the way in which grammar schools meet the demands of the very few disadvantaged students who pass the exam concludes that some are working but others are not, and that one in five is giving cause for concern.

The Prime Minister should also look with equal caution at the evidence of how well grammar schools serve the brightest children. In the largest and most recent study of its kind, the Educational Policy Institute found that there is no benefit to attending a grammar school for high-attaining pupils. Since the White Paper is based on the opposite assumption, I would be very grateful if the Minister gave me contrary research to that effect.

For those who do not trust academics or experts, I say, "Look at London". London schools in recent years have been transformed to the point at which they are now able not only to really stretch and improve results for the brightest but are reducing inequalities. The record shows that 15% of pupils on free school meals get eight or more GCSE passes at Grade B compared with 6% outside London. So perhaps the Minister can tell me why London schools and local authorities are not clamouring for more grammar schools. The reality is that the attainment gap that really counts—the national attainment gap—between the poorest children who get to grammar schools and those who do not is at its widest in selective areas. This is the gap that holds the whole country back.

The Educational Policy Institute has recently shown graphically that the Prime Minister's claim that new grammar schools will help children from disadvantaged backgrounds does not stand up. In wholly selective local authorities you find the lowest attainment for free school meal pupils. Chris Cook undertook an extensive analysis of selective education for the *Financial Times* and found that poor children do worse than they would in the comprehensive system. The evidence from Kent, the exemplar of the selective system, reinforces this. Alan Milburn, the social mobility tsar, has pointed out that in Kent 27% of children on free school meals get five good GCSEs compared with the national average of 33%. The great meritocracy is, I fear, a great illusion. It advantages children already in grammar schools and disadvantages children in the rest of the schools. How could it be otherwise, given that Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools, has said recently that if someone had opened a grammar school next to Mossbourne academy he would have been absolutely furious? He added that it would have taken away the youngsters who set the tone of the school and that youngsters learn from other youngsters and see their ambition, which percolates through the school. In fact, we need look no further than the Government's own consultative document, which goes to extraordinary lengths, I felt, to set out a series of damage limitation strategies precisely to protect local schools such as partnerships with non-selective schools, none of which,

however, deal with the fact that opening a selective school in an area automatically handicaps every other school, no matter who owns it. Those are not my words but those of somebody who was until very recently an adviser to government on education. Once a selective system has been created, those other schools, by definition, automatically become second-best, along with their children, because what has not changed is the impact of being marked down as a failure for not passing the 11-plus on a single day. This is nothing less than a trapdoor through which the majority of 11 year-olds would fall.

For these reasons, the idea that grammar schools promote social mobility is risible. The fact that the heyday of the grammar schools between 1950 and 1970 coincided with significant social mobility driven by economic and technological change is just that—a coincidence. We can also in all humility learn from other countries. There is no evidence from the international PISA research or elsewhere to suggest that nationally selective systems are linked to better test outcomes.

There are no other models for systematic social selection in the English-speaking world. In Europe, England, along with the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, is currently among the top countries which produce a high equity and better test outcomes on the Human Development Index. We should be proud of that record. What Government or country would want to jeopardise that achievement? Why would any country want to go down this distracting cul-de-sac, riddled with division and failure, instead of focusing on how to improve the diverse skills of all its children and give them an equal chance of success? Of course, many schools can do better—no one can challenge that. But my goodness, there are proven ways of doing that, with support, leadership and incentives, and the last thing that is needed is to set up a scheme for rival schools to reinforce failure. No matter how you dress it up, what you call the schools or what compensatory policies you put in place, the fact is that the majority of schools and children will be knocked back.

There is no doubt that this is an area where educational policy and politics elide in a toxic way, and that is neither effective policy nor effective politics. Indeed, I am generally baffled by the politics of it. At best, a policy which will now prioritise grammar schools over other models casts doubt on everything the Government have said they have already achieved in education over six years. Woe betide the academies and the free schools—they simply will not know what has hit them. The former head of the New Schools Network, Rachel Wolf, made this clear when she said in the *Spectator* that,

"the pursuit of grammars at the expense of academies and free schools could undo the extraordinary progress made in the last few years".

She deserves an answer from the Minister today as to why the Government think this risk is worth taking.

It is important that we get an answer to that question because the Minister must know that the great enemy of meritocracy—the failure of children to thrive and therefore learn and succeed—is poverty. When a child grows up in a home with no books, no family support for reading or language and no access to rich experiences

[BARONESS ANDREWS]

outside the home, they are born into disadvantage and locked into it. If the Government want to accelerate social mobility, the first thing they should do is implement the recommendation of their old Commission on Social Mobility and Child Poverty, including on parenting skills. If they want to close the attainment gap between the poorest and the wealthiest children, which starts at birth and widens every year of schooling, they should prioritise early years learning, particularly literacy and language skills. If they want to ensure that schools become as effective as possible, they will concentrate on what happens inside schools, not between them, and on the quality and the excellence of teaching and learning, not on everlasting changes in the ownership and structure of schools. They will continue to invest in school leadership throughout the school, encourage brilliant new teachers through the Teach First programme, invest in professional development and ensure that all children—I have experience of this—have a rich menu of things to do outside the school day which enables them to learn that success comes in different ways.

In a global, digital, highly stressed world, we should not be looking for a narrow, academic curriculum. We should follow other successful countries such as Singapore, which put greater emphasis on flexibility and creativity. If we did that, at least we might be able to face a post-Brexit future, with all its risks and exclusions, with greater confidence and a more collective purpose. We might have a more generous and more inclusive view of the future. We might be more successful as a country. The alternative, which is set out in this White Paper—its central principle an out-of-date and long-abandoned policy—will reinforce a view of a country which has lost its way and is content to rewrite history, reject evidence and revert to nostalgia: a country which may well work for no one.

11.59 am

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, I am delighted to have the privilege of following the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, who made a powerful and well-argued speech. She knows that I hold her in high regard, and there is one matter on which I agree with her unequivocally: I am greatly looking forward to the maiden speech of my noble friend Lady Vere of Norbiton.

The noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, of course made a number of powerful points. She knows as well as anyone that I am not well known for being an unequivocal supporter of government on either side of the House, but on this occasion I find myself very much in support of the Government.

I must declare a number of interests. I received a grammar school education. My last teaching post was as head of history at a Staffordshire grammar school founded in the reign of Edward VI. It was a school with a real social mix, to which everyone from the son of the ploughman in the 19th century to the son of the squire went. I also had the great good fortune to fight the late Anthony Crosland 50 years ago in Grimsby at the general election. He was a man whom I came to admire and to know as a personal friend but with whom I disagreed profoundly on the subject of grammar schools. Indeed, I headed a group which fought—unsuccessfully, I am afraid—to preserve grammar schools

in Grimsby in the late 1960s. So I come to this debate with form. I just wish that I had as long to develop my case as the noble Baroness, rightly, had. However, I shall make one or two points.

This is not a case of the Government thrusting a policy upon the country or upon this House or the other place. What we have is a reversion, of which I am very proud, to the principle of the Green Paper, White Paper and then legislation. We have a Green Paper—a consultative document—before us, and people have until just before Christmas to respond to it. A number of pertinent questions are asked in it to which I hope people will respond.

However, let us just get one or two things completely clear. This is not advocating a return to the 11-plus. I have always felt that 13 is a better age of transition. Indeed, in my native town of Grimsby many people did transfer at 13. I do not like the idea of a demarcation line at 11 and this does not suggest that; nor does it seek to pretend, as the noble Baroness implied, that the achievements of the last 20 or so years, with the development of academies, should be set at naught. Of course they should not. There is a diversity of education in this country and that will continue. No one will have a grammar school forced upon them against their will. But we believe in choice, as we all should, and none of us should seek to deprive others of what we ourselves have benefited from. I believe that there are certain things within the grammar school tradition that could be profitably developed elsewhere—indeed, some have been.

One hallmark of a good grammar school education was discipline and a respect for learning. That is very important. You cannot have an education where quality is at least as important as equality unless there is a disciplined framework within a school. We desperately need all our children to be excited by the discipline they are following—the academic or the sporting—and we need all our children to have a true respect for others and a tolerance of their beliefs. What is happening to freedom of speech in our universities ought to give us all real cause for concern, if not alarm. Another hallmark of good education is courtesy and respect for others, and I do not believe that what the Government are proposing in any way places that in jeopardy.

12.05 pm

Lord Blunkett (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lady Andrews on securing this debate and declare a registered interest—an interest that goes back throughout my life, including when I had the privilege of being the Secretary of State for Education and Employment from 1997. That, of course, included piloting through the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, which included a block on any further extension of selection, but also a range of measures intended to accelerate and build on previous progress on improving the life chances of children in every school, in whichever part of the country they were and whatever type of school they went to. Our mantra was “standards not structure”.

That is why—with, it has to be said, the support of my party and its conference—we chose not to abolish the 11-plus in those areas that chose to continue it,

although we did have a cack-handed referendum clause, which never worked. Referendums rarely work, and this one certainly did not. The reason we chose not to go for direction from the centre was because we believed that it would have been a complete diversion of time, energy and focus away from raising standards in schools across the country. What we are presented with in this consultation paper is, once again, a diversion away from raising standards and towards structures.

It is 40 years ago this month since the former Prime Minister Jim Callaghan made his notable speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, on education. It was about a philosophy of modernisation and a change in the era from the 1944 Butler Act. That Act was implemented, it has to be said, by Ellen Wilkinson and Chuter Ede, but in a very different climate that did not require the majority of young people to progress to an academic level that would enable them to engage with the kind of economy that Jim Callaghan foresaw, back in the 1970s, and which we have very clearly reached today.

Callaghan's philosophy was that it was wrong to rely on a social and economic policy that believed that if you educated the few very well, the benefit they gained would trickle down to the rest and they would then be enabled to succeed in employment and the future building of their family. Clearly, we are out of that era, if we were ever in it. Forty years on, we are also addressing the philosophy of Jim Callaghan that, in liberating the talent of every child, whichever school they go to has to succeed at the highest possible level.

I usually agree with the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, but I say to him today that if this consultation paper were implemented, the imposition would take place of grammar schools where others had chosen not to go down that route. In the system that we have at the moment—and I am proud to support and take part in making a success of a multi-academy trust—the sponsor could determine that they were going to bid for a new grammar school. The existing multi-academy trust system would then allow for the allocation or transfer of an existing school to a selective model. Therefore, it would be imposed without any requirement for consultation or deliberation by other schools or parents in the area.

It was a German Chancellor who once said that the problem with some on the political right is that they promise to the many what they know they will be able to deliver only to the few. Grammar schools do just that. If one is imposed on an area or a transfer takes place to make an existing school selective, the parents and their children who would have expected to go to that school, who would have had an expectation of high-quality education for themselves or their child, will find themselves excluded by some form of examination. It is morally wrong, philosophically wrong and practically impossible to implement. I pray the Government will think again and place emphasis on raising standards for all, not for the privileged few.

12.10 pm

Baroness Humphreys (LD): My Lords, I begin by also thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, and congratulating her on securing this timely and important debate. As a former grammar school pupil, a former teacher in a comprehensive school and a parent of two

sons who attended the comprehensive school in which I taught, I felt that I might have some practical experience to contribute to this debate. I certainly valued my years in the local grammar school and appreciated the advantages that my education there gave me. But I was also very aware of the disadvantages my education bestowed on the pupils in the local secondary modern school. Failure to pass the 11-plus left many of these pupils having to deal with feelings of rejection and of having let their parents down. Sometimes, even, feelings against the grammar school pupils boiled over into open hostility and did very little for social cohesion in our small community.

For the majority of us in the grammar school, social mobility beckoned. Very few of us remained in our locality. We followed out careers outside our community and became doctors, teachers, head teachers, mathematicians, scientists, anaesthetists and successful businesspeople. But I would argue that social mobility was probably easier in those days because of the economic situation. Work was fairly easy to obtain; all sectors of housing were available to those in work and seeking a home; and mortgages were affordable, even to those on a teacher's starting salary.

A comprehensive system of education began for us in Wales when one of the earliest comprehensive schools in the UK was opened in Holyhead on Anglesey in 1949. Now, every single school in Wales is a comprehensive. We have no grammar schools or academies and the Assembly's Education Minister, Kirsty Williams AM, has recently pledged that there will be no grammar schools in Wales on her watch.

We in Wales acknowledge that performance in PISA tests has left us lagging behind our counterparts in England, but GCSE results in 2016 were more promising. This year in England, 66.6% attained five A* to C grades, whereas in Wales the figure was 66%. In England, 6.4% of pupils gained A* grades, with 6.1% gaining the top grades in Wales.

In Wales, there is an acceptance that we have to do better, but there is also pride in what we do right. When the OECD came to Wales to report on our education system, it had many critical things to say about it—many things needed to change. But the number one thing it praised was the fact we have a comprehensive system in Wales and that we are dedicated to it. International evidence shows that the best and highest-performing education systems across the world do not select their children. The Welsh Education Minister insists on making her decisions based on evidence, not dogma.

As someone who has seen comprehensive school pupils become doctors, dentists, scientists, teachers, head teachers, businesspeople, builders, plumbers, electricians, accomplished actors, musicians and artists, and all take their place in the world, I believe the comprehensive system, in the Government's own words, has allowed them to go as far as their talents would take them, without having to attend a grammar school. All the pupils whom I taught studied all their subjects, except English, through the medium of Welsh, but they still attained careers in the UK.

The Government believe that they are responding to the call from parents for new grammar schools, but I contend that most young parents today do not

[BARONESS HUMPHREYS]
understand the reality of the grammar school system. They have not yet had to cope with the failure of a child to pass the 11-plus or 13-plus exam. As my noble friend Lady Pinnock has said elsewhere, the headline should read, “Government to create new grammar and secondary modern schools”—for, inevitably, once what was known as the “crème de la crème” is taken from a comprehensive school or academy to form a grammar school, one is left with a secondary modern school and a system with all the problems that we thought we had begun to overcome 50 years ago. It is self-evident that selective schools give a minority of pupils a first-class education and a majority of pupils a second-class education.

12.15 pm

Lord Puttnam (Lab): My Lords, I not only thank the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, but warmly congratulate her on what was one of the most coherent speeches I have heard in my 20 years in this House. She set out the case magnificently.

I also declare one or two interests as set out in the register, particularly that of chairman of the advisory board of the *Times Educational Supplement*. I mention this in particular because one great asset of that role is that we probably have more data and more up-to-date information than the department itself. In that sense we are in an extremely privileged position.

One of the great roles of this House is its ability to detect and warn against unintended consequences, so I shall take my few moments to talk precisely about the unintended consequences of what could be a quite dangerous policy shift.

I have not been as regular an attender in the House in the past few months as I would have liked and for a very simple reason: I have been making a documentary. It is a four-part documentary on the impact of digital, on Europe in particular. One part of the series is specifically on education. This took me in April to an inner-city school in Dublin, where I interviewed a headmistress. It was a terrific school with a terrific principal.

In a break in the filming, I wandered around and looked at the noticeboards. My attention was drawn to one particular notice, which I photographed—I have the picture here. It set out the 10 top-performing kids at that inner city Dublin school; they were 13 year-olds and it was the Easter term. I shall not read out all the names, partly because I would probably mispronounce them. Suffice it to say that seven were from eastern Europe and three were from Asia; there was not one single Irish kid.

I think that that Dublin school will be typical of almost any inner city school in this country. The very notion that, by reintroducing selection, the people whom the policy is intended to attract—the traditional white working class—will suddenly find their children surging into new and better grammar schools is a fantasy. What will actually happen, which I admire and salute, is that migrant and first-generation kids from Asia—we know already that the highest-performing children in Britain are Bangladeshi girls—and eastern Europe will sweep into those schools, and God bless

them. The small problem will be that the disgruntled and now disconnected white working class, who believed that they were going to get better schools, will not get in. I can think of no more dangerous tinderbox that you could strike under hard-pressed and already divided communities.

This is a potentially lethal policy. It is ill thought through and ill considered, and it could do far more damage than I think anyone fully understands.

12.19 pm

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, today is my seventh sitting day and on each of them I have reached my goal of 10,000 steps a day thanks to these corridors. I have been overwhelmed by the spirit and warmth of the place, and the officers, staff and doorkeepers have been a huge help. As the daughter of an army officer, I like things to be just so. “Morning” should mean morning and “afternoon” should mean afternoon, but I understand that this is not always the case.

My route to your Lordships’ House has been somewhat unconventional. My careers guidance officer at school said to me, “Charlotte, you should become a pharmacist”. So I left school at 17 and studied biochemical engineering at UCL—not entirely what she had in mind. I then headed to the City for 10 years and took myself off to the States to do an MBA. I then settled into a life of running things in recruitment, mental health, education and retail.

My political journey has also been somewhat unconventional, and I am grateful to my two supporters, my noble friends Lady Jenkin and Lord Gilbert, for their guidance. I fell into politics completely accidentally. Next thing I knew, I was sitting in my friend’s kitchen having a cup of tea with Zac Goldsmith. I went on to stand in the 2010 general election, where I lost horrendously to the Greens. Then I went on to fight one of two national referendum campaigns—do we not love those? I was on the side of no for the alternative vote, so am one up.

I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, for raising this topic. I understand that I am to be uncontroversial, so I am delighted to speak on such an uncontroversial subject. I will focus on a principle that I hold dear and on which I believe we can all agree. It is the simple notion that every child, from whatever class, race, city, town, village or household income should be educated to take full advantage of their academic potential. A body of evidence shows that teaching pupils in mixed ability settings lifts the attainment of those of lower ability. However, the corollary is that those who would have achieved the most achieve slightly less. The most able have their wings clipped.

The reasons for inequality in selective settings are many: poorer teachers in charge of less able classes; a lack of confidence sometimes in less able children; the lack of positive peer-group role models. However, rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater and say that all selection by ability is always bad, perhaps we should mitigate the impact and look at clever solutions, as has been said, so that our most able can fly.

One sector in education seems to be able to cope with all-corners. I raise another uncontroversial subject: that of independent schools. Until recently, I was the director of an association of head teachers of independent schools. While independent schools are usually characterised by the most exclusive and selective, the reality is very different and much underreported. Most independent schools are not selective in admissions at all, but they stream and set by ability. They operate in a marketplace where parents pay for education and so have very sharp elbows. This means little Johnny, whether he is in the top or bottom set for maths, is encouraged to reach his full potential. Independent schools are getting it right for children of all abilities and not just the most able.

Why should we redouble our efforts right now? While “morning” may not always mean morning, I know that Brexit means Brexit. In my role as director of ConservativesIN earlier this year, I fought hard for remain. The result remains a defining moment in my life and that of our country. While I am over the worst, uncertainty will be our new norm for many years to come. We will rely on talent from our own shores. There are already plans to expand the number of doctors trained at our medical schools, but will the state system be able to deliver the high quantity of candidates needed, or will it be disproportionately up to the independent sector to fill these places? Budding medics need our support, as do lab technicians and hospital administrators. Our NHS will need them all.

What should we do? Can we create a system more fluid than cliff-edge selection at 11? Yes. Could we have greater streaming across ability range in schools? Maybe. Should we recruit more top-quality teachers and incentivise them to work with the children who need them most? Absolutely. We should look beyond bricks and mortar and go back to the principle that each and every child should be able to maximise his or her potential. We need to find ways to make it happen.

12.24 pm

Lord Knight of Weymouth (Lab): My Lords, first, I declare my interest related to my work at TES. I congratulate my noble friend on her fine introduction to this debate. It is also a delight to follow the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Vere of Norbiton. Clearly, her expertise will make an important contribution to our work. I noticed on her Twitter timeline that she recently saw David Gilmour at the Albert Hall, but I think we would both reject his message that:

“We don’t need no education”.

I congratulate her on a fine speech, on joining the House and on her recent engagement.

The 1911 census shows my grandfather William working in a lock-making factory in Wolverhampton, aged 15. Two years previously, he had left school at 13. He had attended a school founded by the Sisters of Mercy for the children of poor Irish immigrants. They taught him to read and write—everything he needed for factory work. With the outbreak of the First World War, William joined up. He fought in the Somme, he was gassed; he survived. The social mix of the war changed him. His new ambitions rejected returning to the factory and he became a salesman.

Thirty years later, his daughter—my mum—made the cut and passed the 11-plus. She went to grammar school and joined the professions in banking. My dad went to the neighbouring grammar school for boys, as did his little brother. They went into articled accountancy and banking respectively. Their two other brothers missed the cut and followed the destiny of their fellow 75% into the forces, farming or factories via the secondary modern.

Twenty years on, my professional parents could afford to buy me and my brother the privilege of going private. We went to an independent school specialising in getting boys into Oxbridge. As a result, we were the first in our family to go to university. We were implicitly promised that if we worked hard, did well in our exams and got a good degree from a great university, we would want for nothing. We could choose our career, get a job for life, join a final salary pension scheme, get a 25-year mortgage and retire in our 50s. That promise is over. I am on my fifth career but maybe as a Peer I have the ultimate job for life. For my children, longevity and technology have changed the game, yet we still have a schooling system designed around that promise.

My family’s story can be told as a great social mobility story—from locksmith to Lord—thanks to selective education. But it is also a story of brothers divided, of your destiny set at 11, of life chances being bought and of education being designed to meet the needs of the economy, regardless of fairness. Selective education is unfair. Those arguments have been well made, particularly by my noble friend Lady Andrews. But I want to argue for a schooling system that meets the needs of our new economy and gives every child a chance to do well in this changing economy.

This summer Foxconn laid off 60,000 workers in China. It was cheaper for it to deploy robots than \$5-a-day workers. Around the same time, the first artificially intelligent robot, ROSS, was hired by a law firm, BakerHostetler. No wonder this week’s Science and Technology Committee report on AI calls for a more flexible education system in response.

Most fundamentally, we cannot afford to expand a system designed more than 70 years ago to filter 25% of children at 11 into the professions, knowing that the remaining 75% have a secure economic future working in, or marrying someone destined for, the factory. We cannot afford that wastage in a modern economy where we all thrive together on the basis of everyone outcompeting robots.

As the excellent book *The 100-Year Life* by Professors Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott points out, a child born today has a more than 50% chance of living to over 100. Neither the child nor the taxpayer can afford for them to retire any earlier than in their 80s. That 60-year or 70-year working life means several careers and a lifelong relationship with learning, so that alongside recreation that person can also do re-creation as technology continues to deskill us.

As employers tell me—I confess that they are normally part of the global elite which the Prime Minister sneers at—we need much more breadth in school and higher education. We need more human and creative skills as well as STEM skills, and every child needs them. The last thing we need therefore is more narrowing

[LORD KNIGHT OF WEYMOUTH]
of options through selection, so we have to campaign and persuade the Government to give our country, and the discontented majority, a future but not by creaming off some lucky ones and not by an exclusive academic focus. Instead, we should give them hope through radical reform that is joined up across the three pillars of the re-unified education department—skills, schools and universities—and that believes in the ability of every child.

12.30 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, I always knew that this subject would provide a clambering back to traditional battle lines but also that everybody would say, “No, they are not the battle lines. They’ve changed slightly”. The big change has been the Government saying, “We are having grammar schools. We all think we know what grammar schools are, with selection at 11 and so on, but we’re not going to do that. We’re going to select in a different way”. When I had a little exchange with the noble Lord, Lord Nash, I suggested that he look at common entrance because it seems to work very well and there was an agreement that it does. It takes place at 13 for boys but not for girls—well, some girls do it at 13.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, from these Benches on her very interesting maiden speech. The private system is very good at dealing with everybody because it has an incentive to do so. She is quite right there but if we gave an incentive to the state system, which it should have, along with cash and resources then I am sure that it would have an equally good response, providing that we can get the parents to buy in by making sure that investment and effort pays off for the child. This is where things start to break down. The minute a child fails that exam and there is nothing to pick them up that they think will benefit them, the incentive is suddenly lost to give that investment from the parent into the child. Education starts to become irrelevant, not something you are going to benefit from. That is the fundamental problem with saying that you have done it, if you have not.

Let us look at a few other practical problems with this. If one lot of schools changes over at 11 and another at 13, when you have free schools, academies and schools run by local authorities, we are creating an industry for people to be bureaucrats and advisers to parents sorting their way through the system. How you would organise this, God alone knows and apparently He has not told anyone yet. The right reverend Prelate is giving me a slightly stern look for that. Anyway, if we are to do this, this complicated system looks as if it will get more complicated.

Let me throw my own little brick into the pond. It is a pretty open secret that I am dyslexic; I am president of the British Dyslexia Association. We are engaging far more with the idea that was not recognised when people such as Sir Cyril Burt did his famous work on this—I think it was between the 1920s and the 1950s. The reaction was to whether he had faked his results or not. There was great fun to be had there and it is the basis of the 11-plus exam. If we are to get accuracy for

the mainstream special educational needs of dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and autism, and the huge number of speech and language problems which cross-reference to all these groups, we must have an education system which identifies these people so that we can do this new, whizzy intelligence assessment. We will otherwise place 20% of our school population at an extra disadvantage, guaranteeing that we will not identify huge numbers of people who could benefit from such a school if they got into it.

A fundamental flaw has already been created. Grammar schools are great things if you are in them. That is the bottom line. If you are creating something that guarantees that you do not get there, you have a problem. This is not the first time I have asked this of the Government: when it comes to looking at Stephen Munday’s reassessment of the Carter report, how far have we got in at least making sure that teachers are trained and given some awareness package to spot these most commonly occurring disabilities? At the moment, most teachers do not receive training on this or even awareness packages.

There is another fundamental problem here. You can then go into ethnic background, language and everything else to add to this. Identifying accurately is a massive problem, and unless it is addressed any form of selection, regardless of whether you think it is going to be good or bad, is bound to be a relative failure, or a failure for a large number. Unless we can address this, we are talking on false premises.

12.35 pm

Lord Bragg (Lab): My Lords, I hope it is not out of order to say that I simply cannot understand why a Government faced with the greatest constitutional, economic and intellectual upheaval for more than 70 years should want to spend so much time and energy on the future of grammar schools. I congratulate my noble friend Lady Andrews on an excellent opening speech, in which she picked apart the Government’s case.

The evidence is all about us that some of our few grammar schools are doing well and some are doing less well, but many maintained comprehensives and schools like them have largely replaced them and brought multidimensional benefits. I agree very firmly with my noble friend Lord Puttnam that what the Government are seeking to put into operation could be incendiary.

It might be useful to speak from personal experience, as several other noble Lords have done. I went to a grammar school in Wigton in the north-west of England. By the 11-plus I was separated from many of my best friends, who went to the secondary modern. The stigma of success of getting into the grammar school when they did not was not unlike, although not at all equal to, the feeling of failure that several of those who did not pass the 11-plus had and retain. Unnecessary discrimination set in and proved to be a pattern in life.

In 1957, the Nelson Thomlinson Grammar School that I attended sent one person to Oxford. Later it became a comprehensive school with a much smaller catchment area and an unboundaried diversity of

intake, yet last year, if this is any measure, seven students from that comprehensive school went to Oxford or Cambridge and one went to Yale.

I was lucky to be very well taught by teachers of the calibre of Mr James, the history teacher, and Mr Blacker, who taught English, but current students are every bit as well-taught. I was on the board of governors for a while and still keep in close and active contact with the school and especially with the sixth-formers. The skill and dedication of the teachers, and therefore of the pupils, is outstanding. The range of activity outstrips what we did back then. For instance, the young enterprise team reached the national finals in London last year; the school runs serious scientific research projects with the local factory, Innovia Films; it was the first comprehensive in Cumbria to be judged outstanding by Ofsted; and it has bred a highly successful rock band, the Hardwicke Circus, which is going professional and includes four head boys, one of whom is still at the school.

We have to face up to the fact that for many young people in this country, state schools have changed for the better. Nostalgia is rarely very rational, generational memories are notoriously unreliable and we seem to have trouble admitting that some aspects of our life have improved, especially among the young, and that the new generation is very often surpassing us.

That success is now following through. Again, it might be useful to point out that Oxford, recently declared the most successful university in the world, has steadily increased its figures from the maintained sector to almost 60%—not enough, but going in the right direction. If we want to improve the education of all young people in this country, we should do as my noble friend Lady Andrews suggested and look at the great London experience, whereby resources and talent were piled in, transforming what is probably the most complex and large education region in the land into an outstanding education success story.

If we want to—and I think we absolutely need to—improve the technical and skills base of our society after years of neglect and mismanagement from Governments, then the need is not for more grammar schools but for more technical colleges properly linked to strategic re-industrialisation. If we want better education, we should put more money into state schools to help them do more science, and put in more facilities for languages, sports, drama and art. If we want to build a new skilled nation, we should put money into technical colleges. If we want to engineer social mobility, the elephant in the room is obvious: we could have a radical reappraisal of that beta-blocker of social mobility, the public school. What benefits could flow from that—what great consequences and positive aspects for our future.

I am very grateful to the teachers at Wigton's Nelson Thomlinson grammar school, but I am even more proud and pleased that it has transformed itself into such a democratic, decent, diverse and generous comprehensive, which, given a fair wind, will grasp and answer the needs and ambition of our unequal and troubled modern society, which needs all hands on deck and everyone feeling that they have an equal chance to help.

12.40 pm

The Lord Bishop of Norwich: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, for securing this debate. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Ely, our lead bishop on education, cannot be in his place today, but I am glad to contribute from these Benches and to hear an excellent maiden speech from the noble Baroness, Lady Vere.

Like many others in your Lordships' House, I attended a grammar school. I was also the first in my family to receive a university education. At Northampton Grammar School for Boys, as it then was, you imbibed an ethos and culture which simply assumed you would seek university entrance. My grammar school was hierarchical, full of petty rules and almost entirely male—the perfect preparation for a career in the Church of England.

I am not sure whether many of our masters knew much about teaching. Quite a few had no teaching qualification at all, but they were bright, interesting and knowledgeable, and loved talking about what they knew. You caught the excitement of knowledge from them, especially from the most eccentric of them, who, if they had a lesson plan, kept it very quiet. Even at the time, we thought that most of them would never survive teaching in a secondary modern—and that is the problem. I fully understand why grammar schools are thought to be the engines of social mobility for some, even if it is contested territory, but I never hear anyone saying, "Bring back secondary moderns". We can relabel them as high schools, or give them some other title, but they remain schools where around a quarter of the pupils, and the most able in any area, are missing.

The challenge for the Government, surely, in taking these proposals forward is to ensure that no one is educationally disadvantaged. The emphasis must remain on ensuring that every child can attend an excellent school. I remember only too well the shaming threats at my primary school about the prospect of wearing the green blazer, which was the secondary modern uniform. We were threatened that if we did not work hard, that is what would happen to us. How the Government would prevent that happening again seems to me absolutely fundamental to this proposal.

Selection through academic ability is not the only form of selection in the proposals in the Government's consultation, although we have not mentioned any of the others. I welcome the vote of confidence from the Government in the quality of education provided by schools with religious designation. This is indicated by the removal of the cap on faith-based admissions. However, such a move will have a minimal impact on the fundamental principle on which the Church of England's engagement in education rests. Our schools educate around 1 million children and the overwhelming majority are community schools providing the best possible education for every child, regardless of faith. Just as the ministry of parishes in the Church of England is to a designated local population, and not to a congregation, so it is that our schools are intended to serve the common good and the wider community. That is why they are attended by children of other world faiths or those whose parents have no faith at all. It is also why, within my own diocese of Norwich,

[THE LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH]

admission criteria make scarcely any mention of faith but are based on catchment areas, with looked-after children and siblings, for example, as the priorities, not the children of regular churchgoers.

I am pleased that the Government have chosen to make Norwich one of the six opportunity areas announced by the Secretary of State last week. The Social Mobility Commission named Norwich as the second-worst cold spot for social mobility in the country—a distinction the people of Norwich do not want. Chloe Smith, the Member for Norwich North in the other place, formed a steering group in response to this, bringing public sector, business, voluntary and faith leaders together, and I am glad to play a part in that. I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us what parameters there are on the new funding and whether there is more information about it.

The Church of England remains committed to its broad role in education, and actually we are looking forward to expanding our capacity in technical and special education. It was the failure to embrace technical schools in the old system that was one of its greatest weaknesses. If my grammar school had one educational advantage, I suspect it was that it operated within a relatively settled framework. There is a weariness among the teaching profession—I speak on behalf of my daughter, who is a teacher—about the constant reshaping and fiddling within our educational framework. If the Minister could promise us the prospect of a more settled period in education, that would be a blessing in itself.

12.45 pm

Lord Pendry (Lab): My Lords, one would have thought by now that the subject of a return to grammar schools in this country was dead and buried, and that having them back was surely such a gigantic mistake that even the Tory party would not have considered a return to such folly. One could hardly have thought it possible that this would be debated today; in the Tory manifesto at the last election there was no mention of the introduction of grammar schools. I consider that most thinking people will recognise that, far from increasing social mobility as the Prime Minister is for ever banging on about, the evidence suggests that the very opposite would be the case.

Is it not ironic that the only other female Prime Minister we have had, Margaret Thatcher, abolished more grammar schools than any of her predecessors? The current Prime Minister, despite boasting that she is a reforming premier, is in this case only setting the clock back in a most destructive way. The late and brilliant Tony Crosland, a former Secretary of State for Education, is reputed to have said to his wife, “If it’s the last thing I do in life, I’m going to destroy every flipping”—actually he did not say “flipping”; it was an unparliamentary word that I will not repeat—“grammar school in England, Wales and Northern Ireland”. I am sure Tony would not have envisaged that his wish nearly came true with Margaret Thatcher’s leap forward and her ambition to scrap every grammar school in favour of the comprehensive system.

Still, despite the fact that the issue of selection almost went away under Thatcher, it has come back to haunt us today. Selective education is increasingly seen

as a backward step by most serious commentators and educationalists. Education and social mobility experts have already criticised the Government’s proposals. Most argue that grammar schools increase inequality and create an “us and them” divide in education and in society. The evidence is clear: grammar schools benefit the few at the expense of the many, increasing inequality and breeding division. All the evidence that I have been able to muster is that even among middle-class parents, who are mostly believed to benefit from this policy, there is little desire for their children to return to the policies of the 1960s and be subjected to a test at the age of 11 that in many cases determines their prospects for a brighter future and better life.

I can outline to the House the kind of trauma that some have to go through at the age of 11 in the selection process. I speak with some experience of this. When I was evacuated to the county of Durham away from my county of Kent at the age of 11, after my school reports consistently showed that I was at the top or very close to it at the end of each school term, I was very confident that when the 11-plus came along I would go to one of the local grammar schools. Unfortunately, a few days before the examination I experienced a terrible tragedy in that my younger brother, with whom I and another brother were travelling, jumped off the school bus too early before it had stopped. He hit his head on the side of the bus and was killed. My brother and I were shipped out to an uncle in Northumberland to avoid the inquest and the burial of our young brother.

On my return, I discovered I had missed the 11-plus exam and had to take it, not under examination conditions but in a rowdy art class with fellow pupils who had already taken the test. I had a lot of unhelpful advice from people who kept looking over my shoulder and giving me advice that I did not want and certainly did not heed, but nevertheless it affected my concentration and I failed the exam.

In my case, the problem was somewhat restored on my return to Kent at the age of 13 and in different examination conditions. Without doubt it slowed my educational progress—irretrievably, some unkind colleagues have argued. Seriously, that is not everybody’s experience who fails the 11-plus but, in my many years as a Member of Parliament, I have had to help many who had particular difficulties through family illnesses or death at various examinations they had to take. I conclude by congratulating my noble friend on raising this important and timely issue today, and I look forward to hearing the Minister’s reply.

12.51 pm

Lord James of Blackheath (Con): My Lords, I should start by declaring a particular interest. Until today, I thought that I was the only Member of your Lordships’ House who had failed the 11-plus. I now acknowledge that I am not and that I share that experience with another.

I want to make a couple of points about failing the 11-plus because it brings lasting shame and humiliation on the life of those who suffer it in a way that makes it virtually impossible to get past it and get on with anything else in your life ever again. To my father,

it did not matter. He was a church orphan and said, “You don’t need education. I got where I am today without it, so you don’t need it, either”. To my mother it was shame beyond belief in terms of a social slide down the scale because her family had had two bishops and two Victoria Crosses in the previous 45 years, and never thought of having an 11-plus failure to put with that roll of honour.

I say, bring on more grammar schools if indeed you wish to have them, but please can we have a more proactive policy on what to do with the failures? I think that there is a category of failure that needs to be addressed because it is so serious that pupils in it should not be let loose without some special help. That is my great plea to you all.

I failed the 11-plus for one very simple reason—I could not read. It is very hard to pass an exam if you cannot read the exam paper. I could not read because we were bombed out in 1941, went to Chichester where there was no first school education at all, came back to London in 1945 and I was sent to a school that had been bombed, was overrun with rats and mice and had a cat in every classroom. I had a cat allergy that closed my eyes within five minutes of entering the classroom every day—so I could not read. Nobody did anything about that until they realised when I failed the exam that there was a problem. The people who then started to move on it—God bless them—were in Lewisham Borough Council, of whom we have a distinguished Member usually sitting on the Front Bench here. He thinks that I am paranoid about the behaviour of Lewisham councillors but I am paranoid only because they were clearly out to get me—and very nearly succeeded.

My father had a very difficult time coming back out of the Army. He got an officer’s rank and did not want to go back to his old career in the kitchen. He managed to find some local education connections for me, one of which was a private school which would take me for £18 a term, which was something like 60% of his salary in 1948. So it was a very generous move on his part. The schoolmaster who owned the place was a victim of the trenches in the First World War, and he was running a crammer for foreign students; we were the first school in England to take German students after the war. He had a special class for very backward children, which I certainly qualified to join, but he would not take anyone on until he had interviewed them first. He sat me down and said, “I see on the notes about you that you like to play chess”. I said, “Yes”. He said, “Will you play me?” I said, “Yes, sir”. So we sat down and he said, “Ten seconds a move”—and he lasted 12 minutes, by which time he said, “There’s nothing wrong with you, I’ll take you”.

At this point, Woolwich borough council decided that this was still quite unacceptable and sent me to three secondary modern schools to be interviewed, all of which said, “He’ll slow everybody down—we can’t possibly have him”. This is my major concern with all this. Things get out of hand because people in official positions think that they must react in different ways. We must have a better code of practice for what to do about the children who are victims of failure. They then proceeded to serve a notice on my family to the extent that I was going to be deported to Australia.

They started that process; they even went to court to get a court order for it. We got a young barrister—I think that it was about the first case that he had ever handled—who was still wearing his RAF uniform when he came in. My mother was always convinced that that was what convinced the lady magistrate; he looked so handsome that she had to let him win his case. It was overturned, so I did not go to Australia—but it was a very close-run thing.

Now, 70-odd years later, I have been chairman of 12 public companies and bodies and have somehow or other found my way into your Lordships’ House. I am 79 years old, so my comeback policy has probably hit the buffers and is not going to go any further—but I am satisfied with what I have got. One thing I leave with your Lordships is that we should please concentrate on what to do with the failures. It is not the clever-clogs who get to the grammar schools who worry me; they will be all right anyway. It is the failures we need to worry about. Let us have a proper policy for them and make that work.

12.56 pm

Lord Giddens (Lab): My Lords, I am almost tempted to join the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, in defending grammar schools, since everyone is so busy dumping all over them—but I am not really able to do so, although I shall develop a different line of argument from that which most noble Lords have adopted so far.

In early September this year, the PM gave a speech on schools and meritocracy. That speech paved the way for her proposal to introduce a raft of new grammar schools. Whoever put the speech together seems to have thought that if you stick the word “great” in front of every policy idea, it makes it so. The PM asserted repeatedly that the Government will create a “great meritocracy” in the UK. She even ended with the proclamation that Britain will be,

“set on the path to being the great meritocracy of the world”.

That is not even particularly grammatical, if I might say so.

Michael Young coined the term meritocracy precisely to ridicule the tripartite system, with its effect of leaving those who failed the 11-plus with an abiding sense of failure. We all have our personal stories. I somehow passed the 11-plus and went to a grammar school—and who was sitting along the corridor from me but my noble friend Lord Puttnam, who was busy humming the tune that later became the song of “Chariots of Fire”? That is a moment of great distinction—and here we both are, together after all these years.

According to the Prime Minister, things will be very different this time, since grammar schools are seen as part of a diverse school system. The noble Lord, Lord Cormack, made that point. But the effects on the majority in any given part of the country who fail to get in will surely be similar. The point of the great meritocracy is supposedly to promote social mobility, but I see no sign that the Government understand what that notion means. Sociologists distinguish two forms of social mobility, which we call absolute and relative. That does not sound too attractive in the context, but it is crucial for anyone in understanding what possibilities there are for improving social mobility. It is a crucial distinction.

[LORD GIDDENS]

Absolute mobility refers to mobility chances created by positive structural change. In Britain, over the past several decades, there was a great deal of social mobility. Virtually all of it, however, was absolute mobility: the result of opportunities opened up by the expansion of white-collar and professional jobs and the corresponding decline of manual ones. Those in my generation were beneficiaries of this process.

It is crucial to understand that relative mobility, where some are able to move up because others do less well than their parents, was rare, and remains so today. For the up-and-coming generation, the situation in future—over the next three decades or so—will be very different from the experience of people sitting here. Rather than expanding, a range of core white-collar and professional jobs look set to disappear over the next couple of decades. The problems here are huge.

Against such a backdrop, there are only two possible strategies for increasing social mobility, and both would have to be deployed to get any significant effect. First, large-scale social spending, way beyond anything in existence at the moment, would be needed to improve the life chances of those from poorer backgrounds. Secondly, in current circumstances, for children of the less privileged to move up, put bluntly, others from more privileged backgrounds must move down. The Government would have actively and systematically to attack the privileges of those at the top. Private tuition, the dominance of private schools and personal connections transmitted from generation to generation are all ways in which those advantages will be sustained.

As virtually all noble Lords have said, the plan to create a new wave of grammar schools will exacerbate the situation rather than transform it. In education, as elsewhere, we should be looking not backwards but towards the gigantic changes impacting on our lives today. The digital revolution is set to transform education in the classroom just as radically as it is affecting other areas of life. Properly harnessed, it offers opportunities for the radical levelling up of education at all levels. At the moment, it does not seem to figure in government thinking at all.

That celebrated thinker, Woody Allen, remarked that confidence is what you have before you understand the problem. In the case of promoting greater social mobility, that is exactly the position in which the Government find themselves today.

1.02 pm

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, for the opportunity to debate this important issue and congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, on her, if I may use the term, spot-on maiden speech.

I am a product of grammar schools, yet I have serious concern about selection at the age of 11 or at any other stage during pupils' teenage years. Young people of school age have to cope with many pressures, and the potential that someone's academic performance will be adversely affected, unrelated to their academic ability, is significant. Making hard decisions about which type of school a young person should attend at

any age creates the possibility that able students are not given the stimulus and challenge they need to achieve their full potential.

I was coached to pass the 11-plus at a time in my life when I was unaware of my sexuality, but it was shortly afterwards, around the time that I moved into secondary education, that I realised I was different from the other pupils in my single-sex school. It was at a time and in a culture where homophobia was rife in society. At a school where none of the 600 boys identified as gay and in what I perceived to be a home environment intolerant of homosexuality, the feeling of isolation and loneliness was intense. At a time when most young people are exploring their emotions, I was frightened to engage in any friendship or relationship because of my sexuality. Others at the school began to sense my sexuality, and I became the subject of bullying, both verbal and physical. The emotional strain of such isolation was immense and, despite being totally dedicated to my studies, my academic performance was, as a consequence, disappointing.

I am talking about sexuality in my case, but it could be a whole range of other issues. It could be marital break-up in the home, domestic violence at home or a bereavement that impacts on someone's academic performance. For those who like research into twins, I would lock myself in my room for hours on end studying, while my brother did his homework in front of the television in no time at all. He outperformed me in every department.

For me, school was a painful struggle, where I could not even achieve the three Cs at A-level that I needed in 1976 to go to medical school—I understand that standards have gone up since then. Thankfully, after five years in the police service, being more confident in my own skin and with my self-esteem restored, I earned a university scholarship and chose to study politics, philosophy and economics at Queens College, Oxford, where I excelled academically. My other academic achievements are a matter of record.

The conclusions I want to draw from this are twofold. First, I hope that noble Lords will accept that to write off any school-age pupil at any time during their schooling, when young people are having to cope with many pressures outside the academic arena, is potentially to put them into an inappropriate academic setting. I know that the Government propose that selection should perhaps happen at another time, but the disruption and potential stress imposed on someone part-way through an examination course of having to move to another school should not be underestimated.

The second point is this. If noble Lords are thinking that my story is of its time and no longer relevant, I say this. I am attending a charity event this evening in support of the Albert Kennedy Trust, to support young people who, even now, are being thrown out of their family home when their parents discover their sexuality—simply because they are gay. A survey carried out in 2014 by Stonewall showed that 86% of secondary school and 45% of primary school teachers said that pupils in their school, regardless of their sexual orientation, experienced homophobic bullying.

A comprehensive education system ensures that, at every stage, pupils can receive the education most appropriate to their needs.

1.07 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, I declare an interest as the second Cumberland grammar schoolboy to speak in this debate and congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, on her maiden speech. As a fellow strong pro-European, I welcome her to this House. However, the subject of this debate may well be typical of what I fear most about Brexit: that we will go in for backward-looking insularity in our approach to the world. I can think of no other European nation that would today be having a debate about the reintroduction of selection at the age of 11.

I shall make three points: one about the past and two about future policy. I became an opponent of the 11-plus on a summer day in 1958 at my junior school, Morley Street, in Carlisle. We had all got the results, and I remember the chap I shared a desk with, one of those old Victorian desks. I passed and got to the grammar school, but my best friend beside me had not and was going to the secondary modern. For me, that changed a day of what should have been success into one of intense pain, and I have felt that for people who have failed for all my life.

The grammar school did an excellent job for me. I was lucky to have special tuition from excellent masters to get me into Oxford—the same college as the noble Lord, Lord Paddick, as it happens.

The school system not only ignored the consequences for the kids who did not get there, but did not look after the less academic children in the grammar schools very well. It caused social division. I well remember being in my grammar school uniform and having to dodge the stones thrown by some of the lads on the council estate who resented the fact that I was going to the grammar school.

Now to the future. We should not reintroduce this. As my noble friend Lord Bragg has said, there are excellent comprehensive schools that achieve great success. I now represent his home town on Cumbria County Council, and the Nelson Thomlinson School is an excellent comprehensive school which sends a significant number of pupils to top universities every year. What I fear about the reintroduction of selection is the disruption it could bring to the ecology of education in our county. Let me give a local example. We have one grammar school in Cumbria, in Penrith, and already quite a lot of pupils go from Carlisle to Penrith—a journey of 17 miles. Of course, none of those pupils will have parents who are low paid, because they could not conceivably afford to pay the costs of the journey.

If existing schools are allowed to convert to grammar schools, we will find, I think, that some of our schools will want to convert, seeing it as a way of expanding their student numbers. What then happens to other schools that fear losing pupils in competition with these new grammar schools? It could be extremely disruptive to the success of our comprehensive system. I can see no proposals for making sure that this will proceed in an orderly way with some kind of guiding hand.

My second point regarding the future is that this whole debate is a distraction, as several of my colleagues have said, from what should be the central issue in

education policy: how we extend opportunity to everyone and how we raise standards in our schools. We need better standards. The initiative of my noble friend Lord Blunkett was very important but we need a renewed emphasis on standards, and the debate about structures will simply be a total distraction from a necessary reform agenda.

1.12 pm

Lord Cashman (Lab): My Lords, I begin by registering something for your interests: I did not go to grammar school and I did not go to university, but I will return to that later. I commend my noble friend Lady Andrews on securing this extremely important debate and on the brilliance of her opening statement. I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Paddick, for referring to the brilliant work done by Stonewall, particularly on homophobia in schools, which should shame us all—I declare an interest as the founding chair of Stonewall—and for his reference to the work done by the Albert Kennedy Trust.

I am extremely grateful for the many briefings made available to us and the widespread concern that has been brought to my attention by NGOs, academics, the education sector, think tanks, teaching unions and a great number of parents. From reading their submissions it is clear to me that there is a broad consensus that grammar schools do not improve social mobility. Selective systems actually increase inequality in attainment and earnings. I will share some of the findings. While those from grammar school areas who do well—top attaining, top earners—do much better than those who do well from similar, non-selective areas, those who do not do well—the bottom half in terms of attainment or earnings—do significantly worse than their counterparts from similar, non-selective areas. In systems with more academic selectivity, educational attainment is more strongly related to family background. Again, the evidence shows that access to grammar schools, both historically and more recently, favours more affluent children, even when comparing similarly high-attaining 11 year-olds. Taking both these pieces of evidence together, it suggests, or rather confirms, that grammar school systems exacerbate existing inequalities across generations.

If anything, grammar schools lead to less rather than more social mobility. The implications for social mobility are not positive. The evidence again clearly suggests that selective systems exacerbate inequality both in terms of education and later labour market outcomes. These systems work well for those who end up at the top but are harmful for those who end up at the bottom. When this is combined with evidence that pupils from more deprived backgrounds have less chance of accessing a grammar school, even when they perform well in their key stage 2 test at age 11, it suggests—indeed confirms—that family background will play an important role in deciding who gains access and who will end up at the top or the bottom. Hence, these systems contribute to persistent inequalities across generations, hindering social mobility.

I refer to a matter raised by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Norwich. The Government's intention to remove the 50% cap at religious free schools, where pupils can be selected on the basis of

[LORD CASHMAN]

their religion as part of the admissions arrangement, would allow new and existing religious schools to select all their places with reference to religion. For many, including me, this would represent a significant step back in the efforts to make our education systems fairer, more inclusive, and more integrated. This rule is only part of the free school funding arrangements and is not underpinned by statute; the Government will not have to consult Parliament on this issue. I believe that Parliament must be consulted, as this measure would have profound consequences.

In my last minute I will refer to my own experience. At the age of 11, I did not even know that I was sitting the 11-plus. I failed it; I was written off. I was sent to a secondary modern school where I would be pointed towards going into a factory or similar job. I felt that I did not belong. If it had not been for a drama master who saw some spark of energy, I would have remained there, feeling that sense of complete disempowerment and disfranchisement. My father said that if I had not gone to stage school—taken as a child actor at the age of 12 to a fee-paying stage school—I would have ended up in prison. I believe that he was absolutely right, because there was a child who felt that he did not belong—my only option was to rebel.

My plea to the Minister is: rethink these proposals and focus, as was said by the noble Lord, Lord James, on making sure that every single child is never cast aside but is given the opportunity throughout their school years and beyond to achieve their amazing and unique potential.

1.18 pm

Lord Framlingham (Con): My Lords, in 1938, Sir William Spens produced a report recommending a system of grammar schools, secondary modern schools and technical colleges, based on a system of selection. Following the 1944 Education Act this was adopted and it worked well. It was widely understood and accepted. After the war, the system was maintained by that wise man Clement Attlee and continued by subsequent Conservative Governments. In January 1964, there were 1,298 grammar schools, educating 22% of all pupils.

Then began the government interference, which led to the best education system in the world being reduced to the situation we have today where, despite the best efforts of everyone involved, 1.25 million children are receiving education euphemistically labelled “inadequate” or “requiring improvement”.

In 1965, Labour Education Minister Anthony Crosland told all grammar schools to convert to comprehensives. Most did; some held out. By 1979, they were teaching just 5% of our children. Finally, they were banned altogether by a Labour Government in 1998. Those brave survivors that held out have thrived and have been vindicated.

I have always been completely mystified by the amount of irrational and ill-informed animosity directed at the principle of selection in secondary education. Teaching classes of mixed ability is a complete educational nonsense. A few may go at the right speed for them but the high-flyer will be held back, the lower-flyers will

flounder and the teacher’s time will be very badly spent. The only way to teach properly, with maximum benefit to both teacher and pupils, is to have classes containing as near as possible pupils of similar ability. This was recognised by everyone in education until 1965, and has been steadfastly held to by grammar schools, the best comprehensive schools and all our public schools, all of which select, stream and set. I find it fascinating that while parents are clamouring, competing and paying to get their children into schools, state or private, which select, stream and set, because this is acknowledged to provide the best education, so many people still set their faces against the principle of selection.

One of the arguments used against selection at 11 is that those who fail will be psychologically damaged and their life chances impaired. While it is true that any failure is disappointing, these effects can be greatly exaggerated and were certainly no justification for scrapping an entire education system. Children are stronger than we sometimes think and often understand better than we appreciate what the world is like and where they fit in. The job of parents and teachers alike is to stand by those who go in a different direction and to explain to them that, as we have heard from your Lordships today, there are many routes to fulfilment and happiness perhaps better suited to their talents, as exemplified by many famous people such as some of your Lordships.

Can our nation’s educational policy really be, “Because some will not succeed none must try”? How depressing. What a message to send to our young people and how gloomy for the long-term prospects of our country. The greatest asset of many poor children from educationally unaware families is their brain—their mind. Surely it cannot be right not to let them use it to the full.

This will be a permissive measure. It will not be obligatory and examinations can be taken at 14 and 16 as well as 11 to make it as accurate and fair as possible. Over recent years there has been a growing awareness that mistakes have been made and things need to change. There is little point in looking backwards, in recriminations or in fighting old battles. Valiant attempts are now being made to repair the damage done and I applaud the Government’s initiatives and effort. There can be no return to the past: nor should this be attempted. We now have many excellent schools of all shapes and sizes and they must be encouraged and supported. Grammar schools will grow because of their proven and acknowledged value, but this must not be at the expense of existing schools but in addition to and in co-operation with them to everyone’s benefit.

The former secondary modern schools and technical colleges were very good in their time and their modern equivalents are doing an excellent job. The revival and promotion of apprenticeships is a huge step forward. Not everyone is, or wants to be, academically inclined and the nation would not last five minutes without the knowledge and skills of our technicians, plumbers and electricians. We are interdependent and so should our schools be—different but with the same ambitions to provide for every child the maximum opportunity to make use of all their talents to allow them to follow

the path most suited to their needs. Let us be positive about the future, but in order to do that and to go forward together it is important that we acknowledge the contribution that grammar schools made in the past and will make again in the future.

1.24 pm

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, with whom I worked when I was junior education spokesman in the Commons and she was our prime researcher in the House of Commons Library. Thinking about that reminded me just how obsessive certain people on the Conservative Benches were about grammar schools at that time. It also reminded me that in 1979 Bolton was introducing the comprehensive system. The 11-plus had been abolished and parents had been asked which comprehensive school they wished their 11 year-olds to go to. Then we had the general election on 3 May and there was a sudden change. The comprehensive plans were cancelled and an emergency 11-plus was established. Pupils left primary school in July of that year not knowing which secondary school they were going to. That is an example of how obsessive some people on the Benches opposite are about grammar schools. It is about time they learned about the failures of that policy.

We have heard a lot today about the evidence indicating why a selective system does not work. It does not work in the interests of those poorer pupils about whom we have heard and does not deliver the social mobility that is so often talked about. In fact, it reinforces privilege for very many people. We have heard that evidence and I remind the Benches opposite that many people in the Conservative Party understand this. I suggest that they read what the Conservative chairman of the Commons Education Select Committee has said. If I read out his recent comments, they would make a perfect speech on this occasion. However, there are a few other things I want to say. Nevertheless, I shall quote one thing he said recently:

“It is now a well-established fact that by age 11, poor children are lagging nearly a year behind their more affluent middle class peers. They are not only less likely to pass a grammar test at age 11, but it is also unlikely their parents would consider one”.

That goes to the point of what is so important about this debate. The Government need to understand that you do not give equality of opportunity to children simply by creating hurdles for some of them to get over.

We have heard a few personal stories. I shall illustrate an episode from my experience concerning two young girls from the same council estate in the north of England. They started out in a brand new primary school on the same day and took the 11-plus together. I was the lucky one. I passed the 11-plus and was offered a place at a very good school. Indeed, it was considered to be the best. My best friend was the unlucky one. She was not unlucky because she failed the exam: she passed it. But when you took the 11-plus then, your parents had to sign a form stating that their child would stay at school until the age of 16. My best friend's parents did not understand that. They did not want to sign that form. When they were eventually persuaded to do so by my head teacher, my best friend

went to the school without parental support and without a proper uniform. Four years later, when she was 15, her parents paid a fine to the local magistrates' court and got her a job in a local grocery shop. The 11-plus did not give her opportunities. I was lucky, not because I passed the exam but because I had parents who supported me and wanted me to get an education. If we are to make a real difference, we must tackle the problem of those parents who cannot engage in education and do not understand the value of the opportunities that should be provided.

I recall what the noble Lord, Lord Puttnam, said about the programmes in which he is engaged. It is those parents who are disaffected, alienated and do not have the confidence to take advantage of educational opportunities who we have to help. That primary school now takes children at the age of two to try to counter the impact of non-involvement by parents. If we are to make real changes and give real opportunities, it is the early years that deserve our attention, not this nonsense that segregates children at the age of 11.

1.29 pm

Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton (Lab): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Andrews for this fascinating debate, which gave the opportunity for the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, to make her very interesting maiden speech.

I will follow on from my noble friend Lady Taylor. What issues face the education of children in our country? One major issue is underattainment by children, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, and disadvantage, as my noble friend said, can come in many forms. It can be poverty, or poverty of aspiration, or people not believing that the system is for them. The underattainment and failure, particularly of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, is matched by disadvantage for children who have grown up in households where education is seen as “not for us”.

I will talk about increasing the attainment of children who come from backgrounds where we are concerned that they do not do well in the education system. My noble friend referred to nurseries; there is also Sure Start, which involves parents. I recall the Midwinter experiment in Liverpool many years ago, where parents—particularly, but not solely, mothers—were asked to go into the primary school, which was a very gentle, friendly and non-threatening environment. I met a young woman, a single parent with young children, who told me that she had come into the school on Valium—she could not cope with life. The school encouraged her to listen to children learning to read even though she herself was barely literate, so she took adult education classes. She then took a welfare rights course. She said to me, “As a result of that, I now want to go on a course to find out how to get some blankety blank rights”. This is about families like that. Sure Start should be expanded everywhere to help children who this policy will do little or nothing for.

Lancashire County Council was proud to be the first authority in the country to provide means-tested education maintenance allowances for all over the age of 15 who qualified, and we allowed adults who left school to come back. We are not tackling the huge pool of talent that is out there, which would benefit

[BARONESS FARRINGTON OF RIBBLETON]

both children and the community. I am not the sort of person who believes that the sole function of education is employment. I know that employment is important, but everyone is entitled to a good education. People say that in many places 25% got in, but my own grammar school education taught me that it was far fewer than that. Interestingly, for what was then about 15% of the population, a third of the girls were told that they could go to university, a third were told, “My dear, you can become a domestic science teacher”, and a third were told to consider secretarial work. That was the ethos. The world is not like that any more.

We ought to offer everybody the chance to improve their education. If we want to help the most disadvantaged children, we will provide the services for them, but more importantly, for their parents and their families, who were rejected and told that they were failures the first time round.

1.35 pm

Lord Storey (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, for securing this debate and congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, on her maiden speech.

The noble Lord, Lord James of Blackheath, will be pleased to know that I can join his elite and exclusive club, because I failed my 11-plus. In those days, the results were published in the local newspaper. My mother had the embarrassment of walking down the road to be confronted by various neighbours, who said, “We’re terribly sorry that your Michael didn’t make it to the grammar school”. I hope that the Government do not propose to bring back publishing the results of those who pass or fail.

I started my teaching career in a town called Prescott, which was part of Lancashire County Council, division 16. It was a small town, whose main, declining industries were BICC and Pilkington glass. The school I taught in was a small, one-form entry church primary school in the middle of a council estate. After two years, the school I was in asked if I would take year 6, which in those days was called top juniors. They were 40 wonderful children, with wonderful, caring parents. The secondary provision was a boys’ grammar school and a girls’ grammar school, and several secondary moderns. After Christmas the joy of learning was put on hold as we prepared constantly for that 11-plus exam. They practised on past test papers, had verbal reasoning and numeracy tests, and day in, day out, we laboured at this style of learning in the hope that we might squeeze some extra children through to the grammar school.

But what did it mean in practice? It meant that the pressure placed on those children, both emotionally and psychologically, was enormous. It meant that for many months the joy of learning stopped, and that many summer-born children were already at a disadvantage. “Please, sir, why is it called the 11-plus when I’m only 10?”, asked one innocent child. It meant that once the results came out, there were many “hurt” children—and yes, a few joyful children. It divided school families and communities, and 20% of the children were creamed off each year to go to the grammar schools. Of course, it was grossly unfair, because first, there were more places at the boys’

grammar school than at the girls’ grammar school, so girls failed even if they got a higher score than the boys. Overall, it depended on the number of places available, so children one year could fail with a higher score than children who passed the previous year.

Of course, the grammar schools creamed off not just the children but the teaching staff and resources, and as we heard before, the secondary moderns were perceived by parents as the inferior schools, and the pupils as inferior students. This was not social mobility but social and educational apartheid. Do we really want to go back to those days?

Until Theresa May’s speech to the Conservative faithful, academic selection in our school system—pass an exam and see what type of school we send you to—was seen as the past. Grammar schools, as Margaret Thatcher observed, were widely unpopular when they were abolished, which is why she agreed to close so many of them when she became Prime Minister. She did not turn the clock back; she looked at ways of improving standards.

Grammar schools enjoyed a hallowed status in certain parts of the Conservative Party and were seen as engines of social mobility that transformed the chances for a generation of bright children from poor backgrounds. How untrue that was then, as it is now. Even if grammar schools boosted social mobility for the lucky few, they left the majority behind. In areas that still use the 11-plus, the evidence proves that. It favours affluent children and obstructs the poorest. The wealthiest parents will of course pay for the best available education, whether that means moving house to a better catchment area, paying private school fees or paying for tuition to prepare their children for an 11-plus option that is not available to all.

At every educational level, the reintroduction of grammar schools is wrong. As I said, they divide communities and families, and they cause real pain and anxiety for children and families. They do not deliver on social mobility; they do not deliver on improving educational standards and life chances; they do not deliver on choice; and they certainly do not help the neighbouring schools in the community.

As we have already heard, Kent is a county that has retained the grammar school system. Perhaps if we want empirical evidence of whether grammar school education improves the education of all children, we can look at Kent. There, the gap in attainment between children on free school meals and those not on free school meals at key stage 4 is 34%. If you go to inner London, where there are no grammar schools, the gap is 14%. As our Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michel Wilshaw, said, if Mrs May’s priority is social mobility, she should be replicating the best comprehensives in London.

The Government claim that creating more grammar schools will help increase social mobility. That is plainly wrong. It will have the opposite effect, narrowing opportunity and limiting life chances for the majority of pupils in England. Evidence shows that grammar schools have a disproportionately lower number of pupils on free meals than secondary schools. Only 2.6% of pupils at grammar schools are eligible for free school meals compared with 14.9% across all schools.

So it is clear that grammar schools do not increase social mobility in the areas in which they currently operate.

If we really want to tackle social mobility in education, grammar schools are not the answer. By the age of 11, a child from a disadvantaged background lags nearly 10 months behind their peers in making progress in education. It is then too late to tackle many of the education and development problems that disadvantaged children face. The answer, as we have heard, is to start with early years on language development, reading and oracy, numerical concepts and socialisation with peers, and giving real support to parents in those disadvantaged areas—support that was available in the Sure Start centres. If we do that, we can ensure that the gap that keeps widening and widening as those children go through their education experience is stopped.

As I have said before, for summer-born children the 11-plus is very unfair. We know that summer-born children—of which I was one—on average perform poorly in most tests compared with those in their year groups born earlier in the school year. This is most noticeable in primary school children. The learning gap is still statistically significant right up until school leaving age, as summer-born children are 5% less likely to get A to C grades in GCSEs. I ask the Minister whether there are any plans to rectify this unfairness.

The Prime Minister said that she intends to promote a grammar school-style education for all. I wonder how the sponsors of academies and free schools feel about that. If, say, in the catchment area of Pimlico Academy there were suddenly to land a grammar school which, by its nature, creamed off the academically top 20%, how would the Pimlico trustees or our own Minister feel about that, and what effect would it have on the school? We know how the Chief Inspector of Schools feels about it. Writing in the *Times*, Sir Michael Wilshaw said:

“If someone had opened up a grammar school next to Mossbourne Academy”—

the school he was head of—

“I would have been absolutely furious as it would have taken away those youngsters who set the tone of the school. Youngsters learn from other youngsters and see their ambition; it percolates throughout the school”.

Can the Minister tell us what plans can be put in place to protect the balanced intake and curriculum of secondary schools if a grammar school is established in the same area?

The Prime Minister’s pledge on grammar schools is but a distraction—perhaps a distraction to appease some of her more fervent Members who hark back to their grammar school days. Come on, we can do better than this. Do we really want an education system in the 21st century that divides our children by an exam that they pass or fail? Do we really want to create a segregated academic elite in our communities? As the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Norwich and the noble Lord, Lord Cashman, noted, the abolition of the 50% cap in our faith schools will mean that even more of our children will be separated and segregated by their religion. I want an open education system that does not segregate any pupil because of their ability or their faith—a system in which no child is left behind.

1.45 pm

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, like everyone else, I am very grateful to my noble friend Lady Andrews for securing this debate. Her opening remarks set the tone for what has been a high-quality debate from many noble Lords.

The Green Paper we have been discussing today is named *Schools that Work for Everyone*. Well, its proposals did not work for the noble Lord, Lord O’Neill of Gatley. For him, it was apparently the final straw in his general dissatisfaction with the Government of whom he was a part. He resigned as a Treasury Minister 10 days after the Green Paper was published, with much reporting of the fact that grammar schools were a major factor. Indeed, the noble Lord, Lord O’Neill, went further, because he also resigned from the Tory party and now sits as a Cross-Bencher—a very cross bencher, it would appear. It is perhaps instructive that we have heard only four Tory Back-Bench speeches today. I would have hoped that more would be present to justify what the Government are seeking to do.

Schools that Work for Everyone is a misnomer. That is not the case if your child fails the 11-plus or if you want your child to attend a school based on a faith other than your own, and certainly not if your child has special educational needs or a disability, because these words do not make a single appearance in the document’s 36 pages. I hope that the Minister will offer an explanation for this oversight, although perhaps it should not come as too much of a surprise because the Green Paper is, after all, about being exclusive, not inclusive. Some would say that that is the *raison d’être* of grammar schools: it is more about who they keep out rather than who they let in.

Ministers claim that creating more grammar schools will help increase social mobility. We have heard many examples in the debate to head off that argument, and I hope we will not hear any more about that from the Government. Quite simply, all the evidence points in the opposite direction. Today, only 2.6% of pupils at grammar schools are eligible for free school meals, compared with 14.9% across all schools. So it is clear that grammars are not increasing social mobility in the areas in which they currently operate. The noble Lord, Lord Storey, has just talked about Kent. That county has the highest number of grammar schools in the country but also the highest number of failing secondary schools, including academies, of any local authority in the country. As my noble friend Lady Andrews said, grammar schools are often much better at social selection than they are at academic selection.

If the Government were genuinely concerned with increasing social mobility, surely they would invest in early years education—the stage at which state intervention makes the greatest contribution to a child’s life chances. Yet, since 2010 this Government and their predecessor have ruthlessly cut, across the country, the network of Sure Start centres, which provided a vital community resource for less well-off families, many lacking the skills to give their children the early help that is so vital. Sixty-five per cent of nursery school places are located in the 30 most deprived areas in England, yet the Government, who claim to care about social mobility, are about to cut nursery school funding. That shows

[LORD WATSON OF INVERGOWRIE]

their true colours: they are about being exclusive, not inclusive. That is the context within which this Green Paper has been forged. It is damaging dogma, seeking to reverse the educational orthodoxy of the past five decades and return to a so-called golden age—a time when society was ordered and people knew their place, at least in the parlance of the Conservative Party.

I will not repeat the statistics that many noble Lords have highlighted demonstrating that grammar schools widen the attainment gap between rich and poor. I found the report published last month by the Education Policy Institute particularly compelling in this regard. My noble friend Lord Cashman rightly emphasised that, in systems with more academic-style activity, educational attainment is more strongly related to family background.

A major factor in this is what the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Norwich recalled as “shaming”. There is cruelty involved in stigmatising children at the age of 11, of which we have heard many examples today. Although I was educated in Scotland where there are no grammar schools, I none the less did sit an 11-plus. I remember very much the divisions that have been highlighted today by my noble friends Lord Knight and Lord Liddle, and, most movingly for all Members of your Lordships’ House, my noble friend Lady Taylor. They talked of siblings and friends being separated and people being branded as failures, of snobbery reinforced, class divisions entrenched and, perhaps most importantly, opportunities denied. Who would want or even tolerate those outcomes?

The Green Paper states, on page 28, that selective schools need to ensure that the pupils they admit are representative of their local communities. They certainly do, but they have a lot of ground to make up there. We hear much of the postcode lottery. Indeed, the Prime Minister referred to it when she said that there is selection by house price. Of course, grammar schools defy the postcode lottery. Rather than see themselves as part of a community, they cast their net far and wide, resulting in often ridiculous situations such as children travelling from Brighton to attend grammar schools in the London Boroughs of Kingston and Sutton—50 miles away. Southend, for instance, has four grammar schools, yet only one has a majority of children whose home is in Southend. What is the point of that? This is public money being spent on public education, yet it is being used to stroke the egos of grammar school head teachers for whom results are everything and promoting community cohesion—supposedly a legal duty of state schools—counts for, it would appear, next to nothing.

The Government suggest that creating more grammar schools within the education system will create more choice. As other noble Lords have said, it will, but it will be the schools that are given more choice over pupils, rather than parents given more choice over the school they want for their child.

I turn now to a lesser-highlighted part of the Green Paper, one mentioned by only the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Norwich and my noble friend Lord Cashman. The proposal to allow faith-free schools, as well as those currently in existence, to dispense with

the 50% limit of pupils from that faith is potentially playing with fire and should be dropped immediately, whatever the fate of the remainder of the Green Paper.

An ugly and worrying consequence of the decision by a majority of the people of England and Wales to turn inward at the referendum in June has been the development of toxic situations in many communities, with many non-British residents fearing for their safety, even those who have lived here for many years and now have British nationality. I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, on her fine maiden speech. She told noble Lords that she was now over the worst of the referendum result. I take no pleasure in this, but I am afraid to say to her: “You ain’t seen nothing yet”. The developments that lie ahead of us in the years to come are very worrying.

The Government’s response to those kinds of attitudes in those communities ought to be one of concern, enlightenment, bridge-building, solidarity and hope. Instead, it is none of those things, because the Government want to facilitate a policy that will harden the divisions between children by ensuring that those not of a certain faith will be shut off from their neighbours and friends because they are to be prevented from attending a local school that their parents want them to attend. So much for choice. The Government’s plan is to allow groups of children to be segregated and prevented from mixing while they learn for life, conscious only of each other’s differences and not what binds them together as citizens. This move would have been a negative one at the best of times, and, as I have already alluded to, we are very far away from the best of times.

Walls are dismantled by people coming together, not by keeping them apart. Further selection on the grounds of faith will lead to more pupils being discriminated against, primarily based on their parents’ faith. The Government claim that the cap should be scrapped because it has had little impact on improving integration in minority religious schools, but it has been in place only since 2011 and is certainly not doing any harm. If faith schools are not yet successful in promoting diversity with 50% of pupils of that faith, why on earth would they be more likely to do so with 100%? Like so much of this Green Paper, it just does not make sense.

All the evidence shows that creating more selective schools will not raise overall educational standards and is likely, as I have said, to widen the attainment gap between well-off and poor children. The Government must now give due weight to that evidence and abandon their misguided pursuit of grammar school expansion. If they do not, they will condemn countless children to second-class status and a stigma that some may never cast off. I echo the calls made today by my noble friends Lord Blunkett and Lord Liddle for the Government to focus on standards rather than structures. I also urge the Minister to urge the Secretary of State to address the existential problems facing education today—a teacher recruitment crisis, a primary assessment system in chaos and severe school budget pressures. To sideline those issues while prioritising a policy for which, it should be remembered, the Government have no mandate, would be a dereliction of duty.

1.55 pm

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, for securing this debate on the important matter of selection in education. I acknowledge that this is an issue about which noble Lords feel passionately and on which opposing beliefs are strongly held. The noble Baroness herself set this tone at the outset. I hope that I can provide some balance to the debate as others have done—in particular, my noble friends Lord Cormack and Lord Framlingham. I am aware that this House is privileged to have many distinguished and experienced educationalists contribute to the debate.

As noble Lords will know, and as was mentioned earlier, we are facing great change as a nation as we prepare to leave the European Union—a change that will require us to define an ambitious new role for ourselves in the world. Rather than these proposals being a diversion, as the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, said, or a distraction, as the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, said, I believe that this is the very time we should be seeking to make these changes. In doing so, we need to consider what our place and role should be on the world stage, and how we can best develop our home-grown talent and skills to their full potential to ensure that we can truly compete as a global trading nation.

Those points were raised by my noble friend Lady Vere of Norbiton in her excellent and well-considered maiden speech. Her arguments set out the questions that are at the heart of our consultation and Green Paper, and indeed this debate. She alluded not only to those questions but to the bigger picture and, as I said, our place in the world.

We are required to build a school system which works for everyone and ensures that every child has access to a good school place, regardless of their background, and that education provision caters to the individual needs and abilities of each child. To that extent, I believe that the whole House agrees with me. It is therefore right that we should ensure that each child can go as far as their talent and hard work can take them.

When we look at the global landscape, we see that some of the highest-performing countries have highly selective systems, including the Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan. Indeed, some of those countries were mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews. Although, as she and the noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, said, the OECD's 2012 PISA concluded no direct link, we should not ignore the fact that the majority of countries performing above England in the international student assessment have a more selective secondary system. It is therefore right that we should question the status quo, as we have done in our Green Paper.

Our education reforms over the past six years have already seen us make great strides in this regard, with the provision of many more good school places. There are now over 1.4 million more children in good or outstanding school places compared with 2010, and a further £7 billion is being invested over the course of this Parliament to deliver new school places. We have also seen more control placed back in the hands of parents and head teachers; a renewed focus on learning

the basics in primary school; and initiatives to help young people pursue a strong academic core of subjects at secondary level, ensuring that every child has the key knowledge and skills for later life.

As has been mentioned, teaching also continues to remain a popular and rewarding career. We have record numbers of teachers now entering the profession, with 15,000 more teachers in our classrooms than in 2010. Teacher retention continues to be stable, as it has been for the past 20 years, with three-quarters still teaching in the state-funded sector three years after qualifying.

However, I am sure the House will agree there is still a long way to go. For far too many children in England, a good school still remains out of reach. As my noble friend Lord Framlingham said, 1.25 million children are attending primary and secondary schools in England rated as requiring improvement or inadequate. For some regions this is the case for over a fifth of pupils.

At the same time, demographic pressure for good school places is increasing, so we cannot afford to ignore or shy away from this issue. Doing nothing is not an option. We need to radically expand the number of good school places available to all families, not just for those who can afford to move into the catchment areas of the best state school, or to send their children to private school or to pay for private tuition, as mentioned. Access to good and outstanding schools should no longer be based on a postcode lottery, or whether you are wealthy enough to move or afford tuition. Every child should be able to access good school places and to go as far as their talents will take them, irrespective of their background.

The time has come to tackle the remaining inequalities in the system. Statistics show that those who attend state schools are still less likely to reach the top professions than those from independent schools, which make up only 7% of the population. We must continue to strive to break the link between future career and family background.

Let me be very clear. This is not to say that our existing schools are not already making great progress here. We have more than 6 million children in either good or outstanding places. Indeed, we should also trumpet the good work of our comprehensives—75% are rated good or outstanding. The noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, spoke passionately about the experience in Wales. But we have to admit that inequalities persist, particularly for families that are less well off.

We believe there is therefore a strong argument for giving all schools—including selective schools that have a strong track record, experience and valuable expertise—the right incentives to expand their offer to even more pupils. This is why our proposals seek to ensure that universities and independent schools, as well as selective schools, play a full part in raising standards across the whole system. But this is part of a wider education strategy that will ensure that the education system addresses the individual needs and talent of each child, from their early years, through primary and secondary schools, to university and the workplace.

I know that the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, spoke passionately about the inequality that can be created by selection in education, but I can assure her that under our wider education policies, this issue will be

[VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE]

addressed in terms of the disadvantages children can experience before the age of 11. That is why total government spending on early years is increasing from £5 billion in 2015-16 to £6 billion in 2019-20. Selective schools will also be required to support primary schools and help them to increase access for disadvantaged pupils.

However, we accept that grammar schools as they currently operate admit too few disadvantaged pupils. Again, points have been made in the debate that they could do more to raise standards for all pupils in the areas in which they are based. That is why our proposals will ask them to do more. Some schools are already showing how this can be done. For example, the five Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham, which run the Opening Doors campaign to challenge preconceptions about a grammar school environment, have made changes to their admission arrangements to prioritise pupil premium pupils, and expanded by 20% to enable more bright children from less-privileged backgrounds to join the school. Secondly, the Wallington County Grammar School in Sutton is seeking to share its expertise to drive up standards more widely through the opening of a new mixed non-selective school, due to open in 2018, and its existing sponsorship and outreach work with local primary schools.

I can assure the noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, and other noble Lords who have spoken that we are not proposing a return to the old binary system of grammar schools and secondary moderns. “No return to the past”, said my noble friend Lord Framlingham, and he is right. We are instead proposing additional selective schools within a system where more children than ever before already attend a good or outstanding school, so that there is a choice between good selective education and good non-selective education.

In answer to the concerns raised by the noble Lord, Lord Puttnam, we are not proposing to impose grammar schools on communities that do not want them. The Secretary of State will take account of their impact on local communities when considering whether to approve them.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): I am sorry to interrupt the Minister, but could he just explain how it could possibly be, were a selective school to set up in an area that has a successful comprehensive school and therefore take away from that school the most able pupils it has been able to attract up until then, that the character of that comprehensive school will not be affected? I do not see, and I do not think anyone else sees, how that would be possible.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: I might have expected the noble Baroness to raise that point, but first, it may not be right that a new selective school is set up there anyway. We need to lower the temperature on this. If it is the case, the whole point is that the selective schools will be used, where appropriate, to help raise the standards in non-selective schools. It is upping the ante and raising up to the higher level.

Lord Bragg: The Minister seems to take for granted that grammar schools will raise the standards at comprehensive schools when again and again pupils

from comprehensive schools are outgunning those from grammar schools wherever you look. He is just wrong about that. I am awfully sorry to say that—no, I am not all that sorry: he is wrong about that.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: Again, I note the comments from the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, which are clearly opposed to what we are planning, but I can only repeat that it is right to question and look at these issues to see how selection can play a greater part in our education system, as a holistic approach.

We will expect selective schools to play their part, either by supporting other less well-performing schools or sponsoring new schools in areas where they are needed, as well as removing the barriers that prevent disadvantaged students accessing selective education. I took note of the many comments made, notably by my noble friend Lord James, the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, the noble Lord, Lord Storey, and indeed by the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, about the 11-plus, the main point being that certainly in the past—a long time ago—the 11-plus meant that children were classed as failures. I must repeat that we are not talking about introducing the 11-plus. We are proposing that more selective schools are introduced in a diverse schools system.

A flexible approach to new selection is the priority. For example, we are proposing to encourage new selective schools to consider admission at later ages and how they could respond more flexibly to children’s differing rates of development, and according to their talents. This could include moving pupils between schools, encouraging this to happen at different ages, as my noble friend Lord Cormack said, such as 14 and 16, as well as 11, or pupils joining the selective school for specific subjects or specialisms.

Selective schools are good schools. Some 99% of selective schools are good or outstanding and 80% are outstanding. They are popular with parents. As I have already mentioned, there are also a number of non-selective schools that are similarly highly rated, but this is a complex picture and about giving parents the choice of the high-quality education that they want for their children—a choice between good selective education and good non-selective education. It is only right we should examine how we can open up this choice to more families.

Contrary to the arguments put forward by the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, the evidence shows that grammar schools provide good results for those who attend them. Looking at the raw exam results, almost all pupils in selective schools—96.7%—gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, compared with 56.7% at non-selective schools.

Baroness Andrews: I am very sorry to interrupt the Minister. I would not dispute what he said: I said that grammar schools get good results, better results, because of the demography and the support parents give children to pass the exams. That is why it is social, rather than educational, selection.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: I realised that we would probably have a dispute at some point about not only the statistics but the ideological angles that we take.

The most recent research by the Educational Policy Institute indicates a positive impact of around a third of a GCSE grade higher in each of the eight subjects. Even when we take the higher-ability intakes into account, we see that pupils still perform better in selective schools than in non-selective schools. I can assure the noble Lords, Lord Giddens and Lord Cashman, that the consultation focuses on how selective schools can contribute more to ensuring greater social mobility.

A number of studies have found that selective schools are particularly beneficial for the pupils from disadvantaged families who attend them, closing the attainment gap to almost zero. Indeed, one study found the educational gain from attending a grammar school to be around twice as high, of seven to eight GCSE grades, for pupils eligible for free schools meals as for all pupils—around 3.5 grades.

While it is hard to determine the real impact of selection on those who do not attend selective schools, the Sutton Trust found no evidence of an adverse effect on their GCSE performance, while others found small adverse effects. Nevertheless, this is evidence based on the selective school system as it currently operates.

Selective schools could contribute in a number of ways, sharing expertise and resources, assisting with teaching and curriculum support, and providing support with university applications. The Government's proposals intend to make grammar schools engines of academic and social achievement for all pupils, whether they are in selective or non-selective schools.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Norwich asked about the parameters of funding for the new opportunity areas, as Norwich is one of the first that we have announced. We will make available up to £60 million of new funding to support targeted local work in the opportunity areas to address the biggest challenges that each area faces. We expect it to be used to fund local, evidence-based programmes, and local project management and evaluation.

I can assure the noble Lord, Lord Cashman, that any proposal to remove the 50% cap on faith admissions for faith schools will include proposals to ensure that they promote inclusivity and community cohesion. The noble Lord, Lord Liddle, raised a point about plans for existing schools to become selective in a planned manner. I can assure him that the consultation asks for views on how existing non-selective schools should become selective. The Secretary of State will also take account of the impact on local communities when deciding which proposals to approve.

The noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, and the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, asked why London schools appear to be successful without selection. There are a number of reasons why London schools have improved in recent years, but there is no evidence to demonstrate that a lack of selective schools is one of them.

The noble Lord, Lord Addington, referred to special needs and the need for more teacher training in SEND. In July 2016, the Government published a new framework of core content for initial teacher training, developed by Stephen Munday's expert group.

I believe that I am running out of time. I have a few more questions that I would prefer to answer, but I fear that I will have to call a halt. I will certainly write to all noble Lords who have raised questions and review in *Hansard* what I and others have said.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie: The Minister has three minutes left.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The three minutes is for the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, to reply.

2.14 pm

Baroness Andrews: My Lords, I am grateful for a little extra time. It has been a splendid debate and I am grateful to all noble Lords on all sides of the House for their contributions. I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, on her maiden speech. She managed to be non-controversial on a controversial subject—we look forward to more of that. We are all in stages of recovery in many ways, but we will go on trying to do our best.

It has been a challenging debate for the Minister and I completely understand why. I began by making a plea for greater clarity in this policy and in educational policy as a whole. I say with the greatest respect to him that we have not had it. What we have done in the House today is to do a service to the Government, because we have provided a wealth of evidence about the impact of grammar schools not only on the children who attend them but on the whole ecology of education and the life chances of children who do not go. The evidence—I think, counterfactual evidence—that he cited in relation to London was hollow in the extreme. I will read his speech with care, but I hope that he will read this debate with care and draw it to the attention of the Minister for Education in this House.

It is imperative that we get the right evidence in the right place at the right time to tackle inequalities in education. That is what this debate has been about. We have heard moving stories about the personal impacts and evidence from my noble friend Lord Giddens about the true nature of meritocracy and how it can be galvanised in a highly complex and highly competitive society. From the problems of failed expectations to which my noble friend Lord Puttnam drew attention to the many issues raised, not least by my noble friend Lord Knight, about the future, and the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, about “standards not structures”, it is clear that there is a wealth of hard information here. I really hope that it will be taken advantage of.

Motion agreed.

Libraries, Bookshops and Booksellers

Motion to Take Note

2.16 pm

Moved by Lord Bird

That this House takes note of the cultural, civic and educational significance of libraries, bookshops and booksellers in the United Kingdom.

Lord Bird (CB): My Lords, I come here to talk about poverty—the poverty of our streets, the poverty

[LORD BIRD]

of our libraries and the poverty of our bookshops. If we do not sort out our libraries and bookshops, and if we turn our high streets into places that are denuded of bookshops and our libraries are closed down, we will have a real problem in other areas.

When government departments cut budgets in one particular area, it tends to find a manifestation in another area. For instance, if you start cutting the number of libraries—we have lost more than 500 since 2010—you are building up a bill that will occur in another part of government. It will be shifted into disorder, crime, problems for schools and the fact that children will not be able to get a job because they will not have the skills and abilities. So if you wish to cut libraries, please do so—but do it on the basis that you build more prisons and more hostels for homeless people and put higher walls around your house. It is not just this Government or the previous Government or the Government before that; it will be the Government again. There seems to be a real problem about understanding budgets.

If a department cuts support for local authorities, the local authorities are put into a situation where they then ask, “How can we save some money?”. So what do they do? They cut libraries. As I have said, more than 500 have been cut and nearly 9,000 librarians have gone in the past five years. That is in spite of the fact that in 1964 a law was passed making it a statutory requirement for local authorities to provide a proper library system. That was their duty—so how can you lose 500 libraries? How can you cut 21 libraries, as the county of Lancashire is looking to do? Mr Ben Wallace, an MP there, has raised the question of court action. How can you have a situation where we do not ring-fence libraries because we are not taking into account what will happen around literacy and association?

A lot of people are learning on their own; that is increasing. You have broken the communal sense of people learning in groups. The fewer libraries you have, the more people are studying on the internet and by themselves. But they really need association. There are many uses of libraries. The fact is that you can go into a library and feel the knowledge and the history. When I was a young boy, I could not read or write but I would go to the library and just sniff the books and that feeling of knowledge. I would say, “One day, this will be mine. All I’ve got to do is go to prison at some stage, where they will teach me to read and write”—which is exactly what they did.

Libraries are essential, yet what is happening is that they are being cut. I recommend that Her Majesty’s Government supply some emergency relief money to stop local authorities doing this dastardly deed, this process of philistinising our communities. That is one thing they must do. Another thing they must do is make sure that every school in the country has a library. Many schools do not. Think again. As I said earlier, if we make a saving here, we will make a loss elsewhere. Health, sociability, work and all other issues will come into play. I beg us all, before we allow another library to be lost or librarian laid off, to think seriously, “Is this a saving?”. I wrote an article for the *Big Issue* a few years ago in which I said that the problem with austerity is that it is too expensive. It is

so expensive but does not look it. It looks like you have a saving and then you move on.

If we save our libraries, what about our high streets? What about the fact that we are losing bookshops? We have lost more than 450 since 2010. What do we do with bookshops? What are they? Bookshops are places where you buy books. They raise the intellectual temperature of a city, a neighbourhood or an area. If you go to places such as Hay-on-Wye—even though it has been knocked by the Amazonian revolution, which I will return to—or Wigtown on the Scottish border, where they have a book festival every year, it is like going to Mecca. We all love books. We all want to read books and we all buy many more than we can read. It is an insatiable appetite because we realise the importance of books and literature.

What do we get when it comes to the bookshop? Interesting data were given to me, not directly, by Mr Richard Fuller, the Conservative MP for Bedford. He wanted to know why a bookshop trading on the high street in Bedford pays £850 a square metre in rates while somebody also selling books 11 miles away pays £50 a square metre. The first is a bookshop—I think it is Waterstones—which has to up its game, sell many more books and look for all the savings it can to pay that enormous amount of money. Then, 11 miles away on some kind of trading estate, there is a vast place, as vast as the 13 or 14 others that the company has, which pays 50 quid a square metre.

When I spoke to the noble Lord, Lord Ashton, about this, he rightly made the point that we cannot get the Government fiddling around—he did not use that term; I am paraphrasing—with the marketplace, which needs to be self-regulating and should be allowed to get on with it. But the fact is that, before the bookshop in Bedford has sold one book, the ground is uneven. The ground is so uneven that the bookshop must put more effort in. Meanwhile, the other company can sell a book and it can go out from the warehouse and zoom around the world wherever it is directed. That is not fair competition.

Another interesting fact is that a lot of these Amazon warehouses are run militarily. Amazon denied recently that it used zero-hours contracts. I would like to look into that and see the evidence. It denied that its staff were run ragged rushing around and said that they were being trained up to be more skilled in the work. But Amazon has another advantage because it has lots of cheap labour. You will find that many of these warehouses are in areas where there is no other work.

Another advantage is that, in 2014, Amazon paid in the region of £11 million for activity in the United Kingdom of £5 billion. It paid that in Luxembourg. If any one of us in this House were to spend £1 anywhere in the United Kingdom, we would expect part of it to go to the Inland Revenue—or whatever they call it now. You would expect that, would you not? But by some magic process, a lot of that activity gets removed and a lot of the money ends up somewhere else. The British pound is converted, I presume, into a US dollar and ends up in Seattle.

Bookshops are an essential part of the community. If we are to do anything about them, we will have to look upon them as a cultural resource. We will have to

look upon them as precious. A hundred years ago, most of the people I know who work in and run bookshops would probably have been working in the Church or something like that. I do not want to exaggerate but there is something sacred and spiritual about working in a bookshop. That is the impression I get. When I talk to these people, I am struck by their enthusiasm and absolute commitment to books. I have never been in a bookshop where the person actually wants to be a butcher or to be doing some other job. It is somebody who has a job and is task-oriented. They raise the culture.

I started *The Big Issue* 25 years ago. We are having our 25th birthday event on 19 October. I invite noble Lords and noble Baronesses to come along—it is not a fundraiser—and look at what we have done and what we are going to do. There are a lot of very exciting things. One of the reasons I started it was my absolute commitment to literacy. I am not talking about just the literacy of books but social literacy—the literacy of being together, of working together, of loving each other, rather than being against each other in whatever way. Since I started *The Big Issue* we have put an enormous effort into literacy, probably under my influence because I spent the first 16 years of my life unable to read and write and I had to rely on Her Majesty's Prison Service to teach me how.

All the work I have done is about literacy and social literacy. Let us defend the bookshops. Let us make bookshops work. Let us reverse the process. Let us not allow a situation where a behemoth has grown among us—Amazon—which sells 97% of all our e-books. If Amazon were a newspaper, it would be in a monopoly position and we in both Houses would be all over it. I beg to move.

2.32 pm

Baroness Rebuck (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Bird, for initiating this debate and for his spirited contribution. For me, the big issue—if I may borrow a phrase from the noble Lord—is books and their enduring importance to civil society and the extent to which both bookshops and libraries are essential to their continued success. Without both, we will not achieve 100% literacy, which is an essential aim in the 21st century and a bedrock of social mobility, social cohesion and a strong economy.

I declare an interest as a publisher and founder of two literacy charities: World Book Day for children and Quick Reads for emergent adult readers, for which Lord Bird contributed one of the first books. I am also chair of a high street bookseller campaign, Books Are My Bag, to which I will return.

Books have been central to our history—in particular, the history of ideas—and to human experience: first, painstakingly handcrafted and painted; then hot off Caxton's printing presses; then sold as sixpenny paperbacks; finally mass-marketed for a post-Second World War public hungry for self-improvement; and now digitally available at the click of an icon. From the pages of books have come fable, soap opera, knowledge, solace and inspiration for hundreds of years. Matthew Arnold, writing in 1869, believed that social equality would result from the spread of culture—

that all people could live in “sweetness and light” if exposed to the civilising influence of books. I am sure all of us here today love books. For me, as a publisher, it is a passion for discovering new talent and valuing reading as a way of changing people's lives.

The publishing industry as a whole contributes £10.2 billion a year to the UK economy, of which retail sales from books account for £5 billion, and whether we go for a hard or soft Brexit, hardcovers, softbacks and digital books will have a significant role to play in our export market in terms of jobs and growth. Last year book exports were over £1.4 billion, and Europe accounts for more than a third of that. But we do not know whether we will continue to have access to the single market, whether our exports will attract tariffs, whether we will continue unimpeded to hire the essential international staff we need, or even whether intellectual copyright will continue to be adequately protected.

The entire publishing industry supports more than 200,000 workers in the UK and there are 2,270 UK book publishers currently registered here for VAT. Most importantly, books sit at the epicentre of the UK creative industries, responsible for £84 billion of our economy annually and growing year on year. Broadway and West End hits are often adaptations of great books by British authors, such as Roald Dahl's *Matilda* or Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Film also relies on the creativity of our authors. The top three grossing film franchises of all time—“James Bond”, “Lord of the Rings” and “Harry Potter”—are based on books by UK authors. Television, too, takes inspiration from works by our finest authors, such as the late PD James and Ruth Rendell, two former distinguished and much-missed Members of your Lordships' House, and, more recently, dramatisations from “The Night Manager” to “DCI Banks” or the continuing franchise of the riveting, reinvented “House of Cards” of the noble Lord, Lord Dobbs.

The noble Lord, Lord Bird, spoke eloquently about the delicate book ecosystem and the crucial role of libraries and bookshops. They also play a vital role in developing the talented authors of the future. Ask any novelist what made them want to write and I guarantee the seed was planted when they discovered the joy of reading—a joy which began or was augmented through visits to their local library or bookshop.

Recently, many of our top authors, including Philip Pullman, Malorie Blackman and Michael Holroyd, wrote to the new Secretary of State for Culture, pointing out the crisis in the library sector. Since 2010, too many libraries—I have 343; the noble Lord, Lord Bird, said 500—have shut. Opening hours have been cut, alongside educational programmes and mobile libraries, and 8,000 trained library staff have been lost, together with hundreds of thousands of new books. There has been a 93% increase in volunteers—amazingly, this civic-minded army of helpers is larger than the entire staff of some of our well-known book chains. This is all due to the impossible choices local authorities have to make when their central budgets are slashed.

Libraries should be seen as key community centres, open to all, where, alongside books, people can rely on other essential life services. Arts Council England

[BARONESS REBUCK]

recently evoked a vision of libraries as cultural and performance hubs for local communities. Reversing the decline in library provision and ensuring that every school has its own library will be a start to reversing the decline in the literacy skills of our young. We are the only developed nation where our young people significantly underperform their elders, according to the OECD's 2012 survey. Our poor performance is also affecting our economy. It is estimated that more than 9 million adults of working age in England have low basic skills, which is costing our economy around £80 billion per year.

However, bookshops are also under pressure, as your Lordships have heard. The number of independent bookshops has halved since 2005 and they continue to be under threat, with expensive rents, as we have heard, and business rates, while their online competitors trade from warehouses in less expensive out-of-town locations. Online retailing of books has been welcomed by consumers, who can shop at any time of the day or night and have books delivered to their door. They can elect to read on an electronic reading device, most choosing a Kindle, where Amazon invested early and heavily in the UK, achieving over 90% of e-book sales.

If we want a diverse and healthy market in bookselling, we urgently need to consider the competitive landscape in both e-books and physical books. But why does any diminution of high street locations actually matter? Let market forces prevail. But bookshops bring something that online just cannot do. As bookseller Rohan Silva, a former adviser to Downing Street, says, if you buy online and click on a book by a specific author, the other books recommended to you will fall resolutely into that same category. That is not how it works in bookshops. The careful curation they bring provides for serendipity, with displays arranged to encourage discovery and staff who get to know the customers, and whom customers trust to recommend new books that may otherwise never get read.

If you know what you want and prize convenience, you will order online but if you want the serendipity of discovery, you will visit a bookshop: an exciting cultural hub where research has shown that about 70% of new book discoveries take place. Bookshops, alongside book groups, literary festivals and talks by authors lead to the enriching of our cultural life. Algorithms cannot yet replace this. They cannot replicate the eagerness, enjoyment and wonder that I saw on the faces of young children as they sat and browsed in the children's section at my local—and now sadly defunct—Books Etc. on Saturday mornings.

Watching children at a local bookshop just across the road from my daughters' school—one of London's largest state primary schools, on a housing estate in Bayswater—led me to think about how the UK could join the international celebration of World Book Day. That led to the charity, which is now in its 20th year, making a connection between schools and local bookshops. More than 13 million £1 book tokens have been given to children each year to exchange in bookshops, together with the special production of £1 World Book Day books, which are effectively free, allowing children to experience the joy of bookshop discovery and reading. But the leading creative position of UK

publishing, the global influence of British authors and the whole extended creative industries which thrive on books are in danger of collapsing if we do not have a diverse and vibrant high street for bookshops, both chains and independents, as well as a decently funded library system.

We publish hundreds of thousands of new books a year and the democratisation of access to books via print on demand or digital-only editions has encouraged an explosion of self-publishing and crowd-funded books. But very few new authors, carefully curated, funded and edited by publishers, will be discovered without choice on the high street. Our independent bookshops are the places where unlikely bestsellers are made, but for many indies it is a hand-to-mouth existence powered by passion and a love and belief in the transformative power of books, rather than the usual returns of a business. Some independents are able to develop only thanks to the philanthropy of authors such as James Patterson, whose financial grants have helped nearly 300 indies to date. From Scarborough to Surbiton and from Peckham to Penzance, independent bookshops have been awarded grants for basic repairs, renovations, new projects and storytelling corners to help boost a love of reading in the young.

Our bookshops, such as the newly refurbished Foyles in London, are temples of culture which we would be foolish to allow to wither away. This is why publishers, bookshops and authors have joined to create Books Are My Bag, a campaign initiated pro bono by the company of my friend for many years, the noble Lord, Lord Saatchi, which underlines how a passion for books and literature, and pride in our unique global contribution to letters, is an issue that resonates across parties.

I am coming to the end. The big issue is: how can government assess and help to rebalance the competitive landscape in bookselling in the UK, and encourage more people to value our bookshops before we lose them altogether? Central government also needs to address the funding deficit in local authorities, where competing essential services too often result in library closures. Our trajectory towards one library per 50,000 people is simply a disaster. We have a stark choice. If we lose our celebrated bookshops and libraries we will never improve our nation's literacy. We will also lose our next generation of authors and the source of our competitiveness in the creative industries. This simply cannot be allowed to happen.

2.44 pm

Lord Tope (LD): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Bird, for giving us this debate but, probably even more so, for the passion with which he introduced it, born not least of personal experience. I found that I agreed with pretty well everything that he said, but I particularly thank him for making reference to school libraries, as indeed did the noble Baroness, Lady Rebeck. We are all rightly concerned about the disappearance of public libraries, but less well known and recognised is the virtual disappearance of school libraries, or at least anything that could properly be called a library, particularly in primary schools. That merits far greater concern and attention. I wonder whether it will get the attention that it should until and unless it becomes

part of Ofsted inspections and schools have to pay attention to that important issue.

I declare an interest as a trustee of Cityread London, a charity that unites the whole capital every year by inviting it to read the same book together. Cityread audiences are encouraged into libraries and bookshops to take part in a high-quality arts programme that explores London's history through literature. Every April, more than 30,000 Londoners engage in a shared, cultural experience that connects us to each other and the city we call home. In addition to this ambitious Cityread London plan for mass engagement through high-profile public events with iconic partners, the charity works closely with and is led by libraries to reach communities at grass-roots level. London's libraries guide and inform Cityread's accessibility and inclusivity objectives, providing support and infrastructure for our work with specialist partners for non-English speakers, emergent readers, visually impaired readers and London's prison population. Again, I am glad that reference has rightly been made to prison, and I was interested to hear that the literacy of the noble Lord, Lord Bird, came through prison experience, another area which does not get nearly enough attention.

In the short time available today, I want to concentrate on an area I know best and of which I have most experience, particularly from 40 years as a London borough councillor, including 13 as leader of that council and the next 12, by my own choice, as cabinet member for its library service.

Until the general election, when the rules governing all-party parliamentary groups were changed, I chaired the libraries APPG. Sadly, that APPG has not been reconstituted since the general election, but I am pleased to say that working with CILIP, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, which gave us an excellent briefing for today's debate, we hope to relaunch it later this year. One of the last meetings that we had before the general election was with William Sieghart, whose panel had then just published its independent report for England. One outcome of that report was the establishment of the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce. Its then newly appointed chair was present at that meeting and gave us a commitment that he would report back to another meeting of the APPG. Sadly, there has not been another meeting of the APPG, but I hope that we will soon be able to rectify that and the chief executive of the taskforce has already agreed to come and speak to such a meeting.

After wide consultation, that taskforce has published its overall strategy document, *Ambition for Public Libraries in England*, which has been with the Minister since June. It would be good if the Minister could give us today the Government's response to that document. I suspect that is unlikely, but it would certainly be very welcome if, after those four or five months, he can now at least share with us informally—perhaps we could promise not to tell anyone—what exactly the Government's thinking is on this document and, most importantly, when we will get the proper response.

I have some particular questions to the Minister. CILIP has called for,

“the establishment of a clearly-mandated and appropriately resourced development function for public libraries”.

Will the Minister say what the Government's view is on that? It is probably even less likely that the Minister will tell us what will be in the Autumn Statement—if, indeed, he has any idea himself—but can he at least give us the department's view on CILIP's call to provide emergency relief from the closure of public libraries by local authorities? The noble Lord, Lord Bird, referred to this.

Over the past decade, the public library world has not been short of reports; there has been report after report by two successive Governments on what they could and should do. What has been singularly lacking from successive Governments—Labour, coalition and Conservative—has been any action. We look forward to hearing what the Government are going to do, not with further reports and reviews but with action.

The briefings for this debate from CILIP and the House of Lords Library give alarming figures for the decline in the public library service and in the number of professional librarians employed in it. It is an alarming picture. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, referred to this, as did the noble Baroness, Lady Rebeck. The picture is stark enough, but it is a historic picture which, by its nature, is inevitably out of date because it comes from figures reporting what happened last year or the year before. It does not look at what is going to happen or at what is happening in the current year. The outlook for local authorities is far worse now than it has been in recent years. We face a very grim outlook for the public library service.

In the past, Ministers have been very reluctant to review whether a library authority is properly fulfilling its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. There has been some indication that the new Minister may be willing to take a more robust attitude towards this. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, mentioned Lancashire, which is a case in point. In his reply, can the Minister confirm that that is indeed the case?

CILIP has described this country as being at, “the precipice of the most significant literacy and skills crisis in the post-war era”, with the UK already, “bottom of teenage literacy league-tables amongst twenty-three developed nations”.

It is unrealistic to believe that library services can be immune from the severe budget cuts that are hitting all local authorities, but in my experience library authorities are becoming increasingly polarised between the good and the bad. A good library authority recognises the wider and important role that libraries can and should play, not only at the heart of their local communities, but in making a significant contribution to the wider aims and strategies of the local authority and its partners, not least in employment and skills and in public health and well-being. That means working with partners to invest in the library service for the future, something which significantly happens in other countries in times of recession, whereas a bad library authority simply sees its libraries as out-of-date book-lending services in old and expensive buildings, often in the wrong place.

We need more good library authorities, and we need real leadership from a Government who truly understand and appreciate their importance and value.

2.53 pm

The Earl of Kinnoull (CB): My Lords, I, too, thank and congratulate the noble and energetic Lord, Lord Bird. I always admire his passion, and it would be remiss if we did not pay careful heed and attention to the warnings he has so clearly set out today.

I declare my interests as set out in the register of the House. In particular, I declare that I am chairman of Culture Perth and Kinross, the charitable trust that, *inter alia*, operates 13 library premises and four mobile libraries in Perth and Kinross. I thought it would be interesting to give the House a few facts and figures about how our regional library system is interacting with our local residents, as it indicates the extent and breadth of what a modern library systems does in its local area. I am sure it is pretty typical, and I hope that we make the bar of the good library authority set out by the noble Lord, Lord Tope.

In our area, we have about 150,000 people. Our libraries get more than 600,000 visits a year. We lend well over half a million physical items a year. I mentioned our mobile libraries. They make 105 stops every fortnight, bringing library services to remote communities, and especially to the elderly. Our online offering is growing very rapidly. It now gets more than a million visits a year and downloads are growing rapidly. To deliver these services—further to the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Rebuck—we have 120 staff and nearly 200 volunteers from our community, and we would not be able to deliver our services without those fantastic volunteers.

There is also quite a breadth in what we offer. It is not just lending books and tapes and things like that. Four of our libraries are very modern and are part of school campuses. A member of the general public can walk in off the street through one door and be presented with a good library, or you can come in from the school. This is very helpful to the schools, because it allows them to benefit from the environment of a very serious library, which is much richer than would typically have been available in a traditional school library. Certainly Perth and Kinross Council feels this is a valuable model or numbers 2, 3, and 4 would not have been built.

We are in partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland and offer a programme Benefits Advice in Libraries. Perth and Kinross is one of the poorer parts of the United Kingdom, so we can use our premises and staff to help with that sort of programme, which does what it says on the tin. We have just been awarded a lot of funding to improve our digital skills programme, which is training people in our area in digital skills. These are just a few examples of how we are engaging with our community in ways that probably would not have been done in the past.

This is made possible because we have a strong and stable staff. The average length of service of our staff is long—very long when looked at with commercial eyes—and we have a very supportive local authority. The cloud on our horizon is caused by the way in which the Scottish Government are dividing their financial cake, which seems likely to lead to cuts for us which, rather awfully, will affect most those least well off in our community. So my first question to the

Minister is: does he agree with me about the desirability of organisations such as Culture Perth and Kinross offering and continuing to offer the services that they do to their community?

I move to my second and final theme for the day. I am also a member of your Lordships' Select Committee on Social Mobility, which delivered its report in the spring. It has yet to be debated. For the nine months before that, we heard an enormous amount of oral evidence and took a huge amount of written evidence from all over the United Kingdom on a broad spectrum of social mobility issues. Two of the great common themes that arose are relevant to today: first, that the availability of good-quality careers assistance and advice was inadequate; and, secondly, that going forward people typically might have several careers during their working lives.

Today, the venues for delivering assistance and advice are largely schools, colleges and job centres. I feel that we should tool up our libraries in this regard. Once people are beyond school and college age, today the jobcentre is their only option for getting a lot of this careers advice and assistance. There is, I am afraid, some reluctance among some people to go into jobcentres for that, particularly if they are in work at the time. I do not think they would have that reluctance where libraries are concerned. Indeed, libraries represent a very good potential nexus for providing careers assistance and potentially a good venue to provide the advice.

To be clear, assistance is about having the information and helping to get access to it efficiently. Face-to-face advice is a skill set which probably lies outwith libraries, but they could provide the venue. Culture Perth and Kinross had an awayday for the board and the senior staff just last month, where we spent some hours discussing this very theme. My sense of the meeting, which is reflected in the minutes, was that the board and the senior staff thought that it was a good piece of thinking, but we certainly do not have the money to put this evolution into effect.

In closing, the eighth, and last, recommendation of our Select Committee on Social Mobility was that the Government should do a cost-benefit analysis on increased spending on careers advice, because we had a feeling that spending on careers advice was economically positive for the UK. You spend a pound, and the economic benefit to the UK was greater. Indeed, analysis has been done by the Gatsby Foundation, under the able Sir John Holman, assisted by PwC, which very much shows that. I feel that a small amount of spend on libraries to develop careers support further would pay for itself handsomely in the UK. It would also greatly assist with keeping libraries open. Accordingly, I would ask the Minister whether he would agree to look into the idea that libraries play an increased role in careers support going forward.

3.02 pm

Lord Suri (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lords, Lord Bird and Lord Ashton, for securing the time for this very important debate. We live in a services economy. In these Brexit times, when people talk of manufactured goods or rules of origin, I feel that the role of institutions in nurturing some of our

most productive industries is neglected. Libraries are one of those institutions that are a cog in the machine that drives our prosperity and plugs our current account deficit with the world.

I have recently come back from my party's conference in Birmingham, an enjoyable pilgrimage that I have been making for over two decades. While I was there, I had the pleasure of visiting the city's vast new public library. It is the 10th most popular visitor attraction in the UK, studded all around with great multicoloured rings. Inside, the warm hubbub and generously filled shelves make one feel at home. I confess that I spent more time in there than I should have—time I was meant to spend in the ICC—but I have no regrets. This was the heart of the local community, and I felt like a visitor in a welcoming home, watching children run to see if the books they wanted were in and parents enjoying the peace that brought. Those children will read widely and fruitfully, and I have no doubt that some of them will go on to be the doctors and engineers that our economy needs, especially with lower EU migration.

The educational significance of libraries often takes a back seat to the community ideals that we prioritise. Fundamentally, books can expand the mind. Studies show that when we read books, we can empathise with the characters and feel what they feel, as the author intended. I was a bookseller in Kenya, in east Africa, and owned a very large bookshop. My personal experience is that a mind open to learning, whether it is a child's or a grown-up's, is always attracted to reading books. The mere action of entering a room fringed by books helps to focus the mind on the matter at hand.

In my local shopping centre, Ealing Broadway, the second-floor library is an oasis of calm for students. Around May, the place starts to fill up, until it is full to heaving by June. There are also computers, vital for those who need to fill out online forms. The shift to online registration for council services has resulted in there being far more demand for the computers in the library.

Listening to the Chancellor's speech in Birmingham, I got the general flavour of a relaxing of the fiscal tightening we have seen since 2010. He mentioned that we must prioritise the industries that we excel in and develop the infrastructure around them. If he is serious about that, he could well start by reducing the cuts pencilled in for library budgets. Libraries have lost a quarter of all paid staff since 2009, and their budgets are due to be cut further. As they provide a space for young people to get on with their revision and learn, as well as being useful community centres, there is a clear interest in at least maintaining current funding levels. I would wholeheartedly support such a policy, as part of a new post-Brexit economic policy. The circumstances in which the previous Chancellor set his fiscal rules have changed. So should our policy.

3.07 pm

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab): My Lords, of all the places on the face of the planet where the subject we are debating might cause most surprise, it should surely be this Chamber. We are all of us formed by books, even the noble Lord, Lord Bird, who had to

wait until Her Majesty's pleasure to achieve those skills and is now a learned man able to hold his own in intellectual exchange. We are all of us the fruit of learning and intellectual activity, and nothing epitomises that better than a bookshop or a library. It seems odd to me therefore that we should be spending a couple of hours on a Thursday afternoon feeling the need to make a case for these objectives. We are the evidence that these objectives have, in our case, been achieved and we therefore stand as the living evidence before the world of the need for them when we leave this place.

However, as we are here discussing this, I had a bit of a wheeze. Our Library is a truly remarkable place, and no more remarkable service does it provide than our briefing notes for these debates. The one that it prepared for today is astonishing, and I would be surprised if anyone speaking in this debate has not dug deeply into it. I had a feeling that if I could have got four other speakers in the debate to take it in turns with me just to read the Library Note, so that it got on the record, we would have made the case in trumps. We would have saved ourselves an awful lot of time too. It is a remarkable and wonderful piece of briefing material. What does it do? It sets out, in brief form, the corners of the world and social and political activity, from which emerges the strong advice that libraries are essential to the well-being of any properly organised society. UNESCO is there; the Arts Council has done its report; even the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has commissioned work that comes to the same conclusion; the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals agrees—you would expect that, as there is a bit of a personal interest involved for its members, but at the same time they know the truth here better than anyone else—and the Booksellers Association comes to the same conclusion: libraries are good for us, and bookshops are a proper thing to expect to see on our high streets.

On cost/benefit analysis, which we heard mentioned a moment ago, the briefing note looks at the benefits in the world of economics, health and well-being, education and culture, and comes to the same conclusion all over again: this is an investment in the many facets of a properly organised and balanced social activity for a nation, community or neighbourhood. It is all there in the briefing paper but here we are fulminating, voicing our anxieties and saying we want more attention to be given to libraries and bookshops because we feel that, despite that evidence, there is a diminishing degree of investment in what ought to be an infrastructural part of a properly organised and healthy society.

In my own case, before I had any books of my own, there were libraries. I do not quite share the beginnings of the noble Lord, Lord Bird. I could read, I passed the 11-plus examination and went to a grammar school. This debate and the previous one actually belong together; in terms of social mobility, they are two sides of the same coin. My brother, who failed, did not read, although he was as intelligent as I was. It took the trade union movement to give him his opportunity to be socially mobile as a shop steward and then as a regional organiser, and then he was offered a place at Ruskin College, Oxford, this boy who failed the 11-plus and did not know how to read—most extraordinary.

[LORD GRIFFITHS OF BURRY PORT]

For me, though, it was the Burry Port public library that fed me intellectually at a time when I could not afford books. When I became a student of English literature—I got a degree in it and went on to teach at the University of Wales—it took me until I was 16 to have a book to put on a shelf at all. What would have happened to me, for all that my grammar school was brilliant, if I had not had a library at my disposal, as well as the working men's club with its newspapers and its intellectual exchanges? Remarkable intellectual resources were available. Yet here we are, at this point in our nation's history, thinking that all the advances in which we can ascribe some importance to these social developments are now under threat. It is a sad day indeed.

If you go into a library, what do you see? You see child reading circles, all the way through to interlibrary loans. Do they still exist? I used to be able to milk the interlibrary loan system for brilliant books from all over the world. Just fill in the form, come back in a fortnight and you have the book you want. I did not have to go to the Bodleian or the Cambridge University library for those books; I had them in Burry Port, a tiny backwater in south Wales. I hope that does not go on the record. They will never forgive me if they hear me call them that.

We are living at a time when information is increasingly in the private domain, with people looking at their screens. I am not a Luddite and it is fantastic that you can find what you want by pressing a button, but that robs you of lateral interests and cross-referential possibilities, of having two or three things open on the table so that you can see how things work out together. Then there is social interaction—"Have you read so-and-so?". Put two or three people together and you have an informal seminar in a minute. Libraries offer safe space, at a dangerous time, for children and vulnerable people to sit and enjoy social activity and to be together in each other's company. We do ourselves no service if we rob ourselves of facilities of this kind and if we do not see that the money put into developing libraries in this way is not a drain on the public purse but an investment in the future of the country. It is simple—a no-brainer.

There is a question that has been referred to already which I would like the Minister to resolve. I think the 1964 Act makes it clear, but none the less the department says:

"In considering how best to deliver the statutory duty each library authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs and to deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources".

The responsibility is put squarely on the local authority. Yet the Act says that,

"it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act".

That seems to be a contradiction; I would like it resolved, and I wonder if the Minister will do that for us. Is the Secretary of State right to discharge his duty simply by passing the buck to the local authority? No;

I see the Minister's head being shaken, and that reassures me. I hope the shaking of the head will lead to a torrent of words in passionate defence of the principle that I am adumbrating so that I can go home and have a cup of tea with some contentment.

It should be a truth universally acknowledged that any civilised society worthy of the name must be in want of libraries.

3.16 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, it is interesting to follow the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, for the simple reason that I am the person who has taken part in both debates so far today. Before I go into my own relationship with literature—such relationships seem to be a theme of this debate—I would like to say a bit about libraries. Libraries have to be the easiest and cheapest way of having outreach into the community by local or national government. They are instantly accessible. I remember going to the library and leaving with recycling bags, leaflets about road closures and transport plans, and information about new planning structures. Everything was available as you walked past, rather than leaflets coming through the door that get thrown away along with pizza delivery menus. You could see them and relate to them, which made it all more real. If we do not ensure that that aspect of libraries is there, all their functions other than just issuing books will suffer.

Libraries also offer decent online computer access—something that easier to use than struggling with the phone. All these things happen in one place, with support, structure and people behind you. That is important in delivering local and national services or engaging on a voluntary basis, and that is what we have to look at. If we damage that, we damage everything that happens at libraries and make things more expensive. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, spoke about our saving today but having to make huge investments tomorrow in order to catch up on the things we have missed out on—leaving holes to which we simply apply an emergency patch.

Books are the dominant way in which we engage with culture in our society. I speak as a dyslexic who knows—I think this is something I share with the noble Lord, Lord Bird—that if you are trying to become a fully formed part of the culture of our society, access to books is very important, as is your feeling welcome when you access them. Good libraries and bookshops encourage you to expand your breadth of activity. I have to admit a great sin here: I will be the first person to confess to buying books from Amazon. As has been mentioned, you get a nice list of things it thinks you will read—because of course, we only read one type of book. Occasionally we might indeed fall into that trap, but a good bookshop suggests other things you might want to try; its recommendations make things slightly more interesting. Indeed, sometimes bad bookshops are even better because they confuse you and make you dive around for what you are looking for—you have to work a bit harder. Like the noble Lord, I like the idea of the wonderful world of bookshops that reach out to you personally and say, "Come in. Things are available. Interact with them". We have to ensure that this is encouraged and that we do not get rid of it.

We also need to make sure that the big online monster that is Amazon realises that the appetite for literature it is feeding is initially fed by bookshops and libraries, which encourage people to read that extra book, to engage and fill the gaps. I live nearly nine miles from my closest bookshop, and Amazon has a perfect way in, a justification for fulfilling my needs if I do not want to get into a car to go to that bookshop. We must make sure that Amazon realises that if it engages with this sector, we will not be that unfriendly, because it does address a need. We must make sure it pays its way.

Also, let us be slightly optimistic. I can remember when Waterstones was the big, bad enemy in the book world, when it was taking out all the small people. That was only a few years ago. It was opposing things and stopping diversity in the market. It is not now. It is now seen as part of the friendly group. It has changed its style, or has simply been overtaken. It is important to engage and make sure that we get out there. Libraries, bookshops and so on allow us to engage. If we can encourage them all to work together, they will complement each other. We need to make sure that Amazon does not put itself in the position of being the enemy. Public opinion, and indeed parliamentary opinion, eventually catches up. How long will we put up with somebody saying, "We are dodging this"? We have gone after most of the big companies that have done this, and most of them have decided that it is not worth running away. How much pressure are we putting on to make sure that companies such as Amazon are seen to be at least contributing to such activities, and engaging and supporting? We can go too far in addressing them all as one huge monster, but they have to be encouraged to see that there is a benefit in supporting and helping each other. Without that, we will lose the thing that allows us to access literature: supplying books in a way that makes us engage and look for new ways forward, ways to engage with other forms of literature.

We have not really mentioned books on disc, which is another important way into literature. Being dyslexic, I admit that I have many such books and can access them only through that means. Anything written in dialect might as well be written in ancient Latin, as I cannot get on with it. It is the way that many people interact with literature. Encouraging that brings us back to libraries, which are a very good source of making sure that one can engage with literature. If a well written book is being read to you by somebody else, you are still experiencing literature and interacting with it, and you can still become a part of the intellectual life of your nation. The worst thing is not to have access to that; you are cut off from something that is often designed as mass communication and entertainment—and then we put a little stamp on it later on, saying that it is intellectual. I wonder what Shakespeare would make of the fact that people are reading his plays as they sit in the audience, as opposed to listening to the actors. That is just a little aside.

If we are to encourage the utility of libraries and the richness that bookshops give, we must start to think in the round and slightly more long term to see how they feed off each other and support each other. Without that we are in danger of cutting away large chunks of what gives civilised life that little bit of comfort.

3.24 pm

Baroness Hollins (CB): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend on initiating this debate and speaking so personally and passionately. When I was six, my parents were told that I would never learn to read but it was a good thing that I had blonde hair and blue eyes. My mother took me home and taught me to read, and introduced me to books and libraries, and I have been passionate about books ever since.

My remarks will focus on libraries, although many of my comments could relate equally to bookshops. My main question is whether the general duty,

"to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons,"

as outlined in the Public Libraries and Museums Act, is in fact being met with respect to an often excluded group: people with learning disabilities, who were not mentioned in the Library briefing note.

I know of few initiatives in public libraries that welcome them. Shared reading groups offered by the Reader Organisation are open to readers and non-readers alike, to listen to literature read aloud and discuss what they have heard—but many people with learning disabilities struggle with oral storytelling because making sense of words takes them longer and they lack the confidence to participate. The good news is that their visual literacy is usually much stronger, and a preferred and good channel of communication.

Most people with learning disabilities have never used a library, and there is a lack of suitable books on the shelves for people who find pictures easier than words. Books Beyond Words, the charitable company that I set up five years ago as a spin-off from St George's, University of London, is trying to rectify this. I declare an interest as the founder, editor and board chair, and also because my disabled son is a member of a Beyond Words book club supported by the Surrey library service. I hope that noble Lords will be patient with me while I explain the rationale behind this novel approach.

Beyond Words, in partnership with public libraries, has been developing book clubs in some London boroughs, Worcestershire, Kent, Medway and elsewhere in the south-east for adults whose visual literacy is far superior to their word literacy. The county that has taken this further than any other is Kent, where 16 different libraries now offer regular monthly or bi-monthly book clubs, and 10 special schools are starting book clubs for the senior students. These clubs will transition to a community library as school leaving approaches. I hope that their local libraries will survive because these are people who do not have easy access to transport.

The book clubs generally start with books from the 50-strong series published by Books Beyond Words. They are wordless books that tell stories in pictures to help people explore and understand their own experiences, and to learn about adult life and how to cope with its bigger challenges, such as love and relationships, health, death and crime. All the books explore relationships and emotions—perhaps unsurprisingly, given my background as the psychiatrist and psychotherapist. As there are no words, the group members look at pictures in turn, describing and discussing what they

[BARONESS HOLLINS]

see and co-creating the story. Unlike in other book clubs, no pre-reading is required. It all happens in the club. Members can then be encouraged to borrow the books to reread at their leisure later. Some people who can read words say that they still prefer books without words since they can understand the story and the characters at a deeper level.

When one book has been finished, group members choose what they would like to read at the next meeting. At a recent book club in Epsom, co-facilitated by my son, the book club members were looking at the books on the library shelves to see what they might read next. One woman picked up books on epilepsy and diabetes, as she has both conditions. She then picked up the book *When Dad Died* and held it close to her. She was a little tearful and told the group that her dad had died and that she missed him. This prompted other group members to talk about their bereavements. The group agreed to read the book together at a future meeting. These books help people access and share their feelings and their own stories and support each other.

One school group in Kent catches the bus between the school and the library to get to the book club. It is a busy library and the group members are part of the life of the library—reading their books, talking and signing about the stories, guessing what comes next. Their teachers consider the whole experience to be a really useful part of their education, preparing them for their next steps in a very practical and enjoyable way. Many of these book clubs undertake what was called the Six-book Challenge, and is now called Reading Ahead. This national event is organised by the Reading Agency and supported by local libraries. When six books have been read individually or in a group, Beyond Words clubs host a small event to celebrate, with a certificate or a gift.

Many book club members may take a while to feel at home in a library for a variety of reasons. But book club meetings present a perfect opportunity to look for other books and return loans. Members learn how to use electronic devices for registering their loans and are soon keen to show other library users how to do this. Librarians guide them, offering suggestions on books that they might like. The Kent main libraries have a dedicated set of shelves for quick reads and easy read material, and other examples that people have then chosen include illustrated books on ABBA, trains, sport or cookery.

My experience is that libraries want to be as inclusive as possible but do not always have the skills and knowledge that they need. Sometimes they might have books without words, but no one reads them as they do not know where they are or how to use them. Training is usually necessary, with both librarians and volunteers quickly learning what works and how to sustain it. Once librarians have understood the needs of a group of people who are not generally library users, they become enthusiastic supporters. They observe people enjoying themselves and benefiting from books, as well as learning to use the library.

The first steps after deciding to host a book club are usually very simple—identifying a quiet place to meet, creating a shelf for suitable books and advertising

the plan to partners and community groups locally. This is very important because people have to be recruited to come as new users. Book clubs then develop in a range of ways and expand beyond their original remit. For example, one group helped local hospital staff learn about books in this series that help people access healthcare, and another invited a policeman to come to the club after reading a book about criminal justice and was then invited to visit the police station. Several groups have gone on to explore art books for stories or visited the National Gallery or their local art gallery. Nine book groups in Kent obtained funding from the Arts Council, in partnership with Kent libraries and the Skillnet Group, to co-create three short stories in a new fantasy series called *Picture This*. The groups imagine the stories with artists and are proud now to have their own copies and see their own creation on the shelves of their local library, and available for others to buy.

Libraries and bookshops should be important parts of all communities, to support the widest possible range of people, including disabled people, to socialise, enjoy and learn. Libraries are free, warm and welcoming, and usually provide a disability-friendly environment. This is so important for people with such a low rate of employment—less than 10% of people with learning disabilities are in work. But belonging to a book club can provide a chance for a member to move into volunteering, as happened when Julie became a volunteer at Deal and Dover libraries and now helps to run book clubs for other people with learning disabilities.

The reduction in skilled staff in libraries and the threats to bookshops come at a very exciting time in the history of learning disability. More people than ever before aspire to a life of full participation rather than one of care. We should never underestimate the personal, social and cultural capital that comes from belonging to and participating in such valued mainstream activities and facilities. Does the Minister agree that public libraries and bookshops are ideal places to introduce people with learning disabilities to the world of books, if they and their supporters know that they will be assured of an appropriate offering and a warm welcome? Libraries and bookshops are safe places for vulnerable people to meet each other, to develop friendships through sharing their stories, and to develop their visual literacy in a supportive and enjoyable setting.

3.33 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I, too, add my congratulations the noble Lord, Lord Bird, for securing this debate. I want to speak today about the future of libraries and other shared community spaces in rural areas, as a vital contributor to rural sustainability. I should declare an interest as the president of the Rural Coalition, which brings together a range of rural interest groups, and as a bishop responsible for a large number of rural parishes across Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

As noble Lords will know, rural areas face particular challenges when it comes to connecting with the wider world. Many rural towns and villages can be hard to reach by public transport, while telecommunications

access can be very poor indeed. Around 1.5 million rural households struggle with an inadequate or non-existent broadband connection. This lack of connectivity means that many of those who live within rural communities, particularly the most isolated rural communities, can be heavily reliant on local services when it comes to connecting to the wider world. Isolation is one of the greatest threats to rural life, and shared community services and spaces such as libraries provide the best way in which to combat that threat.

The problem, of course, is that rural services have much lower footfall than their urban counterparts, which in turn limits the amount of investment and support that local authorities and companies are willing to provide. Rural libraries can be difficult to justify at a time of severe budget constraints. A 2013 Defra report concluded that the future of rural library provision lay in increased economies of scope—that is, reducing cost through diversification of service provision—rather than trying to increase economies of scale. Rural areas need libraries that are co-designed with other services and local spaces, whether that be the post office, a local cafe or shop, a village hall or, indeed—and this suggestion was sadly lacking from the final Defra report—even the local church.

In this internet age, there is less need for libraries that provide an enormous reference section, and far more need for many of the alternative services that libraries can provide, such as Sure Start and other children's services; internet access for those who do not have their own connection; IT advice and support for those who lack digital literacy; and, indeed, a simple space for members of the community to meet. In some particularly rural and remote communities, the books themselves do not even need to be present the entire week round. A number of noble Lords have talked about mobile libraries, which can ensure access to books for a number of different communities. They have been operating for decades. I remember as a child in the tiny hamlet where I was brought up that once a week the mobile library would arrive and we would all queue up and go in and get our books.

What is required is that shared community space, a platform from which these vital services can be provided. This is not simply about protecting the spaces and libraries that we already have—many rural villages have been operating without an adequate library service for years. We need to empower local communities to reimagine existing community spaces, helping them to refurbish these areas, staff them, very often with volunteers, bring in new equipment and, vitally, connect them to the internet, so that they can provide a connectivity hub for the local community.

At this point, my interests as a bishop in the Church of England should become clear, because the Church of England is the guardian of 10,199 rural community spaces, which we call parish churches. These churches are important to those who use them as a place of worship on a regular basis and to those who mark significant moments in life through baptisms, weddings and funerals. That remains our core business, but it must be remembered that the use of these buildings is not restricted to Christian worship. Our churches are buildings for the whole community, not just the faithful.

In some cases, they are the last public building remaining open in a small rural community, and form a tangible link with the past as a source of local identity.

In recent years, the Church of England has rediscovered a medieval concept of the nave belonging to the local community and being a place that can be used more widely and made more accessible to the wider public. Noble Lords will be aware of the role that the Church has taken in providing foodbanks and debt advice. Sometimes they meet in the church itself; there is a rising wave of imaginative adaptation of church buildings for wider community use, which has breathed new life into them. An increasing number now house a village shop, a post office or a digital hub, and there is real scope for adapting local churches to provide some of the vital services that libraries can bring. St Peter's in Peterchurch, Hereford, is a brilliant example of how a local church can be adapted to better serve the local community's needs, with a children's centre, a coffee shop and a fully functioning library, beautifully adapted to a place of worship which reaches the whole community through a volunteer-run transport scheme.

As I said previously, a vital aspect of any rural community hub is internet provision, something which many rural libraries already provide, and here church towers or church spires can provide new possibilities in those hard-to-reach areas. I know that conversations have already been held between the Church of England, DCMS and Defra about using church spires to wirelessly connect rural spaces to good-quality broadband. This is something that I hope we will be able to explore further in the future.

Reimagining how communities use their local churches is easier said than done. Communities themselves can be reluctant to allow changes to be made to their public spaces and, even when they are willing, the process of redesign does not come cheaply. St Peter's secured funding for its redesign through a range of initiatives, including LEADER and the Rural Development Programme—both funded through the EU. Future post-Brexit funding streams will need to become available if further schemes are to become viable.

I hope, however, that the Minister recognises that there is some potential here for the Church and the Government, along with many other rural community organisations, to work, both locally and nationally, more closely together when it comes to the future of rural services—libraries being just one very good example of that—so that we can ensure the future sustainability of rural communities across our nation.

3.41 pm

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, I am very grateful to my noble friend Lord Bird for the opportunity to speak in this debate. When I was a teenager and in my 20s when I could not afford to buy books, the local library—a very well-stocked library—was in many ways my window on the world, a chance to learn about other cultures. My own passion was for books on art. This was a time, too, when bookshops seemed to be thinner on the ground than even today, when we have had so many recent closures.

Today, with the ability to buy books online from Amazon, AbeBooks—which is owned by Amazon—and other retailers, there is at least in theory a greater

[THE EARL OF CLANCARTY]

potential for people to access books. Yet you can walk into some homes today—middle-class homes—and there is not a single book in sight. It would seem that so many people got rid of books in favour of the internet and, perhaps, e-books. This shift in culture against books will have of course affected the poorest among us, who do not have access to the internet.

There are fundamental questions about how important books and libraries are in 2016. There are questions about how literate you can be using only, or mainly, the internet and how much we ought to redefine what literacy means in the digital age. Nevertheless, the libraries expert, Sue Charteris, in a University of Liverpool newsletter in 2012, pointed to the UNESCO report that indicated that reading for pleasure is the single best indicator of social mobility, with the UK currently rated 47th out of 65 nations in this regard. Within this context, she made the observation that: “Those that need”—a library service—

“most are the ones that don’t know they need it”.

I would say that they are the ones who have not discovered reading for pleasure, which is not necessarily something that a school will teach you, at least not by itself. I echo the concern of the noble Lord, Lord Tope, about disappearing school libraries.

It is useful to put that UNESCO finding next to this year’s widely reported OECD study on basic skills, which found that, out of 23 countries of the developed world, England has the lowest of all literacy rates for 16 to 19 year-olds. I thought that it might be interesting to compile a few statistics of my own on libraries, based on the countries in the OECD study. Finland, which is close to the top of the literacy table, has one library per 6,900 people. Germany, whose literacy levels are significantly higher than ours but lower than Finland’s, has one library per 7,900 people. The UK, at the bottom of the table, has one library per 17,000 people. Korea has been building hundreds of libraries in the last few years and is at the top of the table. Of course, these are rough stats that do not tell the whole story; nevertheless, we are going in entirely the opposite direction to Korea. We are rapidly closing libraries, which in itself will send out a strong signal to younger people about the value that society now places on libraries and, therefore, books in whatever context. And this is despite the clear love that much of the British public have for libraries and the protests about closures that we hear about, almost on a daily basis.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy found that the number of people borrowing books in the UK halved from 1997 to 2014. To a certain extent, the internet has of course been a factor—something that has affected many countries. Yet, it is how different countries have reacted to this that makes the difference. In Germany, the reaction has been to increase opening hours, including trial opening on Sundays; to make libraries appealing not just to small children but to young people generally; and to ensure that libraries lend e-books. This has all led in the past two years to an increase in the use of its libraries. In Germany, e-books represent only 6% of book sales, so the country is already trying to cover all bases. But such

strategies of course require an investment which our Government seem currently unwilling to make. It should be added that, with around 80% of sales, the physical book is still the dominant culture within the UK and, recently, sales have gone up.

In the wider society, books need to appeal to everyone, not just the middle classes. Literacy will improve only if reading becomes second nature—libraries ought then to have a huge part to play. At present, however, for too many young people, libraries are desperately uncool, not just because of the dominance of the internet but because there is no investment, they are being closed and books are being sold off. It is a downward spiral and, the more libraries we lose, the more our literacy problem is going to get worse because schooling does not exist in a vacuum. Libraries are part of the wider social context. A belief in libraries is a belief in books. I emphasise that by libraries I mean public libraries, not volunteer libraries, because it has to be a belief recognised by society at large.

As many other noble Lords have pointed out, the latest statistics on closures are, of course, appalling. The BBC’s survey in March discovered that about 8,000 jobs have disappeared and some 340 libraries closed in the last six years, with over 100 more expected this year. I have no doubt that the statutory requirement for libraries as set out in the 1964 Act has been breached in some—perhaps many—local authorities. Paul Maynard MP seems to think so about library services in Lancashire. But the fact is that libraries, like local museums and cultural services generally, are in the front line of cuts that affect all public services and get worse every year. I certainly do not blame most local authorities for what is the fault of central government. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Bird, that we absolutely need to get rid of austerity. But if we did that, we would also no doubt plough back funding into not just libraries but all else which alleviates poverty such as proper welfare and proper social care, because in the end, of course, illiteracy is caused by poverty. The closure of libraries is itself a form of poverty: it is the poverty of access to culture, literacy and reading for pleasure.

My final point about libraries particularly concerns living authors. I thank the Authors’ Licensing and Collecting Society for the briefing on this. Without authors there would be no readers and we would not have libraries full stop. Volunteer libraries are part of the great British spirit but I believe very strongly that they should not be a substitute for properly funded public libraries. Nevertheless, book counts towards PLR remuneration could easily be made at these libraries, otherwise authors will lose out, and the Public Lending Right Act 1979 can be amended to include them. PLR should also be extended to remote e-book lending. Do the Government have plans to introduce this change into the upcoming Digital Economy Bill?

3.49 pm

Baroness Blackstone (Lab): My Lords, I declare an interest as I chair the board of the British Library. I was also the Minister at DCMS some years ago whose remit covered libraries. That gave me an opportunity to understand much better than I think I had before what a wonderful contribution our libraries make.

Other speakers have spoken eloquently about the many valuable roles of public libraries and the fact that local authorities have a statutory duty to provide comprehensive and efficient library services under the 1964 Act. I shall briefly reinforce what has been said with respect to their role in education before going on to describe a particular project which has been developed by the British Library. From the time I took my then small children to my local library in quite a poor part of central London to browse in the children's section and then to select books which they could take home—at first to have read to them and then later, when they were older, to read for themselves—I have believed passionately in libraries' educational role. This is a passion I share with the noble Lord, Lord Bird. Like other speakers in this debate, I am very grateful to him for both securing the debate and the spirited way in which he introduced it.

As I am sure all noble Lords taking part in this debate agree, reading and literacy are central to every child's learning. Those who are slow to read and grasp the essentials of literacy will be greatly disadvantaged in their levels of achievement across all other subjects. Moreover, if they fall behind, it is often hard to catch up and their opportunities for further education and fulfilling jobs will be seriously damaged. We know, for example, from an OECD study that 40% of unemployed adults have low basic skills.

A love of books is best instilled early and public libraries can play a vital role in developing the habit of reading through hosting book clubs and running reading programmes. The noble Baroness, Lady Hollins, mentioned book clubs, which can be very valuable for children as well as adults. Public libraries also have an important role in collaborating with primary schools, welcoming visits from groups of children with their teachers. This is especially valuable in areas where parents are unaware of their local library and what it can offer. For older children libraries also offer a quiet haven where they can study in the evening and on Saturdays, doing their homework and preparing for public exams. In this way libraries have a role in mitigating the inequality that derives from cramped and noisy homes, where concentration for these children and young people is truly difficult. For adults, libraries have played and still are playing a helpful role in developing information and computer literacy skills. They also have an invaluable role as sources for wider lifelong learning.

For these educational reasons alone the closure of public libraries over the last five years is a disaster. More than 500 libraries have closed over a five-year period. A further 111 closures are planned over the coming year. Can the Minister say what the Government plan to do to stem these closures? Can he assure the House that they will find ways of preventing the implementation of these plans? Can he say what financial help the Government will give to local authorities to maintain libraries to fulfil their statutory functions, so that places such as Lancashire—mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Bird—which has decided recently to close 29 libraries, reducing the number from 73 to 44, can rescind these plans? Can he also say what the timetable is for the recently announced review by the

Secretary of State at DCMS? As the noble Lord, Lord Tope, said, what we want now is action rather than yet more reviews.

I turn to the role of public libraries in supporting economic growth and the part the British Library plays, working with public libraries to develop entrepreneurship and foster new businesses. As I am sure we all agree, libraries are an essential part of the knowledge economy. They are often at the heart of communities, provide both a physical space and usually digital access, and are well placed to be entrepreneurial hubs. The scheme that was launched in London at the British Library was to provide a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs, in particular from the creative, media and technological industries. It has since been expanded so that there is now a network of eight business and IP centres in libraries across the UK, in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Northamptonshire and Exeter, and Hull and Norfolk libraries are also joining the network. These centres provide advice and support, knowledge resources around funding, business development and IP protection, along with workshops, networking and research services.

An independent evaluation has found that over the 10 years that the London scheme has operated at St Pancras, more than 5,000 businesses and 10,000 jobs have been created for Londoners. Some 49% of the businesses started with the help of the centre are owned by women and 32% by black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, compared with 20% and 8% across the UK for new businesses which have not had such support. Small businesses which use the service are four times more likely to succeed and be sustainable; only 10% failed after the third year of trading, as against 40% to 50% in similar schemes that lack the support these centres provide. Similar figures are emerging for centres in libraries outside London, which have not been going for quite so long, and where it was also found that a quarter of users were unemployed or had been made redundant when they came to those centres. Therefore, the scheme provides an amazing service for people who are struggling because they are out of work, but have an interesting idea to set up a new business. I could give many good examples of businesses that have succeeded through these schemes, but I do not have enough time to provide them.

I have described this scheme and told this story to illustrate how libraries can help create jobs and contribute to economic growth, as well as all the things they do for education, culture and local communities by providing information to people who need it and have no other way to find it. I hope that the Minister will acknowledge this important economic role and that the Government will act to maintain our public library system, so that the current situation does not continue and it is able to expand and develop its work.

3.57 pm

Lord Crisp (CB): My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend Lord Bird on securing this debate and on the passionate and well-informed way in which he introduced it. I am glad he has done so because it is the sort of area which we could easily overlook, particularly when faced with the big, pressing issues around Brexit, although it is part of the texture of life

[LORD CRISP]

for many people in this country. I make a very modest declaration of interest in that I have a number of books in print, and therefore I guess that from time to time I secure a small income courtesy of libraries and independent bookshops.

There are many interesting points in the briefings which our excellent Library has produced for us. The most striking and staggering one has already been mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Rebuck, and my noble friend Lord Clancarty, which is that our young people are less literate than our pensioners. We are the only OECD country and probably the only country in the world where this is the case. This is the complete reverse of what is happening elsewhere in the world, where people are trying to increase their skills and wealth and get better life chances for younger people moving up through the generations. If you like, it is development in reverse. It seems similar to that other dreadful projection we know of, that life expectancy for our grandchildren will be lower than it is for ourselves. If there were any worrying signs of a civilisation in decline, these would be two of the sort of ones you would look for.

I am going to talk about health and well-being, and not just the cultural, civic and educational significance of libraries, although they go very closely together. First, I shall refer to three major problems of modern life which impact enormously on our health and well-being: child development; loneliness, particularly in older age; and mental illness. They all affect health but none of them is within the control of the NHS and the curative health services. We have entered an era where the major causes of illness are outside the control of the NHS, and we have to think again about what we need to do. There is an old African saying which sums it up rather well: "Health is made at home, hospitals are for repairs". Bearing that in mind, perhaps I may think about those three problems in the context of libraries and booksellers.

First, on child development, there are dreadful figures showing that only 50% of children in this country pass all their development tests by the age of five—in other words, that they are ready and fit to go to school and to learn. Literacy is at the absolute heart of this. The ability to read leads to so much else, as others have already said, and libraries have a vital role to play. I shall give your Lordships a concrete example.

A few years ago, the Scottish Government initiated the early years programme with the great ambition of making Scotland the healthiest and best place in the world to grow up. They set about doing that by bringing together the various government departments, and they set out a number of interventions. Surprising as it may sound, one of the major interventions was encouraging parents to read their children bedtime stories. That has all kinds of implications relating to books, imagination and, of course, human contact. If you adopt that sort of approach, recognising the importance of those sorts of things in creating healthy and resilient children for the future, you will realise that it means we need libraries. We cannot buy all the books that our children might want to read; we need libraries to supply them so that there is a regular supply of books for bedtime storytelling.

Libraries provide so much more for children, such as access to the internet and computing, which not everyone has at home. Libraries are not the enemy of IT but part of the revolution, adapting to a changing world. They also provide for people with particular needs, as my noble friend Lady Hollins said so eloquently.

I turn to the subject of older people. Loneliness in our society has a health risk which has been calculated to be equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. This is partly about how modern society is organised, with a lack of meeting places, people leading isolated lives, distant families and divorce, all of which put pressure on people. We also know from medical evidence that people who are lonely get well more slowly, and we understand the impact and importance of high morale in older people. There is some very clear evidence that a healthy old age derives from being healthy when you get to 60, having some meaning in life and having a good social network. Again, libraries are part of the solution here: they are about older people meeting and swapping books. I remember that when I was a community worker in Liverpool years ago, older people used the library very much as a meeting place. They swapped books and, just in case they forgot, they wrote their initials in the back of each book when they had read it. I am sure that librarians hated that; on the other hand, they provided a great service to the community.

This is not a sentimental retro-vision of the 1950s. Libraries and independent book shops are not about going back and trying to stop change. They have to adapt and embrace change, and we have heard many good examples of that. I was particularly struck by the noble Lord, Lord Addington, pointing out that they are in many ways the front door to local government and, as such, could be developed still further.

I turn to a case where libraries are specifically working on a health issue—that is, mental health. The excellent briefing from our own Library tells us that, in June 2013, the Reading Agency and the Society of Chief Librarians developed a programme called Reading Well Books on Prescription. This was about ensuring the availability of a whole range of books, chosen by experts, about mental health and depression, and how to handle some of these issues ourselves. I gather that half a million people have used this service and that 90% of them rated it as having been useful. This seems to be a very valuable approach that a library can take in targeting a particular condition or range of conditions, and it may need to be expanded. I understand that Health Education England is working with libraries precisely to expand this sort of programme.

I do not want to exaggerate the importance of libraries and reading for health, but I hope to make the case that they have a significant role to play and are part of a wider trend. We tend to think of the NHS, health professionals and politicians as being responsible for our health, just as we think of teachers, schools and politicians as being responsible for our education. While they all have fundamental roles, of course, they cannot do it by themselves and we would not want them to. Education is not just about schools, and health is not just about the NHS.

Our health system at the moment is severely under strain, and we know that the NHS cannot reach everywhere. It cannot deal with child development,

loneliness in old age, causes of stress and mental ill-health. It can only, as the African might say, deal with the repairs. Everyone has a role to play: employers, educators, planners and libraries. That is why my noble friend Lord Bird and I, with others, have written a “Manifesto for a healthy and health-creating society” that we published in the *Lancet* last Saturday. I will not talk about the detail here, but it makes the point that we need in our country—not just for health reasons—healthy and resilient communities and individuals. Libraries can and should be part of this. Or I could just say, as an African might, health is made at home and in the community.

I do not suppose that anyone is actively trying to destroy libraries, but there is a danger of our destroying part of the fabric of our life almost by accident. We are getting rid of something valuable and which could have an even more valuable role in the future if a bit more imagination and vision were applied to the issue. Let me ask two questions. Do the Minister and this Government understand the actual and potential wider role that libraries can play in building strong, resilient and healthy communities? If so, what are he and they doing to make sure that this potential is realised?

4.06 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Bird, not only for initiating this debate but for his very powerful opening speech. I also thank my noble friend Lord Griffiths, because he reminded me of my own childhood. I was a secondary-modern boy who failed his 11-plus, and for me, the library opened up a world of knowledge and imagination that I simply could not obtain at home.

Libraries are a practical tool and a vital public space for individuals and families across the country. They are a resource for parents with young children, schoolchildren without a place to work at home, jobseekers trying to gain new skills and employment, elderly people living in isolation, and community groups. Increasingly, as we heard from my noble friend, they are an incubator for new ideas and businesses to come to fruition.

In Questions to Ministers, I have raised the importance of the Secretary of State exercising his responsibility under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Because these responsibilities have not been widely understood, the withdrawal of financial and political support for public libraries in England has gone unchecked. The last time that a Secretary of State used powers to order an inquiry into whether a local authority was fulfilling its statutory duties was in 2009. Yet Ministers have said that this is the first Government to review every closure. Apart from Lancashire, which was mentioned recently, will the Minister tell us how many councils they have actually intervened on since 2010 and to what effect? The reality is that Ed Vaizey, the Minister for most of this time, refused to intervene in any library reductions whatsoever. Despite having the resources of his department at his disposal, he preferred to rely on desktop research to assess library closures.

The government figure touted was totally at odds with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, independent BBC research, and what

the public could see happening to their local libraries. As we have heard from noble Lords, the BBC said, from its research, that over the last six years 343 libraries closed. Of those, 132 were mobile services. Since that research the numbers have increased. The number of paid staff in libraries fell from 31,977 in 2010 to 24,044, a drop of 7,933—25% of paid staff cut in the 182 local authorities that provided comparable data. A further 174 libraries have been transferred to community groups, while 50 have been handed over to external organisations to run. This is alongside a reduction of £180 million since 2010.

Of course, the Government have also recently announced their intention to withdraw central revenue support grant, meaning that local authorities will fund local services such as libraries from local revenues, including council tax, 100% retention of the business rate and the new homes bonus. The reality is that the Government are slashing local government finance to the bone and leaving local authorities to pick up the pieces. Sadly, when many library services were under threat we had a Minister with no sense of urgency, no coherent strategy or strategic direction, no guidance for local authorities and no idea what might be the minimum acceptable outcome.

When the *Independent Library Report for England* was published in 2014, the Opposition very much welcomed its conclusions. There was a good case for a body to support development, innovation and best practice, including measures to find efficiency savings and increase impact, helping to lessen the pressure for cuts to services. That is why we supported the review's conclusion to establish the libraries task force. With cross-party and organisational working at the heart of its activities, with functions far wider than the sole advisory function of its predecessor, the ACL, and with its focus on delivery, it is the best hope to retain the library service in our country.

The libraries task force has already focused on the role that libraries play in improving digital access and literacy, and with Arts Council England has enabled universal wi-fi coverage in public libraries in England. Since the Arts Council took over responsibility for supporting and developing libraries from the former Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, it has made available £6 million of lottery funding to create cultural events in libraries to ensure they become and retain a community space. We have had further investment of more than £1.5 million to help local authorities work better together and have supported a range of national initiatives, including reading, digital and health issues that we have heard about in the debate. The Arts Council has also confirmed in a recent announcement, in its approach for its 2018-22 round of support, that libraries will be eligible to apply for all their funding programmes wherever proposals meet the Arts Council's published aims. We are seeing innovation and new uses for libraries.

Since it was established, the libraries task force has, among other things, worked with partners including BT, Barclays and the Tinder Foundation to build digital skills in communities. It has continued, as we heard from my noble friend, to support the expansion of the British Library's business and IP centre network

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

to support small businesses, and it has published two toolkits: *Libraries Shaping the Future: Good Practice Toolkit*, in December 2015, and *Community Managed Libraries: Good Practice Toolkit* in 2016.

As we have heard from many noble Lords, in March 2016 the task force published its draft document, *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021*. After its publication, a consultation period ran until 3 June. The document does not provide all the answers, especially as funding will remain the biggest issue, but it is a road map for future developments, emphasising the importance of public libraries for a whole range of activities.

The report calls on national and local government and all other stakeholders to come together to deliver an action plan for the future. Such an action plan would also encompass governance and delivery, new ways of working, and marketing and communications. As we have heard, the departure of Ed Vaizey and the appointment of a new Minister has led to a delay in the publication of the final report and therefore the action plan, apparently to allow the new Minister time to review the document, visit libraries and talk to colleagues.

Although Matt Hancock has taken over most of Ed Vaizey's responsibilities, he does not have the public library brief, which has gone to Rob Wilson, and his other duties are all about boosting volunteers and non-profit organisations. That may give a pointer to how he sees some of the key issues in libraries. It is hard to see him coming out against using volunteers at the expense of paid staff in libraries when his other role is all about increasing their number. His first public utterances emphasised volunteering and community action. Will the Minister indicate when we can expect the final report?

Finally, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals has suggested that changes made to library services without reference to an appropriate statutory guideline may be unlawful not only under the 1964 Act but in respect of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. What discussions has the Minister had with the institute on these alleged breaches of statutory duties? What is the Minister's response to the call from the institute urging all authorities that may be considering or implementing changes to their library services without statutory guidance to put such changes on hold pending the outcome of discussions with the DCMS?

4.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Ashton of Hyde) (Con): My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Bird, on securing this debate and Members from all sides of the House on all their interesting and thoughtful contributions. What came through to me from the noble Lord's opening speech, apart from his passion and impressive desire to promote books, was his commitment to books themselves. I welcome his gratitude to government for its role in teaching him to read.

I find myself in agreement with many, although not all, of the points that have been raised—on the importance of books and literacy, on their wider role in civil

society and on the deep and lasting pleasure they bring to those who are able to read. Libraries, bookshops and booksellers contribute enormously to the civic, cultural and educational well-being of this country. I think that we all agree that access to books is vital.

The noble Baroness, Lady Rebusk, reminded us that the UK publishing industry is an international success and significant in economic terms. UK book publishers' turnover from sales of digital and physical books in 2015 reached £4.4 billion and total book export revenues were £1.42 billion.

While the number of bookshops has declined, 2015 showed promise for the sector with an increase in the number of physical book sales, and I am glad to say that the reduction in the number of shops has slowed.

Nevertheless, one of the more often heard complaints from independent bookshops—and many small businesses—is the effect of business rates. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, and several others talked about this. The Government announced in this year's Budget the biggest ever cut in business rates, worth £6.7 billion and benefiting 900,000 properties, including bookshops. In addition, from 2017 small and medium-sized retailers will be permanently supported by a more generous small business rate relief and being taken out of the higher business rate. We have lifted thousands of businesses out of paying national insurance contributions.

In addition, a number of welcome initiatives support booksellers. These include the Hive initiative founded by the book wholesaler Gardners, and the Civilised Saturday initiative—an extension to the Booksellers Association's Books Are My Bag campaign mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Rebusk—which nominated last Saturday, 8 October, as Bookshop Day, a reminder that bookshops are an integral part of communities around the country. I am glad to say that as part of that campaign I visited my marvellous local bookshop, the Borzoi Bookshop in Stow-on-the-Wold—and I bought a book. We acknowledge the competitive market pressures as retail deals with the evolving nature of the marketplace but we are doing several things in response.

I will come later to the big question of Amazon but before doing so I turn to the other important institution for book lovers we are talking about: the library. I confirm to the noble Lord, Lord Crisp, that the Government recognise the value of libraries in providing a range of activities to their local communities. The right reverend Prelate mentioned ways that that might be extended and other organisations might be involved in libraries. I will come on to that later. Yet when surveyed, of people who use libraries less than they once did the most common reason given is that they have less free time. This suggests that libraries are right to embrace digital technology. The number of e-books issued by libraries has recently increased significantly. Importantly, libraries also provide alternative book formats and audiobooks to assist people with learning difficulties or sensory impairment. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Hollins, that they are a good place to welcome those of all disabilities. They should be welcoming and safe places.

The most recent public data indicate that local authorities fund more than 3,000 public libraries in England and invested £714 million. There were 225 million physical visits to public libraries in England over the

same period. To put that in perspective, that is more visits than to Premier League football matches, the cinema and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined. However, I should clarify that the library service in the other home nations is a matter for the devolved Administrations. I support the point of the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, about the libraries in the areas he mentioned but that is the responsibility of the Scottish Government.

In England, there is a statutory duty for the provision of public libraries. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for their local communities within available resources. However, while the duty is devolved to local authorities, the 1964 Act also requires the Secretary of State to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the duties conferred on them under the Act. The noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, does not appear to be in his place—I beg his pardon; he has moved. I will attempt to explain the potential conflict he saw in this area. When we are talking about superintending, the Act provides the Secretary of State with the power to intervene by directing a local inquiry following receipt of a complaint. Contrary to what might have been implied, the Secretary of State takes these duties seriously and carefully considers complaints that are lodged.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, was right to say that the power of inquiry has been used only once in the past 52 years—in the Wirral in 2009, under a Labour Government—but, in answer to his question, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has investigated 11 complaints raised in respect of a number of library authorities in recent years. The Secretary of State at the time of each of these previous complaints decided not to order a local inquiry. DCMS is currently investigating four further complaints relating to Harrow, Southampton, Lambeth and Lancashire. Each complaint is considered on a case-by-case basis. DCMS collects and analyses all the relevant information regarding the proposed changes to the library service. This includes an assessment of local needs, as well as consideration of alternative models of delivery. I am afraid that I cannot give the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, a timetable for Lancashire, which is yet to be decided. If there is serious doubt that the library service provided by a local authority offers a comprehensive and efficient service, this Government will not hesitate to order an inquiry.

Let me be clear: the Government are determined to support libraries, even though they are a devolved matter for local authorities. The noble Lords, Lord Crisp and Lord Tope, asked what action we were going to take. We invested £2.6 million in 2015-16 to install and upgrade wi-fi in more than 1,000 libraries in England. This means that wi-fi is now available in over 99% of public libraries in England, in both urban and rural areas—a point highlighted by the right reverend Prelate. This was commended by the noble Lord, Lord Suri. Furthermore, the Government are working with authors, publishers and other interested groups to support the provision of e-books and other online reading resources by libraries.

Together with the Local Government Association, we set up the Leadership for Libraries task force. It involves key representatives of the sector, including chief executives of local authorities, the Society of Chief Librarians, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Arts Council England, the British Library and the Reading Agency. It has a clear purpose: to provide leadership and help revive the public library service in England. It has already published toolkits and case studies to aid local authorities and, as has been mentioned, has consulted on a draft vision, *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021*. Once finalised, this will provide practical and innovative options that local authorities can use to maintain and improve library services. This will include what the right reverend Prelate described as a shared community space; in other words, to extend the use of libraries to make them more available, welcoming and useful for the whole of society.

Relevantly, the new Minister responsible for libraries, mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, is also the Minister for Civil Society. He has visited a number of libraries and met library stakeholders and is currently considering with officials what further support and advice the Government can offer local authorities. The noble Lord, Lord Tope, invited me to give an outline of what is to come in this document—confidentially, obviously, but from the Dispatch Box. I am afraid I cannot help him. But I will tell him and the House that the ambition document will not sit gathering dust. It will challenge both central and local government and include an action plan. In answer to the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, it will be published shortly. The task force will review and update it annually, and provide progress reports every six months.

Further support for the library sector is provided by Arts Council England. This is the development agency for public libraries in England and is funded through the National Lottery and grant in aid from DCMS. It is committed to supporting the development of the library service, while recognising the importance of safeguarding a service that is fit for purpose now and in the future. It invests directly in development activity, including funding support to the Society of Chief Librarians, as well as reading and literacy charities such as The Reading Agency and Book Trust, which deliver programmes in partnership with libraries.

We recognise that local authorities face challenges in evolving library services to meet changing public needs within funding constraints. In practical terms, we have provided them with a four-year flat cash settlement of £44.5 billion from 2015 to 2019. This provides four years of certainty and they have £200 billion to spend on local services. We will encourage local authorities to consider a full range of alternatives before making significant changes to their library services. This may include volunteers, which were mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull. There are also examples of alternative approaches such as the delivery of library services by mutual organisations, as is the case in York.

I said that I would briefly mention Amazon, which is obviously a huge subject that could take many minutes to talk about. I want to highlight that this issue has

[LORD ASHTON OF HYDE]
not been left by itself. First, the European Commission opened a formal antitrust investigation into certain business practices by Amazon—for example, in the distribution of e-books—in June 2015. For the UK, the Competition and Markets Authority has spent considerable time with the European Commission putting forward the concerns set out by various representatives of the UK book industry, with a view to ensuring that key issues affecting the UK would be addressed as part of its investigation. The Competition and Markets Authority currently understands that the Commission's investigations will cover many of the features of the UK market that have been drawn to its attention. Secondly, in previous action in relation to Amazon, the Office of Fair Trading opened a formal investigation of Amazon's price parity policy in October 2012 and Amazon subsequently removed that policy. Thirdly, as I have said at this Dispatch Box many times, we expect Amazon to pay its correct share of taxes and to be a good corporate citizen, so we are not ignoring the giant elephant in the room in that respect.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hollins, talked about the exclusion of learning disability groups. I mentioned the charities that libraries are working with that are funded by the Arts Council, a DCMS arm's-length body. I want particularly to mention the Reading Agency, which helps on some mental health issues—for example, through the Reading Well Books on Prescription programme for common mental health conditions. That programme is supported by, among others, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the British Psychological Society, NHS England, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Mental Health Foundation. Another charity is the Book Trust, which is one of the largest reading charities in the UK and is supported by Arts Council England.

The Government also strongly support school libraries but we think it is for individual schools to decide how best to provide and maintain a library service for pupils. In fact, a survey result in 2010—some years ago—indicated that 96% of all pupils in the UK were attending a school that had a library.

The noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, mentioned the idea of libraries providing careers advice. Libraries provide a plethora of services and whether this extends to careers advice is an issue for the local authority in ensuring that the service meets local needs. But that is an excellent thing to think about and, as he said, it may well be economic in the long run to do it.

We agree that books matter. That means that the public library service, bookshops and booksellers all matter too. The Government recognise that the way people read has changed and that this inevitably will change the way they use libraries and buy books, but that does not mean that the library, the independent bookshop or physical books have become obsolete. It means that libraries and bookshops have to evolve. We will do all we can to encourage and enable reading and to ensure that everyone has access to books, for their value is impossible to overstate.

4.35 pm

Lord Bird: My Lords, that was a very interesting trawl through all the reasons why libraries and bookshops

are not fluffy. They are not some little thing that you can add to society when you have a few bob in your back pocket. It is interesting that, as was explained by all speakers today, we see libraries and bookshops as the very intellectual backbone of society. I will be carrying on, in my itchy sort of way. I would like to think from what the Minister has said that we will see a turnaround and a reversal of their slow decline. I thank noble Lords.

Motion agreed.

Israel and Palestine

Question for Short Debate

4.36 pm

Asked by Lord Dykes

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they plan to take to ensure the revival of the Middle East Peace Process with fresh negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

Lord Dykes (CB): My Lords, I thank all those who have come at the end of a Thursday afternoon to the final debate of the day on perhaps one of the most important subject that Parliaments throughout the world can consider. I start by thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, the Foreign Office Minister, for coming today to reply to the debate. I embarrass her deliberately by saying that she has an incredibly hard work schedule and, inevitably in that job, travels a lot, so we are very grateful that she has come. I commend the excellent briefing pack from the House of Lords Library on this subject.

I have for many years, ever since my first visit, been a strong friend of Israel, which is a great and impressive country in every way. Like many other fans of this country, which is unique and special indeed, and will continue to be so for good reasons, I have sadly to confess that in recent years I have less enthusiasm. I live in France as well, where there are many more press articles on the Palestine-Israel dispute. Sadly, the UK press gives very little coverage to such an important subject.

The Americans have for a long time rightly been the defenders of Israel, but at the UN recently Barack Obama stated that it cannot continue to occupy permanently territories in Palestine. In his moving address for the Shimon Peres ceremony, he said that Peres from the very first day thought that Israel was against the masters and slaves mentality that occupation as a colony implies. Shimon Peres, a very impressive president of the state, always believed that the Zionist idea would be best protected when the Palestinians too had their own state. As the well-known journalist David Grossman stated in the press on 30 September, Peres,

“never gave up, but he knew a disastrous future was being built for both Israelis and Palestinians”.

The international community has been equally critical, but no deeds have followed the many words uttered for almost 50 years since the Six Day War. Indeed, it could not do much anyway, since every time it was discussed at the UN the USA insisted on misusing the

system of endless vetoes to allow its close ally to continue the illegal colonisation policy, even if it did not approve. After the Six Day War, wise voices in Israel urged the Government to withdraw as soon as possible, having made the point effectively that they had enough French and US weaponry and planes to be unbeatable militarily. I remember supporting this very strongly, since Israel needed then and will always need outside support and protection.

In France, at the end of last month, the Franco-German channel ARTE showed the startling documentary made by Shimon Dotan called “The Settlers”, which was originally presented at the International Documentary Film Festival on 20 May last year in Tel Aviv. Of course, the audience may naturally have been made up of moderate citizens, but it was not attacked at all by the critics who were watching as well, including those who routinely defend their country automatically and proudly. This was not merely the left-wing papers: others such as *Yedioth Ahronoth*, which is right-wing, and the centrist *Maariv* urged their readers to make sure they went to see the film to face up to what was happening in the Occupied Territories.

Subsequently, Shimon Dotan did many interviews on TV and radio, both in Israel and elsewhere, and was listened to with great respect. Indeed, speaking at a cinema showing in the city centre of Tel Aviv later, he was widely applauded. But the atmosphere there was also tense. Had the public allowed the politicians to create a situation which had become, literally, inextricable? As Mearsheimer and Walt showed vividly in their historic world tour eight years ago—they came to Britain as well—this had been allowed to happen, seemingly unchecked. A bewildered young lady in the audience at the cinema that evening was even more upset when Mr Dotan added that the situation on the ground was ever more difficult, and the bitterness among Palestinians about what was happening to their own country was stronger than ever.

After the recent very sad passing of Shimon Peres, whom I met many times, especially with the courageous Yitzhak Rabin, who was murdered for his bravery, we have to face this sad reality that the mistakes were made even back then. Mr Peres later acknowledged this fact publicly. I remember him addressing us here as President in the Robing Room and saying, “There are now so many settlers; how are we going to get them to leave?”.

The 21st century does not allow any sensible Government to occupy another country illegally on the basis of a biblical fable of divine promise, even if one is a great sympathiser with religion. We must all surely admire, too, the young military men and women in Israel who have campaigned in the Breaking the Silence movement, whose protest goes on.

We can recall also Mr Rabin’s sombre reminder, many years ago, that Gush Emunim, then the main religious settlers’ movement, was “gnawing away at the essence of Israeli democracy”. Attach all this to a seriously flawed national list electoral system, with no threshold to deter tiny minority groups, to Mr Netanyahu’s recent appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as Defense Minister, and to the reassurance that now comes from the new US defence support deal, and we see the

possible danger of an ominous and catastrophic impasse developing even more, even if it sounds ironical at this stage.

It is precisely because I want Israel to flourish and prosper in the future as a normal society with no feeling of isolation or siege—or besieged—mentality that I ask our own Government from now on, and the international community, to ensure that Mr Rabin’s warnings are responded to and dealt with. Even the Russians now are attempting to establish the first-ever discussions between the two leaders for years—they have not taken a prominent role for some time. Compare the USA, with its sorry record of 11 peace envoys over the years all biting the dust since Oslo. Even the legendary Senator Mitchell pulled out very rapidly from that process. Of course, the huge tragedy unfolding next door in the Syrian civil war has helped us all to indulge in a useful amnesia about the total impasse developing in Ramallah and Jerusalem.

But this crisis is not going to go away. I ask the Minister to say more today than she can with the brief given to her by the Foreign Office and the usual platitudes we have heard many times. I do not criticise her in any way, as that is part of the process, but she works hard on these dossiers and I would like to hear her saying some new things about new initiatives by this Government.

Coming back to the ominous replacement of the moderate Moshe Ya’alon as Defense Minister by Mr Lieberman, we can wonder what will unfold now unless checked by the United Nations. Mr Ya’alon was of course a Likud member, but he condemned the killing of an unarmed Palestinian attacker by Elor Azaria, a Tsahal soldier, and the Prime Minister asked him to step down. This theme was covered in the last edition of the excellent English language newspaper published in Berlin, the *Jewish Voice from Germany*, which is read by a growing readership everywhere, especially the growing community of Israelis in Berlin and elsewhere. It mentioned that the IDF deputy chief of staff, Yair Golan, warned of the rise of extremist tendencies in Israeli society. The same article concluded:

“The Jewish state must remain democratic and pluralistic. This can only succeed if all cosmopolitan and open-minded forces acknowledge the looming danger and ... support a humane Zionism”.

Those who know the country will have various thoughts about whether the Israeli Labor Party should join the present coalition. It appears also that Israel and the UK both have huge problems with our internal constitutional arrangements and no proper written restraints. Israel, however, has all the effective security that any state needs to protect its citizens—and more—unlike the hapless and disorganised Palestinians, who have an ineffective president, Mahmoud Abbas, who has already exceeded his own election mandate period by seven years. As British colonial experience has revealed all too starkly in so many cases in the past, when you seek to extricate yourself from the colonial quagmire you have to talk to the so-called enemy, which will have to include people in Gaza too.

Thanks to brave groups in Israel like JJP, Bet’salem and Peace Now, along with the gradual emergence of better public efforts by the Palestinian intelligentsia,

[LORD DYKES]

there is much more realisation of what can now be achieved. The US must say goodbye for ever to endless vetoes, and the whole world needs to accept the huge recognition that Palestine has now achieved in being a recognised state, with some non-binding resolutions as well, including in France, UK, Spain and Ireland.

When I had the great privilege of going with the courageous Gerald Kaufman to the West Bank, we both agreed that Palestine surely could not end up as being the only country in the world with no civic or political rights. Whoever is the next US President, therefore, has to rise to the occasion and ask their friends in Israel to do the same. The courageous and wise South African President de Klerk did so in freeing and then working with Nelson Mandela, whom Mrs Thatcher had called a terrorist. Is Israel lucky and fortunate enough to be harbouring a de Gaulle, he who saved France from the Algerian nightmare? Someone has to step up to the plate and do the same in Israel. This is, after all, the established state with all the power, in comparison to Palestine.

I wish personally to resume my visits to this great and important country as quickly as possible, and the two-state solution is there still to be achieved.

4.47 pm

Lord Trimble (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord on securing this debate. I support the two-state solution and I hope that the next time the Palestinians are offered a viable state they will accept it. It is important in this debate to remember that they have been offered a viable state at least twice. The first time was at the Camp David talks under President Clinton in 2000 when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak made a formal offer of such a state. Then around 2008, under Ehud Olmert, a further offer of a viable state was made. I can say that with confidence because shortly afterwards Olmert released a map to two Israeli newspapers of what would be the Palestinian state. The map clearly indicated, for example, that East Jerusalem would be part of the Palestinian state, and identified scores of settlements that would have to be removed.

The question then is: if an offer was made that appeared to be quite generous, why was it not accepted? Part of the answer was hinted at by Shimon Peres during the Olmert negotiations when he attended a conference in Jordan. He was asked that question, and I happened to be there so I am quite sure about the answer that was given. It was elegant and quite short. He said: "On all practical matters we are very close to agreement, but the emotional issues are getting heavier and more difficult". I think—although obviously this is just supposition on my part—that the major emotional issue for Palestinians is that they would have to shoulder responsibility within the Arab nations for recognising the legitimate existence of a Jewish state in Arab lands. That is a very big ask. There is also the point, which was made repeatedly by Yasser Arafat in discussions with President Clinton, that if he accepted it, at the same time he should start arranging his funeral. That was not an empty statement; it was the reality of the matter. So, because we are now dealing with big emotional

issues rather than technical ones of whether the line goes here or there and all the rest of it, it will not be easy to get round the current impasse.

I have no simple answer, but some points can be made. First, we and the Arab states must be thinking about what we can do to help them take the big emotional decisions. One point we hear with regard to the Arab states is that they could go back to the Arab peace initiative and sort of rebrand it, or fold that into the emerging agreement from the existing talks. Unfortunately, the Arab states that would support the Arab peace initiative are themselves now focusing on other issues and on the threats that they face, including the proxy wars going on between Iran and its allies and the Shia Muslim states as well. With that proxy war going on there is not much chance of movement being made in that direction.

Some people suggest from time to time that if the Palestinian issue were solved, that in itself would resolve all the other problems in the Middle East, but I am beginning to suspect that the truth is really the other way round. Until all the other issues in the Middle East are solved, we will never get the necessary momentum to resolve the Israel-Palestine issue, even though we can see the outline of the solution. So the other thing that we have to encourage the parties and their supporters to do is understand the difficulties of the other side. It is hugely important to put yourself in the other person's shoes and to try to work out what his problems are and how we can help him deal with them.

However, we have a legacy, which was summed up by Shimon Peres on another occasion when he said that one of the problems was that each side distrusted the other and each side believed that it had good reason for such distrust. Somehow we have to get over that, but we have to remember that at the end of the day the only people who can solve this are the people who live there. That is hugely important; it is the Palestinians and the Israelis who have to solve this. We can offer help but it is not helpful for us, or any outsider, to proceed by berating one party or the other and wagging fingers at them.

4.52 pm

Lord Desai (Lab): My Lords, I, too, am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for getting time for this debate.

I will start by saying that next year we will have the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, and in many ways what is going on in the Middle East right now—not just in Israel, Palestine and Syria, but what has already happened in Iraq and so on—is basically cleaning up the mess left by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. We played a big role in dismantling the Ottoman Empire and in the unsettled business of the borders of Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan. All those problems are still there and we are still trying to solve them. Indeed, we see from Syria how bloody it can get if people do not take a reasonable view of where they belong.

I have always held the view, which was once upon a time held in the Labour Party, that the two-state solution is not viable. There is a single piece of land and two peoples each believe they have an historic

right to it, going back to time immemorial. In some points of view they are both right; they are both passionate; and of course the settlement that has been made has not satisfied anybody—neither the winners nor the losers.

I have always believed that we ought to abandon the search for a two-state solution in drawing or not drawing boundaries. There ought to be one multi-ethnic, multireligious state in that territory which can accommodate the Arabs and the Jews together so that they can live in harmony and peace. It will be the land of both those people, not exclusively of one of them. That is why the only sensible solution to this problem—but of course it will not happen, because nobody gives up what they have, especially when it comes to land. The history of the 20th century and now the 21st century is littered with land disputes in which people have killed each other in incredible numbers.

I do not know how we can create a neutral force of well-intentioned people who can promote the idea that it is possible to have a state in the Holy Land in which Muslims, Jews and Christians can live together. Jerusalem, after all, is the centre of all three religions. Somehow, because they are ultimately the same people—they are not different people—I hope that at some stage somebody, somewhere, will start a movement to create a single, peaceful, multifaith state in that territory.

I am reminded of how we solved the problem of Northern Ireland. There was a very passionate dispute there among people of the same religion but different sects. It took a long time—100 years—but we solved it. There was the good will to solve it, and I hope that we can solve this problem.

4.56 pm

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, my remarks fit between those of the noble Lords, Lord Trimble and Lord Desai.

The Palestinian situation needs to be redefined, if it is to be resolved. The people of historic Palestine have been saddled with the most intense and long-standing stream of emotional and political support, more than any refugee community has received in modern times. Such support, however, has been deluding the Palestinian people and kept them from facing a painful reality—an impossible dream. Their country and homes in Palestine have been permanently lost. Others forced to accept the stark reality of permanent displacement have ultimately been able to move forward with their lives, because they were allowed to settle as full citizens in adopted countries. Not so Palestinians—more than often they are treated as second-class citizens, with little or no civil rights.

The Palestine tragedy has played into the hands of some with the displacement, the Nakba, becoming a cause célèbre for Arabs and Muslims without sufficient support in practical terms. The Israelis have understood all this, and so was created the Palestinian Authority, which has done little more than legitimise de facto Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This illusion of return maintained by the Palestinian leadership has achieved the net result of perpetuating the misery for the Palestinian people, who have never given up the powerful emotion of hope. Some would say that this illusion of return has provided a powerful excuse to

avoid integrating the Palestinian refugees as full citizens—the excuse being that the never-to-be-fulfilled dream of eventual return to Palestine, and being given citizenship, technically undermined their right of return to Palestine and so should be denied them.

This humiliation tears at the heart of all Palestinians, who care more vehemently about this than any issue in their lives. I combine my remarks on the impossibility of ownership of ancestral land with the critical need to have a legal identity—citizenship with full rights that would allow a person to operate productively in the modern world. This means having a passport and legal residency enabling them to live, work and travel, such as those of a citizen of any respected state.

Why might the time be arriving when Palestinians might consider the painful reality? The first generation, which lived through the Nakba, has now passed. Subsequent Palestinians have endured years of suffering, having grown up in refugee camps with minimal education, training or work opportunities. As things stand, there is no viable future for them or their children. What is required is a collective decision of the Palestinians, but only by those Palestinians who have no nationality, since they are the only ones paying the price. A referendum of all stateless Palestinians should take place on the single question of right of return and claims to Jerusalem in return for nationality and a homeland. Israel should proactively adopt and drive this catalyst for change. It holds the cards and is the only player with the hard power to effect change on the ground.

Rejectionists might resort to terrorism, but the Palestinian people who will have voted will have an enormous stake in its success. Their will would prevail in creating a foundation block in rebuilding a secure and prosperous Levant—failing which, a son of ISIS could become the future of the region. The sensitivity of return must be balanced with the prospect of life in dignity for their children and their children's children.

Step forward King Abdullah. The time has arrived for the people to decide. Give them the hope they cherish. Let this become a defining moment, a time of partnership, allowing Israel to redefine its contribution to the Arab world.

5 pm

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Con): My Lords, as is usual, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the register of interests, which shows my involvement in a number of Israel-related organisations, and that I made a trip to Israel earlier this year with the APPG on Israel with other Members of this House as guests of the Israeli Government, to which I shall refer again in a few minutes.

I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, on securing this debate. He has long been interested in this subject, as has all of Parliament. Your Lordships will be aware that, in 2015, more Written Questions were asked on foreign affairs than any subject other than health and, other than Iraq and Syria, Israel has attracted more Questions than any other country on the planet. One may wonder why.

The Question is of course important, but is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the real issue of the day? We all want to ensure that our Government are doing

[LORD LEIGH OF HURLEY]
everything possible to promote peace in the area. However, I have my reservations as to the purpose of any conference and its likelihood of success.

Before the funeral of the much-missed and highly respected Shimon Peres, the last time President Abbas and Mr Netanyahu met publicly was in 2010. Mr Netanyahu has repeatedly publicly offered to meet President Abbas wherever and whenever, without any preconditions. President Abbas has made clear that he is not in a position to move the peace process forward unless Israel meets his requirements: namely, to stop settlement construction, which he and others, but not all, regard as illegal; to release the fourth batch of prisoners; and to establish a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is clear from reading the Arab press that it would be impossible for President Abbas to meet Mr Netanyahu without achieving some of those demands. President Abbas made a very brave move to attend the funeral, but he has his own restraints.

When the APPG visited the PLO head office in Ramallah, it was made apparent to us that the PLO has real concerns about its future. We have just learned that the elections for the West Bank and Gaza have been postponed again. Initially scheduled for 8 October, they are now due to be held in December. This is in part owing to the worry that the Fatah movement has about the very troubling possibility of a Hamas victory. The elections have to cover both the West Bank and Gaza, and there have been disturbing reports of the Hamas-run courts in Gaza annulling candidates and barring Fatah figures from standing.

President Abbas, who is 81, is now in the 11th year of his four-year mandate. Accordingly, I ask my noble friend what steps are being taken by the British Government to assist in fair elections so that the Palestinian people, most of whom urgently seek peace, have proper and fair representation to allow peace talks to happen.

In the meantime, the violence continues. Only on Sunday, two Israelis were killed in East Jerusalem, and photographs have been published showing Hamas supporters handing out sweets and baklava to celebrate this tragedy.

On the positive side, there is much in Jerusalem to celebrate. As chairman of the Jerusalem Foundation in the UK, I am delighted to highlight the Hand in Hand school in Jerusalem, where half the children are Arab and half Jewish, as are the teachers and as is the curriculum. It is initiatives such as this that Her Majesty's Government may wish to consider supporting.

In summary, it may not be fruitful to seek large showpiece photo-opportunity conferences, but on-the-ground support for real peace initiatives must be encouraged.

5.04 pm

Lord Mitchell (Non-Affl): My Lords, speaking from this Bench as a non-affiliated Peer is a new experience for me. I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for securing this debate. Even as we speak, we are witnessing—200 miles from Israel's northern border—the total destruction of an ancient Arab city. What we see

in Aleppo makes what happened in Sarajevo in the 1990s seem like a children's picnic. The annihilation of Syria is ghastly and what is happening in Yemen could become just as bad. Russia and the Assad regime are guilty of war crimes, and maybe genocide—just for once, I agree with Boris Johnson when he says that we should protest outside the Russian Embassy. Putin has much to answer for. This morning, I was shocked and aghast to hear Seamus Milne, one of Jeremy Corbyn's closest acolytes, saying that, instead of Russia, we should be protesting outside the US Embassy. But what should I really expect?

Two weeks ago, as everyone knows, Shimon Peres passed away. At his funeral, 70 countries were represented by their political leaders, including President Obama, President Hollande and the President of Germany. From our own country, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was there with two ex-Prime Ministers, Cameron and Blair. But surely the most significant presence was that of Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority. He was fulsomely welcomed as the leader of his people—he knew just how much Peres had worked for peace.

Israel has a population of 8 million people. On the map, it is just a dot surrounded by a huge Arab land mass. Why then, at such short notice, did so many of the world's great and good make the long journey to Jerusalem? Surely it was because Peres was such an indefatigable fighter for peace. He never gave up; no matter how often the peace talks with the Palestinians broke down, he picked himself up and kept fighting for what he believed. As President Obama, quoting Peres, said in his eloquent eulogy:

“The Jewish people weren't born to rule another people”.

Sadly, Peres never saw peace happen. He was the architect of modern Israel. After the Second World War, the new state gathered into its parched land the traumatised remnants of the Holocaust. It also welcomed those 700,000 Jews forcibly expelled from Arab lands. Israel was a small country, seemingly unable to defend itself and surrounded by hostile countries baying for its destruction. But, due to Peres's efforts, they were thwarted. He was instrumental in building Israel into a military powerhouse—a military builder, but also the man who founded the world-renowned Peres Peace Institute.

Israel today is not threatened by any nation. It has signed long-lasting peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. Syria—its most hostile enemy—and Iraq are in total chaos, and Iran's nuclear threat has been neutralised. The only dangers come from Hamas and Hezbollah. Israel is a world leader in agriculture, technology, medicine and science. Using home-grown desalination techniques, it manufactures all its water needs. The days of the threat of drought have gone.

How much could Israel offer to its neighbours were peace to prevail? Recently, it has developed huge reserves of gas and oil in the eastern Mediterranean; no longer are its energy supplies threatened by boycotts. It is also working closely with its neighbours: with Egypt on energy, agriculture and security; with Jordan on science and gas; and with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states on intelligence and, of course, technology.

All my life I have prayed and fought for a two-state solution, but today I am more pessimistic than ever. I am not sure that either side is that interested in preparing to do what it takes to change the impasse. It feels like the tide of history is moving in the wrong direction. Making peace seems less and less likely. It is a sad outcome, but it feels inevitable.

5.09 pm

Lord Sacks (CB): My Lords, I would like to add to the words of other noble Lords on what we might learn about the pursuit of peace in the Middle East from the life of a man who did more than most to that end, the late Prime Minister and President of Israel, Shimon Peres. He was one of a remarkable generation of Israel's founding fathers who began as hawks and ended as doves and who showed no less courage in pursuit of peace than they had done in the course of war. He was the last of that generation, and the older he became, the younger his vision grew. He never despaired of peace with the Palestinians, no matter how many times he failed. In 1996, he set up the Peres Center to advance peace between Israel and the Palestinians by bringing people together in their shared humanity, through medicine, healthcare, sport, the arts, business and the environment. In July of this year, he launched the Israel Innovation Centre to harness new communications technology to build virtual bridges where physical ones did not yet exist.

The last time I was with him, he was already in his 93rd year. Somebody asked him how he stayed so young. He replied, "First, you have to count your achievements, then you have to count your dreams. If your achievements outnumber your dreams, you are already old. If your dreams outnumber your achievements, you are still young". He lived the words of the Prophet Joel:

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people ... your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions".

Where others despaired, Shimon Peres dreamed dreams.

WB Yeats once wrote: "In dreams begin responsibilities". Now that Shimon Peres is no longer with us, his dreams have become our responsibilities. What if Her Majesty's Government were to encourage others to see the Middle East in the way Shimon Peres did? What if there are other paths to peace beyond politics, diplomacy or war? What if trade is the most powerful antidote to war and there is an economic road map to peace? What if education has a role? What if the peoples of the Middle East taught their young not to hate those with whom they will one day have to live? The only way Her Majesty's Government or any other body will advance the cause of peace will be by communicating to both sides that they are heard, that their fears are understood and that they have to recognise the legitimacy of each other's existence.

In that context, I salute Her Majesty's Government's opposition to today's UNESCO vote denying the Jewish connection to the Temple Mount. The vote itself is an outrage and will achieve nothing but to further damage trust and set back prospects for peace. Shimon Peres knew that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is not a zero-sum game, because from peace both sides gain; from violence, both sides lose. Above all, he was right never to give up hope, because when hope is lost,

there comes first fear, then anger, then hate. Not by accident is Israel's national anthem "Hatikvah", which means "The Hope".

Yesterday was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish year, when we atone and then we move on. Surely the time has come for both sides in the Israel-Palestinian conflict to admit wrongs, real or perceived, and to move on. The most powerful thing that Her Majesty's Government could do is to encourage both sides to continue along the path that Shimon Peres walked as one of the great visionaries of our time.

5.13 pm

Lord Suri (Con): My Lords, I have just returned from my first ever visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, organised by the All-Party Britain-Israel Parliamentary Group in conjunction with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I now feel that I have seen some things that allow me to express myself on this subject.

We visited a wonderful organisation called Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow, known as MEET. Over 12 years, MEET has brought together 400 excelling Israeli and Palestinian youth, aged 15 to 18, in their two hubs in Nazareth and Jerusalem. Each year, MEET engages approximately 170 of the most talented Israeli and Palestinian youth and currently has 300 graduates regionally and internationally. The system that it has set up is an excellent example. It has no commercial interest; rather, it just wants to promote peace and co-existence. Surely this is a wonderful model, which should be replicated. Not only do high school students receive invaluable entrepreneurial skills, which will benefit them and their careers, as well as having the knock-on effect of benefiting their wider community and economy, but they also fraternise with people of their own age whom their parents and their political leaders might even say they should be killing. Can the Minister say what plans the Government have to fund more co-existence projects like MEET?

I was born in the state of Punjab in India in 1935, 12 years before partition in 1947. Millions of innocent lives were lost during partition. They did not do anything wrong. They were killed purely because of the country they belonged to. During our visit, we went to Yad Vashem, where I laid a wreath during a memorial service to commemorate the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis purely because of the religion they belonged to—nothing else. These two horrendous atrocities have taught me a great lesson and should serve as a great lesson to the world, too. The people who suffer the most through wars are the innocent people.

Loss of life can be prevented only if we have a robust peace plan between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Israel has agreed to give a helping hand to the Palestinian state, which should be accepted. The Prime Minister of Israel has stated publicly on many occasions that he is willing to return to the negotiating table without any preconditions. However, President Abbas seems unwilling to co-operate. I was pleased to see the two shake hands at the funeral of former President Shimon Peres and I hope that this will lead to the resumption of talks. Many world leaders have resolved such issues without

[LORD SURI]

bloodshed—to name just a few, Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela, when he unified the nation of South Africa after his release from prison. Coincidentally, all these three great leaders and advocates of peace have statues in Parliament Square. We should follow their example.

The economic growth of Israel is remarkable. Increased economic ties will help both sides and consequently world development. Israel has very strong ties with the UK, the US and India. In fact, during our visit the Indian Minister of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Radha Mohan Singh, was there and met Israeli Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel, and they discussed a variety of existing and future opportunities for co-operation. The UK is Israel's second-largest trading partner; bilateral trade is worth £5 billion a year and has doubled in the last decade. Can the Minister say what plans there are to further the already prosperous bilateral trade relationship?

On our final morning in Israel, we had the extreme privilege of being hosted by the Israeli President, Reuven Rivlin. I will conclude by sharing with your Lordships the conversation I had with him. I said to him: “Mr President, everyone else has asked you a question. However, I actually don't have any questions for you. You see, after hearing your excellent words this morning and from what I have seen from this week in Israel on my first visit, I have no questions, because everything is so clear to me. What the state of Israel has developed in just over 70 years since its creation is just simply marvellous and this miraculous small country has no parallel in the world”.

We must do everything possible to encourage both sides to return to the negotiating table to agree to a long-lasting peace solution, where the security of the innocent populations, both the Israelis and Palestinians, is guaranteed.

5.18 pm

Baroness Deech (CB): Time is short, my Lords, so I will start with my conclusion. The essence of the issue is the right of Jewish self-determination, and the Arab rejection of Jewish statehood—its refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Solve that, and the other issues can be negotiated. There is no enduring value in sitting at the negotiating table and talking peace while, in the Arab street, media and politics, hate and denial prevail. The whole world needs a change in the Arab Islamic political culture, which does not currently promote peace, democracy and human rights.

If not direct negotiations then we need a new ideology, Israeli/Palestinian co-operation and support from Europe for Israel. We need grass-roots activism from young Palestinians in institutions such as the Interfaith Encounter Association, OneVoice and the Peres Center for Peace. We need to support the British Council in Israel, Ben-Gurion University and the UK Government, who should be congratulated on the Science and Innovation Network, which is enabling Israeli and Palestinian water experts to meet and co-operate in the UK.

To change hearts and minds, the Government should call on the Palestinian Authority to stop promoting

the murder of Jews, to stop the financial support of murderers and to stop indoctrinating children with hatred and suicide tactics. Two states would be fine, but the real issue is the recognition of Israel, on which Abbas has reiterated refusal over the decades. Let us be clear about this: the Palestinian National Covenant aims at the elimination of Israel in its entirety and denies nationhood to Jews. How can you negotiate with this stance any more than nation states can negotiate with ISIS?

The Palestinians rejected the offer of statehood in 1947, 1967, 1978 and 2008. There were no settlements then. That was never the barrier; it was the Palestinian rejection of any Jewish presence. Proof is present in the proclaimed Palestinian plan to sue the United Kingdom for the Balfour Declaration. How can they say at one and the same time that the barrier to peace is settlements but then seek to undermine Israel's moment of conception? The hostile attitude of some parliamentarians undermines the position of the UK as a partner for peace or negotiation.

There have been 334 debates and Questions about Israel in this Chamber in 12 months and 13 about Libya. If Israel, instead of Russia and Syria, were bombing Aleppo or killing and arresting children on the scale that is happening in Turkey and Syria, then protests might be justified. Israel looks at the silence in relation to other countries and cannot take criticism of Israel here or in the United Nations with any seriousness. The anti-Zionists encourage Palestinians to believe that, if they hold out with terror long enough, they will get what they want.

It is not the occupation that causes the conflict; it is the conflict that necessitates the occupation. Israel is perfectly capable of withdrawing its citizens from disputed territory, as happened in Gaza and Sinai, with the result that terrorists moved in and no state-building occurred. In any case, why should there not be 400,000 Jews living in a tiny 1% or 2% of the territory of the future Palestine? Is Palestine to be yet another judenrein Muslim state, where no Jews, or Christians, are to be allowed to exist?

Peace can occur only with a change of heart not only on the part of the Palestinians but on the part of the West, with its obsessive bias against Israel, and on the part of the United Nations. Many more states in the Middle East are recognising that Israel is not an enemy but an ally in the fight against fanaticism. The United Kingdom needs to be on its side.

5.23 pm

Baroness Tonge (Ind LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for securing this debate.

I am ashamed that nearly 100 years after the Balfour Declaration we have honoured only one half of it. The half which has been ignored is:

“it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

Has Mr Netanyahu read this recently, I wonder, with his ever-expanding illegal settlements and discriminatory laws and brutality towards Palestinian children in particular, ensuring that they will grow up wanting revenge and fuelling more and more terrorism?

The noble Lord, Lord Desai, mentioned a one-state solution, but the lion lying down with the lamb is a dream. It seems to me that Mr Netanyahu and President Abbas are both perfectly happy with the status quo. It allows Netanyahu to carry on taking Palestinian land and President Abbas, quite happy with his well-paid job, to act as Israel's servant in the West Bank.

My solution would be, as you might expect, quite radical. I think that we should impose sanctions on trade with Israel—yes, government-led BDS—and stop all aid and payments to the Palestinian Authority, including those paid to Gaza. We should stop those payments until Netanyahu and President Abbas sit down in a closed room with representatives of Hamas, who were the legitimately elected Government of the West Bank the last time that President Abbas allowed elections. They should stay there—all sides under strict sanctions—until an agreement is reached. Pressure has to be exerted on both sides; otherwise, everything will continue as now and Israel will go on fulfilling its ambitions for a greater Israel and more and more Palestinians will die or become refugees—the whole situation will get more and more violent on both sides.

I want to make two other points. The current McCarthyite-style persecution of all critics of the Government of Israel must cease. We cannot have a fair and honest debate about anything as long as any opponents of the Israeli Government are accused of anti-Semitism. We must refute the claim made by the Israeli ambassador, Mr Mark Regev, on “Channel 4 News” a few nights ago. When tackled by an unusually brave interviewer, Jackie Long, on this subject, he said on two occasions that critics of the Israeli Government were denying Israel's right to exist. I have never done that. I know that some people dispute the legality of UN Resolution 181 and the Balfour Declaration, but they are plenty good enough for me.

Israel has existed for 70 years now and, in many ways, is a very great country. But if she wants to continue with that right to exist and to be such a wonderful place, she must change and accord the same right to the Palestinian people by ensuring that they also have a prosperous and secure state, living side by side with Israel.

5.27 pm

Lord Stone of Blackheath (Lab): My Lords, reviving the peace process is possible but complex, as it exists on many levels: the people-to-people level, on the ground; the regional level, among the neighbouring countries; and the world level, among nations. However, at the leadership level in both countries, self-serving minorities who do not want peace hold the balance of votes. To change this, let us support several positive projects for the first three.

At the people-to-people level, Combatants for Peace are ex-Palestinian fighters and ex-military Israelis who have previously taken an active role in the cycle of violence. They realised that military engagement is not the way to create stability and security and are co-founders of this bi-national movement. They decided to drop their arms and work together to promote a peaceful solution through dialogue and non-violent action.

Their mind-changing, high-quality film, “Disturbing the Peace”, is to be shown in London on 15 November, and I recommend it.

Two States One Homeland is a group of Palestinians and Israelis who concluded that the endless repetitive, divisive negotiations for the current two-state solution will not work. They realise that the two nations, each separately, hold deep convictions that all the land is their own sacred homeland. As the noble Lord, Lord Trimble, said, it is emotional. They now recognise the deep-felt narrative of the other side and are dealing with them as neighbours. They offer two states, each with their own separate constitutional settlement, but in one homeland in the form of a confederation, with a separate jointly agreed constitutional arrangement that allows for freedom of movement, distinguishes between “residency” and “citizenship”, and will manage the co-ordination of education, health, welfare, policing, security, economics and ecology.

The complex conversations they are holding on the ground, people to people, require great sensitivity and expertise, which we have here in the UK. The Crowd Foundation here, led by Alan Watkins, has been helping with this facilitation. A UK Government-funded extended visit of their team to the region to manage meetings with all concerned would greatly help to move things forward.

In Jerusalem, Isaac Hassan at his hub, PICO, is creating co-ownership companies with Palestinians and Israelis online. This summer, PICO arranged a simultaneous live streaming of young entrepreneurs from both east and west Jerusalem to pitch successfully to investors in a London hub, the Innovation Warehouse. It is now planning a similar event for next year, simultaneously from Egypt, Palestine and Israel, centring again into London. The Mayor of London could help here, thus enhancing our reputation as a worldwide hub.

This brings me to the wider regional agreement. Koby Huberman's framework for a two-state solution leverages the Arab peace initiative, and William Morris from the Next Century Foundation is developing with Egypt and others a phased implementation of the Arab peace initiative. The Arab neighbours need to stabilise the region and offer their young people hope. These initiatives need help to bring together leaders from the Arab world to work with Israelis and Palestinians. Will the Minister help encourage Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to engage with these groups under the good auspices of Her Majesty's Government?

On the world scale, Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum just published an enlightened book called *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, which demonstrates how digital technologies are revolutionising every industry globally. We could help Egypt, now fragile, to leap into this new paradigm, in the same way fragile Germany leaped into the third industrial revolution after the war. For example, Egyptian long staple cotton is the best in the world. The Egyptian Junior Business Association is developing a huge project to help Egypt actualise its potential. We in the UK are experts on cotton. So is Israel. China is hungry for these resources and will invest. As a way to regional harmony, will Her Majesty's Government help us bring from the UK, Israel and the world appropriate

[LORD STONE OF BLACKHEATH]
technologies and investment to Egypt, where we know they are trying to reform and grow to help the millions of people there? Saving Egypt is perhaps our last hope for stability in that region.

Finally, in the same vein, when our APPG on Egypt visited Sharm el-Sheik, we were told by our representative in the Department for Transport that he could now see no reason why we should not fly there. Can we resume flights soon to help the 4 million people there and their tourism industry?

5.31 pm

Lord Hylton (CB): My Lords, I am happy to follow the noble Lord, Lord Stone, because he usually has some constructive suggestions. Today there is little or no peace process, but the issue of Israel and Palestine cannot be ignored or avoided, so I thank my noble friend Lord Dykes for this debate. I will avoid the past and concentrate on two current questions, the first about Palestine, the second concerning Israel.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Leigh of Hurley, I ask: what is Her Majesty's Government's approach and attitude to comprehensive Palestinian municipal elections? "Comprehensive" means in the West Bank, in Gaza and in east Jerusalem. There has been no real test of public opinion for more than 10 years on the Palestinian side. Municipal elections have been proposed as a small start, since they affect the daily lives of the voters. They could allow reasonable voices to emerge in a deeply divided society. Such elections have been postponed several times by the Palestinian Authority. However, we know that external powers largely control the purse strings of that authority. Perhaps there is a little room for persuasion.

Regarding Israel, your Lordships may have noted my Oral Question of yesterday about Palestinian children in military custody. Will the Government press for action on this? There is little doubt that Israel is in breach of six articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and of two articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Surely this is an issue on which Israel could make small concessions to world opinion. We are talking about only 400 or 500 children in detention at any one time. If Israel goes on dragging its feet on the recommendations of two independent reports, it is hard not to conclude that it prefers low-level violence—for instance, stone throwing and stabbings—to anything like confidence-building measures leading to real negotiations.

If the dwindling chances of two states living in peace, mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Desai, are now missed, we shall be left with one state, whether de facto or de jure. That will cancel the Zionist vision and mean the end of Israel as a predominantly Jewish state. Is that what the Israeli people really want?

The Minister has done valiant work for women in war and conflict. Will she work equally hard for children at risk? I have given notice of my questions and look forward to helpful replies.

5.35 pm

Lord Shinkwin (Con): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for enabling your Lordships' House to consider such an important issue. I also

visited Israel a few weeks ago as part of an all-party parliamentary delegation. My time there opened my eyes not only to the proximity and vulnerability of the Middle East's superpower to the immediate and existential threats it faces, but to the fragility of freedom—the freedom to be Israel, the freedom to exist, as the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, highlighted so powerfully.

Seeing Israel up close forced me to put myself in Israeli shoes and ask myself: how would I feel to be surrounded by forces that denied my country's right to exist and pledged to wipe my country, and with it the region's only democracy, off the map?

As Israel attempts to absorb the horror of last weekend's drive-by Hamas terrorist shootings, I might also ask the question: with whom should my country negotiate? Should it be with Hamas terrorists, who have used my country's withdrawal from Gaza to turn it into a launchpad for terrorist rocket attacks on Israeli civilians and who, even now, are openly constructing terrorist tunnels, using hundreds of thousands of tonnes of cement supposedly destined for reconstruction but instead designated by Hamas for destruction—the destruction of Israeli lives?

Perhaps my country should negotiate with Mahmoud Abbas instead. However, it is one thing to step up to the podium of the UN General Assembly; it is quite another to step up to the plate as a credible partner for peace. Relying on extremism, such as glorifying terrorist murderers of sleeping children as martyrs and inciting five year-olds to racial hatred of Jews—mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Deech—is no basis for providing a credible partnership for peace or engendering trust among Israelis, the very people whom President Abbas must convince of his good faith as a prerequisite to successful negotiations.

The worst thing we could do today would be inadvertently to send the Palestinians a signal that violence pays and that more drive-by shootings, more stabbings and more rocket attacks will somehow force the Israelis to the negotiating table. Terrorism must not, cannot, triumph. Surely, credible negotiations require a credible partnership for peace.

I agree with my noble friend Lord Trimble that we can be ready to encourage, to facilitate and to support when the Israelis and the Palestinians are themselves ready to talk peace, but we can neither ensure the revival of negotiations nor assume the crucial role of credible partners. Only the interested parties in the Middle East can do that.

5.39 pm

Lord Turnberg (Lab): My Lords, I, too, must declare my interest as a guest of the Israeli Government on the APPG visit earlier this year to Israel, the West Bank and the PLO offices in Ramallah.

When I told my Israeli granddaughter that I was speaking in a debate on the peace process, she said, "What peace process?". She was simply reflecting the widespread cynicism among Israelis—and, I fear, among Palestinians, too. When Khalil Shikaki, the respected Palestinian pollster, conducted his recent public opinion poll, he found that only a minority of Palestinians believed in a two-state solution—and this is similar to Israeli opinion now. The saddest thing is that the reason they feel this way is that they believe the other

side do not want it. That is a complete misunderstanding of the other, but it is no wonder when the only Israelis that Palestinians see are those in full army gear and the only Palestinians that Israelis see are knife-wielding and gun-wielding terrorists. Israelis believe that the Palestinians would throw them into the sea if they could, while Palestinians see the takeover of all the land they want for their own state. These entrenched positions are not helped by the size of the problems facing the two sides.

Despite all the attention given to the settlements, these are not the biggest problem. Withdrawal from settlements in the Sinai, Gaza and from four settlements in the West Bank shows that the principle of withdrawal is established, given sufficient security measures for Israel. The biggest problems are not those: they are the position of future borders, the return of refugees—as we have heard—and, perhaps biggest of all, the position of Jerusalem that is so important to Muslims and Jews. Of course, there must also be the renunciation of violence and a willingness to accept the idea that Israel is a Jewish state.

Solutions to all these problems have been on the table many times: withdrawal from most settlements with land swaps for the towns immediately adjacent to Jerusalem; the return of a small number of refugees to Israel, and resettlement and compensation for others; a division of Jerusalem into Muslim and Jewish halves along the lines of one or other of the enormous number of proposals that have been made over the years; a just solution for the Palestinians and security for Israel. But something always gets in the way of a final agreement: an assassination, a terrorist attack, incitement to violence and so on.

Now there is doubt that Mr Abbas is even interested in trying to negotiate. He is deeply unpopular at home for having achieved so little for his people and for the corruption that permeates his regime. Mr Netanyahu is not trusted, even though he keeps saying that he will go anywhere, at any time, to negotiate face to face, without preconditions. But now there seems to be a glimmer of hope with the initiative of President Sisi of Egypt and the Arab peace initiative led by Saudi Arabia. There is a remarkable alignment of interests between the pragmatic Arab states and Israel as they face the common threats of Iran and ISIL.

There is an opportunity for the UK to give its strong support to these initiatives, and to exert pressure on Mr Abbas to take up Sisi's offer to mediate. Mr Netanyahu has already agreed, and now would be a good time to test whether he is as wedded to a peaceful two-state solution as he professes. There are tantalising glimpses of what the future could mean for Palestinians and Israelis. Will it take a long time? Probably. Will it require new leaders with fresh approaches? Almost certainly. Is it worth all the effort and pain? Absolutely.

5.44 pm

Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Con): My Lords, I will add a few words in what is known as the gap. The UK is an important player in the ongoing quest for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. We retain good

relations with both parties. Therefore, the UK's influence can only be helpful in an increasingly volatile Middle East.

The bilateral relationship between the UK and Israel, in particular, has never been stronger, whether in trade, technology, academia, the military or between Governments. Trade is at a record high, amounting to more than £4 billion in 2015, and is on course to increase this year. More than 300 Israeli companies are currently operating in the UK and Israel has expressed an interest in becoming one of the first countries to secure a free trade agreement with the UK, which will benefit both our nations.

Peace cannot be imposed by one party or another from the outside. The Palestinian Authority's recent unilateral actions at the UN and in other international fora simply take us further away from that long-sought peace deal. I hope that your Lordships will welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu's repeated offer for talks anytime, anywhere. I hope that our Government can use their influence to persuade the Palestinian Authority to respond positively.

One prerequisite for successful talks is an end to violence and the renunciation of it. Sadly, Hamas remains committed to the violent destruction of Israel and examples abound of Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority endorsing and encouraging violence against Israel. To this end, I welcome DfID's recent announcement that it is temporarily suspending a portion of aid to the PA, pending investigation into claims that the PA has been paying salaries to convicted terrorists. The PA's financial endorsement of terrorism should appal many in this House.

Against all these difficulties, it is a source of hope to see the incredible work that is being done by many in Israel to build trust across the divide between the two communities. One example is the work of Save a Child's Heart. Each Tuesday morning, children from Gaza with congenital heart conditions travel to this Israeli charity, along with their parents, for a free clinic and to receive life-saving heart surgery. This remarkable Israeli charity has saved the lives of 2,000 Palestinian children in the past few years, along with 2,000 other children from countries as far away as Afghanistan and Zambia. The work of this organisation and countless others is showing the next generation that there is an alternative to violence and, thanks to such work, I am more hopeful—a bit more hopeful—about the future.

Finally, I ask my noble friend the Minister to urge her department to consider supporting some of the coexistence projects. This would be tangible evidence of the Government's commitment to peace. Therein lie the seeds of the future peace.

5.47 pm

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for introducing this debate. Next year's centenary of the Balfour Declaration, in the preparation of which I applaud the Liberal role, gives an opportunity to celebrate the success of Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people and its huge achievements, as cited by the noble Lords, Lord Mitchell and Lord Sacks.

[BARONESS LUDFORD]

Recognition of the right of Israel to exist as such a homeland and in security must be the foundation of any peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The noble Lord, Lord Dykes, asserted that Israel has all the security it needs. It does not, not at all, as others have noted. Of course, I am aware of the call to give unilateral recognition to a state of Palestine, irrespective of negotiations. But I believe that that would hit a brick wall and only direct negotiations between the parties can achieve a lasting two-state solution. Will the Minister tell us what representations Her Majesty's Government have made recently to the Palestinian Authority to accept the Israeli Government's offer of negotiations without preconditions? Does she see a helpful context in the warming relationship and security co-operation between Israel and a number of Arab states, especially Egypt and Jordan, with which economic co-operation is also advancing, as others have noted? Of course, this would have warmed the cockles of the heart of the late, lamented Shimon Peres.

The superiority of two states living peacefully side by side over the present situation is self-evident but it requires hard work with a mix of pressure and incentives on both sides, not instant solutions. It is not platitudinous to say that those direct negotiations are essential. I thought that the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Trimble, was particularly valuable. Of course, he knows what he is talking about regarding the emotional hurdles to a peaceful settlement.

Other progress needs to be made on the ground to foster greater trust through an end to violence, murder and incitement to hatred—particularly, though not exclusively, Palestinian; an end to settlement construction and the obstruction of Palestinian development; and an end to the illicit arms build-up and militant activity in Gaza. But there are also all the educational and cultural exchanges that the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, and others mentioned. There is the medical collaboration just mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Grade, and the economic collaborations described by the noble Lord, Lord Stone. In such a complicated situation, it is necessary to do all this kind of work to support the possibility of dialogue and negotiations. Boycotts are not only ineffective but absurd in a situation where we are trying to get people to work together. I was proud of the role that I was able to play as a Member of the European Parliament in securing an agreement between the EU and Israel on pharmaceutical trade.

I want to say a word about anti-Semitism masquerading as anti-Zionism. Too many of those who claim to be only anti-Zionist use it as a fig leaf for prejudice and bigotry towards Jews. It is frankly absurd to claim that it is impossible to criticise Israel or its Government's actions without being accused of anti-Semitism. Tell that to the Members of the Knesset, who make PMQs in the other place look like a vicarage tea-party.

Lastly, I share the outrage of the noble Lord, Lord Sacks, at the decision by UNESCO to question any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. That this is unhelpful in the extreme goes without saying. For a UN body not to acknowledge the significance of the Temple Mount to Jews is beyond belief. What we

need is all these measures of confidence and trust to support the possibility of negotiations, not the blunt instrument of measures such as boycotts.

5.51 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for initiating this debate. While I hear my noble friend Lord Desai, I cannot agree with him. I believe absolutely in the right of Israel to exist and the Labour Party remains committed to a two-state solution that recognises the importance of security and stability. Like the Government, we recognise that it is essential that the UK continues to support dialogue and keep the two-state solution alive. I agree with my noble friend that we should be backing fully all initiatives, including the Arab peace initiative. Whatever hope there is, we have to ensure that hope remains strong.

Earlier this year, the Middle East quartet reiterated its concerns over the events that undermine reaching that eventual agreement of a two-state solution. On the one hand, we have continuing violence, terrorist attacks against civilians and incitement to violence, as we have heard in this debate. On the other hand, we have the continuing policy of settlement construction and expansion, the designation of land for exclusive Israeli use and the denial of Palestinian development. Noble Lords have referred to the continuing absence of Palestinian unity, which will clearly affect progress.

I want to focus on three of the quartet's specific recommendations, which this debate has fundamentally been about. What should the Palestinian Authority do? It should act decisively and take all steps within its capacity to cease incitement to violence and strengthen ongoing efforts to combat terrorism. Israel should cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion and designating land for exclusive Israeli use. The final recommendation I want to focus on is that parties should foster a climate of tolerance, including through increasing interaction and co-operation in a variety of fields—economic, professional, educational and cultural. The new, young generation will benefit from those by working and living together.

What is the Minister's assessment of how we can progress the objectives set by the quartet? Does she agree that UK financial and political support for those cultural, economic and professional exchanges can assist the two parties to begin to trust each other? We have to focus on how to build trust.

I shall conclude with President Obama's words at Shimon Peres's funeral. He said:

"And yet, he did not stop dreaming, and he did not stop working ... Even in the face of terrorist attacks, even after repeated disappointments at the negotiation table, he insisted that as human beings, Palestinians must be seen as equal in dignity to Jews, and must therefore be equal in self-determination ... he believed that the Zionist idea would be best protected when Palestinians, too, had a state of their own".

5.55 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Baroness Anelay of St Johns) (Con): My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, for giving the House the opportunity to debate these issues today.

I will now reflect on some of the major issues raised in what is one of the most difficult peace processes we have seen for some while.

Our long-standing policy on the peace process is well known, but I hope not to disappoint the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, entirely by being consistent—there will be something fresh coming forward in a moment. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states and a just, fair and agreed settlement for refugees. A just and lasting peace agreement is needed to end the occupation and deliver the peace for both Israel and Palestine which is long overdue.

My noble friend Lord Leigh of Hurley and the noble Lord, Lord Hylton, asked about our approach and attitude to comprehensive Palestinian municipal elections. We note Tuesday's decision by the Palestinian cabinet to postpone local elections for four months in all governorates of the Occupied Territories. We recognise that it is a matter for the Palestinian people, but that does not stop us expressing our disappointment. The UK and EU partners have called on the Palestinian leadership to work towards genuine and democratic elections for all Palestinians based on respect for the rule of law and human rights.

With regard to other questions in this section, I shall address one raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, who pressed us on boycotts and asked why we do not impose them on Israel. We have made our position consistently clear. While we will not hesitate to express disagreement with Israel whenever we feel it necessary, we are firmly opposed to boycotts. We believe that imposing sanctions on Israel or supporting anti-Israel boycotts would not support our efforts to progress the peace process and achieve a negotiated solution.

The noble Lord, Lord Hylton, referred to children in custody. My noble friend Lady Goldie, who is beside me in the Chamber, answered a Question yesterday at col. 1886. I simply repeat that the Government will indeed press for action on these matters, but I can add a personal perspective. I have on two occasions while meeting representatives of the Government of Israel personally made representations about the position of children in custody. I do that not because I have a geographic responsibility but because of my responsibility as Minister for Human Rights. I undertake to continue that pressure.

The Question tabled today directs us to the need for renewed and redoubled efforts to find a resolution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. We strongly support Secretary Kerry's tireless efforts to deliver a final status deal.

The noble Lord, Lord Dykes, asked about new initiatives. The French have sought to find a new approach, and we are in close contact with them about their initiative, which was launched in January, to develop the foundations for peace. The noble Lord, Lord Sacks, talked about economic initiatives, and this includes enhanced economic incentives and strengthened Palestinian capacity building. I know there have been further meetings through the summer discussing how that may be progressed.

My noble friend Lord Grade and others asked about coexistence building. Our embassy in Tel Aviv and consulate-general in Jerusalem work closely with all sectors of society, including the ultra-Orthodox, national-religious and Israeli-Arab communities, and the Palestinian communities affected by the occupation, to build constituencies for peace. That is important work.

Although we are doing all we can, ultimately peace will only come through fresh negotiations between the parties. It is critical that Israel and the Palestinians take advantage of any momentum gathered through international efforts. It is vital that they commit with sincerity to restarting the process and focus once again on finding common ground. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Ludford, on the importance of the UK continuing to put pressure not only on Israel and on the Palestinians but on all those involved in the negotiations and about always looking with a fresh eye at good will from those who come forward to seek to press new initiatives.

To reach the goal of an agreement, both parties must take steps to build an environment conducive to fresh negotiations and must avoid actions which undermine the viability of a two-state solution. Noble Lords have referred to the July report of the quartet, which highlighted the damaging impact of provocative Israeli and Palestinian actions. The report highlighted how certain Israeli policies are eroding the viability of the two-state solution. Far from ceasing its policy of systematic settlement expansion and removing blocks on Palestinian development, as the quartet recommended, we have seen Israel push forward plans for more than 1,500 settlement units and continue to demolish Palestinian structures. The UK Government have repeatedly stressed to Israel our deepest concern. The demolition orders issued against the Palestinian village of Susiya are particularly concerning. It would have a terrible human impact on the 350 inhabitants of Susiya. We have also seen extremely concerning reports of further so-called "legalisation" of Israeli settlement outposts deep into the West Bank. Such moves are not legal.

The foundations of a lasting and just peace—trust and good will—will never be built in an environment of incitement, terrorism and violence. We are appalled by the recent wave of terrorist attacks against innocent Israeli civilians. The UK Government's immediate focus has been on urging all sides to encourage calm, take steps to de-escalate and avoid any measures which could further inflame the situation. The quartet report sets out the damaging effect of incitement and violence. The British Government strongly condemn, in the strongest terms I can summon up, the use of anti-Semitic, racist and hateful language. We deplore incitement on all sides of the conflict. We also continue to support the revival of the tripartite committee on incitement to address all allegations.

There is an urgent need to address the terrible situation in Gaza, which undoubtedly fuels violence. An agreement must ensure that Hamas and other terrorist groups permanently end their rocket fire against Israel, that the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective governance, and that Israel lifts its restrictions to ease the suffering of

[BARONESS ANELAY OF ST JOHNS]
 ordinary Palestinians. The UK will continue to urge the parties to prioritise progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza. All of us are appalled by the conditions under which people there live, but it is only by Israel and the Palestinians working together, and the Palestinian Authority asserting its own authority there, that we can further ease those conditions.

The Middle East peace process is of course also a regional question—a point that many noble Lords rightly made. Middle Eastern countries indeed have a significant role to play. Through the Arab peace initiative, Arab states have offered Israel the normalisation of relations in the event of a comprehensive peace agreement. This opportunity must be seized upon as part of a relaunched negotiation process.

Europe must remain a key partner in the peace process. In December 2013 we led EU efforts to set out an unprecedented package of political, economic and security support that Europe would offer to both parties in the event of a final status agreement. More needs to be done, and we will continue to work closely with EU partners.

On a regional basis, the noble Lord, Lord Stone of Blackheath, asked in particular about flights to Sharm el-Sheikh. The Government have not yet concluded that it is right to lift the restrictions on direct UK flights to and from Sharm el-Sheikh. The security of British nationals is the Government's top priority. Our security experts take account of many factors in providing advice on whether it is safe to fly to certain destinations.

Throughout all this, one has to come back to the main point that a lasting solution to the Middle East peace process is in all our interests. It requires fresh negotiations between the two sides, and we will continue to work hard to make progress. As we approach 2017 and the brutal reality of 50 years of occupation, we may indeed, as some noble Lords have said, feel disheartened. Peace seems so distant, yet the late President Peres, the President who helped broker the Oslo accords to whom tribute has been paid today, reminded the world of the need to heed his warning that, "He who has despaired from peace is the one dreaming. Whoever gives in and stops seeking peace—he is naive". Let us remember that.

House adjourned at 6.06 pm.