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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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# HOUSE OF LORDS

## OFFICIAL REPORT

*ORDER OF BUSINESS*

Questions	
Civil Servants: Working from Home .....	1267
Green Spaces .....	1270
Child Obesity .....	1273
Russell Group Universities: Foreign Student Admissions .....	1277
Arts	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i> .....	1280
Northern Ireland Executive Formation	
<i>Statement</i> .....	1327
Schools: RAAC	
<i>Question for Short Debate</i> .....	1339
Industrial Strategy	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i> .....	1352

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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# House of Lords

Thursday 1 February 2024

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of London.

## Civil Servants: Working from Home Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Lord Naseby**

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have plans to review the effect on public services of civil servants working from home.

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) (Con):** My Lords, there are clear benefits from face-to-face, workplace-based collaborative working. That is why departments have issued new guidance that most civil servants should spend at least 60% of their working time in the office and our senior civil servants have been told that they need to set an example as leaders.

**Lord Naseby (Con):** I am most grateful to my noble friend for that Answer but are we not a trading nation? If we are, should we not support our industry, commerce and individual entrepreneurs? How can they possibly do what we want them to do when they—let alone the poor ordinary person who is equally affected—cannot get the support they need from His Majesty's departments of state, whether that amounts to telephone calls unanswered, emails not returned, or meetings rescheduled? Against that background, we now know from a report published by the National Audit Office that this is costing over £5 billion a year on procurement, and on theft and fraud, again, over £5 billion a year. Will my noble friend, as a senior Minister and with her teams, meet the Civil Service to ensure that we get good, firm leadership that is aspirational and involves civil servants at all stages, and recognise that working from home is not viable?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** I agree with a lot of what my noble friend says. He and I both have a background in retail and leadership is very important. That is one reason why the new Minister for the Cabinet Office, John Glen—well known to many of your Lordships—set out in a speech how the Civil Service should lead in providing public services. That included spending a minimum 60% of working time in the office, with leaders encouraging that because of the benefits it brings to the workforce.

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD):** My Lords, I declare an interest as an academic who has worked from home for at least two days of the working week throughout my career. Email and mobile phones have made it a great deal easier to do so and still be efficient. The introduction of hot-desking in Whitehall and the squeeze on places for staff to work mean that it is difficult for everyone to have a desk if they come in every day. Is that a constraint on the Civil Service bringing people back in to work?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** Clearly, the Civil Service is changing to have a very good approach, which is to modernise the property that civil servants are working in. We are doing more outside London, as the noble Lord will know. That is allowing a more modern approach in the office, with more hot-desking. Some of the offices are full some of the time, but it is important that we use our property properly in the interests of value for money, while modernising it so that it is a good workplace. One of the things young people say is that they want to come to a nice place to work; my department, the Cabinet Office, is certainly a very nice place to work.

**Lord Grocott (Lab):** The Minister has regularly referred to time in the office and work in offices. I am especially concerned about those people employed by the Government who do not work in offices. They work to clean buildings or provide refreshment services and the like. What proportion of staff have the option of deciding which days of the week they come in and which days they do not? Is there a correlation—there must be a rough one, but maybe she can put me wrong—so that it is basically the lower-paid workers who do not have the option of working from home? Perhaps they should be compensated in some other way.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** Each department is its own employer, as the noble Lord will know, so the arrangements vary. He is right that it is different not only for the people who clean the offices but for prison officers and immigration officers. There are different demands on their time. Noble Lords should look at, in addition to our policy on working from home, our policy on flexibility, which has been enhanced by recent legislation. The Civil Service has used flexible working as a tool in attracting, recruiting and retaining talent. That would include some of the operatives whom he is talking about. In a 24/7 economy, that flexible working can be very valuable but it does not necessarily mean working from home, which is the subject of today's Question.

**Baroness Bull (CB):** The noble Lord, Lord Grocott, mentioned economic diversity, but what assessment have the Government made of the impact of this new ruling on other types of diversity in the workforce? I think particularly of those with significant disabilities. Working from home has enabled them to imagine careers they might not otherwise have had. Has this been taken into account in this new ruling?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** It has, and the noble Baroness is right to mention attracting disabled persons into the workforce, which I have always thought important. We make some limited use of home-working contracts for certain roles. We promote adjustments for people with disabilities. On the Procurement Act, which I recently took through this House, the lead official had a very substantial disability; he is blind. That can go side by side with ensuring that, much of the time, those who are office-based are in the office and working with other colleagues in the Civil Service.

**Baroness Wyld (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend mentioned younger civil servants. Does she agree that, whether it is in the Civil Service or the private sector, the way younger workers learn and prosper is by observing their senior colleagues and having the opportunity to share ideas and thinking? Is there not an onus on senior civil servants to make the case more powerfully for working in the office?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** I completely agree with my noble friend and that is part of our approach. I noticed in the press recently that the president of Adecco, an international recruitment company, said that working from home can hit creativity and empathy and was part of the problem we have with soft skills. I am very keen that we should have balance, but people should come into the office and get the sort of mentorship my noble friend has mentioned.

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab):** My Lords, it is certainly true that the Government ought to think much harder about their approach to the Civil Service. The overuse of external consultants, for example, is expensive and gradually undermining in-house expertise. The Government awarded £2.8 billion of consulting contracts in 2022 alone. Does the Minister agree that the Government should work hard to retain expertise within the service? Will she commit the Government to cutting back on their habitual overreliance on consultants?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** I do not see an overreliance on consultants. While I have been a Minister—only just over one year—we have moved to replace consultants with full-time civil servants in areas such as digital, because they represent better value for money. We probably have a certain amount of alignment on that. Clearly, we need to use outside consultants for some things, not least bringing in skills on things such as AI where we do not have the Civil Service skills we need. There has to be a balance; consultants can be valuable. Where I am with the noble Baroness is that there needs to be proper value for money and proper competition and we should not overdo it.

**Lord Hogan-Howe (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interests. One thing that has never been properly explained is how people working from home with access to data on their laptops et cetera protect that data when it includes private information. I hear now that the police service is working from home, which I find bizarre. Of course the police are trying to support victims, but how can you be walking around a supermarket or at home with all this data, which other people can see? How do you stop that happening? This includes banks and may include the Civil Service. It is a very important issue, which I do not hear being discussed much.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** I thank the noble Lord for raising this question. Of course, he helps the Cabinet Office a lot through his role as a non-executive director. On security, obviously we had a big move because of Covid, which was favourable in terms of people having more kit at home, allowing them to pick

things up. That has been established in a secure way. There are protocols for how you must use office kit; you cannot forward or print things. We are trialling work on devices that allow you to have parliamentary or government access on the same device, to make sure that security is protected. A lot of effort and expense is going into trying to keep us secure, but we need to do more because security is a big challenge.

## Green Spaces

### Question

11.17 am

Asked by **Earl Russell**

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have plans to increase the number of locally available and easily accessible green spaces.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Penn) (Con):** Our environmental improvement plan includes a commitment that everyone should live within a 15-minute walk of a green or blue space and includes measures to reduce barriers which prevent people accessing them. Progress on this commitment is well under way through the levelling up parks fund, the green infrastructure framework, the urban trees challenge fund, the Access for All programme and the woodland access implementation plan.

**Baroness Fookes (Con):** My Lords—

**Earl Russell (LD):** I thank the Minister for the response. I warmly welcome this commitment; it is extremely important. However, 38% of people do not have access to green or blue space. Those who are economically marginalised have the least access of all. Access to green space is vital for our physical, mental and general well-being. Can the Minister confirm what proposals the Government have to deliver the target and when they expect to make progress?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, one of the programmes I mentioned in my initial Answer, the levelling up parks fund, is focused specifically on grants given to and administered by local authorities to deliver new or improved green spaces in more than 100 of the neighbourhoods most deprived of green spaces across the UK. Some 92% of recipients of that funding have reported increases in access to green spaces in deprived urban areas. That is one example of how we are delivering on that commitment. I also reassure the noble Earl that we are working across government to ensure that there is a robust baseline for measuring that commitment, so that we can report on progress in future.

**Baroness Fookes (Con):** My Lords, I give my sincere apologies to the House for jumping in prematurely; as a Deputy Speaker, I ought to know better. Is my noble friend aware of the value of private gardens as green spaces, particularly in urban areas? Will she try to discourage householders from concreting over their front gardens?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, the Government absolutely acknowledge the role that private gardens have to play as part of our overall green space and open space. The importance of our green spaces is of course reflected in the NPPF and other government guidance for planning.

**Baroness Boycott (CB):** My Lords, when I was chair of the London Food Board, we created 2,012 new growing spaces in London in the years leading up to the Olympics. There are still 2,500 of them—200 acres of London—producing an extraordinary amount of food, mostly in areas of most deprivation. The key to getting these places going was a thing called a “meanwhile lease”, which is different from an allotment because no council or building company will give anyone space in perpetuity. I have been trying to get the Government to adopt an amendment saying that meanwhile leases should be encouraged and made mandatory for all councils. Will the Government agree to look at that now? It is a very easy and effective way to give people of all denominations access to green space and their own healthy food.

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, I am happy to look in more detail at the proposal put forward by the noble Baroness and to write to her on what the Government can do in this area.

**Lord Watts (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister talks about open green space, but many urban areas do not have any, as we have heard. Is there a case for allowing some development in the green belt if the developer agrees to have green space in urban areas for people to access?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, I do not believe it should be an either/or. The green belt is rightly protected, and the Government’s approach to that is set out clearly. For urban green space, that is also reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework. It is clear that access to high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity are important to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies and decisions should enable the retention and development of accessible open spaces. That is what local plans should seek to do.

**Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP):** My Lords, the environmental improvement plan is an example of this rubbish Government actually coming up with some good ideas. But, despite the fact that this plan is good particularly for deprived communities, children and biodiversity, there is a problem. Is it perhaps the fact that this Government have slashed funding to councils that has made progress so slow?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, I have set out a number of different ways that we are supporting this commitment. On local government funding, the provisional local government finance settlement for next year announced a substantial funding package for councils, worth more than £64.1 billion—£4 billion more than last year. But, having listened to councils, a further £600 million was announced at the end of January. So we are providing the funding to councils to help support their important role in delivering this.

**Baroness Jolly (LD):** My Lords, many homes have only small gardens, or none at all. Grass playgrounds with trees give children open and safe places to play and run around. Will the Minister tell the House whether local authorities are responsible for maintaining the environment and safety of these local playgrounds? Can she confirm which government department is responsible for their safety?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** It will depend on the particular arrangements for each park or playground, but local authorities are responsible for around 85% of urban parks in England. On which department is responsible, it is my department, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

**Baroness Deech (CB):** My Lords, why are the Government intent on wrecking the only available green space near Parliament, Victoria Tower Gardens, which serves an underprivileged population? They are doing it contrary to the 1900 Act, which preserved it as an open space, in order to build an ugly memorial and an inadequate learning centre that is too small and not wanted by Holocaust survivors.

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, on the legal point, I believe the department is bringing forward legislation to address that. I am sure there will be further discussion of the points the noble Baroness makes when we discuss that Bill.

**The Lord Bishop of London:** My Lords, it was welcome to see the introduction of funding for opening new permissive access in the latest update to the agricultural transition plan, released in January. According to the Ramblers, access to public rights of way and the time in nature that they provide is deeply unequal. Can the Minister explain how this funding will be steered towards routes that are most needed, and how she will ensure that these new routes are of sufficiently high quality to be accessible to as many people as possible?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, I will need to write to the right reverend Prelate on the specific details that she asked for. But I reassure her that making our green spaces more accessible is a key focus of government funding and programmes. For example, the Access for All programme and the woodland access implementation plan look at how we can make our green spaces, urban and rural, more accessible to all sorts of people. The Access for All programme, for example, is £14.5 million worth of accessibility improvements in our protected landscapes, national trails, forests and wider countryside.

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage (Lab):** My Lords, the noble Earl, Lord Russell, mentioned the worrying figure that 38% of people in this country live more than 15 minutes from a green or blue space. Our new town, Stevenage, has green space accessible to all and five Green Flag parks, including the wonderful Fairlands Valley. Does the Minister agree with me that a new generation of new towns would enable planners to start tackling the housing crisis, as well as delivering homes with access to green space that families need?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** I agree with the noble Baroness that, in any new development, it is important that access to green and open space is properly taken into account. That is why it is reflected in the NPPF; it is also recognised in programmes such as the Green Flag Award scheme that the noble Baroness mentioned. We also have the green infrastructure framework, which was launched by Natural England in January last year, to help local authorities and developers incorporate green infrastructure into development plans to improve access to nature on our doorsteps and build resilience to climate change.

**Lord Robathan (Con):** My Lords, further to the question of the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, does my noble friend agree that Victoria Tower Gardens is indeed a locally available and easily accessible green space, hugely popular with local residents and tourists? Every statutory body that has been consulted, including the local authority, is opposed to any unnecessary development of Victoria Tower Gardens.

**Baroness Penn (Con):** I hope my noble friend will forgive me if I am not drawn any further on this question. There are two separate matters that need to be dealt with here. One is the legislation that is being brought forward to address the legal issues regarding that land, and the other is a separate planning decision that will be taken. All of these facts will be properly taken into account in both those processes.

## Child Obesity Question

11.28 am

*Asked by Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have plans to require reformulation of children's food and drink to reduce child obesity.

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** My Lords, the soft drinks industry levy and location promotions legislation, together with the voluntary reformulation programme, have resulted in businesses lowering the levels of sugar and calories in a wide range of products. Pending regulations on volume price promotions and advertising should encourage further reformulation of less healthy products consumed by children and their families.

**Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab):** My Lords, as the Minister is aware, I have been pressing the Government to reformulate, removing sugar and using healthy alternatives. The Government are unwilling to do that, yet they are now prepared to spend £40 million on an experiment with the anti-obesity drug Wegovy. Why can they spend that money in that area but not spend it on exploring the possibilities of using alternatives to sugar? Will children be part of the anti-obesity experiment that is taking place? If it is successful and developed further, will they give children anti-obesity drugs?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** I am grateful to the noble Lord for the question. I pay tribute to the work he does in this field and to his lifelong service in the trade union movement and the Community Service

Volunteers. The Government are tackling child obesity seriously and will continue to work closely with industry to make it easier for people to make healthier choices. It remains up to businesses to decide whether and how they wish to use sweeteners, including stevia, in food and drink, and which ones to use. Indeed, we know that some businesses are already using stevia and the like in the products they make. However, sweeteners are not permitted in all foods and some consumers do not want sweeteners in the products they buy. Businesses can reduce, and have reduced, the levels of sugar in food without the use of sweeteners. On the specific question about using children, I cannot give him the exact answer from this Dispatch Box, so I will write to him.

**Lord McColl of Dulwich (Con):** My Lords, will the Minister kindly explain why the Government do not adopt the technique of the Canadian Government? The children of Canada have been fed on whole milk for many years, thousands and thousands of them. They are much healthier and they are not obese. Furthermore, will the Government encourage the 40 million obese people in this country to eat the right kind of fat, because that tends to limit obesity?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** The noble Lord is a doughty campaigner on this subject, both in this House and within the department. The Government recognise that milk and dairy products make a valuable contribution to a healthy, balanced diet as a source of calcium, protein and vitamins and minerals. However, they are also a source of saturated fat, so government advice is to choose lower-fat milks and dairy products where possible. Full-fat milk and dairy products are recommended up to the age of two years, after which lower-fat versions, such as semi-skimmed milk, can be introduced, provided that the child is consuming a varied diet and is growing appropriately for their age.

**Lord Stone of Blackheath (Non-Affl):** My Lords, I declare an interest as a governor of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel. Is the Minister aware of the sugar-reduced food solutions being produced and marketed by the Weizmann Institute? If not, will he research them and put a letter in the Library advising noble Lords of the advances being made? Is similar research into solutions to reduce sugar in food and drink being undertaken in UK academies?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** I presume the noble Lord is referring to a product called Incredio Sugar, which provides the taste of sugar while reducing the amount consumed by between 30% and 50%. I understand that during the processing, a molecule is added to natural cane and beet sugar that moves more sugar into a person's saliva, causing a heightened taste of sugar. To date, the product works best in solid foods, such as chocolate and baked goods. We are not aware of any similar research being undertaken within UK academia or industry.

**Baroness D'Souza (CB):** My Lords, the risk of obesity is greater in those who suffer food insecurity, costing the National Health Service £6 billion annually, a figure that is likely to rise. It is reliably estimated,

meanwhile, that £1.70 is returned for every £1 invested in free school meals over a 10-year period. Does the Minister agree that free school meals for all primary and secondary schoolchildren would be a sound investment?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** I am not sure I can make that commitment to the noble Baroness. The school food standards ensure that children have healthy food and drink options across the school day and restrict foods high in fat, sugar and salt, including high-sugar foods and confectionery. The Department for Education continues to keep the SFS under review. It is right and proper that families that cannot afford school meals should be helped by the taxpayer, but we cannot commit to providing for all schoolchildren.

**Lord Allan of Hallam (LD):** My Lords, the data is devastating: 11 year-olds in the poorest areas of our country are twice as likely to become obese as those in the wealthiest, and that gap is growing. I ask the Minister to take a brief holiday from painting a rosy picture of the Government's plans—I know it is his job to do that—and acknowledge just how badly we are failing children in poor areas, who are acquiring conditions that will leave them less healthy than their wealthier neighbours for the rest of their lives. This requires big, bold steps and urgency, something that the Government can show in other areas of policy but not here, where it really matters.

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** I am not aware that I am painting a rosy picture. There are serious issues with childhood obesity in this country, as there are in other countries around the world. Nearly one in 10 children, 9.2%, start primary school living with obesity, and approximately one in five children, 22%, leave primary school living with obesity. Children living in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to be living with obesity as those living in the least deprived areas. Obesity costs the country an estimated £58 billion. The Government are doing all we can to help reduce that from an early age.

**Baroness Merron (Lab):** My Lords, given the Minister's response just now, does he acknowledge that the Government's childhood obesity plan has presented us with what NHS England now describes as "a ticking health timebomb"? What assessment have the Government made of the impact of their own flagship sugar reduction programme managing only a 3.5% reduction and failing to meet its 20% target?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** I am grateful to the noble Baroness, who raises a very important subject. It is not unique to the United Kingdom: many countries in the western world have this issue with childhood obesity. Sugar intakes in children aged one to 18 in the UK are double the recommended maximum level and more than 5% of daily energy intake. Consuming too much sugar can lead to weight gain, which in turn increases the risk of serious diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and Covid-19. It also increases the risk of tooth decay. Modelling shows that children who are overweight or living with obesity consume between 140 and 500 excess calories a day,

depending on the age and gender. The Government are working hard and doing a huge amount to reduce childhood obesity, but there is clearly a lot more to be done.

**Baroness Boycott (CB):** My Lords—

**Baroness Manzoor (Con):** My Lords—

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** My Lords, I think we should hear from the Cross Benches, then my noble friend and then the Green Benches.

**Baroness Boycott (CB):** My Lords, what are the Government doing to challenge the industry about the types of substitutes it uses for sugar? When the big ones, such as aspartame, go into products such as Diet Coke, they create the illusion in your brain that you have had something sweet whereas your stomach is telling you that you have had nothing. They have now, on many scientific levels, been seen to make no difference to obesity. The same is true of low-fat yoghurts—in fact, they can contribute to obesity—so how are the Government tackling the industry to understand whether these low-fat products are actually helping with diets? I believe that they are not.

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** I completely agree with the noble Baroness that aspartame is an issue in diet foods, such as yoghurts and drinks. We work closely with the industry to look at formulations that can help reduce sugar, and a lot of progress has been made. I remember that, as a child, when asked what I would like by my grandmother, I used to say fizzy drinks and she would provide me with something called corporation pop, otherwise known as tap water.

**Baroness Manzoor (Con):** My Lords, as my noble friend the Minister will know, obesity rates are highest in deprived areas, followed by higher incidence of mortality and morbidity related to type 2 diabetes, heart disease and strokes. There is also a higher prevalence of food banks in these areas. Can my noble friend say whether there is any correlation between the incidence of deprivation, poverty and food banks? My noble friend Lady Boycott made a very interesting suggestion on the previous Question. How are the Government addressing these issues?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** This is a complicated picture, as many factors contribute to obesity. We know that there are more fast food outlets in deprived areas, offering very large portions of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor food. Buying this type of food can be seen as value for money for people who are struggling financially. We also know that people living in an area of high deprivation are subject to more advertising, thus encouraging the purchase of foods higher in fat, salt and sugar. Food banks offer emergency food provision and people may be accessing these as a short-term measure, so they may not represent the food that is routinely consumed over a long period. The Government are working hard with industry. The reduction of sugar is going on in the reformulation of many products that we all consume, but there is clearly a lot more to be done.

## Russell Group Universities: Foreign Student Admissions

### Question

11.39 am

Asked by **Baroness Falkner of Margravine**

To ask His Majesty's Government, following reporting by *The Sunday Times* on 28 January, what assessment they have made of admission policies for foreign students at Russell Group Universities.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con):** My Lords, I was concerned to see the allegations of bad practice by recruitment agents and unfairness towards British students. The Department for Education has launched an urgent investigation into university admission practices, including the behaviours of agents involved in recruiting international students. We will take action to ensure fairness between domestic and international students. Every student should be able to benefit from a world-class education.

**Baroness Falkner of Margravine (CB):** My Lords, I am speaking in a personal capacity, but I also serve as chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which is responsible for compliance with the public sector equality duty. This seeks to prevent discrimination and to ensure equality of opportunity. The *Sunday Times* investigation has revealed that as many as 15 of our 24 top universities are accepting through the back door foreign students at lower grades than those applied to UK students for the same courses. In effect, they are accepting cash for access. This is unfair at best, and discriminatory at worst, as UK students do not have those choices. I am extremely relieved to hear the noble Baroness's response about ordering an urgent investigation. Can she give the House a timeline and say what measures they might take to penalise the institutions that are creating this lack of a level playing field for domestic students?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The noble Baroness makes important points. To be clear, our work will focus particularly on the unscrupulous behaviour of recruitment agents, and whether it is genuinely easier for international students than for domestic students to get places on undergraduate courses. However, there is no evidence that international students are displacing domestic students in England, where UK students make up 85% of the total population. We will be working on this as a matter of urgency, but I do not have as yet a definite timeline to give the noble Baroness.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith):** My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, is participating remotely.

**Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, as someone who benefited from free higher education in France, and in gratitude has remained a lifetime Francophile, I argue that the best way to develop sympathetic international relationships is to invest not by bringing the rich, unqualified undeserving into the

United Kingdom just for the money, but bringing instead the brightest and the best from problematic parts of the world, even at our expense? Is that not one of the best investments we can make in developing international understanding?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** Developing international understanding is important, but I imagine that universities would argue that there are a number of other potentially greater priorities in terms of the quality of the education they provide. We are very proud of our track record in terms of international students. Everyone, including the Government and universities, need to have a shared interest in upholding the quality of and confidence in the system.

**Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge (Con):** My Lords, I declare an interest in that I am still paying a student loan with an interest rate of 7.6%. I ask my noble friend the Minister: what are the Government doing to ensure that the contact hours offered by university courses represent value for money for all students enrolling on them?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The universities are obliged to provide information about contact hours to students before they go on a course, and there are websites that are UK-wide, such as Discover Uni, where potential students can compare, for example, contact hours and other metrics across courses. The OfS obviously regulates the quality of courses and, although it does not look specifically at contact hours, it does look at continuation rates from one year to the next, completion rates and progression to graduate jobs.

**Lord Addington (LD):** My Lords, the Government have got themselves into a situation where universities are just very short of cash. When are we going to put enough money into the system so they are only taking foreign students because they are of the right quality, and not because it keeps the universities afloat?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I remind the House of the figures on university income. Over the last five years, it has grown by 24%, from £32.9 billion to £40.8 billion, and over that time UK fees have grown by 19%. The latest data on the staff headcount in universities, which was published very recently, showed another increase year on year, which does not look to me like a sector that is in trouble across the board.

**Baroness Twycross (Lab):** My Lords, I am pleased to hear that the Government are taking seriously the *Sunday Times* allegations, but the truth is that even within the UK there is not a level playing field for admissions to university, with many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds still missing out. In a report from October 2023, the Sutton Trust said:

"Widening participation efforts appear to have been a case of 'running to stand still', and where those efforts have not been present, inequalities have worsened".

What further action will the Government take to address this issue?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The Government share the noble Baroness's commitment to making sure that disadvantaged students can access higher education.



As the noble Baroness and the House know, our perspective is that there are opportunities at different levels of jobs, such as levels 4, 5 and 6—namely, undergraduate level. We have also put an enormous emphasis on degree apprenticeships so that loans should not be a barrier to access and, as the House knows, we will be introducing the lifelong loan entitlement, which will also unlock potential from those who do not currently access higher education.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con):** My Lords, like the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, I benefited from a free education and a grant at St Andrews University. Today I would not have a hope of getting into St Andrews University because, while they are free of tuition fees, there is insufficient funding. The result is that children from disadvantaged backgrounds cannot get a place at Scottish universities. The universities have responded to the lack of income from fees by bringing in lots of international students. This is a disgrace, and if the situation in England is bad, north of the border—under the SNP—it is extremely worse.

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I have to agree with my noble friend. The figures are very different in Scotland. I mentioned that 85% of undergraduates in England are UK students. In Scotland, that figure is only 66% and has declined from 73% over the last five years.

**Lord Pannick (CB):** My Lords, I declare an interest as the proud father of a daughter who has obtained places at university from this September. Can I ask the Minister to focus, in the department's investigation of this matter, on the stress imposed on students—and, of course, their parents? It is a very stressful process, and it adds immeasurably to the stress if students cannot be confident that universities are applying a fair and transparent procedure.

**Baroness Barran (Con):** Absolutely. We focus on that and a sense of confidence in the fairness of the system is vital. However, I would underline universities are autonomous institutions, and we would encourage them to take the initiative to address the noble Lord's concerns.

**Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Afl):** My Lords—

**Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab):** My Lords—

**Lord Sandhurst (Con):** My Lords—

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** My Lords, we will hear from the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, and then the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick.

**Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Afl):** My Lords, I fear the problem is that we have lost sight of what universities are for. Does the Minister agree that it is a con when new university degrees are created as a substitute for high-quality skills training—the latest being estate agents' degrees—while academic study is suffering? For example, there is the tragic closure of the music department at Oxford Brookes. Is not this university growth propelled by credentialing schemes,

leading to the exploitation of overseas students who are effectively buying visas/degrees to pay for this ridiculous, non-academic growth?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I think the noble Baroness brings together a number of different issues. However, the essence is: do we need high-quality degrees in this country that are accessible, particularly to those from disadvantaged backgrounds? There are areas where we have clear concerns. We have already expressed our concerns publicly about foundation years and have reduced the funding for classroom-based subjects, as well as regarding franchise provision.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith):** My Lords, that concludes Oral Questions for today.

## Arts

### *Motion to Take Note*

11.51 am

*Moved by Lord Bragg*

That this House takes note of the contribution of the arts to the economy and to society.

**Lord Bragg (Lab):** The creative arts generate more revenue than the life sciences and the aerospace and construction industries combined. Add the input from television, films, advertising and broadcasting and we are faced not with a charming marginal activity but with an industry ready to grow to the massive benefit of this country, commercially and educationally, and equally in areas such as health and social equity.

First, however, the arts industry needs a radical overhaul. At present, it is dangerously patchy and punching way below its weight. Last year, there were over 3 million job roles in the creative and cultural industries—and there could be more, if we recognised and reached the full potential of what is still considered too often to be the cherry on the cake. The arts are not the cherry on the cake—they are the cake. It is the opportunity this society needs to reform itself, to replenish all parts and pockets, and to stem the slide to the bottom of just about any listing that appears. It is an open goal.

There is no doubt that this country could build itself up through a cultivation of the arts, and a determination to release its energies and take on the mantle of other places and other times—this is not too fanciful—such as Athens, Florence and elsewhere, which transformed their societies through the arts. Why cannot we do so? We have the skills, but what we need is the vision and the will. We need to think of the arts as an industry, and a new industry, which it is.

What we have to build on deserves attention and often praise. Cities which have imploded, especially in the north, because of government abandonment and investors seeing no future beyond the stock market—I will take three: Newcastle and Gateshead combined, Leeds, and above all, Manchester—have regrouped and found profit from their engagement with the arts. This goes for similar smaller venues too: Keswick in Cumbria, middle-sized cities such as Bath, and towns such as Cheltenham. In many places, the arts have reinvented and magnetised dying conurbations. However,

[LORD BRAGG]

this still does not provide the fundamental requirement, which is to engineer a deep change which will be universal.

To get to the best, we need to take a close look at the worst. Recently, the *Times* chief cultural correspondent, Richard Morrison, said that British theatre is “dying” and “in a dreadful state”, its demise hastened by the dominance of television and streaming, and that

“Those theatres not facing closure because of local authority budget cuts ... are struggling to attract audiences for anything except musicals and famous plays featuring famous actors”.

National Theatre Wales has lost its subsidy from the Arts Council of Wales. Creative Scotland has received a big cut from the Scottish Government. An all-party report from a House of Lords Select Committee last June commented that the current Government policy towards the sector is

“complacent and risks jeopardising the sector’s commercial potential”.

It is strange that, although over the past decade the creative industries have grown at 1.5 times the rate of the wider economy and contributed billions of pounds of business activity and exports, again and again these profits drain away and the only begetter of the arts is left stranded on overdrafts. This is at least unfair and at most blind to the power and potential of the arts.

When they built the first steam engine, they did not say, “Okay, we can do it—we’ll stop now”. They went on to create a network, here and abroad, with a brilliant non-university workforce. Why do we stop here now, in this country, when it is losing its theatres, its music and its dance? We are sleepwalking into permanent mediocrity, and cultural institutions once the guardians of the arts have, in crucial cases, become accessories to this deterioration.

The Arts Council, for example, set up in 1948, in those flagship years of public service, has been of the greatest value for the arts, especially its arm’s-length management. Yet in November 2022, English National Opera was given 24 hours’ notice by Arts Council England that all current funding would be withdrawn and the company removed from the national portfolio by April 2023. This was said to a company approaching a century of often outstanding work: opera in English; free ticket schemes for young people; 51% of audiences first-time bookers; and a world-class infrastructure. The way in which this was done disgraced the Government. Nadine Dorries, the Culture Secretary, “instructed” in a short letter—she used the word several times—Nicholas Serota, chairman of the Arts Council, to do as the Government, that is, Nadine Dorries, dictated. We had become, it seemed, a state-run arts country, one step away from the dictatorship of the state on the agenda. Without being rude, what on earth was she playing at? Who did she think she was, and why did the Government back her? Dr Harry Brünjes, chairman of ENO, fought it, and eventually the Government shifted their ultimatum back a few years. What on earth is going on? ENO makes a profit, just as importantly as it makes a mark on the future of opera in this country. The magnificent Royal Opera House is incomprehensibly besieged by not dissimilar troubles.

Ms Dorries did not stop there. She threatened the reviewing of the BBC licence fee by 2027 in such terms that the BBC knew it would have crumbled—a policy which seems to have been adopted by her successor. So far, the BBC has stood firm. We will see what happens in the media debate. The finest cultural institution in this country is the BBC. Classical music would be bereft without it. From the Proms to new composers, music of all genres is given airtime. BBC drama on television has pulled in some of the most memorable work over the generations, as have discussions and features on the radio. In the broadest sense, BBC radio is a tailor-made embroidery of our tastes, aspirations and intellectual achievements.

Then there is the World Service of the BBC, surely our greatest ambassador. From the diurnal to the most distinguished, the BBC defines the range and ambition of our society. Yet it is under constant attack from those who envy it and want to capture its audiences, not to make better programmes. There is to be a debate on the media in your Lordships’ House quite soon. I trust that this House will develop some themes which are brought out today, and come out emphatically to leave the BBC unweakened.

The key word is “education”—to change the society thoroughly. This can lead us to a new state of the arts. I owe much of the next passage to the composer Howard Goodall. In the last century, there were the county music services, free instrumental lessons, Saturday morning music schools, orchestras and choirs. After 2020, these services were transferred into “hubs”, a private enterprise model. The local authorities lost responsibility for them and the slide began. In 2022, the number of hubs was reduced nationally from 116 to 43, in direct contradiction to consultations saying that this would be the worst possible option for state schools. The 43 hubs had to do the same work as the 116, and on the same money.

The uptake in GCSE music has dropped from 50,000 entrants in 2009 to 29,000 in 2022. Consequently, staff numbers in music and other arts have dropped dramatically. The noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, in her excellent speech on the depletion of support for the performing arts, referenced this, pointing out that “the decline in teachers of dance, drama and music”, and in “teaching hours” and “position in the curriculum”, is disgraceful,

“nor is there support for small music venues, which are closing down at the rate of one a week”.—[*Official Report*; 30/3/23, col. GC 108.]

Mr Sunak promised assistance, but none has arrived yet.

Howard Goodall writes that what has happened to music education in the past 13 years is a “seismic reconfiguration”. He continues that “the Conservative agenda being driven through the Arts Council seems to be to let classroom music die out in state schools”. The Department for Education met only 27% of its target for newly trained music teachers last year.

In 2008, under a Labour Government, a programme was funded that revived group singing in 97% of all primary schools in the country, with a verifiable increase in discipline, attendance and work in classrooms. Music mattered—it lit the flame—but the scheme was dropped. Why cannot the 93% of children in our state schools

receive the same musical offering that the 7% in private schools take for granted? It is shocking, unfair and just wrong—and what a waste. Just imagine what talent could be released and what benefits would flow were not only music but all the arts given a chance to be a part of the engine of growth in a country which used its proven assets—talent, flair, cultural enterprise—to grow to its full potential? Of course, this needs more investment and rescuing from the doldrums, but look at how we are wasting money at the moment. We are squandering it. What enormous rewards could follow from building up the arts. Let us look again at the Industrial Revolution—the greatest revolution, I would say, that the world has ever seen. Why do we not have an Industrial Revolution for the arts? It is possible.

Finally, Professor Daisy Fancourt has just delivered a book to be published first in America. If ever utterly conclusive proof were required of the benefits of the arts in our society, here it is—she has nailed it. She says: “In 2018, the World Health Organization reported that after 3,500 studies, it had cast-iron evidence of the deep and widespread health improvements which came from the teaching of the arts, from neurological disorders to child development. Cohort studies have shown that tens of thousands of people of all ages benefit physically, emotionally, and intellectually by going to galleries, by dance and singing in choirs”.

I shall not club your Lordships with statistics at this stage, but the evidence of the connection between the arts and intellectual health has now been conclusively made. We have scientific proof that art exercises the imagination and feeds us in positive, unique and lasting ways. We cannot afford to ignore this. We can no longer go on to cut, stint, cancel and slash. If we are to bring up generations whose minds and feelings are moulded by the best work, good teachers, and multiple opportunities, we could indeed make a brave new world. Why not, and why not start now? I beg to move.

12.03 pm

**Lord Vaizey of Didcot (Con):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, who has given so much to the arts over so many years. I briefly declare my interests as a trustee of the Tate, chairman of the Marlow Film Studios and a cultural broadcaster on Times Radio, broadcasting from the South Bank, but not quite to the same level as the noble Lord, Lord Bragg.

The funding for the arts in this country is not actually insubstantial, if you take the direct grants to museums, the grants through the Arts Council, the BBC itself, the tax credits which extend from film through to theatre and museums and, of course, university and local authority funding, although I accept that local authority funding is under intense pressure at the moment. This Government also deserve a great deal of credit for the support they gave the arts throughout Covid. My noble friend Lord Mendoza is not in the Chamber today, but he and Ministers worked tirelessly to ensure that the arts were supported. Nevertheless, it will not surprise your Lordships to learn that I think we can still give more.

I take a very simple view: that the arts budget is effectively a rounding error in terms of what government spends across the piece. It could be increased substantially

for the arts insignificantly for what government spends overall, and it would make a difference. My thesis has always been that the Government should decide effectively what their national champions are—the national museums, flagship theatres, not just those in London but around the country—and fund them properly, securely and long-term, not to such an extent that it stifles their creativity, enterprise and philanthropic needs, but certainly to ensure that they do not have to keep looking over their shoulders to see whether they can keep the roof on. That to me is what one could call a no-brainer.

At Tate, for example, we have not lost our ambition. Tate Liverpool is going through its first major refurbishment for 40 years. Tate St Ives has acquired the Palais de Danse in St Ives, where Barbara Hepworth made her sculptures. We are building a new storage centre, which will be open to the public in a very deprived area of London. Please help these national institutions match their ambition.

I noted that the noble Lord focused on the economic impact of the arts, and there is no doubt that the arts and creative industries are some of our most successful industries. Their wider impact has also to be taken into account. I do not really like these terrible economic reports which say that for every pound you spend on the arts you get £500 back. I think they are nonsense—but we are world-leaders, and the arts have a huge impact on health, education, criminal justice and soft power.

The arts are the venture capital for really successful industries, such as our film, television and video games industries. Marlow Film Studios could not exist if it were not for the incredible talent that exists through this country's heritage in television and film, but Marlow Film Studios may not exist because of the chronic and appalling planning system that exists in this country. If we look at the planning guidance in this country, we can see that cultural heritage and assets come even behind Wetherspoon pubs. The sooner we put cultural assets and heritage at the heart of our planning system and speed it up, the better.

Finally, I love the system we have in the UK of what we call the three-legged stool—core government funding, enterprise and creativity, and philanthropy. It is important to acknowledge all the people who make that happen and say thank you—thank you to the people who work in the arts, who work for salaries far lower than their talents deserve or what they could receive outside. We must thank the philanthropists, who give so generously, two of whom are in the Chamber with us today, and thank business—and yes, thank BP for its grant to the British Museum. Finally, of course, we should thank my noble friend Lord Parkinson for being such an excellent Arts Minister, and for the hard work and devotion he gives to his job as a servant to the community that he works for.

12.08 pm

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** My Lords, it is truly an honour to be speaking in a debate opened by my noble friend Lord Bragg. Probably like many noble Lords, I am a devotee of “In Our Time” and a great fan of his books. I intend to follow his speech and talk about the arts' and creative industries' place in the education

[BARONESS THORNTON]

and development of our young people and the generations who, we hope, will take this wonderful heritage forward into a prosperous future.

I was inspired to make this the subject of my short time to speak today by a recent visit to the National Theatre. I was treated to a tour behind the scenes and stages, which I thoroughly enjoyed—particularly, I have to say, the wardrobe department. I really appreciated the challenges that the National Theatre faces today, but I also learned of the extensive programme of education, learning, teacher support, training and apprenticeship which is on offer at our National Theatre. For example, it runs a scheme called New Views; it is a year-long, in-school playwriting programme for students aged 14 to 19. Each school is paired with a professional playwright, who supports students to write their own original 30-minute plays, one of which will be performed on the stage in the National Theatre. It is of course a struggle to keep that going under the current circumstances.

I thank the Royal Shakespeare Company for its briefing, which tells us that it has 30 long-term regional partnerships, made up of 280 schools and 15 regional theatres, all in areas of disadvantage. It says that “talent and potential are everywhere, but opportunity isn’t”. I would hate to see that threatened and not thriving.

Near where I live in Camden, the Roundhouse offers a huge range of poetry, music and performing arts for local schools and children. But we have to raise the money in those schools—I do so in my local school—to ensure that our children can go there.

Where I grew up in Bradford, the first art gallery that I ever visited was Cartwright Hall. We visited it as children; nobody ever stopped us running around in it, which was probably very enlightened of the keepers there. Many decades later, last year, I took my granddaughter to its half-term arts activity, which was put on by the gallery for the local children in Manningham, which is one of the most deprived areas in the country.

St George’s Hall in Bradford is the Yorkshire home of the Hallé Orchestra; last year was its 155th music season. I went from my comprehensive school to its concerts. Today, the tickets for school students are £5 each, I am happy to say, but we have to raise the money for those children to be able to attend.

A huge favourite in our family is the Wonderlab at the Science Museum. I see many schoolchildren go there. It has a sister museum in Bradford, the National Science and Media Museum, which is doing “Back to Space” as its trip for the half-term holidays. I think that we will be in London this half-term because we are getting only a day off, so my family and I will probably go to the British Museum, with its wonderful and extensive programme of learning and family activities—or we might take advantage of the amazing offerings of the National Trust. Quite why this Government have made a perverse ideological decision to focus on culture wars and target the National Trust, our fantastic and wonderful national treasure, is a complete mystery to me.

I mention these places and programmes not just because I love them but because they are a small number of examples of the richness of our arts and

cultural heritage. Theatres, galleries, museums and community arts projects are absolutely vital as an investment in the future, sustainability and prosperity of this sector, which we neglect at our peril. Labour’s vision is that, no matter where they live or who they are, every single person should have the opportunity to create and consume excellent art and culture.

12.12 pm

**Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB):** My Lords, we are indebted to the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing this necessary debate. It is necessary because, notwithstanding the Minister’s undoubted love of the arts and the money secured during Covid, we find ourselves currently in the midst of a crisis—a crisis brought about largely by ill-considered decisions whose ramifications reach deep into the cultural fabric of our society. Should we make a special case for the arts? Yes, on so many levels, including the return that they bring to our economy, our well-being and our standing in the world.

Out of deference to the gifts of the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, let me start with literature. Books are provided, as they should be, for those detained at His Majesty’s pleasure. However, I am reliably informed that, in areas of deprivation such as Haringey, primary school libraries have bare shelves compared with our prisons. That is shocking. The Minister may say that this is a matter for the Department for Education, but I suggest that it falls well within the area of our debate today because, if young children do not have sufficient access to reading, what chance do they have of becoming literate and, ultimately, potential writers—an area where we are world leaders?

It is this failing at the most basic educational level that so worries me, be it in literature, music, art or drama. Yes, there has been some improvement in music in schools but, essentially, most state schools—as opposed to private ones—are miserably catered for, with hardly any peripatetic teaching and often a dearth of instruments. The DfE admits that there are recruitment problems in this area. Do local performances provide exposure and opportunity? Sadly not. As we have just heard, in 2023 in the UK more than one music venue a week closed permanently.

We know now that it is not just the very young for whom exposure to music is beneficial; research published this week shows how it benefits older people too. In fact, engaging in music throughout your life is associated with better brain health, according to a new study published by experts at the University of Exeter. Noble Lords advancing in age may like to know that the study found that, if you continue to play the piano into great old age, your brain will benefit enormously.

A few weeks ago—here I should mention my interests as listed in the register—I was working with the BBC Singers. I was amazed by their legendary ability to sight-read new scores. The fact that the axe was poised over their heads because of the cuts that the BBC has been forced to make by government was shocking, as were the ill thought-out and nonsensical Arts Council cuts to the London Sinfonietta, the Britten Sinfonia and the ENO. I concede that that there was mismanagement in the past but, in recent years, the ENO has fulfilled its outreach ambitions and the

bringing in of a young audience. The fact that its music director, Martyn Brabbins, felt it necessary to resign over cuts to these musicians is a matter for which we should all feel shame.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason, on the other hand, is a young musician for whom we can all feel pride. But his family say that they would not have prospered under the current provision of music in schools. When Sheku dared gently to suggest that “Land of Hope and Glory” made him feel uncomfortable, he was subjected to racial abuse; when I supported him by recalling that Elgar himself hated the jingoism attached to a piece originally written purely for orchestra, I, too, received abusive comments. Here, at least, in our condemnation of that sort of behaviour and of racism, I suspect the Minister and I will be as one.

12.16 pm

**Lord Kinnock (Lab):** My Lords, I am very pleased to follow the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, who continues to delight us musically and in every other way.

We take the arts for granted. I therefore warmly thank my noble friend Lord Bragg, who has done more than just about anyone else to demystify and popularise the arts in our country. That certainly matters because he is giving us a timely prompt—a spur—to our awareness in order to overcome our collective complacency; I mean the whole nation, not just this House.

Creativity in the arts and sciences, often fused in technology, is the sustainable raw material of modern times. We now need exploration and innovation as the means of maintaining life itself. Of course, they need funding; philanthropy is therefore invaluable. But society—certainly civilised society—should not depend on charitable largesse, especially when public investment in the arts magnetises and enables private investment. It pulls in rather than crowding out.

Public funding for creativity is therefore essential for the human spirit and for community cohesion and pride. However, crucially, the arts are also an economic cornucopia. Using a definition of “the arts” that is narrower than that employed by DCMS, last November’s McKinsey report, *Assessing the Direct Impact of the UK Arts Sector*, showed that, in 2022, there were 139,000 arts enterprises and 63,000 voluntary arts organisations. Some 95% of those professional enterprises were sole traders or small businesses; the other 5% included the BBC, which is the biggest single employer of musicians in the UK. The arts employed 970,000 people, including 350,000 self-employed, and generated revenues of £140 billion, tax receipts of more than £50 billion and gross value added of £49 billion. Local authority provision is an essential and substantial component of those totals—it is a keystone in the cultural arch—but, as the House knows, with £20 billion-worth of cuts to central funding since 2010, councils everywhere have pared back all non-statutory provision.

The effects on creative activities have been severe and, in some cases, ruinous. Such cuts in central funding are gross, short-sighted and socially, educationally and economically counterproductive. They impoverish lives, communities and the future. They inhibit individual opportunity, stunt aspiration and diminish global Britain.

Despite that, so many creative people still valiantly respond to the adversity of cuts as a challenge to fresh inventiveness, rather than a defeat; they give so much more than they take. I wish them well and I want them to know that, although they are certainly underfunded, they are valued and not forgotten. A creative compact with the arts will come with a Labour Government, and the sooner the better.

12.20 pm

**The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** My Lords, I too am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing this debate, and I am particularly glad we are debating the contribution of the arts not just to finance and the economy but to society. The arts are fundamental to human flourishing, to expanding our imaginations, to deepening our sympathies and to touching all aspects of our lives that, so often, the merely financial fails to engage with.

Of course, the arts do make a significant contribution to the wealth of this nation, and we are fortunate to be home to some of the world’s leading orchestras, musicians, playwrights, theatres, artists and galleries. In my own diocese in Hertfordshire there is a rapid expansion of studios that are attracting filmmakers from around the world, which is important. But the danger is that we do not give enough time and attention to thinking, “Where are these musicians and artists going to come from, and where are they first going to get the experience of the arts? Where are the ordinary people, in their homes and families, engaging with the sheer delight of creativity?” That is why I find it deeply sad that many young people do not have the access to artistic expression or musical education in their communities, homes, or, sadly sometimes, even in their schools.

As I go around the communities in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, I note that, in many villages, the only place with any communal singing left is the church; what was once a bigger part of communal life is dwindling. But the music and arts are not just for professionals: they should be accessible to all, and this really matters. I have spoken before in this Chamber about how many of the UK’s composers, including Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Howells, Taverner and Rutter began their musical careers because they were caught up in local music making in their churches. Without this opportunity, many of them might never have touched the artistic part of their lives and developed their skills.

A significant number of contemporary musicians also started out in local—sometimes church—choirs, such as Ed Sheeran, Annie Lennox and Chris Martin of Coldplay. The Royal School of Church Music is just one example of an organisation that is working at grass roots across our country to bring the joy of music making to so many others that would not otherwise experience it, for example through its Voice for Life course. In my own diocese, the St Albans chorister outreach project has worked with over 80 primary schools and given thousands of primary school-age children the opportunity to participate in and enjoy singing. The National Schools Singing Programme, run by the Roman Catholic Church, has already expanded into 27 of Britain’s 32 Catholic dioceses, reaching more than 17,000 children in 175 schools.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF ST ALBANS]

None of this is funded by the state, but, in some limited cases, all that is needed to get it going is some limited seed-corn funding. Yet, in the face of financial pressures, those very modest amounts of money have been renewed, which has enabled people to get going; it has given them a life experience of the joy of music and art and set them off in a career that has been such a blessing to many people. So my question to the Minister is: will His Majesty's Government take a fresh look to ensure that we do not just fund flagship arts projects but have modest amounts of money to release the arts among a much wider group of people in our nation?

12.25 pm

**Baroness Rebuck (Lab):** My Lords, as we heard from my noble friend Lord Kinnock, McKinsey published an arts report last November that described the UK as a “cultural powerhouse” that punches above its weight globally with a dynamic ecosystem of multipurposed talent. I thank my noble friend Lord Bragg—a true multitalent—for initiating this debate. I also mention my own interest, particularly in book publishing, as set out in the register.

The creative industries significantly grow our economy, as we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, and the civic contribution of the arts improves our health, well-being and happiness. Creative learning inspires children's inquisitiveness, persistence, collaboration, imagination and self-esteem. The arts encourage social cohesion and lower crime, which is perhaps why all 18 year-olds in Germany are given a €200 KulturPass for cultural events, books or music.

A third key impact of the arts is soft power and international reputation. British writers are some of the top-grossing global film franchises of all time: think of JRR Tolkien, Ian Fleming and JK Rowling. The film of Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things* has clocked up 11 Oscar nominations and the film of Martin Amis's *The Zone of Interest* has five. The BBC World Service is listened to by 318 million people weekly and the British Council engages with 650 million people annually.

The Royal College of Art and UAL are ranked number 1 and number 2 globally for art and design. Other countries revere, invest and showcase their creative successes, but not us. The BBC, an admired global brand, sits at the heart of our connected creative industries. It is a trusted provider of news and our largest commissioner of entertainment. But, instead of nurturing it, we freeze its income for two years, engineer a 30% decrease in funding since 2010 and give it a below-average inflation rise at the end of it. With the arts declining by 40% at GCSE and no government plan to improve literacy, oracy, creativity and music in schools, together with the downgrading of humanities at university, I fail to see how we will keep a pipeline of talent.

The destruction of our arts ecosystem began in 2010 with austerity cuts. Local authorities, traditionally the largest investors in culture, suffered a 40% real-term core funding cut over 10 years, with libraries, local theatres, museums and public art the first to go—making a mockery of the levelling-up agenda. Meanwhile, as

referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, an astonishing one in seven primary schools do not have a library. It would cost £14 million to correct that and, if all children in the UK read for pleasure, the UK's GDP would be up by £4.6 billion over a generation.

By contrast, France's primary schools devote 10% of their time to the arts, all secondary schools have a cultural co-ordinator and art history is compulsory up to 16 years of age. Twenty years ago, South Korea decided to invest in the arts, and it is now the seventh largest creative cluster in the world. It increased funding by 14% last year and put £500 million into a public/private VC fund for the arts. The film “Parasite” won over 300 awards and four Oscars. “Squid Game”, K-pop and the Hallyu wave have powered the growth of other local industries, from food to cosmetics to tourism—which is why British creative leaders are all travelling to Seoul.

We did lead the world creatively and should have aspirations to do so again. We still have the creative talent, but not the policies or the funding, for our cultural industries to flourish at the heart of a growth strategy. We fail to recognise the innovation the arts initiate when coupled with science and technology. We make it difficult for our cultural activities to tour, to export and to be discovered. This has to change. We must invest in the power of art and in the creative industries that bring us such pride and recognition globally.

12.29 pm

**Baroness Garden of Frognal (LD):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to contribute to this debate on the arts from the noble Lord, Lord Bragg. As the wonderful Darren Henley said:

“England's artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries enrich our lives, increase our knowledge and open our minds to new possibilities”.

They not only are life-affirming but contribute around £126 billion in gross value to the economy and employ some 2.4 million people, so they are value for money and good for us too.

I declare an interest in that a son-in-law, Jon Rolph, is a talented television and radio comedy producer. His son Tom Rolph has already had leading roles in local musicals, with his amazing singing voice. Their skills have brought pleasure to many and will continue to do so, because of how important both music and comedy are to our well-being. I used to sing and play the piano. After the exhortation of the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, I will perhaps try to do better in the future.

It is enormously challenging for those talented in the arts to be recognised and employed to use those talents. It is a cut-throat business, severely damaged by Brexit and the pandemic. In many areas, artists struggle to survive, even when they are highly skilled, highly talented and very real assets to our national life.

The noble Lord, Lord Bragg, has a highly distinguished career in the arts. “In Our Time” always makes fascinating listening. Since listening this morning, I know a whole lot more about the Hanseatic League than I ever thought possible. Age is no barrier to achievement, as we see from amazing octogenarians, nonagenarians and even centenarians who are still contributing their artistic talents to our enjoyment.

As the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, said so eloquently, the BBC is a national treasure if ever there was one. We see its significant contribution to education as well as enjoyment. It has the BBC Bitesize programme, its flagship educational website, and BBC Teach with resources for teachers and students alike.

We know that the Government are pressed for money, with health, education and housing all vying for well-deserved eye-watering amounts, if our people are to be housed, cared for and educated to the standards that we all wish for in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. But the arts too need proper support if they are to continue to be world beating and economically advantageous.

As one fascinated by heritage arts and crafts, I congratulate the Minister on the part that he played in ensuring that the Government will at long last ratify the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; I thank him for that.

We hear that, since Brexit, teaching, lecturing, exhibiting, entering competitions and, importantly, trade with the EU for our brilliant crafts men and women has virtually ceased, which obviously affects the contribution of crafts to the economy. What provision will the Government make to ensure that the skills of our arts and crafts people will be supported so that the UK continues to hold its place as a creative centre in the world? What plans do the Government have to ensure that music, drama, dance and art are taught in all schools—various noble Lords have already identified that there has been a woeful shortfall in recent years—to ensure that the next generation has every opportunity to use its artistic talents to the benefit of the economy and for the enjoyment of us all?

12.33 pm

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab):** My Lords, I will come to my noble friend Lord Bragg later. I remind the House of my current and past interests, including as a former executive director of the National Theatre and a former deputy chair of the board of the Royal Shakespeare Company. I ask the House to be so good as to take it as read that I agree with virtually everything that has been said so far and that I anticipate agreeing with most of what will be said after I have sat down. I will strive to repeat none of it.

I will talk slightly differently about why I think the arts matter—not for their economic impacts, important as they are, nor because studying music improves our maths skills, for example, which it does, but for the power that the arts have to change us and thereby to change the world.

In the *New Statesman* last month, the journalist Anna Leszkiewicz wrote:

“In narrating this injustice with empathy, immediacy and urgency, television drama has succeeded where journalism has failed ... The series has invited the average person to step inside the experience of Bates and so many others, to feel the iron walls of bureaucracy closing in on them, to take on their panic and powerlessness. It is an extraordinary and rare example of a drama not just capturing but creating a national moment”.

The only word with which I disagree is “rare”. She was, of course, talking about “Mr Bates vs The Post Office”. After it was broadcast, there was widespread confusion: “How did this happen? How did this drama

have such an impact?” The hard-won experience and skill of researchers, producers, designers, a remarkable writer and director, and a peerless group of actors and many more took us into the minds of others, obliging us to confront experience that we do not have and perspectives other than our own. This is how a drama about the Post Office succeeded in altering the course of events when so much excellent previous research and journalism—on which, of course, the drama relied—could not.

All of us watching certainly gained knowledge, but much more importantly we gained insight. Our imaginations were engaged and we felt the “iron walls of bureaucracy”, the “panic and powerlessness”, closing in on us and we were moved. This is what art and artists can do: they link us to each other, remind us of our common vulnerabilities and help us to make sense of an often chaotic world.

Human beings need stories. It is how they learn. They need to hear them and to tell them. Art, in all its many forms, is how stories are shared. This is why encouragement of creative thinking should be central to any well-balanced school curriculum. Education cannot be about just acquiring knowledge, important as that is, but must also be about learning to process that knowledge, to challenge it thoughtfully and to use it imaginatively.

We live in a dangerous world—angry, frightened and divided. The power of the arts to help us navigate it has never been more needed. We must protect and nourish them. Now I come to my noble friend Lord Bragg, who has probably done more than anybody alive, in his extraordinary career, to protect and nourish them. I hope that I do not embarrass him by saying that he is a true national treasure but, more importantly to all of us, he is an inspiring colleague and has been for many years. How very lucky we are to have him.

12.37 pm

**Lord Parekh (Lab):** My Lords, I too begin my comments by thanking my noble friend Lord Bragg for introducing this fascinating subject with great eloquence and passion.

I want to do two things. The first is to ask the question: what are arts? The question we are debating is: what is the contribution of the arts to the economy and to society? That raises two questions—arts and contribution—and I will say something on them both.

We have talked about arts for a long time, but I am not entirely sure what we mean by them. Some might ask whether sport is an art. Is cricket an art? Is billiards an art? What can one say? What would be the answer of those who were silenced by Mrs Thatcher, who was interrogating this, to the question of what snooker or cricket’s contribution to the economy or society is?

The first thing to do is to be clear about the arts but, since I cannot do this here, I will do it in my classroom. I simply say that art refers to an imaginative reconstruction of an object or activity. One creates an object and its bears one’s imprint on it. Through that imprint, one makes it distinctively one’s object and it can give a lot of pleasure to others.

[LORD PAREKH]

The next question is far more important—contribution. The contribution of the arts can be at many levels. One can produce millions of DVDs, sell them and say that this is the contribution of the arts, but is this our interest here? We are interested in what is distinctive in the contribution of art, not just what is incidental but what is intrinsic to it. Art cannot be imagined without those contributions and we cannot imagine those contributions from any activity other than art, in any society.

I want to concentrate—because I think it is very important—on the distinctive contributions of art to any society, without which it is not really worth living in. I point to four contributions that art makes. First, it gives you self-knowledge. Art gives a society some understanding of what it is, the deeper forces working within it, and the deeper contradictions and self-knowledge.

Secondly, art points out the defects of society in an intelligent and meaningful way. It does not lecture and say, “You should be doing this”, but rather it subtly gets under your skin and points out what the defect is and how it needs to be rectified. That is why, for example, “Cathy Come Home” or “Mr Bates vs The Post Office” had enormous impact. You ask why, if this had been going on for all those years, nobody was moved? Why did we have to wait so long, until a 45-minute programme came along? My guess is that it is because art unsettles you. If you asked the millions of people who saw it and were influenced by it what moved them, they would give you all kinds of answers that refer to the internal mechanism of the human mind, which the art was able to touch.

Thirdly, art creates a community. For example, a novelist represents characters from different communities and introduces them to each other. If I do not know how a worker lives his life, by reading Dickens I begin to get a picture of how that person works.

Fourthly, and finally, as Toni Morrison said, art is my access to me—an entrance into my own inner life. By reading about art and people like me, I begin to understand myself. What more self-knowledge can there be than art? Religion is supposed to be the source of our self-knowledge: God alone knows us. The artist certainly does that: he holds a mirror to us and gives us some idea of who we are. A society lucky with its artists is a society that has a great contribution to make.

12.42 pm

**Lord Aberdare (CB):** My Lords, I am delighted to speak in this important debate, tabled by the noble Lord, Lord Bragg—whose status as a national treasure I am delighted to endorse—reminding all of us, not least the Government, of the importance of the arts. I will focus on music and its contribution to society.

So many of the events that define us as a society have music at their heart. Hatches, matches and dispatches all feature music—we sang some splendid hymns at Lord Judge’s moving thanksgiving service last week. Music figures at national occasions, such as the Coronation, Trooping the Colour and Remembrance

Sunday. Music festivals, whether pop, rock, jazz or classical, are important to many of us, as are eisteddfodau in Wales. We express our affiliations to our country, religion or football team in songs and anthems. Where would we be without our choirs, orchestras and ensembles, including the Parliament Choir, my own contribution to which may or may not qualify as artistic? We even learned this week that singing or playing music might help to ward off dementia.

Like the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, I agree with everything that has been said so far, and probably with everything that will be said. I will highlight two challenges facing music, both of which have already been mentioned.

Last week, I attended an event hosted by the Music Venue Trust, representing grass-roots music venues across the UK. I was shocked to learn that, as we have heard, the number of such venues shrank by more than one a week in 2023, with 42% of these closures resulting from financial problems. The trust does a great job of making music available locally through such venues, but much more help is needed, both nationally and locally. I hope that the Minister might consider what steps the Government could take to ensure a more sustainable ownership and business model for grass-roots music venues. Might he consider a ticket levy, with tickets for large-scale music events including a small contribution towards supporting grass-roots venues? There are other actions government might look at, such as reducing the burden of VAT or business rates on small venues.

As we have heard, issues around music education raise even greater concerns. The number of pupils taking music GCSEs and A-levels has been steadily declining. Art and creative subjects are excluded from the five EBacc subject groups, causing some schools to drop them altogether, particularly state schools, as we have heard. The Independent Society of Musicians highlights a teacher recruitment and retention crisis: targets for recruiting music teachers have been missed, and some schools may have to rely on non-specialist teachers or none at all. As the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, told us, the local music education hubs set up under the original national plan for music education have been consistently underfunded. They are currently preoccupied with a major reorganisation to reduce their number from almost 120 to 43—and will still be underfunded. How do the Government intend to assure that the excellent aims of the refreshed national plan—led by the noble Baroness, Lady Fleet, who cannot be with us today—will be met, for the benefit of children across the country? What will the Minister do to blow the trumpet for music education and sing the praises of all those who contribute to it, so that music’s absolutely vital contribution to our society is sustained into the future?

Without music education, the music could stop. So come on, Minister. We recognise his personal commitment, and he has an excellent and ambitious plan to work with—why not give it a bit more welly?

12.46 pm

**Lord Rooker (Lab):** My Lords, if everybody agrees with everybody else, I wonder where that leaves the Minister.



I will work on one thing for a couple of minutes: rural life. Governments—of all parties, to be honest—ignore rural life in the UK. The word “rural” has not crossed anybody’s lips, although we came close with the right reverend Prelate’s speech. This goes for the big arts funders as well.

I live in Ludlow. It is the case that citizens there cannot even get home from events in Shrewsbury and Hereford, 30 miles away, using public transport. We are on our own. I declare an interest, in that Helen Hughes, aka Lady Rooker, was the pro bono chief executive of the Ludlow Assembly Rooms for eight years, after it was disowned by Arts Council England. It contains a 300-seat auditorium, recently rebuilt to modern standards, and it is mainly run by over 100 volunteers. Events can be streamed from London and New York. A mixture of film, live shows and international streaming for thousands of people, including those with dementia and other impairments not catered for by the big battalions of the arts, are offered. But the base funding is crucial to help provide the infrastructure for such small organisations. In turn, they are crucial for artists to develop their craft—people often come to a 300-seat rural enterprise to test events for a bigger auditorium later on. Funders want innovation, while small organisations need core funding to stay ongoing.

We are 10 miles from the Welsh border. Annual performances by Mid Wales Opera fill the auditorium. Recently, “Beatrice and Benedick” packed the place out. Mid Wales Opera ensures that nobody in Wales and the Marches is more than 30 miles from professional opera through its touring programme, together with the outstanding work it undertakes in schools, providing an education programme that gives massive benefits to so many young people. But now, Arts Council of Wales, in its wisdom, has cut support to this innovating company to zero. It just does not care—that is the problem. Rural arts need more support and attention.

12.49 pm

**Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (LD):** My Lords, as ever, it is a great honour to follow the noble Lord, Lord Rooker, who put his finger on a very important issue. However, I return to the role that the arts play in activism and campaigning—what the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans called “deepening our sympathies”.

The arts can engage us in a way that a thousand worthy leaflets or an informed speech simply do not. The noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh of Hudnall, laid that out when she talked about “Mr Bates vs The Post Office”. It took an ITV drama to focus the nation’s attention; two decades of campaigning led up to it but had not been able to focus anybody’s attention on its sufficiently. I am amazed how the scriptwriter, Gwyneth Hughes, managed so brilliantly to condense all that into a drama.

A gut-wrenching example of a brilliant and powerful play that I saw in the last year was Suzie Miller’s “Prima Facie”, which starred Jodie Comer. That play examines a brilliant, hard-working woman who gets crushed between misogyny and the rules of the game devised outwith the reality of women’s experience.

In a very different genre, Ai Weiwei’s recent exhibition at the Design Museum was very thought-provoking. He is an absolute master of stating tragedy with great subtlety, and of addressing immense issues originally and strikingly. We are very lucky to have him living in this country.

At the moment, I am reading *Prophet Song* by Paul Lynch. I appreciate that he is an Irish writer; of course, the Irish support the arts rather better than we do. It rightly won the Booker Prize, and chillingly portrays the little steps it takes to descend into a totalitarian state: the removal of sympathy, the lessening of empathy as it seeps away from people, neighbours, work colleagues and even family, until the state, working on the resulting fear and isolation, takes total control. It is a very chilling book that I thoroughly recommend.

Paula Rego changed a whole nation’s attitude to abortion through her series of paintings, as the then President of Portugal acknowledged. The power of art to change society for the better simply cannot be overstated. There are lots of other examples of that.

Right now, at Tate Britain, there is a very moving mixed media exhibition, “Women in Revolt!”, which follows women’s activism and campaigning on everything from equal pay to advertising to war. It is a thoroughly worthwhile exhibition and only just down the road. However, it provoked in me the thought that we have come a long way in some regards compared with where we were in the 1970s, but there is still an awfully long way to go. The arts have a very big role to play in that.

12.53 pm

**Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great privilege to take part in this debate on the contribution of the arts to the economy and society. It is even more of an honour to take part in a debate led by my noble friend Lord Bragg. For most of my adult life, he has been the cultural advocate to follow and one whose opinions on the arts, artists and the art world have shaped much of the national conversation. His contributions have made the arts accessible and helped us all to see their value, rather than to see the artistic endeavour as remote, highbrow and elitist. With others, he has argued the place of popular culture—a legacy to celebrate, surely.

In my few comments, I will draw attention to the role that the arts can play in regeneration, in particular in seaside and coastal communities. Living in and running a coastal city has, inevitably, shaped my view.

In 2018-19, I chaired a Select Committee on the future of seaside towns. Our report painted a depressing picture of decline and lost opportunity—of once thriving seaside communities feeling disconnected and left behind. Health and education, caring services, public transport, access to the arts and culture—all had outcomes infinitely poorer than in our major cities. We charted this decline from the 1960s, when many seaside towns lost access to the rail network and Brits with rising living standards changed their holiday habits. We concluded that none of this was inevitable.

The committee visited Cornwall, Clacton, Skegness, Blackpool, Whitby and Scarborough, and Margate. We heard from councils, social commentators, cultural entrepreneurs, MPs, Ministers, architects, regeneration

[LORD BASSAM OF BRIGHTON]  
experts and, most importantly, local people. In short, we listened to those with a passion for those communities and their potential.

One thing came across strongly. The British people have not fallen out of love with the seaside—visitor numbers remain high. They just view the seaside and our coast in a different light. The successful coastal communities we visited had a strong cultural imprint and had invested in the arts, education and culture. Margate, St Ives, Penzance, Scarborough and Falmouth had all taken a leap of faith, and it was evidently paying off.

Take my own city: back in the 1960s and 1970s it was a semi-industrial tourist town in economic decline but with the Brighton Festival, the arrival of higher education and the development of a college of art, it has shifted from being Keith Waterhouse's town that looks like it is

“helping the police with their inquiries”

to becoming the place to be. Now it is full of creatives, arthouses, art entrepreneurs, TV production companies, musicians, writers and performers. It has one of the UK's highest business formation rates, many of them linked to the arts and the digital economy. The Brighton Festival, the Brighton Dome and the Royal Pavilion show an economic impact annually of some £60 million and support 1,200 jobs. It is an arts hub for the south.

Is this a miracle cure for the seaside economy? In itself no, but it is part of the answer. As we have heard, the arts have high levels of productivity, can be open and accessible, can deliver new skills, and are at the cutting edge of new technologies. The UK, partly because of the brilliant advocacy of the arts by my noble friend Lord Bragg, is a recognisable arts superpower. But just as decline is not inevitable, nor is success. The arts economy needs champions, risk-takers, well-shaped investment plans and a sense of national purpose, and it needs a Government—a Labour Government—who are confident, outward looking, invest in winners, help its arts exporters, and celebrate and value our successes.

Regeneration led by arts and culture has enormous transformative potential—just look at Dundee and the V&A's impact—but we need support, a framework of renewal and a national plan for improving the seaside that embraces that potential.

12.57 pm

**Lord Howarth of Newport (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, I declare my interests as chair of the National Centre for Creative Health—a charity independent of government—and as co-chair of the All-Party Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing.

Since the APPG published its report, *Creative Health*, in 2017, the term “creative health” has become increasingly familiar in the worlds of healthcare, social care and culture. It denotes creative activities and approaches that have benefits for our health and well-being. Activities can include visual and performing arts, crafts, literature, cooking, and creative activities in nature, such as gardening. Approaches may involve creative and innovative ways to provide health and care services in healthcare settings, but also in homes, in communities, at cultural institutions and at heritage sites. My noble friend Lord Bragg referred to the important research

by Professor Daisy Fancourt of the World Health Organization, demonstrating the effectiveness of creative health.

Creative health may be used as a targeted intervention to support people living with specific mental and physical health conditions. It can be applied in people's everyday lives, supporting general well-being, reducing isolation and loneliness, and, as a component of place and community-based approaches to population health, influencing the social determinants of health: the conditions in which people live, grow, work and age.

Some noble Lords may recall that, in our proceedings on the Health and Care Bill in 2022, when the Minister declined to set up a review of the efficacy and potential of creative health, I said that we would do it ourselves. The *Creative Health Review* report, sponsored by the NCCH and the APPG, and led by a very distinguished group of commissioners, was published in December. It describes the current state of creative health in England and makes recommendations to government and metropolitan mayors. Greater Manchester and London are already well ahead with creative health strategies for their city regions.

We call for a cross-governmental strategy to ensure that the power of creative health is fully harnessed to improve the health and well-being of all people across the life course, reduce inequalities, improve economic productivity, reduce pressure and demand on the NHS and support the personal resilience of staff in the NHS and social care.

If the potential benefits of creative health are to be realised, this is not just a matter for the DHSC and DCMS. We addressed recommendations to the Department for Education, DLUHC, the Ministry of Justice and other departments. We recommend, for example, better focus on creativity in school and using creativity to improve working conditions and the planning and design of the built environment. Strategy to realise the full potential of creative health needs to be driven by No. 10, with a new and sophisticated analysis of the economic benefits by the Treasury.

The report is available on the NCCH website. It presents evidence that creative health offers value for money, and that creative health interventions can lead to a reduction in healthcare usage. Mindsong's “Breathe in Sing out” programme in Gloucestershire uses singing to support people with breathlessness resulting from COPD, asthma or anxiety. They have seen a statistically significant improvement in mental well-being, a 23% decline in A&E admissions and a 21% decline in GP appointments.

Some integrated care systems, including creative health hubs in West Yorkshire and Gloucestershire, have incorporated creative health into their joint forward plans and established supporting infrastructure and funding and commissioning models that facilitate the sustained development of community-based creative health initiatives. They have also collated consistent data that demonstrate the long-term impact on health outcomes and inequalities. The Government should encourage and support such approaches across the country. This requires a whole-system approach, endorsed and led by the Government, including health systems, local authorities, schools and the cultural and VCSE sectors.

1.02 pm

**The Earl of Clancarty (CB):** My Lords, I too congratulate the Government on deciding to ratify the UNESCO treaty on intangible cultural heritage. I thank Patricia Lovett, who has campaigned on this for so many years. I also applaud the Government's stated commitment to negotiate the artist's resale right with other countries, which is much appreciated. However, the triumvirate of crisis areas—arts funding, arts education and Brexit—is now causing firefighting on a daily basis in terms of cost, red tape and feasibility.

An artist's work is primarily a contribution to society, which is why public funding is so important. Visual artists, for instance, should be properly remunerated for participation in public exhibitions on the kind of scale that, for example, Stuttgart has recently announced for artists there. Compare that progressive model with Suffolk and Nottingham, which are the latest councils to announce zero funding for the arts. There will be no exhibitions, let alone payment for artists, and theatres are now in danger of losing much of their total funding, as the excellent introduction by the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, made clear.

I read with horror this week of the possible plans for a fire sale of public assets to deal with local authorities' financial woes, including buildings that might be used for arts and cultural purposes. This is so short-sighted. Councils have already lost many precious buildings that cannot be recovered. Local authorities ought to be part of the solution, rather than hindering the provision of, for example, our increasingly scarce music venues, which were mentioned earlier.

The Arts Council and local authorities are blamed, but ultimately the long-term cuts to central government funding are responsible. The key to arts funding lies in reversing the cuts to local authorities, particularly as through the "Let's Create" strategy the overstretched Arts Council has taken on the kind of community projects that used to be funded by local authorities.

Brexit has yet to be properly addressed for the arts. While much can be done to ameliorate the situation, including renegotiating the deal the EU originally offered us, in the end the real solution must be to rejoin the single market. I say this particularly because many of the jobs that used to be on offer in Europe to performers as an accepted part of their career path are now advertised only for those with European passports. We will always remain at a disadvantage to our European neighbours in the creative industries until we are an equal member of that market again.

One specific thing the Government could do to help touring musicians would be to speed up and reduce the red tape on the issuing of A1 forms. I have an Oral Question on this on 12 February, to be answered by the Treasury, but I take the opportunity here to ask DCMS to impress on the Treasury the importance of addressing this concern.

The third main area of concern is arts education, with GCSE arts entries falling by a massive 41% since 2010. The key issue here is the accountability measures, with their built-in hierarchy of subjects. Look to the recent report by the Lords Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee that recommends the EBacc be scrapped

and Progress 8 reformed. One should bear in mind that the EBacc was set up to cement the then Education Secretary Michael Gove's vision of a narrowly academic bias to school education, not the properly rounded education that all students deserve and that would most benefit society.

1.06 pm

**Lord Wood of Anfield (Lab):** My Lords, I declare my interest as a member of the board of the Royal Court Theatre. When I was first appointed to your Lordships' House, the first reaction of one of my oldest friends was: "Oh wow, that's amazing. Does that mean you get to meet Melvyn Bragg?". I cannot think of anyone else whose cultural appetite spans so widely, yet whose passion is always tethered to the values of incessant curiosity and intellectual rigour.

Another thing I associate with my noble friend Lord Bragg is the belief that art and culture should be available to everyone, whatever their background—a statement that sounds trite, perhaps, until you unpack what it says about a country and a culture when it stops being true. It is rare that someone steps out and says, "Art should only be for the privileged few". But the problem is that that is precisely what happens in a country that lets the open, democratic contract at the heart of arts and culture slip away—a country, sadly, a bit like ours.

This is what happens when you see the arts not as a staple of what makes for a good life but as a luxury that can no longer be afforded—the "cherry on the cake" misnomer, as my noble friend Lord Bragg said. It leads to nearly £1 billion cut from local government spending on the arts in the last 15 years—a 30% real-terms cut in public funding for the arts since 2010. It is accompanied by a view that the arts are the plaything of the metropolitan elites. It tethers political grievance directly to our cultural institutions—to our media, whose integrity gets constantly questioned; and to our arts institutions, which are portrayed as enjoyed only by the champagne swillers. It leads to a Culture Minister who did not even know that Channel 4, one of her party's boldest innovations, was not taxpayer funded.

In education, it continues with the prejudice that science is an investment but arts are a hobby—that arts and culture are a private good, not a public one. Arts courses at universities are repeatedly challenged for their economic value, their academic merit and even their political acceptability. Unsurprisingly, these courses then get whittled away. Cash-strapped and curriculum-overloaded schools become less able to offer supplementary arts and music options, or even core arts and music options, for their students. Over time, as many noble colleagues have said, the values of empathy, curiosity, sensitivity and openness become associated with elitism, privilege, weakness and even being a "snowflake".

What is the consequence of this financial and cultural chipping away at the arts? It means that children's access to arts is radically reduced, arts institution cuts that were temporary in bad times become the new normal, and thousands of freelance workers who depend on the arts, and who are not often mentioned, find their careers totally unsustainable.

[LORD WOOD OF ANFIELD]

It is no surprise, then, that in Britain today, people who grow up in professional families are four times more likely than those with working-class parents to be working in the creative industries. One of our leading actresses, Dame Helen Mirren, warns that acting is becoming the preserve of the rich. Thus, the prejudices of many of those who neglect and starve the arts are perversely vindicated.

The price we all pay for this is not just young people with less exposure to the arts, and who are less enriched by them; it is not just growing inequality in access to what should be a daily staple for everyone in our country. It is also that the quality of our democracy is undermined, because our arts are at the heart of freedom of expression, solidarity, debate and disagreement accompanied by civility.

Arts make us all better citizens, which is why we all need access, continued exposure and participation in the arts. More than anything else, this is why, whatever happens politically in the decade ahead, we must all, whatever our party and our preferences, call time on the neglect, austerity, politicisation and prejudice towards our arts that I fear has become part of daily life in the past decade.

1.10 pm

**Baroness Hooper (Con):** My Lords, I, too, welcome this debate, and thank the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing it. As a general point, I emphasise that the arts/creative industries sector provides us with an important ingredient of soft power internationally. The status and recognition of the UK and its economy is based on a mixture of our history, the importance of the English language, our education system and the BBC, but it is enhanced by the role of the arts, whether music, dance, theatre or anything else that can claim inclusion in the definition. In this, the British Council has an important role, which I believe could and should be extended.

In the short time available, I will concentrate my remarks on dance and classical ballet, in particular. As a former co-chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Dance Group, a position now enjoyed by my noble friend Lady Fraser of Craigmaddie, I can point to the importance of the role of dance in education, health, well-being, discipline and international relations as well as in its sheer beauty and entertainment value. In recognising the importance of excellence and high standards in performance, a perhaps less-known institution, the Royal Academy of Dance, plays a vital role. Here I must declare an interest as a former governor of the RAD, which teaches the teachers of ballet, provides the syllabus and examination system and maintains standards. It is recognised for this throughout the world. Indeed, I have come across RAD examiners working away in South Africa and New Zealand and even in El Salvador.

In terms of culture, the Royal Ballet has, of course, a leading role. Again, I should declare an interest as a former governor in the days when my late friend Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover was the chairman. I was also privileged to attend the Royal Ballet School at the ripe old age of 10, so long ago that it was still known as the Sadler's Wells Ballet School. The Royal

Ballet, at its home in the Royal Opera House, represents a centre of excellence renowned throughout the world and is a huge attraction for tourists and British balletomanes alike. In talking about the Royal Ballet, let us not forget the Birmingham Royal Ballet under the brilliant artistic directorship of Carlos Acosta and in the safe hands of its CEO, Caroline Miller. The BRB delights audiences at its home base in Birmingham, but also brings joy and pleasure to the citizens of Southampton, Bristol, Plymouth, Sunderland, Salford and elsewhere in its capacity as a touring company. We are fortunate in other companies, such as the English National Ballet and the Northern Ballet, to name but two which are also world class. All are struggling with budgetary restrictions.

If I may raise a specific question for my noble friend, given the funding cuts we have been hearing about, the higher rate of theatre tax relief introduced in 2022 has provided a lifeline for theatre, opera and ballet. It has made it possible to invest in various productions, fostered innovations and supported employment for actors, dancers, designers, producers and stage crew who would otherwise be out of work. To take one example from the Birmingham Royal Ballet, it supported the highly innovative "Black Sabbath - The Ballet", which last year thrilled sold-out audiences across the country, many of whom had never seen ballet before. The current rate of tax relief is due to end in 2025. Could it be extended? Such a move would be cheered across the performing arts sectors. Can my noble friend give me hope?

1.14 pm

**Lord Cashman (Lab):** My Lords, we get to the point in the debate where we defy the rules of "Just a Minute" and have hesitation and repetition. However, I make no excuses for congratulating my noble friend and national treasure Lord Bragg on his lifelong commitment to the arts and on ensuring this debate. I refer to my register of interests. I spent 40 years as an actor before entering the theatre of politics, and I know full well what my noble friends Lord Bassam and Lord Rooker said about seaside and rural theatres. Indeed, I have performed the length and breadth of the country, sometimes in theatres that wished I had not.

On a serious point, I believe that our lack of a comprehensive arts policy will fail a generation in this country. Therefore, my focus will be on access to the arts and the creative industries in all their aspects through education at primary, secondary and tertiary level and on physical access to experience the arts in all their interconnected forms. I am indebted to the Lords Library, in particular to Nicola Newson, for the detailed research I requested and to the briefings I received from Equity.

My premise is that we have no effective joined-up, cross-departmental approach to one of our most successful industries. I would go so far as to revisit the concept of DCMS and instead make a case for education, arts, science and innovation. I believe that without cross-departmental strategies, young people, especially from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities, will be denied crucial, life-changing opportunities without regular access to the arts, arts education and the careers therein.

It is not only young people who benefit; it is cross-generational. I have witnessed at first hand the impact of drama and art within the prison system in opening up minds and helping people to face the challenge of reading and writing and expressing oneself and the deep and often damaging frustration that comes when people are unable to express themselves. The arts have the power to bring imagination to life and allow and encourage individuals to explore new, unimagined opportunities. The arts are all interconnected. Television soap opera, music, television drama and theatre open audiences to the world around them and challenge misconception and misinformation while all the time being engaging and entertaining and in fact, as mentioned by my noble friend Lady McIntosh, bringing about a monumental change for justice, as we witnessed with “Mr Bates vs the Post Office” and, for those of us old enough to remember, the social justice that followed “Cathy Come Home”.

However, we are failing young people, as witnessed by the findings of a report by A New Direction, a not-for-profit organisation that promotes creative opportunities for children and young people. Its report *The Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future* was published in March 2023, and it still needs to be fully addressed by the Government. We must ensure that there is greater time to study and explore music, drama, design, dance, video games, films and audio within our schools and in hubs outside, especially for those who might not otherwise be able to afford it. We must keep our theatres, music venues and libraries open. They are not luxuries; they make economic sense, and they speak of the kind of civilised, open country that we are or could become.

1.19 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the powerful contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Cashman, and join the universal thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing this debate and introducing it so powerfully. It is worth focusing on his key message that the arts feed us. They are to our physical, emotional and intellectual benefit. However, rather than cake, we should look at them as bread—one of the staffs of life.

I shall focus on the importance of that staff being available to all communities, as did the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans in noting the near collapse of provision in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, particularly in opportunities for people to participate in the arts. For the Green Party, that must be the foundation of arts policy: focusing not on what people purchase—Hollywood movies or blockbuster exhibitions—but on what they participate in or jointly create. We know that that is of great public interest, in the best sense.

To take an example that noble Lords may be aware of, there is currently a giant furore around Suffolk County Council’s decision to deliver a 100% cut to core arts funding. This has even penetrated the London-centric mainstream media bubble. We have to acknowledge the long-term impact of more than a decade of government austerity on local government—and I declare my position as a vice-president of the Local Government

Association. The foundational blame lies in Westminster. But the local decision is still indefensible and has since, to a degree, been reversed, although the outcome is yet to be finalised. However, a partial climbdown by the county council leaves hugely valued local institutions, such as DanceEast and the New Wolsey Theatre, without the kind of certainty needed to securely continue to deliver hugely valued community services. The mother of 15 year-old Jack, who has autism, told Channel 4 how much a weekly drama class had brought him out of his shell. “I absolutely love them”, Jack told Channel 4’s reporter.

Noble Lords will be aware that I work across many issues in your Lordships’ House. In health debates, we often hear that the Government understand and value the increasing contribution to health of social prescribing, which enables people to access dance, theatre and other creative arts as a way of caring for them and improving their health and lives. Yet Ipswich, where one-third of children live in poverty, faces a collapse of such provision, which can only put more costs on to our struggling NHS and take away that essential food to set children up for a healthy life.

Finally, I step away from my main focus to comment on the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Vaizey, who is not currently in his place, and disagree in the strongest terms with him about the relationship between BP and the British Museum. As the campaign group Culture Unstained said, this is “completely indefensible”. Greenwashing and artwashing do not clean the hands of companies such as BP, but they do damage the reputation, the standing and the world’s view of institutions that enable that effort at greenwashing.

To comment further on the noble Lord embrace of philanthropy, relying on philanthropy as a foundation to keep our institutions going means that a tiny number of people get a big say in the direction of those institutions—the subjects they tackle and the kind of work they support. How much better it would be to ensure that big companies and rich individuals pay their taxes and we all democratically decide how to allocate the funding. If we want arts that embrace and show the way to change, rather than simply seek to reinforce the status quo, we need democratically decided funding for them.

1.23 pm

**Viscount Chandos (Lab):** My Lords, I join noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing this debate, his powerful introduction and, as so well expressed by my noble friend Lady McIntosh, his exceptional contribution to this country’s cultural and artistic life.

I had the privilege of introducing a debate on a similar subject a year or so ago. Depressingly but unsurprisingly, little has changed for the better since. The real reduction in public funding for the arts has continued to squeeze all institutions while the Arts Council stumbles on in its attempt to distribute that inadequate funding in the context of admittedly incoherent directions from the Government. All the while and against the odds, artists of all disciplines in this country daily create miracles of inspired excellence. So, are we wasting our breath today? I was encouraged last night when talking to the chair of one of the most important

[VISCOUNT CHANDOS]

artistic institutions in the country, from outside London. He welcomed our debate, saying that: “Nobody else advocate for the arts—least of all the Arts Council”.

I declare my interest in the register as a vice-chair of LAMDA. I strongly endorse the arguments made by the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, and every other speaker about the vital importance of the arts, directly and indirectly, to our lives. I will make two brief points.

The noble Lord, Lord Bragg, highlighted the huge divergence in the teaching of music and the performing arts in the state and independent school sectors. I see this vividly through the more than 120,000 drama exams conducted by LAMDA worldwide every year. While LAMDA, as a world-leading drama school, already draws its students from a broadly representative cross-section of society and works hard to improve that further, its exams are overwhelmingly taken by students from independent schools—a vivid but depressing illustration of the rundown of arts teaching in state schools. My right honourable friend Sir Keir Starmer’s commitment to the Labour Party promoting oracy through state schools is a light at the not-too-distant end of the tunnel.

I hope that the Minister will not again insult the intelligence of your Lordships in winding up by presenting small nominal increases in funding for the arts and shrugging off the savage inflationary cost increases suffered by all arts institutions. Since the start of the Conservative and Conservative-led Governments, public funding has been cut by over 30% in real terms.

A year ago, I suggested that the additionality required for funding from the lottery might be relaxed and that the doubling of distributions to good causes promised by the new lottery franchisee could be used to compensate in part for the real-terms reduction in the Arts Council grant in aid. By coincidence, today is the first day of the new lottery franchise, yet the new franchisee has already talked about struggling to match previous years’ distribution and a delay in any increase. Does the Minister agree that the award of the franchise to Allwyn by the Gambling Commission appears to have been based on a false prospectus? If, as is now predicted, lottery funding for the arts and other good causes does not meet the original projections on which the franchise was awarded, will the Government make up the difference through an increase in the grant in aid?

1.28 pm

**Lord Browne of Madingley (CB):** My Lords, I too pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing this debate. I refer the House to my interests as set out in the register, specifically my chairmanship of the Courtauld Institute, my co-chairmanship of the Prime Minister’s Council for Science and Technology and my membership of the board of the Royal Opera House. I will make four short points.

First, the arts do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are a prism through which everything else in our world can be viewed. That means that they must feature much more prominently in education and outreach programmes. Successful examples can be found and built on—for example, at the Royal Opera House and the Courtauld Institute, which remains faithful to its founder’s vision of art for all.

Secondly, the arts lift our eyes up, out of our day-to-day preoccupations, towards the broader human condition. For many years, I have been a patron of Paintings in Hospitals, a charity which loans artworks to health and social care organisations, where they are displayed, reducing anxiety and therapeutically benefiting patients, staff and visitors. I will never forget, when I served as chairman of the Donmar Warehouse, speaking to a group of young people who had been invited to the all-women performance of selected works by Shakespeare in a warehouse near King’s Cross. They had never experienced the power of Shakespearean verse before and they found that it spoke to them in a commanding yet fresh way about their own lives and the lives of those around them. We must do much more to open the arts to new audiences, widening access and, in the case of visual arts, expanding public display.

Thirdly, we should remember that the arts always give more than they take. The question of public funding should always be tested against the backdrop of the significant value that the arts add to the UK economy—approximately £50 billion gross, a figure similar to that of the food and beverage service sector. This must be recognised, with commensurate levels of public finance, but more philanthropy must be encouraged. For example, there must be scope for additional tax relief for smaller donations—commonly called individual giving—and for the lifetime donation of works of art, which should be incentivised and made much more tax efficient without a limit on total value. We should be recognising and encouraging generosity, not stifling it.

Fourthly, the arts are instrumental in creating our future. The research and development growth potential of the world-class creative industries is enormous. Yet they are often overlooked for investment. In the autumn, the Council for Science and Technology made a series of recommendations on how further to incentivise R&D activity that will have benefits across the arts, the creative economy and beyond. We called for increased levels of public finance, further tax relief opportunities, renewed efforts to value and digitise our cultural assets, and greater copyright protections for creative content in the face of AI deployment. We look forward to the Government’s full response.

I am a firm believer in and a supporter of the arts in this country, but those of us who play an active role know that we cannot take their continued contribution for granted. The benefits that they bring to individuals, to society and to the economy of today and of the future must not be overlooked, even in challenging economic times.

1.32 pm

**Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab):** My Lords, this the view from street level of someone who has never chaired very much or run huge organisations.

The late, revered Michael Parkinson once declared that of all the interviews he had done, his favourite was the one he did with Jacob Bronowski. Most of us will remember Jacob Bronowski’s ground-breaking television series “The Ascent of Man”, which was broadcast almost exactly 50 years ago. Here was a scientist of the first order who was marinated in the arts.

Human values, a fascination with the work of William Blake, a writer of poetry himself and such an engaging personality—what a cocktail of qualities he possessed. He championed the idea that the best science was simply the material and physical outworking of deeply implanted human instincts. The arts were as important to him as his science.

Moving from then to now, Jamie Brownhill is the headmaster of the Central Foundation Boys' School, a magnificent inner-city comprehensive in Islington. I was involved in its governance for 20 years, 10 of them as chairman of its trustees, but that is as grand as it gets. Ask Jamie about the history of his school and he will be bound to tell you how Jacob Bronowski is its most admired former pupil. This recognises the important place that Bronowski plays in the school's past, but it is equally an indication of the spirit of the man still hovering over a community of learning which, for all the problems in our national education referred to by previous speakers, continues to live out the ideals of its former pupil.

I visited an exhibition of paintings done by the school's pupils and put on by the Wellcome Foundation. I sat proud as punch at a concert in the Guildhall, where a range of musical skills were on display. Our trustees kept agreeing to buy pianos for rehearsal rooms and music lessons, and the drama put on by the pupils was wonderful. How can I ever forget the way that a 17 year-old Macbeth, just after stabbing the king, with the same facility of utterance that he might have shown in wiping his hands after consuming a burger at McDonald's, lamented:

"No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine"?

The arts must surely be at the very core of our curriculum so that one generation after another can bring their creative, cultural, emotional and imaginative selves into the mix of their developing minds. It is vital for the well-being of society, as others have said, and for building the kind of world that we all want to live in. Again and again, Jacob Bronowski made reference in his great work to poets, musicians, philosophers, artists and dramatists. He ended one of his chapters with a favourite quatrain of mine from William Blake. He wanted people to be able:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour"—

or as I, in a pathetic contemporary version, might have it:

"To build a culture that is steeped in the arts  
Where STEM plus A equals STEAM  
Where the whole is more than the sum of its parts  
And life rich beyond our wildest dreams".

I salute my noble friend, a true Companion of Honour, and thank him for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important subject today.

1.36 pm

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, on securing this important debate and on his excellent and powerful introduction. We have heard some very knowledgeable contributions today. Mine is very different.

Small children can express themselves through art with paper and crayons. A roll of lining paper and a pot of felt-tip pens and they are away. Do not ask, "What is it?" but try, "Tell me about your picture". Have at least one contribution pinned up around the home somewhere. Plasticine and FIMO are also great starting tools to encourage children. If talent is there, nurture, develop and encourage it. Art therapy and the use of drawing is often used in cases of children's bereavement or abuse, to help them express what they are feeling and to say what happened when they do not have the words to do so.

The digital age and the computer have moved the pace on significantly towards graphic design. Advertisements and packaging are there to sell us something that we did not know we needed or wanted, but this all helps the economy. The cultural aspect of the creative industries is unquestionable. From deciphering the contributions of a four year-old to standing in front of a work of art from a grand master, our hearts and spirits are lifted, making us smile and sometimes cry. Art improves our mental health, keeping us going and economically active.

Whether inside or outside, art has a part to play in the economy. We flock to see a play in a theatre; we save up to visit the Royal Opera House to see ballet, which is so transporting, or an opera, which is so dramatic; we visit galleries, which are calming and thought-provoking. A visit to the cinema gives a much better experience than viewing on the small screen at home, more convenient though this may be for many. Music calms the troubled soul and there is nothing that comes close to the experience of a live concert.

I return now to the younger generation, the classroom and the national curriculum, which other noble Lords have referred to. Art is squeezed out. Visits by theatre groups to schools lift the children out of their routine and give them a different aspect on life. Playing an instrument gives a great sense of achievement. Some art forms are more squeezed than others: music, for instance. Drama, acting and painting get a reasonable allocation of time. Ballet tends to be after school and at weekends. Sculpture is not so good. For ceramics or craft pottery, it is reasonable, but if you might be the next Grayson Perry someone will need to keep a foot in the door for you.

Art foundation courses give limited time to various art forms. Two weeks for clay is insufficient to discover if it might be your medium. All art forms need space on curriculums at all education stages to ensure they survive. There would undoubtedly be an effect on the economy from their disappearance, but the effect on the mental health of us all would be very significant if our art choices were restricted and some forms disappeared altogether.

1.40 pm

**Baroness Bakewell (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my fellow Peer and noble friend Lord Bragg for introducing this debate. He is not in the Chamber at the moment; I think he is out in the Lobby being interviewed for television. He cannot spread the message too far and too fast. I support his proposition that the economy of this country and the well-being of its people benefit both in money and in spiritual well-being from the

[BARONESS BAKEWELL]

flourishing of the arts. As the BBC's arts correspondent for 10 years, I documented week by week the talent and success, reputational and financial, of our outstanding arts community. I will be repeating a lot that has already been said, but repetition shows only how universally these important views are held.

State funding since the war by central and local government has underpinned much of our success and it continues to be subject to the vagaries of political volatility. That is a word we should not need to use. Before that, I should mention the consistent donations made by private individuals and families in the UK. The Blavatniks, the Ruddocks, the Rausings and the Sainsburys, and indeed the noble Lord, Lord Browne, who has just spoken, are some of the most generous but, taking the broader picture, the UK arts depend on the state as both central and local government.

Arguments in their favour are consistent and enduring. At the risk of repetition, here are some of them. The arts make money. They employ some 2.46 million people and train generations to follow. The UK has some 275 arts colleges and arts courses at further education institutions. Many of their talents go on to enjoy international reputations in the world's galleries and museums. There is soft power: the range of Britain's writers and its flourishing publishing industry, as we have already heard, support our reputation in universities and in cultures around the world. Our musicians and composers—a number of them have seats in this House—and the popular music industry more than hold their own in concert halls and on stages. Our established artists, who trained at any one of our 275 arts colleges, command huge rewards on the booming UK arts market, currently worth £9.7 billion. For example, the paintings of the Scottish artist Peter Doig, who studied at Central Saint Martins and Chelsea, currently command prices towards £30 million per painting at auction.

Then there are the personal and social benefits, which your Lordships have already heard spoken of several times. Millions of people visit hundreds of the UK's museums and art galleries. Post the pandemic, theatregoers are now back to a number of around 16 million. More recently, research at Exeter University found that playing a musical instrument or singing in a choir can promote better memory skills and hence brain health in older age. Music is being used to help those with dementia.

The House has already heard and will hear more arguments and examples of how the arts benefit the UK economy, its institutions, its communities and its individuals. The arts are not a fringe activity for randomly filling in our leisure hours. Although they may do that for us individually, they are an ongoing conversation that this culture has within itself. The Government must take notice of that conversation, back it and support it. How that culture comes to define its identity and nourish the lives and happiness of all who live here depend on the arts, and the arts depend on the Government.

1.45 pm

**Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, who has done so much for the arts over such a long

period of time; and equally, to thank the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, for securing this debate. Again, he is a national treasure, a hero and a legend of our arts in this country. In doing so, I declare my interest as set out in the register as a member of the board at Channel 4. The arts excite, entertain, amuse, intrigue, shock and, yes, offend us, and all to the good. I will talk briefly about the arts' potential to make the difference—not a difference but the difference—and to cause change.

I am reminded of a programme that the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, made decades ago, which affected me then and is still seared into my consciousness. It did not have a big blockbuster budget; it was not filmed on location; it was across the way, in a non-dressed empty studio, with two cameras and two chairs. The noble Lord, Lord Bragg, was on one chair and Dennis Potter, his life fading from him, was on the other, with a morphine flask in his hand. In that moment, with no set or and no need for graphics or any other staging, two humans discussed the power of art to change, transform and make the difference.

I have tried to take that essence into some of the things I have been fortunate enough to be involved in. When I led the team that planned and delivered the London 2012 Paralympic Games, I was absolutely seized of the necessity to drive the artistic as well as the sporting—not least because, for decades in this country, probably up to that point, sport and art had been put in some pathetic opposition where, if you funded one, you could not have the other. Like oil and water: never the twain shall meet. What nonsense. I hope that, in our small way, in 2012, we helped drive that point home, so that they would never be seen by any future Government as opposing forces.

We put on Unlimited, the largest deaf and disabled arts programme ever staged on these shores. There were great shows and exhibitions, with stand-up comedians and performers, many of whom then led or were part of the opening ceremony of the 2012 Paralympics—so perfectly put together by its directors, the sensational Jenny Sealey and Brad Hemmings. Shakespeare's "The Tempest" ran right through the ceremony, with modern music and the national anthem—signed as well as sung. In the midst of all of that, Professor Stephen Hawking talked about possibilities not just beyond ourselves but beyond our universe. What gravity-defying, attitude-altering and opportunity-creating art and sport it was—all of it inclusive by design and accessible for each and every person who experienced it.

This leads to my one question for my noble friend the Minister, of which I gave him prior notice. How many of our cultural institutions—our museums and galleries—currently in receipt of National Lottery and/or grant in aid funding are not accessible? They are putting on inaccessible exhibitions and shows, for the want of simple accessible services such as audio description. It does not make a difference; it makes the difference between somebody being able to experience that art or exhibition or being effectively and completely shut out. As I am talking about making the difference, I ask not only how many institutions are currently putting on inaccessible shows but what my noble friend will commit the Government to doing to put an end to this.



The arts, accessible for all, is what we should all be aiming for. Accessible for all or not at all; “accessible for all” is my clarion call.

1.50 pm

**Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to take part in what has been a great debate. I particularly welcome my noble friend Lord Bragg’s powerful and penetratingly relevant speech on the arts today. He referred, quite rightly, to the chaos caused by the former Culture Secretary and Arts Council England to the English National Opera.

I will refer to opera outside London, which has equally been affected by the decision of the Arts Council to reduce funding. The Arts Council was given 9% more funding in the last settlement but has cut opera by 22%. The effect in England and Wales, outside London, is on touring opera. My noble friend Lord Rooker referred to Mid Wales Opera and the work that it does. I want to refer to just three companies, because that is all we have, in England and Wales which deal with touring opera: Glyndebourne, Opera North and—inevitably—the Welsh National Opera. Despite its name, the Welsh National Opera does a great deal of work in England and a big part of its funding comes from the English funding council as well as the Arts Council of Wales. As a consequence of those cuts, we have seen cuts in performances.

On the touring aspect of opera, those three companies go to 13 cities in England, including Plymouth, Hull, Newcastle, Bristol, Southampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Canterbury, Nottingham, Liverpool and Manchester. In all of those cities, we have now seen a reduction in performances. The year before last there were 146 performances, but now there are 87; 10 years ago, there were 250 performances throughout England and Wales outside London. The figures speak for themselves. Take two continental European countries as a comparison: in Germany, there are 78 companies, and in France, there are 17 companies. You can go through all the countries in Europe, and the Scandinavian countries, and find that they serve their people better in opera than we do.

If we make opera less accessible, with performances reduced and production ceasing in various parts of the country, we will make it elitist. But it should not be; it should be for everybody. As a consequence of that decision by Arts Council England, we are in dire trouble, and touring opera in England and Wales now faces a crisis. It is the opposite of levelling up.

I hope that the Minister will refer to my remarks in his wind-up. I ask him two things. First, I ask him to liaise with his counterpart in the Welsh Government to ensure that the Welsh National Opera receives proper funding. Secondly, before Arts Council England’s next funding round—I think it is in three years—and to save opera in our country, I ask for this crisis to be dealt with directly and not left in the hands of Arts Council England, which is not doing opera any good at all.

1.54 pm

**Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (CB):** My Lords, I echo the observation of the noble Lord, Lord Holmes, on the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, to

all our individual experiences—recalling, for example, his interview with Dennis Potter. I think everyone in the Chamber can probably recall an experience where he made a real difference.

I urge noble Lords to reach in their pockets—they may still find some coins there. Yes, we do still use coins. When you hold a coin in your hand, you have a visible example of how the arts, design and innovative production methods contribute to the economy and reflect our society. Tokens that represent a value and underpin the assets of a nation, and that display the effigy of the sovereign, have a long history. In this country, the Royal Mint has not only a proud past but a promising future. This may be a fitting moment to declare an interest: I chair the Royal Mint’s advisory committee on coins and medals, as well as being president of the Birmingham Bach Choir—so there is a resonance of music.

The advisory council includes practising artists and designers, and we make suggestions on lettering, heraldry, images and themes. Together with the in-house designers and their team, we aim to improve the design standards of our nation’s coins and medals. The next time Members handle a coin, they may have one that has the new effigy of King Charles III. The effigy was designed by Martin Jennings and, even if you have not seen the coins yet, you have probably come across one of his public sculptures: John Betjeman—incidentally, he was a previous member of the Royal Mint’s advisory committee—at St Pancras station, George Orwell at Broadcasting House, or the “Women of Steel” at Barker’s Pool in Sheffield.

The Royal Mint also encourages young talent. One-third of its design team is under 30. One of the earliest coins celebrating the King’s Coronation—a 50p coin—was designed by Natasha Jenkins, one of the local designers. There are several initiatives to support craft skills and encourage the design and manufacture of the Royal Mint’s jewellery range, which will be made in Britain.

The first definitive set of coins of King Charles’ reign was issued towards the end of last year. The coins feature flora and fauna, celebrating the King’s passion for sustainability and love of the natural world. The £2 coin has floral emblems; the £1 coin has an industrious honeybee; the 50p has an Atlantic salmon; the 20p has a puffin; the 10p has the capercaillie, a woodland grouse; the 5p has an oak tree; the 2p has a red squirrel, so it was helpful that it was a copper coin, making it clear that we were celebrating the red, not the grey, squirrel; and the 1p has a dormouse.

The Royal Mint is a significant direct employer in Wales. It supports its local area and the Welsh tourist industry through its award-winning visitor attraction, the Royal Mint Experience. But the main thing I stress is that it promotes, protects and champions British craftsmanship and works with the Heritage Crafts Association, issuing bursaries for precious metal workers, for example. It is a major contributor to exports, producing over a billion pieces for 22 countries.

The Royal Mint’s success is based—this is the point about the arts—on the simple fact of excellent designs, high-quality craftsmanship, innovative manufacturing and the use of new technologies. The Royal Mint expects that it will be the first world pioneer in green

[BARONESS STUART OF EDGBASTON]

technology, which recovers gold from discarded electronic devices such as mobile phones and laptops on an industrial scale.

I wanted to take part today simply because we should not overlook the importance of making things and valuing those things. When they are artistic, we should appreciate them.

2 pm

**Lord Grantchester (Lab):** It was good to see the Minister on his first visit to Liverpool in November last year. I was surprised to hear it was his first visit to Britain's premier city.

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Lord Grantchester (Lab):** I am sure he will have been thrilled to find such a fine, vibrant city, with deep cultural and artistic traditions that have given rise to a business community of talent across all the arts. The message from Liverpool is that you do not need to go to London to experience artistic excellence. Liverpool is set on reversing the gravitational pull to the south.

However, let us not forget the need for investment in infrastructure: the failing historic buildings still need central funding. The port city and its maritime industry were revolutionised through the creation of the Albert Dock and, after falling into dereliction, the area was transformed into a renowned cultural destination that has become a model of successful regeneration. But the fabric is now outdated. Liverpool Museums boasts National Museum Liverpool on the waterfront, the Walker Art Gallery, World Museum, the Lady Lever and the Williamson on the Wirral, along with Tate Liverpool. These are homes of national art collections as well as modern and contemporary art in the north. Liverpool was recently voted the seventh best city of the world and tourism accounts for roughly 48% of the local economy, with a majority of visitors citing the dock and the museums there as the main reasons to visit. But cost rises present huge challenges: wage rises are 14% and energy bills have increased by 100%, while DCMS grants have grown by 4%.

However, great things are happening. Liverpool is committed to its waterfront transformation project. Both the Tate and National Museums Liverpool have received £10 million each of levelling-up funding. Yesterday, the Wolfson Foundation announced a fantastic £1.25 million award for the transformation of Tate Liverpool. But certainty is certainly needed for the waterfront project. From the Minister's visit in November, can he say how his department is assessing financial support for the development of the International Slavery Museum and the Maritime Museum of National Museums Liverpool? Here I want to mention the bees project, which is a very innovative and immersive educational project outlining the importance of conservation and pollination that needs funding certainty, looking naturally to DCMS and Defra to contribute.

I want to mention the Liverpool Film Studio, rising from the regeneration of the iconic Littlewoods Edge Lane building. It is the Minister able to encourage this in any way as the new home for film in the north?

Finally, I mention the John Moores modern art prize at the Walker, the longest running art prize open to all painters, trained and untrained, that has brought prominence to professional and emerging talent alike. I declare my interest as a trustee of this charity. Being at the leading edge, the show demonstrates the breadth of work across the UK in contemporary painting. I was glad that my noble friend Lady Bakewell mentioned Peter Doig, who was a past winner of the prize in his earlier years. All this provides excellence, along with the musical tradition of the Philharmonic and the Mersey sound, revolutionised in the hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest last year in place of Ukraine. This all provides evidence of the GVA to local enterprises through the promotion of the arts, and I wish the noble Lord many more happy visits to Liverpool.

2.04 pm

**Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury (LD):** My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Bragg—I hope I can say my noble friend Lord Bragg—for this debate. I draw attention to my interests as declared in the register.

All who have spoken, led so eloquently by the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, have expressed a clear sense of the true value of arts and culture, and of the creative industries they support. What is needed, as the noble Lord, Lord Cashman, said, is to ensure that this value is properly woven into government policy, and it is certainly not at the moment. The funding system for the arts is broken at central, local and Arts Council levels. Central Treasury funding for culture has seen a 40% reduction since 2008. Alongside this, local authorities have also been subject to a 40% real-terms reduction which means, due to the necessary prioritising of statutory responsibilities, that cuts have fallen disproportionately on arts organisations.

Supporting local culture is not a cost; it is an investment. Having listened to the noble Lord, Lord Vaizey, I have jettisoned the figures I was going to express as he said that they were not to be listened to. Then there are the less tangible and less measurable contributions, as mentioned by my noble friends Lady Miller and Lady Bakewell. Engaging in culture enhances individuals' lives, providing young people with opportunities to channel their creativity and energy. It combats loneliness and both physical and mental health issues, as the noble Lord, Lord Howarth, so eloquently put it.

Many people need statutory services because they have been deprived of what makes them feel good, and of what the arts can provide. Cutting funding for the arts is a false economy, in every sense of the word. I cannot make a speech about the arts without mentioning Peter Bazalgette, the former chair of the Arts Council, who said:

“The arts create empathetic citizens, putting us through storytelling in the shoes of others, and is society's glue, urging us to positive action”.

Witness “Mr Bates vs The Post Office”, as the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, mentioned.

I am a trustee of the Lowry in Salford, a prime example of the important contribution that local culture makes to a community. Not so long ago, the Salford Quays was a place of derelict, disused docks. Now it is

a thriving, creative hub. What was behind this regeneration? It was an artist who inspired a gallery, and a performing arts centre with a great building and with a mission to involve, include and inspire the local community. Most importantly, the city council had the foresight and commitment to support this vision. Over the years, the Lowry has forged almost 30 community partnerships across Salford and Greater Manchester, and has contributed a deep, diverse and long-lasting impact on local lives through educational, volunteering and community-engagement programmes. Will the Minister please take note of the excellent LGA report *Cornerstones of Culture*, which recommends a return to local decision-making when shaping cultural provision?

The point about the importance of listening to local government and local institutions is exemplified by what happened in the latest Arts Council funding round. The Arts Council, set up by John Maynard Keynes—a very good Liberal and a very good economist—had, as its first priority, that while money for the arts came from the public purse, the independence of artists and arts organisations would be protected at all costs. As the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, so forcefully explained, this arm’s-length principle was destroyed by this Government when ACE was issued a directive by a recent Secretary of State to redistribute funding from London to the regions, as a part of the Government’s agenda for levelling up.

Let us go back to the Lowry. The National Theatre’s commitment to touring and the Lowry’s role as its home venue in the north-west have meant that local audiences have experienced some of the most celebrated theatre productions of the last 20 years. But what is happening now? Exactly what those who run provincial arts centres predicted. Deprived of resources, our national arts organisations have got rid of their touring commitments, so they will inevitably become more entrenched in their London bases. The result could not be further away from levelling up. Does the Minister not agree that it is essential we return to the arm’s-length principle?

As so many noble Lords have said, the arts must be returned to centre stage in our education system. STEM, not STEAM, has been the Conservative mantra, and as the noble Lords, Lord Aberdare and Lord Wood, said, the Government persist in supporting the EBacc, ignoring the fact that there should not be a choice between arts and science. Interestingly, the DfE recently announced that James Dyson has made a £6 million donation to build a science, technology, engineering and arts centre in a school in Wiltshire. Note the inclusion of arts—he is supporting STEAM. It is curious that in celebrating this in her press release, the Secretary of State welcomes only that it is STEM. James Dyson was educated at the Royal College of Art before becoming one of our most successful inventors, success that lies in the fusion of his creative and technological skills.

To pick up on the point that the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, made about the Industrial Revolution, it was this very fusion that the Victorians understood. They had a Science and Art Department. I have just learned about Sir Humphry Davy, one of the most extraordinary scientific minds of that time, who discovered nine elements of the periodic table and was a pioneer in the field of electrolysis but also a poet. In his

fascinating notebooks, his poetry and scientific explorations are all muddled together, influencing each other. He lived in a time when there was no dividing line between the arts and science. There still should not be. Does the Minister agree? On which point, will he let us know when the cultural education plan, the panel on which is chaired by the noble Baroness, Lady Bull, will be published, and will it have financial backing?

On the matter of skills, the creative industries are a world of freelancers, and in some sectors this is as high as 80%. However, the UK’s tax and social security framework is not set up to effectively support freelancers, which means that an alarming number of people are leaving the sector. It exacerbates inequalities in the industry, and in particular the loss of diverse talent. Does the Minister agree that what is needed is a freelance commissioner, as recommended by the Creative Diversity APPG, of which the noble Lord, Lord Vaizey, and I are both members?

Finally, there is the calamitous consequence of Brexit, as mentioned by my noble friend Lady Garden and the noble Earl, Lord Clancarty. There have been issues with complicated paperwork, carnets, cabotage—new words—visas, and costs, costs, costs; music touring has gone up by 30% to 40%, and theatre by an average of 20%. Visual artists—not often heard—are also experiencing problems, as is fashion. It is all the same story: so much red tape involved in moving goods, in sales and exhibitions, and in the freedom of movement of people. Does the Minister agree with the noble Lord, Lord Frost, our chief Brexit negotiator, that his trade deal

“failed touring musicians and other artists by inflicting punishing costs and red tape”?

Like the noble Lords, Lord Bragg and Lord Kinnock, I despair of this Government, although not of the Minister. Whoever the next Government are, they need to be as bold as Keynes was in 1946 with the Arts Council; as bold as Jennie Lee in 1964, the first Minister for the Arts; as bold as John Major in 1992 with the Department of National Heritage and the first Cabinet post for an Arts Minister; and as bold as Chris Smith—now the noble Lord, Lord Smith of Finsbury—in 1997, with free museums and galleries. They need to stand up for the arts and culture, for all the reasons the many speakers in this debate have mentioned. We need joined-up education and skills development, the reopening of negotiations with the EU, and joined-up funding and a return to the arm’s-length principle.

John Maynard Keynes said:

“the work of the artist in all its aspects is, of its nature, individual and free, undisciplined, unregimented, uncontrolled ... But”  
the artist

“leads the rest of us into fresh pastures and teaches us to love and to enjoy what we often begin by rejecting, enlarging our sensibility and purifying our instincts”.

Long may the creative industry that is the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, lead us in debates such as this.

2.14 pm

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Bragg, first for his choice of subject today, secondly for his excellent introduction, and thirdly for inspiring what has been a truly fantastic debate from across the whole House.

[BARONESS SMITH OF BASILDON]

I suspect that his career is not one that he ever envisaged as he was growing up. We all remember the “South Bank Show”, but when he joined your Lordships’ House in 1998 it was felt that there could be a conflict of interest so he should be sidelined into a quieter radio slot, with a new programme called “In Our Time”. That worked, did it not? It is a wonderful programme, delightfully curious about everything and anything and, however intellectual the subject, it is never pretentious or boring—just like him. He is not pretentious and boring, I hasten to add. For more than 1,000 episodes, it has gently educated through conversation on the widest range of subjects.

The strength of this debate has been its depth, its breadth and the range of cultural issues that we have debated. I have to confess that I have never enjoyed opera, but that is despite the best efforts of my comprehensive school, which gave us the opportunity to experience the arts, and I retain a love of music, drama, theatre and literature. It was a bit harsh that when I became the culture Minister in Northern Ireland, the *Irish Times* wrote—and I paraphrase only gently—“What hope was there when her favourite programme was ‘Coronation Street’?”.

This debate is everything I thought it could be, covering everything from music to theatre, TV and film to museums, libraries and galleries, books, poetry, dance and drama. The ability to give expression to emotions, to educate and inform and to reach beyond superficial divisions allows us to unite and bring communities together. Never to be underestimated, these industries give us pleasure and support our well-being.

Also, as my noble friend Lady McIntosh said, they bring power to move us. Why was it that, after years of campaigning—including Questions and speeches in Parliament, some brilliant journalism and an excellent BBC documentary—it took an ITV drama about the Post Office scandal to capture the imagination of the public and force action in a way that the totally committed efforts of others had not? Partly, it was because of the brilliant writing, production and acting. It made us invest our emotions in those characters. We empathised, we were outraged, it gave us insight and it led to action. It was not for the first time, but it was on an extraordinary scale, as was Jimmy McGovern’s “Hillsborough” drama and, as my noble friend Lord Cashman said, “Cathy Come Home”. Telling a true story through drama can breathe life into something we know about but we have not felt.

This debate has raised a wide range of issues; lots of concerns have been raised about both funding and the pipeline of talent. My noble friend Lady Thornton spoke about how young people can be engaged and enthused by museums and theatre. We heard a lot from the noble Lord, Lord Aberdare, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans and others about the role of music in health—for example, the growth of community choirs and how they are bringing people together. I am one of those people who benefited from school music lessons. I am not sure that my neighbours agreed, as I was allocated the trumpet to play at the time. Those opportunities are fewer and farther between today.

I was really struck by the comments from the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, and my noble friend Lady Rebuck about books and libraries. The figure she gave of £14 million to reinstate school libraries in primary schools is one that we should all heed. I am sure I am not alone and many of us still recall going to the local library from an early age and having to beg the librarian to be able to use the adult library, because we had read all the books in the junior library. Today, one of my great pleasures at weekends is browsing around bookshops. As much as I love my Kindle, nothing replaces that hard copy of a book, and they all contribute. My noble friends Lord Bassam and Lord Grantchester and others commented about the role of the arts in regeneration for our communities. That economic role is vital. How many other industries have this reach across so many other areas of society? It is hard to think of anything else.

As we have heard from many, but we too often underestimate, the arts and culture industry is probably the most highly productive non-financial sector in the economy. Book publishing and artistic creation lead the way, but our museums and galleries and performance arts make a significant contribution.

We have heard that the industry receives some public funding, but it more than pays that back. The Centre for Economics and Business Research calculated that a total of £3.4 billion was paid by the industry in VAT, corporation tax, income tax and national insurance—many times more than the just over £400 million that some cultural organisations received from Arts Council England. Such funding has to be seen as an investment. It is not just a grant, as the noble Lord, Lord Vaizey, and my noble friend Lord Kinnock said.

The TV and film industry certainly plays its part. The 2023 annual census by the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television revealed that, as they recovered from the pandemic, TV sector revenues increased by more than 20% in 2022 to nearly £4 billion, despite the difficult economic challenges faced. That is largely due to the world-class skills of our production teams.

In celebrating that contribution, which inspires and entertains us, we have a duty to look at how we can support and protect those working in the TV and film industry. There are many issues affecting those who work in the wider creative arts industries. I know from the 10 years when I chaired the Production Exchange charity that few earn large salaries; that self-employed and contractual work can be erratic; and that, for many, there is little job security. There are also serious health and safety issues to be addressed.

I thank the TUC, as well as the trade unions BECTU and Prospect. I am especially grateful to the Mark Milsome Foundation for the information and advice it has provided. Mark Milsome was well known in the film industry as an experienced, inspirational, innovative and talented cinematographer. The films on which he worked—“Little Voice”, “Four Weddings and a Funeral”, “Brassed Off”, “The History Boys”, “The Constant Gardener” and many more—are known to us all. In 2017 he was killed in Ghana when a stunt

he was filming went horribly, tragically and fatally wrong. Three years later, in his ruling of this as an accidental death, the coroner declared that

“the risk of Mr Milsome being harmed or fatally injured was not effectively recognised, assessed, communicated or managed”.

That is shocking. It is also devastating as it is clear that this could and should have been prevented. For many in the film and TV industry, their work may also be their passion, but it is still a job and they deserve no less consideration because of that.

Mark’s case is not an isolated one but it is one of the most serious. I pay tribute to his family, his colleagues and his friends, who have set up a foundation in his name to help protect others. Three-quarters of those who work in this industry have said that their safety or that of a colleague had been compromised. Most who had reported incidents wanted to remain anonymous for fear of losing future employment, and too many people who have responsibility for health and safety do not have the necessary qualifications or experience. Yet, because of cuts, the Health and Safety Executive has 500 fewer inspectors today than in 2010, so there are fewer inspections and the issuing of fewer notices that would lead to improvements being made. That has a direct and possibly disproportionate impact on the arts sector, where there is unlikely to be an HR department on specific projects and it is unlikely that producers have the training to be fully competent to do risk assessments. Those who work in this industry, which brings us so much pleasure, deserve better.

Sometimes, small changes can bring about great improvements. We need to ask ourselves some questions; I hope to discuss them further with the Minister. Could this issue be addressed through more effective monitoring and inspections, or are fresh guidance and legislation needed? Are the existing training requirements adequate and how are they assessed? Why can this not apply to UK staff who are employed in the UK but work in other countries? It is not just about money; so much effective work could be done on the above issues. The will, commitment and support from both the industry and government could make a real difference and save lives. I hope that it will be possible for the Minister and I to meet campaigners to discuss this.

This has been an amazing debate, but we expected nothing less. At the beginning, my noble friend Lord Bragg made it clear that our support and the contribution made by the arts are not just the cherry on the cake but are integral and central to all that we do. My noble friend Lord Wood talked about public good, and my noble friend Lord Kinnock warned us against national cultural complacency.

Today we have heard, across the House and from all corners of this Chamber, the ambitions we have for our British artists, our performers, writers and painters—a whole range of areas. I was asked earlier today what I hoped for from today’s debate, and I said that I would like to see us kickstart a new national renewal of commitment to how we use the arts across every part of society, whether it is in regeneration or in drama, ensuring that in every way we contribute to well-being and the economy and moving away from warm words and simply saying that we want an analysis of what is good. We can use this debate to kick-start that, to have a real sense of what we can achieve from

the ambition of those who work in our creative arts, with our support. The noble Lord, Lord Bragg, has done this House a great service with this debate today.

2.25 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay) (Con):** My Lords, I happily join in with the tributes that have been paid to the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, not just for securing this debate in the way he introduced it, but for a life and career devoted to championing the arts and their transformative power. The noble Lord’s contribution to the arts in this country is, indeed, unparalleled. His work on “The South Bank Show” has left an indelible mark on our cultural landscape, and he has inspired legions of people, through more than one thousand episodes of “In Our Time”, about topics they did not even know that they did not know about. The noble Lord is a living embodiment of the power of the arts, in the way that he sets out in the terms of his Motion today, but also directly on people’s lives. They are what have borne him, as the BBC profile of him on his 75th birthday put it, from Wigton to Westminster and how glad we are that they have. The great turnout that we had today is another recognition of that.

Another noble Lord who I know would have joined us, had she not lost her voice, is my noble friend Lady Sanderson of Welton. However, her voice is certainly heard loud and clear through the independent review of libraries that was published last month, which I commissioned from her, and which I hope the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley of Knighton, the noble Baroness, Lady Rebuck, and others who rightly mentioned the importance of literacy and reading have had the chance to see. It will inform the Government’s strategy for libraries for the next five years.

It is important to start by reflecting on art for art’s sake. When I go to the theatre, to the opera or to a gallery, I rarely take my seat thinking of the social benefits accruing to me by being there, or of the economic impact of the drink I buy at the bar or the magnet that I buy in the gift shop. I am thinking about what I have seen and witnessed, and how I have been challenged, moved and changed by the experience. The noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, rightly extolled the power of “Mr Bates vs The Post Office”, a TV drama that has moved and motivated us in a way that so many column inches and debates in Parliament have not. Although the economic and social impact of the arts is vital, the reason that I am proud of the way this Government support the arts and culture is because they are an essential part of what makes life worth living. Governments should be confident in helping people experience that. It is also why, for me and the Secretary of State, excellence in the arts is so vital. We believe that the unique and life-enriching quality of the arts are at their most potent when they combine creativity, talent, skill and rigour to create truly excellent cultural experiences. Undoubtedly, excellence comes in many forms and can look different in different places but, whatever the context, we should never be ashamed of aiming high. To that end, I agree with what noble Lords have said about the English National Opera and the Welsh National Opera and the excellent work that they do on and off-stage.

[LORD PARKINSON OF WHITLEY BAY]

I will not go all the way that the noble Lord, Lord Murphy of Torfaen, advocates and tell the Arts Council, in either England or Wales, precisely which organisations they ought to fund. When I became Arts Minister, it was impressed on me, very clearly, how important the arm's-length principle is, and I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter about its importance: Ministers should not decide who gets what, no matter how deserving. That unenviable job is done by the Arts Council, which does the micro while the Government do the macro. I have acknowledged before that the instruction that we gave the Arts Council before the last funding round, to ensure that its funding was more equitably spread around the country, made its job harder and presented it with some invidious choices. However, I am proud that it has resulted in a record number of organisations being funded in more parts of the country than ever before, including, as the noble Lord, Lord Rooker, rightly mentioned, in rural parts of England. I visited Pentabus theatre company just outside Ludlow, which does brilliant work in telling the stories of rural England to audiences around the country.

Our forthcoming review of the Arts Council allows us to ask some important structural questions about how it makes its decisions and sets its strategy, how it measures them and the timeframes by which government asks it to do it. I hope that noble Lords from all corners of the House help us to inform that review.

Notwithstanding the inherent cultural value of the arts, their economic and social impact cannot be ignored. At a time when decision-makers are looking at budgets in all sorts of contexts, be they philanthropic givers, corporate sponsors or colleagues in the devolved Governments and local authorities, they would all do well to be mindful of the benefits that have been set out so clearly today. I spoke to a number of local authority leaders about this matter only yesterday and I pay tribute to groups, including the Campaign for the Arts, which keep them and us on our toes.

As the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, did in his opening, I turn to the economic role of the arts. It is not by chance that economic growth is one of the key things identified by the Government's *Creative Industries Sector Vision*, published last summer. As we set out in that document, over the past decade, the creative industries' output has grown more than 1.5 times as quickly as the economy overall and its workforce has grown at almost five times the UK rate. The first goal set out in that vision is for the creative industries to add an extra £50 billion in gross value added by 2030. The second goal addresses one of the key enablers of that growth—its workforce. The vision makes it clear that we want to ensure that our creative workforce embodies the dynamism and talent of the whole UK, while addressing skills gaps and shortages. The arts are a vital part of that mission.

In 2022, the arts sector contributed £9.5 billion in output to our economy; that was a sharp rise from £7.4 billion the year before. We also saw increases in the workforce of the arts sector, which has grown at over 3.5 times the rate of the UK as a whole over the last decade. However, there are important skills gaps

and shortages that we must address to optimise its productivity, including in technical roles across our creative and cultural venues. In part, that is because of the great demand for prop makers, set designers and technical professionals of all sorts in our booming film and television sectors, but these people are vital to our live performing arts. The Department for Education skills bootcamp funding, both nationally and locally, is one part of our work to address this; another is our work to ensure that parents, teachers and guardians have access to helpful and up-to-date careers guidance to inspire people to pursue these enriching careers.

During the pandemic, as my noble friend Lord Vaizey of Didcot set out, the culture recovery fund of more than £1.5 billion supported thousands of organisations and venues across the land, helping to preserve the environment in which so many creative professionals work. The evaluation of that unprecedented fund estimated that organisations supported by it worked with more than 200,000 employees and freelancers. The impact on growth goes further: creativity might not be unique to arts and culture, but it is certainly where it is most prized and cherished. Creativity is at the heart of innovation across our economy, as the noble Lord, Lord Kinnock, rightly said in his contribution. Skills and attitudes to innovation, which are incubated in the arts, can spill over happily into the rest of our economy, so we should applaud the arts and creative industries not only for their own output but for how they make us more creative, productive and globally competitive in so many other industries. As the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, said, they are not the cherry; they are the cake.

As many noble Lords pointed out, the impact of the arts goes far beyond their pure economic value. That is why the third goal of the *Creative Industries Sector Vision* is to maximise the positive impact of the creative industries on individuals, communities, the environment and the UK's global standing. We start from a good foundation: people engage with the arts in the UK on a very wide scale. According to the DCMS's participation survey, more than four in five adults engaged with the arts in the previous year—a powerful demonstration of how the arts remain an integral part of our national life. It is clear that this engagement has a positive effect on people's lives, improving their health, education and well-being.

A key social impact of the arts is its positive impact on our health and well-being, including its use as a non-medical intervention through the growing work on social prescribing. A recent study involving more than 1,100 people aged 40 and above by the University of Exeter found that playing a musical instrument or joining a choir is linked to better memory and cognitive skills in older age, particularly for those suffering with dementia.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to attend a reception for *Paintings in Hospitals*, hosted by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London here in your Lordships' House, in the Cholmondeley Room. The noble Lord, Lord Browne of Madingley, was there, and spoke proudly today of his role as a patron. I am glad that the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, recognised his great generosity, not just financially but

through the time and expertise that he brings to so many organisations in the arts in this country. Paintings in Hospitals does wonderful work, loaning artwork to, and running art projects and workshops in, health and social care organisations across the country. Likewise, Arts Council England, in partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing and others, set up the thriving communities fund, which has supported many initiatives to increase social connectedness and provided a great boon to many during the pandemic.

Many more arts organisations across the country are doing fantastic work in this field. The noble Lord, Lord Bragg, talked about the transformative impact of the arts on my home city, Newcastle. I had the pleasure of admiring the Laing Art Gallery's work in 10 Downing Street earlier this week, as it is this year's museum in residence at No. 10. It delivers a hugely powerful service to the community on Tyneside through its Meet @ the Laing project. The sessions that it runs offer an opportunity for people to socialise, overcome loneliness, and boost their well-being every month by exploring a different aspect of the art in the gallery over a cup of tea. On the other side of the Tyne, I visited Northbourne care home in Gateshead during Arts in Care Homes week, in September. Over a delicious cup of coffee in its pop-up coffee shop, I saw how arts and creativity were helping the residents and their families, both physically and mentally. Last year, we saw the launch of the national creative health associates programme, supported by the Arts Council and the National Centre for Creative Health—and I am glad that its chairman, the noble Lord, Lord Howarth of Newport, took part in our debate today.

Many noble Lords spoke of the powerful impact that the arts can have on children and young people. That is why it is so important that we ensure that children and young people have access to high-quality cultural education and creativity, inside and outside school. I am one of the 93%, and very proudly, educated in the state sector, which is why I want to ensure that everybody has access to the opportunities which are so often illustrated in the posters and adverts for private schools.

The Government's refreshed national plan for music education, *The Power of Music to Change Lives*, informed by a panel chaired by my noble friend Lady Fleet, aims to level up music opportunities for all children and young people. As part of the commitments that we made alongside that plan, £25 million of new funding is being made available to purchase hundreds of thousands of musical instruments and equipment for young people, including adaptive instruments for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities. The refreshed plan also renews our commitment to the music hubs programme, delivered by the Arts Council, providing £79 million a year.

Looking ahead, we intend to increase the opportunities for all children and young people in culture more broadly, including, as the noble Baroness, Lady Garden of Frogmal, rightly highlighted, in heritage crafts and skills. In the coming weeks, the cultural education plan, being shaped as we speak by a panel chaired by the noble Baroness, Lady Bull, will set out a blueprint for the way in which government and its partners can

work together to improve cultural education across the country for all children and young people. The plan is intended to highlight the importance of high-quality cultural education and promote its social value, support career progression pathways, address skills gaps, and tackle disparities in opportunity. I have attended a number of the panel's discussions so far, and I am grateful for the work that it is doing to encourage us to be ambitious for the lives of young people.

An arts education fosters creativity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence. It cultivates a space where young minds learn to express themselves, develop a sense of self and appreciate diverse perspectives. Moreover, arts education nurtures the skills essential for a dynamic workforce, producing minds capable of critical thinking and adaptability. These are things that no country should take lightly, and certainly should not take for granted, which is why cultural education is such a priority for the Secretary of State and for me.

While an arts education plays an important role in developing individuals, we know that it has a wider impact on society. For example, the *Arts and Place Shaping: Evidence Review*, commissioned by Arts Council England and published in 2022, points to a body of evidence that demonstrates how arts and culture-led regeneration and investment can help to promote social cohesion and civic pride. Alongside this study, other research, including the McKinsey study mentioned by many noble Lords today, has testified that cultural participation can contribute to social relationships, community cohesion, and making communities feel safer and stronger. Its impact depends not only on the individual efforts of artists and arts organisations but on the whole ecosystem: creators, educators, distributors and promoters, suppliers, funders and audiences.

To that end, and in line with the challenge rightly posed by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans, we are delivering a number of programmes to help communities across the country to extend and improve their arts and cultural offerings. The £4.8 billion levelling up fund, for example, invests in local infrastructure projects that improve life for people across the UK, focusing on regeneration and transport, and supporting cultural, creative and heritage assets. The second round of the fund, announced last January, included over £500 million of support, awarded to 31 culture and heritage-led projects.

The noble Lord, Lord Aberdare, was right to talk about the infrastructure of live music venues. My colleagues and I have been pleased to meet with the Music Venue Trust. I hope that the noble Lord has seen that £5 million was given, alongside the creative industries sector vision, to support grass-roots music.

Since its launch in 2019, over three rounds of funding so far, the cultural development fund has supported a number of other culture-led regeneration projects. The successful recipients of the third round, totalling over £32 million, were announced last March. Recipients were spread across the country, from Yorkshire to Devon, fuelling projects that will make a real difference to local people. Just yesterday, I launched the fourth round of the cultural development fund, with another £15.2 million available to support transformative projects across England. I warmly encourage people to apply.

[LORD PARKINSON OF WHITLEY BAY]

My noble friend Lord Holmes of Richmond spoke proudly of his role during London 2012 in fusing sports and art, and he spoke passionately about making sure they are open to people, whatever their needs and background. I am grateful to him for doing so. My department and the Arts Council are committed to ensuring the accessibility of our culture and heritage across the UK for everybody, whatever their background or needs. The Arts Council has done excellent work in recent years to widen access. As part of its national portfolio, it supports a range of organisations striving to improve access, from *Attitude is Everything*, which seeks to connect people with disabilities with music and live events, to *VocalEyes*, which works with arts organisations across the UK to remove barriers to access and inclusion for blind and partially sighted people. More broadly, in its new portfolio, the Arts Council is supporting an increased number of organisations—32 of them—led by people with disabilities. The Government's museum estate and development fund supports physical adaptations to buildings to make them more accessible to everybody.

I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, for recording my first visit to Liverpool. I am ashamed that it took me 40 years to make it, but I was delighted that when I went the Beatles were at No. 1. It was a delight to see him at National Museums Liverpool. I know he supports that DCMS arm's-length body wholeheartedly. My officials continue to talk to the team there about their exciting plans, which I was delighted to see for myself, with our colleagues from the Department for Levelling Up and from the Treasury.

I am very happy to meet the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Basildon, and the campaigners she mentioned who are working to ensure that everybody can play their full part in the arts and creative industries, and to do so safely.

We heard a great number of thoughtful views from noble Lords. I do not think that we are in any disagreement about the inherent power, economic value or social impact of arts and culture in the UK. Happily, this has been, for the most part, a non-partisan speech, as exemplified by the pantheon of cross-party heroes listed by the noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter, in her winding-up speech.

I must take slight exception to what the noble Viscount, Lord Chandos, said. We have had a number of exchanges before about the increased grant in aid provided by the Government to Arts Council England. I hope noble Lords know that I would never seek to insult their intelligence, and I certainly would not get away with doing so. I have acknowledged that the increase of more than £43 million that we provided to the Arts Council in the most recent spending review is hampered by the rise in inflation. That is why the Government are working to bring inflation down and why we have halved it. It stands in stark contrast to the cut in arts funding proposed by the Labour Government in Wales, of nearly £3 million and more than 10%. I hope the noble Viscount will take exception to that.

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab):** My Lords, I can tell that the Minister is coming to a close, and there are a couple of minutes left. I would very much

appreciate it—and I am sure that his noble friend Lady Hooper also would—if he would, in passing at least, address the question of theatre tax relief. It is a very serious matter for the arts sector, and I hope he will address it.

**Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con):** I certainly will; I have it next on my list to do. I talked about it with orchestral leaders and the Association of British Orchestras in Bristol last week; we speak about it regularly with museums and theatres as well. But my noble friend is right to talk about the importance of the way that it is encouraging innovation, risk-taking, and new writing, productions and tours. We are very glad to have secured the extension we did at the last Budget. We continue to feed all the evidence of shows such as “Black Sabbath—The Ballet”, which, like my noble friend, I had the pleasure of seeing, to our colleagues at the Treasury to show the impact that that is making—the new productions, the new jobs, and the new enjoyment it brings—and to measure that in a Green Book-compliant way, so that we can make the strongest case for those tax reliefs and their impact.

I hope noble Lords will see that those extensions secured at the last Budget, the funding through the levelling up fund, the cultural development fund, and the work we are doing through the cultural educational plan and the national plan for music education are parts of the way that the Government, like all noble Lords who have spoken in today's debate, agree wholeheartedly with the sentiments the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, put forward in his Motion. We are very grateful to him for giving us the important opportunity to have today's valuable debate, and I am grateful to all noble Lords who have taken part in it.

2.46 pm

**Lord Bragg (Lab):** I will make a very short speech; I have a very small amount of time, and that suits me, because I have enjoyed listening to other people. The support for the arts all over the House has been such a pleasure. There has been well-thought-through information; people are coming at it not with swipes of prejudice, but having looked at their own experience—personally, in the places where they live, and historically. If we know one thing after this debate, it is that the House of Lords is firmly on the side of the arts: of digging into them, developing them and seeing them in their rightful place in society. All we have to do is convince the rest of the country.

I just had a good time. You do not often go down a street and see so many people you admire and like saying all the things you want to listen to, but I had that experience today. I will single out one person: my noble friend Lady Smith, who encouraged me to do this. I was very nervous, as I had not been in the House for one reason or another, but she could not have been more helpful—or more firm. Right up to the last minute, I felt I was almost going to be pulled into the Chamber. It was wonderful working with her.

I thank everybody. It is a great thing noble Lords have done for the arts, and I think it will move things forward. I hope so.

*Motion agreed.*



## Northern Ireland Executive Formation Statement

2.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office (Lord Caine) (Con):** My Lords, I shall now repeat a Statement made in another place by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Statement is as follows:

“With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a Statement. This Saturday would mark two years without a fully functioning devolved Government in Northern Ireland. That is two years without locally elected Ministers able to take important decisions on Northern Ireland’s schools, hospitals and the broader economy, and, above all, two years in which Northern Ireland has been held back from achieving the massive potential of this unique part of the United Kingdom.

It was nearly two years ago that the then First Minister resigned over the old Northern Ireland protocol. The Government recognised that the protocol did not deliver to the people of Northern Ireland the same freedoms that leaving the EU delivered for the rest of the United Kingdom. As the party of the union, this Conservative Government sought to address those concerns by replacing the protocol with the Windsor Framework. I maintain that the Windsor Framework was, and is, a good deal for Northern Ireland that addresses the issues around the old protocol and sets out a new way forward. However, it alone did not prove sufficient to allow the devolved institutions to function with the cross-community support that is such an essential bedrock of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

So, for the past few months, my team and I have been holding discussions with the Northern Ireland political parties on how we could see the return of the devolved institutions. Those discussions have been long and necessarily tough, but that is testament to the patience of all Northern Ireland’s political leaders, who, as I have seen at first hand, work tirelessly to make sure that Northern Ireland is the most prosperous and safe society it can be. This is particularly true of the honourable Member for Belfast East. It was a pleasure to confirm recently that the Government will support his Bill that seeks to create a dedicated route for eligible Irish nationals who wish to apply for British citizenship. If passed, that legislation would support the close historical and geographical ties between Ireland and the UK, and I commend him for championing that cause.

I am pleased now to be able to outline the package we are announcing today, which has four core elements. First, it further protects Northern Ireland’s place in the UK by demonstrating our commitment to restoring power sharing so that it has the broadest support from across the community in Northern Ireland. I know that I am not alone in believing firmly that the long-term interests of the union are served by persuading those who might not vote for unionist parties, or even think of themselves as unionists, that Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom offers the best future for them and their children. I have always believed that making Northern Ireland work—indeed, making Northern

Ireland thrive—is the surest way to safeguard the union, and I commend the DUP for taking bold steps to make that case for the union too.

We will also legislate to reaffirm Northern Ireland’s constitutional status, including as reflected in the Acts of Union. So too will we recognise in domestic law that, with the vital democratic safeguard of the Stormont brake that a new Assembly would wield, the idea of automatic and permanent dynamic alignment of EU law no longer applies. We will also future-proof Northern Ireland’s position within the UK’s internal market against any future protocol that would create a new EU law alignment for Northern Ireland and, with it, barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Secondly, the deal promotes and strengthens the UK internal market, delivering new legislation to guarantee and future-proof unfettered access for Northern Ireland goods to the whole of the UK internal market and ensuring that internal trade within the United Kingdom takes place under a new UK internal market system. Only yesterday, we saw how quickly progress has been made, with a joint legal solution reached with the EU on tariff rate quotas. This solution, to be taken forward at the next UK-EU joint committee, will ensure that Northern Ireland traders can benefit from the UK’s independent free trade policy when importing agri-food goods, reflecting Northern Ireland’s integral place in the UK’s customs territory. To maintain that focus on delivering in the interests of businesses for the future, we will put in place new structures, such as a new independent monitoring panel to ensure a practical and pragmatic approach without gold-plating.

Thirdly, this deal will recognise the importance of the connections across the United Kingdom now and in the future. A new UK east-west council will bring businesses and Ministers together to identify the opportunities that unite us across all parts of the United Kingdom, and a new public body—InterTrade UK—will promote and facilitate trade within the United Kingdom, recognising that while international trade is important, so too is the vital trade that occurs within our internal market.

Finally, this deal will help put public services on a sustainable footing, with funding totalling over £3 billion to support Northern Ireland’s public services and provide a solid foundation for the Executive to deliver better outcomes in the day-to-day lives of the people of Northern Ireland. This is part of a financial package I announced before Christmas that will help to address public sector pay pressures; provide an updated Barnett formula for Northern Ireland, now and into the future, reflecting the needs and unique circumstances of the people of Northern Ireland; and give the Executive significant funding to stabilise public finances.

Much of what I am announcing today was the result of a significant period of negotiations between the Government and the Democratic Unionist Party, led by the right honourable Member for Lagan Valley. Many of us in this Chamber last week could not fail to be struck by his unshakeable advocacy on behalf of the unionist cause. The same determination, fortitude and tact was at the heart of his approach in those detailed discussions. Further to his comments in this

[LORD CAINE]

place last week, I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing support for him in utterly condemning those shameless figures who have tried to threaten and intimidate him for simply doing his job. The right honourable Member is a man who is truly committed to Northern Ireland and the union, and someone who has always worked hard to find solutions and improvements when others have taken the far easier path of simply criticising and heckling from the sidelines.

The result—as I hope honourable Members will agree—is a deal that, taken as a whole, is the right one for Northern Ireland and for the union. With this package, it is now time for elected representatives in Northern Ireland to come together, end two years of impasse and start work again in the interests of the people who elected them. The right honourable Member for Lagan Valley was clear this week that this depended on this Government demonstrating their commitment to the union in not just word but deed. That is just what we will do. Today, I am publishing the details of this deal, but I am also laying the statutory instruments that enshrine several of its commitments in law. Those instruments will be debated in this House tomorrow as an immediate show of good faith.

Once, as I hope they will be, they are passed by this House, I trust we will have the conditions to move onwards and to see Ministers back in post in Stormont swiftly. As they take their places, they will face massive challenges, but so too do they have the tools to grasp them, not least in moving to resolve the public sector pay issues that have been so disruptive. As well as that, they will be able to grasp the opportunities offered by Northern Ireland's unique economic position and the good will that it enjoys around the world.

It is only right that I acknowledge that, for many in the community, an important part of this will be seeing Michelle O'Neill take her place as First Minister following the democratic mandate she won at the May 2022 Assembly election, recognising that the First and Deputy First Ministers remain equal in law. I look forward to working with the new First Minister and Deputy First Minister and all their colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive to improve the lives of people from all backgrounds, whether unionist, nationalist or other. As we move swiftly to give effect to our commitments, I now urge the parties to do the same by notifying the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly to recall Stormont, electing a First Minister and Deputy First Minister and appointing new Ministers to the Executive.

It is time to build on the progress of the last 25 years. Today, we have presented a plan that will deliver the long-term change that Northern Ireland needs. It will strengthen Northern Ireland's place in the union and guarantee the free flow of goods across the entire United Kingdom. It is only by sticking to this plan that we will become a more united and prosperous country, and I commend this Statement to the House."

2.58 pm

**Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Lab):** My Lords, it was only last week that we debated the legislation deferring this decision and pondered whether we would arrive at

a settlement. The Minister was very coy but, as the result of a great deal of negotiation, we have now arrived at a considerable and significant deal. I congratulate both the Secretary of State on the work that he has obviously done over the last number of months to achieve it and the Minister, who I know will have put in a huge amount of effort and used his great knowledge of Northern Ireland to help ensure that this deal came to fruition. I also put on record my party's appreciation of Sir Jeffrey Donaldson and the immense work he has done over the last number of months, against all odds and with grave threats. He has done a great service to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

I also thank the civil servants in Northern Ireland, who have ensured that there has been government there for nearly two years in the absence of an Assembly. They should not be forgotten. The Minister referred to the document. It is a long one—80 pages of decisions that have been taken to ensure that the deal is effective. There are some ingenious solutions there, such as the internal market between Great Britain and Northern Ireland being ensured and guaranteed. Also, now in Northern Ireland we have an internal market—including the east-west council and the InterTrade body that the Minister referred to—as well as the operation of the single market. I hope that those two factors will ensure that Northern Ireland will have access to markets far beyond what businesses in Scotland, Wales or England would have. Above all else, of course, this leads to the restoration of the institutions of the Good Friday agreement: the Executive and the Assembly and, of course, the strand 2 institutions, the north-south bodies. Can the Minister elaborate a little on what might happen with those bodies?

I welcome the financial settlement. At last, we have a needs-based formula for Northern Ireland, as we have in Wales. That has been fought for by the parties in Northern Ireland, particularly the DUP in this Chamber, for some time now. Even though a lot of money, £3.5 billion, is going over to Northern Ireland, the Executive and the Assembly will have a really hard job on their hands to ensure that public services are maintained, particularly the National Health Service, which is in dire straits. Can the Minister tell us, as far as he can, what the next steps will be over the next few days to ensure the restoration of the institutions?

Finally, I think that he would agree that we do not want to see all this happening again. It has been two years since we have had an Assembly. Before that, Sinn Féin brought down the Assembly. Is there a case for the parties in Northern Ireland, helped by the Government, devising a system to ensure that greater stability would occur in Northern Ireland in years to come?

For the moment, I wish the new and first nationalist First Minister of Northern Ireland, the Deputy First Minister and all Members of the Assembly well. It is a good week for Northern Ireland and for the country.

**Baroness Suttie (LD):** My Lords, I too thank the Minister for repeating yesterday's Statement and commend him and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for their dedication and hard work in all their efforts to secure the deal that we are discussing today.

Northern Ireland is in a significantly more hopeful place as a result of this deal, which is greatly to be welcomed. After two years of political vacuum in Northern Ireland, the most important thing is that the Executive and the Assembly can get back to work as soon as possible, for there is so much to do. It is tragic that so much time has been wasted when so much has needed to be done. It has been nearly two years, during which time the healthcare system, education and public services in Northern Ireland have reached crisis point. But, as Naomi Long, leader of the Alliance Party, said on Tuesday:

“The priority now is where we go from here, not where we have been”.

I am glad that the deal has very much been welcomed in Northern Ireland, at least by the majority. There is a palpable sense of relief, and a recognition across the board that it is surely better for local people to be taking these decisions and, if necessary, pushing for further improvements and further reforms. Once the Assembly and the Executive are fully functioning again, Northern Ireland will have a stronger voice in both Westminster and Brussels. It is also welcome that the funds, the £3.3 billion, can now be released, as the noble Lord, Lord Murphy, said. It is the Executive who will be best placed to decide how this money should be used.

The stalemate of the last two years has served nobody well. Indeed, the stop-start nature of devolution in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday/Belfast agreement has meant that Northern Ireland has been held back from reaching its full potential. It is unacceptable that, for five of the last seven years, there has been no functioning Executive.

But people and businesses in Northern Ireland need to know that this deal will last. As was said many times during debate on the Statement in the House of Commons yesterday, there needs to be a bedrock of stability so that it is no longer possible for one party to collapse the Executive. Like the noble Lord, Lord Murphy, I would be grateful if the Minister can confirm that he will, with the parties in Northern Ireland, examine ways to ensure that the stability of the institutions can be better protected in future.

As has been said, particularly in the House of Commons, this is now an opportunity for Northern Ireland: an opportunity to ensure that it is a place where people want to invest and where families want to choose to come and live. There is so much potential, and I sincerely hope that, this time, this agreement will last.

**Lord Caine (Con):** My Lords, I am extremely grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Murphy of Torfaen, and the noble Baroness, Lady Suttie, for their support for the deal reached by my right honourable friend that was announced yesterday. In response to the noble Lord, he talked about this as a considerable achievement. He knows from his own experience as the negotiator of strand 1 back in 1998, just how difficult and challenging these issues are and can be. I am grateful for what he said and will of course pass on his congratulations to my right honourable friend the Secretary of State, which I know will be greatly appreciated.

The noble Lord, Lord Murphy, also mentioned the contribution of civil servants. I completely agree that they have done a fantastic job in Northern Ireland,

keeping public services running and, in many respects, really holding society together there. In addition, I put on record my thanks to officials, both in the Northern Ireland Office and the Cabinet Office, for the outstanding work that they have done in pulling together the deal that was announced yesterday.

I also place on record that I agree with the noble Lord about the contribution of Sir Jeffrey Donaldson. I have known Jeffrey since 1988, believe it or not, so we go back some way. As the Secretary of State mentioned in his Statement, he has always been a true unionist, committed to making Northern Ireland a safer, more prosperous and better place. I really do commend the contribution that Sir Jeffrey has made to this outcome.

The noble Lord referred to the guarantees around the internal market, which are of course very important. Northern Ireland's biggest trading partner by far is Great Britain, which is by far the most important market for Northern Ireland. We are confident that, as a result of what has been agreed now, there will be a smooth flow of goods circulating throughout the United Kingdom. He was right to highlight the benefits that will bring to Northern Ireland, alongside the privileged access that it will retain for goods moving into the EU single market. That should be a huge selling point for the newly restored Executive in working with the UK Government to try to attract foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland. It really gives Northern Ireland some unique advantages that are not available anywhere else.

The noble Lord referred to the strand 2 bodies. As noble Lords throughout the House are aware, the Belfast agreement is a three-stranded agreement, all of which strands are interlocking and dependent upon each other. Without strand 1 in operation, the Assembly and Executive, the strand 2 bodies have not been able to function properly or to realise the hopes and objectives for them that were contained in the 1998 agreement. With the restoration of the Assembly and Executive, those strand 2 bodies will start to function fully again, along with the strand 3 bodies. For the past couple of years, there have been notable absentees from the meetings of the British-Irish Council, for example, with two empty chairs for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. I look forward to the next meeting of the BIC and seeing the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister taking their rightful places in those bodies.

The noble Lord also made reference to the financial package and strongly welcomed the sums available. It is a significant package, alongside a new Barnett formula. Going forward, the formula will be subject to negotiation between the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Executive. What has been agreed around that is very positive for Northern Ireland and will significantly help an incoming Executive to meet some of the very real challenges the noble Lord raised, and which I fully acknowledge, in the coming months and years.

The noble Lord asked about the next steps. The next step is for the parties to approach the Speaker to recall the Northern Ireland Assembly. The first item of business will be to elect a new Speaker. Thereafter it will be to appoint a new First and Deputy First Minister. The next step is to run the d'Hondt system,

[LORD CAINE]

which the noble Lord knows only too well, in order to allocate the Ministers from each of the parties who are eligible to take up places in the Executive. Hopefully, that will all happen very swiftly. I cannot give a precise timetable. One of the reasons the other place is debating the statutory instruments today, only one day after publication, is as a clear signal of our intent that this moves as quickly as possible, and we get the institutions back up and running in the shortest possible timeframe.

The noble Lord and the noble Baroness talked about trying to introduce reforms and measures to promote greater resilience of the institutions and to prevent a similar scenario—one party pulling down the institutions—happening again. We all recall that, between 2017 and 2020, Sinn Féin did that and of course we are familiar with the history of the past two years. It is something that, at some point, I personally think we will need to look at, and the Government have always made it very clear that the Belfast/Good Friday agreement has never been set in tablets of stone. There is the capacity for it to evolve, as it did at St Andrews in 2006, and changes were made after the Stormont House agreement in 2014. We have always been open, as I have said on a number of occasions in this House, to sensible reforms, so long as those reforms command cross-community support and are consistent with the underlying and enduring principles of the Belfast agreement.

The priority for now must be to get the institutions back up and running, established and functioning, supported by the financial package, to finalise the programme for government and then to start tackling the really tough challenges the Executive face. Thereafter, I think there is room for a sensible debate about how we can possibly prevent this happening in future. For now, we should focus on re-establishing the institutions and getting things up and running with the support of the UK Government and, where appropriate under the three-stranded approach, the Irish Government. They will be supporting and helping the Executive to get stuck into the challenges and to start building that brighter, stronger, more prosperous future for Northern Ireland, which I have always maintained, along with my right honourable friend, is the surest foundation for strengthening our union.

3.13 pm

**Lord Dodds of Duncairn (DUP):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement. It is good that we will have bodies like InterTrade UK and an east-west council. These are positive developments, as are the new needs-based budget provisions and the new model. I commend and congratulate all those who have been involved in the talks, who have approached it in good faith and with integrity.

However, will the noble Lord accept—noble Lords in this House need to realise this—that there are still many unionists who are deeply worried and concerned about the Irish Sea border? We must drill down into the details of this deal. The Irish Sea border still exists because many British goods coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, especially in manufacturing, still need to go through full EU compliance checks and procedures? While we have the new green lane—

renamed—which is mainly for retail, the default position is as I have described for everything else that does not have an end point for sale in Northern Ireland.

Will the Minister, who knows Northern Ireland very well, confirm the concern among many unionists about the continued sovereignty, jurisdiction and application of EU laws over large swathes of our economy—in 300 areas—to which the Stormont brake does not apply? We cannot make or amend laws in those areas. These are fundamentally important constitutional and economic issues, and many unionists are still concerned about them. Although there are improvements to the operation of the Windsor Framework, which in itself was a tweak to the original protocol, the fundamentals of it remain in place. Can the Minister confirm today what provisions of the framework itself are changed by this deal? Can he lay them out? Will he confirm that the SIs currently being debated in the other place do not come into law until they are passed by this House on 13 February, if they are indeed passed?

**Lord Caine (Con):** I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Dodds of Duncairn, for his words, and I welcome his positive remarks about a number of the new bodies, such as InterTrade UK and the new east-west council. He made a number of points on the so-called Irish Sea border that have been made on a number of occasions by members of his party and other political parties in Northern Ireland. I am sorry to say to him that the Government take a very different view as a result of the deal that has been agreed over the past few days, as indeed, I gently point out, does his party leader, who, along with the Government, now accepts that what we have agreed is a firm basis for going back into the institutions and re-establishing the Executive and Assembly at Stormont. We simply do not recognise that what the noble Lord describes is anything like a trade border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As a result of this deal, the number of goods that will pass into Northern Ireland from Great Britain without checks will be significantly increased.

The noble Lord referred to EU law, and I will repeat what I have said on many previous occasions. By the EU's own calculation, the amount of EU law that will apply in Northern Ireland is under 3% and is there solely for the purpose of dealing with goods going from Great Britain via Northern Ireland into the single market. We have in place some important and robust new democratic scrutiny structures to prevent new EU laws applying where they are not desirable or appropriate for Northern Ireland. That is all set out in the Command Paper.

On the noble Lord's final point, as I pointed out in the Statement, that legislation will reaffirm in the clearest possible terms Northern Ireland's position as an integral part of this United Kingdom. It will guarantee and future-proof the smooth circulation of goods throughout the United Kingdom internal market. As a matter of fact, he is right that those SIs will not become law until they have passed your Lordships' House.

**Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab):** My Lords, I welcome the Statement. It has been a frustrating two years, but it would be churlish for anyone not to say, "Well done",

particularly to the Minister and his colleagues and, above all, to Jeffrey Donaldson. Like the Minister, I have known him for many years, and he has served his country and this country well, in and out of uniform, unlike some of his extremist critics, as he pointed out.

I wish the Assembly well when it is up, but I am not naive enough to believe that there will not be further huge bumps on the road. I cannot criticise anyone for suspending the Assembly because I did it myself when I was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, because the IRA refused to decommission its weaponry. It is an unfortunate reality that the present construction leaves it open to a number of parties, including the British Government, to suspend the Assembly.

I think it would be wise for the Minister to agree that the mechanics of this need to be looked at again, but even wiser to recognise that it has to be done with great caution and has to be led by the parties in Northern Ireland themselves. In the meantime, will the Minister ensure the most expeditious passage not only of the legislation but of the practical operational implementation of the agreement? It is precisely the proof of the pudding being in the eating that will avoid problems arising in the immediate future.

In the meantime, I send my best wishes to all the Members of the Assembly, who will be able to meet joyously together for the first time in a long while, and to the prospective new First Minister, Michelle O'Neill. Twenty-five years ago, I do not think any of us envisaged this sort of position being accepted by the community in Northern Ireland as a whole; therefore, let us recognise the advances that have been made as well as the problems that still face us.

**Lord Caine (Con):** I am very grateful to the former Secretary of State for his comments and commend him for the work he did as Secretary of State in trying to move Northern Ireland forward after 1998—in particular at Weston Park in, I think, 2001. I also endorse what he said about Sir Jeffrey. In my comments, I failed to mention the fact that Sir Jeffrey had a distinguished career in the Ulster Defence Regiment: we should recall that, and it is in sharp contrast to some of those who are now issuing threats and seeking to intimidate. He put on uniform to serve his country and we should not forget that.

The noble Lord referred to suspensions. I suspect I am right in saying that he holds the record for the number of times he suspended the institutions—with, I should add, our support at the time and our agreement when he did the right thing. He is absolutely right that we should be cautious in our approach to reform, but, as I said, sensible and practical reforms ought to be considered where they are consistent with the agreement. I think the noble Lord is right in saying that the conversation should be led primarily by the parties in the Executive and in the Assembly. The history of trying to impose reforms and solutions on Northern Ireland without the consent of the people is not necessarily a happy one. Finally, I entirely agree about implementation: the Government are committed to doing it as swiftly as possible.

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** My Lords, I am mindful that we are almost half way through the Back-Bench speaking time, so if noble Lords could keep their questions crisp—and I know my noble friend the Minister will keep his answers crisp—we might get through everyone who wants to speak.

**Lord Rogan (UUP):** My Lords, in a Parliamentary Written Answer on 6 December 2023, the noble Baroness, Lady Penn, advised me:

“£30 million has been reserved for Northern Ireland from Levelling Up Fund round 3”.

Can I have an assurance from the Minister that this ring-fenced money is in addition to the £3.3 billion package to fill the hole in Northern Ireland's finances? Further, can he tell me when the levelling up fund money promised to Northern Ireland will finally be released?

**Lord Caine (Con):** I am grateful to the noble Lord. I appreciate that he has a particular interest in this area and is involved in one of the potential bids for levelling up fund money in Coleraine. As to the details, I am not in a position to give him an answer now, but I will endeavour to write to him very rapidly.

**Lord Moylan (Con):** My Lords, the return of the Assembly is of course wholly welcome, but the agreement reached yesterday has implications for the whole of the United Kingdom, and many of us are concerned that it implies, in subtle and less subtle ways, a greater degree of alignment for the United Kingdom with European Union legislation, and therefore the slowing of the opportunities that are available to us from Brexit to enhance the prosperity of the country over time. But there is a more optimistic alternative view.

One of the effects of this agreement, in practice, is to introduce mutual recognition to the trading of goods in Northern Ireland, where European Union goods and British goods can circulate to different standards, provided they are destined to remain in Northern Ireland. This is a process that was ridiculed when it was put forward during the negotiations as being wholly undeliverable, but now we see it happening on the ground. So will my noble friend say whether His Majesty's Government see the opportunity to build on this so that Northern Ireland can actually winkle its way out, eventually, from under undemocratic EU rule and remain part of the United Kingdom, as envisaged in the Good Friday agreement, for as long as the people of Northern Ireland, by a majority, support that position?

**Lord Caine (Con):** I welcome the fact that my noble friend supports the restoration of the institution; where I part company is on the issue of alignment. There is absolutely nothing in this deal that prevents the United Kingdom diverging from European rules and European law, should Ministers believe that is in the interests of the UK. Fundamentally, that will be a matter for the Parliament of the United Kingdom, which remains sovereign. Indeed, the pipeline of automatic alignment is ended through this agreement by the introduction of the new robust democratic safeguards and checks, such as the Stormont brake.

[LORD CAINE]

So far as my noble friend's final comments are concerned, there is absolutely no diminution in Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. As the statutory instruments make clear, Northern Ireland is a full integral part of the United Kingdom and of its internal market.

**Lord Bew (CB):** My Lords, I am very glad to add to the congratulations to the Minister, who has been central to the success of this process. In the other place, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland talked about a breakdown of trust between the United Kingdom Government and the local parties. One of the people who has worked hardest to restore that trust is the Minister.

Does the Minister agree that this is in fact also a tribute to three Prime Ministers, who worked very hard from the beginning of this Parliament, with great difficulty and often very slowly, and often under great criticism in this House, to put the Good Friday agreement back in place? This includes the commitment in the agreement to address the alienation of one or other community—in this case it was the unionist community, but not that long ago it was the Irish nationalist community on the Irish language question—and to act in the spirit of the Good Friday agreement by putting that at the centre of affairs in a way which makes quite a dramatic change.

The Minister will remember us both studying the 2018 withdrawal agreement. There was no mention at all of a role for the Northern Irish Assembly—look how far we have moved in that respect. The December 2017 agreement between this Government and Europe committed the British Government to supporting an all-island economy, which then fuelled all those in the TUV, for example, to believe that that means a politically united Ireland. In fact, 25 years ago they said the same thing about the Good Friday agreement. Does the Minister agree that that scenario has also passed as a result of the Command Paper?

Finally, does the Minister agree that there was a certain irony when we debated the Bill of the Johnson Government in this House? I can remember being told very firmly that the DUP will always let you down. Does he think that we can now smile at that? I should say that was from the noble Lord, Lord Clarke of Nottingham.

**Lord Caine (Con):** I thank the noble Lord, who is my good friend, for his kind words. I pay tribute to him for the many hours of work he put into this process behind the scenes in bringing us to this place—and, if I am allowed to say, to members of his wider family. In the interests of brevity, I endorse entirely his comments. I reiterate my tribute to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for the fantastic work they have done in bringing us to this place.

**Lord Jackson of Peterborough (Con):** My Lords, I warmly congratulate my noble friend; I have known him for a long time, since our work together in the Northern Ireland Office. Of course, we all welcome the re-establishment of the devolved Administration. On territorial integrity, are we not, in these statutory instruments, codifying in statute the subjugation and

suspension of Article VI of the Acts of Union? The noble Lord, Lord Dodds, mentioned the issue of EU law continuing in Northern Ireland and the sea border remaining. Does not having to apply for authorisation for trade in your own country, of necessity, simply fetter trade, as between Great Britain and Northern Ireland? The commitment to protect the trade flows between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in respect of a permanent guarantee, is contained only in the Command Paper and does not have a statutory basis. Might not a future Government very well disregard it in the absence of bespoke legislation?

**Lord Caine (Con):** My noble friend will be aware that the statutory instrument, which we will have the opportunity to debate at length, reaffirms the supremacy of UK law, including the Acts of Union, in respect of Northern Ireland. On the trade issue, the aim of the second statutory instrument is to future-proof Northern Ireland's position within the UK internal market. Of course, no Parliament can bind its successors, but the statutory instrument would ensure that any changes would require changes in law.

**Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown (DUP):** My Lords, it is a fact that in any agreement the devil will be in the detail; therefore, can we have clarification? Does Northern Ireland remain under EU single market laws for production of food and agri-food? Do His Majesty's Government believe that the Irish Sea border has fundamentally been changed? Is there a fundamental change to the Windsor Framework or is it still operational, and will Northern Ireland be able to enjoy UK state aid like every other part of the United Kingdom, without reference to the EU?

**Lord Caine (Con):** The Government are absolutely confident that this deal will guarantee the smooth flow of goods throughout the United Kingdom. That is not just the opinion of the Government but of the noble Lord's party leader, on which basis he has advised his party to go back into the Northern Ireland Executive. We will have a chance to debate these points more fully, in the interests of other speakers. I am sure we will come back to them during the debate.

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** I rise to reflect the views of the Green Party in Northern Ireland and join everyone here in welcoming the end of limbo, but I stress that a return to the current form of devolved government is not a cure-all. Does the Minister agree that the return of the Executive has to happen in a framework of understanding the need to do things differently? In particular, empowering local communities through more local democracy and activities such as local people's assemblies will be very helpful going forward.

**Lord Caine (Con):** Those will of course all be matters for the new Executive to take forward, not for His Majesty's Government to impose. However, I am sure that they will take note of the comments of the noble Baroness.

**Lord Godson (Con):** My Lords, I join my noble friend the Minister in welcoming this Command Paper, *Safeguarding the Union*, which by common consent

constitutes the most extensive set of commitments in decades, by any Government, to strengthening the union, and thus fulfils many of the consent principles enshrined in the 1998 Belfast agreement. Of course, this needs to be set in the broader context of this Government's pro-union commitments, not least of which—I seek my noble friend's thoughts on this—was the recent legacy legislation whereby the Government also pushed back at Dublin's intemperate response to the very necessary legislation in this House, which he took forward here, to protect our service men and women and others besides. Does he therefore agree that the time has surely come for unionists of all hues to recognise this Government's commitment to the union and to strengthening our United Kingdom, and for them to row behind that?

**Lord Caine (Con):** I pay tribute to my noble friend for the work he has done on the Northern Ireland protocol sub-committee over the past few years and for the work of his think tank, Policy Exchange, which has helped frame the debate around a number of issues connected with the Northern Ireland protocol. I agree entirely with his comments about the Government. Anybody reading the Command Paper can be in no doubt that this is a unionist Government committed, within the terms of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, to the maintenance and strengthening of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. As somebody who is an unashamed and unapologetic unionist, I strongly welcome that.

### Schools: RAAC

#### *Question for Short Debate*

3.35 pm

*Asked by Lord Addington*

To ask His Majesty's Government how they plan to mitigate the safety risks of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete in schools and to ensure the swift deployment of financial assistance for necessary maintenance and construction upgrades.

**Lord Addington (LD):** My Lords, as the Chamber empties, the first thing I should say on this debate is to remind everybody listening of what we are talking about: reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. It is a type of concrete of which I have heard some very picturesque descriptions—"a cement Aero bar" was my favourite. I am not quite sure what that confectionery has done to deserve comparison to this substance, but we are talking about a type of concrete that does not have aggregates in it, and thus is light, with its strength given by putting steel strips in it. It is used in things such as roofs and walls. In Britain, it is used very heavily in roofs. It is fine if it is kept dry and well-maintained. Unfortunately, it has been used in school roofs. Whatever you say about schools' maintenance budgets, we can all agree that they have not been that great or consistent, and anybody who has ever owned a house knows that you cannot guarantee not to have leaks. We have in schools a substance which is porous, above your head and can collapse. This is not a good starting point.

The timeline for when trouble was first spotted is incredible. This issue was first raised in 1996. In 1999, the Standing Committee on Structural Safety maintained that we should be identifying it. We have had this problem a long time and we have not dealt with it. We waited until the situation got critical, when things started falling down, and then had to run around trying to do something about it. This is where we have got to. What has been the result? We have schools which are unsafe—when your classroom ceiling comes in, you cannot teach in it.

Here we come to the real nub of the matter: children's education is affected. We find classrooms that are not fit for purpose and potentially dangerous, and we have to take remedial action. We can bandy around figures about just how many, but a few hundred schools are affected and tens of schools have actually been collapsing. In certain key cluster areas, the construction pattern of previous years has led to schools that do not work and pupils who are not being educated. Largely, they are the same pupils who have already had their school life disrupted by the Covid lockdown. This Chamber has talked often enough about not getting enough children into school. We have a historically high absentee rate. Across schools we have children who are not functioning in their classrooms, and we have this thrown in.

Then we see that the maintenance of schools has usually been something that people have wanted to put off for another day. We have not had the drive to make sure schools are maintained. We have not spotted the problem and now we have this nice little crisis coming down and pushing in. The Government's response has been, "Oh, terrible! Let's stop going in and let's take money from somewhere else, roughly in the budget, and push it in here as a priority". This effectively means that you are robbing Peter to pay Paul—moving money around within the school budget. So we are going to have other problems in other areas, and there are already other problems in the school infrastructure package—we know that.

One of the things that brought this issue to my attention was the "Panorama" programme showing temporary classrooms that were older than the teachers in them. I ask the Government this: if you are bringing in temporary structures, what is their life expectancy and where will that be reported? Before this debate, the Local Government Association came to me and said, in effect, "By the way, it has always been clear as mud as to where we have these problems". Can we have some guarantee that we will take the information about where the problems have been identified and pass it on to those who will have to make the budgetary decisions? That is one of the things that we should do on the way through.

The second thing is that we simply must make sure that the schools that have this issue get the extra funding they need to deal with the situation now. If we strip the budget or move things around, we will create more problems across the piece. What is the Government's attitude to making sure that funding goes directly to this problem now, and quickly? We have had emergency funding before, and okay, the figures will sound big. The Government will then tell us that we are spending more money than we have ever spent before. Last night,

[LORD ADDINGTON]

we had a debate about financial education. One of the things we did not mention was inflation. Inflation means that you will always spend more money on a project today than you did yesterday. Some of the figures I have received estimate that, in real terms, our budget has been consistently lower than at any time since around 2003.

What are we going to do to make sure that the immediate need is met? We have a situation where children who should be in a classroom and should be being taught are not. We then have extra costs being lumbered on people, such as for temporary accommodation and moving children around. They are not concentrating; it is going to be more difficult. Some will come through and some wonderful teachers will pick up the slack, but any system that says you have to be a little lucky and a bit special has a degree of failure in it; if you have to be very lucky and very special, it is a total failure.

Can the Minister tell us how the Government mean to mitigate this quickly and keep track of what they have done, so that we can come back in and make sure that temporary solutions are not becoming permanent ones? That is an important facet here. The temporary classroom that sits in the corner of a school estate should be gone in five or 10 years. It should not be waiting for its third refit.

**Lord Storey (LD):** Not 10 years.

**Lord Addington (LD):** My noble friend's comment suggests that I am being hopelessly optimistic in my assessment there; I look forward to hearing from him later.

Can we have some guidance from the Government showing that they will make sure that the Treasury helps the department, because that is where the money comes from? The current Prime Minister has been Chancellor. If he did not give money in the past, it is time to give it now—or to encourage his friend in Downing Street to ensure that there is enough money to deal with this issue. Its oncosts are incredibly high, not just for the establishment but for pupils and teachers in particular. This is where we should concentrate. I hope that, when the Minister replies to this short debate, we will get an idea of how that will be achieved. If we just move money within the estate—an estate that needs more repairs—we will not achieve it. We might not even deal with the RAAC problem—it will have gone—but there will be other problems. It is important that we make sure that the school estate is in better condition and that those working in it can function properly. This is the least we owe our pupils.

I hope that the Government will have a positive response for me, and will tell me that they are going to punch through and make sure that the Treasury coughs up. I do not expect that but I hope for it. I beg to move.

3.44 pm

**The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Addington, for securing this debate on a subject that has already been raised in this House and is adversely affecting a significant minority of our schools. I pay tribute to those hard-pressed and sometimes overstressed heads, teachers, ancillary staff

and pupils who are still having to cope with this on a daily basis; it really is having an effect on the ordinary running of some of our schools across our nation. I think, for example, of the staff and students of St Leonard's Catholic School in County Durham, who have been extremely adversely affected by this crisis; the pupils are still being taught in temporary classrooms five months on. The DfE announced this week that it cannot make any exam dispensations for the GCSE and A-level students at this school, despite experts advising a 10% boost to grades to compensate for disruption to education.

Will the Minister consider carrying out an assessment to ascertain whether results at schools that have been adversely disrupted by the RAAC crisis are lower than those projected or expected at schools where education has not been disrupted—and, if results are shown to be considerably lower, to see it as a case for any regrading or adjusting of exams? I ask that we remember that exam results will shape the futures and the aspirations of these young people, and it would seem a great injustice to pupils from a handful of schools if they were severely disadvantaged simply because their school buildings were not fit for purpose. The National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have both called for the department to set date targets for the eradication of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete in schools. Can the Minister confirm whether a target for the eradication of RAAC will be determined, as the Department for Health and Social Care has done for the NHS estate?

The Association of School and College Leaders has pointed out that parents are taking their children out of those schools that are affected by RAAC over concerns about disruption to their education and a lack of access to facilities such as science labs. Schools affected by the RAAC crisis are seeing their school rolls drop. Not only are current numbers of pupils dropping, but RAAC-affected schools are reporting reduced admission applications for this coming September. Given that pupil numbers are one of the ways the Government determine funding, will the Minister consider what financial support or protections can be put in place for these schools?

My final point is that the RAAC crisis is one part of what is a much wider backlog of maintenance and repair that is desperately needed across our school estate. I know that many noble Lords will have heard this statistic quoted before: a National Audit Office report from last year showed that there were around 700,000 children being taught in unsafe or ageing buildings. Earlier this month, one primary school in Devon reported temperatures being so low that children were keeping their gloves and coats on during lessons—and this school did not even qualify for any extra money for repairs.

The Association of School and College Leaders has also called on the Government to commit new money for the removal of RAAC, rather than using money that was already set aside for buildings and is desperately needed for the ongoing and already promised repairs programme. I echo this call and ask the Minister to confirm that schools identified as a priority for rebuilding for other issues, not RAAC issues, will still be getting the funding they need during the coming years.



3.49 pm

**Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]:** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Addington on securing this important debate. It is always a pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans. I declare my interests as vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group, and as a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

I have an interest in safety in school buildings since my children's primary school, Mayfield in Cambridge, of which I was also chair of governors, was severely damaged by fire in September 2004. It took 100 firefighters eight hours to bring the blaze under control and, importantly, despite Cambridgeshire County Council providing a perfect alternative site close to the school within two weeks, there is no doubt that the many months of rebuild were disruptive to the children's education, not to mention the emotional distress caused by the destruction of their beloved local school.

Part of the problem was that the structure of the building exacerbated the fire damage. The early 1960s model was commonplace across the country, but it emerged that the large metal window frames were the major structural feature holding the top of the walls and the single-storey roof in place. One small fire started by an arsonist caused significant damage.

That is why I have campaigned for sprinklers in new schools or school buildings, but it is equally important to ensure that schools are built from the right materials. Just yesterday, Blatchington Mill School in Hove, which had one department damaged badly by a fire earlier this year, had to tell parents that the damage caused by smoke and water means that the school as a whole cannot reopen until after half-term at the earliest. I do not know the structure of this school but, once again, significant damage, including to electricity, gas and water supplies, could have been avoided if sprinklers were installed, as water damage would have been restricted to just one small department and there would have been no spread of smoke damage to the rest of the building, which has meant that none of the pupils can return yet.

The Minister wrote to the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group on 4 October, saying:

"I would like to confirm that I have already spoken with departmental officials, who will re-review the data that has been provided".

The letter refers to a cost-benefit analysis of sprinklers and the effect on children's education of a fire, with a consultation on *Fire Safety Design for Schools*—BB 100.

The all-party group has some concerns about the risk assessment of the impact that a fire has on children's education and attainment levels. Time does not permit me to go into the detail, but our experts believe that some of the underlying assumptions used by the DfE were flawed. We also heard that the DfE is going to appoint a fire engineer; despite the all-party group writing to and meeting regularly with Ministers on this issue for more than 15 years, we welcome the fact that there will now be someone inside the department who understands the issues relating to buildings and fire.

I have two questions for the Minister. First, has the fire engineer now been appointed? If the answer is yes, have they started work? Secondly, as the Minister said that she would not come to a meeting of the all-party group but was prepared to meet with the officers, will she now undertake to do so as soon as practicable?

As my noble friend Lord Addington outlined, the RAAC scandal is also keeping children out of school. I pay tribute to my noble friend for his highlighting of the damage that this does to the education of children. After many years of concern by experts and the construction industry, in September, the Government announced that any school buildings with RAAC needed to be closed until they had been checked.

As with Mayfield Primary School's extraordinary windows story, RAAC was a cheap construction component installed between the 1950s and 1970s. It transpires that many other public buildings, hospitals and universities contain RAAC, so this issue is a stark warning to the public sector about ensuring that buildings are built safely and to last. What advice is being given to schools about how to build safe and long-lasting schools for the future, even if they cost a small amount more at the time of construction? It is becoming so evident that methods used between 50 and 70 years ago are costing us dear.

In December, it was reported that nearly 1,000 schools were believed to contain combustible materials similar to those used in Grenfell Tower. Shockingly, a further 120 school projects under way since the Grenfell Tower fire have been built using combustible facade insulation. While it is important to note that this is now to be banned, the DfE still forbids the installation of sprinklers.

Rockwool, which makes non-flammable cladding, commissioned a report that identified a total of more than 1,000 school and university buildings erected since 2013 using combustible cladding. An article in the *i* newspaper last autumn reported that heads across the country are furious with these problems of safety in their school buildings, not just with RAAC and combustible cladding but with the continued discovery of problems with asbestos.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said that government spending on schools is a third of that spent in 2010, and the president of the Royal Institute of British Architects has called for remediation and urgent funding by the DfE of all repairs.

This means that school estates cannot be repaired without impacting on the teaching element of school budgets, and that replacement of unsafe or flammable buildings, whether RAAC, cladding, or lack of sprinklers, is patchy at best, rather than repairs bringing buildings up to a safe standard for the future. I urge the Government to take these concerns on board and not only build and repair schools that need it, so that they will last for many years into the future. That will ensure that our children, their teachers and other staff can learn and teach in a safe environment for many years to come.

3.56 pm

**Lord Rogan (UUP):** My Lords, I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Addington, on securing this debate about an important matter which was clearly

[LORD ROGAN]

high on the political agenda last autumn but no longer has such prominence. One can only hope that this indicates that the problem is being properly addressed. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in that regard from the Dispatch Box.

As your Lordships will be aware, the issue of RAAC in school buildings is UK-wide. However, thus far, it has been found at just one school in Northern Ireland, Cairnshill Primary School in south Belfast. That discovery, in November, prompted the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to speed up surveys at 180 schools across the Province, with 120 schools having already been inspected at that point.

My understanding is that no further evidence of RAAC in Northern Ireland schools has yet been found. However, while this news is most welcome, there can clearly be no room for complacency, in order to properly protect pupils, teachers and staff at the almost 1,100 schools in the Province. Had RAAC not been discovered in any school in Northern Ireland, perhaps local residents could rest a little easier. But, by the simple laws of probability, one case would suggest that there are likely to be more instances yet to be found.

Sometimes it is easy for us to be slightly overcritical, and we perhaps do not praise public servants as often as we should. In that vein, I am advised that staff at the Department of Education and the Education Authority in Northern Ireland have been thoroughly professional, swift and helpful throughout the inspection process. I place on record my sincere thanks to them for their attention to detail and professionalism. Given the absence of Ministers at Stormont since the RAAC issue emerged, I suggest that they deserve even more credit for their efforts. I know that schools, parents and, indeed, teaching unions are grateful for what has been done. I hope that the possible appointment of an Education Minister to a reformed Northern Ireland Executive in the coming days will help rather than hinder their efforts.

In the meantime, I ask the Minister this: what contact have she, her ministerial colleagues or her officials had with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to ensure that what can be done to guarantee safe school buildings across the Province is being done?

Also, the topical Question by the noble Lord, Lord Addington, which is the subject of this debate, rightly refers to the need for

“the swift deployment of financial assistance for necessary maintenance and construction upgrades”

caused by RAAC in schools. However, I imagine that the operation to find RAAC, and carry out remedial work where required, will also be costly.

Both the noble Lord, Lord Addington, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans repeatedly and rightly stressed the consequences if funding is not allocated properly and on time. Can the Minister therefore assure me, particularly given the parlous state of the public finances in the Province of Northern Ireland, that any RAAC-associated overheads incurred by schools and funding bodies in Northern Ireland will be fully reimbursed by His Majesty's Government?

4 pm

**Lord Storey (LD):** My Lords, I begin by declaring my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I thank my noble friend Lord Addington for initiating this debate.

I pay tribute to all the teachers, staff, governors and parents who have coped during this very difficult situation. Anybody who saw “Panorama” could not help but be shocked by the effect on schools and schooling. Pupils face misery, with governors and head teachers struggling to cope and make alternative arrangements. Some 227 schools are unable to deliver face-to-face teaching to all their students, with 23 schools having to implement mixed-age teaching. The impact on those schools, whether of temporary classrooms, being bussed miles away to safer schools, or hurriedly organised virtual learning, is immeasurable. The huge effect on mental health and academic performance, and a lack of social interaction, come on the heels of the same things happening during the pandemic.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans mentioned St Leonard's, which is one of the best-performing schools in the north-east. It has concluded that school closures and mixed-teaching arrangements will have seriously affected pupils and their performance in exams, impacting their anxiety and academic performance. Paul Whiteman of the National Association of Head Teachers has said that we

“need a real sense of a clear plan not just to put short-term mitigation measures in place, but to properly repair or replace buildings so they are fit for purpose. Propping up ceilings with metal poles is clearly not a serious option in the medium or long term”.

It is very easy to get into a blame culture, which I am pleased to say we have not done, because it helps neither the schools nor, more importantly, the children and young people. However, we need a clear commitment from the Government that they have a clear plan that every affected school can have the provision of first-rate buildings. Yes, there will be short-term measures while replacements are planned and built, but it is the long term that we need to get right. The school of which I was deputy head had mobile classrooms that had been provided because there had been a bulge in the birth rate. We were told that we would have these mobile classrooms for just a few years. They were still there 20usb years later. Temporary solutions are, as it says on the jar, temporary; they cannot be there many years later. I hope the Minister will give a commitment that any mobile classrooms will be provided for the shortest of periods until permanent provision can be made.

I have three other things I want quickly to mention. First, I am sure the Minister will speak to Ofsted to ensure that any affected schools will not have the added pressures of an Ofsted inspection. Might she consider making that move?

Secondly, although I think the Minister shook her head, I very much agree with the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans that the academic performance of these young people will be affected in their all-important summer exams, whether they be GCSEs, T-levels or A-levels. There needs to be some consideration of how we can mitigate the effect that this disaster has had on them.

Thirdly, why not use this as an opportunity not just to replace what has happened, but to actually enhance the school buildings and make sure that pupils, for all the suffering they have had, get a much better provision? Let us use this as an opportunity.

Knowing the Minister, I am sure she will be anxious to do all she can. I echo the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Addington, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans that we cannot just take existing funding which was planned to be spent and use that. We need to make sure that this is additional money, because it would be quite wrong that those schools that have been waiting for some considerable time, whether it be for an extension or a major repair or whatever, suddenly find that stopped while their money is used to deal with this particular issue. I hope this is new money we are talking about; perhaps the Minister could confirm that as well.

4.05 pm

**Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Lab):** I thank the noble Lord, Lord Addington, for securing this short debate on a most pressing issue affecting our most precious resource—our children and young people.

In the answer the Minister gave to me during Oral Questions last October on this subject, she told me that the Government's

“overarching efforts are to get children back to normal education as quickly as possible”.—[*Official Report*, 23/10/23; col. 383]

However, the drip-drip of schools being added to the RAAC list is yet more evidence of chaos from this Government, which have no grip on the extent of crumbling school buildings. One of the defining images of 14 years of Conservative Government is children cowering under steel props to stop the roof falling in. What an unhappy metaphor.

Can the Minister say when a full list of schools affected will finally be available and how much her department expects this remedial work to cost? Parents, children and school staff need urgent reassurance and answers on the steps being taken to support schools, to ensure children can get back to their normal classrooms and to rebuild classrooms riddled with unsafe, crumbly concrete. In early December, the number of schools and colleges with RAAC stood at 231, when the Secretary of State announced that a deadline to remove RAAC from every school would be confirmed in the new year. Is the Minister able to confirm here what the deadline will be, and when will it be announced?

School leaders remain worried about the disruption to learning, with children taught in marquees, portable classrooms, sports halls or off-site. There is a further worry about specialist spaces, such as science labs, drama studios and design and technology rooms. There is a call, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans noted, for examined students to be given special consideration. As a former A-level examiner of some 27 years, I can attest to the disruption that displacement from specialist teaching spaces has on pupil learning. I urge the Government to engage with the examination boards to discuss what we call “mitigating circumstances” for those affected by this disruption.

As noted previously, parents are taking their children out of schools with dangerous concrete and sending them elsewhere. I will give just one example: 100 families have asked a council to move children from two Warwickshire schools affected by unsafe building materials. ASCL said that an unacceptable wait for mitigation works meant that parents were starting to

“lose confidence ... and vote with their feet”.

Worryingly, however, RAAC is just one issue affecting schools in England. Some 700,000 children are being taught in unsafe or ageing buildings, according to a National Audit Office report last year. When will this downgrading of the school estate cease? When will real funding be put into making our schools fit for the present and for the future?

I am sure the Minister will expect me to note that, in Wales, we were able to continue with our school building and refurbishment programme over the past 14 years. In terms of RAAC, the situation in Wales was different from that in other parts of the UK, as many schools had been built before RAAC was in use. Since RAAC has stopped being used, we have had 140 new schools built in the first wave, and another 200 schools as part of the current wave of investment by the Welsh Government, in partnership with local government, which runs schools in Wales. This includes both capital maintenance of the existing school estate and a huge transformation programme building new schools and colleges.

In England, I believe there are currently 100 unallocated places on the list for the Government's 10-year school rebuilding programme, and it is expected that they will be filled by the RAAC situation. The Secretary of State told Members of Parliament earlier this month that she anticipated that there would probably be more than 100 schools that need rebuilding. With schools across England in an urgent state of disrepair and with more than 1,200 originally being considered for this fund, experts are warning that other school building projects are likely to be hit due to the demand from RAAC-affected schools.

The National Audit Office reported that one of the biggest issues facing public buildings is the lack of knowledge of the state of disrepair. The Government have rejected a proposal to have a register of public holdings in a state of serious disrepair. I wonder why the Government are hesitant to have such a register. Last November, the Public Accounts Committee warned that

“the school estate has deteriorated to the point where 700,000 pupils are learning in a school that needs major rebuilding or refurbishment”.

It was shocked and disappointed by the lack of basic information from the DfE on the concrete crisis in schools.

I will end my contribution to this debate by echoing the words of the chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Dame Meg Hillier, MP, who said:

“A significant proportion of children in this country are learning in dilapidated or unsafe buildings. This is clearly beyond unacceptable, but overcoming the consequences of this deficit of long-term infrastructure planning will not be easy. The School Rebuilding Programme was already struggling to stay on track,

[BARONESS WILCOX OF NEWPORT]  
and DfE lacked a mechanism to direct funding to regions which need it most. It risks being blown further off course by concerns over RAAC, and many schools in dire need of help will not receive it as a result”.

4.11 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con):** My Lords, I echo other noble Lords in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Addington, on securing this debate on this very important subject. I take this opportunity to thank all our school leaders, those working in trust, local authority and voluntary-aided schools, for their work if they have been affected by RAAC. As the noble Lord, Lord Rogan, pointed out, this has been less in the public eye recently, and I would like to say that it is because this is being properly addressed. In addition to my thanks to those in schools, I add my personal thanks to officials in the department who have worked tirelessly with schools to try to resolve this problem.

As we can all agree, the safety of pupils and staff in our schools and colleges is of the utmost importance. That is why when new evidence emerged over the summer regarding reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—RAAC—we took immediate action to ask settings to take spaces known to contain RAAC out of use until mitigations were put in place.

I slightly took exception to some of what the noble Lord, Lord Addington, described in the Government’s response. The Government have been working on this issue for a long time with schools and colleges. Indeed, we have been talking to them about the potential risks of RAAC since 2018, when we published a warning note with the Local Government Association which asked all responsible bodies—that is, trusts, local authorities and dioceses—to identify any properties constructed using RAAC and to ensure that RAAC properties were regularly inspected by a structural engineer. Again, I do not think it is fair to describe this as not as clear as mud.

In February 2021, we issued a guide on identifying RAAC. Then we were concerned that not all responsible bodies were acting quickly enough. In 2022, we decided to take a more direct approach by issuing a questionnaire to responsible bodies to ask them to identify whether they had or suspected they had RAAC, and then we started a significant programme of technical surveys. With almost 16,000 schools built in the period when RAAC was used, that was no small task to undertake.

In July 2023, we emphasised the importance of keeping school buildings safe and well maintained in the *Academy Trust Handbook*. This update included additional content on safety and management of school estates and a new requirement in the *Academies Accounts Direction* for accounting officers to confirm that they are managing their estates in line with their statutory responsibilities. I am pleased to confirm that responsible bodies have submitted responses to the questionnaire for 100% of schools and colleges with blocks built in the target era. All those which advised us that they suspected that they might have RAAC have had a first survey to confirm whether it is present.

The vast majority of schools and colleges surveyed to date have been found to have no RAAC. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans spoke about a “significant percentage” of schools having RAAC. It is important to be accurate in how we describe this. There are over 22,000 schools and colleges in England, of which 231—around 1%, which it is fair to say is not a significant percentage—have confirmed RAAC in some of their buildings. All education settings with RAAC are in full-time face-to-face education for all their pupils. In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, we will publish a full list of all settings shortly.

Every school or college with confirmed RAAC is assigned dedicated support from our team of caseworkers. Project delivery teams are on-site to support schools and colleges to implement mitigation plans. They work with them to put in place bespoke plans that suit their circumstances.

The noble Lord, Lord Addington, stressed the immediate need for funding—I think he asked whether we would “punch through” with the Treasury. We did not need to, because the Chancellor has confirmed that we will spend whatever it takes to keep children safe. The Government are funding the emergency work needed to mitigate the presence of RAAC. This could include installing structural supports or temporary buildings.

The noble Lord, Lord Storey, talked about disruption. It is important not to generalise and take the most complicated cases of RAAC, such as in some of the largest secondary schools and some of the special schools, which are the hardest cases for obvious reasons. However, the vast majority of schools did not lose any face-to-face education.

All reasonable requests for additional help with revenue costs, such as transport to other locations or temporarily renting a local hall, are being approved. Responsible bodies should discuss their requests with their caseworker at the Education and Skills Funding Agency in the first instance to agree any further support needed. To address the concerns of the noble Lord, Lord Addington, we are treating RAAC revenue requests as the highest priority and working closely with responsible bodies to process their requests as quickly as possible and ensure that our processes are not burdensome. We can also arrange urgent payments if needed.

Most importantly, we are funding longer-term refurbishment or rebuilding projects to replace RAAC. To answer the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, schools and colleges will be offered either capital grants to fund refurbishment work to permanently remove RAAC or rebuilding projects where needed, including through the school rebuilding programme. She asked me about a target date for removing RAAC. The critical date is that, today, no child is in a classroom in which they are at risk from RAAC. We could not say that a few months ago, so we should recognise that as the important first milestone on the road to replacing it as appropriate.

The requirements of each school or college will vary depending on the extent of RAAC and the nature and design of the buildings. We will be informing schools and colleges very shortly of our decisions.

The right reverend Prelate asked about the impact of pupil numbers. The House may be aware that we work on a lagged funding basis. If there is a fall in pupil numbers, that is softened by the lagged funding model, but we work with individual schools and if there are schools with particular pressures, of course we will work with them to address those.

The noble Lord, Lord Addington, asked about how we support responsible bodies to ensure that the necessary maintenance and construction upgrades take place. We support them by providing capital funding. We have a lot of guidance and support. We have a team of capital advisers who will go out free of charge and work with schools and responsible bodies. Of course, if there is an immediate and serious concern about a building, we work closely to address that. We have allocated over £15 billion of capital funding since 2015, including £1.8 billion in this financial year. That is on top of our 10-year school rebuilding programme. That programme will transform buildings in 500 schools, prioritising those in poor condition and with potential safety issues. We have announced 400 schools so far, of which we announced 239 in December 2022, and eight have been completed. I think that there was a concern that schools that will be rebuilt as a result of RAAC will somehow displace those that are already in the programme. I assure the House that this is not the case.

The noble Lord, Lord Storey, asked about Ofsted inspections. Ofsted did suspend its inspections for schools affected by RAAC last term, but it is now resuming them, given that all children are now all in face-to-face education.

The noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, raised the issue of cladding standards and fire safety. She pointed out the changes that we have made in the use of combustible cladding. Of course, we are insisting that automatic fire suppression systems such as sprinklers are installed in all new schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities, those with residential blocks and schools over 11 metres or four storeys in height. We have updated our guidance for new school buildings to ensure that we increase the already high fire safety standards in new schools. I am pleased to be able to confirm that our new fire engineer started work in the department on 15 January.

In relation to examinations, we recognise that this has been, for a relatively small number of schools, a tremendous disruption to education. We are doing everything that we can to work with settings to give those schools the financial and practical support to ensure that children in exam years in particular can catch up as effectively as possible. However, the legislation on examinations is very clear. Only with a change in legislation would we be able to make some of the changes which noble Lords suggested. The legislation is clear that exams show what children know and can do and not what they might have been able to do if they had been taught differently or under different circumstances. It is not possible to make changes to exams to reflect the impact of disruption on some groups of pupils. However, we have worked with awarding organisations to facilitate discussions with affected schools. We have asked them to agree longer extensions

for coursework wherever possible and non-examined assessments, so that pupils have as much time as possible to complete those tasks.

I am running out of time, but on the question of the noble Lord, Lord Rogan, about contact with our counterparts in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, we have a cross-UK group which makes sure that we have the most effective engagement on these issues.

In closing, I reassure most importantly pupils, parents, teachers and staff in all our schools and colleges that this has been a massive focus for the department over many years, but particularly in the last four months. I particularly thank the leadership of those teachers who are giving real confidence to their pupils to overcome the difficulty with which they have been presented. I thank them personally, from the bottom of my heart.

## Industrial Strategy

### *Motion to Take Note*

4.25 pm

*Moved by Lord Watson of Wyre Forest*

That this House takes note of the case for a comprehensive Industrial Strategy for the United Kingdom.

**Lord Watson of Wyre Forest (Lab):** My Lords, I draw attention to my entries in the register, particularly for UK Music and Windward Global.

This Motion would not be debated in the legislative assemblies of the major economies: not in Germany or the USA, nor France, Japan, China, South Korea, nor any other developed nation on earth. Why? Because as the manufacturing trade group Make UK says, the United Kingdom is unique among advanced economies in not having an overarching, comprehensive industrial strategy.

I know that the Minister will point to the Government's plan for growth, introduced under the previous-but-one Prime Minister in March 2021. I suspect he will want to advance the argument that the plan for growth, with its specific focus on five areas of economic activity, constitutes a strategy. I am sure he will be keen to mention the £500 million per year that the Government have earmarked for 20,000 R&D businesses, along with £650 million for life sciences. Let me say at the start that these are all commendable initiatives, and worthwhile in their own right, but they do not yet form part of an overarching strategy. I know that because, in June 2023, the then Minister in the Lords said:

"I think noble Lords will agree that this is a time for specialisation rather than a single, overarching, broad strategy".—[*Official Report*, 20/6/23; col. 93.]

I disagree with that assertion.

I do not think we are doing enough to make a decisive difference to the UK's economic prospects, given our sluggish growth, flatlining wages, regional disparities and chronic underinvestment. I invite the Minister to cogitate on why it is that the UK is unique in not having an industrial strategy, while reminding colleagues that a plan is definitely not a strategy. We have had a plethora of announcements, initiatives and

[LORD WATSON OF WYRE FOREST]

institutions since 2010 and a constantly changing cast list: those 13 years have seen 11 growth strategies, nine Business Secretaries and seven Chancellors. This is partly, I am sure, why Make UK has said that:

“A lack of a proper, planned, industrial strategy is the UK’s Achilles heel”.

Meanwhile, the Centre for Economic Policy Research reports on the renewed interest within our competitor nations in

“effective tools and strategies to promote economic development and address new challenges, from supply chain risks to national security and climate change”.

It further says that industrial policy has featured significantly in the world’s largest economies. Again, I ask the Minister: why is the UK the odd one out?

What then is the case for an industrial strategy? An industrial strategy would

“help young people develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future. It backs our country for the long term: creating the conditions where successful businesses can emerge and grow, and helping them to invest in the future ... it identifies the industries that are of strategic value to our economy and works to create a partnership between government and industry to nurture them ... it will ... propel Britain to global leadership of the industries of the future—from artificial intelligence and big data to clean energy and self-driving vehicles”.

Those are not my words; they are the words of the then Prime Minister, the right honourable Member for Maidenhead, in her foreword to her Government’s *Industrial Strategy* document in 2017. It is hard to disagree with that, and even harder to understand why the Government cancelled it so soon afterwards. It is quite a head-scratcher.

Ministers also abolished the Industrial Strategy Council in 2021. It included Andy Haldane from the Bank of England, the Community union’s Roy Rickhuss, and ceramicist Emma Bridgewater—all of them were given their marching orders. If you do not have an industrial strategy, you do not need an Industrial Strategy Council to guide it. The respected Institute for Government states:

“Weak productivity performance and regional imbalances have worried politicians for a long time, as has a sense that the UK does not make enough of its abundant strengths in science. These alone are important justifications for an industrial strategy”.

The case is overwhelming. It is why the cry has gone up from trade union leaders, former Conservative and Labour Cabinet Ministers, civic leaders, entrepreneurs and investors. It is no wonder that 99% of British manufacturers back the need for an industrial strategy, and yet we do not have one.

Thankfully, we have a lot to build on. On manufacturing, the *Economist* recently reported a survey of the public that asked respondents to state where they thought the country ranked in global manufacturing league tables. The median answer was 43rd, which was wrong. The latest comparable data makes Britain the world’s eighth-biggest manufacturer. The *Economist* said:

“Many manufacturers believe that the successes of recent years have come about despite rather than because of government policy”.

What would a new industrial strategy look like? My starting point is that an effective industrial strategy is not about picking winners or propping up losers, or

meddling in markets when they work, and it is not about Ministers interfering in the business of business. It is about working in partnership with firms to identify problems and fix them; to see opportunities and seize them; to ask not why but why not.

The moon landing in 1969 needed a strategy that included not only aeronautics but electronics, nutrition, product design, computer software and engineering. The UK right now needs to define its moonshot equivalent. It could be fixing the climate crisis, although we know that is a global challenge. It could be that we are the first country in the world to have a sovereign quantum computing facility. It may be that we choose to build homes for everyone before they are 30, and orient things around that. My point is that there should be a small number of clearly understood and defined national goals where there is currently a vacuum. I am greatly influenced by the work of the economist Mariana Mazzucato, who said:

“Industrial strategy thus holds a dual promise: helping to address climate change and revitalizing industry so that it can compete in the twenty-first century. We need not accept ... a trade-off ... The two can go hand in hand if green policies are deployed to fuel growth and innovation, and if sustainable practices are woven into the fabric of how we consume, move, invest, and build”.

A new industrial strategy would take full cognisance of the UK’s context. We have a growing and ageing population, and a huge wealth of talent and expertise in science, technology and manufacturing. We have world-class universities, and fantastic entrepreneurs and inventors. We are a global leader in creative industries—gaming, film and music—and native speakers of the English language. We are a great nation, straining at the leash to be allowed to get ahead. It would view climate change as both an existential threat as well as an opportunity for economic growth and technological advance, leading the way in carbon capture, renewable energy, and post-carbon manufacturing of everything from hydrogen to nuclear, and from electric vehicles to the next generation of batteries for our phones. It would negate the need for a Department for Levelling Up because it would promote economic activity and growth in every nation and region, not just the south-east and London.

It would provide a stable platform for long-term investment and sustained growth instead of political chopping and changing, which business always tells us is the drag anchor on its success. It would represent a true partnership with small and medium enterprises, growing companies, unicorns, long-established British businesses and government at every level of our devolved constitution. It would allow businesses to thrive, turn profits and create decent, well-paid jobs, and it would allow the state to invest these products of growth into our public realm and shared services. Without economic growth, we do not grow as a society. It would allow the next generation to grow tall.

In my peroration, I will highlight one area where the absurd absence of an industrial strategy is most keenly felt and where the price is most heavily paid: the steel industry. Unless we act soon, the UK will lose its ability to make primary, or virgin, steel forever—*[Interruption.]*

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** My Lords, I apologise for interrupting the noble Lord. I remind noble Lords that speaking on mobile phones is not permitted in the Chamber.

**Lord Watson of Wyre Forest (Lab):** We will be the only advanced nation unable to make steel, in a time of global turmoil and uncertainty. This would represent criminal negligence. I note the announcement that Tata will close the two blast furnaces at Port Talbot in a few months and install an electric arc furnace, which would cut productive capacity. This is mindless vandalism to our manufacturing base. The salt in the wounds is that the Government are throwing £500 million at Tata, to lose 3,000 jobs in steel manufacturing. British Steel in Scunthorpe is looking to close its blast furnaces. These twin actions will mean that we have to import primary steels, with huge costs to the environment.

The trade unions have a plan to transition to cleaner, greener steel production and safeguard local jobs. Community union and the GMB have a workable, serious plan. Is the Minister aware that Tata indicated that this plan is credible and viable but was rejected by the Government on the grounds of cost? Can he comment on the exact nature of the £500 million offered to Tata, and whether this is in any way related to Tata's battery plant in Somerset? Does the Minister know that electric arc furnaces cannot produce the base steel that is needed for tin manufacture—yet 30% of Port Talbot's output is for tin cans? It has the orders, but the means to fulfil them are being removed. Has he read the rescue plan?

I do not want to make the case just for saving jobs in this part of Wales, nor focus on the bitter human cost that will be paid by working people and their families in these proud communities. I do not want to point out just that 20,000 jobs in the supply chain rely on this plant. I am sure others will want to point out the similarities with the destruction of our manufacturing base in the 1980s, with the price paid by miners, steel-workers and skilled engineers and their families in that dark decade of deindustrialisation and demoralisation of whole towns and cities. I want to link what is going on with steel today with my central argument for the need for an industrial strategy.

An industrial strategy must seek answers to the central questions of our age: our negotiation with rapid technological change, our need to decarbonise, our desperate need for growth and the big shifts in our society. An industrial strategy can mitigate the risks, manage the transition and soften the hammer-blows that rapid change can bring. This is not top-down statism, but not free-market fundamentalism either; it is a true partnership with communities, companies, industries and government.

An industrial strategy must view the steel industry as part of a bigger landscape of manufacturing, and manufacturing as part of a bigger landscape of economic activity. It must view economic activity as the basis of our society, culture, well-being and national character. All the moving parts interact and interrelate, just as all humans do. What happens in Port Talbot, in Scunthorpe, in the long-ignored corners of our country and in the

left-behind towns and estates happens to us all. This is an essential truth that the Government seem to have missed. I beg to move.

4.39 pm

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** I thank my noble friend Lord Watson for initiating this debate and look forward to the maiden speech by the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield.

It is not that long ago that the Government had an industrial strategy. When the noble Lord, Lord Henley, was Minister at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, he referred to it more than 300 times, including Written Answers, between 2017 and 2019. Described as a modern industrial strategy, it covered the *Good Work Plan*, the environment, safeguarding the post office network, life sciences, productivity and skills training. In a major debate in January 2018, the noble Lord, Lord Henley, referred to contributions by

“the grandfather of industrial strategies”,

the noble Lord, Lord Heseltine, and

“the godfather of industrial strategies”,—[*Official Report*, 8/1/18; col. 105.]

my noble friend Lord Mandelson. He also referred to contributions by my noble friends Lord Eatwell and Lord Chandos. Perhaps they were slightly less optimistic about the Government's White Paper and he thought their contributions were “Eeyoreish”—difficult to say—but it was clearly central to government strategy, so what happened?

Theresa May went to the Back Benches; the noble Lord, Lord Henley, went to the Back Benches; industrial strategy disappeared from the title of the government department. Andy Haldane, who had been appointed chair of the independent Industrial Strategy Council to oversee the Government's industrial strategy, commented on its subsequent abolition and the closure of the industrial strategy directorate in the department, saying:

“In the UK, industrial strategy is dead”.

He was lukewarm about the substitute policy, the plan for growth.

Make UK, the body representing the manufacturing industry, has claimed that the lack of a formal strategy is damaging to the UK, regionally and internationally, and called for, as my noble friend Lord Watson said, a long-term national manufacturing plan similar to those in Germany, China and the US. This has been backed up by research from the CEPR and the OECD. Why is the UK the only major economy not to have an industrial strategy? Does the Minister agree with the CBI that “the clock is ticking” for the UK to publish an industrial strategy that can rival other markets in fast-growing green economy sectors?

4.42 pm

**Lord Kakkar (CB):** My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Watson, for having secured this debate and in welcoming the opportunity to listen to the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield. I will confine my comments to the life sciences sector and in so doing draw noble Lords' attention to my registered interests, in particular the fact that I am chairman of the Office for Strategic

[LORD KAKKAR]

Coordination of Health Research and King's Health Partners and actively engaged, outside this House, in biomedical research.

It is often argued that it is difficult to find a true position for an industrial strategy, as we have heard, that does not define a top-down impact by government and the state on what ultimately needs to be entrepreneurial activity to drive opportunity, growth and innovation in many sectors. But in a sector as complicated as the life sciences, where we need to bring together the universities, our health service, the commercial sector, big pharma, biotech, health tech and medtech, commercial sectors, entrepreneurs, financiers and legal and other professionals, it is essential that a framework exists so that government intervention can facilitate the creation, for instance, of a highly skilled workforce, the environment in which science can be delivered at scale and pace, a health service that can make an appropriate contribution to the delivery of life sciences and, indeed, the appropriate data infrastructure to ensure that a life sciences strategy and its broader contribution to our economy can be delivered.

Is the Minister content that His Majesty's Government's strategies, over many iterations, such as *Life Sciences Vision* and other commitments over the last 10 to 12 years, are actually delivering what has been anticipated? This sector is vital to our economy. It is estimated that some 250,000 highly skilled jobs attend the life sciences sector currently, contributing over £80 billion to our economy and sustaining some 63,000 organisations. It is anticipated that if the life sciences vision can be fully implemented over the next 30 years, there will be a further £68 billion contributing to our GDP, and there will be a 40% reduction in attributable burden of disease—not only wealth creation but health gain.

Regrettably, many of the indicators suggest that we are not sustaining our position. Is the Minister content that we are doing enough to ensure that we remain globally competitive?

4.46 pm

**Lord Rosenfield (Non-Afl) (Maiden Speech):** My Lords, as I rise in this place for the first time, may I say what a pleasure it is to follow the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar? I thank him and all Members for the warm welcome I have had so far. I also take a moment to thank the excellent staff, especially the doorkeepers for their kind and assured guidance as I find my way in this place.

After over a decade as a civil servant in His Majesty's Treasury, it is especially pleasing—and somewhat daunting—to see so many familiar faces, friends and former political masters in this place. If I may, I would like especially to pay tribute to one of my former bosses, Lord Darling of Roulanish, whom I served as principal private secretary and who passed last year, sadly. He was an outstanding public servant, and a man of real depth and values, who I will miss dearly.

I also thank the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, for luring me back into public service after over a decade in the private sector, and for giving me the opportunity to serve my country and my Government at a time of real challenge.

Much of my career, both in public service and the private sector, has been taken up with questions of economic policy, investment and growth. There is one theme that has struck me time and again, a theme that the noble Lord, Lord Watson, touched on briefly. It is the huge opportunity that we in the UK have to boost prosperity, if only we can find the right approach to address the stark regional and geographic disparities in productivity and economic performance. From regional development agencies to the northern powerhouse to levelling up, there have been many attempts and some good progress. No more so than in Manchester, my hometown, which I have seen recover from its post-industrial slump to thrive in a services-led economy, and have the sorts of jobs, skills and investments that any city in the world would envy. I wish only that it would also envy the leading football team in Manchester—that is, the red one—but that may be too much to wish for right now.

Yet there is much more to do, and the UK remains one of the most geographically unequal countries in the OECD. As this House considers the need for a comprehensive industrial strategy, I would argue that an essential ingredient is government working in tandem with the private sector to unlock the huge potential of those towns and areas that have not yet seen the sort of economic success of Manchester, let alone London and the south-east.

I would also observe the impact of such disparity, coupled with the phenomena of geographic disparity, on social mobility. Speaking personally, if I may, I feel truly lucky to be born into the British Jewish community, and I celebrate the multitude of fantastic personal stories in that community; for instance, families finding personal and economic success within a generation of arriving in this country with only the possessions in their suitcase, something my own father experienced as a second-generation immigrant. He became the first of the Rosenfield family to attend a grammar school and university and to take up a profession.

Does the Minister agree that a credible industrial strategy must seek to address those geographic disparities, not through short-term subsidies but through long-term investment in infrastructure, education and skills, and a stable framework to support growth and empower the private sector?

4.50 pm

**Lord Willetts (Con):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to welcome the maiden speech from the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, to congratulate him on the points that he made and to welcome him to this House. By happy accident I follow him in this debate, and I realised that there were some rather significant career parallels. We both began our careers as Treasury officials and both then moved to 10 Downing Street. He worked for Boris Johnson; I worked for Margaret Thatcher. I am now here on the Tory Benches and he is a Cross-Bencher, which may tell us something about the particular qualities of bipartisanship that he will bring to this Chamber and which I am sure will lead to many interventions in the months to come.

I register my interests, particularly as president of the Resolution Foundation and chair of Innovate Cambridge.



Industrial strategy is a very fraught concept, which is sometimes argued about too much. It has a very simple meaning. All of us believe that we can promote economic growth by horizontal policies that apply across the entire economy: a good tax system and an efficient planning system. Industrial strategy says that there also have to be vertical policies addressing particular sectors, particular places—as we just heard so eloquently—and particular technologies. I have observed many Ministers who arrive in government determined to have purely those general horizontal policies and find that they are brought into having to take decisions—where to make transport investment, exactly what kit to buy, how to spend a limited science and technology budget—and they need some criterion for reaching those decisions. That is why you need some kind of strategic framework.

I welcome the excellent opportunity of this debate and the opening speech. However, I quarrel with some of the terms in the Motion before us, such as “comprehensive”. There are some sectors that just want to be left alone; I think “comprehensive” may be too ambitious. It should be comprehensive where there is a need, certainly, but I am not so sure that you can have something as comprehensive as Labour’s National Plan of 1965. Similarly, “industrial” has rather a precise meaning. Our work at the Resolution Foundation in our recent economic inquiry showed that it was absolutely clear that Britain has a real comparative advantage in services, which is an area where we can do more. For me, with my interest in higher education, I think of higher education as a really important British export industry. Therefore, any kind of industrial strategy really has to cover services as well.

There are, of course, risks to industrial strategy, and it is just possible that in subsequent interventions we may have warnings of some of those risks. One risk is producer capture: big, powerful lobbying firms getting things for their advantage. One reason why I very much agree with the excellent points made by the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, is that one of the arguments for investing in disruptive new technologies is that they rarely favour incumbents. They are a great way of shaking things up, hence the particular importance I attach to technologies being supported.

One of the reasons why I very much regret the Government’s decision to abolish the Industrial Strategy Council is that the real purpose of that council was not to write detailed plans but to keep industrial strategy honest by scrutinising what was being done, what was proving to be effective and should be grown, and what was ineffective and should be abandoned. I very much hope that it will be possible in the future to recreate something like that excellent body.

4.54 pm

**Lord Drayson (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, and to join him in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on an excellent maiden speech. We look forward to his contributions to this House in the future. I thank my noble friend for securing this debate. He will recall our time together as Ministers in the MoD and my enthusiasm then for industrial strategy for defence, and he will not

be surprised that my belief in the importance of industrial strategy for our national wealth, our security and the challenging transition to net zero has not dimmed since. I draw the House’s attention to my entry in the register of interests.

History tells us that there is a clear dividing line between Conservative and Labour Governments when it comes to industrial strategy. Labour has consistently used industrial strategy as a core part of its policy framework, based on a commitment to set a long-term vision in partnership with industry, to help businesses grow, to create well-paid jobs across regions and to compete on a global stage, within a belief that it is part of the role of a responsible Government to have the courage to make choices that seek to build a fair, meritocratic and prosperous nation.

I shall concentrate in my time in this debate to offer eight principles based on my experience in government in developing and implementing industrial strategy that I believe are key to making sure that the implementation of industrial strategy works. There should be a commitment by the Prime Minister to ensure that the UK has an industrial strategy that will provide the long-term certainty that many noble Lords have mentioned, that commitment to work with industry, business, academia and local leaders to develop the strategy together; the full engagement across government of all the relevant government departments, particularly the Treasury, to ensure that the various levers that the departments have—be it regulation, procurement, skills or finance—are all brought to bear in a policy that helps to create synergy between them and prevent rivalry; the recruitment and development of a cadre of civil servants with the knowledge and experience to develop policies based on a sound understanding of the science, technology—as the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, mentioned—and, most importantly, the processes of innovation and wealth creation; painstaking leadership by a Minister in a powerful government department of the policy development process, with single-point accountability to the Prime Minister; active engagement to create that consensus, maintained over time, and a planning horizon that provides the certainty for industry needed beyond one Parliament; once the strategy has been developed, provision of the resources, oversight and ownership to ensure its implementation, ideally by the same Minister who led its development; and, finally, a biannual review to take stock, identify what is and is not working and make the necessary corrections.

None of this is rocket science, but it requires a new type of politics that goes beyond the soundbites and provides proper answers to complex questions—that delivers the how as well as the what. Whoever wins the next general election will face some major challenges—ones that can be managed if these principles are put into practice.

4.58 pm

**Lord Whitty (Lab):** My Lords, I offer congratulations to my noble friend Lord Watson on securing this debate, and a warm welcome to the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield—I appreciated his speech.

Arguably, the biggest failure of the British economy over several decades now has been that we face a falling share of global investment in industry in its

[LORD WHITTY]

widest sense, including the service and digital industries. That means we have to have the confidence of investors—and by “investors” I mean everybody from the boards of multinational companies, those who run the great sovereign funds which decide where the money goes, those who run private equity firms and, indeed, those who run the more mundane pension schemes and the ordinary Joe who has a few shares. They all want to invest and they take the risk to invest, but one of the essential contradictions of capitalism—of which there are a few—is that those who earn their money by taking risks actually require a degree of certainty. That applies to investors of all sorts. I remember industrial policies, or whatever they were called at the time, from Harold Wilson onwards, and none of them lasted long enough, none of them was clear enough and none of them convinced the investors of the world that Britain was the place to invest. It was different in other countries, as my noble friend Lord Watson said.

Over the past 48 hours, I have met three sectors of business. All of them are operating under what may be a high-level industrial strategy: the pathway to net zero. Each told me the same thing, in effect. I met the nuclear industry, which has suffered over decades through changes to industrial policy when it needs a real, long-term environment. I met the automotive industry, which is now committed to moving away from fossil fuel-powered vehicles but sees the Government changing dates and not giving enough certainty there. And I met the new sector of carbon capture and storage, which will be another vital sector in delivering net zero but needs greater certainty from government; it has already had two false starts in developing technology where we could have been world leaders.

We need an industrial strategy that provides certainty both to investors and to the future workforce that we hope to recruit and benefit from. It needs to be a just and fair transition—fair to workers and to different parts of the country. That means it has to involve an effective medium-term to long-term policy for training, including the retraining of existing staff and the training of future generations. We will have to take the workforce, including the trade unions, on board in this; we will also have to take those who are in different parts of the country into consideration in developing the strategy.

But a long-term strategy is what we need. We have not had it properly and we need it even more desperately now.

5.01 pm

**Lord Mountevans (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Watson, and congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on his excellent maiden speech.

I spoke in the debate on the Government’s industrial strategy White Paper in 2018. Sadly, the scope of the plan laid out then was not followed through. Since then, the Government have brought forward amended but less detailed strategies, in 2021 and 2023. There has been a lack of co-ordination and consistency in UK industrial policy. In my view, it would be immensely helpful to business if we could have a more comprehensive strategy—that is, a framework offering consistency. The strategy should set out a long-term vision for growth, skills and productivity, as well as increased

competitiveness—and of course, innovation today is critical. Importantly, a long-term growth strategy needs to give investors confidence to make long-term decisions.

Noting priority sectors such as the life sciences, advanced manufacturing, the creative industries, digital and green is essential, but can we please not overlook the wider economy? Governments tend to be overly attracted to the obviously 21st-century sectors and do not pay enough attention to less eye-catching but vital sectors, for example financial and professional services and transport. The financial and professional services sector is one of the UK’s competitive strengths, supporting 2.5 million jobs and contributing £100 billion in taxes each year. London was recently ranked number one for the fourth successive year among leading international financial centres. A recent City and practitioner report recommended that a goal should be to anchor the UK as a leader in sustainable finance. It also called for a long-term strategy for a competitive financial and professional services sector to build support for

“the growth of potential areas of competitive advantage such as sustainable finance, and emerging technologies”.

UK-based financial and professional services play a critical role in the domestic and global green finance ecosystem. London ranked first in the latest Global Green Finance Index, published last October. Time does not permit me to comment on transport, but it is an obvious case for greening and the march to net zero. Look how the sector delivered during the pandemic and, indeed, at all times—although perhaps I should leave railways out of that.

Moving to my close, I would personally warn against too prescriptive an approach in the strategy. A lighter touch seems appropriate. Being practical has always been a core UK strength. In my view, there is a need for any party hoping to win the next election to get cracking on industrial strategy. Suggestions of a royal commission risk taking too long.

Finally, it is essential to simplify and speed up the planning process while protecting our precious countryside: brownfield sites, please, wherever possible.

5.04 pm

**Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab):** I add my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on his maiden speech. I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Watson for securing this debate to allow discussion of this area, which is crucial for enabling future economic growth and prosperity across the UK.

The transition to net zero presents a great opportunity for the UK to realise its ambitions for economic growth, lower energy bills, energy security and jobs. A refreshed industrial strategy will be vital to keep investments on track, ensuring that the UK’s reputation as a global leader does not go further backwards and that essential investments flow into the UK and not just to our global competitors. Businesses are telling us that they need certainty, consistency and clarity as we go forward to deliver our objectives. It is my firm belief that a clear policy framework is essential to enable businesses to work with the Government to deliver the step change we need. Growth in our economy will depend on creating and developing partnerships between the public and private sectors, the unions, our

communities, and local and regional governance bodies; these relationships must underpin any strategy approach. They will need to deliver major infrastructure schemes, provide the skilled workforce as required and ensure the supply chains are in place to enable development.

To deliver net zero, the UK will need to become a world leader in producing electric cars, developing hydrogen, and developing and creating further capacity in renewables, as well as delivering our nuclear power potential—and we have had many discussions on the need to invest in the national grid to achieve those ambitions. Analysis shows that many of the clusters of high-value green industries are outside of London and the south-east, which offers opportunities to tackle stubborn interregional inequalities. Developing clean power offers the potential to create good, well-paid jobs across the country to overcome the current piecemeal and fragmented approach that has blighted progress, especially over recent months, with inconsistent government policy announcements bringing despair and irritation to many business leaders. Developing a joined-up, inclusive industrial strategy is essential in tackling the perceived gap between aspiration and delivery, frequently mentioned by the Climate Change Committee and others.

The brilliant Library briefing gives us many examples of how important this is. The last formal industrial strategy was set out in 2017. The need for laying out a new one is obvious and overdue, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's views on the current situation.

5.08 pm

**Lord Aberdare (CB):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Watson, on obtaining this debate, and my new noble friend Lord Rosenfield on his excellent maiden speech.

I will talk about skills, which are central to the Government's aims of becoming a science and technology superpower and leading the world in achieving net zero, and therefore central to industrial strategy. Digital skills are needed across the board, particularly as artificial intelligence grows ever more pervasive. Green skills are essential in the pursuit of net zero; creative skills are increasingly demanded by all sorts of employers, and are key to our success in the creative and cultural sectors; and the importance of technical skills is well presented by the new Technicians gallery at the Science Museum. The noble Lord, Lord Hague, pointed out in the *Times* last week that the current lack of craft and trade skills, including electricians, plumbers, bricklayers, plasterers and roofers, makes the target of building 300,000 new homes a year “at present ... a fantasy”, in his words. We also lack leadership and management skills.

Current skills policy seems far from being joined-up or comprehensive. What can the Minister tell us about progress in developing the nationwide local skills improvement plans required by the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022? Where in government does responsibility lie for ensuring that skills needs are fully addressed nationally and locally? Where is the big picture for skills strategy?

The recent report of the Lords Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee, on which my noble friend Lord Mair and I served, emphasises the need for a better balance between academic and technical education in schools. The curriculum's current overacademic bias fails to offer enough attractive technical or vocational pathways for the 50% of young people who do not aspire to university, especially the so-called forgotten third of pupils whose educational progress is stymied by not achieving pass grades in English and maths GCSEs. We should instead be opening their eyes to the wealth of opportunities for them to acquire the technical and practical skills that we so badly need.

Apprenticeships should also be central to any skills strategy, but the numbers of young apprentices aged between 16 and 25 are low and falling further. Employers almost universally complain that the apprenticeship levy is not flexible enough and that a significant proportion of levy funds is not being used to finance skills development at all, but reverts to the Treasury. Meanwhile, small employers are reluctant to take on apprentices because of the cost and bureaucratic complexity involved.

A culture change is needed to recognise the central importance of skills and to put in place appropriate policies across government to deliver the skills we need. No industrial strategy will work unless it includes development of the skills needed to deliver it. I hope the Minister tells us how the Government plan to address this key challenge for the achievement of their strategic industrial goals.

5.11 pm

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate my former Downing Street colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on an excellent maiden speech. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Watson, for securing this debate today.

Perhaps not for the first time, I am a bit out of sync with the thrust of the debate in the Chamber so far. I am a little sceptical of industrial strategy. The case for it is that decision-making by Governments and officials produces a pattern of economic activity of industries that would be better than that which would otherwise develop in the market. Perhaps even less plausibly, it is that the industries that we must support for strategic reasons are also, by total coincidence, those that are better for growth too, even though we still cannot rely on the market to provide them. My simple question to all this is: says who? How do you know? Where does the Government get the information they need to shape the economy through tax, subsidy and—apparently soon—tariffs in the form of CBAMs?

Proponents of industrial strategy say that they know better than the market, but you cannot just say that; it has to be proved. That is literally impossible. The only reliable source of economic information in a market economy is prices, yet the proponents of industrial strategy say that market prices are wrong because the allocation of resources that the prices create is inferior to the one that their industrial policy would create. They cannot then use market prices of the future to justify the claim that their new industrial structure is better than the unknown alternative. You cannot have it both ways.

[LORD FROST]

The second problem with industrial strategy is regulatory capture. We all know about that: it is the tendency for economic decision-making to be captured by Governments, who find it hard to admit failure, or firms that benefit from incumbent positions.

The final problem with industrial strategy is epistemological. Nobody knows the future. No one knows that “the industries of the future” actually are the industries of the future. Of course, if you spend enough money on them, they become the industries of the future—at least, if any competition can be squeezed out—but that does not mean that they were the best use of our resources. It is especially unlikely that they were if the outcomes are shaped by Governments spending other people’s money, rather than firms and entrepreneurs risking their own.

Of course, it is possible to make a case for industrial strategy on different grounds, such as by saying that we need, for example, a windmill industry for climate change reasons or a steel industry for national security reasons, and that although doing that is not the best use of resources and will harm growth, we must do it anyway. It would still fall foul of the inability to know the future, but at least we would be honest in debate.

To conclude, I commend the Government for their at least partial reluctance to go down the money-wasting road of industrial strategy. My policy proposal to the Minister is to end all the subsidies, use a bit of the money to buy for every Minister and official a copy of Hayek’s essay *The Use of Knowledge in Society*, and then sit back and let the market work.

5.15 pm

**Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab):** My Lords, I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, to the House, and I thank my noble friend Lord Watson of Wyre Forest for introducing this important debate and for his powerful speech in support of the need for a comprehensive industrial strategy. To my mind, it should really go without saying. What is more contentious, and perhaps highlighted by the previous speech, is what goes into a comprehensive strategy. I emphasise that the bedrock of an industrial strategy for this country must be a green prosperity fund, maybe costing £28 billion. The arguments for such a fund are straightforward: it is for our children’s and grandchildren’s future, stretching into the 22nd century. There must and will be a transition to a decarbonised economy—that is coming—which means, as a matter of urgency, Britain needs rebuilding for a greener future, which means more investment, not less. We need to do it now. We cannot afford to wait.

Having said what I want to see, I will highlight what I do not want to see, and I turn to the financial services industry—I take a broad view of what counts as an industry for these purposes. The danger here is captured in the term “overfinancialisation”. This is where the financial sector becomes too large or dominant within an economy, at the expense of other sectors. London’s status as a global financial hub means that the financial services industry plays a significant role in the national economy. This has brought wealth and employment, but overreliance on finance can lead to

several problems, such as economic volatility exposing the economy to risk of financial crises; resource misallocation, starving other industries and regions outside London of innovation, investment, and growth in productivity; and making income inequality worse, as the wealth generated by financial services is not evenly distributed across the population and the country. Ultimately, we end up with what is called the resource curse. Also known as the paradox of plenty, the resource curse refers to the paradox that countries with an abundance of natural resources, such as oil or minerals, tend to have less economic growth and worse development outcomes than countries with fewer. Overdevelopment of financial services leads to the same bad outcomes.

In ‘summary, we need to be concerned about the risks of overreliance on a single sector, whether finance or natural resources, and the importance of pursuing a balanced and diversified economic strategy.

5.18 pm

**Earl Russell (LD):** My Lords, I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on his maiden speech and the noble Lord, Lord Watson of Wyre Forest, on bringing this debate.

Our economy is largely stagnant, and productivity remains poor. This is harming living standards. The UK does not have a coherent industrial strategy. Lots of changes have caused uncertainty. We need a green industrial strategy to support the future green economy. Markets need certainty in political outlook and an industrial strategy to have confidence to invest, and we need huge levels of private investment.

On green issues, Rishi’s change of course has been hugely damaging to our place as a green world leader and to UK plc. Industry is now wondering if we are still a safe partner for large-scale green investments. Ministers tell me that this is the greenest Government ever. I recognise the scale of the ambition but, time and time again, their plans for implementation are not happening at speed and to scale.

The anti-green rhetoric grows ever louder as we approach the election—a convenient stick to beat the Labour Party with but not necessarily good for the UK. Labour responds by putting up its flagship £28 billion green pledge as a sacrificial lamb almost daily. We need to stop playing politics with the environment. The next industrial revolution, if there is to be one at all, must be green.

The UK is near the bottom of the table in the G7 for investment and the outlook is bleak. We are predicted to see a decline in investment from 2.6% of GDP in 2023-24 to a predicted 1.8% in 2028-29.

The EU, America and China have all made huge green investments. China developed more solar power last year than the rest of the world did in the whole of 2022. Instead of investing £78 billion in burning more fossil fuels, as we have been with the price cap and other measures over the last two years, we could have invested in renewables, creating long-term energy security and jobs. We must also invest in energy efficiency. Our interconnectors are out of date, we have a lack of storage and our homes are not fit for purpose in terms of energy.

The transition to a green economy is an opportunity to enhance productivity and create new growth, jobs and private investment. Jürgen Maier, the former UK head of Siemens, said yesterday that massive investment is needed to rebuild the UK economy and make it fit for the future, and that it should concentrate on low-carbon energy, transport, and industry. He said:

“These are the growth areas of the future”.

5.21 pm

**Viscount Hanworth (Lab):** My Lords, Britain is in decline. To avert that decline, we need a comprehensive and sustained strategy for encouraging investment in our publicly owned social infrastructure and in our economic infrastructure, which is predominantly in private and corporate ownership.

We need to spend money to revive the social infrastructure and the services that it sustains. This raises the question of where the money should come from. The answer is that it must come from taxes. This is a truth that becomes increasingly difficult for political parties to acknowledge as an election approaches.

The revival of public infrastructure will not be enough to restore our economic prosperity. Private industry must also meet the challenge of investing in new technology and new factories. There has been a dire lack of industrial investment over many years.

The hope is entertained that this deficit can be overcome by dint of foreign investment in the UK. A recent report by the noble Lord, Lord Harrington, extolled the virtues of this recourse while regretting that, in consequence of Brexit, there has been a modest decline in the value of such capital inflows. The assertion that such investment is unequivocally favourable to our economy must be challenged. Direct foreign investment is virtually synonymous with the sale of our assets to foreign owners.

The large inward capital flows we have experienced over the years have had the effect of easing our balance of payments deficits. They have also been immensely profitable to the City of London, which has mediated them. They have also had the effect of sustaining the demand for sterling in the international markets, and of elevating its value. This has been one of the prime causes of our economic distress. Our goods have become too expensive to compete in foreign markets and our industries have wilted in consequence of a lack of demand for our exports.

Steps should be taken to reduce the value of the pound in the currency markets. This can be achieved by purchasing foreign currencies when the value of the pound exceeds certain levels. The effect would be to make British goods more attractive abroad. This would stimulate our industrial sector by increasing our exports. The process of recovery will be protracted. It might have the same duration as the processes of industrial decline that we have experience since the 1960s.

5.24 pm

**Lord Mair (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Watson, for securing this debate, and I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield on his excellent maiden speech. I will make two points: the first on the timescale and continuity of government funding for any sort of

industrial strategy or growth plan, and the second on the acute national shortage of engineering skills, limiting the success of such plans.

First, in November the Government announced £4.5 billion of funding for the manufacturing sector. Eight key sectors have been identified: automotive, aerospace, and life sciences, and five sectors in the all-important clean energy industry—carbon capture, utilisation and storage; electricity networks; hydrogen; nuclear and offshore wind. These are undoubtedly all key sectors for our economy, and such funding is of course very welcome. To harness the all-important underpinning science and technology most effectively, the UK requires a robust and consistent strategy for industry.

However, at the same time it was also announced that this funding for manufacturing would be available from 2025 for only five years. Without a commitment to a longer pipeline of funding, this does not constitute an industrial strategy; it is surely no more than a temporary fix. As has been pointed out in this debate, Make UK, a body representing the manufacturing industries, has emphasised that

“Every other major economy, from Germany, to China, to the US, has a long-term national manufacturing plan”.

“Long-term” in this context means beyond five-year political cycles; it means longer-term budgets and durable institutions. It means a stable pipeline to enable the UK’s world-renowned research and innovation system to deliver and provide confidence for businesses to thrive.

Secondly, there is a huge importance of the need for engineering skills. Here I declare an interest as an engineer, both in practice and in academia, over the past 50 years. In its recent report, *Engineering Economy and Place*, the Royal Academy of Engineering finds that the total engineering economy contributes up to an estimated £646 billion of direct GVA annually to the UK economy—over 30% of total economic output.

Of the eight million people working in the engineering economy, 70% are engineers, yet there remains an acute shortage of engineering skills, which must be addressed. A recent report led by the Institution of Engineering and Technology

“estimated there is a shortfall of over 173,000 workers in the STEM sector”.

It called on the Government to help to tackle the UK’s engineering skills shortage by embedding engineering into the current school curriculum. As mentioned by my noble friend Lord Aberdare, this is consistent with the findings of the recent inquiry of this House’s Committee on Education for 11 to 16 year-olds. There is a substantial untapped resource of future engineers and engineering apprentices in our schools. We need to address this urgently and plug the skills gap.

In summary, any strategic support of manufacturing must resist any quick-fix approach and instead focus on a long-term pipeline. We need a planned industrial strategy and, to be effective, it must address the acute shortage of engineering skills.

5.27 pm

**The Earl of Effingham (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Watson, for raising this debate and congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on his maiden speech.

I spent 20 years advising and winning business from over a third of the companies in the FTSE 100, and I now try to help SMEs. I refer the House to my entry in the register of interests. During my time with the multinational corporates, I enjoyed many trips to Derby to see Rolls-Royce, Farnborough to see BAE and Coventry to see Jaguar Land Rover. I now travel to different parts of the country to see SMEs, but whether it is Lichfield, Exeter or Portsmouth, it is striking that wherever I go, the enthusiasm and the commitment of the workforce is the rock that allows these companies to thrive. All over this country, we have a truly amazing industrial and manufacturing sector. We should be doing everything that we can to help it.

I will therefore focus on SMEs and exports as part of a wider industrial strategy. I will give noble Lords a crucially important statistic. If you were to go to Companies House today, you would find around 5.4 million firms registered. However, of those, only 8.8% export at all. UK exports are now at the highest level we have seen in our history, and it is clear that we have a very experienced and successful team at UK Export Finance. None of that is in doubt but, taking a purely objective view, 8.8% appears to be at the low end of expectations. Will the Minister say why he believes that number to be where it is and how he believes we can help it to flourish and grow? Is it a case of allocating more resource to UK Export Finance so it can visit more companies? Do we need more material to deliver the message that exporters are more productive, diversify their risk and drive their own growth? Should the Government be working with the big banks to laser focus on promoting the benefits of exporting to those companies which are best placed to benefit from an export strategy?

Another of the companies I did business with was ARM, the chip maker and one of our great UK success stories. However, it is listed in the US, not the UK. When our brilliant companies grow and think about raising capital they should, one would think, look to list in London. However, the FTSE Small Cap index is seeing its constituents decline as well as its market capitalisation, which materially impacts the investor funds available to support our businesses which want to borrow money to expand. What steps are the Government taking as part of an industrial strategy to encourage investment in UK small caps and make the sector great again?

5.30 pm

**Lord Rooker (Lab):** I was pleased to endorse the Policy Exchange paper published last week entitled *Where now for UK Industrial Policy?* by Geoffrey Owen, the former editor of the *Financial Times*. I encourage Ministers and shadow Ministers to study the paper and, above all, to listen to Owen and his contacts, as they themselves will have no direct experience of his lessons from the past, and from other countries.

There are warnings such as, “the picking winners ... of the 1960s and 1970s”

and the “apparent success” of Biden’s programmes. Of course, we should look at recent US and European experience, but we need to look deeper to see whether they are relevant to the UK. Owen gives an indication that the lurches in UK industrial policy can be assessed by the 18 changes in titles and responsibilities of the UK departments that have been the principal link between Whitehall and industry since 1970.

Previous policies have failed. I shall give a brief outline of Owen’s conclusions: do not imitate the EU; have government investment in R&D; and

“the UK’s newest funder, the Advanced Research and Investment Agency ... ARIA is charged with supporting high-risk projects” to have

“a transformative effect on the economy. But these will be calculated risks with a clearly defined objective, and the project will be terminated if not enough progress being made”.

When this occurs, there is a need to ignore the inevitable lobbying that will take place to create open-ended government support. Projects should not be made difficult to abandon. Do not enter a subsidy race with other nations. Do not use the term “strategic investment” for any sector without explaining in clear terms why one sector is more strategic than another. Furthermore, it is crucial to channel government support,

“on a competitive basis, allowing scope for new entrants as well as established producers”.

After his first stint at the *Financial Times*, Owen worked at the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation and British Leyland for the short period from 1969 to 1972. His report indicates some successes, but the story overall is not good. Manufacturing is not the same as in my early experience between 1957 and 1971—I am the oldest, most out-of-date chartered engineer still paying his subs in the House. It is vital, as my successor as MP for Perry Barr, Khalid Mahmood, says in his endorsement of the paper that we have a, “consistent and predictable policy environment”

It is also vital that the tent is big enough and that Ministers and shadow Ministers are big enough to accept things invented by others. In this respect, the legacy of Dominic Cummings is the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, and this should be embraced and, I hope, allowed to flourish.

5.33 pm

**Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Watson of Wyre Forest, not just for securing this debate, but for a fantastic introduction. He is absolutely right. As we have heard from across your Lordships’ House, the case for a new industrial strategy, one that works in partnership with business, unions and government, is overwhelming.

I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, on his maiden speech. I agree with him that there is huge opportunity across the UK, not just in London and the south-east, to develop an industrial strategy. I echo his warm words about Alistair Darling, a mutual friend of many of us on this side, and his family. I thank him for that. I hope he enjoys his many years in your Lordships’ House.

We are a country full of talented people and businesses, with ingenuity and ideas in every town and city, but we cannot meet our vast challenges alone, as individuals

or businesses. It requires a national focus and effort that has been sorely lacking over recent years. We have some key economic strengths across the UK: our world-class universities, our thriving life sciences sector—the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, who is not in his place, talked about—advanced manufacturing clusters, creative industries, and many more.

Yet, despite our enormous potential, the UK is set to have the lowest growth in the G7, having suffered years of low investment relative to our neighbours. Our productivity levels remain stubbornly low and, as a result, workers have seen no growth in real pay since 2010, leaving families exposed to the current cost of living crisis. A country such as Britain should not be looking at a future of low growth and poor productivity. The defining mission of the next Labour Government will be to restore that growth.

A co-ordinated, cross-sectoral approach, with policy consistency so that businesses and individuals can make long-term decisions and invest, is vital. The emphasis must lie on unpacking and refining an industrial strategy within a comprehensive framework, as the title of this debate sets out. This Government said that they would achieve their plan through a focus on policies across three core pillars of growth: infrastructure, skills and innovation. These Benches agree, but it is time to transit from words into action. If we have the opportunity to serve and govern after the next election, we will foster community collaboration to drive positive change across Britain's industrial landscape.

An industrial strategy can play a crucial role in supporting the broader fabric of British society. Under the coalition Government, Vince Cable continued some of the work that new Labour had put in motion, but this was jettisoned after the 2015 general election. As my noble friend Lady Donaghy said, in 2017 Theresa May's Government published an industrial strategy and established the Industrial Strategy Council. However, since 2019 there has been little serious attempt at any industrial strategy; the 2017 industrial strategy was set aside and the council disbanded. The challenges and opportunities ahead make it essential that Labour reverses this inconsistency and pursues a serious and strategic approach. Our lack of progress as a nation has encountered serious challenges, with the impact of Brexit in particular serving as a major obstacle.

At the core of implementing Labour's industrial plans is a commitment to make Brexit work by re-establishing connection and engagement with the EU to support UK industry. The last Labour Government's early intervention in renewable energy technologies supported large-scale renewable electricity generation and led to the expansion of wind-generated power. Labour's cultivation of the life sciences sector when we were last in government was crucial to ensuring that it is now one of the leading industries. Just two days ago, the Labour Front Bench launched a new plan for the future of life sciences. This underscores the urgency of re-evaluating our industrial strategy to foster sustainable growth.

Jonathan Reynolds, Labour's shadow Secretary of State, when presenting Labour's industrial strategy, said that fostering collaboration with small businesses

and adopting a national government approach representing smaller and larger businesses is critical. Such inclusive measures can contribute to a more comprehensive and effective approach to advancing the nation's industrial landscape. Labour will provide policy consistency by placing an industrial strategy council on a statutory footing. This would help to end the farce of long-term plans that do not survive the political cycle, as we have heard, and which make it difficult for businesses to take strategic decisions about their future direction. It would instead offer the certainty needed to increase investment in British business, people and places.

Labour has based its industrial strategy on four missions: delivering clean power by 2030; harnessing data for public good; caring for the future; and building a more resilient economy. Collaborating with organisations such as the British Business Bank can effectively support entrepreneurs and business owners. Addressing disparities by strategically targeting areas in need of industrialisation, such as empty high streets, can play a key role. This includes investing in areas to transform them, with thriving businesses and creative, vibrant communities. In creating an industrial strategy for Britain, considering environmental outcomes is paramount, as my noble friend Lord Davies and a number of other noble Lords have said. We are currently facing one of the worst G7 economic growth rates. The Labour Party aims not only to revitalise the industry but to prioritise climate change and environmental concerns.

The war in Ukraine has driven up energy prices, leaving the UK set to have the highest inflation in the G7. As part of our mission, we plan to boost offshore wind capacity by investing in key ports on the Forth, Tay, Humber and in the north-east of Scotland. This commitment to clean power not only aligns with environmental goals but has the potential to create well-paid nationwide jobs. As we have heard a few times this afternoon, Labour's commitment on the UK's broader digital economy underscores our focus on fostering collaboration and inclusivity.

The lack of resilience in the economy can have widespread consequences. The current cost of living crisis highlights the importance of developing more resilient supply chains to mitigate the impact of such challenges on industry and the lives of individuals. Our nations need a Government who can provide certainty and clarity. Achieving prosperity through partnership is key to our economic revival. I look forward to the Minister's response.

5.44 pm

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** My Lords, I am grateful to all noble Lords for their insight and remarks in this important debate. I welcome their views, especially from the engineers in this House, on how the Government can best ensure clear direction as we drive towards economic growth and progress. In recognising its importance, so too should we recognise that different approaches are favoured by different countries, depending on what works for each economic context. Each has benefits, of course, but this Government favour a more targeted approach to industrial policy, focused on a set of clear priorities.

[LORD EVANS OF RAINOW]

If I may, I will answer directly the noble Lords, Lord Watson, Lord Mountevans, Lord Davies and Lord McNicol, and the noble Baronesses, Lady Donaghy and Lady Blake. Industrial strategy is a philosophy that is very much bandied about; we are not in favour of such things. It is favoured by a command-and-control approach to economics that is particularly well loved by large countries such as the US, China, India and, in the EU, Germany and France. Our approach—our plan for growth—is that ideologically, as the noble Lord, Lord Watson, said, as a small country we do not try to pick individual winners, as many noble Lords have said. Instead, we invest behind clusters of excellence. As a small country, we will never match the pure dollar muscle of the US, China, India or the EU. But we can be nimble, smart, proactive, entrepreneurial and open as a country to doing business.

First, I thought I should consider where the UK sits in the global economy. The latest official figures from the IMF show that the UK is the sixth-largest economy in the world and fourth in the G7, behind the US, Japan and Germany. Since 2010, the UK has seen the third-highest rate of growth in the G7—faster than Japan, Germany, France and Italy—and the IMF projects the UK to have the third-fastest cumulative growth in the G7 over the period 2024-28. Indeed, the ONS has revised up its earlier assessments of GDP, showing that we surpassed pre-pandemic levels of GDP by the end of 2021, while PWC's economic outlook states on growth that

“the UK will ... outperform France, Japan and Germany with real GDP around 2.7% higher in 2024 on average relative to 2019 levels.”

The UK was also the fifth-biggest exporter in the world in 2022 and achieved £870 billion of exports in the 12 months to November 2023. We are the second-largest exporter of financial services globally and our service exports to the EU are now at a record high, reaching £169 billion in the 12 months to September 2023, with key sectors such as professional business services and telecoms, computer and information services driving growth.

We also perform strongly on innovation. The recent WIPO *Global Innovation Index 2023* shows that the UK economy is more innovative than our European neighbours such as Germany, France and the Netherlands, and technology powerhouses such as Israel, Japan and South Korea. Indeed, we have the second highest number of Nobel prize-winners in the world, above Germany, France, Sweden and Japan.

From a labour market perspective, according to the new ONS experimental series, the number of people in employment is now at 33 million. With an unemployment rate of 4.2% in the three months to August 2022, our unemployment rate hit its lowest point in nearly 50 years. While we are by no means complacent, we are pleased that the latest estimate from the ONS shows that the UK's inactivity rate has fallen since its record high in September 2022.

Brexit is also offering great opportunities to the UK. Because of Brexit, the UK now has more trade agreements in effect than any other sovereign independent country in the world. We have secured trade agreements with 73 countries, plus our comprehensive deal with

the EU. We have also been able to negotiate brand new trade deals with Australia and New Zealand, creating opportunities for British businesses to break into new markets by eliminating tariffs on 100% of UK exports and securing unprecedented access for the UK's world-class services industry. We have also signed the accession protocol to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. This brings new opportunities for UK businesses, with 99% of current UK goods exports eligible for zero tariffs in dynamic economies across the Asia-Pacific, as well as the reduction of other barriers to trade across four continents.

We will leverage our strong global economic position to drive forward growth. Our approach is not to pick individual winners; instead, we invest behind clusters of excellence. The Government are therefore continuing to deliver an ambitious plan for growth and prosperity, as set out in the Autumn Statement. At that time, the Chancellor outlined the Government's plan to unlock growth and productivity, laying out 110 growth measures, including removing red tape, speeding up access to the national grid, supporting entrepreneurs raising capital, unlocking foreign direct investment, and cutting business taxes.

The noble Lord, Lord Davies, talked about reliance on the single market. It is clear that delivering growth across the whole of the UK is a top government priority, and the Government have identified five key growth sectors for the UK. The first is advanced manufacturing, with an aim to make the UK the best place in the world to start, scale up and invest in manufacturing, as outlined in the *Advanced Manufacturing Plan*. The second sector is green industries, in line with our commitment to achieve net zero by 2050. Thirdly, as outlined in our *Life Sciences Vision*, are the life sciences, which were mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar. The fourth and fifth are the creative industries, in line with the creative industries sector vision, and digital technology, as outlined in the Government's digital strategy. I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Frost, for his suggestion of removing all subsidies, but the Government are keen to support those five key growth sectors.

First, on advanced manufacturing, we published our *Advanced Manufacturing Plan* and the UK's first ever battery strategy in the autumn. This includes a £4.5 billion package of funding to 2030, tax reliefs, and business environment measures aimed at making the UK the best place to start, scale up and invest in manufacturing. As part of this, the Government are working to drive growth in the UK's automotive industry with a £2 billion support package, giving long-term certainty to industry to continue to invest in UK manufacture of zero-emission vehicles, batteries and supply chains. The Government have also committed an additional £975 million to the aerospace industry through the Aerospace Technology Institute programme to help secure the UK's role as a hub for the next generation of ultra-efficient aircraft and wings.

We are also helping small and medium manufacturers to adopt digital technologies by extending the reach of the Made Smarter programme. Our approach here is already working, with recent successes including:



Tata Group's announcement of a new gigafactory that will produce 40 gigawatt hours of batteries per year; Nissan's £2 billion investment in Sunderland to produce two new electric models; and Boeing's £80 million investment in South Yorkshire's advanced manufacturing investment zone.

Secondly, on green industries, the Chancellor and Energy Security Secretary have already announced £960 million for a green industries growth accelerator, which will drive forward advanced manufacturing capacity in key net-zero sectors—including offshore wind networks; carbon capture, usage and storage; hydrogen; and nuclear—to support the expansion of resilient, homegrown, clean energy supply chains across the UK.

This builds on our existing plans to speed up grid connections and make reforms to the planning system, making sure that the UK has the right conditions for further investment and growth. As a result of the UK's global leadership in clean technologies, including the flagship contracts for difference scheme and the £20 billion recently committed to develop carbon capture, usage and storage, the UK has attracted £200 billion since 2010. A further £100 billion is expected by 2030, which will support up to 480,000 skilled jobs across the country.

On life sciences, our 10-year strategy, developed jointly with the NHS and industry, focuses on creating a business environment in which the UK can maintain a global advantage in areas such as genomics and health data. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, for raising these important points and for everything he does in this sector. It will help build resilience for future health emergencies and capitalise on the UK's R&D strengths. The Chancellor announced a £520 million life sciences support package at the Autumn Statement. This builds on our existing £650 million war chest announced in May last year, designed to fire up the UK's life sciences sector.

Moving on to the creative industries, it is evident that we are world leaders. Indeed, the sector grew at over one and a half times the rate of the wider economy between 2010 and 2019. But we want to go further. In June 2023, we published a sector vision that set ambitions to grow the creative industries sector by £50 billion and deliver a creative careers promise to support a million more jobs by 2030. This included £77 million in new government spending, bringing the total announced since the 2021 spending review to £310 million.

Finally, on digital, the UK continues to lead the European tech ecosystem, with over 150 unicorns—tech companies valued at over \$1 billion. That is more than France, Germany and the Netherlands combined. The overall value of the UK tech sector reached \$1.1 trillion in 2023, up from \$640 billion in 2012, making us the third country in the world to pass the \$1 trillion milestone, after the US and China. We are also playing a world-leading role in developing technologies of the future, such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, ensuring that the UK is at the forefront of shaping how technology transforms lives for the better.

Our approach is working. At November's Global Investment Summit, the Government announced nearly £30 billion in private investment commitments, backing

some of the fastest growing and most innovative sectors in the UK, including projects in tech, the life sciences, infrastructure, housing and renewable energy. Our visions for the key sectors identified by the Chancellor are further supported by our export strategy, which aims to support business to access export opportunities, and our clear investor road maps for hydrogen, carbon capture and storage, and automotive industries, which help business to support government priorities.

The Department for Business and Trade continues to deliver a wide range of business support schemes, with over 40 offers that help businesses start, grow and export. This includes the work of UK Export Finance, which champions SMEs by unlocking finance for viable exporters, helping to make global markets accessible. In the 2022-23 financial year alone, UK Export Finance delivered £6.5 billion in new direct support through loans, guarantees and insurance policies, supporting 55,000 UK jobs. This included direct product support to 251 companies, of which 84% are SMEs and 82% are based outside London. As we move forward, we will continually improve our offer to help businesses across the UK access the finance and support they need, improve their skills and remove barriers to export.

I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Harrington for his report on increasing foreign direct investment, which has been warmly received by the Government. We have already taken significant steps to improve our ability to attract the most strategically important investments to the UK over the last couple of years, including establishing the Office for Investment and ensuring that we focus on securing the highest-value and highest-impact investments. I reaffirm our commitment to the noble Lord that the Government continue to drive forward implementation of the recommendations in line with our response, and that the Department for Business and Trade and His Majesty's Treasury are working jointly to deliver a clear cross-government approach to securing and retaining investments.

I will respond to some specific questions. On the support for Tata Steel employees, I say to the noble Lord, Lord Watson, that we are determined to secure a sustainable and competitive future for the UK steel sector. On 15 September 2023, we announced that Tata Steel is investing £1.25 billion, including a UK Government grant worth up to £500 million, in a new electric arc furnace. This will not only modernise production but ensure that steel-making in south Wales can continue for generations to come. Without this major investment, Port Talbot would be under serious threat and Tata Steel's operation in the UK, which employs 8,000 people, would be at risk. This support is expected to save at least 5,000 jobs within the company.

My noble friend Lord Willetts and the noble Lord, Lord Watson, asked about the industrial strategy shutdown. The Government decided that we would no longer monitor the impact of the former industrial strategy, following its transition to the plan for growth. We continue to engage closely with businesses across all sectors, representative organisations, trade associations and investors through dedicated forums such as the Prime Minister's Business Council.

[LORD EVANS OF RAINOW]

I have answered the question from the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar. Since the vision was first published, we have seen strong growth in the life sciences sector, which saw £24 billion in exports in 2022. As a result of this, the sector supports more than 300,000 jobs across the UK. We will continue supporting this important and innovative sector with a sector-specific approach.

The noble Lord, Lord Aberdare, asked about the skills improvement plan. Skills are very important across all sectors. The Government support manufacturing through a high-quality skills offer, including our flagship apprenticeship programme, skills bootcamps and higher technical qualifications through institutes of technology delivering manufacturing skills in areas such as clean energy, renewable energy, industry and transport.

To answer the noble Lord, Lord Mountevans, our teams in the Department for Business and Trade work across government, with business and investors in all sectors to drive growth. Indeed, in the Autumn Statement, we focused on building a stronger and more resilient economy. The Chancellor set out a plan to unlock growth and productivity by working with business, investing £20 billion a year getting more people into work, increasing the working population of 29 million. To answer the noble Lord, Lord Mair, the Government support manufacturing and engineering through a high-quality skills offer, flagship apprenticeship programmes, skills bootcamps and technical qualifications through institutes of technology.

I conclude by grounding this debate in a higher purpose. The Government must always be focused on how to build prosperity for our country, our people and our communities. It is right, in the context of heightened global competition, that the UK must be smarter and more strategic by maintaining a highly attractive business environment, prioritising areas of strength and focusing efforts on the biggest growth opportunities. Through this approach, we can be more agile in response to change, and more effective at delivering economic growth and enabling everyone to participate in economic growth and prosperity. Under our vision for key growth sectors, the Government will continue to ensure we capitalise on our strong partnership with business and make the most of UK's underlying economic advantages to keep the economy growing.

These clusters of excellence have the great benefit of being accessible in every part of the country, whether it be working to deliver space ports in Scotland; pioneering the development and commercialisation of semiconductors in Wales; supporting Northern Ireland's dynamic and rapidly evolving aerospace ecosystem; building on Coventry and Warwickshire's unique automotive supply chain to develop new enabling technologies for automotive transportation; continuing to capitalise on our thriving financial services capabilities in London; or building our offshore supply chains and gigafactory capabilities in the north-east. It is through our targeted approach towards our five key growth sectors that we can be more effective in delivering the direction for growth and prosperity in the UK. We continue to take the long-term decisions to deliver a transformational step change and strengthen the UK economy as a whole. It is this co-ordinated and targeted approach that will continue to boost investment and deliver for the country: that is what is called levelling up.

6.03 pm

**Lord Watson of Wyre Forest (Lab):** My Lords, I thank all contributors to today's debate. I thought it was both interesting and thoughtful and set the terms of future discussions that we will be having in the years ahead in this House. In particular, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield, for his considered contribution and welcome him to the House. Like him, I felt very nostalgic when he described working at No. 10. I have very fond memories of working there myself, and I know that his experience in the Treasury and in No. 10 will ensure that his contributions to this House really make a difference.

The nostalgia did not stop there. Is it really over 30 years since I shared a flat with my noble friend Lord McNicol and was so infuriated when I was reading the seminal work of the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, *Modern Conservatism*, page by page? I am grateful and relieved, of course, that both of their thinking has moved on in the last 30 years, on the basis of their contributions today.

But the nostalgia does not stop even there. It is 40 years since I was appointed as the photocopy kid in the library at Labour Party headquarters, where the general secretary, my noble friend Lord Whitty, as he is now, used to tell me about how he worked for the Ministry of Technology under Harold Wilson—we all know that Harold knew how to back a winner and was very good at industrial strategies.

Then it reminded me that I am just getting on a bit. Indeed, my noble friend Lord Rooker reminded me in his contribution that he was the first MP I ever met, at the age of seven years old, which gives me the right to say to him that, this month, I believe, we will see his 50 years of unbroken service to the Houses of Parliament, both in the Commons and the Lords. It has been a genuine pleasure to see his contributions in both Houses during those years, and I am delighted and honoured that I can say that while wrapping up this debate.

An industrial strategy sets a longer-term higher order of direction for a country to take, perhaps even more than markets can predict, with goals like technological leadership or sustainable development. I was particularly entertained, amused and impressed by the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Frost. I will just remind him by way of conclusion that the company of his fellow Hayekian anarchist, Elon Musk, the boss of Tesla, had a market capitalisation of \$588 billion the last time I checked. He must be very grateful for the \$465 million he got as a loan guarantee from the American Government because they had an industrial strategy. Would it not be great if we could have the same in this country?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** My Lords, please forgive me: I forgot to mention the excellent speech of the noble Lord, Lord Rosenfield. Coming from Manchester, he is most welcome to the House, and I look forward to working with him and finding out if he is a blue or a red.

*Motion agreed.*

*House adjourned at 6.06 pm.*