

**Monday  
18 April 2016**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 18 April 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 18 April 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### DEFENCE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Trident

2. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the Leader of the House on the timetable for a vote in the House on replacement of the Trident missile submarines. [904478]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):** As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear on 10 February, we will bring forward a debate and vote in the House at the appropriate moment, and announce it in the usual way.

**Drew Hendry:** Can the Minister tell the House where Trident falls in value terms in regard to the cost-benefit ratio using the Government's own standard appraisal mechanism? Can he confirm that an appraisal has been conducted, and will he make it available to Members in the Commons Library?

**Michael Fallon:** I will of course make available what figures I can to the hon. Gentleman, but let me be clear that the overall cost of the Successor programme was set out in the strategic defence and security review that we published in November. It is £31 billion, which should be seen in the context of a deterrent that will serve us for over 30 years.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): It is an open secret that the Ministry of Defence wanted this debate to take place in the spring, so I do not blame the Secretary of State for the fact that it has not happened. However, he is on record as saying that people are worried about the wavering position of the Labour Opposition on this matter. Would it not assist us to restore bipartisanship to the issue if the debate were to be brought forward, at least to before the Labour party's conference, or do the Government—by which I mean No. 10—prefer dissension at a Labour party conference to bipartisanship on a particularly important issue?

**Michael Fallon:** Well, no. The position is that in November we announced our commitment to replacing the existing four Vanguard submarines, and we would like that principle to be endorsed by a vote in this

House. I would obviously like that vote to take place as soon as possible, respecting of course the periods of purdah that will exist this spring and summer.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State understand that, unlike some on the Opposition Benches, we will not allow any individual questions over cost—valid though they might be in and of themselves—to be used as an excuse to wriggle out of our commitment to the British people? Those who remain true to the spirit of Attlee will do the right thing for Britain.

**Michael Fallon:** I am very glad to hear that. I would certainly caution the Labour party against moving away from the moderate mainstream support for a deterrent that every previous Labour Government have expressed. Indeed, I note that the advisers of the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) told journalists that her review would be fudged, as the “last thing we want...is another reason for those who oppose Jeremy to call for him to go”.

The hon. Lady seems to be the only person who thinks that defending our country means defending the Labour leader.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Trident alternatives review concluded that there was no credible or affordable alternative to a Trident-based nuclear deterrent?

**Michael Fallon:** Yes. The alternatives were looked at exhaustively as part of the Trident alternatives review three years ago, and I set out the principal arguments as to why we are making this replacement in a speech to Policy Exchange on 23 March.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Last Monday, I had the privilege of visiting Rolls-Royce in Derby, which is working on the Successor programme, and meeting members of the unions and the management. The one thing that they all want is certainty on the decision on this programme and on provision for the future. Does the Secretary of State agree that any notion that we would have an easy option to cancel the programme at some point in the future—say, at the next general election—would be disastrous not only for our defence but for the workforces in Derby and other places that are reliant on it?

**Michael Fallon:** It would be disastrous for our defence and for jobs in this country. It would also be disastrous for our relationship with all our principal allies. Let me be very clear that this programme is already going ahead. We have spent nearly £4 billion, as authorised by the House, on the Successor programme. Work is under way in Barrow, in Derby and in a number of other locations across the country, including those in Scotland, and the programme is already employing several thousand people in small companies.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): The Minister for Defence Procurement wrote in November 2014:

“The security requirement to source and sustain certain capabilities within the UK—for instance nuclear submarines...means that single source procurement is and will remain a significant activity...

The taxpayer is entitled to know that this money is being spent properly... That is why the Single Source Regulations Office (SSRO) has been established”.

So can the Secretary of State please tell the House how many meetings his Department has had so far with the SSRO about the Successor programme?

**Michael Fallon:** I am very happy to write to the hon. Lady about the number of meetings that may or may not have taken place. Let me be clear, however, that the programme is now under way and it is time she made up her mind as to whether she will support it or will we be taking a message to our allies, including the President of the United States, who visits on Friday, that the Opposition are no longer prepared to support a deterrent that they have always supported in the past?

**Mr Speaker:** I dare say that we will find out who thinks what when the vote comes.

**Emily Thornberry:** I asked the Secretary of State specifically about the SSRO and the Successor programme. I appreciate that he does not know the answer, so let me tell him that there have been no meetings—I have a letter here from the Ministry of Defence. The SSRO was tasked with saving at least £200 million last year through its scrutiny of MOD contracts. However, because the Secretary of State will not allow it to do its job properly, it has agreed savings of only £100,000. Why is it not being allowed to scrutinise the Successor contract? Is it because, as the Department has said:

“The government needs a safe space away from the public gaze to allow it to consider policy options... unfettered from public comment about”

their “affordability”? That is not good enough. We demand that the Secretary of State reverse the decision and open up the Successor programme to the independent scrutiny that it requires.

**Michael Fallon:** The hon. Lady appears to misunderstand completely the function of the Single Source Regulations Office, which is to supervise contracts once they are signed. This particular contract is still under negotiation, and I am certainly not going to go into the details with her or, indeed, in the House until it is signed. Once it is signed, we will of course ensure that it is properly scrutinised.

#### Defence Attaché Network

3. **William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): What plans he has to strengthen Britain’s defence attaché network. [904479]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier):** Our growing defence budget allows us to expand the defence attaché network, including new posts in Finland, Albania and Senegal, also covering the Gambia, Mali and Niger. We are also creating new deputy posts in Qatar, Afghanistan, Latvia, Lithuania and Georgia. The expansion of the DA network will increase our global defensive reach and influence and will strengthen our partnerships around the world, as set out in the 2015 strategic defence and security review.

**William Wragg:** I thank the Minister for that reply. It is critical that we continue to be vigilant about the security threat coming from Russia. Will he ensure that there are sufficient numbers of defence attachés in the

Baltic states, central Europe and, in particular, Ukraine and Poland to provide the analysis and expertise required to understand fully the security and defence dynamics of the region?

**Mr Brazier:** Indeed. I am sure my hon. Friend welcomed the announcement of the new DA in Finland and the new deputy posts in two of the Baltic states.

On expertise, I should stress that we are expanding not only the number of DAs, but their career path and expertise. For example, we have opened a new defence attaché and loan service centre in Shrivenham and have reviewed and enhanced their terms and conditions of service.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I am a big supporter of our DA network, but it is also important that defence attachés are robust in their relationships with their host countries. Will the Minister tell us what representations the defence attaché in Riyadh has made regarding the allegations of civilians being targeted in Yemen following claims that a UK-made PGM 500 missile was located at one of those sites?

**Mr Brazier:** The Department gets a constant stream of advice from the DA and several other sources on the matter that the hon. Gentleman ingeniously managed to work into his question.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Army 2020 and the creation of regional forces will help to grow future defence attachés and will enable officers to follow a career path that includes a substantial element of foreign service, allowing them to get the skills necessary to be effective defence attachés?

**Mr Brazier:** My hon. Friend is exactly right on that matter, as he of course knows, having previously done the international brief in the Ministry of Defence. The new approach of having brigades facing particular parts of the world means that expertise and institutional memory on particular regions will grow. Combining that with the greatly improved career prospects for DAs should in the medium term greatly enhance our representation.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): May I, through the Minister, thank the DA to Tunisia and Libya for the excellent, candid and rigorous briefing he gave the Foreign Affairs Committee on our visit about a month ago? What can the Minister tell the House about any envisaged deployment to the Libyan international assistance mission? What British contribution is being considered?

**Mr Brazier:** My hon. Friend has shown ingenuity in managing to work that question in as a supplementary. As he knows very well, this matter has not yet been decided, but I am delighted that he has received such typically excellent assistance from the DA who covers Tunisia.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister does not have to sound quite so surprised, because, as we have discovered, ingenuity is not an entirely novel phenomenon in the House of Commons.

### Defence Spending

4. **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): What estimate he has made of the likely change in the level of defence spending over the course of this Parliament. [904480]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne)**: As from this month, the Ministry of Defence's budget has risen to more than £35 billion—that is an increase of £800 million on the year just ended. This is the first real-terms increase in six years, reflecting the priority set out by this Government in the 2015 spending review to increase defence spending by 0.5% above inflation every year to 2020-21. This Government have clearly committed this country to meeting the NATO guideline of spending 2% of GDP on defence each and every year of this decade.

**Christopher Pincher**: I welcome this increased budget. If we were to adopt the position advocated by some and not spend 2%, what would the impact be on the morale of our troops, their equipment and our security?

**Mr Dunne**: My hon. Friend is right to identify that the threats we face are growing in scale, complexity and concurrency, and a failure to meet this commitment would have a significant adverse impact on our ability to deliver the capability we need to face those threats and would send a very wrong message to our adversaries. Our commitment to spending 2% of GDP on defence enables us to deliver one of the most capable armed forces in the world; to spend more than £178 billion on equipment and equipment support over the next decade; and to fund an increase in the number of regular personnel for both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, and of reservists for the British Army.

19. [904497] **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But the Minister cannot pull the wool over our eyes on this one, because we all know that defence spending was set to fall below 2% of GDP, but for the Government including things that had never been included in the NATO analysis before, such as war pensions and the pension contributions of MOD civilian staff. Will he now come clean? Will he have to resort to these sorts of accounting gimmicks to be able to assure NATO that in future we will maintain 2% spending?

**Mr Dunne**: The hon. Gentleman, in characteristic style, is looking for smoke where there is no fire. We use the NATO definition to make the calculation of our proportion of GDP spent on defence, and it assesses the figure and then publishes it. We have done that in the past under previous Administrations and we will do it again under this one.

18. [904496] **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): The Government's defence review set out a £178 billion programme of investment in equipment for our armed forces over the next decade. Will the Minister ignore calls from the other parties to cut defence spending, which would mean smaller, weaker armed forces and the loss of highly skilled jobs in the defence sector?

**Mr Dunne**: I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the chance to rehearse again our commitment to increased spending on defence and security for each and every year of this Parliament—that will be a real-terms increase. We have published our 10-year forward equipment plan, which shows the contribution that defence will be making to the prosperity of the nation—that is another objective we have taken on in the defence review for the first time. That will benefit both the security of our nation and the economy as a whole.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): Despite the claims by the Minister's Department, the reality is that, between 2010 and 2015, the Royal Navy has had a 33% decline in carriers and amphibious ships, a 17% decline in submarines and a 17% decline in destroyers and frigates. We are a maritime nation, and yet our Navy is declining. Is it not time that we placed greater investment in our maritime capabilities?

**Mr Dunne**: The hon. Lady is very experienced in these matters, and she will know that, in 2010, the then coalition Government inherited a dire financial situation across the public sector, and especially in defence, and some very difficult decisions had to be taken to reduce certain front-line elements, including our aircraft carriers. She is also fully aware that we are in the midst of the largest shipbuilding programme that this country has ever known. Early next year, we expect to see the first of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers moved out of Rosyth to take up their position with the Royal Navy.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): I proposed a private Member's Bill last year requiring the Government to enshrine in law that we spend at least 2% of GDP on defence. May I welcome today's announcement and hope that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) is wrong and that this really does represent new money? May I also take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on the important work that he has done, under the lead of the Prime Minister, in promoting defence exports, and to welcome the 24 Typhoons that have been sold to Kuwait and hope that that will contribute to the Ministry of Defence's budget?

**Mr Dunne**: I thank my hon. Friend who, in a previous role, had responsibility for promoting defence exports. I also wish to say that I have even better news for him: the announcement last week of the sale of Typhoons to Kuwait was for not for 24 aircraft, but for 28.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): What defence spending can the Minister guarantee for the steel industry given that the procurement rules allow for community benefit?

**Mr Dunne**: This Government have undertaken a new set of procurement guidelines for steel, which we have implemented through the Ministry of Defence through a combination of briefings to the Defence Suppliers Forum undertaken by the Secretary of State. I have also written to the chief executives of the 15 largest contractors. We are cascading that through the supply chain to ensure that, for future defence procurement, there is every opportunity for UK steel manufacturers to bid for tenders.

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Government Members appear to be insinuating that the Labour party is advocating a reduction in defence spending, which is entirely untrue. It is perhaps unfortunate that the hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) talked about the impact that defence cuts have on the morale of our armed forces, because I have here a letter from the Secretary of State confirming that the MOD agreed to make £500 million of in-year savings after the Budget this year. The Government, of which this Minister is a part, has overseen a 17% cut in those Royal Navy warships and now, for the first time since 1982, have left the Falklands without a Royal Navy frigate protecting it. Can he clarify the record that we have a Government who are cutting defence spending—massively in recent years—and leaving the nation less protected as a result of it?

**Mr Dunne:** The hon. Gentleman really needs to read those letters more carefully. The reduction to which he referred related to the in-year spending of the Department, which ended at the beginning of this month. The defence budget for the current year, and for each future year, is going up, and the question that he and his colleagues need to answer is this: why will his party not commit, as our party has, to the 2% NATO commitment?

### Daesh

5. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the progress of the international campaign to defeat ISIS/Daesh. [904481]

11. **Dr Phillip Lee** (Bracknell) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on progress in the campaign against Daesh. [904487]

14. **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on progress in the campaign against Daesh. [904491]

15. **Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on progress in the campaign against Daesh. [904492]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):** My next regular meeting with my counterparts in the coalition is on 4 May. The campaign against Daesh is making progress. With coalition support, Iraqi forces hold Ramadi, are clearing Hit, and have begun preparatory operations for the retaking of Mosul. In Syria, Daesh has been driven from al-Shadadi, cutting a key supply route from Mosul to Raqqa.

**Mike Kane:** I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. With the advent of a new unity Government in Libya, does he believe that they are preparing the ground to request military assistance from the UK, and does he think that, as part of that request, they will require assistance with airstrikes against Daesh targets in Libya?

**Michael Fallon:** It is early days. The Foreign Secretary visited Tripoli this morning in support of the new Government, and I and fellow European Union Defence Ministers will be meeting in Luxembourg tonight to hear directly from Prime Minister Sarraj as to how he

thinks we can best help stabilise that new Government. We urgently need to engage with them, not least to help close down the very dangerous migration route that is seeing so many lives lost in the Mediterranean, and to help that Government tackle the spread of Daesh along the coast.

**Dr Lee:** Can my right hon. Friend confirm that contrary to its propaganda, Daesh has lost much of the territory that it held a year ago, and that now is the right time to back the Iraqi security forces in taking the fight to Daesh?

**Michael Fallon:** My hon. Friend is right. With coalition support, Iraqi security forces have retaken around 40% of the populated areas that Daesh once held in Iraq, including Tikrit, Sinjar and Ramadi, and as I said, Hit is in the process of being cleared. We are continuing to provide vital air support, as well as specialist training and equipment.

**Helen Whately:** Experience tells us that unless we get civil institutions up and running quickly after a conflict ends, we can end up with a failed state. What steps is my right hon. Friend's Department taking to make sure that that does not happen in Syria once Daesh has been driven out?

**Michael Fallon:** Following the Syria conference held in London in February, there is now a stabilisation plan for Syria that we are working to deliver with our international partners. We are already working with existing Syrian institutions to try and restore stability, and we are working with communities on local government and civil defence, but stabilisation in Syria depends on a sustainable peace deal that protects communities from attack either by Daesh or by the regime. We are supporting that peace deal through the International Syria Support Group.

**Robert Jenrick:** Tomorrow the Mayor of London will unveil in Trafalgar Square a reconstruction of the arch of the temple of Bel from Palmyra, as the symbol of our defiance against Daesh and also of our commitment to protect culture in war zones when it is reasonably possible to do so. In December my right hon. Friend announced that he was commissioning a group within the armed forces of modern-day "monuments men" to lead this agenda and to bring the UK into compliance with The Hague convention, and I hope that will be in the Queen's Speech shortly. Will he update the House on that?

**Michael Fallon:** Yes, the Government have announced that they will ratify The Hague convention at the earliest opportunity. That includes the establishment of a military cultural property protection unit, and my Ministry is already engaging with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the stabilisation unit to further develop plans for that capability to help better protect such important monuments in future. It is also important to deny Daesh the revenue that it has earned from selling artefacts and coins from archaeological sites.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State believe that it is possible to stabilise Libya only by having ground forces there? Does he accept that that may include British forces?

**Michael Fallon:** It is up to the new Government of national accord being established in Libya with our support, led by Prime Minister Sarraj, to make it clear what assistance he needs. A number of countries, including ourselves, have already indicated that we will be part of a Libyan international assistance mission, but it is far too early to speculate about what form that assistance might take, whether it is training, advice from the Ministries, or other support.

22. [904500] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be all too aware of the evidence of atrocities being committed by Daesh against religious minorities and the destruction of antiquities in the areas that it controls. What specific actions have been undertaken in the military campaign against Daesh to prevent both of those?

**Michael Fallon:** We have to continue to degrade and eventually defeat Daesh to bring to an end the horrific attacks that we have seen and the persecution of those of other faiths that we have witnessed, particularly the persecution of the Yazidi minority. In the end, Daesh has to be defeated so that we can have a tolerant and comprehensive settlement in Syria that protects all minorities.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Let me begin by sending my sincere best wishes to the Royal Regiment of Scotland, which will celebrate its 10th birthday on Friday with a celebratory service at Canongate kirk. I am sure that the whole House will join me in passing on our congratulations.

Libya is increasingly becoming the focus of a campaign by the international community to defeat Daesh. Given that the UK's last intervention in Libya was by any measure a catastrophic failure, what plans do the Government have to ensure that we have clear, stated objectives, an exit strategy and a coherent and transparent policy for rebuilding the country afterwards?

**Michael Fallon:** I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in wishing the Royal Regiment of Scotland a very happy 10th birthday and acknowledge the enormous contribution it makes to the military tradition in Scotland.

Let me be clear that no decisions in respect of any involvement in Libya have yet been taken. We are waiting to hear from the new Government of national accord what kind of assistance they need. We have a very strong interest in helping them rapidly stabilise the country, not least because of the spread of Daesh along the coastline, which is a direct threat to western Europe and to ourselves.

**Brendan O'Hara:** It has been widely speculated that the Government are considering sending ground troops to Libya. Can the Minister give us a cast-iron guarantee that any such deployment would be discussed on the Floor of this House and voted on by this House?

**Michael Fallon:** First, let me be very clear that no such decision has been taken, and we are not contemplating at the moment a commitment of that kind. What I can say is that if we are, in future, to deploy military forces in a combat role into a conflict zone, we would of course, as the Prime Minister has made clear, come to this House first.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): This is a very important constitutional issue, as I am sure the Secretary of State understands. How can it be that we read in the media that the Government have already drawn up plans to send 1,000 troops to aid the Libyan unity Government in fighting Daesh? When asked whether or not they would be deployed in hostile areas, a defence source told the *Daily Mail* that that was not yet clear. Surely it is important that the Secretary of State, instead of briefing the media, commits to coming to this House and answering questions directly. I am very concerned that in a written answer published today he has said that he reserves the right to take military action without parliamentary approval. Does that mean that we will not have a proper debate on proposed deployment, or will he come to the House, allow us to have a proper debate, answer questions and allow us to have a proper vote?

**Michael Fallon:** First, let me caution the hon. Lady against believing everything she reads in the *Daily Mail*. Secondly, let me make it very clear that we are not currently planning a deployment, as reported in that newspaper. Thirdly, I am always prepared to answer questions in this House, as indeed I am doing at the moment. Fourthly, the written answer published today makes very clear the circumstances in which we would of course come back to Parliament for its approval. However, I should also emphasise that the Prime Minister and I have to take decisions about the deployment of ships, planes and troops, and we do not want, as the House will understand, to be artificially constrained in action that would keep this country safe. We will keep Parliament informed and we will of course seek its approval before deploying British forces in combat roles into a conflict situation.

#### EU Withdrawal: Effect on National Security

6. **Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the potential effects of withdrawal from the EU on UK defence and national security. [904482]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):** NATO remains the cornerstone of the United Kingdom's defence, but the European Union has an important complementary role in addressing and managing international crises, especially where NATO cannot, or chooses not to, act. Our response to the complex security threats we face requires a united, comprehensive approach, including the European Union's diplomatic, humanitarian and economic levers.

**Mr Shuker:** Our most important defence allies, including a certain US President, who will visit this week, have recognised that leadership and membership of the EU are vital for Britain's national security and place in the world. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the implications of leaving the EU for our transatlantic alliance and our national defence?

**Michael Fallon:** I cannot think of one ally—never mind the United States—that thinks that the world would be safer or that we would be safer if we left the European Union. Let me be clear: our central defence rests on our membership of NATO, but there are things

that the European Union can add to that—not least, for example, the recent action taken against Russia after its annexation of Crimea and its interference in eastern Ukraine. It was the European Union that was able to apply economic sanctions—something NATO cannot do.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): President Obama is indeed visiting the country later this week. Nobody doubts for a second the total commitment of the United States to NATO, and nobody claims for a second that, just because the United States is not in the EU, it is any less committed to national defence, NATO or anything else—indeed, it would never surrender a jot of its sovereignty. The fact is that our security depends on NATO, not the EU, and if we leave the EU, we will be just as safe as we are now.

**Michael Fallon:** My hon. Friend and I, although we have been friends for many years, differ on this matter. Let us be clear: the United States, as we do, shares its sovereignty by its membership of NATO—by being prepared to come to the aid of other NATO members under the obligations in article 5. There are many international ways in which we decide to share our sovereignty for the common good and for the better security of our country.

**Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State recognise the enormous value of EU membership to our defence industry? That was recently reflected in an ADS survey, which showed that 70% of companies want Britain to remain in the EU. Does he agree that access to the European funding—particularly in research and development—is critical for British defence companies to maintain a leading edge in the global market?

**Michael Fallon:** I do agree with much of that. We heard earlier this afternoon of the success of the Typhoon sales to Kuwait. That European consortium was put together with four different European countries and is now successfully selling aircraft to eight separate nations. There are projects and programmes of such a scale that European collaboration is only beneficial.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Should this country decide to leave the European Union, would my right hon. Friend undertake to use his best endeavours to secure as much of the £10 billion a year we would save to boost the defence budget?

**Michael Fallon:** I do not anticipate this country actually taking such a dramatic step. Let me repeat: I do not know any of my Defence Minister colleagues around the world who would like this country suddenly to start leaving the international alliances and partnerships that it has entered, so I do not think the money my hon. Friend thinks might be available will be.

### Successor Ballistic Missile Submarines

8. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effects on the UK's (a) economy and (b) security of building four Successor ballistic missile submarines. [904484]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):** As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State indicated earlier, the nuclear deterrent is at the apex of the UK's full spectrum of defence capability. The UK's defence nuclear enterprise is gearing up to deliver the successor to the Vanguard class submarines. Last month we announced a further £642 million of preparatory work ahead of the investment decision for this £31 billion programme. That investment in Successor submarines will not only help keep Britain safe but support over 30,000 jobs across the UK.

**James Cartlidge:** With Russia openly menacing our allies, and with us on the cusp of the centenary of the greatest sacrifices ever made by our armed forces in defending this country, would it not be foolish and totally inappropriate for us no longer to be prepared to make a relatively small financial sacrifice to maintain the only asset that can guarantee the freedom of this country?

**Mr Dunne:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As the Secretary of State indicated in his speech on nuclear deterrence before Easter, we have both a political and a moral responsibility to protect our people and allies. The nuclear deterrent is assigned to NATO, and as a leading member of NATO we cannot and should not outsource our commitments to others. There has been broad political consensus for decades in this House on the need to maintain the UK's independent strategic deterrent. Government Members are clear where we stand. This remains the official policy of Her Majesty's official Opposition, and it is in our view irresponsible that the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) and her leader appear determined to put the ultimate security of our nation at risk.

**Mr John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): The Minister and, indeed, the Secretary of State have referred to the long-held and well-known views of the Leader of the Opposition on this issue, but it is the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister who will put the resolution to the House. Given that there is overwhelming support for the renewal from the Ministry of Defence, the forces, industry, the workforce and the majority of this House, will the Minister get the message through to dithering Dave in No. 10 to stop playing party politics with this issue of national security and to put the vote to this House?

**Mr Dunne:** The right hon. Gentleman, who speaks with some knowledge on these matters, has given a strong indication to the House that there will be a broad measure of support, which we thoroughly welcome. I will offer the Prime Minister his advice.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): Two weeks ago I had the great privilege of visiting Rolls-Royce up the road in Bristol, where I met apprentices and workers at the defence aerospace operations and turbine manufacturing facility. I witnessed the important work that Rolls-Royce is doing around the country on manufacturing nuclear engines for servicing naval vessels. Does the Minister agree that Trident stands to benefit the economy by virtue of the many jobs it will create?



**Mr Dunne:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the fact that that programme will benefit not just those folks working for Rolls-Royce in various plants, particularly around Derby, or those employees of BAE Systems, the prime contractor, but companies in constituencies right across the breadth of this country, including his own.

#### **Armed Forces: Protection from Persistent Legal Claims**

9. **James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): What steps he is taking to protect the armed forces from persistent legal claims. [904485]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt):** Although we will always investigate serious allegations of wrongdoing, we are committed to ending the large amount of opportunist litigation brought against our armed forces, which places great stress on them, undermines human rights and corrupts our operations. The Prime Minister chaired a National Security Council meeting on the subject in February, which looked at a range of options we have developed, and tasked the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), who has responsibility for human rights, and me to produce a comprehensive package to address the problem. We expect to make announcements very shortly.

**James Cleverly:** Two weeks ago Justice Leggatt said that Public Interest Lawyers showed

“a serious failure to observe essential ethical standards”

when it claimed that British soldiers were responsible for the death of a child. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is simply the latest example of the hounding of our forces—something we committed in our manifesto to clamp down on—and that it must now be investigated by the regulator?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I agree with my hon. Friend and it is right that Public Interest Lawyers has been referred to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal. Justice Leggatt criticised them for failing to take action when they discovered inconsistencies between their claimants’ accounts and, worse, for ignoring those inconsistencies when they were pointed out to them and for continuing to advance the case. In his words,

“no responsible lawyer...conscious of their duties to their client and the court would have felt able to advance the original allegation.”

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Would it not help to deter future legal cases against our soldiers if the House read the remarkable speech made in this House last Thursday by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway), who said, from his authoritative position as a former soldier and journalist, that many untruths by Ministers, civil servants and the military resulted in grave errors in the war in Afghanistan? When can we start a full inquiry into the reasons we went into Helmand?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I know that the hon. Gentleman cares passionately about these issues. I point him to a number of investigations that have gone on, both very lengthy investigations by the Ministry of Defence and investigations by Committees of the House into Afghanistan and, in particular, Helmand in 2006. It is important that

we learn the lessons from those inquiries. I hope that he will be able to see from operations today, in particular Op Shader, that we are acting on those lessons learned.

#### **NATO Countries: Defence Spending**

12. **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in other NATO countries on spending 2% of GDP on defence. [904488]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):** The UK is proud to be one of five NATO countries that meet the commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence. Since the defence investment pledge was made at the Wales summit in 2014, progress has been made, with 16 allies increasing defence spending in real terms and 24 allies now spending more of their defence budgets on equipment. As it happens, the leadership role that the UK is given in NATO on this issue was warmly welcomed once again by the US Deputy Defence Secretary in my bilateral discussions with him last Friday.

**Pauline Latham:** What signal would it send to our NATO partners, and to our adversaries, ahead of the Warsaw summit if the Government took the advice of some in the House and failed to commit to spending 2% of GDP on defence? Will my hon. Friend update the House on the Libya and wider middle east situation?

**Mr Speaker:** Briefly.

**Mr Dunne:** I am not sure that the Speaker will give me enough time to answer both those issues, so I will focus on the first, if I may. The NATO Secretary-General was here last week and he praised the United Kingdom for our leadership on defence spending and our contribution to NATO. By the NATO summit in Warsaw in July, we expect to see further progress on the part of our allies in working to meet NATO’s 2% guideline. By contrast, the deafening failure to match that commitment by the Labour party sends precisely the wrong message to our allies and, even worse, to our adversaries.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The Minister and many other hon. Members make much of this 2%, but 2% in the United Kingdom is quite different from a measurement of 2% for other NATO allies. Does the Minister not agree that this process of self-assessment, which NATO seems to tick off, has profound implications for the alliance’s method of calculation of GDP expenditure on the military?

**Mr Dunne:** As I indicated earlier this afternoon, NATO makes the definition and assesses the contributions that are made by each member nation to its return. It is not for the United Kingdom to make that determination; it is for NATO to do so.

#### **Procurement**

13. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support British jobs and industry through its procurement process. [904490]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):** In the recent strategic defence and security review, the Ministry of Defence agreed a new strategic objective of contributing to the nation’s prosperity. We do that in many ways, not least by spending some

£20 billion a year with industry, around half of which is in the manufacturing sector, and some £4 billion with small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Daniel Zeichner:** Will the Minister tell the House just how much his Department has saved by buying cheap steel from Sweden? Does he think that that in any way offsets the devastating impact on our steel industry?

**Mr Dunne:** I am in a position to update the House on the steel component of the aircraft carrier contract, which is much the largest defence procurement contract. Of the structural steel, some 95,000 tonnes have been procured from UK steel mills over the period of that contract.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that the United Kingdom works very closely with countries such as Pakistan on defence procurement? Will he join me in welcoming the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, who is sitting at the top of the Public Gallery?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. First, one should not refer to the place to which the hon. Gentleman referred. After six years in the House, frankly, he ought to know that. Secondly, that was pretty wide of the question.

I call Stephen Phillips. Not—

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)  
*rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Ah! Mr Phillips is here. Splendid. How could I have thought otherwise for a moment? It is only that the hon. Gentleman has perambulated to a different position in the Chamber. We are delighted to see him.

### Service Housing

17. **Stephen Phillips:** What measures he has put in place to improve the quality of service housing. [904495]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster):** My Department is committed to improving the quality of service family accommodation provided to our service personnel and their families. We have been working closely with Carillion Amey to deliver those improvements. Work to improve accommodation has resulted in the upgrading of some 3,000 homes through complete refurbishment and the separate installation of around 10,000 new kitchens, bathrooms, and central heating systems.

**Stephen Phillips:** I will be short, Mr Speaker—which may be why you did not see me earlier.

Service housing is absolutely critical not only to the wellbeing of our servicemen and women and their families, but to their morale. Carillion Amey has been an appalling contractor, and I know that the Department has taken this issue seriously. May I encourage my hon. Friend to continue to be robust, and to take the contract away from it unless and until it starts to discharge its obligations properly?

**Mark Lancaster:** My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to highlight the poor performance of Carillion Amey to date. I am determined, as indeed is the Secretary of State, to improve this matter, which

is why we will continue to work closely with Carillion Amey. I can reassure my hon. and learned Friend that Carillion Amey has committed to meet all the key performance indicators across the suite of the next generation estate contracts, including the national housing prime contract, by the end of May 2016.

### Topical Questions

T1. [904502] **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):** My immediate priorities remain success in our operations against Daesh and implementing our SDSR commitments. This month, the defence budget increases for the first time in six years, and it will increase in every year of this Parliament. Our choice to spend more on stronger defence will help keep us safe.

**Kirsten Oswald:** The Secretary of State will know about the worrying number of cancers and terminal illnesses among groups of former RAF personnel working in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s who worked in a toxic soup of chemicals with precious few safety precautions, and he will surely know of the distressing inconsistencies in financial support for those affected. Will he confirm that the Government's duty of care under the armed forces covenant extends to investigating this properly and to compensating victims fully and consistently?

**Michael Fallon:** Yes. When a veteran considers that their service has led to an illness or injury, they are entitled to make a claim for compensation through our legal claims department, or to apply for enhancements to their pensions. Let me assure the hon. Lady that the Veterans Welfare Service will listen and will provide all necessary support.

T2. [904503] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Last week, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier), responded to a debate in Westminster Hall secured by our hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) on air cadet training facilities. In Southend, 1312 Air Training Corps uses the facilities for gliding in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly). Will the Under-Secretary of State make sure that those facilities are still made available to our cadets?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier):** Wethersfield, the facility to which my hon. Friend is referring, has been identified for disposal, and the new site is yet to be selected. However, I can reassure him that we are strongly committed to gliding, and 614 Volunteer Gliding Squadron, when it moves from Wethersfield, will expand into its new role as a regional hub. Our immediate priority is to get cadets back flying again, after a gap of about two years. That will start again this year, and should be fully delivered by 2018.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Those injured in the course of their duties should receive the financial support they need, but currently the value of compensation payments is being eroded by a comparative

third under the armed forces compensation scheme's guaranteed income payments and the war disablement pensions supplement. Applying the triple lock to military compensation payments would ensure that the highest of earnings, inflation or 2.5% was paid. When will the Government take evidence to review this payment and examine the impact of the real-term loss under the current system?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster):** We always keep our payments systems under review. The hon. Lady will of course be aware that, in the recent Budget, the Chancellor decided that, for the first time, payments under the war pensions scheme would be set aside for care costs. These are the sort of positive measures that we keep under review in support of our veterans.

T3. [904504] **Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Kuwait's decision to buy 28 world-beating Typhoons is testament to the skill of the BAE workforce at Warton, many of whom live in my constituency, and this Government's commitment to defence exports?

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):** We welcome wholeheartedly this month's contract signed by Kuwait for 28 Typhoon aircraft. Kuwait thereby becomes the eighth country to select the Eurofighter Typhoon and the third in the Gulf to do so. It is very positive both for our bilateral and defence relationship and, as my hon. Friend indicates, for jobs across the British aerospace and defence industry, including the thousands employed by BAE Systems at Warton in Lancashire, many of whom are her constituents. It is excellent news for the whole supply chain right across the UK.

T5. [904506] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Following the Foreign Secretary's statement that we

"stand ready to provide further assistance to Libya and its people", will the Secretary of State confirm what kind of assistance the UK would be willing to provide and how much notice this House would have before a vote on military action in Libya?

**Michael Fallon:** I have made it clear that we are waiting to hear from Prime Minister Sarraj and the new Government, who have only been established over the past few days, what kind of assistance they want, whether it be training or other support. On notice to this House, I repeat that there is no plan to deploy British troops in any kind of combat role. If there were a plan to deploy troops in a combat role in a conflict zone anywhere in the world, we would come to the House first.

T4. [904505] **Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): A particularly nasty Daesh force has seized territory at the top of the Bekaa valley in Lebanon. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the British Government are doing everything they can to support the Government of Lebanon in tackling this particularly nasty group of people, who are inflicting misery on local people?

**Michael Fallon:** Yes. Last week, I discussed with the Lebanese Defence Minister, Samir Mokbel, the threats that Lebanon faces and the importance of its security. We recently committed to spend a further £23 million on equipment, mentoring and training to help the Lebanese armed forces secure their entire border with Syria. We plan to spend an additional £4.5 million on urban and rural operations training so that by 2019, some 10,000 Lebanese soldiers will have received British training.

T6. [904508] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Will the Minister say a little more about what progress is being made to ensure that a very high percentage of UK steel is used in defence procurement? In particular, will he say what steps he has taken to ensure that there is the capacity and capability for UK steel to be used to build any Successor Trident submarines, should the House determine that that is what it wishes to happen?

**Mr Dunne:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government as a whole are committed to supporting the UK steel industry. The Ministry of Defence has issued new policy guidance to the prime contractors to address barriers to the open market. I am working closely with our contractors to ensure that they support the new policy. In relation to the submarine contracts, as and when they are placed, UK suppliers have an important role to play in the supply of some specialist steels, but at present we do not have manufacturers that are capable of supplying other specialist steels, so there is a balance.

T7. [904509] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that the standard of food for the military at HMS Sultan and similar naval establishments has become such a source of complaints that service personnel have been banned from taking photographs and using social media to critique it? What is he doing to ensure that our servicemen and women are properly looked after in such a basic area as food?

**Mark Lancaster:** Defence personnel are offered core meals, covering breakfast, lunch and dinner, with set calorific and nutritional standards. That includes unlimited access to carbohydrates and vegetables. I confess that I experience the food that is served to our armed forces personnel on a regular basis, and I have not experienced a poor standard. The normal process is for complaints to be made via the chain of command, but I am more than happy to look into the matter for my hon. Friend.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Ministers have been remarkably coy this afternoon about the timing of the maingate decision for the Trident Successor programme. I understand entirely the point about purdah, but will one Minister at least help the House by indicating whether we are likely to get a vote after 24 June and before the House rises for the summer recess on 21 July?

**Michael Fallon:** I hope we will have an early debate and vote on the principle of supporting the replacement of our four existing submarines. I should explain to the hon. Lady that it will not be on the maingate decision,

because there is not one main gate decision. We are obviously negotiating with our suppliers for four separate submarines.

T8. [904510] **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Secretary of State is a suave and polished parliamentary performer, which is why the Defence Committee would like to see a little more of him and why it is doubly disappointing that, despite trying since the beginning of March to agree with his private office to two two-hour slots before the end of May, so far we have achieved only one and the offer of a second on what happens to be local government election day, which is far from ideal. Will he kindly have a word with his private office, ask them to extract their proverbial digit, and thus avoid our two quite important inquiries on the middle east and Russia being either delayed or written without his valuable input?

**Michael Fallon:** I always enjoy my appearances before my right hon. Friend and his colleagues on the Select Committee. It is not always easy to reconcile the dates he offers with some of my international travel commitments but I will certainly have another look at the diary today.

**Mr Speaker:** We all know that the Secretary of State is a very busy man with many commitments and a very full diary, but the House's Committees are very important, and I am sure that he will not forget that. Get it sorted, man.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Hawk aircraft are built at Brough and flown by the Red Arrows, promoting the very best of British. Are there plans to procure new planes for the Red Arrows?

**Mr Dunne:** I recently announced a new support contract for the Hawk aircraft that takes it up to November 2020. We have time to decide how to sustain Hawks beyond that. That is much as I can say. However, I will tell the hon. Lady that the Red Arrows are due to commence a substantial programme of displays in this country and overseas this summer. I hope that many Members have the opportunity to watch them.

T9. [904511] **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): One hundred years ago, Porton Down was established as a centre to deal with nerve gas attacks during the Somme; 100 years later, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory continues to do a fantastic job, now tackling the growing threats we face in this country from Daesh. Following the visit by the Secretary of State and other Ministers, what reflections do they have on the continuing role of DSTL at Porton Down in my constituency?

**Michael Fallon:** DSTL's remit to defend our nation and armed forces against a wide range of threats is just as crucial today as it was 100 years ago. We need to continue to invest in science and technology to stay ahead of our adversaries. I congratulate all our staff at Porton Down, Portsdown West and Fort Halstead, which is in my own constituency, on reaching this milestone and on the remarkable work they do to help keep our country safe.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): With both the existing Trident programme and the potential Successor programme in mind, will the Minister tell me what measures his Department is taking to identify unexploded ordnance in the River Clyde?

**Mr Dunne:** The Department places the safety of our nuclear fleet at the highest possible level. There are continuous attempts to ensure that any potential threats to our submarines are monitored. If the hon. Gentleman has something specific he would like to draw to our attention he should do so, and I am happy to meet him to discuss it.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): Tata Steel developed three new types of steel to build the Queen Elizabeth class of aircraft carrier. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that British steel manufacturers continue to innovate with as well as deliver for the Royal Navy?

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for highlighting the success of Tata Steel in supplying steel for the aircraft carrier. Other grades and types of steel are not currently available in this country and we would be happy to talk to the industry about what steps it can take to make such steel types available.

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The Army Reserve centre in Cobridge in my constituency is home to the A detachment 202 (M) field hospital. I have been in correspondence with the Minister but have yet to receive a response to rumours about its imminent closure, something that is yet to be confirmed or consulted about with the wider community. May I have a response from the Minister?

**Mr Brazier:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her letters on this issue; we have also had a word in the margins. We are looking into the matter. We have a robust system for appeals. I am so far unable to offer her any comfort but I will come back to her shortly.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), the 1206 Air Training Corps squadron in Lichfield is one of the biggest in the west midlands, but it too has been suffering from a lack of glider training provision. What hope can the Minister give my friends and corps members that that training will be resumed?

**Mr Brazier:** I am delighted to answer a question from the distinguished president of that squadron. Nearly two years ago, all gliding had to be suspended for safety reasons. We have been unable to find a contractor who could credibly take on the repair of the Vigilants, but the Vikings are all on their way up, together with a very small number of Vigilants. By 2018 we will be delivering a full programme of gliding, with an enhanced level of powered flying with more Grob Tutors, and that will start this summer.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Some 5,000 service personnel who serve overseas have applied for postal votes. They tell me that by the time the postal votes are sent to the regiment, those serving overseas are

disadvantaged. How will the Minister ensure that postal votes are received by those serving overseas who wish to vote?

**Mark Lancaster:** We partook in the Government-wide scheme launched on 1 February to try to ensure that our service personnel were aware that they could register, and we will do the same again through a defence information notice on the EU referendum that will be issued in May. Ultimately, it is down to individual service voters whether they register or vote.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** May I ask the Secretary of State, or perhaps my hon. and very gallant Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces—*[Interruption]* Gallant because she is in the Royal Navy reserves—to assure the House that no investigator used by Leigh Day or Public Interest Lawyers is paid for by the Ministry of Defence for any service?

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt):**

I can give the assurance that, although the Ministry of Defence does not direct the investigations of the Iraq Historic Allegations Team, it is responsible for ensuring that public money is spent well and efficiently. While we can clearly justify investigations into wrongdoing and those that exonerate our armed forces, we cannot justify spending money on processes that frustrate those investigations. We have given clear ministerial direction that those agents are not to be paid with public money, and we have received assurances that that is the case.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but demand invariably exceeds supply and we must move on.

## Junior Doctors Contracts

3.37 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the imposition of a new junior doctors contract.

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt)**: This House has been updated regularly on all developments relating to the junior doctors contract, and there has been no change whatsoever in the Government's position since my statement to the House in February. I refer Members to my statement in *Hansard* on 11 February, and to answers to parliamentary questions from my ministerial colleagues on 3 March, which set out the position clearly. Nevertheless, I am happy to reiterate those statements to the hon. Lady.

The Government have been concerned for some time about higher mortality rates at weekends in our hospitals, which is one reason why we pledged a seven-day NHS in our manifesto. We have been discussing how to achieve that through contract reform with the British Medical Association for more than three years without success. In January, I asked Sir David Dalton, the highly respected chief executive of Salford Royal, to lead the negotiating team for the Government as a final attempt to resolve outstanding issues. He had some success, with agreement reached in 90% of areas.

However, despite having agreed in writing in November to negotiate on Saturday pay, and despite many concessions from the Government on this issue, the BMA went back on that agreement to negotiate, leading Sir David to conclude that

“there was no realistic prospect of a negotiated outcome.”

He therefore asked me to end the uncertainty for the service by proceeding with the introduction of a new contract without further delay. That is what I agreed to, and what we will be doing. It will start with those in foundation year 1 from this August, and proceed with a phased implementation for other trainees as their current contracts expire through rotation to other NHS organisations.

Let me be very clear: it has never been the Government's plan to insist on changes to existing contracts. The plan was only to offer new contracts as people changed employer and progressed through training. This is something that the Secretary of State, with NHS organisations as employers, is entitled to do according even to the BMA's own legal advice. NHS foundation trusts are technically able to determine pay and conditions for the staff they employ, but the reality within the NHS is that we have a strong tradition of collective bargaining, so in practice trusts opt to use national contracts. Health Education England has made it clear that a single national approach is essential to safeguard the delivery of medical training and that implementation of the national contract will be a key criterion in deciding its financial investment in training posts. As the Secretary of State is entitled to do, I have approved the terms of the national contract.

The Government have a mandate from the electorate to introduce a seven-day NHS, and there will be no retreat from reforms that save lives and improve patient care. Modern contracts for trainee doctors are an essential

part of that programme, and it is a matter of great regret that obstructive behaviour from the BMA has made it impossible to achieve that through a negotiated outcome.

**Heidi Alexander**: Just when we thought this whole sorry saga could not get any worse, it now appears that Government policy is in complete disarray. Despite the Health Secretary giving us all the impression back in February that he was going to railroad through a new contract, it now appears that he is simply making a suggestion—or, as his lawyers would say, approving the terms of a model contract. Last night, the Health Secretary took to Twitter to claim that this was not a change of approach, and we have heard the same again today, so, on behalf of patients, I have to ask him: what on earth is going on?

We need a straightforward answer to a simple question: is the Health Secretary imposing a new contract—yes or no? If he is not, but merely suggesting a template, why did he not make it clearer beforehand, and why, in his oral statement on 11 February, did he lead Parliament, the media, the public and, crucially, 50,000 junior doctors to believe that he was announcing imposition? The junior doctors committee took the unprecedented step of escalating its industrial action on the back of his decision to force through a contract. How can he possibly justify a situation whereby his rhetoric, underpinned by nothing but misplaced bravado and bullishness, could lead to the first ever all-out strike of junior doctors in the history of the NHS? He must get back to the negotiating table, and quickly.

We also need answers to the following questions. Do all NHS employers have free rein to amend the terms of the Health Secretary's so-called model contract? Does this include non-foundation trusts? Is it legal for Health Education England effectively to blackmail trusts on the part of the Health Secretary by withholding funding, if that is what Government policy now is? Finally, it seems there are two basic scenarios: either he has known all along that he does not have the power to impose a new contract, and so all this is part of a cynical attempt to take on a trade union, or he was oblivious to the fact that he did not have the power, in which case, what is going on in his Department? This is no way to run the NHS. Today's revelations call into question the motives, judgment and competence of the Health Secretary, and the House, doctors and patients deserve some answers.

**Mr Hunt**: That is a truly desperate attempt to divert attention from the single biggest question that people in this House want answered: does the Labour party support or not support a strike that will see the care of thousands of people up and down the country suffer?

Let me answer the hon. Lady's question very directly. Yes, we are imposing a new contract, and we are doing it with the greatest of regret, because over three years—with three independent processes, 75 meetings and 73 concessions that we made in a huge effort to try to come to a negotiated settlement—the BMA refused to talk. With respect, I think Sir David Dalton, the trusted chief executive of Salford Royal, understands these things better than the hon. Lady has shown she does today. After working very hard, he concluded that a negotiated settlement was not possible. That is why I announced on 11 February that I would introduce a new contract.

As for foundation trusts, if the hon. Lady had listened to my statement she would know that it is true that foundation trusts have the freedom to introduce new contracts on pay and conditions. They can choose to exercise that freedom, but none of them has done so. She asked about non-foundation trusts. They do not have that freedom, and that is why we will be introducing a new contract for everyone.

Let me say this to the hon. Lady. There has been a lot of talk about this, but none of it as specious as the story that she planted in *The Guardian* this morning about the Government changing their position, which was absolute nonsense. We have not changed our position. The fact of the matter is that the Government have bent over backwards to avoid this strike. Right now, the people refusing to talk, whether it be on rota design with hospital managers or training reform with the academy, are not the Government but the BMA. Had it negotiated on Saturday pay, as it said it would, we would have had an agreement by now. Instead, we have a strike—the first ever withdrawal of emergency care in NHS history. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Opposition Members should calm themselves. The Secretary of State is responding, and everybody will be heard.

**Mr Hunt:** Rather than try to fabricate some story about the Government changing their position, which the hon. Lady knows perfectly well they are not, she might think about the words that do need to be said in this Chamber this week—about whether or not it is appropriate for the BMA to be telling people to deny life-saving care to patients.

Some people in the NHS have shown great courage in speaking out, even against their own profession: Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, the NHS England medical director, Lord Darzi, the former Labour Minister, and Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer. But there is one person on the public stage who has not had the courage to condemn those emergency strikes, and that is the shadow Health Secretary. I hope that, for the sake of her constituents and the reputation of the Labour party, she will say at the earliest opportunity that withdrawing emergency care in pursuance of a pay dispute is wrong, disproportionate and inappropriate, and that the right thing to do now is to show courage to reform these contracts for the benefit of patients and a seven-day NHS.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** The BMA has always been a very militant trade union. It has had bitter political battles with just about every Secretary of State that the national health service has had since it started. It has, however, never previously contemplated strike action, withdrawing urgent services in pursuit of what is essentially a pay claim. I do not believe that before this year the Labour party would ever have supported the BMA if it had done so. Does my right hon. Friend agree that as the pressures on the NHS are obviously mounting, with the ageing population and the rising level of demand, it is urgent to move towards a fuller seven-day service, and that it would be totally wrong for him to delay that in the face industrial action or nit-picking legalisms from a shadow Secretary of State who has just discovered what the legal status of foundation hospitals actually is?

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. and learned Friend speaks with huge wisdom and experience. He makes a point about what happened under previous Labour Governments. He might also have said that those were the same Governments that gave us the current badly flawed contracts. Because those previous Labour Governments did not stand up to the BMA and because they ducked difficult decisions, we saw the pay bill balloon and some shocking failures of care. Leadership is not just about talking and negotiating; it is also about acting. That is what Ministers have to do, and in this situation we have a very simple decision to make after three years of talks: do we proceed with the measures necessary to deliver a seven-day NHS and better care for patients, or do we duck those decisions? This Government choose to act.

**Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP):** Yet again, I must pull up the Secretary of State. It is not a case of excess deaths at weekends; it is a case of people admitted at weekends dying within 30 days. He said the same thing again today, and it is being repeated over and over.

The Secretary of State has described, within the same pay envelope, having more doctors at weekends, not fewer during the week, and reducing a maximum of 91 hours to 72 hours. I do not see how the maths of that can possibly add up. We are not managing to cover the rotas that we have, and those rota gaps pose a danger to patients.

I was very disappointed that the equality impact assessment dismissed the impact on women and other people who train less than full-time as acceptable collateral damage. We are facing the first ever all-out strike next week, and I cannot believe that we are not in negotiations. We should be at the table trying to prevent that strike. May I ask the Secretary of State how he plans to get us out of this? He should come back to the table, because that is the only way in which an impasse can ever end.

**Mr Hunt:** Let me gently ask the hon. Lady how long she expects us to sit round the table. We have been trying to discuss this for three years. She asked how the maths added up. I will tell her how the maths adds up. It adds up because we are putting an extra £10 billion, in real terms, into the NHS over the course of this Parliament. Conservatives put money into the NHS. The Scottish National party, incidentally, takes money out of the NHS.

The hon. Lady referred to the equality impact assessment selectively. She normally pays very good attention to detail, but the paragraphs from which she quoted related to changes that were agreed to by the BMA. What she did not quote was paragraph 95, which says that the overall assessment of the new contract is that it is “fair and justified” and will promote “equality of opportunity”. Why is that? Because shorter hours, fewer consecutive nights and fewer consecutive weekends make this a pro-women contract that will help people who are juggling important home and work responsibilities.

**Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, notwithstanding the appalling nature of the decision that, for the first time during strike action, junior doctors may not provide life-saving care for young children and other vulnerable patients,

[*Sir Simon Burns*]

that decision is also totally incomprehensible, given that the doctors' own leader has said that it is indefensible to take such action?

**Mr Hunt:** It is totally incomprehensible, and I know that many doctors will be wrestling with their consciences. However, I think that, in the context of the House, this could be an occasion for us to put aside party differences. I think that there was a time when Members in all parts of the House would have condemned the withdrawal of life-saving care in a pay dispute, but that day has sadly passed, and it is the Conservatives who must now show leadership in this regard. As we heard from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the NHS faces huge challenges, but we will not tackle those challenges if we allow obstructive unions to hold a gun to the Government's head and refuse to allow us to proceed with really important changes—modern contracts that will allow safer care for patients and better terms for doctors. We are determined to do the right thing for the NHS, and, indeed, to be the party of the NHS.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): If the Secretary of State wanted to do a deal with anybody, does he not think it is a bit unwise to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) that she planted a story in a newspaper? That is accusing her of reprehensible conduct. I think he ought to be looking at withdrawing that. I am an expert on this subject. Somebody said to me on the picket line, "Do you know what sums up this Government, Dennis? 'When first they practise to deceive'"—I had better not finish it. [*Interruption.*] "Oh what a magic web they weave, when first they practise to deceive." That is what they are.

**Mr Hunt:** Well, if planting a story in a newspaper is reprehensible, I do not think many Members of this House would survive the scrutiny of the hon. Gentleman's very high code of moral conduct for long. Let me say this to him and to all Labour Members: we should be honest about the problems we face in the NHS, whatever those problems might be, and we should not sweep them under the carpet. One problem that we face—not the only one—is the excess mortality rates for people admitted at weekends. There was a time when Labour Members would have recognised that their own constituents were the people who depended most on services such as the NHS and who had the most to gain from a full seven-day NHS. Labour Members should be supporting us, not opposing us.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): We are eight days away from an unprecedented full walkout of junior doctors, including the withdrawal of emergency care. Our constituents want to know whether they will be safe on the strike days. Will the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State join me in calling on the BMA at least to exempt casualty departments and maternity units from this walkout? We know that, even with goodwill arrangements in place to bring people back in when hospitals are overwhelmed, the delays will cost lives.

**Mr Hunt:** As ever, my hon. Friend speaks very constructively on this issue. She is absolutely right to say that the departments at most risk are emergency departments, maternity departments and intensive care units. Those are the areas that we are most keen to ensure will maintain critical doctor cover over the two strike days that are planned. I really hope that the BMA will co-operate with NHS England as we identify where we think the gaps might be. We will share that information with the BMA and I hope very much that it will help us to plug those gaps with junior doctors, because in the end no one wants there to be any kind of tragedy. We all have a responsibility to work to ensure that that happens.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will be aware that, when it comes to a medical diagnosis, words and clarity matter. The same applies to us as politicians. He has said today that he is imposing a contract, in contrast with what his legal team are saying to the doctors. For the avoidance of doubt, will he set out explicitly what legal powers he thinks he has to do that?

**Mr Hunt:** I am very happy to do so. We are introducing a new contract from this August, and it will be for all junior doctors. It will go progressively through the different ranks of junior doctors and, over the course of the next year, the vast majority of new doctors will move on to the new contracts. The reason that we did not use the word "impose" in the original statement was not a matter of semantics. We are proceeding with this new contract and everyone will move on to it, which is the gist of what most people mean by this. What we are not doing is changing existing contracts, so when people move trust or move to a new position, they will move on to a new contract. That is why we have used the term "introduction" of new contracts. However, it would have been much better if the introduction of the new contracts had been done through a negotiated process. That is why we took such trouble: we went to 75 meetings and made 73 different concessions in order to try to do this on a negotiated basis. Very regrettably, that proved not to be possible, which is why we took the difficult decision to proceed with these new contracts anyway.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is totally unjustified for doctors to demand higher premium rates at weekends when almost all other NHS workers, and indeed most other working people across the economy, do not get them? It is completely disrespectful for the BMA to suggest that doctors' lives are somehow uniquely disproportionately inconvenienced by Saturday shifts and that those of other people are not.

**Mr Hunt:** It is true that the BMA rejected Saturday premium pay that was more generous than the Saturday premium pay offered to nurses, healthcare assistants or paramedics working in the same hospitals and operating theatres as those doctors. Many people will ask whether that was a reasonable position to take, given that the doctors' overall pay was protected. I think they will also ask whether, even if the doctors disagreed with the Government on that point, it was appropriate or proportionate for them to withdraw life-saving emergency



care from patients in the pursuance of their disagreement. I wonder whether that is something that will shape many people's confidence in what the NHS stands for.

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I have been disappointed by the Secretary of State, and by his language and tone, during this urgent question. Looking at how he has responded here, we can understand why the discussions and talks have ended up as they have done. He asked how long we should do this for; I would say, "As long as it takes." The problem with the negotiations so far has been the Government's failure to respond to the BMA and to work with junior doctors, who do care about their patients and do want to provide a good quality of care.

**Mr Hunt:** I think that sums up the difference between the two parties. It is true that Labour would take "as long it as takes" to negotiate the changes, which is why we ended up with poor contracts in 1999, 2003 and 2004. After three years of trying to get reforms to contracts to make the NHS safer for patients and better for doctors, we need to proceed with a manifesto commitment. Ministers have to decide and act as well as talk. We did not choose this outcome and tried hard for a negotiated decision, but when the hon. Lady says that talks should go on for "as long as it takes", she is actually saying that the other party has a veto over change. No one should have a veto over an elected Government's manifesto commitments.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): One thing that the whole House can agree on is that the postponement of treatment or operations is never cost-free for patients. Every hospital has an ethics committee, so does my right hon. Friend agree that all striking doctors should consult their hospital's ethics committee? Does he agree that the removal of emergency cover by any doctor for industrial reasons would be unlikely to meet with the approval of any medical ethic committee? Finally, does he agree that it is unacceptable for any doctor to act unethically, and that that would place him or her in serious jeopardy?

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. Friend speaks wisely. A whole chorus of senior doctors, from Professor Sir Bruce Keogh to Dame Sally Davies to Lord Darzi, have urged doctors to think hard about the ethics involved. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that consulting the ethics committee in the trust is a wise thing to do. Doctors might also take note of what the General Medical Council said about it being increasingly difficult to justify the withdrawal of emergency care and about the ethics involved. In the end, this is a personal decision for doctors, and it is about whether it is right to withdraw emergency care from patients in an industrial dispute about pay. This is a bridge that the NHS has never crossed before. It is a very big decision, not only for the NHS, but for every single doctor inside it.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): On the basis of the Secretary of State's previous comments, and particularly his opening comments, is he absolutely confident that he has the legal power to impose the new contract?

**Mr Hunt:** Yes.

**Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): In November, the BMA promised to negotiate on Saturday pay. Has it kept that promise?

**Mr Hunt:** No, it has not. If it had, I do not think that we would be having a strike. I think we would have a negotiated settlement, and the NHS would be able to proceed with the contracts, which have important benefits for doctors, such as reducing the number of consecutive nights or consecutive long days that they can be asked to work. The refusal to negotiate on the crucial issue of Saturday pay, which is not a reduction in take-home pay because the reduction in Saturday premiums was made up for with an increase in basic pay, was what led Sir David Dalton to say that a negotiated settlement was not possible. It is a matter of huge regret, but I am afraid that it leaves the Government with no option but to proceed in the way that we are doing.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): A senior executive at Babcock once said to me that there are employers who could pick a fight with themselves. During 30 years in the world of work, I cannot remember a legitimate sense of grievance so grotesquely mishandled. Does the Secretary of State not recognise that he is poisoning relationships with a generation of junior doctors? Will he not get back to the negotiating table and stay there until the dispute is resolved?

**Mr Hunt:** Without going over the previous points about the three years we have been around the negotiating table, I just say this to the hon. Gentleman: I think there are legitimate grievances for junior doctors, and they extend well beyond the contract. There are some big issues with the way training has changed over the years, and there are some serious issues we need to address about the quality of life for junior doctors—sometimes they have a partner working in a different city and they are unable to get training posts nearby to each other. We want to address those issues, which is why we set up a review, led by Professor Dame Sue Bailey, the president of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. Who is refusing to talk to that review, and refusing to co-operate with it? It is the BMA. That is why it is so important that people get around the table and start to talk about how we resolve these problems, rather than remaining in entrenched positions.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the new contract provides a far better work-life balance than the current contract, which doctors tell me cannot even help them to provide and plan for important family events?

**Mr Hunt:** Absolutely. One of the key changes in the new contract that we hope to see is much more predictability about weekend working, and a sense for junior doctors that when they do go into work at the weekends they will get the same support around them as they would during the week; it can be incredibly stressful when junior doctors are called into work at the moment. All these things are improvements, and what has made it very difficult is that these improvements have been misrepresented by the BMA to its own members, so that people have become very suspicious about these changes.

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

That is why we tried so hard to get a negotiated outcome, and why we have been so disappointed that that has not been possible.

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the studies of mortality rates within 30 days of weekend admissions have in no case said that the rostering of junior doctors is a problem? Instead of talking about others negotiating, why does he not take responsibility and get around the negotiating table himself?

**Mr Hunt:** With respect, not very far away from the hon. Lady's constituency is the Salford Royal, whose very respected chief executive concluded that a negotiated outcome was not possible. That is why I reluctantly took the decision to proceed with the new contracts. As for the studies on mortality rates, we have had eight studies in the past six years, six of which have said that staffing levels at weekends are one of the things that need to be investigated. The clinical standards say that we need senior decision makers to check people who are admitted at the weekends, and junior doctors, when they are experienced, count as senior decision makers, which is why they have a very important role to play in delivering seven-day care.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I know that the BMA very properly balloted its members before embarking on a policy of industrial action, but has it yet balloted junior doctors on the specific question of withdrawing emergency cover?

**Mr Hunt:** No, it has not, and I think that is what is causing many junior members to pause for thought. Many people say that this escalation is something that the BMA should consult its members on, once again.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Secretary of State accept that we need closure on the junior doctors' strike, for patients and for doctors, to enable the NHS to concentrate on issues such as the projected £8 billion shortfall in the NHS; the GP out-of-hours services, which are under real pressure; the worst ever NHS performance in the first month of this year; and the long-term threat to the financial viability of our whole health and social care system?

**Mr Hunt:** We do face many challenges; the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we need to focus on those, and so the sooner we resolve this dispute with the BMA, the better. I simply say to him that if we were to carry on negotiations that were clearly not going anywhere at all, this dispute would go on for even longer. We have been trying to resolve these issues for a very, very long time, and in the end one has to decide if one is going to do what it takes to move forward.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): Mr Speaker, if every one of the 650 MPs came to you and said that one of their constituents was dying unnecessarily every five weeks—that is the lower estimated number of excess deaths; it would be once every two weeks at the higher estimated number—I would hope that you would grant this kind of debate every day until we had a system that was safer for patients and junior doctors, and until we brought into the open the nameless characters behind

the BMA negotiators. They refuse to come out into the open and argue their case on its merits, and to say why they will not discuss Saturday pay.

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Part of the hallmark of this Government's approach to the NHS has to be honesty about where we have too many avoidable deaths, and where there is the weekend effect for people admitted to hospital at the weekends. We have a big responsibility in that regard. The reason why we discharge that responsibility is that we believe in the NHS. We want the NHS to be the safest, highest-quality system in the world. Just as this Government have pioneered reforms that have dramatically improved the quality of state education, so too we need equal reforms in the NHS. That is why it is absolutely right to say that we have to focus on these things and debate them in this House. We should not automatically say that there is someone who must be blamed when we are dealing with these difficult situations. Unfortunately, one of the things that has led to feelings running high in this dispute has been the sense of blame being tossed around, when what the Government want to do is try to solve the problem.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): May I tell the Secretary of State about my admission to hospital in the early hours of a Saturday morning? I spent five and a half weeks in intensive care. I had many conversations with doctors during the time I was in St Mary's hospital, Paddington. I ask him to look at the circumstances of those doctors today, as they do work weekends. We do have a weekend NHS. It is not true to say that the lives of people like me who are admitted at the weekend are not saved, because it is the doctors who make it possible for us to survive. Will he stop talking down the medical profession and start defending the doctors?

**Mr Hunt:** With respect, that precisely encapsulates the problem. The hon. Gentleman has interpreted the fact that I want to do something about excess mortality rates, which mean that a person admitted at the weekend has an 11% to 15% higher chance of death than if they were admitted in the week—that is proven in a very comprehensive study—as an attack on the medical profession. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was actually the medical profession—the royal colleges and Professor Sir Bruce Keogh—that first pointed out this problem of the weekend effect. We are simply doing something about it.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Health Secretary rightly mentioned the excellent Salford Royal, which the BMA has used to suggest that the new contract is not necessary, because of the progress that it has made on seven-day working and on Sir Bruce Keogh's clinical standards. However, is it not the case that what might be right in a large hospital in a densely urban centre might not be applicable right across our national health service? Is that not why the very radical changes to working practices that he is rightly prosecuting are necessary?

**Mr Hunt:** Yes, there are some hospitals that have managed to eliminate the difference between weekend and weekday mortality under the current contracts, but there are only a few. Having talked more widely with the

medical profession, it is clear that we need a sustained national effort—contract reform is part of that effort—if we are to promise uniformly across the NHS that we will provide every patient with the same high-quality care, every day of the week. Part of that is having a modern contract for junior doctors that deals with the anomalies that they themselves recognise in the current contract; that is why this is the moment for wider reforms.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): This is clearly a fight that the Secretary of State went looking for because he expected to put himself on the side of the patients. The trouble is that it has not worked out like that, because the patients, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), use these services and know that junior doctors are in work at the weekend; it is some other procedures that are sometimes not available. Their feelings now will be fear and anxiety that they, their children or their elderly relatives will get sick, fall or need help on strike day. They will be seriously, seriously worried about that. Does the Secretary of State take any responsibility for the situation that he has caused?

**Mr Hunt:** On the contrary, I take full responsibility for delivering a safer NHS for patients. That is my job. If the hon. Lady wants to talk about patients, perhaps she might listen to the comments of one of the most famous patient safety campaigners in the country, James Titcombe, who tragically lost his son because of mistakes made at Morecambe Bay. He said that there has been

“much progress towards a safer NHS in recent years”,

but that there is

“much more to do to reverse the cover-up culture that flourished under Labour.”

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that on the last occasion that the BMA called on junior doctors to take strike action, that call was rejected by 47% of junior doctors? Now the BMA wants junior doctors to remove emergency cover. What does he think it will say about the BMA's mandate for future action if fewer than half of junior doctors support its call for further strikes?

**Mr Hunt:** That is a very important point to make. On the BMA's mandate for the current strike action, many hon. Members have said today that we should get round the negotiating table. They may not be aware that the BMA decided to ballot for strike action before even sitting down to talk to the Government about our plans. It decided to go straight to a ballot for industrial action on a false prospectus of the Government's planned changes. That sowed many of the misunderstandings in the current dispute.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Like most hon. Members, I have had many doctors coming to my constituency surgery—not junior doctors, but registrars, on whom our hospitals rely. They have sometimes been in tears. They have asked me if the Secretary of State will define exactly what he means by a seven-day NHS, because clearly there is seven-day care. Is it just an ideological mantra?

**Mr Hunt:** I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's definition of “ideological” is. If “ideological” is giving safer care to patients, it is an ideology that we can all share, but I will tell him exactly the answer to his question, which he can relay to his constituents. What we want to do is reduce the difference between the mortality rates for people admitted in the week and at weekends. We have identified four key clinical standards that we believe are necessary to do that. It is by making sure that we can deliver those four clinical standards across the NHS that we will deliver this strategy.

**Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend imagine the distress and the anxiety felt by constituents who have come to see me over the past six years because they are concerned about the treatment of their relatives admitted at the weekend, when they see the BMA and the Labour party appearing to use them and other patients as hostages in a long-running dispute that must come to an end?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is right. What patients want is a safe NHS where it does not matter on which day of the week they are admitted if something goes badly wrong. The big surprise here is that this is not something that the whole House can unite behind. It is something that people who believe in the NHS, as I think we all do, should strongly support. We are standing up for those patients, and I hope Labour, the party that founded the NHS, might do the same.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I would be grateful if the Secretary of State could update the House on any legal action against the Department, and on whether the Department will be defending it.

**Mr Hunt:** We have two cases ongoing, and we are defending them vigorously.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I, too, have been contacted by a number of junior doctors who are increasingly disillusioned by the way that the BMA is handling the dispute, and especially by the militant tendency, which has been hell-bent on strike action for many months. Will the Secretary of State meet other groups of junior doctors who want to resolve the dispute, recognise that a reformed contract is needed, and want to get back to looking after patients?

**Mr Hunt:** Of course I am delighted to engage with junior doctors, and I have been talking to a number of them over recent months. I agree with my hon. Friend. My observation from talking to junior doctors is that most of the time I am with them, they are not talking about things they do not like about the new contracts. They are concerned about things to do with their training and quality of life—things that I think we can sort out outside the current contractual negotiations. As my hon. Friend has correctly been passing on to them, there are many things in the new contract that will benefit junior doctors, and we should make sure that everyone knows about them.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): How can the Secretary of State claim that he is motivated by a desire for a seven-day NHS when he and others in the coalition Government legislated to allow hospitals to

[Margaret Greenwood]

make up to 49% of their money from private patients? If hospitals achieve that 49%, what impact will that have on mortality rates for NHS patients?

**Mr Hunt:** The difference between those of us on the Government side of the House and those on the Opposition side is that we do not have an ideological view about a trust wanting to offer some private treatment in order to benefit its NHS patients. That is what some trusts are doing, within very strict constraints. I think that most people know that all the scare stories that were put out about the Health and Social Care Bill in 2012 have not materialised. We are finding that trusts are being very sensible about making sure they get that balance right. Indeed, in certain circumstances it makes a big difference to improving NHS care.

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): The key thing is looking after patient safety, so will my right hon. Friend consider changing the law so that hospitals such as Derriford hospital can make use of dedicated military doctors to fulfil that service if it is needed?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend always makes important suggestions that can benefit his constituency, and rightly so. I do not think that there is a need to change the law for that to happen; if military help were needed, I think the military would stand ready to offer it. At the moment, we are making contingency plans by drawing on the consultant workforce, who are not involved in industrial action, and our hope is that A&E departments throughout the country will be covered by that extra support.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): If the Health Secretary is unable to impose the original contract, how can people be expected to abide by a new contract that is not legally binding? Does he agree that maintaining a constant approach is absolutely vital, particularly in a fifth walkout, which could involve everyone? What actions is he taking to restore faith in the NHS among both the staff and the general public?

**Mr Hunt:** Just to be absolutely clear, the new contract is legally binding and it will apply to all junior doctors in the NHS. On restoring confidence, obviously morale is low at the height of an industrial relations dispute. I think the real way to restore confidence is to point out to the doctors who work incredibly hard inside the NHS that the Government are this year giving the NHS the sixth biggest funding increase in its history, that we are committed to making the NHS the safest and highest-quality system in the world, and that we believe that if that happens it will also be a better place for them to work. I believe that all those things will come together, but obviously there is a very difficult period that we have to get through first.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Against the background of Kettering general hospital being under huge pressure, there is a great deal of local sympathy for junior doctors, but increasingly people are bemused as to what the strike is about, given that the contract involves a reduction in hours from 91 to 72 and a 13.5% increase in basic pay. My constituents are opposed to

strike action, and they are completely opposed to any strike action that involves the withdrawal of emergency cover.

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am sure that that position is shared by many members of the public. I think people are very perplexed, because both sides in the January negotiations concluded that there was only one area of outstanding difference, which was Saturday pay. I adopted a compromise position on Saturday pay, which I thought was the fairest thing to do, but the BMA was not prepared to countenance any flexibility on that whatsoever. I therefore had to make the very difficult decision of whether we go forward, or whether we do not address the big issues that we need to address for a seven-day NHS. I share his concern about whether the strikes are really worth it, and I am concerned about the impact on the residents of Kettering.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): If the Secretary of State is correct that he has the legal power to impose contracts, can he tell the House from where that power derives? Can he also explain why the Government's legal team failed to argue that case?

**Mr Hunt:** I hope the hon. Lady understands that I am not going to go into the details of the legal cases that we are currently arguing. However, let me make it clear that the Secretary of State does have that power and that we are using it correctly, and we will argue that case very strongly in the High Court.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Many hundreds of operations were cancelled during the last strike. The next strike will see the unprecedented step of emergency cover being withdrawn, and many junior doctors are themselves worried about that. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time for the BMA's leaders, who are calling for the strike, to heed the worries of those junior doctors and of patients, and to call it off?

**Mr Hunt:** I absolutely agree. It is entirely legitimate to disagree with the Government of the day about contract reform—we have tried to make the case as to why that reform is important—but it is wrong for patients to pay the price for that disagreement. While the NHS can cope with the withdrawal of labour for elective care, it is a much bigger deal when emergency care is withdrawn, and people throughout the NHS are extremely worried about the impact of that. Doctors should also worry about how the public will view their profession if they proceed with this wholly unnecessary step.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am glad the Secretary of State has come to the Chamber to answer the urgent question—I witnessed for myself his eagerness to get here as he sprinted across Portcullis House.

There is a real lack of clarity in this debate. "Agenda for Change" staff get paid a premium rate for working unsocial hours. Foundation trusts' freedom to set rates allows them only to improve conditions and pay, not to diminish them. May I add that 98% of those who voted in the BMA's ballot supported industrial action, including

the full withdrawal of labour? May I suggest that the Secretary of State arm himself with the facts and get back round the negotiating table?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady is right that I sprinted here—I was a little concerned that Defence questions might not last the full hour, although they did, and I am sure Mr Speaker is pleased about that. The point I would make about the ballot, which did receive the overwhelming support of junior doctors, is that it happened before they knew what the deal on the table was. On the heated issue of Saturday premium rates, we ended up with a proposal where the Government agreed to pay premium pay on Saturdays for any doctors who work one Saturday or more a month. At the moment, therefore, we have this extreme step—the withdrawal of emergency care—to boost the pay of doctors who work less than one Saturday a month. I think many members of the public will say that that is not proportionate.

**Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):** Let us be clear: this is an old-fashioned wage dispute, run by one of the most militant long-standing trade unions. My constituents are asking why the highest-paid NHS workers should be paid extra for working Saturdays when some of the lowest-paid NHS workers are not.

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is right. Doctors who strike will need to explain that to paramedics, healthcare assistants and nurses working in their own operating theatres. In the end, that issue is why this strike is happening. The BMA said in writing in November that it would negotiate on Saturday pay; it went back on its word in February. As a result, this is the only outstanding issue, and we now have this extreme step—the withdrawal of emergency care. I find that very hard to justify.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** At the beginning, the Secretary of State said he was publishing a model contract, which he believed trusts, including foundation trusts, would by convention implement, but he has subsequently said that there is a legal duty that he can impose. He needs to clarify that, and it would be helpful if he could publish the legal advice. That would not be a surprise in the judicial review cases, because his lawyers are presumably doing their skeleton arguments. We have a right to know the answers to these questions.

**Mr Hunt:** With respect, all the hon. Gentleman needs to do is look in *Hansard* at my response to the urgent question, which made it clear that we have the right to introduce a new contract. On the basis of the conventions that currently apply in the NHS, that contract will apply to all junior doctors. Foundation trusts do indeed have the right to set their own terms and conditions, but they choose not to do so.

**Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** This unprecedented withdrawal of emergency care seems to revolve principally around the issue of pay on Saturdays. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether pay uplifts will continue to be available to junior doctors who work regular Saturdays?

**Mr Hunt:** Absolutely. More to the point, any doctors who see an increase in their Saturday workload will see a significant increase in their pay, including their premium pay. The contract is designed to make sure that we

reward people who work the longest and most antisocial hours, including women, but in a way that means that we can afford to deliver a seven-day NHS, which is why it is good for patients as well.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** Many weekend admissions are for urgent cases such as heart attacks and strokes, while many weekday admissions are for elective surgery and other non-life-threatening conditions. Is not that the main reason for the myth of excess weekend deaths?

Why will the anxiety of this strike be felt only by patients in England, while the other nations have settled? Is it because of bad negotiation or because the health service is never really safe in Tory hands?

**Mr Hunt:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would have the courage to say that in Wales, but let me answer his question directly. The 15% increase in mortality rates for people admitted at weekends falls to 11% when we take account of the more chronic conditions, so there is a small reduction, but the mortality rate is still significant.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** May I take the Secretary of State back to the question he did not answer when it was asked by my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State? If the Government are now arguing that the Secretary of State does have the power to impose a contract, can he explain why Government solicitors did not argue that case in their letter of 15 April? Can he point to where it is proved that he actually has that power?

**Mr Hunt:** We do have that power by law. The letter we put out in defence against the legal action that has been taken against the Government explains very clearly why and how we have that power. It is all written there for the hon. Gentleman to see. I assure him that, on something as contentious and difficult as this, we take every care to make sure that we are acting within the law.

**Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** If I were Secretary of State for Health, I would feel personally responsible for this unprecedented action taking place on my watch, and I would do everything I could to build bridges to make sure it did not happen and that patients were not threatened in the way we all fear. What is the Secretary of State doing to build trust between himself and the NHS workforce?

**Mr Hunt:** I will tell the hon. Gentleman one of the things we are doing, which is turning around the hospital in his own constituency, which is no longer in special measures because the quality of care has improved dramatically. What else are we doing? Over three years, there have been 75 meetings, 73 concessions and three different independent processes. We have tried everything to get a negotiated outcome, but in the end we have to do the thing that is right for patients.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** The Secretary of State needs to face reality: there is a recruitment and retention crisis of junior doctors in paediatrics, A&E, intensive therapy units and acute medicine. Those specialisms demand seven-day working and people working unsocial hours. The junior doctors

[*Rachael Maskell*]

know that these contracts will make the situation worse, so why is the Secretary of State not doing everything in his power to get people to sit around the table—even if that does not include him personally or David Dalton—to have negotiations to address the real issues concerning junior doctors?

**Mr Hunt:** That is exactly what we have been doing. Indeed, there are a number of changes in the contracts that will be beneficial for people working in A&E departments, as has been recognised by the president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, Cliff Mann. The difficulty we have had in terms of morale is that we have been faced with the BMA, which has consistently misrepresented the contents of the new contract to its own members. Nothing could be more damaging for morale than that. What we will need to do, I am afraid, is wait until people are on the new contracts, and then they will actually see that they are a big improvement on their current terms and conditions. That is the right thing for doctors and the right thing for patients.

## Point of Order

4.34 pm

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There is great concern in Wrexham about the disappearance in Peru of a local cabinet maker and craftsman, Harry Corder Greaves. I have spoken today to the Foreign Office, which has been extremely helpful both to the family and to me, and I am grateful for the support that it is offering. May I, through your good offices, Mr Speaker, make it clear to the Government of Peru that the people of Wrexham and the wider community would be extremely grateful for any efforts that that Government can put in to try to find this young man, who is 29 years old, and whose family is going through terrible distress at the present time?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. Although this is not a matter for the Chair to determine, the hon. Gentleman has made his understandable concern about his constituent extremely clear. He will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, and his concern will doubtless be conveyed to the relevant Ministers. I hope and trust that they will have contact, as appropriate, of a kind that I hope will, in due course and preferably soon, allay the concerns of the hon. Gentleman.

## Appointment of the Commissioner for Public Appointments

### PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

#### *Select Committee statement*

**Mr Speaker:** We come now to two Select Committee statements. In a moment, I shall ask Mr Bernard Jenkin to address the House. He will do so for up to 10 minutes, during which I remind the House that no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to put questions on its subject, and I will call Mr Bernard Jenkin to respond to those in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. The Front Bench team may take part in questioning. The same procedure will be followed for the second Select Committee statement.

These are extremely important matters, but I hope that the House will understand if I express the hope that together, the two Select Committee statements do not consume more than 40 minutes of our time, because there are important Backbench Business Committee debates—two of them, to be precise—to which we need to move on, and in which I want to accommodate all interested would-be contributors. With that, I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs, Mr Bernard Jenkin.

4.37 pm

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am grateful to have this opportunity to make a statement on the report by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee entitled “Appointment of the Commissioner for Public Appointments”, which we published last week. The post of Commissioner for Public Appointments was established in 1995 following the recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its first report, the Nolan report. The Nolan report recommended the creation of the post as a means of enhancing public confidence in the public appointments process and the quality of appointments made under it. The role of the Commissioner for Public Appointments is set out in the Public Appointments Order in Council 2015.

Since the post and office of the commissioner were established in 1995, there have been four Commissioners for Public Appointments. From 2011 to 2016, the post of CPA was held jointly with the role of First Civil Service Commissioner by Sir David Normington. However, with Sir David’s departure, the two posts of First Civil Service Commissioner and CPA were advertised separately. That was the result of a recommendation made to Ministers by Sir Gerry Grimstone prior to the publication of his review of public appointments. As indicated by the recruitment advertising for this post, the commissioner will be expected to work with the Government in implementing the Grimstone review’s recommendations. The Grimstone review, however, was published only in March this year.

After two hearings with the Government’s preferred candidate, the right hon. Peter Riddell, and after some discussion, we have given Mr Riddell a qualified endorsement as Commissioner for Public Appointments.

He is well known to many in this House as a respected political journalist and commentator. He was appointed a Privy Counsellor for his work on the Gibson inquiry into the possible illegal rendition of UK detainees. He has also been chair of the Hansard Society and, most recently and perhaps relevantly, director of the Institute for Government.

PACAC remains concerned, however, that the changes proposed by the Grimstone review, as interpreted by the Government, alongside other changes, such as the introduction of enlarged ministerial offices—whereby Ministers, instead of the civil service, can themselves make appointments to their private offices—may be leading to an increasing politicisation of senior public appointments. We will report on our inquiry into the Grimstone proposals after the code of practice for public appointments and the new Order in Council have been published.

The proposals are controversial. They propose a significant removal of the powers exercised by the office of the CPA over the public appointments process. Ministers, instead of the CPA, would set the rules by drawing up the new governance code. Ministers could decide to run an appointment process without referral to the CPA. Ministers, not the CPA, could determine the membership of appointment panels, including the independent member. Ministers could include on selection panels an official acting as a Ministers’ representative without the consent of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Ministers would have latitude to interview and appoint someone even if the selection panel had marked him or her below the line.

The new Order in Council and the new code of conduct for public appointments have yet to be published even in draft form. Publication of the Grimstone review was originally expected last year, but it was held back. There was a gap of only three days between the publication of the Grimstone review, along with the Government response, and Mr Riddell being named as the preferred candidate. That left us with no opportunity, by the time of Mr Riddell’s appearance before the Committee on 21 March, to consider the Grimstone review.

We concluded that it would have been inappropriate for us to make a report on the Government’s preferred candidate that could have been regarded as an implicit and unqualified endorsement of the Government’s interpretation of the Grimstone proposals. After our initial evidence session with Mr Riddell before Easter, we therefore issued a call for evidence on the Grimstone review. We took evidence from the outgoing CPA, Sir David Normington, from Sir Gerry Grimstone himself and from my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General prior to concluding our pre-appointment scrutiny of Mr Riddell on 12 April. I am very grateful to the Government for delaying Mr Riddell’s appointment while we completed our pre-appointment scrutiny.

We intend to report on the implications of Sir Gerry Grimstone’s review shortly. We will welcome any further written evidence. The present Committee on Standards in Public Life has warned that this could

“all add up to a public perception of a system which was being operated under increased political patronage. It could also run counter to the intentions to increase transparency and diversity.” The outgoing CPA, Sir David Normington, has expressed his opposition to the proposals as a reversal of the Nolan reforms of 20 years ago. Sir Gerry Grimstone

[Mr Bernard Jenkin]

has made it clear that transparency rather than the direct powers currently held by the commissioner would enable the commissioner to remain a powerful regulator. However, the Minister for the Cabinet Office has made it clear that the CPA would be consulted by Ministers, but the CPA would no longer have the power to direct an independent appointment process, as now.

PACAC will therefore closely monitor how Mr Riddell works with Ministers to implement the Grimstone review's recommendations, and how he responds to the recommendations that PACAC have yet to make on the Grimstone review. PACAC will underwrite Mr Riddell's authority and independence as the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and we will make use of our ability to carry out follow-up scrutiny, if necessary, to make sure that any concerns we have are heard. We agree with Sir Gerry Grimstone that the role of the CPA should be robust and authoritative, and should not be undermined.

Furthermore, in the light of the Grimstone review's proposed changes to the public appointments process and in line with other roles, such as those of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and the chairs of the Office for Budget Responsibility and the UK Statistics Authority, PACAC recommends that future appointments of the Commissioner for Public Appointments should be subject to a resolution of both Houses of Parliament. This will be an additional safeguard, and act as a public reassurance that the independence and status of the Commissioner for Public Appointments is not threatened. We also recommend that a similar procedure should apply to the post of First Civil Service Commissioner. I am very pleased to present this report to Parliament.

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** I commend the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for his report and today's statement.

Sir David Normington, the outgoing Commissioner for Public Appointments, said that the Government's proposals put at risk 20 years of progress and risk ushering in

"a return to the days of political and personal patronage".

Indeed, he said that as the commissioner, he would be contacted once a month by the Prime Minister or other Ministers, asking why party donors, office holders or former MPs had not been shortlisted or recommended for posts.

In the light of those concerns, does the hon. Gentleman share our fear that dismantling the powers of the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments will open the door to political cronies being gifted public service jobs either as a reward for donations or to create an army of political enforcers in the public sector? Rather than appointment being made on merit or according to skills or public service ethos, are not the Government putting themselves at risk of accusations of cash for jobs?

**Mr Jenkin:** I think the danger is not that those things will happen, but that people will say that they may seem to be happening. Curiously, it might make it harder for the Government to put a friend or supporter into a

public appointment job if the Minister is more directly involved. The current arrangements were created to protect Ministers.

If Ministers are frustrated that the wrong people are being interviewed, that people are being appointed according to the wrong job specifications or that people with the right skills are not being given an interview, it is up to them to make sure that the job specification for a job is as they think it should be before the recruitment process starts.

I will not defend the public appointments process in total. The Grimstone review has started a much-needed debate about public appointments, but before my Committee and I give a definitive view of Sir Gerry Grimstone's proposals, we want to consider all the arguments and all the evidence.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend and his Committee on their excellent publication and the robustness of their recommendations, and I congratulate him on his statement to the House. What was Mr Riddell's response when the Committee put the points that my hon. Friend has made to him? Does my hon. Friend foresee Mr Riddell being invited back before the Committee before the end of 12 months?

**Mr Jenkin:** On the latter point, we certainly intend to give Mr Riddell an opportunity to appear before the Committee before too long to see how he is settling into his new role. We would not have agreed to his appointment unless we were convinced that he was determined to be independent, but with so many of his powers being questioned and with Ministers substantively proposing to take back control of the appointments process, how he carries out the role will be crucial. How he maintains the importance of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments will be very interesting to observe.

We would like whatever changes are made to be made on the basis of consensus. We have picked up a certain amount of—how shall I say it?—tension between civil servants and Ministers about these appointments. There may be an opportunity to build a better understanding of both parties, so that these changes are not necessary.

**Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP):** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that to ensure that the best candidates are aware of these opportunities, the vacancies must be promoted far and wide? That would go some way towards ensuring that applications were received from candidates regardless of their race, creed, colour, religion, gender or even the university or school they happened to go to. It would also open up the process to people from different and varied walks of life who could bring their life experience to a different arena. Advertising a job on a specialist website and then phoning round our pals to encourage them to apply is not an effective or appropriate way to attract the strongest candidates.

At a time when the public are rightly demanding more accountability from their elected representatives, the opportunity to apply for jobs such as the Commissioner for Public Appointments should be widely publicised across a spectrum of United Kingdom society to encourage a diverse range of applicants, rather than going down the traditional route, which will reaffirm the public's view that there is cronyism and engender disenchantment and apathy.



**Mr Jenkin:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's contribution. I thank him for the very diligent work that he puts in on the Committee. I do not think he will mind me putting on the record that in the discussions to which I referred he was one of those who expressed a strong reservation about this appointment, not least because no one could possibly describe Peter Riddell as an outsider to Westminster. Whether an outsider is appropriate for this particular role is debatable. We do not know who else was interviewed for the role, as that is not the job of a Select Committee. One of the frustrations of pre-appointment hearings is that we are not interviewing the person for the job but merely trying to establish in our own minds whether the proposed appointment is an appropriate one and the person has the necessary skills and experience. That is what we concluded, but with reservations. In his evidence, Mr Riddell confirmed his determination to make sure that a much wider pool of people are attracted to public appointments than currently appears to be the case. Certainly, we do not want to go back to the discreet tap on the shoulder—"Why don't you apply for this job, old boy?"—that used to exist before the Nolan rules were brought into operation.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Are we not going back to pre-Nolan days, which were rife with personal and political patronage? Is this not a case of the role of the commissioner being emasculated? Sir David Normington said that he managed to see off the monthly attempts by the Prime Minister and other Ministers to appoint Tory donors or former MPs to key roles. We will be back in that position. Will that emasculation not be very similar to what has happened with the Government's adviser on ministerial conduct, where we have seen cases of the most egregious misconduct by Ministers that were not referred to the adviser? We are going back to the bad old days. We have lost so much trust in the parliamentary system in this country. Our reputation was at rock bottom after the great scandal of Members' expenses; it is now subterranean or worse. Will the implementation of Grimstone's changes not take us further down that road? How will the Committee make sure that those abuses of patronage do not return?

**Mr Jenkin:** I am reminded by the hon. Gentleman's stentorian warnings of the cries of St John the Baptist from the dungeon until his head was presented on a platter. Such warnings are important, and we have to have a system that we can defend against them. People

are always going to be suspicious that there has been something of a fix about a public appointment. That is perfectly legitimate. Ultimately, the authority for such appointments rests with Ministers. We want a balanced and transparent approach, with safeguards. I repeat that if Ministers get a grip on the job specifications at the outset of such appointment processes, and have confidence in the independence of the interview panels, there should be no problem with the people of quality they want getting through the interviews. If that is not the case, we need to address that.

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock):** I am grateful for the Select Committee's support for the appointment of Peter Riddell to the post. He is a heavyweight and distinguished public servant. The Grimstone report, which the Chairman of the Committee mentioned, follows the Nolan principles, adding to them the principle of diversity in public appointments. Although the proportion of appointees to such posts who declare a political allegiance is the lowest on record, down from more than 20% in the early 2000s to less than 5% now, transparency is important in this area. On those grounds, it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to ask the Chairman of the Select Committee a question, rather than the other way around. As a sturdy defender of the principle of parliamentary democracy, does he accept that voters would expect Ministers to make appointments to these vital public roles?

**Mr Jenkin:** Yes, of course they do. In the end, no public appointment of the general nature that we are talking about is made without a Minister signing off that decision. The question is twofold. First, are Ministers being presented with a choice of candidates that they consider appropriate? If they are, can we be certain that the process has not been fixed to get friends and cronies through the appointment process? We need a balance that the public will respect and have faith in. On job specifications, if we get the process right at the outset, there should be no need for the Minister to complain. If we take away too many safeguards, it is Ministers who will be criticised for the appointments they make, not civil servants who have been sitting on panels and been ignored.

**Mr Speaker:** We are most grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee.

## Private Members' Bills

### PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

#### *Select Committee statement*

4.55 pm

**Mr Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con): I am presenting the third report of the Procedure Committee 2015-16. On private Members' Bills, the Government are in the last-chance saloon. I adore this place, and I adore taking part in debates, but for so many good, hard-working and committed people here, Fridays are becoming no-go zones. The private Member's Bill process is in total disrepute, and I hope that we can bring it back from the edge in the months ahead. If we cannot, I see a world where private Members' Bills as we know them cease to exist. People in this place are doing so much good work in their constituencies and on legislative matters that they will not be willing to give up their time for something that many would say—indeed, as tens of thousands of people are now saying in petitions—is broken.

Let me bring the House's attention to our report. The current system is designed to fail. We do not recommend getting rid of the ballot system in its entirety, but at the start of each Parliament it creates a scenario in which people put their name into a lottery and if they are lucky—or, indeed, unlucky—their name is drawn out and they are bombarded with worthy causes to take forward as legislation. That is for Opposition Members. Government Back Benchers are bombarded by bright and good ideas from the Whips, and they are seen as another avenue for the Government to get their legislation on the books.

That means that either we have handout Bills, which are worthy but boring, or we have Back-Bench Bills proposed by Opposition Members, a lot of which, to be fair, are frankly ill thought through and perhaps do not deserve to become law. That is how the system is structured and what it creates. Our key recommendation is to give the Backbench Business Committee a role in how private Members' Bills are conducted in this place.

Our report suggests that up to four Bills—the first four Fridays—should be decided by the Backbench Business Committee. I hope that will mean that groups of Members, or individual Members with a good legislative proposition, can invest a great deal of time—perhaps upwards of a year—working on that proposition, talking to Ministers and respected Members in this place, and building coalitions in and outside Parliament. They can then take that legislative idea before the Backbench Business Committee and say, "This is our work. This is what underpins our legislative idea. It is not a flight of fancy. It has real support in this place and out in the wider community." The Committee will decide whether a great deal of work underpins that proposition and whether it deserves to be heard in Parliament. That is for the first four Bills. The Committee could decide in one year that no Bills are worthy of one of those sought-after slots, but in other Sessions it might decide that four Bills are worthy of being taken forward.

We recommend that, on the first seven Fridays, the first private Member's Bill on the Order Paper gets a guaranteed vote on Second Reading. That is important because a lot of people do not turn up, thinking,

understandably and with demonstrable proof, that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), while opining often on things of importance that matter to him, might fail to express himself in a measured period of time—to put it generously—but instead orate for vast acres of time. I am afraid that a lot of people, as much as they love him and other hon. Members who specialise in boring the House to tears, find better things to do with their time.

Our proposals, however, would provide protections even for my hon. Friend—I do not want to ruin his Fridays. If a Bill, when it came out of Committee and on to Report, still did not meet with his approval, he could do what he does best. I am hoping, however, that if we allow the first seven Bills at least to get to Committee, the sponsors will have a significant amount of time in which to talk to Ministers, build support and perhaps iron out some of the problems that would otherwise lead the Bill to be talked out.

We suggest reducing the number of Bills in the ballot from 20 to 14 to ensure better and more thorough scrutiny. Of those 14, four, potentially, could be assigned by the Backbench Business Committee and a further 10 through the ballot, but if the Committee decided that nothing was worthy of being introduced by it to the House, there would be 14 in the ballot. There is a proposal to change the name from "private Members' Bills" to "Back-Bench Bills" but there are people in the House who might not like that, and we cannot force anything on the House; all this can be contested in debate.

We recommend changing the system whereby Members have dozens of presentation Bills on the Order Paper on a Friday to one in which a Member has only one a day. We want to remove the dummy Bills from the Order Paper. I am sure this will find favour with a lot of colleagues. If we remove them, we will not be asked to turn up to Parliament on a Friday to vote on a Bill that is 18th on the Order Paper and has no chance of seeing the light of day. Our report also refers to the possibility of taking a private Member's Bill or two on a Thursday, but again that is just a suggestion.

We say that not every happy thought that occurs to a Member should become law—that would not be a good thing—but we think that serious legislative propositions should have the chance of progressing. I read closely the speech by the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) last week in Westminster Hall, and I apologise to everyone in the House for not having resolved this matter in the last Parliament. As Chairman of the Procedure Committee, I have to be held accountable for the lack of progress, but I conclude my brief speech by saying that the Government are in the last-chance saloon, and if they do not act now, there are other people in this place who will be less understanding than me, and the change they will bring forward will make the Government's eyes water, and rightly so.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) says he adores the House, and we adore him—certainly more than we do the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies)—not least because he is quite right: the private Members' Bills system is, frankly, bust. It is not only open to abuse but is regularly abused. It misleads the public and wastes the House's time, so we stand four-square with the Committee and

will do everything we can to support him. I take just one tiny exception to his report. He says this should start in 2017-18. What is wrong with now? Why can the Government not give us time to debate these changes before the next Session of Parliament so that we can do it in May?

**Mr Walker:** That is an ideal suggestion, and I look to the Government to be revolutionary in their approach to our report and to take it forward as quickly as possible. I am sure the Deputy Leader of the House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I shall aim to be brief. In saying that the first Bill on the Order Paper should be guaranteed a vote, my hon. Friend failed to mention that the first Bill on the Order Paper can already be guaranteed a vote. All it requires is for 100 MPs to turn up to support it. As we saw with the overseas aid Bill—the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Bill—the European Union (Referendum) Bill and the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill, if a matter is important enough to hon. Members, plenty of them turn up to debate it. Does my hon. Friend not agree that if a Bill cannot muster the support of 100 MPs out of 650, it clearly does not have the support that others might claim it has?

**Mr Walker:** I say to my hon. Friend—I love him dearly—that his determined efforts and those of a few of his colleagues, including Labour colleagues in previous Parliaments when Labour were in government, have almost destroyed people's faith in this place and in the process. People are simply not turning up because, too often, they spend a lot of time listening to my hon. Friend. *[Interruption.]* As I said, we are not trying to ruin my hon. Friend's sport because we are not recommending a guaranteed vote on Report. What these Bills need is a bit of space on Second Reading to get approved at that stage so that negotiations can take place with the Government before the Bills go into Committee and there is a chance of some output. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend will not wind me up with his barracking because I love him too much to rise to the bait.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): As a member of the Procedure Committee, I pay tribute to the skilful work of its Chair, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), in piloting this report through. Those of us from Scotland are familiar with the far more robust procedure for Members' Bills in the Scottish Parliament. Perhaps that provides an example of the process that the hon. Gentleman threatens if the Government are not willing to give ground on the proposals in our report. I echo the comments of the shadow Leader of the House on the importance of the Government providing time at a very early opportunity to debate, consider and implement these proposals. If that fails, perhaps we could look to the Backbench Business Committee to give us some time.

**Mr Walker:** I hope the Government are listening to these exchanges because the mood is darkening, and quite rightly so, not just in the Chamber, but out there among those whom we represent. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady),

along with all members of the Committee and the Clerks, for their hard work in bringing forward a sensible report. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley is so agitated by it because he knows it is sensible and reasonable, and he will find it difficult to oppose it.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): One problem with private Members' Bills is that pressure groups raise the expectations of the public that every private Member's Bill stands a really good chance of becoming law. Does my hon. Friend not agree that it is incumbent on us all to make sure that the procedures for private Members' Bills are more widely and better understood?

**Mr Walker:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. In communicating with constituents, we too often demur from telling them how it is. I suspect that on occasions that is because we are embarrassed about what happens on Fridays.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I would not go as far as to say that I adore the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), but I certainly hold him in high regard. Any criticisms were not directed at either him or his Committee. Does he agree that this issue now needs to be resolved, and speedily? We need some means of testing the will of the House. The options set out in the report, and options proposed by me and other right hon. and hon. Members, could be put before the House so that people can vote on how they want to proceed.

**Mr Walker:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a fantastic point. If the Government find time to debate the report, which I sincerely hope they will, there would be opportunities for Members to table their own amendments to the report. I hope that this will be a vehicle for change in this place and for improving a fairly bankrupt private Member's Bill procedure.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): I commend the report and the Chairman, who has been a superb leader of the Procedure Committee in recent years. Does he feel as I do that the process misleads the public and brings the House into disrepute, and that if the Government fail to act now—this is our second report on this issue—the problem will get ever-deeper and the public will lose even more faith in the processes of this House?

**Mr Walker:** I agree with the hon. Lady, who worked tirelessly on the report, and who has been involved in this process for a number of years. We are selling our constituents a false prospectus as private Members' Bills Fridays are currently constructed, and they will not forgive us lightly for that.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for his chairmanship of the Committee, but I think that he is being extremely unfair on our hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), because our hon. Friend and others are the ones who actually turn up on Fridays to scrutinise draft legislation. Is it not the case that in any given year there are 52 Fridays, and the House sits on only 13 of them? The myth has built up that every Friday is a constituency Friday, as an excuse for Members not to be here, but the bald truth is that only one person per constituency is entitled to

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represent his or her constituents in this House, and that is their Member of Parliament. The Members who should be condemned are those who do not turn up on Fridays, not those who do.

**Mr Walker:** I have been so generous in my appraisal of the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley! He often does very important work, but on occasion he does not, in my view. The truth of the matter is that people are not coming here because they have lost faith in Fridays, and they are bored with listening to my hon. Friend.

As you know, Mr Speaker, and as the Deputy Speakers know, if we have a guaranteed vote on Second Reading of the first seven days of private Members' Bills, you could put a time limit on speeches—and what a happy occasion that will be for the ears of some in this place.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his excellent chairing of the Committee, and for producing the report. Does he agree that, if implemented, the report will increase the transparency and credibility of the private Members' Bills process, and will therefore increase our standing in the eyes of the general public whom we serve?

**Mr Walker:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman—who also serves on the Committee—that incrementally it will, but we have a lot of ground to recover in this place. As I have said to him, and as he knows, if we do not succeed in implementing the report, there is no guarantee that the House will tolerate private Members' Bills remaining on Fridays. They could well end up being dealt with on another night of the week.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As a Member who has been present on Fridays since being elected, I have seen both the good and the bad in terms of Friday debates, and I therefore welcome the report. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need less focus on individuals, and that there is already a procedure that could bring debates to an end? How does he think that the Backbench Business Committee will be able to define the level of cross-party support, given the comments that have been made about pressure groups and the impression that is given that Bills that have no chance are going to get through? How can there be a definitive ability to work out which Bills have enough genuine support to take those prime slots?

**Mr Walker:** I have been involved in a successful private Member's Bill, the Bill that became the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Act 2013, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell), and which attacked discrimination in the area of mental health. In partnership with Lord Stevenson, my hon. Friend spent an enormous amount of time—over a year—building up a coalition of support across the Benches, talking to private secretaries and Ministers, and to well informed pressure groups which are well respected by Members on both sides of the House. By the time the Bill appeared on the Floor of the House, a great deal of the hard work—the groundwork—had been done. That, I hope, is what members of the

Backbench Business Committee will be looking for when assessing whether a Bill warrants one of those coveted first four spots.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I commend the hon. Gentleman for all the work that he and his Committee have put into the report. I was grateful for the chance to give evidence to the Committee during its preparation.

It seems to me that, provided that we allow filibustering to be the means by which the Government defeat legislation in 2016, the reputation of the House will simply sink lower and lower. If the substantive changes are to be made in 2017-18, or even in 2016-17, the onus is now on the Government to provide a debate in Government time so that these issues can be discussed and further suggestions can be made. Filibustering Friday must end, and we must have change now.

**Mr Walker:** I am delighted that the mood of the House is more ambitious than that of the Chairman of the Procedure Committee; the House is to be commended for that. If we can bring forward these recommendations earlier, that would be a truly fantastic thing. We need to restore faith in Fridays so that people attending on Fridays have a chance to put their point of view and so that people watching Fridays with interest have a chance to hear a diversity of voices in this place from both sides of the argument. I do not want to see poorly drafted legislation getting on to the statute book, however. As I keep saying, the protections that we are proposing will not protect Bills on Report. If they are not up to scratch by Report, they can be dealt with by a variety of means.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for this incredibly impressive piece of work, and I support many of the recommendations in it. I welcome the fact that it looks as though it will at last bring to an end the sport that takes place on private Member's Bill Fridays, when on many occasions there is no serious attempt to have a proper debate on issues that concern or distress the wider public. It brings the whole of Parliament into disrepute when serious issues are the subject of sport in this House.

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Lady makes a very good point. Debate in this place should never be a sport; it should be about contesting the issues, arguments and propositions before the House. I agree with her sentiments, and I hope that we are beginning to travel in the right direction.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate the Procedure Committee on its report and wish it more success than previous attempts at achieving reform. We have a tired, discredited system that really does us no credit at all. Much of this short debate has focused on the benefits of Fridays, and I note that the report does not talk about the sitting hours of the House. May I urge the Committee to look at that question as a matter of urgency, because I believe that some of the answers might lie in having different sitting times for private Members' Bills?

**Mr Walker:** The Procedure Committee has deliberately steered away from looking at the sitting times of the House, but during the last Parliament, we pledged to conduct a survey of Members' views on sitting hours at

the end of the first year of every new Parliament and to bring forward a neutral motion that Members could then amend. I hope that will provide the hon. Gentleman with some comfort. He will get an opportunity at some stage in the near future to look at the sitting hours of the House, at which point I imagine that everything will be up for debate.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I should like to assure the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) that, as a new Member and a London Member, I did make an effort to turn up on Fridays early in the Session. However, I am afraid that I now have to write back to my constituents to explain that my time is better spent in my constituency. I welcome the report from the Procedure Committee, and I hope that it will give people more confidence in Back-Bench business. Given the Chair of the Committee's experience of previous attempts at parliamentary reform, does he agree that the risk now is that perfect will be seen as the enemy of good, and that we need to build as much consensus as possible for at least some reform, if not perfect reform?

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, and I really hope that the Government are listening to him. Let us try to build some consensus and find a way forward. I do not think that we are going to come up with a perfect solution, simply for the reason that every happy thought that occurs to Back-Bencher should not become law, as I said earlier. However, I would just say that in my time in this House, serving under two different Governments, I have observed that the people who specialise in talking out Bills are very good at talking out Opposition Back-Bench Bills but they seem to go missing in action when it comes to a Government handout Bill. That applies to Members on both sides of the House.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I also welcome the report from the Procedure Committee and I strongly agree with the comments made by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker). We had an excellent debate in Westminster Hall in my name on this subject last week, in which it was made clear that there is a desire for change right across the House. I would have liked a slightly bolder proposal involving moving private Members' Bills away from sitting Fridays. Nevertheless, this is a step in the right direction. I should also like to echo the plea from the Chair of the Committee and others for the Government to act quickly on this. Does he agree that we need to move quickly in order to restore the reputation of Parliament?

**Mr Walker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. For the sake of Members on both sides of the House, I must stress that it is important to recognise that the Procedure Committee cannot impose anything on the House. Our recommendations will be subject to debate and a vote. *[Interruption.]* I thought my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley, as a procedural expert, would be aware of that, but he clearly is not. All our recommendations will be subject to a vote on the Floor of the House, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will have the chance to carry the day for his side of the argument, just as the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) will have the chance to carry the day for his point of view.

## Backbench Business

### National Living Wage

**Mr Speaker:** As a courtesy, I might mention to the House that the motion was to be moved by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). Unfortunately, she sustained an injury and had to go to hospital and was not, despite her willingness, allowed to be available to move the motion today. In the circumstances, I am sure colleagues will agree that is perfectly fitting and right that the motion should be moved instead by the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), her good friend and colleague.

5.21 pm

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House agrees with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that Britain deserves a pay rise and commends his introduction of the national living wage; notes, however, that some employers are cutting overall remuneration packages to offset the cost of its introduction, leaving thousands of low-paid employees significantly worse off; and calls, therefore, on the Government to guarantee that no worker will be worse off as a result of the introduction of the national living wage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) has been campaigning tirelessly on the implementation of the national living wage, and has been fighting for all workers to truly benefit from the new proposals. Unfortunately, as Mr Speaker said, she is in hospital and cannot be with us today. I am sure that Members from across the House will join me in wishing her a speedy recovery. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I have spoken to her today, and she is on the road to recovery. I understand that she will be listening and possibly watching our proceedings.

I had intended to speak in support of my great friend and colleague's work, but I am proud to be a signatory to the motion, and I am honoured to have been asked to present her speech and lead this important debate on her behalf. She is delighted that the debate can go ahead without her. She thanks the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for the debate, and the Speaker's Office and the Table Office for allowing me to lead the debate on her behalf.

When my hon. Friend made her application to the Backbench Business Committee, she had no idea just how huge the issue would be. It all started a few months ago, when a friend of hers approached her with his payslip from B&Q. He said, "Siobhain, B&Q has given me new terms and conditions, which it says I have to sign or I'll lose my job. It is cutting back my Sunday and bank holiday pay, as well as my summer and winter bonuses. I think I might have my pay reduced." How right he was. Indeed, my hon. Friend was shocked when she calculated that he would lose up to £50 a week, or about £2,600 a year. The saddest thing was that this was happening after his basic pay had been increased by the introduction of the national living wage. To be clear, this was a pay cut after the Chancellor guaranteed that Britain was getting a pay rise.

After raising the matter at Prime Minister's questions—frankly, the Prime Minister did not have much of an answer for her—my hon. Friend started receiving dozens of emails from B&Q employees from around the country.

[Joan Ryan]

From Exeter to Aberdeen, she was contacted by staff at all levels and from all walks of life who would also lose out.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I pass on my best wishes to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who has done tireless work on this issue. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the fact that, as I have heard myself, because of the differential whereby under-25s are not eligible for the living wage, others are losing out on overtime and other hours, which are given to younger workers who can be paid less? Not only are younger workers losing out because they are paid less, but other people are not getting the overtime or extra hours that they might have thought they would.

**Joan Ryan:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. This is a double whammy for some workers; not only are they losing out because their employers are altering their terms and conditions, but they are losing these valuable other hours. Many of these workers absolutely depend on being able to work extra hours and overtime.

B&Q, like so many companies nationwide, has made all employees sign new terms and conditions under a variation of contract. Those new terms scrapped double time for Sundays and bank holidays, as well as seasonal bonuses and other allowances that staff relied on to top up their income. These pay cuts were much greater than the gains of the national living wage, which is why so many employees are losing out.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Would my right hon. Friend think it a good idea for the UK Government to make a register of the companies that have undertaken such action, and bring them to a round-table meeting to explain that the purpose of the living wage was to improve, not reduce, people's expenditure power?

**Joan Ryan:** I would indeed. Part of what we are doing today is asking the Government and the Chancellor to address these issues. There are strengthened penalties for employers who do not pay the national living wage, but I suggest that alongside those should go penalties for employers who deliberately circumvent the national living wage in this way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden was grateful for the fact that her speech during the Budget debate last month offered a great platform to get this issue the recognition it deserves. She was especially grateful for the interest shown by the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, which doubtless brought further attention to this issue, and I am pleased to see her here. My hon. Friend's speech highlighted how illogical and unfair it was to claim that Britain was getting a pay rise while hard-working employees across the country were being hit by such pay cuts. She reminded the Government that the week before, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor had been unwilling to promise that nobody who works on the shop floor would be taking home less money after 1 April. Last year, the Chancellor said he was committed to a higher-wage economy. He said:

"It cannot be right that we go on asking taxpayers to subsidise...the businesses who pay the lowest wages."

He promised that the change would have only a "fractional effect on jobs", and that the cost to business would be "just 1% of corporate profits."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 337 to 338.]

That was a cost he offset with a cut to corporation tax.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on this opening speech, and on the way in which she is making it. May I raise the issue of care providers? The care sector is faced with a bill of £330 million for implementing this legislation—this is money that the Government have not provided—and I hope to be called today so that I can talk about the impact the change is having on wages and conditions there.

**Joan Ryan:** That is a crucial point, because the cost to business is offset by the reduction in corporation tax, and smaller businesses will also benefit from increased business rate relief and higher national insurance allowances. In terms of care homes, there is also a significant impact on local authorities, and that has not been taken into account.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I should declare an interest as a councillor in the London borough of Redbridge. The Local Government Association and others have estimated that the amount put aside through tax increases—through the new social care levy—will barely cover the cost to local authorities of providing the living wage, as they should. This is once more a Government pledge being delivered through stealth tax rises, with the buck passed to local authorities.

**Joan Ryan:** I could not in any way disagree with my hon. Friend, and as ever, it is the most vulnerable and the needy who suffer the most.

Companies such as B&Q use the introduction of the national living wage to "reform their pay and reward structures", as they put it. That is a euphemism for cutting staff pay. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden received a rather panicky email from B&Q requesting a meeting to clear things up. Indeed, B&Q's chief executive officer and its head of human resources were eager to convey how much they appreciated their staff and how generous the reward package was. At the same time as my hon. Friend's meeting with them, they announced that they would extend by an extra 12 months the period of compensation for those staff members who were going to lose out—an increase from 12 to 24 months. Of course that was because of the reputational pressure that B&Q was under. Although that is definitely a good step forward, achieved because of the considerable public pressure, lots of questions remain unanswered. What will happen to these employees after 24 months? Does B&Q hope that we will forget about the issue and quietly let these long-serving staff members lose out? Will it review its pay structures to guarantee that staff receive the pay they deserve?

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend think that the Chancellor's decision to conflate the national minimum wage with the reality of the living wage was the gimmick at the outset that allowed these employers to think that this

was not to be treated seriously, and that that is why we see these different actions by big chains and unscrupulous employers?

**Joan Ryan:** Undoubtedly that is the impression, especially as the real living wage recommended by the Living Wage Foundation is significantly higher than the one that the Chancellor proposed. We certainly could question it, as he could not have been unaware that what happened was always going to be possible.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, welcome though the living wage is, the tendency of many employers—some of them with internationally high reputations—to introduce the casualisation of labour through zero-hours contracts and rolling contracts is likely to be accelerated? Does she also not agree that, in exposing these companies, the Government should go not just for a register, which would be welcome, but for regulating the way that these contracts are used, as they undermine wage rates and people's security in employment?

**Joan Ryan:** Absolutely. There is no question but that low pay runs alongside job insecurity, and the situation is getting worse. What has happened absolutely demonstrates that terms and conditions and pay are inextricably linked. Again, as we have said with the care sector, people who are vulnerable and needy and who have the weakest voice are always the most affected. If it were not for the trade unions raising their voice, us raising ours, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden focusing on the issue in such a forensic manner, awareness of this matter would probably have been nothing like it is. Whatever the outcome, it is clearly totally wrong that any company should cut wages of loyal, long-standing members of staff off the back of the national living wage.

Let us make no mistake about it: if a company as big and as well known as B&Q can do this, anyone can. When my hon. Friend met the chief executive, Michael Loeve, he told her that he was “a bit annoyed” that B&Q was being singled out. He said, “We're a great employer, and we're not the only ones making the changes.” We seem to be in the realm of two wrongs making a right. He is right, though, about not being the only ones, sadly. B&Q was just unlucky to have received so much attention. It was unlucky that my hon. Friend's friend worked there, instead of for one of the many famous high-street retailers doing the same thing.

It is true that B&Q had been particularly thoughtless about the predicament of its staff. Let us consider a few of the people from around the country who contacted my hon. Friend in desperation about their situation at B&Q. There was a gentleman who works at a B&Q store in the south-east, where he has been employed for more than 15 years. To give him whatever protection we can, let us call him Mr Jones. He has a family—two children—and is the sole wage earner in his household. He works hard but part time because of the strains of his physical disability. He works every Sunday he can, as well as all the unsocial hours on offer, but from April, under the new contract that he has been coerced into signing, Mr Jones will lose £1,000 a year. Yes, it is true that he will not lose out for the next 24 months because of the one-off payments that B&Q has promised to

employees who are set to lose out, but he will still lose out after this period, because B&Q has no contingency plan.

Let us also consider Ms Smith from Yorkshire. She is a hard-working, low-paid mum. As a result of her contractual changes, her total monthly wage will be reduced by a staggering 30% pay cut, and the two one-off payments that she will receive do nothing for the £2,000 a year that she will lose from 2018. She says:

“How exactly am I going to make up this wage deficit? I have a young son to support, and next year is looking very bleak for us. . . I am worried about how I will support my family next year. I am heartbroken that the company I have worked so hard for, done 16-hour shifts for, come in on days off for, and valued greatly, has treated me like this.”

**Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just a matter of current income? People will also lose their deferred income and salary, which is their pension, so there will be a longer-term, knock-on effect when they retire.

**Joan Ryan:** Indeed. Compare that double whammy—loss now and loss of deferred income, which is pension income—with what happens to the companies: they gain from cutting pay, and from the reduction in corporation tax, which should offset the pay increase, not allow them to cut pay. Although B&Q says that it has rectified the sort of situation I have described, I defy B&Q senior management to place themselves in the shoes of Mr Jones and Ms Smith and honestly say that they feel optimistic about their future.

Let us turn our attention to other employers that we know are doing similar things. Bradgate Bakery is part of the group that owns famous brands that we all enjoy, such as Ginsters pies and Soreen loaf, but the pay that it is offering staff is a lot less tasty than its food. Bradgate has written to all its Leicestershire staff, detailing changes to their wages. Most shop-floor employees at Bradgate were earning just over £6.70 an hour before 1 April, so the introduction of the national living wage should have made quite a difference for them, but Bradgate, like B&Q, has found an opportunity to save money. That is because of the universal truth that companies will usually pay their workers a lot less than they can afford, if they can get away with it.

**Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that part of the problem is that employers see the national living wage or minimum wage as a ceiling for payments, rather than a floor, and will always try to pay the least that they can get away with?

**Joan Ryan** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Thirteen Members wish to speak after the right hon. Lady, and we are already well into a good debate, so I am worried that we might be squeezing the time for other Members.

**Joan Ryan:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I take your point.

Certainly, the national living wage does not mean that that is all that employers can pay. Bradgate Bakery, like B&Q, found an opportunity to save money, so it has changed staff terms and conditions to phase out double pay for Sundays by 2019. That means that while

[Joan Ryan]

employees on the national minimum wage earned £13.78 per hour on a Sunday last month, by 2019 they will earn just £9 per hour. That is the national living wage according to Bradgate Bakery. Extra pay for night shifts, Saturdays and overtime are also being scaled back. In sum, Bradgate workers are being sold a lie: they are told that their pay is increasing, but what the Government are giving with one hand, Bradgate is taking with another. According to one very worried worker who approached my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden, these cuts will affect the whole range of shifts that run in the factories. That means that by 2018 a production operative on night shift will be paid £2,778 less a year, while a night shift team leader will be paid £344 less.

I want to make a few things clear. First, increasing the minimum wage is not a bad thing. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden, myself, and indeed all hon. Friends, were proud to be part of the Labour Government who introduced it almost 20 years ago, and we wholeheartedly support moves to increase it. Our workers work hard and deserve every penny that they are entitled to. We quite agree with the Chancellor that Britain does deserve a pay rise.

Secondly, despite what they say, businesses can cope with the increase in the minimum wage. Every minimum wage rate rise since its introduction has been greeted with predictions of doom and gloom by a minority of employers, but their dire warnings have not come true.

Thirdly, we all know that businesses will tend to pay their workers less than they actually can, because that is what profit-making is all about, but businesses should not be cutting staff pay via terms and conditions to offset the costs. Despite what they say, there are alternatives: they could improve productivity and invest in the skills and talents of their employees; they could cut back shareholder pay just a little, so that those who work hardest get the remuneration they truly deserve; or, following the Chancellor's suggestion, they could use the further 1% cut in corporation tax announced last month to fund the increase in the minimum wage.

Fourthly, I have discussed B&Q and Bradgate Bakery today, but there is an industry-wide problem. Huge supermarket retailers, such as Morrisons, cut their staff pay months ago, to little media attention. For instance, while hourly pay at Morrisons has now increased to £8.20, the firm simultaneously scrapped a raft of pay perks to save money. Only last week, we read reports of how popular, thriving café businesses, such as EAT and Caffè Nero, are cutting free staff lunches to claw back costs. That will save them about £3.60 per employee per day—less than the cost of one of their toasted paninis. According to media reports today, it looks like Waitrose will also be scrapping Sunday and overtime rates for new workers. This is all part of a worrying trend.

I am sure that my hon. Friends will agree that what we are asking for is not easy, but we truly believe that there is a precedent for cross-party support on this issue. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden was delighted to receive the support of the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) during their “Channel 4 News” interview on the subject last week. He joined her in calling for employers to guarantee that no one loses out. During the interview, my hon. Friend said:

“Any Member who wants to join me on calling for action from employers and the Government, from whichever side of the House they may be, is a friend of mine.”

The truth is that securing meaningful change is not beyond the Government's ability. If the Chancellor promised everyone a pay rise, then everyone should receive one. If he promised that the Government would be radical on strengthening wages, then he needs to deliver radical change. A thriving economy is not built on low pay and unscrupulous employers; it is built on a proper day's pay for a hard day's work. It is time the Government gave hard-working people—the same people all political parties claim to represent—the outcome they truly deserve.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. May I suggest that people use up to seven minutes? However, if you start making interventions, I will have to drop the time later. It is up to Members, but I do want to get everybody in.

5.44 pm

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** I want to make a few brief points in the time available. The first—we have to have a few home truths here—is that the whole concept of a national living wage is intellectual nonsense. The amount that people need to earn to cover their living costs depends on all sorts of factors. It depends on their housing costs. It depends on how close they live to their workplace and how much it costs them to get to work—the cost is obviously a lot less for somebody who lives right next to their place of work than for somebody who lives a considerable distance away. The idea that one national living wage can apply to everybody in the country, irrespective of their personal circumstances, is therefore nonsense, and we should make that clear from the start. What we are talking about with the living wage is an increased minimum wage, so let us just be honest about our terminology.

The right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) made the usual mistake of thinking that every employer in the country is some rich baron who lives in a huge mansion, drives around in a Bentley and has all the goods in the world. Actually, the vast majority of businesses in this country are small and medium-sized enterprises. I advise her speak to a few shop owners down her local high street, because she will actually find that many are struggling to earn a living. In fact, many of the people she is talking about do not earn the minimum wage or the living wage—whatever anyone wants to call it—themselves. She berates them for trying to do down their staff, when many of them are working desperately long hours to keep their staff in employment because their staff matter to them.

**Wes Streeting:** The hon. Gentleman is throwing up all sorts of straw men, but what we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) were concrete examples of large companies that have the ability to pay their staff properly but are not doing so. When will the hon. Gentleman engage with the facts rather than straw men?

**Philip Davies:** I am engaging with the facts—these are home truths the hon. Gentleman should appreciate.



When people ask, “Do you think everybody should get a pay rise to £9, £10 or £11 an hour?”, everyone of course says yes. I think it was Norman Tebbit who said that if we ask people, “Would you like a Rolls-Royce?” they will all say yes, but if we say, “You’ll have to live in a tent for the rest of your life to pay for it,” the answer will be no.

We have to realise that there are consequences to increasing the minimum wage. We all know that if we want to reduce the consumption of something—if we want less of something—we increase its cost. If the Government want fewer people smoking, one of the tools they use is to put the price up. If we want fewer people drinking, we put the price up. The same rules apply to employment: if we put up the cost of employment, we will find fewer people employed—that is just an economic fact.

**Mr George Howarth:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but the binary choice he presents of a Rolls-Royce or a tent is not the living reality of most of our constituents.

Last year, the Big Help Project’s food bank in Knowsley helped to feed 6,000 people, 3,500 of whom were children, for three days. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that cutting people’s wages will mean that even more people are dependent on food banks? Is that the 21st century, or is he harking back to the 19th century?

**Philip Davies:** The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that what is more likely to send people to a food bank is not having a job at all.

When the Chancellor announced the higher rate of the minimum wage, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimated that 4 million hours a week would be lost, half resulting from reduced hours for workers and half resulting from the loss of 60,000 jobs. The great thing about the OBR is that at least we are now able to understand the consequences of such a policy.

There are a lot of advantages to having a higher minimum wage. A lot of low-paid people have found themselves in higher-paid jobs, and I very much welcome that. However, Labour Members who praise the policy should at least be honest about its consequences.

**Mr Howarth** *rose*—

**Philip Davies:** I have already given way to the right hon. Gentleman; he can have another go in his own speech later.

Labour Members have to face the consequences of the policy: the OBR has made it clear that it will result in fewer people being employed. The right hon. Member for Enfield North mentioned companies such as B&Q and Morrisons. When I worked for Asda, every employee was given a 10% discount card. I have no idea what Asda’s policy is today—it may well be the same—but it used to employ a lot of people with families, and a 10% discount card was a very valuable commodity to them. We should be wary about forcing employers to put up pay, because the inevitable consequence will be that some benefits might have to go if they want to keep the same number of people employed in their stores. These decisions have consequences, and we cannot pretend that increasing people’s pay will not have consequences.

The right hon. Lady mentioned care homes and the care sector. We need to think carefully about what the consequences will be for them. In my constituency, in Bradford, a very small proportion of the extra 2% that is being levied on council tax is being passed on to independent care homes. I thought it was designed to help them with the costs of things such as the national living wage. This high-minded policy is motherhood and apple pie. It enables people to look good and argue, “I think that, whatever people earn, they should get more, and that even when they do get more, they should get even more than that,” but an awful lot of care homes around the country could close as a consequence. Is that really what we want to happen in the UK? It would happen not because employers are mean, nasty people, but simply because they cannot afford to pay the national living wage at the rates that the councils are giving them for care home fees. That is the economic reality, whether people like it or not.

I met a number of employers recently, and they pointed out that the policy takes no account of differentials. When the pay of people at the bottom is raised to a higher rate, they are not the only ones to get a pay rise, because everyone else in the organisation will say, “Hold on a minute, I was paid £1 an hour more than they were, so if their pay’s being increased by £1 an hour, I want an extra £1 an hour as well to maintain that differential.”

Anybody who knows anything about running a business will know that, particularly for employers who run small businesses on the high street in small towns in our constituencies, there is not a never-ending pot of money to pay higher wages to everybody and to protect those differentials. Something has to give: either those differentials disappear, much to the unhappiness of the people who had them before, or fewer people will be employed, or people will be employed for fewer hours.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Philip Davies:** I am afraid that I cannot give way, because there is not much time left.

Finally, I have two very quick points to make. First, the increased national minimum wage will almost certainly lead to even more people from the European Union coming to the UK if we do not leave the EU in the forthcoming referendum. That is a basic fact. Secondly, a higher minimum wage is great for people who are already in work and getting paid. However, it can be as high as we like, but it will be of very little use to those who do not have a job. Many people in this country already find it very difficult to get on the jobs ladder, for all sorts of reasons.

I have made this point before and got into terrible trouble for it, but the fact, whether people like it or not, is that too few disabled people in this country are employed. It would not be good if they were put further away from the jobs ladder, and I want the Government to think about what they are going to do, when wages are higher, to help disabled people find a job, including subsidising employers to bring them up to the living wage. Something has to be done. We cannot just leave people on the scrapheap unable to get a job because the first rung of the jobs ladder was too far away to give them a chance in the first place. We have to think through the consequences of all these high-minded policies.

5.54 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. In opening, may I place on the record my sincere thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for her efforts in securing this Back-Bench business debate? She is a fearless campaigner and a credit to this place. I wish her a speedy recovery, which I know she will achieve through sheer force of willpower. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for stepping in.

When I sat in this Chamber alongside many other hon. Members not so many months ago and heard the Chancellor say that he was going to increase the pay of the lowest paid, I was speechless. The glib tagline was, “A pay rise for Britain”. Throughout my political life, I have fought for improved pay and conditions for the working people of this country, especially the lowest paid. One of the proudest moments in my political life was seeing a Labour Government, in this very place, introduce the national minimum wage as one of their first acts—a move that was strongly opposed by the Conservatives.

Despite my understandable cynicism, I was delighted that the Chancellor had undergone his own damascene conversion and had finally seen the light by belatedly understanding that every worker in this great and prosperous country, not just those at the top of the ladder, deserved to be paid fairly. But—and there is always a “but” with this Government—my initial delight soon dissolved as I rapidly discovered that my cynicism was not misplaced but very much spot on. As the now former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), recognised, the Chancellor’s glib tagline about giving Britain a pay rise was devoid of substance and nothing more than hot air and bluff. His Budget announcement was the stuff of fairy tales. When we scratch beneath the thin veneer of the so-called national living wage, it swiftly becomes clear that the low-paid workers of this country are being hammered, just as they always are by this Tory Government.

Despite the Chancellor’s embarrassing U-turn on tax credits, he has ploughed ahead with cuts to the successor scheme, universal credit. Cuts introduced this very month mean that tens of thousands of low-paid working families who are in receipt of universal credit are expected to lose up to £200 a month from their pay packets. That is the first attack by this Tory Government. The second attack, and the topic of today’s debate, is the Chancellor’s spectacular failure to ensure that big business funds his so-called national living wage off its own back and through its profits, rather than off the backs of workers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and the *Daily Mirror* newspaper, through its coverage in recent weeks, have shown that, when given the choice, big business has seized on the cheapest method to fund a pay rise for its workers by heartlessly cutting their overall pay and benefits package. That is simply shameful.

**Stephen Doughty**: My hon. Friend is making a very strong speech. Many businesses, particularly in the care sector, have got away with not paying the minimum wage and used all sorts of tactics such as clipping and

not paying for travel time. An even greater number of them now use tactics such as cutting tea breaks and lunch breaks, in order to get away with it on an even greater scale. The Government failed to enforce the original minimum wage, and the situation is now being compounded further.

**Judith Cummins**: I thank my hon. Friend for giving that very good example. My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North mentioned the glaring example of B&Q, which has asked its workers to sign a contract that reduces a number of their benefits. It is believed that the overall result will be that many will lose thousands of pounds. The company’s response has been to introduce a temporary scheme, for just two years, to protect the value of its workers’ overall packages. That is simply not good enough, particularly as it has been reported that the parent company of B&Q, Kingfisher, may pay its chief executive officer a total package of up to £3.6 million. The numbers are jaw-dropping, as is the hypocrisy. Once again, this Tory Government are presiding over the shameful exploitation of those who are least able to make ends meet, least able to make their voices heard and least able to stand up and tell the Government that what they are doing is simply unfair and unacceptable, and that it cannot go on.

The Chancellor cannot even plead ignorance and suggest that this shameful episode is an unexpected by-product of his noble and good deeds. A ministerial answer to a written question by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) on 21 March revealed that the Government were aware of the possibility that big business would choose to fund their so-called national living wage through cuts to wider remuneration packages. The Government’s view was:

“It is for individual businesses to decide exactly how to respond to the introduction of the National Living Wage, appropriate to their circumstances. But any changes to contractual pay should be discussed and agreed with workers in advance.”

The Government simply do not get it. If the choice for workers is between unemployment and agreeing to changes designed to reduce their overall contractual benefits, most, if not all, workers—especially the lowest paid in society—will sign up.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that another group of workers, namely the self-employed, are also in a difficult position? I was recently contacted by a constituent whose partner works for a courier company. Once his petrol has been paid for, he is getting paid about £260 a month for working a 50-hour week. My constituent told me that she works on the minimum wage as a pizza delivery driver, and she earns about three times as much for doing half the hours that her partner works. Does that not show that a whole group of people is being forced into an invidious position?

**Judith Cummins**: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. Big business knows that the voice of the lowest paid is easily silenced, because the fear of unemployment is a powerful tool. The Government need to step up and legislate for big business to fund the so-called national living wage not through cuts to workers’ wider benefits but by, quite rightly, sacrificing a percentage of its own profits. That is not only fair but proper, given that tax on big business profits was cut in the Chancellor’s

Budget. Soon, businesses will pay just 17% tax on their profits, down from 20%. I call on the Government to legislate to require big business to use the extra cash released through reduced corporation tax to fund the so-called national living wage, not to deliver larger dividends to its shareholders in the coming years, as I fear it will. The Government must step up. They must end this injustice. This simply cannot go on.

6.2 pm

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for helping to secure this vital debate, and I hope that she gets well very soon.

Britain certainly deserves a pay rise. It has been due one since 2010. If we listened to the rhetoric from the Government, we might be forgiven for believing that the new national living wage would end all the problems of those who are struggling to make ends meet. We have heard the radio adverts in which countless actors with differing regional tones deliver sonnets about what the new national living wage entails for them. In reality, this is not a real living wage—far from it. Although many will receive a step up, some in our society will face an uphill challenge from 1 April. As chair of the all-party group on small shops, I have spent the last couple of months talking to business owners, who fear that the increase in their wage bill will be the final nail in the coffin, because they will simply not be able to meet those costs. I will come on to some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies).

There were some promising features in the Budget on business rates, aimed at small businesses. From April 2017, small businesses will either be taken out of the rating system completely or have a smaller burden to pay. However, 2017 is the key point.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Government's new measures on business rates. I do not know whether he is aware of this, but some local authorities may lose out because of that. In other words, it may cost them more.

**Simon Danczuk:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is a real concern for local authorities, and there is disparity across the country. That is a good point.

The other point about business rates is that there is an issue with the fact that the relief will not be introduced until 2017. Small businesses will struggle for a whole year before they receive the relief that is in the Budget. As I have already mentioned in this Chamber, the retail business rate relief grant has been stopped this year for small business owners as well. Small businesses employ 35% of the nation's workforce, but they employ more than half of those who are on the minimum wage. From 1 April, small businesses will be dealt a double whammy of increased wage bills and a reduction in support from business rate grants. They will be under real financial pressure for a whole year.

**Mr Nuttall:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Simon Danczuk:** I am going to make a little bit of progress. Larger retailers will be able to offset their costs by reducing the benefits that they pay out, such as

Sunday pay, as we have seen from the examples that the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has raised in the media recently. Smaller businesses will have to put up prices, slow recruitment or perhaps downscale their operations. Some will have to shut down because they are unable to shoulder the costs until 2017 after having struggled for years. The truth is that the new national living wage should have coincided with the changes to the business rate system.

Next I want to mention the pressures facing the social care sector, which has faced a wave of pressure from the Government over the last few years. We have heard much recently about the social care precept, which enables councils to raise council tax by 2% to pay for care costs. Senior members of Rochdale Borough Council have told me that with the introduction of the national living wage, the precept will provide very little extra funding, if any. Poorer areas such as Rochdale—this is similar to the point made about business rates—will raise only just over £1 million from the precept, because of the council tax bands of the properties in the borough. Even the Conservative-led Local Government Association has warned that the national living wage will put adult care services at breaking point.

The new change is even more worrying in view of the fact that many in the care sector are not even paid the minimum wage. Work by Unison has shown that pay structures, such as not paying travelling time, mean that those who care for our elderly loved ones are not being paid for the vital work that they do. If we want to give careworkers the wage that they deserve, it must be adequately funded. They are some of the most hard-working people, and they deserve to earn at least the minimum wage. Unless the appropriate funding is in place, that simply will not happen.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I was not referring to the living wage, as such. I was talking about the cost to local authorities of the change in the business rates. Some local authorities will lose out on this.

**Simon Danczuk:** I understand that point, and I agree with it completely. Britain deserves a pay rise, not some public relations stunt from a Chancellor who is obsessed with political strategy. An increase in the minimum wage must be done properly, and small businesses must be helped so that they can afford it. Most importantly, it must enable individuals to support themselves. The minimum wage remains a great Labour triumph. By the look of things, we will need a Labour Government once again to give Britain a proper pay increase.

6.8 pm

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing a debate on this important topic, and I wish her a speedy recovery. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) on the way in which she has led the debate.

Like so many Members in the House, I welcomed the news in last year's Budget that the Government would introduce a new national living wage, as a result of which workers aged 25 and over would receive £7.20 an hour in April—an increase of 50p from October 2015, when the minimum wage was set at £6.70. I also welcomed

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the plans for it to rise to £9 per hour by 2020. Both those measures are important steps towards securing a real living wage, which the Labour party continues to campaign for. After years of workers enduring the bulk of the Government's austerity agenda, a pay increase for 1.8 million workers is welcomed, even though it does not go far enough.

For me, this is a local issue, that affects the lives of many of my constituents. According to the House of Commons Library, 19% of people in my constituency will benefit from the living wage this year. That figure will rise to 27% by 2020. I understand that the changes will have a disproportionate impact on small businesses, which employ 35% of the adult workforce and 52% of Britain's minimum wage workers, and that it will be concentrated in the hospitality and retail sectors, which account for more than 46% of minimum wage jobs. I also note the concerns coming particularly from the social care sector, which is already underfunded. The Government urgently need to do more to address the shortfall in funding.

In the recent weeks leading up to the implementation of this new wage, a campaign of fear has been put out by large employers that simply do not want to pay their employees a fair wage. Some have claimed that a living wage will lead to job losses. Others have had the gall to say that raising wages is in effect a tax targeted at businesses using low-skilled workers. The truth is that the taxpayer has had to pay to top up the pay of workers to the tune of £11 billion a year. Prior to this wage rise, the four big supermarkets alone—Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons—cost £1 billion a year in the tax credits and extra benefit payments their underpaid staff received.

I have found disturbing and, quite frankly, shameful the way in which some large employers in the service sector have used the introduction of a living wage as an excuse to cut basic work entitlements. In the face of the changes, some employers have cut holiday pay, lunch hour pay and sick pay, and have cut contracted hours. As has already been mentioned, the retailers B&Q, Tesco and Wilko have all cut premium holiday pay and other benefits while reluctantly raising pay. Staff at Tesco face a cut to night-time and holiday bonuses, as do staff at Wilko and Morrisons. One Tesco worker has said that the loss of pay will amount to £75 a month, which could be the difference between making next month's rent and being kicked out on to the streets.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend is outlining what I regard as very underhand practices that are hurting such workers. Will she join me in paying tribute to the work of trade unions such as the GMB, USDAW, Unison and Unite, which have played a key role in exposing a lot of these problems during the past few months? That underlines why trade unions are so crucial in standing up for workers in workplaces, such as the care sector or the retail sector that she mentions.

**Julie Cooper:** I am very happy to agree with my hon. Friend and pay tribute to the trade union movement, which has done so much to stand up for the rights of workers when faced with such threats from some big companies.

Eat, the café chain, has reportedly stopped paying staff during lunch breaks. Caffè Nero has told staff that it cannot afford to pay the national living wage and allow their workers a free panini at lunch time, despite the fact that its profits grew by 8.5% to £241 million in the 12 months to last May and that the company has not paid corporation tax since 2007. As was mentioned earlier, B&Q has demanded that employees sign away rights to a range of in-work benefits worth more than a £1,000 a year or face the prospect of being sacked. This intimidating and bullying of staff should not be tolerated in any workplace.

The Low Pay Commission has warned that some employers may decide to label employees as apprentices or self-employed to avoid having to pay them the living wage. Other suggestions floated by large retailers include cutting the number of staff or speeding up the implementation of technology to replace staff, such as using more self-checkout tills in supermarkets. These regressive actions are in complete contradiction to the aims of the living wage, as the Government pointed out when they introduced it. They said it would prompt employers to invest in training and technology to make their workers more productive and break the low-pay, low-productivity cycle. I do not see how cutting in-work benefits will make employees more productive, or break the cycle of low pay and insecure work.

Costa Coffee, Next and other high-profile companies have said that they will increase prices to cover the change in wages by passing the price directly on to the consumer. I was astonished to hear a member of staff in a small chain in my Burnley constituency tell a customer that the price of bread had gone up because of the change to wages. These companies can afford to pay and should pay a living wage off the back of the profits that they produce. This should not be a system in which employers can choose between holiday pay and a living wage, or between raising prices and sacking staff.

Those guilty of such actions show their contempt for their customers, for this Parliament and the law and, most importantly, for their staff—the very individuals who give their sweat and blood, and their time and effort, so that those at the top can receive large salaries deducted from record profits. If such large companies employing thousands of people across the UK can afford to pay their lawyers and accountants large fees to cut their tax bill and avoid paying corporation tax, I do not see how they cannot afford to pay their employees a real wage that they and their family can live off.

The Government estimate that the total cost to employers of implementing the national living wage in 2016-17 is £1.1 billion. Yet last year, according to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, tax fraud cost £16 billion, with tax evasion alone meaning that the Government collected £4.4 billion less in tax. The money lost to the economy could easily cover the cost of the implementation of a real living wage.

Some claim that a living wage will lead to job losses. In the face of much of the scaremongering about job losses, it is worth pointing out that there has been little to no negative impact on our economy or jobs since the introduction of a minimum wage in 1999, despite the fact that the same people made the same arguments then. I am happy to say that some employers have welcomed the wage rise. Some have gone further by paying all their staff, irrespective of age, a higher wage than the Government's living wage.

This debate is not simply about the cost of a living wage; ultimately, it is a wider reflection of an increasingly divided society. I am running out of time, but I would like to share with hon. Members my own experiences. For 24 years, I owned and ran a successful small business in which I employed 10 people. Through all that time, I recognised that the staff were a real asset, helping to build the success of the business. They worked hard and contributed much, and they were valued highly. I was proud to pay them a real living wage, and they certainly deserved no less. Similarly, when I was leader of Burnley Borough Council, I was pleased to introduce the real living wage for all employees. Not only is this the fair and decent thing to do, but it makes sound economic sense, because when people have more money in their pocket, they create demand for more and better services and shops. Thus the living wage, far from damaging business, actually acts as a boost.

I call on the Government to protect workers' rights that are clearly being undermined. It should be made clear, through legislation if necessary, that employers should not see the living wage as an opportunity to cut back on holiday pay or other hard fought for entitlements—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order.

6.16 pm

**Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this debate, and I wish her well with her recovery. I am only sorry that she could not be in the Chamber to deliver her speech, but I thank the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for opening the debate.

As a signatory to this motion, I want to recognise that the idea of a living wage sounds positive and a great thing. In fact, it sounds like a boost for people on low incomes. Who would argue with an increase to the living wage or to any wage? However, the fact is that this is not a living wage. I do not often find myself agreeing with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies)—in fact, I do not think I ever have until today, when he stated that this policy is nothing more than an increased minimum wage.

The fact that we are already witnessing the unintended consequences of this policy—the reality of an adverse effect on workers' benefits—only proves that this Government have once more undermined the role of workers in favour of businesses. Once more, the hard-working people of this country will pay, while the bankers, businesses and tax avoiders continue to profit. As employers seek to manage the impact of wage bills, the reality is that no business wants to lose profit. Reducing staff numbers, cutting hours, misusing or abusing zero-hours contracts and reducing employee benefits are just some of the ways in which businesses are managing to subvert the cost of paying people real living wages, while expecting more from their employees.

Let us be clear: the real living wage, as defined by the Living Wage Foundation, takes into account living costs, whereas this Government's so-called living wage is calculated on median earnings and completely fails to take into account the cost of living. How can it actually be called a living wage?

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** I have listened to several speeches from Opposition Members and the hon. Lady is making the same argument. It is important to understand that the living wage should be seen in the context of hourly pay. She is right to say that employers look at the total wage bill and look for other changes, but she should not conflate the two. I think she wants to support the Government's intention of increasing the hourly pay of workers. Does she agree?

**Angela Crawley:** We can agree that workers deserve a real living wage, but this is not a real living wage. To go back to my argument, it is merely an enhanced minimum wage. While I would welcome a living wage, this does not meet the mark. Sadly, this does not even apply to those under 25. Try telling a 17-year-old part-time worker that their work is of less value than that of someone who is a few years older. Is that really what we think of our young people? Is that really the value we place on the work of our young people, who are all too often forgotten in this Government's priorities?

The term "living wage" is important. In Scotland, we recognise that. We set a target to have 500 real living wage employers by the end of this Parliament and we have already exceeded it. Last year, the Scottish Government announced that they had become an accredited living wage employer. The SNP Government have introduced a requirement to pay the real living wage as an integral part of the public sector pay policy. Since 2011, we have invested £1.5 million per year in paying the living wage rate across the parts of the public sector where the Scottish Government control the pay bill, directly benefiting 3,000 workers. Scotland has a higher proportion of workers who are paid the living wage than any other nation of the UK.

There are some positive examples in my constituency, such as Hamilton citizens advice bureau, Bluebird Care in Larkhall, the medical centre in Lanark and Emtec contractors in Uddingston, all of which are leading the way as real living wage employers and showing what can be achieved. In many ways, what the Government are doing will undermine the incentive for employers to achieve a real living wage.

Despite what the Government have said, they must do more to ensure that no worker is worse off as a result of this change. We have all seen the worrying reports about employers mitigating the cost of the new rate by cutting hours and premium rates for overtime and bank holidays. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden asked the Prime Minister whether he would guarantee that no worker would be worse off as a result of the national living wage, but she never received a response. Perhaps the Minister will give that commitment today.

**Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** I am depressed by the negativity of this debate. People who have come to me in my constituency are pleased that they will have £900 more in their pockets. Some 40% of people will get a wage rise. This is something that the Government have been speaking up for. People want more money in their pockets and they are going to get it. On the whole, businesses in my constituency are in favour of the national living wage. It is difficult, but they are for it.

**Angela Crawley:** Although it will always be welcome if people have more pennies in their pocket, the Government are not looking at the full picture. When cuts to universal

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credit outweigh any benefit from the so-called national living wage, how can it be defended as a national living wage at all?

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): My constituent, Andrew Larmour, sent me a message to say that although he got a pay rise on 1 April because of the living wage, he received a pre-printed letter on 31 March about a change of circumstances for his benefit entitlements, which indicated that he will not be better off but worse off.

**Angela Crawley:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that valid point.

Despite the Chancellor's claim that the lowest-paid workers need a pay rise—indeed, they do deserve a pay rise—his actions will result in the rich getting richer while people in low-wage jobs see no real benefit. Indeed, they will experience an erosion of any employer benefits that they once had.

It is telling that the Government believe that women will benefit most from this change in policy, because it means that they recognise that women are more likely to be stuck in minimum wage, part-time, uncertain employment. That tells the story of gender inequality, whereby women are systematically paid less than men. It perpetuates the gender pay gap—something that the Prime Minister has pledged to end in a generation. His deeds do not appear to be matched by words. Once again, the Government know the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

6.23 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this important debate and my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) on stepping in to introduce it in such an impressive manner.

Given that most of our constituents will at one time or another find themselves working for somebody else, we give far too little attention in this place to the reality of the world of work. To many, that reality involves insecurity, uncertainty and exploitation. This debate has exposed the level of exploitation that still pervades many workplaces in this country. Members have listed many examples of employers abusing their bargaining power to take away with one hand what the new minimum wage gives with the other.

I agree with Ian Hodson, president of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, whose members have seen this at first hand, that the way in which the new minimum wage has been introduced has allowed employers to force through changes to contractual entitlements. If it is the Government's intention for the increase in the minimum wage to end the underwriting by the state of poverty wages, they surely cannot want that increase to be paid for out of the pockets of the very people the policy is intended to help.

**Richard Fuller:** On that point, the change in the living wage over five years will effectively mean a 30% increase in the labour costs for companies. I agree with the hon.

Gentleman that the Government did not want that to result in people losing wages, but what would he say to the employers—the small business people that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) spoke about—who have to meet that increase in costs? What is the alternative that the hon. Gentleman wants them to undertake—an increase in prices? What else would he like to see?

**Justin Madders:** The hon. Gentleman is missing the point, which is that we have a very dishonest settlement whereby the Government are saying, "You're going to get more money in your pocket," but again and again we are seeing employers use unscrupulous methods to take that money back. We want the Government to come up with a much more clear and transparent way of dealing with this, so that employers end up paying what the Government have decreed is the minimum that people can live on.

**Jo Stevens:** Specifically on the point about small businesses, we know that if the lowest-paid workers, who often work for small businesses, have a pay increase, they tend to spend it locally, so the local economy grows. In addition, the Government have given tax cuts to businesses, so small businesses are not being deprived of any benefit.

**Justin Madders:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We have heard examples today involving large national chains. We can all use our spending power to go elsewhere and support local businesses, which are the lifeblood of our communities.

We should not be surprised by the way this policy is panning out, because this is the way in which some employers have always operated—they see every issue that affects their business as an excuse to whittle away at the terms and conditions of their staff.

The Minister for Skills said in a written parliamentary answer, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) referred to earlier, that any changes to terms and conditions should be discussed and agreed with workers in advance. I am sure that that advice will come as a surprise to the Secretary of State for Health, given his approach to the junior doctors dispute. I am afraid that the idea that employers will wait for an agreement on these issues is fanciful and bears no relation to the reality on the ground.

Those who are represented by a trade union at least have a fighting chance, but the reality is that employers can and do change terms and conditions fairly frequently. When they do so, it is almost always to the detriment of the people they employ. Once an employer gives a notice of change, the employee has very little redress. If legal redress is an option, the introduction of employment tribunal fees has made that a most unlikely route, given the 80% drop in employment tribunal claims since fees were introduced.

My constituency of Ellesmere Port and Neston is one of the top five living wage blackspots for women working part time across the north-west, according to the TUC, with 66% earning less than the living wage. Any increase in basic pay has to be a step in the right direction for that group of workers, as long as it does not come at the expense of other elements of the pay package.

It would be a mistake to claim that simply increasing basic pay means that there is now a fair workplace settlement. We know that many ruses and mechanisms are used to stop effective workplace protection, such as bogus self-employment and zero-hours contracts. This policy could even see the development of other scams. Some unscrupulous employers might sack people just before their 25th birthday just so that they can get someone on a cheaper rate. More apprenticeships that are apprenticeships in name only might pop up because they offer the chance for an employer to pay someone a lower rate for the same job. What will be done to tackle that?

Nearly half of all minimum wage jobs are in hospitality and retail—sectors that are both major employers in my constituency. I have conducted my own research into the practices of many of the national restaurant and fast food chains, which has revealed widespread abuse that the Government do not appear to be interested in tackling. The research, which was conducted at the end of last year, showed that 90% of the 9,000 outlets surveyed did not pay the real living wage. It also highlighted the widespread practice of what is known colloquially as “shift shafting”, whereby staff are sent home at the start or in the middle of a shift if the outlet is not busy, without any pay or compensation. More than 80% of respondents to the survey admitted that they would do that. It means that people can end up out of pocket simply by going to work, through being made to wait around without pay and then being sent home without even having their travel costs reimbursed. I hear a lot about the Government wanting to get everyone into work who is able to work, but I hear no condemnation from them of the blatant exploitation of people who are trying to do the right thing, and find themselves out of pocket through the very act of going to work.

Let us make every job reward people with a wage that they can actually live on, but at the same time let us put in place a proper system of workplace protection so that a Government policy is not allowed to be undermined by unscrupulous employment practices that take away other benefits so that people end up no better off, and in some cases actually end up worse off. To achieve that, we need a fundamental change in the Government’s approach, starting with the recognition that trade unions and collective bargaining have a significant role to play in the future prosperity of our nation. We need a fundamental change not only in the Government’s attitude but in the attitude of many employers, with a move away from the bean-counting philosophy that views the worker as a disposable item ready to be replaced by a machine that does not question, expect to be paid or belong to a union. For many people, being in work means vulnerability and uncertainty about their future. How can we tolerate a situation in which people in work can routinely not know whether they will have earned enough to put food on their family’s table at the end of the day?

We should not be fooled into thinking that this policy is a panacea. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimated that even with the new minimum wage, people with children will be £700 a year worse off thanks to other changes introduced by the Government. The reality is that we are having this debate because the law and culture in this country place far too little emphasis on employment rights. Until this place resolves to do something about that, the kind of injustices that we have heard about today will continue.

6.31 pm

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): I join colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this important debate. I wish her all the very best for a speedy recovery. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for opening the debate in her absence.

One of the biggest challenges facing this Government has been the persistence of low-paid work. I welcome any and all measures to address that. I will focus on asking the Government to reconsider the decision to deny the national living wage to under-25s.

It is an absolute travesty that young people have been told that they are not worth £7.20 an hour. I ask the Government to think carefully about the message that sends to young people and their families. People between the ages of 21 and 24 are currently paid 50p less than the new living wage per hour, 18 to 21-year-olds are paid £1.90 less an hour, and those under the age of 18 are paid just £3.87 an hour, which is £3.33 less. It is frustrating enough for those under 25 to be missing out on the financial boost, but the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General outlined his reasons for that decision as follows:

“Anybody who has employed people knows that younger people, especially in their first jobs, are not as productive, on average...It was an active choice not to cover the under 25s.”

What a blow to the next generation.

To give some perspective, Queen Victoria inherited the throne at the age of 18, Steve Jobs was 21 when he co-founded Apple, Mark Zuckerberg was 19 when he created Facebook, Adele was just 21 when she produced her Brit and Grammy award-winning album of the same name, and Roger Federer had won eight grand slam singles titles before he turned 25. Tales of William Pitt the Younger, Prime Minister at just 24, have no doubt made all of us in the Chamber feel like underachievers, but although that is far from being the norm, there is nothing new about young politicians and, dare I say it, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) is doing a pretty outstanding job as the baby of the House at the age of 21. I accept that those embarking on a new role often require training and support from employers, and so perhaps initially represent a reduced return on the employer’s investment of wages, but that could be the case for any new employee, regardless of age.

I will give an example of how unjust the policy could be in practice. Let us imagine a young person who takes their A-levels at 18, and goes into training in the workplace or directly into employment. They could have been in their job for seven years before being entitled to the living wage, yet a new employee could start in the same role, sat at the next desk, and be paid the living wage—50p more an hour—with seven years’ less experience, simply because they are over 25.

Alternatively, a young person might study hard at school and decide to pursue an academic route by going to university. Research by Which? indicates that a typical student on a three-year course outside London might expect to graduate with around £35,000 to £40,000 of student loan debt. Most students on a three-year course graduate at the age of 21. The Office for National Statistics has identified that around 47% of graduates

[Holly Lynch]

are employed in non-graduate roles, a trend that has steadily increased since the 2009 recession. A young graduate who has done all the right things—worked hard and got a degree—and who is saddled with up to £40,000 of debt as a result has only a 53% chance of securing a graduate job, and is not even entitled to the new living wage. That also means that they will not start paying their student loans back to the Government, which surely does not make sense for anyone.

When I graduated from Lancaster University at 21, I started working for an SME in my constituency, predominantly working in sales both overseas and across the UK. As one of the few employees who was young, was not married and did not have children, I was regularly asked to travel at short notice and do the out-of-hours engagements, working evenings and weekends. That reflects the experience of young people across the country. Young people are often asked to work harder and longer hours because of their youth—to work the longer shifts, lift the heavier packages and work the antisocial hours—and often oblige, through a desire to prove themselves and to move up the ladder, but also because sometimes their circumstances mean that it is easier for their employers to ask them, as a young person, rather than older members of staff who might have commitments at home.

Matt, who works in my parliamentary office, is 23. He graduated from Oxford University at 21. He works, in all honesty, like a Trojan, as do my other staff, who are over 25. It would be completely unfair and unjust to pay Matt less than my other members of staff simply because of his age.

There is also a danger that the omission of under-25s from the living wage makes those over 25 more vulnerable in the workplace, as it has the unintended consequence of making those under 25 more attractive to companies that have to deliver a service at the lowest possible cost. I hope that when summing up the Minister will outline what safeguards the Government intend to introduce for the living wage. In an economy where a few pounds is the difference between winning and losing a contract, how do we ensure that firms will not seek exploitatively to employ only under-25s, doing a disservice both to them and to those who are over 25 and will miss out as a result?

With that in mind, I ask the Government to reflect on their offer to young people. Citizens Advice recently published a report stating that young people from varied socioeconomic backgrounds are starting their adult lives with a significant and sometimes crippling amount of personal debt. Further figures from the Office for National Statistics confirm that as a result of lower pay, under-25s are being sucked into debt. According to the latest figures, 16 to 24-year-olds have the highest level of debt compared with income. It is double the debt level for the population as a whole. Would it not make sense to give that group a helping hand, and extend the national living wage to under-25s?

In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden, the Prime Minister said:

“We want to see people taking home more money”.—[*Official Report*, 9 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 276.]

However, we are once again on the wrong side of the debate on equal pay for equal work. I ask the Government to rethink their decision to deny under-25s the national living wage.

6.38 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I too thank the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for her powerful introduction to the debate. I wish the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) a speedy recovery and return to this place.

Let us be absolutely clear: what the UK Government have put forward is not a living wage. It is an enhanced minimum wage. We have heard that before, but it is important to stress it. The real living wage is some £8.25 in Scotland just now, not £7.20. The living wage calculation is made, as it should be, according to the basic cost of living and what is adequate for households to maintain an acceptable living standard. A higher minimum wage for the over-25s will help some of the low-paid, but has other consequences.

In January, the Resolution Foundation made it clear that the national living wage is not a real living wage. My hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) and the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) have made very important points about the differential in pay for young workers. The point about the unique effects that the introduction of the new so-called living wage—actually a new minimum wage—will have on young workers was particularly powerful. A differential in pay for young workers is simply unacceptable. Fair pay should be fair pay for the job done; there should be no exceptions. The UK Government are discriminating against those under 25. They have also brought into question the future role of the Low Pay Commission, which has been devalued by this exercise.

Back in 2011-12, the Scottish Government introduced the real living wage as an integral part of public sector pay policy, and they contribute more than £1.5 million per year directly to wages. They continue to require all employers covered by public pay policy to pay the real living wage, and as we have heard, those employers became accredited in 2015. The Scottish Government are encouraging the real living wage, which 80% of employees are now paid. Earlier we heard that 500 Scots-based living-wage employers are up and running in Scotland, and the target has been set to make that 1,000 by autumn 2017.

**Richard Fuller:** The hon. Gentleman may have heard Labour Members say that they want to ensure that no employee is made worse off by the change to the national living wage. Do the Scottish Government have a policy to ensure that that is the case?

**Drew Hendry:** As I have said, the Scottish Government have introduced the real living wage. They have taken control so that proper safeguards are in place to ensure that people are treated fairly across the piece. The hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) said that as council leader she introduced the living wage for the council. That is laudable and something we have in common: as leader of the Highland Council, I was responsible for leading the charge to introduce the real living wage.



Crucially, we included apprentices of all ages on that real living wage, and there was no discrimination against the under-25s. Young people received the same fairness, and that extended to arm's length bodies, the Highland third sector interface, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Councils in Scotland are helped by the Scottish Government to provide for careworkers, and support with the real living wage is provided for care homes and to those who provide care in the community. The Government are committed to making further progress on that. In 2015-16, the Scottish Government put £12.5 million into a tripartite agreement worth £25 million to improve the quality of care, create a fair workplace, and make progress on the real living wage. The First Minister of Scotland has said that from October 2016, thanks to Scottish Government decisions, the real living wage will be paid to social care workers across Scotland.

We have heard a lot about business from Conservative Members—the one thing that I and the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) agree on is his description of the UK Government's living wage proposal as a minimum wage. He spoke about how business struggles with the living wage, but earlier I mentioned those Scots-based businesses that are now accredited living wage employers, and the target to go further. The independent Fair Work Commission framework was set up this year to

“deliver fair work by providing an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect.”

From experience, I know that implementing the real living wage for business pays dividends. It pays dividends in productivity, because people enjoy doing more for companies that respect them. There is better retention of staff—people are not looking around for the next job to help them scrape through the day because they are getting paid fairly. Companies are able to plan better. Team morale is fostered, and people are able to work better collegially to achieve results for business. Companies can focus not just on survival or how they recruit and replace staff, but on growth. A real living wage paid by companies provides them with good results.

In conclusion, the list of living wage employers includes the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Parliament, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the major political parties; the Scottish National party, of course, pay the real living wage in Scotland. However, there are a couple of notable omissions: the UK Government and the Conservative party. Something must be done to ensure fair pay across the piece. Those under 25 should not be excluded, and a real living wage should be put in place to ensure that people have a decent chance of an adequate standard of living.

6.45 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for her work in preparation for the debate, and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for the way in which she opened it.

I want to focus on the impact that the Government's so-called national living wage is having, and could have, on the care sector, following the theme raised by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). The care sector is under increasing financial pressure, and many organisations

have warned that the Government's failure to provide additional funding for the national living wage could result in a number of care providers becoming financially unviable. It will also have an impact on the pay and working conditions of care staff.

The Local Government Association has estimated that introducing the Government's national living wage will cost home care and residential care providers at least £330 million this year. A number of Members have mentioned the social care precept. In my local area of Salford, the precept can raise only £1.6 million, but the cost of the national living wage increase to the care sector is £2.7 million. It has clearly been left to taxpayers to pay for, with a mechanism that is not even sufficient.

Care England says that the Government's national living wage announcement

“places additional, unfunded pressures on the care sector that it cannot cope with. Care providers have already had to fund the National Minimum Wage increase of October 2015, plus standard Cost of Living increase in contracts from local authorities, and increases in Care Quality Commission regulatory fees... The aggregate impact of all of these increases is substantial: providers estimate that this will cost them a 5% rise in the wage bill in the first year, and 7% each year thereafter.”

I have already been told that, like other businesses, some care providers have altered their employment contracts and conditions as a way of coping with those changes, meaning that additional costs from the national living wage are being paid for by careworkers themselves. As we have heard, many careworkers are already underpaid. The National Audit Office has reported that up to 22,000 home care workers in England are illegally paid below the national minimum wage, and I believe the actual figure is much higher.

In HMRC investigations of care providers between 2011 and 2015, more than four out of 10 were found not to be complying with the national minimum wage. The Resolution Foundation has calculated that careworkers are collectively cheated of £130 million a year due to pay levels below the minimum wage. That is done through a variety of mechanisms, such as careworkers not being paid adequately for travel time, despite statutory guidance. As one careworker has said:

“In order to earn a full time wage, the carers in our company usually start work at 7 am and work until 9 pm five/six days a week, with gaps throughout the day where we wait in the car until due at the next client.”

Some careworkers are paid as little as £3.50 per hour when lack of pay for travel and waiting time is considered.

**Mr George Howarth:** In response to a point that I raised earlier, the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) said that he thought the biggest cause of more people going to food banks would be if people lost their jobs. As I know he is aware, the facts show that the majority of people who use food banks are those in low-paid and insecure employment.

**Barbara Keeley:** Very much so. We are talking about people who are paid £3.50 an hour, and their hours are being cut. Careworkers on zero-hours contracts complain about not getting the hours they want and are finding it hard to make ends meet, so my right hon. Friend is quite right. In a recent Channel 4 “Dispatches” programme, an undercover reporter employed as a careworker confirmed

[Barbara Keeley]

the point about staff being paid way under the minimum wage. He was being paid just £3.89 an hour, working in a London borough.

Rather than improving pay, the introduction of what the Government call the national living wage is having an adverse effect on the working conditions of some careworkers. I have heard reports of one domiciliary care provider in the north-west raising the wages of care staff to £7.75—fair enough—but balancing the increase by introducing other changes that have a negative impact on employees. Sick pay, which was previously two weeks on full pay and two weeks on half pay, has ended. The hours during which careworkers must be available for work now run from 7 am to 11 pm. Mileage claims no longer include the first 10 miles of each day's journeys—and staff are already paid only 20p a mile, which is well below HMRC's recommended rate of 45p a mile. Workers at that care provider believe they are effectively paying for their own pay rise.

I have heard of a care provider in the east midlands cutting staff allowances and charging more for services in order to implement the national living wage. I am sure we will see much more of that up and down the country. As a result of the mileage allowance being cut by 15p to 20p a mile and the first and last seven miles of travel each day being excluded, 35% of the workforce at that care provider will lose out. Some workers have reported that they will lose up to £1,000 a year. That is shameful. It is just like the B&Q workers my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North talked about.

The introduction of what the Government call the national living wage was supposed to improve employees' living standards, but it appears that some careworkers are receiving little or no benefit from the changes and that some might even be worse off. If careworkers continue to suffer because of unpaid travel time, care visits that are too short and unfair working conditions, it will have a detrimental effect on their work and the wellbeing of the people they care for. In fact, the Social Care Institute for Excellence has warned that stress and low morale resulting from how care staff are treated can have a direct impact on care service quality.

I believe that care work is a demanding job and requires skilled workers who are compassionate and have the time to provide good-quality care. It is completely unacceptable that a job that has historically been undervalued is being so exploited today and that careworkers are not being paid the basic wage for the job they do. Given the examples I have quoted, will the Minister tell us what the Government will do to ensure that careworkers are not worse off as a result of the national living wage?

6.52 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing this debate and the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for speaking very well in her place.

The Chancellor announced the national living wage with great triumphalism, but as with so many aspects of Government policy, it was quickly exposed as nothing more than smoke and mirrors. As we heard earlier, it is

not a living wage but a rebadging of the minimum wage. The real living wage is independently determined by the Living Wage Foundation and currently set at £8.25 an hour. If a person cannot live off it, it is not a living wage. The Government and the Minister should apologise to the Living Wage Foundation, to the many trade unions and employers that have legitimately taken up the real living wage and to the many campaigners who have fought for it over the years. It is a gross insult to those campaigners to appropriate their term, and it is bound to lead to misleading job adverts. It is not a real living wage if it is not an actual living wage for everybody.

It is also not a living wage if someone happens to be under 25. The Chancellor said:

“Britain deserves a pay rise and Britain is getting a pay rise.”—[*Official Report*, 8 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 337.]

Interestingly, under-25s are clearly not “Britain”, because they are not entitled to the higher rate of the minimum wage. Their fair day's work is not receiving a fair day's pay. Since the minimum wage's inception, it has contained an in-built aspect of age discrimination. It has been Scottish National party policy for some years to equalise the minimum wage—I was convener of the youth wing when my colleagues raised it in the party. I am proud to raise that point today, along with the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). I have heard it said that younger workers lack experience, but the minimum wage is not based on experience; it is based on age. A person can start on a minimum wage job at 16 and work in it for nine years before they are legally entitled to this new pretend living wage, which a 25-year-old would get on their first day at work. They could walk in the door and get the higher living wage.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Halifax, this new minimum wage has also exacerbated the differential in the wages paid to younger workers in this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) said, the most pronounced effect has been on apprentices. There are 54,000 apprentices in the UK who are not entitled to this living wage. They might have families and various other needs to meet, and they deserve fair pay as well. They cannot be expected to live off nothing. Discrimination of that sort is opposed in all other parts of society. This long-standing, state-endorsed age discrimination must end, and I call on the Government to take action. If they will not, I would like them to devolve employment law to the Scottish Government, who are making tremendous progress in promoting the uptake of the real living wage in Scotland.

The need to equalise the minimum wage has increased significance for younger workers on zero-hours contracts. I had a constituent in my surgery a few weeks ago who worked in a bar in Glasgow city centre. One day, she received a phone call from her employer saying that there was no need for her to come into work that evening because her services were no longer required. After getting over the shock of her sudden dismissal, she researched her options. Citizens Advice and ACAS both said she had no rights in her circumstances as a zero-hours worker. She suspects but cannot prove that she was let go because she was over 25 whereas her colleagues were under 25. I have heard the same thing anecdotally from friends who are over 25 and have seen their hours cut. They are now finding it difficult to make ends meet and to find another job in their sector.

**Richard Fuller:** The hon. Lady is making some very good points, including about the potential for discrimination at the age of 25. Would she be interested to hear from the Minister, as I would, what steps the Government might take to ensure that that does not happen?

**Alison Thewliss:** I would be interested, but I would be more interested to hear what we can do to equalise the wage so that unscrupulous employers are not tempted to discriminate in the first place. The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training, Roseanna Cunningham, posted on her Twitter feed a photograph of a sign in a shop window advertising for a waitress but saying that applicants had to be under 24. That is illegal, but it is encouraged by the differential in the living wage. Particular attention needs to be paid to under-25s on zero-hours contracts, who are doubly discriminated against.

I wrote to the Minister asking who was enforcing the minimum wage. I had received figures in a parliamentary answer suggesting that a great number of people were not earning the wages to which they were entitled. There are 1,718,000 over-21s earning less than £6.50 an hour, 78,000 under-18s earning less than £3.87 an hour and, as I mentioned earlier, 54,000 apprentices earning less than £3.30 an hour. Despite those figures, which show that hundreds of thousands of people are not earning the wages to which they are entitled, according to the Minister's letter there have been only nine successful prosecutions of employers since 2007. That is because the people affected are in a position of weakness, as they might lose their job if they complain. We have to do an awful lot more. His letter mentioned that the Government were taking on more staff and investigating more, but only nine prosecutions is absolutely woeful given the scale of the problem.

There is another way of dealing with this. The Scottish Government have worked with employers—it is not necessarily about imposing a real living wage on employers, because as the Scottish Government acknowledge, that might be difficult for small employers—and as a result 56,000 employees now earn the real £8.25 an hour living wage. In my constituency, they include employees of large organisations such as Barclays and SSE; small organisations such as An Clachan café, the Good Spirits Co and Locavore; organisations that provide services, such as Southside Housing Association and Glasgow Association for Mental Health; Glasgow Caledonian University; and supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl. If they are all able to do it, there is no reason why other employers cannot work towards it as well.

The Scottish Government, through their Scottish business pledge, have moved dramatically towards getting more people on to the real living wage, and it has been a hugely successful scheme. They first ask employers to pledge to pay the real living wage, and employers then have to meet two of eight further elements of the pledge, which can include ending exploitative zero-hours contracts and investing in young workers. They must also work towards achieving all nine elements. It has been a very successful scheme, so I suggest that the UK Government take a leaf out of the Scottish Government's book.

7 pm

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member

for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing this debate and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for standing in for her and opening the debate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden makes a speedy recovery.

I shall focus my remarks on a specific group of workers—seafarers. These are the only group of workers who are excluded from the full protection of the national minimum wage legislation and equal pay legislation. Ships working in UK waters between UK ports and between UK and continental ports are crewed by staff on pay rates that are well below the national minimum wage. Increasingly, companies are recruiting outside the UK to crew their ships with non-UK seafarers, particularly ratings, in order to profit from sub-national minimum wage pay rates.

Allied to the rise of the flag of convenience vessels, these exploitative pay and employment practices are driving a decline in the number of UK seafarers. In the early 1980s, there were 28,000 officers and 30,000 ratings in the UK merchant navy, but by June last year, the total number of UK seafarers had dropped to 23,380—a fall of nearly 60%. The position for UK ratings, particularly deck and engine, has become exceptionally precarious, with 8,830 working at sea last year—a fall of over 25% since 2011 and over 70% in the last 30 years. Pay exploitation in the UK shipping sector is happening because non-EU seafarers are excluded from the full protection against nationality-based pay discrimination in the Equality Act 2010.

Following years of campaigning by maritime unions, the last Labour Government commissioned an independent assessment of the impact of nationality-based pay differentials in the shipping industry, which was known as the Carter review. It concluded at the end of the parliamentary term in May 2010 that there would be no adverse impact on the shipping industry or jobs and recommended the outlawing of all nationality-based seafarer pay differentials.

The last coalition Government, however, rejected the Carter recommendation, but the Government were forced, under threat of infraction by the European Union, to protect European Economic Area seafarers from nationality-based pay discrimination. In recent months, maritime trade unions have contributed, with the Government and industry, to a working group on the effect of the existing protections in the Equality Act 2010, and it will report in the summer.

At present, passengers and businesses are travelling on vessels crewed by seafarers who are earning as little as £2.40 an hour. This legalised exploitation has systematically undermined maritime jobs in the UK, damaging the skills base and driving up unemployment rates in seafarer communities across the UK.

The RMT trade union estimates that prior to the introduction of the increase in the national minimum wage, over 8,300 seafarer ratings working on UK-flagged or other vessels qualifying for the tonnage tax are likely to be earning hourly rates of pay below the national minimum wage. It stands to reason, therefore, that the introduction of a higher statutory minimum wage will put more seafarers below that threshold and more employers in breach of the national minimum wage legislation.

[Jo Stevens]

In its March 2016 report to the Government, the Low Pay Commission recommended that a stronger third-party complaints system be introduced for employers breaching the national minimum wage. That would be through the creation of a public protocol to govern HMRC's investigation of third-party complaints. This would provide feedback to the complainant and could be a useful source of additional evidence on the rates of pay and contractual terms and conditions of employment for seafarers. The Low Pay Commission said:

"We recommend that the Government establishes a formal public protocol for HMRC to handle third party whistleblowing on breaches of the NMW, which should include arrangements for giving all possible feedback to relevant third parties and appropriate continuing involvement in any resulting casework."

I urge Ministers to accept that recommendation. A strengthened third-party complaints procedure represents the most effective way to tackle pay rates in the shipping industry that fall below the national minimum wage because of the understandable reluctance of the affected seafarers to complain directly to the UK Government.

7.5 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for bringing this debate to the House and for the sterling work she has done to highlight this important issue. I am sorry that she cannot be here today, and I wish her a speedy recovery. I thank, too, my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for her eloquent introduction to the debate.

I have mixed feelings about the Government's new living wage. Of course an increase in low-paid workers' wages is to be welcomed, but what we have here is, in effect, a new national minimum wage. The real living wage, as other Members have mentioned, is set by the Living Wage Foundation and calculated by the centre for research in social policy at Loughborough University. The research looks in detail at what households need in order to have a minimum acceptable standard of living. The Government's national living wage is not connected to those calculations. The Government rate is based on median earnings while the Living Wage Foundation rate is calculated according to the cost of living—and, at £8.25 an hour outside London and £9.40 inside London, it is considerably higher than the Government version of the living wage.

I have a particular interest in the real living wage. TUC figures published last year showed that my constituency of Heywood and Middleton was the second worst in the north-west for payment of the real living wage, with 40% of workers earning less than that. It would therefore be churlish of me not to welcome the Government's version of the living wage as a step in the right direction. I wish it were called something different and I wish it were more, but for my constituents and for low-paid workers up and down the country, I welcome what should be a pay rise for around 1.9 million employees.

That is why I am so appalled by the methods used by one of our national retailers, B&Q, to try to wriggle out of paying its workers any more money as a consequence of the introduction of the Government's new living wage. I almost have to grudgingly admire its ingenuity in the various ways it has employed in attempting to cut

other areas of pay in order to save itself from having to pay its workers any more money. B&Q is a well-respected national retailer and it is regrettable to see the company behaving in this manner.

Here I feel I should declare an interest in that my partner is such an avid DIY-er that he contributes substantially to B&Q's profits, but he, too, was shocked to hear that the staff who serve him so well and so frequently are being treated so shabbily. Thanks to the tireless campaigning of my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden, B&Q has now announced a two-year protection period, for which I am grateful. Surely, however, for a major retailer whose parent company, Kingfisher, declared profits of £512 million last year, implementing the new living wage without attempting to offset the costs by cutting other elements of pay would have been the right thing to do and the actions of a good employer.

Yesterday, it was my pleasure to visit the beautiful village of Port Sunlight in the Wirral South constituency. Port Sunlight is a "model village" of architect-designed houses, originally built to house the workers in Lord Lever's Sunlight soap factory. Lord Lever, a businessman and philanthropist, put into action his belief that good housing ensures a happy and healthy workforce. He also implemented a workplace pension scheme, thus ensuring that his workers could enjoy a comfortable retirement. I cannot help comparing and contrasting the altruism of Lord Lever in the 19th century and early 20th century with the antisocial attitude of some modern businesses, which appear to think only of profit and the shareholder and not of that vital asset, their employees.

However, not all businesses are villains. It was my pleasure recently to attend an event in Parliament, organised by the Living Wage Foundation, which showcased the work of small businesses that had signed up to be accredited living wage employers. Those employers told me that they had a much higher rate of staff satisfaction as a result of becoming living wage employers, and—importantly—that it had improved their status and standing as employers in the community. One of them said to me, "If you can't afford to pay the living wage, then, quite simply, you shouldn't be in business." That is a philosophy from which some of our larger employers could learn.

The Government's tag line for the national living wage is "a step up for Britain", but some companies are trying to take a step back from their commitments to workers' rights. Where companies are trying to find a loophole to take remuneration from their employees, I ask all Members on both sides of the House to work together to stop that happening, and to protect low-paid workers. I hope that one outcome of the debate will be the ability of workers who fear that they cannot speak out against the imposition of new contracts for fear of losing their jobs to contact their local Members of Parliament and ask them to stand up and speak out in their support, so that not one constituent loses out as a result of the new so-called living wage. That, surely, was never the intention.

7.11 pm

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), not just for her efforts to secure today's debate but for the work that she has

done in recent months, fairly consistently, on this issue. I am sorry to hear that she is not very well, and I wish her a swift recovery and return to the House. However, the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) stepped up to lead the debate with aplomb.

I think that Members throughout the House should be disturbed about the fact that some companies are seeking to undermine the legislative provisions of the minimum wage increase by cutting other employee benefits, such as additional premiums for Sunday working, antisocial hours or working on bank holidays. I am glad that some of those firms have been named and shamed this afternoon, because there is no excuse for poverty pay, and trying to offset business costs on the backs of the very lowest paid workers is unacceptable. However, reputational damage has been shown in the past to have a fairly limited impact on such firms. I hope the Government will take the opportunity to set out the action that they intend to take to ensure that employers meet their obligations and do not erode the terms and conditions of those on the lowest pay and in the most insecure jobs. I ask them to look at the variation-of-contract procedures to see what can be done to ensure that companies do not try to get round what is, I believe, a well intentioned increase in the pay of those on the lowest wages.

Many people over 25 who are working hard in minimum wage jobs will have been pleased to learn that they would receive at least a modest pay increase, but that will have turned rather sour for those who have learned that they will be losing out. A number of Members have highlighted cases from their constituencies, many of them in the retail sector, but others in the social care sector and the hospitality industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), and the hon. Members for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), made the key point that people under 25 were in a particularly vulnerable position when they reached that magic age, and suddenly became less attractive to their current employers because they would have to be paid more. It strikes me as an arbitrary age, because it does not seem to be based on anything more tangible than when people's birthdays are. At 25, young adults are probably at the peak of their labour abilities and cognitive functions. Surely that should be recognised, and they should receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work like every other employee.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the setting of a floor on wages has had enormous benefits for those working in low-paid sectors of the economy, the vast majority of whom are women. When we think back to the introduction of the minimum wage some years ago—and, indeed, to every occasion on which minimum pay has been introduced—we recall that a wide range of corporate interests lined up to warn that it would lead to higher unemployment, firms going out of business, and the economy going to hell in a handcart. The reality, however, has been quite the opposite. When people on low wages have had money in their pockets, they have tended to spend it, usually in their own communities, thus boosting their local economies. Not so much of it has ended up stashed in offshore bank accounts.

**Richard Fuller:** A number of other Members have referred to what has happened when the national minimum wage has been increased in the past, but does the hon.

Lady accept that this is a different approach? In the past, increases in the minimum wage resulted from discussions and decisions on the part of the Low Pay Commission, in conjunction with business, whereas the introduction of the national living wage constitutes a Government-imposed increase.

**Dr Whiteford:** I certainly acknowledge that the approach is different, but I think that we should all appreciate the work done by the Low Pay Commission in assessing the levels of pay increase that our economy can sustain without pushing up unemployment, and the possibility of gaining that optimal balance between the two. However, I fear that the commission's role has been rather undermined by this process, although a significant pay increase is long overdue. I think that we need to recognise the benefits that the minimum wage has brought, and the need to bring wages into closer alignment with the real cost of living in the longer term.

I echo the point that was made so forcefully by my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), who welcomed the increase in the minimum wage for those over 25, but said that rebranding it as a national living wage did not make it an actual living wage. The so-called national living wage is significantly lower than the real living wage, which is calculated by the Living Wage Foundation on the basis of the cost of living. A national living wage of £7.20 an hour is well below the real living wage, which is £8.25 an hour, and more in London. That is what it actually costs to have an acceptable minimal standard of living in this day and age.

That issue becomes much more acute in the context of the shift away from tax credit towards the new universal credit, which was touched on earlier in the debate. For many low-paid workers, especially parents, the increases in the minimum wage and the personal allowance will not offset the reduction in income that will result from universal credit. Moreover, the real living wage has been calculated on the assumption that families will be receiving their full entitlement of tax credit. The cuts in tax credit, work allowances, housing benefit, and other benefits that help to make work pay for low-income families will not be replaced by the increase in the hourly rate of minimum pay, and thousands of families will be worse off overall. The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who is not in the Chamber at present, gave the example of a constituent who had found himself in exactly that position.

It is estimated that the total wage gain for low-paid workers resulting from the increase in the minimum wage will reach about £4 billion by 2020, whereas the estimated reduction in tax credit and other allowances over the same period is three times that amount. The notion that this will have a significant positive effect on the living standards of low-income households is misplaced. The fact that businesses will now be paying more of the real costs of labour will not be much help or consolation to the low-paid workers whose incomes will fall.

We have heard today that some low-income working families will indeed be badly hit. The TUC calculates that those who are set to lose out financially include families consisting of three children and two parents working on the minimum wage, one full time and the other part time. According to the Equality Trust, a single parent with two children, already working full

[*Dr Eilidh Whiteford*]

time, would also lose out, and would have to find an extra 16 hours of work a month just to plug the gap. Meanwhile, the tax changes that were announced in the Budget mean that the wealthiest 15% of earners will be hundreds of pounds better off every year.

One issue on which I have pressed the Government in the past, and on which I have been given a less than satisfactory answer, is the question of whether the increase in the minimum wage should trigger a commensurate increase in the carer's allowance earning limit. That is not uprated through the benefits uprating order, although I fail to see why it should not be. Instead, it is raised on an ad hoc basis. For those carers who are able to work, it is often important to keep in contact with the labour market, and for those in low-paid jobs, the increase to the minimum wage could have significant implications. Some might consider reducing their working hours, but that could cause problems for their employer and also create problems with their entitlement to tax credits. The net result would be a reduction in carers' incomes, which are already very low. I would be grateful if the Minister could address that point today, look at it more seriously and work out how he might ensure that carers' incomes are not inadvertently squeezed by these increases.

I hope we all recognise the value of reducing wage inequality and ensuring that everyone gets a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. We can make a start in the public sector. As my hon. Friends the Members for Lanark and Hamilton East and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) pointed out, back in 2011 the Scottish Government introduced the requirement to pay the living wage as an integral part of public sector pay policy, and in 2015 they became an accredited living wage employer. That means that all employees on Scottish Government-controlled payrolls receive the real living wage, which is already well above the new minimum wage being talked about today.

The Scottish Government have also established an independent fair work convention and introduced the Scottish business pledge, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central explained. Becoming a living wage employer is only one part of the process, however, and there are already ambitious plans for expanding those commitments. The Scottish Government are also working closely with local authorities and private sector care providers to fund improvements in pay in the social care sector. This has been mentioned frequently in the debate today, and it is pertinent to my own constituency, where a care home has closed as a result of staff recruitment and retention problems. Social care sector wages have traditionally been very low, and recruitment has been difficult because of the nature of the work, yet care assistants do an enormously responsible job. They look after people who can no longer fully attend to their own needs, often going into people's homes. If we are moving towards fairer pay, this is a great place to start, and it will benefit not only the employees but the whole community as well as delivering better and more consistent care.

It is in everyone's interest to move to a higher wage economy. It is quite right that the minimum wage has been raised to bring it closer to the cost of living, but this Government need to make it enforceable and to enforce it, as well as taking action to stop companies

sidestepping their obligations. They could lead by example by seeking to become a living wage employer and ensuring that all Government employees earn the living wage. They could also do much more to encourage private sector firms to become living wage employers.

7.22 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), who has been more than a super-sub for my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) today. We all wish my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden a speedy recovery. My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North gave the House some good examples of people who could lose out despite the fact that the so-called national living wage was intended to increase pay for those on low incomes. We have heard a lot of very good contributions.

We heard a contribution from the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who appears to have read, in his book on microeconomics, of the impact of increasing wages, but not to have got on to the volume on the impact of labour as a derived demand and the impact of higher wages on aggregate demand in the economy. As we discovered when we introduced the national minimum wage, increasing pay for the less well-off can result in a more prosperous economy because of their higher propensity to consume.

**Philip Davies:** I just want to know on what basis the hon. Gentleman feels more qualified than the Office for Budget Responsibility, which made it very clear that 4 million hours and 60,000 jobs would be lost.

**Kevin Brennan:** I will come to my concerns about the way in which this policy is being introduced in due course. There is plenty of evidence from the introduction of the national minimum wage that if it is done correctly, increasing pay for the lowest paid workers can result in an increase in aggregate demand, and in greater productivity and prosperity for the economy.

We have heard contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), and for Burnley (Julie Cooper). We have also heard from the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), whose reference to Adele and the importance of paying younger people sounded convincing to someone like me.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), who talked about his experience as a council leader. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), and from the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), made a pertinent point about seafarers. It is important to remember that seafarers are exempt from this legislation, and we need to bring in new protections for them. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) told us about her partner spending a lot of time at B&Q. If her household is anything like mine, that is no doubt a

result of his being told that he has to go to B&Q and do certain DIY jobs. This happened to me so much in years gone by that we used to call it “Be in the Queue” because I was down there so much. We also heard from the Scottish National party Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford).

Today’s debate has been rather peculiar. On this side of the House, there has been general support for the idea of the so-called national living wage that the Chancellor announced in his Budget, but there has also been criticism of its implementation and its potential to make some people worse off. That is the purpose of today’s debate. However, the only contribution from a Back-Bench Conservative Member seemed to be against the Government’s policy altogether, so it has been a peculiar debate in that respect.

As has been highlighted, the national minimum wage was introduced by the Labour Government in 1998. It was opposed tooth and nail by the Conservatives, but the Minister for Skills has previously and rather generously acknowledged that they were wrong to do so, just as they were wrong to oppose other progressive achievements of Labour Governments, such as the NHS. He has acknowledged that fact on the record in my presence in this House, and I am grateful for his generosity in doing so.

I referred to the “so-called national living wage” because, as has been pointed out many times today, it really is not a new concept. It is a symptom of the Chancellor’s inability to do anything that might be worth while without trying to extract the maximum political advantage from it. This was highlighted when the former Work and Pensions Secretary resigned, saying that the Chancellor was always seeking to do something that was

“distinctly political rather than in the national economic interest”.

The Chancellor could have said, “I want to increase the national minimum wage for the over-25s”, which is in effect what this policy does. Instead, he chose to pinch the name “living wage” from those who have worked on devising and calculating it, who have brought together the evidence based on need to formulate the concept of a living wage, and who have campaigned for it right across the country with great success. He nicked that name for his policy, which, it has been pointed out, will not introduce a true living wage based on the concept of the evidence of need as developed by the Living Wage Foundation.

Similarly, the Chancellor could have done the thorough preparation that a policy such as this requires. He could have put the policy through a proper stress test, as was done by Ian McCartney and others when the national minimum wage was first introduced. However, that would have spoilt his piece of political theatre in the Budget, and the Great Osborn would not have been able to pull a rabbit out of his hat to the delight of all his misdirected audience on the Conservative Benches. The problem of some workers potentially being worse off could have been avoided if we had a Chancellor who was more interested in the substance of making policy work than in the smoke and mirrors of political presentation.

It is illegal for employers to pay less than the national minimum wage, yet figures provided by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills show that the numbers

of employers being fined for doing so have actually increased in recent years. We would like to know what measures will be put in place to ensure that we do not have a repeat of this deliberate lawbreaking and undermining when the so-called national living wage is more established. Will these companies be named and shamed? Will there be financial penalties?

**Stephen Doughty:** Is my hon. Friend aware of the case of MiHomecare, a subsidiary of Mitie in the care sector? It has had to make a significant number of payments to workers in Wales and has been involved in out-of-court settlements for non-payment of the minimum wage, yet it was the Conservatives who gave Mitie’s chief executive, now Baroness McGregor-Smith, a peerage.

**Kevin Brennan:** I am aware of that case. My hon. Friend, who is my other parliamentary neighbour, accurately reflects the problems in the care sector that came up in the debate, and describes the connections to some of the companies that need to be looked into more carefully.

The action being taken by some employers may not be illegal, but it undermines the spirit of the law, which is to provide an increase in wages and living standards for British workers. Some of those taking this curmudgeonly path are in the sectors that might benefit most from workers having extra purchasing power in their pocket, such as tourism, retail and hospitality. As we have heard, the Low Pay Commission warned that some employers could label employees as apprentices to avoid having to pay the so-called national living wage.

We have heard examples involving various supermarket chains, retailers, restaurants and so on. In the interests of time, I will not name them or repeat what was said in the debate, but in a week when we have seen one loss-making chief executive officer try to secure a pay package of £14 million a year, it is obscene that an ultimate pay rate of £9 by 2020 is being undermined by the heads of some of these big businesses. Corporation tax has been reduced in recognition of the introduction of the so-called national living wage, leading to savings for businesses. Was that intended to compensate businesses for the phased introduction of the so-called national living wage? If so, does the Minister condemn the businesses using some of these practices?

Private sector businesses may have other opportunities to recoup increased costs by raising prices for goods and services, or by altering how labour, capital and profits are apportioned and rewarded. However, those options are not available to local government, as was pointed out, and the gap there is huge. Will the Minister agree to review the local government cuts in view of the impact of the national living wage?

Many hon. Members referred to young people, who have been deliberately excluded from the so-called national living wage. *The Guardian* recently highlighted the case of a worker at a well-known DIY store—I will put it no more strongly than that—who was on £7.20 before the introduction of the so-called national living wage and £6.70 after its introduction. He said:

“I’m getting less for doing the same job... I feel so worthless.”

What is the Minister’s reaction to that? What assessment has he made of the impact of the so-called national living wage on workers under 25? As was asked in the debate, what is the purpose of widening the differential between the under-25s and those who are older? Is it to

[Kevin Brennan]

increase demand for the under-25s, or does it reflect that the Minister somehow believes that the under-25s are worth less in productivity terms than those over 25?

The so-called national living wage could be celebrated on all sides of the House if it was introduced properly and if the letter and spirit of the law were upheld. If not, many workers could, as we have heard, be considerably worse off. The Opposition will be watching closely to ensure that that does not occur. The Government, with all their resources and power, should be introducing the change with real vigour. Will the Minister act to ensure that, as the motion demands, no workers are worse off as a result of Government policy? I invite him to tell the House how he will do that.

7.34 pm

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** This has been an excellent debate. My, how we have missed the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). We are all agreed on that. If she is listening, I hope that she is enjoying the hospital grapes. We look forward to her rejoining us and adding great wisdom to our deliberations. However, she was well represented by the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), who brought equal passion to her argument for working people in her constituency and across the land, who, as we all agree, deserve a pay rise.

I was struck by the fact that most Opposition Members failed to recognise the significance of the achievement. Call it a national minimum wage or a national living wage—I do not really care—but please recognise that it is a significant increase in the legal minimum hourly rate for workers across the country. I would have hoped that there might be a little more recognition of that, although I acknowledge that the right hon. Member for Enfield North and the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) were gracious enough to call it a step in the right direction. Indeed, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) did the same from the Front Bench, even if there was a little sting in the tail, as there always is with him.

However, none of the Opposition contributors recognised why the Government are able to do this now, namely because of the steps that we have taken to ensure that the economy is strong. If the economy was weak, unemployment was rising and business failures were increasing, such an intervention would have been profoundly damaging to the British economy and to the interests of the working people whose pay we would like see increase. There would have been millions of job losses and a far greater loss of income than gain. The reason why we have been able to do this now is because of the difficult steps—every one opposed by the Opposition—that we have taken to secure a strong economy and to create the platform from which we were able to make this intervention.

**Barbara Keeley:** As the Minister is talking about the strength of the economy, will he comment on my points about the care sector, which is not strong? It is being hit with a bill of £330 million, but the Chancellor has refused even to bring forward funding from later years, as requested by the LGA, to meet the bill. In the meantime, we have people earning £3.50 or £3.89 an hour. That is the tragedy.

**Nick Boles:** I do not accept the hon. Lady's analysis. A total of £3.5 billion of extra revenue is being provided through the social care precept and the Better Care Fund, which is more than adequate to cover the cost of the living wage.

**Barbara Keeley:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nick Boles:** I will not give way again.

We agree that we want everyone to benefit from the pay rise that that national living wage represents. I want to be clear about how we will ensure, as a Government and as Members of Parliament, that that is the case. The first and most important thing is to ensure that all employers fulfil, in full and in every case, their legal obligation to pay the national minimum wage at whatever level it is set for those under 25 and the new national living wage for those over 25.

I can report to the House that we are enforcing the national minimum wage more robustly than any previous Government and will be enforcing it more robustly every year. In 2015-16, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs identified more than £10 million of arrears for more than 58,000 workers across the economy—three times the arrears identified in 2014-15 and for twice as many workers. I am delighted to be able to share with hon. Members that we will increase the HMRC enforcement budget to £20 million in 2016-17, which is up from £13 million in 2015-16 and from only £8 million in the last year of the Labour Government. Spending on enforcement of the national minimum wage and the national living wage next year will be more than double what it was in the last year of the Labour Government.

**Stephen Doughty:** Even if the situation were as rosy as the Minister paints it, which it is not, there are the underhand tactics of companies in cutting benefits aside from pay to offset the increase or even make workers worse off, which have been pointed out repeatedly in the debate. Will he respond to that? Does he consider those tactics underhand?

**Nick Boles:** If the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment, I will move on to discuss the enforcement of what I consider to be moral obligations that fall upon all employers capable of meeting them. First, let me remind him about the previous Labour Government, whom I am sure he supported. He was not in that Government—he was not yet in the House, and nor was I—but they spent only £8 million on enforcing the national minimum wage in 2009-10. At a time when they seemed able to spend unlimited amounts of money on almost everything else, they thought it rated only £8 million. We are going to spend £20 million next year, which is why the amount of arrears secured and the number of workers being helped is significantly greater now than it ever was before.

Furthermore, we have introduced the scheme of naming and shaming companies that do not pay the national minimum wage or the national living wage and do not have a good reason for explaining why. That has been an extremely effective approach. Hon. Members should see some of the letters I receive from employers trying to persuade me to exclude them from a naming and shaming round; they take it very seriously indeed, as they do not want their customers and suppliers, and



indeed their neighbours, to know that they have broken the law. I do, however, agree with the hon. Gentleman that legal obligations are not enough—not for us as individuals and not for employers either. I welcomed the contribution of the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), who talked about her experience in employing 10 people and insisting on paying them a proper living wage because that was good for them, for her as an employer and for the business. Without being too pompous about it, let me say that that is the kind of moral responsibility we would hope and expect every employer to seek to fulfil.

I recognise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) that some small employers will find the national living wage very difficult. I do not criticise them for an instant if they are not able immediately to ensure that every aspect of an employee's conditions is preserved in full, because I am sure we would all agree that if the alternative is to fire some people, we would prefer to have more people being paid the legal national living wage than to have people losing their jobs. However, I am clear that for larger employers there is simply no excuse for trying to evade the effect of the national living wage by cutting other benefits and premiums.

**Richard Fuller:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nick Boles:** I will in a moment. First, I want to remind the House of the other measures the Government have put in place to benefit businesses, which are of substantial financial value to them.

We are cutting corporation tax from 20% to 17% in 2020, and the Chancellor announced an additional percentage point specifically to make up for the impact of the national living wage. Together, all our cuts in corporation tax since 2010 will be worth £15 billion a year to businesses. We have also introduced the employer allowance, which is now being extended from £2,000 a year to £3,000 a year. As many hon. Members mentioned, we have also expanded small business rate relief, and 600,000 small businesses will be paying no rates at all from 2017. We have taken a number of steps to ensure that businesses large and small can point to other savings that have come from the Government which they can use to fund in full the increase of the minimum wage, through the national living wage, without eroding other aspects of compensation.

Although I hope hon. Members will understand why I am not going to start naming names at the Dispatch Box, they will have observed that the work of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden and of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise has been peculiarly effective. My right hon. Friend met one of companies that was much discussed and it has already shifted its position, and I know that other companies will do the same if the spotlight falls on them.

I wish to conclude by making this proposal to hon. Members in all parts of the House: please bring to me and my right hon. Friend any case of a company that seems to be trying to evade the spirit of the legislation in an unreasonable way. I am talking about companies that are profitable and will be benefiting from the dramatic cut in corporation tax, and companies that will be benefiting from the employer allowance or from the cut in business rates. Bring those cases to me and I promise hon. Members that we will use the full force of our office, little though it sometimes feels to be, to put pressure on those companies to live up not only to their legal obligations, which are our job to set out in making legislation in this House, but to their moral obligations, which are the ones we feel matter a great deal more.

7.45 pm

**Joan Ryan:** I thank all Members for their contributions to the debate. Low-paid, hard-working employees in the UK are being sold the same lie they were sold last year. The Chancellor tells them that their lives will get easier, but from this month thousands of them know that that is not true, and that cannot be right. I hear what the Minister says, but the loophole is not being closed. He made a generous offer, and I am sure people will take it up, but it was about applying pressure. That was not the promise that the Chancellor made; the Minister cannot guarantee that all people will be better off and will get the pay rise.

Increasing the minimum wage is not a bad policy, but I know my Labour colleagues will share my view that £7.20 an hour is not nearly enough to live on. That is why the Living Wage Foundation calculates that a worker in London needs at least £9.40 an hour to achieve a basic standard of living. Although the £7.20 hourly rate is not nearly enough, it is a start. It is, however, fundamentally unfair that hard-working people—the same people this Government have claimed they care about—should earn less as a result of this policy. If the Chancellor meant what he said, and if he is genuine in his promise of a pay rise for Britain, he should join me in supporting the motion and closing the loopholes. It is a serious matter if the Budget can be so undermined. After all, who is running the country—is it the Government or companies such as B&Q? I call on the Chancellor and the Government to guarantee that no employee will earn less as a result of the national living wage; to close the loopholes; and to recognise the rights that people are entitled to under the announcements that the Chancellor made.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House agrees with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that Britain deserves a pay rise and commends his introduction of the national living wage; notes, however, that some employers are cutting overall remuneration packages to offset the cost of its introduction, leaving thousands of low-paid employees significantly worse off; and calls, therefore, on the Government to guarantee that no worker will be worse off as a result of the introduction of the national living wage.

## Educational Attainment: Yorkshire and the Humber

7.47 pm

**Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes that Yorkshire and the Humber was the lowest ranked region in England in 2013-14 for educational attainment; further notes that the January 2016 report from the Social Market Foundation entitled *Educational Inequality in England and Wales* found that geographical inequality was the most important factor in determining students' educational attainment; and calls on the Government to take action to address the underlying causes of these inequalities as a matter of urgency and to set out the steps it is taking to ensure that children in Yorkshire and the Humber are equally likely to achieve good school qualifications as children in London.

First, may I thank the Members who made this debate possible this evening? For too long, attention has focused narrowly on socioeconomic inequality in determining academic achievement. We now know, however, that it is not just the relative wealth of parents that holds back the potential of our children—it is also where they live. New research in January by the Social Market Foundation found marked disparities in GCSE performance between the regions, with more than 70% of pupils in London achieving five good GCSEs compared with just 63% in Yorkshire and the Humber. These regional differences in attainment are already apparent by the end of primary school, and they are evident even when we account for other factors such as ethnicity and income. Furthermore, if we compare the performance of 11-year-olds born in 2000 with those born in 1970, it is clear that where someone is born has become a more powerful predictive factor of their performance at school than any other. Yorkshire and the Humber are a stark example of that. Tragically for our children, the region has gone from fifth lowest achieving in the 1970s to the worst in England today, with nearly a quarter of pupils attending schools that are rated less than good. That is despite the tireless effort, dedication and commitment of the headteachers, staff, parents and children across our great region.

As schools across Yorkshire and the Humber struggled, in London, with the targeted support and investment of the London Challenge, attainment surged. Indeed, according to the Government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, London and the south are now pulling away from the rest of the country. This disparity is a disgrace, and education has become a postcode lottery. After 30 years of neglect and a lack of focus from Government, we now live in a country where a child in some regions has less chance of reaching their potential than one born in London. As London powers ahead in educational attainment, children in the so-called northern powerhouse are falling behind.

There is of course no silver bullet to improve educational attainment in our region overnight, but all the international evidence tells us that the key to a successful education system is the quality of its teachers. Evidence from the Sutton Trust and the London School of Economics shows that if we were to raise the performance of the least effective teachers in our schools just to the national average, England would rank in the top five systems in the world for reading and mathematics. Yet instead of taking action to support the profession, the Government have presided over a shocking teaching crisis. For four years, they have missed their target for recruiting trainees.

Between 2011 and 2014, the number of teachers leaving the profession increased by 11%, which means that one in 10 schools is having to resort to using unqualified staff in the classroom. Instead of ensuring that every classroom has a world-class teacher, as Labour promised to deliver in its last manifesto, this Government remain obsessed with relentless tinkering of the curriculum and never-ending structural upheaval. As one of my local headteachers said to me last Friday:

"It is time to stop beating teachers and start giving us the support we need to do our job."

The evidence is now so compelling about this gulf in regional attainment and the crippling impact it has on individuals, communities and the economy that it is time for a revolution in how we tackle the problem.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate her on securing this debate. Does she not agree that one of the problems we face, particularly in our post-industrial towns, is that we do not have the global companies on our doorsteps from which our children can get work experience and other opportunities? It does not matter what type of housing people live in or what the challenges are, those opportunities are on offer to the children of London, but not to our communities in Doncaster and elsewhere in Yorkshire.

**Jo Cox**: I thank my right hon. Friend for her incredibly insightful comment and I could not agree more.

More generally, in Yorkshire and the Humber, children are now being left behind, and no child should be left behind. We can no longer accept that young people in London are far more likely to achieve good outcomes at school than those in other regions.

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful case and her point about the gap between Yorkshire and London is valid. She cites the evidence, but will she join me in agreeing that having 1.4 million fewer children in underperforming schools is a significant national improvement, although, as we will be discussing tonight, we need to ensure that that success is everywhere and not just concentrated in some areas.

**Jo Cox**: I bow to the hon. Gentleman's expertise and knowledge on this issue. He is right to identify the fact that we need to spread the successes across the country, not just in some bits of our great nation.

It is morally right that we act urgently to address the inequity and it is an investment that will resonate far beyond individuals. Improving educational attainment in Yorkshire schools is central to the success of the so-called northern powerhouse. Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools, says that more attention must be focused on regions where too many schools are "languishing in mediocrity" and that the northern powerhouse will "splutter and die" unless underperforming schools improve. To that end the Budget contained vague details of the Government's new northern powerhouse schools strategy, which admits that

"progress in education isn't felt everywhere."

However, there is only very limited information about how the money will be spent and no clarity on where exactly the north is. Furthermore, £20 million is a paltry

gesture when we think about the scale and importance of this crisis—particularly when only £10 million will be spent this year. The recent recalculation of the International Democratic Education Conference index on levels of deprivation had a severe impact on many schools across my local authority, Kirklees, with one school, for example, losing £300,000 per year.

The region needs real investment, not just rhetoric. We also need to learn the many transferable lessons from the success of London. In the 1980s, the south-east and the east of England had better results than London, but the most recent evidence now shows that London is outstripping the rest of the country. The Labour Government's London Challenge saw the combination of a political push and huge investment to raise standards across the capital. With the long-term backing of Downing Street, the Challenge focused on three clear and measurable objectives: to reduce the number of underperforming schools, especially in relation to English and maths; to increase the number of schools rated "good" or "outstanding"; and to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am pleased that we have the opportunity to debate this important issue this evening. One thing that I learned from the London Challenge, which is key to all this, was the co-operation and the co-ordination among schools across the capital. Rather than being set against each other in different schools, teachers came together and worked in a co-operative model. That is the best way of sharing good practice and building capacity.

**Jo Cox:** My hon. Friend's point is valid and offers a stark contrast to current Government education policy.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York, which has the best results of schools across Yorkshire, also has the York Challenge, but it is co-ordinated by the local authority. Is that not why it is crucial that the local authority is at the heart of our education system in the future?

**Jo Cox:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I fear that the Government are trying to take the heart out of local authority support for education, and there is no evidence that such a strategy will improve standards.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) said, a key element to the success of the London Challenge was a focus on leadership and support for teaching and learning. In supporting leadership in that way, clusters of schools were established and encouraged to work together. Headteachers from good and outstanding schools were chosen as "consultant heads" who could share experience and expertise with others in the area. The language and ethos of the London Challenge were positive. A highly experienced advisory team provided tailored support for each school and local authority, but at the heart of the London Challenge was collaboration, which sits in stark contrast to current education policy. The Government's plan to force schools to become academies is perhaps the most blatant example of that policy. Instead of enhanced local co-operation, we will, I fear, see schools existing in an increasingly competitive environment—on recruitment, admissions and salaries. As one local headteacher said to me:

"There is collaboration already. We have natural partnerships where geography is key. Academisation potentially shatters years of trust and joint working."

I supported the original purpose of academies in the provision of much-needed, targeted support for failing schools, which has in many cases transformed children's lives, especially in London. However, as the evidence shows, the reality of academies is that they are neither inherently good nor bad and thus should not be bluntly imposed on all schools.

The Government simultaneously want to erode a key source of support in the education system—local authorities. As Conservative Councillor Roy Perry notes:

"Ofsted has rated 82% of council-maintained schools as good or outstanding, so it defies reason that councils are being portrayed as barriers to improvement."

There is no compelling evidence that dismantling the role of local authorities in this regard will improve educational attainment. What is more, evidence from 2009 showed that English schools were already the third most autonomous in the world, yet were still ranked 23rd in terms of global pupil performance.

So instead of fixating on school governance, the Government need to ensure that schools have the tools they need to do the job. This means ripping up their flawed proposals for academies and focusing instead on key issues, such as teaching standards and recruitment. As the chief inspector of schools has noted:

"We've seen a significant difference in the quality of teaching between the South and the Midlands and the North"

and a significant difference in the quality of leadership. Yet we know that the surest way to improve our children's attainment is by raising the standards, standing and status of teaching in our schools.

We need to be much more ambitious about improving teaching, dealing with teacher shortages, ending the use of unqualified teachers in our classrooms, and tackling low pay, which deters far too many good young teachers from going to and staying in the toughest schools. We know that there is an emerging two-tier system where some schools are more able to recruit good teachers than others. It is surely time to look at financial incentives to encourage trainees to move to and work in those regions that most need their talent. To this end, the new National Teaching Service, which will see 1,500 of the country's top teaching talent matched to the schools that most need them, should be accelerated urgently. Currently the service does not go far enough, with the aim of only 100 teachers to the north-west by 2016.

Teach First should work far harder to expand beyond London, where it sends a whopping 40% of its teachers. It is time to ensure that training is not overly concentrated in London, which has huge cost and time implications for teaching staff based in remote and rural areas, excluding many from this vital opportunity to learn.

I recognise that the answers to these problems will not be found easily, but surely the growing divide in regional academic attainment can no longer be left unchallenged. Indeed, I contend that nothing we do in this place matters more than ensuring that no child is left behind. If education, education, education is a priority, the answer must, in part, be teachers, teachers, teachers. What has worked in London can work elsewhere. It can work in Yorkshire, but it will need real investment and sustained political commitment. It is time for a new, bold and ambitious target to end the postcode lottery in educational attainment. We have a duty to

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ensure that every child has access to the best possible education. It should not matter where they were born. No child should be left behind.

8.3 pm

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) on securing it and for setting out so passionately and in such a well informed way her desire, which we all share, to see no child left behind and the regional gaps that have occurred in this country closed.

Members on both sides of the House will surely agree that raising school standards in our part of the country is essential if we are to raise the life chances of our constituents' children. It is not just that in Yorkshire and the Humber our education has been left behind; average earnings tend to be lower than they are nationally. There is a link between the life chances of someone 20 or 30 years after they were at school, and their performance and the support they received while they were at school.

As has been set out, results in Yorkshire are among the lowest in England, so Yorkshire is at the frontline of the education debate. The question is how to deliver the Government's twin aims: to raise standards for all and to close the gap between rich and poor. Teach First has just released research showing that poor children are four times as likely to go to an inadequate primary school or one that requires improvement than children from wealthier backgrounds, and poorer children are only half as likely to go to an outstanding primary as their richer peers. In Bradford, for instance, the schools that serve the poorest have a one in three chance of being inadequate or in need of improvement.

Teaching lower income children is more challenging and requires higher skills, yet the system penalises professionals who seek to go where they are needed most. Schools can end up, as the Sutton Trust reported last week, putting barriers in the way of poorer children getting places at their schools. According to the trust, more than 1,500 primary schools have socially selective intakes.

As the hon. Lady rightly said, we need to work constantly to improve the incentives for the best teachers to teach in the poorest communities and be rewarded for staying there. As has been said, however, there is not just a social divide, but a geographical one. As Sir Michael Wilshaw, the head of Ofsted, said on 1 December:

"We are, in effect, a nation divided at the age of 11. We are witnessing an educational division of the country, with schools performing well overall in the South but struggling to improve in the North and the Midlands. If schools north of this line were performing as well as those south of it, 160,000 more pupils would be in a good or outstanding secondary school."

In the east riding, 76% of pupils attend a primary school that is rated good or outstanding, a figure that falls to 68% for secondary schools. Like the hon. Lady, I would like to pay tribute to those phenomenally hard-working teachers who are succeeding, and those who continue to work flat-out to try and raise standards in schools that are not succeeding. We owe it to our constituents to improve the situation.

It is important to say that the divide in educational attainment was not created under this Government. There has long been a divide. We need to find a way—

ideally, in education policy—with the maximum consensus possible, of creating a framework of incentives to get the best teachers to the places where they are needed most, and which can transcend any general election, regardless of who wins it. Without that, the divide will continue and there will be unnecessary tinkering and disruption of improvements to the education system.

With that in mind, it would be unfortunate if the 2022 deadline for total academisation of schools led our energies to be deployed debating that rather than how to improve teaching and thus standards of education. Whether such a policy was necessary or wise I will not debate today, although I note that many colleagues have already expressed some doubts. As Sir Michael also said in his speech in December,

"we should not waste time in tendentious arguments about the relative merits of academies but rather on how we can make them work. Academies, like all schools, work if they have good leaders and good teaching. If they lack them, they do not."

Sir Michael is absolutely right. It cannot be emphasised too often that the key to raising performance and narrowing the attainment gap between rich and poor lies, as the hon. Lady rightly said, in the quality of teaching, and that is what we need to focus on. One of the best sources in this area is the work of Professor Eric Hanushek of Stamford University. It is shocking how much difference there is between how much a child learns in the classroom of a teacher at the 90th percentile compared with how little they learn with a teacher at the 10th percentile. Hanushek has calculated that one of the teachers at the top will give their students an entire year's worth of additional learning in one year, compared with those near the bottom in teaching quality. That is, they advance their pupils' understanding 150% compared with what might be expected from an average teacher in that time, while their least talented counterparts help their students to make only 50% of the progress that would be expected.

As if that was not important enough, Professor Hanushek has found that the effects of high-quality teaching are especially significant for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, who do not have the other support and succour to help them make up for an inadequate teacher. These findings not only underline the importance of good recruitment and teacher training models, which are critical, but show that we need to ensure that the best teachers work where they are needed most. Academies' flexibility to design attractive packages to recruit and retain good teachers has the potential to help here.

I also believe that the new National Teaching Service—the hon. Lady referred to it—which will be piloted in the north-west this autumn, could make a significant contribution once it is rolled out to our area. By the end of this Parliament, it will see 1,500 of the country's best teachers assigned to the schools that need them the most. To support those teachers in their new roles, a package of incentives is being offered, including help with relocation, assistance with commuting costs and access to prestigious leadership development programmes, as well as great mentors.

Underlying this, there is also a pressing need to ensure that our education system is structured so that it does not conspire to drive talented individuals away from underperforming schools. There are many idealistic teachers and leaders who want to help at the educational frontline, but for too long they have been incentivised

to teach elsewhere. Why? Because in our high-stakes accountability system, a headteacher working in a successful school in a prosperous area has long been less likely to be fired, found wanting or publicly criticised than one who opts to work somewhere such as Knowsley, where not a single secondary school was rated good or outstanding in 2015.

That is why I am so encouraged that the new White Paper, “Educational excellence everywhere”, proposes the introduction of “improvement periods” during which schools under new leadership will not be inspected by Ofsted. For schools that have been judged to require improvement, new heads will have a grace period of around 30 months before inspectors visit again, and the same goes for new academy sponsors. Ministers deserve credit for addressing that issue and tackling the perverse incentives that deterred good leaders from taking on some of the toughest challenges.

We also need to boost effective partnership working between schools, as the hon. Lady said, something that can be a particular problem in a large, sparsely populated rural area such as the east riding, with significant distances between schools. If I was to draw a circle around some of the schools on the coast in my constituency, I would of course find that half the area from which they might seek support or collaboration is in the North sea, and they are unlikely to get any help from that direction. School leaders could be encouraged to sign up to partnerships by introducing Sir Michael Wilshaw’s proposed “Excellent Leadership” awards. The Government have resisted that, but we need by every means, from status to pay and any other structures we have, to level the playing field so that we encourage people to go where they are most needed.

I must touch on fair funding, which is one of the most significant issues. The hon. Lady mentioned London, which receives significantly more funding in general—inner London certainly does—than the rest of the country. The Association of School and College Leaders found that the top 10 local authority areas in the country get an average of £6,300 per pupil, and the bottom 10 get £4,200. That is based not on need or deprivation, but on historical anomaly. Therefore, I must again congratulate the Government on grasping that. I ask colleagues on both sides of the House to celebrate the fact that the Government are moving towards a fair funding formula that will mean that a rural school in the east riding or an inner-city school in Bradford can expect to have a formula that is transparent and that reasonably seeks to provide fair funding for everybody. With that, I am pleased to bring my remarks to a close.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I suggest that Members should speak for up to 10 minutes, which will allow us to get everybody in.

8.14 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for permitting me to speak in this important debate. I will keep my remarks short. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) on securing this debate about education in our region, a topic that is arguably more critical than any other to the success of our constituents and, in particular, our region’s future generations.

As the Member of Parliament for Bradford South, I have raised on a number of occasions in this House, including in my maiden speech, the question of educational standards in the city of Bradford. Why? Because I know personally just how transformational education can be, and how it has the potential to broaden horizons more than any other tool available to us as a society. Very sadly, right across the board, too many of my constituents and their children do not have access to the high standard of educational provision that they rightly deserve.

I could illustrate the underperformance in the education system in my constituency with a raft of statistics, but I find that the following two most disturbingly reveal the position. First, of the 650 constituencies across the UK, Bradford South comes 609th when we consider the percentage of individuals with level 4 qualifications or above. Secondly, Bradford South is ranked 74th in constituency league tables for those without any qualifications whatsoever.

So what is to be done? The city of Bradford faces an almost unparalleled set of challenges, none of which can be solved easily. However, with cross-agency working by all those in the public sector and, importantly, with the help of those in our business community, we can at least begin to turn the tide. I want to touch on the important role of our business community in helping to improve standards in our schools. Why? Because at a time of the first real-terms cuts to school funding in well over a generation, help from our business community is becoming increasingly vital.

When I spoke recently at a session of the Bradford chamber of commerce, along with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), among the headline issues was educational standards. Arguably, our business community knows how poor standards hold back my constituents, our communities and, by extension, business success. If the northern powerhouse is to mean anything at all, we need extra investment in education. I therefore look forward to working with businesses big and small, the Bradford chamber of commerce, my local authority and other partners in the coming months and years to tackle underperformance and low educational achievement in Bradford and the wider region.

8.17 pm

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), who has rapidly carved out a reputation in the House as a strong supporter of Bradford, and Bradford South in particular. I commend her on everything she has been doing in that regard. I also want to thank the Minister for recently visiting two schools in my constituency, where he saw at first hand the education situation in Bradford and met the local authority people, which I think was very useful.

It is important to say right from the word go that there are some fantastic schools in Yorkshire, and indeed in my constituency, and I am very pleased that the Minister was able to see that for himself when he visited. We should not get too bogged down in doom and gloom, because there are some very good schools with excellent standards for pupils right across the region. However, it is perfectly clear that standards are not good enough as a whole. Yorkshire—and particularly my local authority district of Bradford, which has suffered low attainment for many years—is ranked lowest in the country for educational attainment. A recent report by

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Bradford Council's children's services scrutiny committee ranked Bradford 139th for the number of seven-year-olds achieving level 2B-plus in reading—in writing it was 123rd, and in maths it was 137th—out of 150 local authorities nationally. For pupils achieving the higher “gold standard” level 4 in reading, writing and maths combined at the end of primary education, Bradford was ranked 142nd out of 152 local authorities.

Although some areas are showing signs of improvement—the performance of children at key stage 1 is improving faster than the national average—unfortunately in some areas progress does not seem to be moving in the right direction, with Bradford remaining 3% behind the national average for attainment by the end of year 2. The authority fell two places to 128th between 2014 and 2015 for pupils making more than two levels of progress in reading, remaining 2% behind the national average.

There is also a worrying trend in the disparities between boys' and girls' attainment in Bradford schools, as there is around the country. The recent report by Bradford children's services scrutiny committee showed that while 71% of girls in Bradford achieved a good level of development by the age of five, only 53% of boys achieved the same. We must look at the widening performance gap between boys and girls in our schools; we cannot just allow it to continue to flourish.

The lower educational attainment in Bradford is also seen at secondary school level. In September 2015 the proportion of students attaining five A\* to C GCSEs, including English and maths, in Bradford was 44.6%, whereas the national average was 52.8%. Bradford is ranked 148th out of 151 local authorities for GCSE performance. Clearly, those figures show that the position is not good enough. Pupils get only one go at their education, and we have not got time to try to turn round this oil tanker, because all the pupils now going through our schools deserve the best possible education, and it is clear from those results that they are not getting it.

Bradford has some features that I hope the Minister will accept make it a special case. There is certainly an issue around language. Many pupils start school from a much lower base, and particularly from a much lower language base, than those in other parts of the country, and that must be given some recognition. In many schools in Bradford, teachers face very difficult circumstances.

We should also mention parental responsibility, which does not get mentioned often enough. Parents have a responsibility to make sure their children are up to a certain standard before they start school. Often, teachers find that children starting school are below the level that is expected of them at that age. We should not absolve parents of responsibility in this; they have a role to play in the education of their children and in helping teachers to bring children up to a particular standard.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of that is about parents having access to local libraries, so that they can read with their children?

**Philip Davies:** Yes, I very much agree, and I am sorry that Labour-controlled Bradford Council does not seem to believe in that as much as the hon. Lady does.

Bradford Council has raised the funding formula for schools with me. I would be interested to hear the Minister's view of the formula, and of whether it takes into consideration the current standard of educational attainment in places such as Bradford and makes sure that no action is taken that puts that already poor educational attainment under further pressure. The consultation is only at the first stage, and we are unaware of the numbers or the possible effects of the new regime, but concerns have been expressed that the parameters being set will disadvantage schools in the Bradford district. Need and pupil mobility are not necessarily guaranteed to be part of the new formula. As outlined by Ofsted, the Bradford district, in particular, has high levels of need, as well as the highest number of in-year admissions in the country. Attainment standards are already below average in the district, and if the new formula does not acknowledge the specific challenges there, schools could be unfairly disadvantaged and face a tougher task in addressing those challenges.

It is important to mention that the big disparity between schools in my constituency and schools in other parts of the Bradford district. We must not let schools coast in what might be seen as better areas, where educational standards are not as low, because we are focusing too much on the schools with the lowest attainment. We must make sure that all schools do their best for every pupil, but we sometimes overlook that priority.

Leadership is an important issue in our schools. We must do much more to attract the very best leaders and headteachers to our schools. My hon. Friend the Minister visited Beckfoot School in Bingley, which has an outstanding headteacher, who has transformed it into one of the best schools in not just the Bradford district but the country, and it is now rated as outstanding. We need to find ways of getting more leaders into the most difficult schools.

**Graham Stuart:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just about attracting great leaders into Yorkshire? We need to do more to grow our own, and we need to build the systems to do that. Attracting them from outside is probably not going to be the primary answer; growing our own is.

**Philip Davies:** Yes, I very much agree with my hon. Friend, who makes a good point, as he always does on education matters.

I emphasise that we have some fantastic schools and some fantastic teachers, who are all working incredibly hard. I am very pro-teacher. My dad is a retired teacher, so I will certainly not criticise them; they work very hard in sometimes very difficult circumstances. I am not often a big fan of all the teachers in the National Union of Teachers, but teachers on the whole work incredibly hard, and it is important that we do not criticise them when we are discussing some of these educational standards, because they often operate in very difficult circumstances.

Finally, I was struck by the good point the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) made about opportunities being harder to come by for people in the north than for those in places such as London, and I would like to float an idea. We often give student loans to people who want to progress their career through the

university route; I wonder why others, if university is not for them, should not be able to get some form of student loan to allow them to do things such as come to London to access work experience placements. I do not see why student loans should be only for the benefit of the most able and perhaps the wealthiest and most advantaged. How about giving loans to some of the most disadvantaged people in the country to allow them to pursue their career? How about giving people in Yorkshire the opportunities that people in other parts of the country get? I hope that the Government will look at that. Social mobility is what the Conservative party should be all about, and we have to look much more imaginatively at this issue.

**Jo Cox:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Philip Davies:** I am going to finish; otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker will get annoyed with me, and I do not want that to happen.

I hope that the Conservative party, which I believe is about social mobility, will look more imaginatively at what we can do to help kids from poorer backgrounds who are perhaps not the most academic to access the best opportunities. I would like to think that student loans could be extended to them for their benefit.

8.27 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) on securing this important debate. This issue is important for a number of reasons. First, unless we address the regional disparities in educational attainment, this country will continue to become more divided. Secondly, that attainment gap wastes the talent of young people in our communities.

I pay tribute to the great work going on in Barnsley. Fantastic people across our community are working incredibly hard to give our young people a bright future and to help close the attainment gap. I am thinking of people such as Chris Webb and his great team at Barnsley College, which is rated outstanding and ranks as one of the best further education colleges in the country. I am also thinking of our great headteachers, including Kate Davies, Simon Barber, Dave Whitaker, Nick Bowen, Diane Greaves and Paul Haynes, and of great teachers such as Mat Wright, who I met during the Easter recess at the Barnsley teaching and learning festival. They are people with great passion for improving the lives of young people in Barnsley.

Teaching is a hugely valuable form of public service, but we all know that huge challenges come with it. In Barnsley, less than a fifth of pupils on free school meals get five A to C grade GCSEs. That damning statistic represents a massive waste of talent. I know that the young people in Barnsley do not lack talent. I think of the young people I know in the Barnsley youth choir; the young people I have met who are involved with the community work of Barnsley football club; and the young people I meet when I visit primary schools in my constituency who have the most curious minds and often ask the most brilliant and challenging questions. It is clear when I meet these young people that they are being failed, and the talk of how prosperous Britain has become and how well things are going simply rings hollow to those young people who are being failed by

the system. I want to address three areas where progress needs to be made if we are to change that, namely poverty, aspiration and leadership.

First, I recently wrote a report on child poverty that found that more than one in five children in my Barnsley Central constituency grow up in poverty. There is no doubt about the crippling effect that poverty has on educational attainment. Poverty is a complex and difficult issue to solve, but some of the Government's measures over the past six years have contributed to children in my constituency remaining in or falling into poverty. I fear that the Government's approach has best been represented by their ambivalence towards independent evidence that the Government's policies are hitting the poorest hardest.

Bold and practical measures can be taken to reduce child poverty and boost educational attainment. For instance, we know that promoting the bonds between parents and children in their early years not only leads to happier and more prosperous lives, but saves considerable future spending on the cost of family failure. At present, the Government spend too much money dealing with the symptoms of the problems. Our priority should be to shift spending to investing in preventing the causes of social problems. By shifting resources to targeted early years intervention, we can help tackle the root causes of social and emotional problems among children and young people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) has done great work in that area, and the cross-party manifesto, "The 1001 Critical Days", sets out a policy framework from the period of conception to the age of two, because services and children's centres need to be co-ordinated in a whole-family approach, working with all members of a family involved in the care, education and health of a child. Louise Casey's troubled families programme has been pioneering that approach with success.

Secondly, poverty in my community is often intrinsically linked to poverty of aspiration among young people. In Kingston upon Thames, many children are the sons and daughters of barristers, surgeons and media executives, but in Kingstone in Barnsley, children are more likely to be the sons and daughters of barmaids, cleaners and call centre workers. When they are growing up, too many children in Barnsley do not comprehend the opportunities that could be available to them. They do not know that they are this country's talent of tomorrow. Raising aspiration will not be an easy task, but better careers education and career guidance are clearly part of the solution.

The recommendations of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation's "Good Career Guidance" report should be looked at more closely. It states:

"Every school and college should have an embedded programme of career education and guidance that is known and understood by pupils, parents, teachers, governors and employers."

I could not agree more, but we are still some way off that goal.

**Jo Cox:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful, well informed and passionate speech. Does he agree that, unless we tackle some of the regional differences that hold back children in constituencies such as his and mine, any talk of rebalancing the economy will lead to nothing?

**Dan Jarvis:** I absolutely agree. In every respect, it is a great thing to be born in the great county of Yorkshire. That is something around which we can unite—*[Interruption.]* It is something around which many of us can unite, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have to admit to the House that I did not enjoy that privilege, but my hon. Friend makes an important point. For so many Labour Members—other Members can speak for themselves—the basic, fundamental principle that brought us into politics was that where someone grows up should not determine where they end up. That is the essence of this important debate.

**Philip Davies:** I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for better careers advice. Does he agree that it is also important for people to have realistic but inspirational role models so that they can see that there is a path to a better life and that they can achieve what they want, whatever their background? A good role model is a great way of demonstrating that to people.

**Dan Jarvis:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. One thing that I have observed about the culture in Yorkshire and the Humber is that people are often quite reticent about talking themselves up. We have a real responsibility to the next generation of talent. When I visit schools in my constituency, I make the point that people from Barnsley Central have gone around the world, achieved great things and shaped the world in which we live today. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we all have a responsibility in our communities to make the powerful point that the most amazing success stories have come out of our area, and we should never be shy about championing the success of people from our region.

I have reflected on the Gatsby Charitable Foundation's career guidance report. It is also worth reflecting briefly on the recent report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility. That excellent report makes detailed comment about improving the transition from school to work for young people. One recommendation, that the Government should look closely at, is for Ofsted to place greater emphasis on the provision of careers education.

**Graham Stuart:** I chair the all-party group on careers information, advice and guidance. Schools are encouraged by the Government to work towards a quality in careers standard, but they are not obliged to do so. In a high-stakes accountability system, in too many cases they will not do the right thing until that is joined with the system. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should make it mandatory for every school to work towards that standard and maintain it?

**Dan Jarvis:** I absolutely agree, and I will be interested to hear what the Minister is able to say when he responds.

Finally, I want to talk about leadership. If we are to close the attainment gap, we will need brilliant headteachers leading teams of excellent, highly motivated teachers. If we look at the recent schools White Paper, however, we see that the Government show a dearth of ambition in that area. There is a chapter headed "Great teachers—everywhere they're needed", but despite that promising title, there is little in the way of proposals for how we can get more great teachers. Instead, the main focus of the White Paper is the plan for the forced academisation of every school, a divisive policy for which there is absolutely no evidence that it will improve standards.

On a more positive note, I was encouraged by the Government's announcement in the Budget of a northern powerhouse schools strategy. A number of measures sounded promising, including the additional funding being made available to support turnaround activity and the report on transforming education, which is to be led by Sir Nick Weller. Since then, however, I have been disappointed by the lack of detail that has been forthcoming. The schools White Paper did not mention the northern powerhouse schools strategy once.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen said, Yorkshire needs a strategy for improvement, similar to the pioneering scheme that we saw in London. I would like the northern powerhouse schools strategy to progress with the ambition of generating an improvement similar to the one seen in London. Sadly, we do not have enough information about the strategy to know whether that is what we are looking at. I ask the Government to provide more information to Members on the strategy, and also to publish the terms of reference for Sir Nick's review.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Laughter.]* Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker; it has been a long day. Closing the attainment gap will take real effort from everyone involved in the education system, from Ministers to school leaders, teachers and parents. It is not going to be easy, but we have to succeed because the stakes are so high. We cannot allow the educational divide in this country to continue. We cannot let down the young people of today and tomorrow.

8.39 pm

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** I must congratulate the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) on introducing the debate. It is quite clear from what she and other speakers have said that there will be a wide element of agreement throughout the House on this subject. I noted that she had one or two little political digs—that is fair enough, as even I have been known to criticise the Government occasionally—but she did say that there had been 30 years of neglect, which perhaps divides the spoils evenly between the various parties.

I do not want to paint a particularly black picture, because I am always conscious of wanting to be something of an ambassador for my constituency. However, reading the comments of the Social Market Foundation, many of its points hit home. It states:

"GCSE performance at age 16 across England and Wales reveals marked disparities between regions, with over 70% of pupils in London achieving 5 good GCSEs compared to 63% in Yorkshire & Humber."

It goes on:

"Regional differences in attainment are already apparent by the end of primary school".

It also says:

"Regional disparities persist, with some areas such as... Yorkshire and the Humber... falling further behind and London's performance surging over the last three decades."

Those are not particularly encouraging points for our region.

I have read the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission report. As Members will know, the commission is chaired by Alan Milburn, the former Labour Minister. One particular point hit home:

"Social mobility for my generation speeded up in the 1950's",



due to the move

“if you like from blue collar to white collar”,

which drove demand for new skills. We seem to have failed to deliver such new skills to many of our young people. The move from blue to white-collar jobs has been typical of many towns, particularly northern towns, all of which tended to have a core industry. In the Grimsby and Cleethorpes area it was fishing, down the road in Scunthorpe it was steel and elsewhere it was shipbuilding or mining. Those industries mopped up all the young men coming out of school who lacked many of the skills that are now essential even for much unskilled work.

I have read other documents to prepare for this debate. Interestingly, whether they are from a left or right-leaning think-tank, a similar picture emerges. For politicians, it is easy to get into a bit of a knockabout about academies, grammar schools or whatever, but as I said, I think we will achieve a certain amount of harmony tonight.

It is interesting to note that in North East Lincolnshire, which makes up three quarters of my constituency, the local authority was something of a trailblazer for academisation. It was the Conservative-Liberal coalition, of which I was a member, that encouraged and supported that change. I should also point out that we were encouraged, cajoled and persuaded by the Labour central Government to push our schools in that direction. The academies we have established under Oasis, Tollbar, the David Ross Foundation and other organisations have, on the whole, been a considerable success, and we should note the leading part that those organisations have played.

**Diana Johnson:** The Labour Government pushed academies for particular areas—the areas of social disadvantage that we are talking about this evening, where schools were not performing and needed a fresh start. It was not about the academisation of the whole educational establishment, which is what the Government now seem to be proposing. Labour’s was a tailored approach that, in some cases, was very successful.

**Martin Vickers:** It is because of the success of the policy, which the hon. Lady acknowledges, that this Government and the coalition Government have chosen to expand it and to have more and more academies.

**Melanie Onn:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the 100% academisation of secondary schools across North East Lincolnshire has resulted in no material improvement in GCSE results?

**Martin Vickers:** I would not necessarily agree with that, because the league tables are only one measure of success. The work of the various organisations that are running the academies in North East Lincolnshire is opening up further opportunities for our young people.

**Melanie Onn:** Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that the proportion of pupils achieving grades A to C has reduced from 75% in 2012 to 57% in 2015? Those are the figures for schools in Cleethorpes.

**Martin Vickers:** I take note of what the hon. Lady says, but this is a much broader issue than just GCSEs. Opportunities are opening up for our young people, encouraged by some of the sponsors of the academies.

North East Lincolnshire has some excellent schools and dedicated staff, yet, as the hon. Lady has just pointed out, it still has some poor educational attainment. I hope that in summing up, the Minister will give some solutions to that conundrum.

Leadership has been mentioned. Sir Michael Wilshaw has spoken of the “steady hand of leadership”. Governors, headteachers, principals and chief executives are all important parts of the mix in delivering our schools. In days gone by, governors were often appointed by local authorities. I remember serving on many school governing bodies. Quite often, someone would say, “Such and such a school needs a governor. Can you go along?”. When I replied, “I can’t. It’s a Wednesday afternoon and I’m at work”, they would say, “It doesn’t matter. Just turn up now and again.” We do not need that approach any more. We need a much more professional team of governors, because the role of the governing body is much more extensive, and rightly so. Governors are a crucial part of the leadership of our schools.

Just to be slightly contentious towards the end of my speech, I will mention those terrible words “grammar schools”. North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council are right up against the border of Lincolnshire County Council, which still has selection and grammar schools. The point I want to make is not necessarily that those schools are excellent, although places like Caistor Grammar School are indeed excellent schools that rank very highly at national level. It is that many parents in my constituency, and indeed in the constituency of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), who are only in their 30s or 40s and who may be professional people, choose to go out of the district to send their children to grammar schools because that is what they think will bring academic excellence. Given that they are 30 or 40 years old, they will never have experienced grammar schools themselves, but they still want to send their children to a grammar school.

A Conservative Government should, above all, believe in freedom and opportunity. If an institution wants to convert into a grammar school or a chain of academies wants one of its schools to look for academic excellence and become a grammar school, I think the Government should allow that. I went to a bilateral school, which allowed a certain element of selection. The Government might like to consider that as a compromise.

I reiterate that we have a dedicated team of teachers in our schools in North and North East Lincolnshire, and excellent leadership, but we need to get more and better teachers—leading teachers—into our schools to give our young people the opportunities that they deserve just as much as those in more successful regions.

8.50 pm

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers). In different but similar ways, we share some of the same challenges when it comes to offering our young people and children ambition for what they can achieve, as often they do not have it locally on their doorstep to reach out and touch. That is such an important part of children’s aspirations—whether they can see themselves in some of the jobs that others take for granted. If one school in Don Valley ended up with

[Caroline Flint]

half a dozen Cabinet members, people would say it was a conspiracy rather than just an opportunity given to some.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) for securing this debate. I have been an MP living in Yorkshire and serving a Yorkshire constituency for almost 19 years. I also speak as a mum, as my children went to local schools in Doncaster. When I was a new MP in 1997, I remember there were dilapidated primary schools with outside toilets. It has to be said that the loss of jobs in mining and manufacturing cast a long shadow over children's potential. Back then, it cut me to the quick to hear a headteacher question whether it was worth introducing computers to schools, as the jobs that used such skills were beyond pupils' expectations.

It is of huge concern to me that, as well as my region having a high percentage of young people who are not in education, employment or training, Ofsted states that my region

"lags behind the rest of the country in its task to prepare young people for the future."

As my hon. Friend said, Yorkshire and the Humber has slipped over the decades from a hardly inspiring seventh out of 10 regions in 1970 to 10th out of 10 in 2013-14. In decades gone by, when manual jobs were plentiful, a 16-year-old could go straight from school to work without any or with only a few qualifications—it may have been to a low-paid job, but it was probably a job for life. That world no longer exists. There were better paid volume jobs in one industry that dominated the town economically and socially. We need the Government to understand post-industrial towns in Yorkshire and the north of England such as Doncaster—towns that globalisation seems to have passed by.

Education is a life-changing force. I know: it was for me. Too many children from backgrounds like mine—from ordinary working-class families—have no expectation of going to university or learning beyond 16. As someone who never knew my father and was the child of an alcoholic mother, school was all too often my refuge, a world I could embrace, from the subjects I loved to the activities such as sport, music and drama. By the time I was 18 I had lived away from home twice, during my O-levels and A-levels. Without doubt, my comprehensive girls' school altered my path in life. It raised my aspirations, and, after attending one of the country's first tertiary colleges, I went to university.

London and the south-east have seen results improve in recent years, but it is clear that Yorkshire and the Humber has, as Ofsted bluntly puts it, "persistently underperformed". The truth is that the problem starts before children start school or even pre-school. Postcodes are a factor, but parents are the most important influence on their children. They shape their world, making many decisions—or not—every week that will have an impact on their child's development. There is no such thing as a perfect parent, but confident and engaged parenting makes a difference.

The Government have continued a policy that started under Labour by offering free additional pre-school hours for two-year-olds; the offer is available for looked-after children, disabled children and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. With the last group, I wonder what the parents are doing while their child is in nursery. That time

would seem to be an ideal opportunity to support the parents in whatever activity is likely to help them and their child's start in life. I understand that the take-up has not been as good as expected, and we must ensure that its provision and cost is making a difference.

Louise Casey is an old friend of mine, and I worked with her to tackle antisocial behaviour, and on the Respect programme, when I was a Home Office Minister. Social inclusion, family intervention, troubled family programmes—whatever the title under different Governments over the past 20 years, it is recognised that during the early years it is crucial to offset negatives with positives where we can. We must address how well early years or family interventions are working in and out of school. How can we share best practice and break down the barriers and the silo thinking that still exist among partner agencies?

Comparisons with similar neighbourhoods are another good way to show what can be achieved and leave no room for excuses. In 2015 in Doncaster, one in three children attended primary schools that were neither good nor outstanding. In Barnsley, however, 81% of pupils are in good or outstanding schools. I am pleased that Mayor Jones recognises the importance of leaving no child in Doncaster behind, and we are backing an education commission to address why Doncaster is at the bottom of the attainment league table—hard questions need to be answered. So much of education is out of the hands of local authorities, so who do I or concerned parents turn to apart from a regional schools commissioner?

For many children the move to secondary school is a key transition in which they either sink or swim. How hard must it be to move to year 7 if by age 10 or 11 a child cannot read and write well enough to cope, and ends up being pigeon-holed when long-term choices are made at 14? The Government should seriously consider earlier intervention, or even delaying the move to key stage 3 until every effort has been made to turn the situation around for those children.

As with primary schools, secondary schools in Doncaster must make more progress, with just over a third of students attending a good or outstanding school compared with 79% of pupils in Sheffield. The Government need to understand some of the difficulties that towns like Doncaster face. Not enough schools offer 14-year-olds diversity and a quality vocational equivalent to a more academic path. Short of modelling schools on the German system—I would prefer that to a grammar school system—I see no other way than expecting schools and other learning providers to collaborate to ensure that positive choices are not undermined by bad timetabling or lack of transportation. However, I cannot see that happening in the current fragmented environment.

**Jo Cox:** My right hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful and personal speech, which is a testament to her desire—and that of many children—to get on and achieve great things. Does she agree that although constituencies such as hers and mine, and many across Yorkshire and Humber, need specific localised interventions, that goes directly against the centralising competitive tendencies of this Government in education policy?

**Caroline Flint:** I agree with my hon. Friend. We cannot have everything defined by Whitehall, even in the shape of a regional schools commission, which is basically what this is.

The recent area-based review of further education colleges in South Yorkshire seemed to happen in total isolation given what was happening in school sixth forms, which makes no sense at all. A number of businesses are engaged in our schools, but I will return to what I said earlier: London has its challenges but it has its opportunities too. As an avid reader of the *Evening Standard*, I am jealous of the corporate and individual resources that have backed the various campaigns to get London reading, or get young people on apprenticeships. If someone wants to become an intern or gain work experience, whatever housing they live in, being in London has huge advantages—on that issue I have common cause with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). Provincial towns such as Doncaster and many others have to fight much harder to provide anything similar to transform young people's aspirations.

We may have more teachers than ever before, but they are not always the right teachers in the right places. The Government have failed to meet their own recruitment targets for four years—that was recently investigated by the Public Accounts Committee. One primary headteacher told me that a recent job advert she posted online joined 35 other adverts for primary school teachers locally. A secondary headteacher told me that another school in the region was offering a starting salary that they could not compete with, in order to hold on to an excellent Teach First graduate.

Because teachers do not have the same terms and conditions at academy schools, that can result in a form of poaching that does not help the schools that need the best teachers to get them. It does not surprise me that it is easier to recruit newly qualified teachers in big cities, because—let us be honest—they are often more exciting for young professionals than some of our towns. I want the Government to consider those barriers and seek to get more good teachers to our provincial towns where the need has been identified. The Government could recognise those shortages, look at the pattern, and offer new rewards or incentives for teachers to apply for jobs in those areas. This issue is important because life chances should not be determined by someone's postcode or who their parents are, but in Yorkshire and Humber—and across the UK—there is clearly a hell of a long way to go.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I suggest we keep speeches to eight minutes to give everybody a fair amount of time.

8.59 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). It was powerful not only in the content of its suggestions but in its description of the importance of education and its ability to transform lives when we get it right. It underlined why we need to get it right, which sadly we are not doing in too many ways, as demonstrated by the gap between north and south.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spenningsdale (Jo Cox) on securing this debate. Two years ago, I started a contribution in the House with the words: "Mind the gap". Sadly, we are here again. Last

time, I was talking about the Chancellor's failure to rebalance our economy between the north and south—there has been no change there, despite the empty rhetoric about a northern powerhouse—but today we are discussing the wholly unacceptable fact that, whereas over 70% of pupils in London achieve five good GCSEs, the figure for Yorkshire and the Humber is just 63%.

Economic success and educational attainment are clearly linked. That was the conclusion of a study that has underpinned contributions from several hon. Members and it was the conclusion of Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's chief inspector, who, in a speech at the end of last year, said:

"There has been much talk about a 'northern powerhouse'. To succeed, it will require astute leadership, complex regional alliances and billions of pounds spent on infrastructure. And what of education? All that money, all that commitment and optimism, will be wasted if the next generation is not educated sufficiently to take advantage of the opportunities presented by this initiative."

It is not just that education drives economic success; economic success is critical to higher educational attainment. That point was made very clearly to me by the headteacher of one of Sheffield's most successful secondary schools. It is in my constituency and is one of the top 100 in the country on GCSE results. His comments echoed the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley in an intervention. He said that

"working with our outstanding sister school in London, I see a real difference in the level of aspiration held by the children and I think that this is an important factor. The children there are deprived but it is a different sort of deprivation. They are financially deprived but are surrounded by wealth and opportunities whereas in the North, entire communities have never really recovered from deindustrialisation."

He is holding an "aspiration day" next month to do something about this but there is only so much he can do. The fact remains that there are far fewer skilled jobs outside London, far less investment, both public and private sector, and therefore much less opportunity. He estimates the number of children at his school with parents in professional occupations to be in single figures.

Yet rather than using the levers of public sector employment and investment pots to change this, the Government are moving in the opposite direction. They are starving local authorities in deprived areas of the money they need, in sharp contrast with wealthier areas; failing to come up with a coherent industrial strategy focused on the regions; and presiding over private sector jobs growth in London and the south-east at the expense of the regions. Indeed, they are adding to the problem by closing the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills office in Sheffield and moving civil service jobs to London. We cannot separate the issue of our unbalanced economy from the imbalance in educational attainment. I hope the Minister will recognise that and, in responding, outline what joined-up discussions there are across Government to tackle the issue.

There are specific things that can be done to support schools in addressing the challenge of under-attainment. I was in touch with one of the primary heads in my constituency in advance of this debate—the head of one of the fastest improving schools in the country—and he made two suggestions for how the Government could act. I hope the Minister will comment on both. First, how will the new schools funding formula ensure that resources can be directed to those schools seeking

[Paul Blomfield]

to improve attainment outside the south of England and those serving deprived communities? The early indications are that money might actually move away from deprived communities.

Secondly, the headteacher asked how we could alter admissions criteria to help disadvantaged children to access the best schools, given that people with more money are buying advantage by purchasing houses nearer the best schools, meaning that the gap, even within Yorkshire, is widening. We must act because it is simply not acceptable that, by virtue of growing up in Sheffield and not London, a child is less likely to do well at school.

What will not address the challenge of raising standards in our schools in Yorkshire and the Humber is, as others have said, the forced academisation programme. Academisation might be a useful distraction for the Government, but it is not an answer to underachievement. It is an issue on which I have received a lot of correspondence from constituents. The secondary head I mentioned earlier runs a very successful academy in my constituency. It is a great school and one that I am proud to work with, but the simple truth is that one size does not fit all.

My constituents have also raised serious concerns about teaching standards and conditions in a system that permits or even rewards the use of unqualified teachers; about the undermining of national pay structures; about local accountability, given the Government's thrust towards multi-academy trusts to drive change; and about teacher morale, with further reorganisation to be forced on them. As others have said, there is no evidence that forced academisation will improve standards, and there is quite a lot of evidence to show the reverse. What it will be—the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) alluded to it—is a distraction, with time and resources taken away from the central task of improving the quality of our schools.

In the words of my constituent Kathryn:

“Schools and heads who have not chosen to become academies do not want it...The DFE does not have the capacity to convert those who have currently applied so why add an extra burden to a struggling department?”

What happened to the Government's emphasis on freedom for headteachers? Another constituent, Jane, told me that she was leaving teaching, complaining that the Prime Minister

“talks of head teachers being in charge of academies instead of ‘bureaucrats’ from the authority getting in the way”,

yet she was

“not aware of outside control until we became an academy”.

We have already heard how, as things stand, Yorkshire and the Humber is losing out. This forced academisation agenda will only make things worse. Increasing numbers of Conservative Members and of Conservative councillors across the country are saying this, with even leaders of academy trusts saying it, too. I urge the Government to think again.

9.7 pm

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I thank and pay tribute to the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) for securing the debate. Along with the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), I am

happy to support her in this important debate. Indeed, it is good to see in their places colleagues of all parties representing our proud region.

I think you would probably agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it is unusual to have a group of Yorkshire MPs debating something where Yorkshire is not performing well. We just have to think of the last Olympics, and just yesterday the Yorkshire pudding was crowned the best regional food in Britain. I gently say to Mr Deputy Speaker, a friend and colleague on the all-party group on rugby league, that the Lancashire hotpot came only 10th, which I think is rather unfair.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Let me make a very clear point in gently reminding the hon. Gentleman that both Yorkshire teams are bottom of the league.

**Greg Mulholland:** We are not going to get into rugby league—otherwise I would have to remind Mr Deputy Speaker of what happened last season.

In all seriousness, it is appalling that educational attainment in Yorkshire and the Humber is the lowest in the country. To quote the report from the Social Mobility Foundation, our region has

“persistently underperformed compared to the national average”.

Even at primary school level, the report stated that Yorkshire and the Humber had

“disproportionately high numbers of low scoring pupils”.

I warmly welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) is now leading a commission for the Social Mobility Foundation, looking at inequalities in educational attainment. I hope that Ministers will take its conclusions very seriously and that it will lead to the collaborative working that other colleagues have highlighted. However, the simple fact of the current state of education seriously undermines the claims about the northern powerhouse. There cannot be a powerhouse in a region—there cannot be a powerhouse in a regional economy, in manufacturing and other industries, or in jobs—if there is failure, and what is happening now is a failure of education in our schools.

I must stress that my constituency contains some excellent schools which are performing extremely well. I am very lucky in that respect. I work closely with those schools, and I have to praise all the headteachers, governing bodies and staff who work so hard in them. Indeed, Leeds is doing better than other parts of the region in some respects, and last year Ofsted deemed its primary schools to be the best. However, Nick Hudson, the Ofsted regional director, pointed out in a letter that standards in reading, writing, maths and science were below the national average. So Leeds is doing well in terms of primary schools, although not so well in terms of secondary schools, but it is still not doing well enough.

This is not a party-political debate, but I am concerned about the direction of travel in the Department for Education. I certainly do not feel that what we have heard from the current ministerial team in the last year is what we need to hear. We have not been given the assurance for which we have asked, and which is required by the whole country, not just Yorkshire and the Humber, that the excellent pupil premium—which the coalition Government introduced to tackle a problem that is

clearly at the heart of some of the under-attainment in the region, namely the performance of pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds—will be continued and maintained.

We need to hear an assurance about school funding as a whole. According to the Institute of Education, there is a rise in demand for school places—there is certainly a huge rise in demand for them in Leeds—and a need for more teachers. That could lead to a crisis if it is not dealt with soon, but doing so will spread the funding further, and will therefore lead to a cut in the absence of further investment.

At this point, I must declare an interest. My wife is a qualified teacher, although she currently works as a teaching assistant because I am away and because of the demands on the family. I know from her school, which is also my daughter's school, and from other heads, teachers, and teaching assistants in other schools, that there is no sense of anything resembling a collaborative approach on the part of the current ministerial team. Indeed, I am sorry to say that there is still real anger towards the Government, although perhaps a little less than there was. I am sorry to say that the name of the previous Secretary of State is still considered to be a dirty word by the people I know in the teaching profession.

The morale of teachers is of serious concern, and I do not think that Ministers take it seriously enough. The NASUWT surveyed 5,000 of its members, a very significant proportion, and found that 7% had "increased their reliance on prescription drugs".

Teachers had turned to anti-depressants—10% said that they had gone to their doctors to obtain medication—while 14% had undergone counselling, and 5% had been admitted to hospital. Moreover, 79% reported feeling anxious about work, 86% reported having sleepless nights, and 73% said that they had suffered from low energy levels. There is no possibility of dealing with the current unacceptable level of attainment if teachers are not at the forefront, and are not feeling valued and supported.

The changes in standard assessment tests are creating an undesirable culture, not just among teachers but among our young people in secondary and, in particular, primary schools. The pressure that is being put on primary school pupils will certainly not drive up standards, and it is causing those young people to become stressed. I can tell the House this not just from the figures and surveys, which should be giving cause for concern, but as a father. I have a 10-year-old daughter, Isabel, who is in her all-important year 6. As a conscientious parent, I am having to tell her that she needs to take some time off and not do homework every single night.

I am also hearing from teachers in a number of schools that the league tables have a significant effect on morale, even when there are often good reasons for the results—for example, cohort issues resulting in a school not being at the top of the list. Teachers are also telling me that SATs results will be carried through into secondary schools, which will have a lasting effect on a pupil's education. That is not what was intended—[*Interruption.*] The Minister is saying that that is not true. It is not what he intended, but it is what is happening. I am telling him this as a father and as someone who speaks to the people involved. This is not acceptable and it is not the way to drive up standards.

Similarly, we need change but we most certainly do not need a change to be introduced on the basis of some ideological drive or, frankly, of a gimmick in a manifesto from an election that took place a long time ago. The Government think that the answer is to turn all our schools into academies, and this has led to real anger and further damaged the morale of teachers and the teaching profession.

There are other issues relating to particular cohorts and groupings in our schools. One issue that certainly has resonance, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), is the need to do more to support those from certain ethnic minority backgrounds. I want to ask the Minister specifically whether he will consider restoring the ethnic minority achievement grant, which was designated to support ethnic minority pupils in dealing with certain issues in some of our constituencies. In parts of Leeds, as well as in other parts of Yorkshire and the Humber, we need to deal with particular issues in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. There are also real concerns about the funding for special educational needs provision, which continues to decline.

**Melanie Onn:** Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that SEN children account for 65% of all exclusions across all school types?

**Greg Mulholland:** I do indeed. I was about to say that—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I suggested that Members should speak for up to eight minutes. The hon. Gentleman has now been speaking for 10, so I am sure that he must be coming to the end of his speech.

**Greg Mulholland:** Thank you for your patience, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was about to say that pupils with special educational needs missed 8.2% of sessions, compared with 4.8% of those without SEN.

In conclusion, we need change. We need collaborative change: we need to work together in this House, with local authorities, with schools, with parents and with pupils, but that is not the approach being taken by the Government. I ask them to think again and to work with everyone here and everyone else I have just mentioned to turn around these figures so that we can see Yorkshire at the top of another league table in the years to come.

9.18 pm

**Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab):** I should like to echo my colleagues' congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox). This is exactly the kind of debate that we need to have in this Chamber, and exactly the kind of debate that we need the Government to listen and respond to. Along with everyone else who has spoken today, I am deeply concerned that when it comes to education, Yorkshire and the Humber lags behind the other areas of the country, but I do not see this simply as a Yorkshire and the Humber issue. As the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) said, if children from our region are not allowed to reach their full potential, it will have a devastating economic impact on the entire country. That is why we need the Government to respond to this debate.

[Sarah Champion]

Sadly, it is becoming more and more clear that a child's prospects depend on not only their ability but on their economic circumstances and their postcode. The north and the midlands achieve persistently lower GCSE results than the south. As the report from the Social Market Foundation shows, in 2013-14, Yorkshire and the Humber had the lowest percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, at only 63% compared with more than 70% for London. The chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, commented in Ofsted's most recent annual report that there is a "deeply troubling" north-south divide in secondary school performance, and that the consequences of failing to address it would be profound. Does anyone believe for one second that the disparity is down to the children's ability?

Income inequality and deprivation of course play a huge part. The north and the midlands are more economically deprived than the south. In Yorkshire and the Humber, 19.9% of children are classed as being in poverty; that is significantly higher than the UK average. The SMF report clearly demonstrates the impact of deprivation on achievement at school. Only slightly more than 40% of children entitled to free school meals achieve five good GCSEs, compared with almost 70% of those not entitled. Furthermore, evidence shows that even the highest-achieving primary school leavers from economically deprived backgrounds are failing to reach their potential. Research from the Sutton Trust shows that one in three boys eligible for free school meals who got top marks at key stage 2 fail to achieve among the top 25% of marks at GCSE. That is more than double the proportion for those not on free school meals. For girls, the figure was only slightly better, at one in four.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that teachers in deprived schools are likely to be significantly less experienced than those in more advantaged schools. Teachers in the most advantaged 20% of schools have an average of 1.5 years' more experience than those in the least advantaged. However, the underperformance of Yorkshire and Humber cannot solely be explained by economic deprivation. London has some of the most deprived areas in the country, yet academic achievement, as my hon. Friends have mentioned, soars above that of Yorkshire and the Humber.

The chief inspector of schools argued that there is nothing inevitable about the correlation between poverty and underachievement at school, pointing out that 84% of primary schools in the north and midlands are good or outstanding, which is virtually the same as in the south. In Yorkshire and the Humber, 80% of primary schools are good or outstanding, but only 66% of secondary schools achieve that rating. Indeed, 10% of secondary schools are deemed inadequate—another measure in which Yorkshire and the Humber sadly leads the field, or rather fails. While income inequality has long been recognised as contributing to underachievement at schools, we must acknowledge that geographic inequality is a crucial factor.

Successive Governments have not tackled the problem; indeed, it has got worse over the past 30 years. The SMF report states that where a child lives is a significantly more powerful factor in academic success for those born in 2000 than it was for those born in 1970. Yorkshire and the Humber has in fact fallen further behind,

dropping from being the fourth-lowest performing area in 1985 to being the lowest in 2013. It cannot be acceptable for a child's postcode to limit their chances in life in Britain in the 21st century. The Government must urgently tackle the problem.

Far from tackling inequality, the Government have instead overseen a crisis in education. Britain faces an overwhelming teacher shortage, rising class sizes and an exam and assessment regime that is in chaos. Capital spending on education has fallen by 34% in real terms under the Tories. The Government have missed their recruitment target for new trainee teachers for four years. The number of teachers leaving the profession ahead of retirement has risen by 11%. How can we seriously address inequality when the education system faces such strains? Rather than tackling the crisis, the Education Secretary berates children—sorry, I meant teachers; I do not know what she says to children. She berates teachers, accusing them of talking down their profession, but teachers are raising real concerns about the future of education in this country.

The Government's much-vaunted White Paper contains not a single measure that will address any of the problems. Instead, it proposes the forced academisation of all schools, though there is no evidence whatever that it will improve standards. Indeed, the chief inspector of schools has made it abundantly clear that becoming an academy will not automatically lead to improvement, arguing that without strong teaching and leadership, standards will inevitably drop,

"whatever type of institution the nameplate on the door proclaims the school to be."

It cannot be acceptable that children in Yorkshire and the Humber have their achievement limited because of their address. We need urgent action to ensure that all children are able to reach their potential. Instead, I am sad to say that we see a Government utterly unable to tackle the crisis they have created, seemingly oblivious to the problems we face, and completely out of ideas to enable all our children to flourish.

9.24 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings (Jo Cox) for securing this important debate, and the members of the Backbench Business Committee for giving time for it. This is vital time in which to discuss education and attainment in our region, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss the subject again so soon after the Opposition day debate on the Government's schools White Paper, which my colleague the shadow Education Secretary led in the Chamber last week.

Education is a subject close to my heart, just as it is close to the hearts of everyone in the Chamber tonight. I am the son of two teachers, and I was very proud of the part they played in a collective contribution to changing the lives of people in my home city of Leeds. Without the education I received at Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School in Meanwood in Leeds, I would not have had the skills or the opportunity to represent the people I went to school with.

This motion highlights the fact that our region of Yorkshire and the Humber was the lowest ranked in England in 2013-14 for educational attainment. As has been mentioned, the SMF has found that inequality between regions was the most important factor in

determining the educational attainment of students. Hon. Members who research the matter in the Library will find that in Yorkshire and the Humber 55.1% of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at A\* to C, whereas the national average in state-funded schools in England was higher, at 57.3%. In Leeds East, the figure was 44.8%, below both the national average and the figure across our region.

Why is that? Is it because people in Leeds East are less able? Is it because people in my area are less ambitious, less hard-working or less aspirational? Not a bit of it. Economic circumstances are a key factor. In 2015, eligibility for free school meals was higher in Yorkshire than nationally, and it was higher in Leeds East than in our region. Let us be clear, because this is political, as everything is: the Conservative Government's austerity agenda of cuts to welfare and holding down pay in the public sector, which is such a dominant source of employment in my constituency, damages not only people's living standards now, but the life chances of their children.

As we have heard today, the Government would have us believe that forced academisation is a panacea that will deliver school improvement. The problem is that there is no credible evidence base that suggests that conversion to academy status improves pupil attainment in national tests or national exams, or leads to school improvements. Even the Minister for Schools has conceded that, saying:

"This government does not believe that all academies and free schools are necessarily better than maintained schools."

On that at least, he is correct.

Reference has been made to two reports by the Sutton Trust on the effect of academisation on students from low-income backgrounds. Both found "very significant" variation in outcomes for pupils from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, both between and within academy chains. In 2013, only 16 out of 31 academy chains bettered the improvement achieved across all non-academised state schools by disadvantaged pupils in attaining five A\* to C GCSEs including English and maths. The Sutton Trust concluded:

"Far from providing a solution to disadvantage, a few chains may be exacerbating it".

I will not dwell on how talk of "chains" of schools, as though they were some sort of fast food outlet, offends me greatly, but these are schools and they should not be chains. My constituency has five secondary schools, with a mixture of secondary academies and community schools. Last year's GCSE results show that the academies in my constituency were the bottom three of those five schools for attainment. That is just a snapshot, but it is worth noting. One academy is in special measures following an Ofsted inspection in December. Just 34% of its pupils achieved five A\* to C-grade GCSEs last year, compared with 50% in 2012 when the school had a "good" overall rating. The Ofsted report found that the new principal, who has a record of turning around a poorly performing school in Sheffield, has begun "to tackle long-term weaknesses in the academy's effectiveness."

Another academy in my constituency, now in a local chain supported by Leeds City College, was transferred out of the E-ACT academy chain because of that chain's "ineffective...intervention and support." Perhaps that transfer was fortunate for the school, as E-ACT has recently scrapped all its governing bodies, cutting out

parents and the local authority. In that sense, it is ahead of the game, as the Government are following it in that unjustifiable exclusion of local parents. A third academy transferred into the United Learning academy chain in 2012 when it was in special measures. Although it is performing better, I cannot help but note some of the concerns that others have about that chain.

We have work to do. I have already said that there is no evidence that academies perform better, and the facts on the ground in Leeds East support that view. The work before us is not helped by a serious funding shortfall. Leeds faces the prospect of a 5.2% real-terms cut in funding with the introduction of a new funding formula for schools. As we have heard from my colleagues today, it is clear that there is much to be learned from the London Challenge, which encouraged collaboration between schools and the sharing of good practice across local authority boundaries to improve all schools, not just those with the lowest attainment.

According to Professor Merryn Hutchings, lead author of the Department for Education's "Evaluation of the City Challenge programme", it is notable that the programme was comparatively cheap. Over three years, the funding for City Challenge was £160 million, which is considerably cheaper than the £8.5 billion reportedly spent on the academies programme over two years.

I have focused on secondary schools, but as this is primary school allocation day, I want to highlight the concern of Lucinda Yeadon, Leeds City Council's executive member for children and families. She said that at a time when we are struggling to find new places for pupils, the forced academisation of primary schools means that the legal obligation on local authorities to provide more places while being stripped of the power to do so is "totally illogical," and she is right. I conclude by thanking Councillor Lucinda Yeadon, all the wonderful teachers in Leeds and the local NUT and NASUWT activists—I know that the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is not so keen on those activists—for all the work they do.

I also thank Parliament's education centre, and Mr Speaker for the support that he has given it. Without a doubt—I am sure that on this at least I do speak for many others in this place—one of our greatest pleasures is meeting children and young people from our constituencies. I love meeting Leeds school pupils who have travelled down to see Parliament, which of course belongs to them, and hearing their insightful, inspiring questions and discussions. Leeds and Leeds East have pupils with ability and potential; it is down to us as MPs to hold the Government to account and ensure that we deliver the education system that young people in Leeds East, across Yorkshire and across the country need and deserve.

9.33 pm

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) on securing the debate with the assistance of the hon. Members for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers).

I am not shy in being absolutely passionate about making sure that children in Grimsby have every opportunity available to them—the same opportunities

[Melanie Onn]

that are available to all children across the rest of the country. That is why it is so important that MPs from Yorkshire and the Humber are in the Chamber today, speaking with one voice in support of the children of our region.

The fact that Yorkshire and the Humber is the lowest-achieving region in the country should throw into question the Government's revised funding formula announced in the autumn statement. I am sure the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) will disagree with me greatly, but I will continue regardless. Surely if there were a need to redistribute funding to rural areas, we would expect schools in the south-west or the north-west to be performing worse than those in our region. It makes a mockery of any claim from the Government to be raising education standards in towns such as Grimsby, Doncaster or Rotherham when they are shifting funds away from those towns. The plans currently out for consultation will result in north-east losing around £2.1 million, which is more than £100 per pupil each year. How can it be described as fairer when a town without a single good or outstanding secondary school loses out?

**Graham Stuart:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Melanie Onn:** The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not—time is rather short.

Many colleagues have talked about the shortage of teachers, partly because of the large number leaving the profession. More than one in 10 teachers quit in 2014, a 10% increase on 2011. That has been a recent issue for schools in Grimsby, where three of the four secondary school heads left their posts last summer. That level of leadership turnover has an impact on children's educational experience. It disrupts continuity and makes young people believe that their school does not care about them. It gives them less incentive to invest in their school if they do not think the teachers and leadership are investing in it as well. It is an incredibly damaging message to send.

The problem of teacher flight is coupled with that of local schools struggling to bring teachers to the area, which has been mentioned. That is a particular issue facing coastal communities across the public and private sectors. As my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings said, Teach First should be sending more teachers to low-achieving areas of the country. I welcome the national teaching service and urge the Government to hurry up and bring it to Yorkshire and the Humber.

I take this opportunity to commend Macaulay Primary School in my constituency, which I had the privilege of visiting recently, for meeting its own recruitment challenges with an innovative solution, which the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness will approve of—a “grow your own” approach. The school has been supporting its teaching assistants into teacher training schemes, enabling it to fill vacancies with teachers who already have a relationship with the children at that school, as well as experience in the classroom.

Teaching assistants are a huge resource for schools, but they are often undervalued and not used effectively. Unlike for teachers, there is no national pay structure for TAs, so when budgets are squeezed, those remaining often end up having to take on more work, which they

are not necessarily qualified to do, for less pay. Research has shown that in many schools, TAs are not being used in ways that allow them to best improve students' learning. The Education Endowment Foundation has called for closer working relationships between teachers and TAs, and for more training opportunities. Has the Minister considered the EEF's report and a potential career path from assistant to teacher?

Unison has called for teaching assistants to be paid for 52 weeks of the year, rather than the current term time-only arrangement. Have the Government considered that for TAs who want to become teachers, so that they could spend their time out of the classroom working with teachers to better prepare for lessons and training to become qualified teachers themselves?

I feel well placed to comment on the Government's recently announced policy of forcing schools to become academies, as all the secondary schools in my constituency have already made that move. That is quite a gentle description of what has happened. One problem I see is that different chains of academies do not seem to work together. To change that, I am trying to co-ordinate a meeting between the companies that operate in my town. Are the Government doing anything to encourage the sharing of best practice between local schools?

What we have seen locally is that schools that were performing okay before they became academies are still okay, but those that were underperforming are still underperforming. I do not put that down to any failure on the part of teachers. The teaching staff I have met are incredibly dedicated, and every child I meet is happy to be in their school. That is a credit to all the people working in those organisations. The fact remains, however, that every secondary school achieved worse results last year than in 2013, and although two schools improved their Ofsted ratings, one school received a worse rating than the previous year, and the other still “required improvement”.

I am coming to the end of my allocated time, but I want to mention two more schools. The first is the Academy Grimsby, a 14 to 16 academy that was set up two years ago by a local further education provider. It allows students to learn skills for the engineering, care and digital industries among others. It was originally set up for hard-to-place children and has been incredibly successful at giving less academic students the chance to learn vocational skills early in life and a much greater chance of finding a job once they finish school.

The second school I want to mention is the Lisle Marsden Primary Academy, which I am due to visit on Friday. It is undertaking a literacy day initiative run by Pobble, which specialises in inspiring reluctant writers as well as stretching the most able readers through its literary programme, which is operating in over 300 schools across the country. Those are examples of schools really innovating to try to get the best, but we need the Government to step in and do more.

9.40 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings (Jo Cox) on securing the debate, which has been excellent, along with the hon. Members for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland). It has shown the strength and passion of Yorkshire and the Humber MPs across the Chamber.



My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings made the case really well about the dangers of education becoming a postcode lottery. Sadly, the evidence suggests that children in the so-called northern powerhouse are falling behind, which we definitely do not want to happen. She was right to emphasise the importance of teacher quality and to urge the Government to do more to address the teacher recruitment and retention crisis that we face. She was also right to welcome steps set out in the White Paper, such as the setting up of the National Teaching Service. She urged the Government to accelerate such actions and drew attention to the problem of Teach First retaining so many of its teachers in areas where they are perhaps less needed than they are in Yorkshire and the Humber. That is a challenge to the Minister and the Government.

The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), who used to chair the Education Committee, made an interesting and informed contribution, as he always does, focusing on good leaders and good teachers being the key. He drew attention to the Hanushek research, which shows that teachers performing on the 90th percentile add an extra year's learning compared with teachers performing on the 10th percentile. That reminds us of the need to do everything we can to get teachers to the high level of performance we need consistently across the country. He reminded us that the high-stakes accountability system sometimes creates perverse incentives, so more intelligence is needed in how we deal with those incentives so that we get the right teachers and the right leaders in the right places and deliver the right outcomes across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) talked about her constituency passionately, drawing attention to the underperformance of young people there but pointing out that it was not for want of trying. She drew attention to the enormous challenge that the city of Bradford faces. The word "challenge" came up again and again. We need to look at the London Challenge as an exemplar for tackling this issue. She said that if the northern powerhouse is to mean anything at all, it must mean that we invest in educational excellence and make sure that things are moving forward.

The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), in a characteristically robust contribution, made the strong point that pupils get only one go at their education, which is why it is so important to get it right. He drew attention to parental responsibility. The Minister might want to talk about what the Government are doing to support parents—not just in a technical way, but by supporting parenting and parenthood—so that the opportunities that young people coming into the system with good parental backgrounds have are equalised across the piece.

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): Parents as governors.

**Nic Dakin:** Exactly.

The hon. Member for Shipley also expressed concern that the changes to the funding formula might have unintended consequences. That has been a theme throughout the debate, and it was a helpful comment.

In a useful exchange, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and the hon. Member for Shipley emphasised the importance of role models,

as well as the fact that where someone grows up should not be where they end up, and that aspiration is a key driver of educational and other attainment. My hon. Friend also reminded us of the advantages of growing up in Kingston upon Thames as opposed to Kingstone in Barnsley. Furthermore, he drew attention to the impact of poverty and of leadership—key issues that need to be considered.

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Cleethorpes, talked about the conundrum of North East Lincolnshire—something my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) also touched on. The area was a trailblazer for academies and has some excellent practice, but it continues to perform less well than we would wish—as my hon. Friend said, performance is actually going backwards at secondary level. The Minister should think about that conundrum, given that we are on the cusp of putting a lot of energy into forced academisation. As many hon. Members have said, that might be a distraction from the issues we should be prioritising.

In a personal, passionate contribution, my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) reminded us of the relationship between home and the world of education, and of the fact that education can often transform lives and be a passport to a better future. As she said, Yorkshire and the Humber persistently underperforms, and that needs to stop. We need more confident, engaged parenting, which will make a difference to our young people. She also drew attention to the way in which area-based reviews have not always looked at all post-16 provision in an area, which seems perverse. Some 91% of colleges in Yorkshire and the Humber are good or outstanding, and we should recognise that in the debate.

In a characteristically perceptive contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) reminded us of the relationship between economic success and educational attainment. He talked about the imbalance that arises when jobs—whether private sector or public sector—move out of the north for various reasons. As those jobs move out, it is not surprising that the opportunities for growth, and the opportunities my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley talked about for things such as internships and work experience, also shrink. My hon. Friend also echoed concerns about academisation being a distraction, and he quoted people in his constituency with a lot of knowledge about the issue.

The hon. Member for Leeds North West talked about issues having an impact on the morale of teachers, as well as about the importance of teacher morale and the Government needing to do something about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) talked about the way in which one in three youngsters from poorer backgrounds does well in primary school but only 25% achieve at GCSE—a damning statistic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) reminded us again of the relationship between economic performance and educational attainment. Speaking with great passion and with great knowledge of his area and the performance of different schools there, he outlined his concerns about forced academisation.

[*Nic Dakin*]

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby finished on a fantastic note, saying that it is important that Yorkshire and the Humber speaks with one voice. That is very much the case.

I hope the Minister will be able to give us a northern powerhouse schools strategy, to talk about what the Government are doing for parents, to talk about joined-up discussions of education and the economy, and to give us confidence about moving forward in Yorkshire and the Humber.

9.49 pm

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** All in eight minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I am delighted to be able to respond to what has been an excellent debate on educational standards in Yorkshire and the Humber. I spent five years of my secondary school education at comprehensive schools in Yorkshire: first at Roundhay School in Leeds and then a sixth form in Wakefield. My mother taught at Talbot Primary School in Roundhay, and my sister and brother both went to Harrogate Grammar School, which, despite its name, is an outstanding comprehensive school in Yorkshire.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Batley and Spenningsdale (Jo Cox) and for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) on securing this debate. May I begin on a note of consensus? I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale that nothing we do in this House is more important than ensuring that no child is left behind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) cited Eric Hanushek, who wrote the book, “The Knowledge Capital of Nations: Education and the Economics of Growth”, which makes the important point that knowledge is the key to the long-term prosperity of a nation. That is why our education and curriculum reforms are so important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) referred to some very good schools in his constituency, such as Beckfoot School in Bingley, which I visited with him in February. Some 46% of its pupils achieve the gold standard English baccalaureate combination of GCSEs.

In her powerful speech, the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) was right to say that it is unacceptable for any child to start secondary school still struggling to read. Intervention should be put in place before those children leave primary school. Nothing could be more important to me personally than ensuring that we get reading right for all children in primary schools.

I say to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) that the work of academy trusts such as the David Ross Education Trust, of which I used to be a trustee, has done a huge amount to transform education in Grimsby and to provide greater opportunities for sport and the arts.

The hon. Member for Leeds North West referred to the Social Market Foundation commission on inequality in education. I know that the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), who launched that commission in January, will continue to champion the cause of reducing educational inequality throughout the country. As for the pupil premium, I refer the hon.

Gentleman to the White Paper, which confirms the continuation of the pupil premium. It is, of course, closing the education gap, which the Government are sincerely and absolutely committed to closing.

**Greg Mulholland:** That is good news, but the question was whether it will have the same level of funding.

**Mr Gibb:** We have given a commitment both in the White Paper and in our manifesto, and we will come to the details very shortly.

Last month we published our White Paper setting out how we will seek to achieve educational excellence everywhere. As the Secretary of State set out, we must extend opportunity to every child, whatever their background. Access to an academically rigorous education in a well-run and orderly school should be seen not as a luxury, but as a right for every child.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale raised the issue of the disparity in GCSE attainment between London and Yorkshire and the Humber. There is also, of course, a disparity within Yorkshire and the Humber, with performance ranging from 63.7% of pupils in York achieving five A\* to C GCSEs, including English and maths—which is three percentage points higher than London’s 60.9%—down to 45.5% in Bradford, which is 15 percentage points lower than the London average.

In 2015, Yorkshire and the Humber had the lowest proportion of pupils from any English region reaching the expected standard in a year 1 phonics check. Some 74% of pupils reached the expected standard in Yorkshire and the Humber, compared with a national average of 77%, and compared with 83% in London boroughs such as Newham.

Yorkshire and the Humber have the second lowest proportion of pupils entering the EBacc combination of GCSEs: the figure in Yorkshire and the Humber is 35%, compared with 36.2% nationally. There is a similar disparity in terms of achieving the EBacc. Some local authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber, however, achieve above the national average for entering the EBacc, including York with 55.4%, North Yorkshire with 42.1% and Leeds with 40.6%.

We should celebrate the great improvements that have taken place in London, as hon. Members have done during this debate, but we should also acknowledge and celebrate improvements that the hard work of teachers, headteachers and governors has delivered throughout the country. Schools today are better than ever before, with 1.4 million more children in good and outstanding schools than there were in 2010. In Yorkshire and the Humber, compared with 2010 there were 209 more good and outstanding schools in August 2015, meaning that more than 133,000 more pupils attend a good school today than in 2010.

The London Challenge focused on ensuring that there was collaboration between schools. Collaboration is the essence of multi-academy trusts, particularly for the spread of best practice. The argument is sometimes made, as it was by the hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale, that the Government were wrong not to roll out the London Challenge programme across the whole of England. What we have done instead is to build the most successful aspects of the challenge programme into our reforms. We have continued and expanded the

matching of failing schools with strong sponsors. We have increased the number of national leaders of education from around 250 in 2010 to more than 1,000 in 2015, and we have encouraged school partnerships.

A third of schools are now engaged in a teaching school alliance, and we have set out an expectation that most schools will form or join multi-academy trusts, given the benefits that they offer. In Yorkshire and the Humber, there are currently 186 national leaders of education and 58 teaching school alliances, and there is a higher level of participation by schools in such alliances in the region than there is nationally. High-quality sponsors can have a tremendous impact on underperforming schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes referred to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, and I would argue that the most important recommendation in its report was the call for a zero-tolerance approach to schools in terminal failure. That is exactly what we have legislated for in the Education and Adoption Act 2016, which will ensure that regional schools commissioners have the power to commission the turnaround of failing and coasting schools without delay. Through the National Teaching Service, it is our intention that by 2020, 1,500 high-performing teachers and middle leaders will be placed directly into schools in areas of the country that struggle to attract, recruit and retain high-quality teachers. The national roll-out will begin in early 2017.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) mentioned the northern sponsor fund. I am delighted that Sir Nick Weller, the chief executive of the Dixons Academies trust, which has helped to improve results at several schools in Bradford, will be leading a report for the Government on how we can go further and faster to deliver a lasting turnaround in school performance in the north. Sir Nick's work will, among other things, identify ways in which our current reforms can support improvements in newly identified "achieving excellence" areas across England—those areas of the country where we need to take specific action to raise academic standards. The White Paper identified areas of the country where low school standards are reinforced by a lack of capacity to deliver and sustain improvement. In those areas, we will work with local headteachers to diagnose the underlying problem and target our national programmes to help them to secure sufficient high-quality teachers and system leaders, sponsors and governors.

I have listened carefully to hon. Members and my hon. Friends this evening. As a Government, we are determined that every area and region of the country will have rising academic standards and ever-improving standards of behaviour. The whole objective of the White Paper, "Educational Excellence Everywhere" is to ensure that wherever a child goes to school, they can expect the same high standards. We want, and our reforms are intended to deliver, those same high standards throughout Yorkshire and the Humber, as well as throughout the country.

9.58 pm

**Jo Cox:** It has been an honour to lead and participate in this well-informed, passionate and compelling debate, to which Members from all parts of the House have made powerful contributions. There has been an enormous amount of consensus on many issues—not least on the tremendous contribution that headteachers and teachers make to the future of our children in Yorkshire and the Humber—and that is welcome indeed. With respect to the Minister, it is clear that we need far more detail from the Government, and far more ambition on a strategy to improve the life chances of children from Yorkshire and the Humber. Although he gave a compelling response, I do not think that his answer quite stacks up to the level of ambition for which there has been a united call this evening from all parts of the House. The action called for really must address this regional disparity. If we are serious about rebalancing our economy and ensuring that no children fall behind, we need to see more from the Government on this compelling issue.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that Yorkshire and the Humber was the lowest ranked region in England in 2013-14 for educational attainment; further notes that the January 2016 report from the Social Market Foundation entitled *Educational Inequality in England and Wales* found that geographical inequality was the most important factor in determining students' educational attainment; and calls on the Government to take action to address the underlying causes of these inequalities as a matter of urgency and to set out the steps it is taking to ensure that children in Yorkshire and the Humber are equally likely to achieve good school qualifications as children in London.

## Electoral Fraud: Tower Hamlets

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Charlie Elphicke.)*

10 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise the concern of many of my constituents not only about the breathtaking decision of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police Service not to prosecute following the judgment of the election court in the case of fraud at the 2014 mayoral election in Tower Hamlets, but about the way that decision was communicated.

If I may, I will briefly lay out some of the background. There have been regular allegations about electoral fraud in Tower Hamlets at almost every election in recent years. Following the chaos at the 2014 mayoral election, especially at the count at the Troxy centre, many complaints were again registered. This time, however, there was a major difference. In the absence of prosecutorial action and to the embarrassment of local political parties, four brave citizens—Andy Erlam, Debbie Simone, Azmal Hussein and Angela Moffat—decided, at considerable personal risk, to raise a private prosecution in the election court. As you know, Mr Speaker, that court has all the powers of the High Court or the Court of Session.

As long ago as 1947, a report produced by a committee considering electoral law reform commented:

“Irregularities in elections should not be regarded as a private wrong which an individual must come forward to remedy, but as attempts to wreck the machinery of representative government, and, as an attack upon national institutions which the nation should concern itself to repel”.

The committee also noted that

“the integrity of elections...concerns the community as a whole”.

Those words should give us some idea of the enormity and significance of what the four Tower Hamlets petitioners did not only for Tower Hamlets, but for the whole of the national electorate. Indeed, the judge stated:

“To bring an election petition as a private citizen requires enormous courage”,

as, for the petitioners, it involves

“a potentially devastating bill of costs”.

He also observed the misery that the petitioners faced, who

“would be portrayed as racists and Islamophobes, attempting to set aside the election...And so it proved. The Petitioners have been duly vilified—but they have hung in there.”

No one suffered in this respect more than petitioner Azmal Hussein, whose efforts to highlight and bring to an end corruption in the borough of Tower Hamlets brought all manner of vile abuse literally to his door. The verbal abuse and threats lasted right through to the case in the High Court. Azmal Hussein was told he should die for challenging the election result, and was despised as someone who failed to join others in the view that ethnic and religious solidarity should outweigh any respect for democracy and fair play. Mr Hussein’s van and restaurant window were vandalised, but he stayed resolute and strong.

The judge quite rightly said in his judgment:

“The court expresses surprise that this Petition was not brought by the Labour Party.”

His words resonate, embarrassingly, with many of us. It should not have been left to four tenacious and brave individuals to insist that democracy, not Kray twins-style gangsterism, should be the system that governs in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

I want to say a word in praise of Mr Hoar, who provided the legal representation for the four plaintiffs. I echo the sentiments of the judge, who said in his judgment:

“For Mr Hoar, this has been a complete *tour de force*. He accepted the case on the basis of direct access”,

as his four clients could not afford to instruct solicitors. Of his efforts, the judge said:

“By any standards this was a considerable feat and worthy of the admiration of the court.”

After a trial lasting 30 days, with Mr Richard Mawrey QC sitting as a judge, on 23 April 2015 Lutfur Rahman was reported personally guilty and guilty by his agents of corrupt and illegal practices, of making false statements of fact about another candidate’s personal conduct or character, of administering council grants in a way which constituted electoral bribery and of spiritual intimidation of voters. He was also reported guilty by his agents of personation, postal vote fraud, fraudulent registration of voters and illegal payment of canvassers. That is quite a list.

The judge also stated that

“the financial affairs of THF”—

Tower Hamlets First—

“were, at best, wholly irresponsible and at worst, dishonest.”

The judge’s observations indicated that he recognised that character assassination had happened not only during the election campaign, but in the court. In referring to evidence given by THF members about a woman who gave evidence against them, he said that

“the three men were quite deliberately lying.”

In the end, the election of May 2014 was declared void, with Mr Rahman disqualified from holding electoral office for five years. The court judgment says:

“These penalties are entirely separate from any criminal sanctions that might be imposed if the candidate concerned is prosecuted to conviction for an electoral offence.”

In an article in *The Guardian*, Dave Hill said of Judge Mawrey:

“He did not give Rahman a back alley kicking of the type that recur in the more gruesome East End mythologies, but he did dish out a legal equivalent.”

As I understand it, the level of proof required by the election court is equivalent to that in criminal law, rather than civil law. The judgment states:

“It is settled law that the court must apply the criminal standard of proof, namely proof beyond reasonable doubt.”

It later says:

“Thus the court will apply a) the criminal standard of proof to the charges that Mr Rahman and/or his agents have been guilty of corrupt or illegal practices; b) the criminal standard of proof to the question of whether there has been general corruption”.

The plaintiffs have been seeking costs. The Solicitors Regulation Authority has recently confirmed that Mr Rahman is to appear before its disciplinary tribunal. At the very least, there are suggestions that he has been hiding his assets, offloading to his family or not declaring properties owned here and in Bangladesh. As was reported recently in the *East London Advertiser*,

“The £500,000 legal costs of the original six-week election trial was awarded against Rahman,”

although, as the article went on to say, £3 million of property assets have been frozen. The four petitioners are still trying to recoup heavy financial losses from Mr Rahman.

There is talk of a property in Bow that is owned by Mr Rahman, although it takes some effort to get beyond the layers of complication in respect of his properties, with his wife claiming part-ownership and beneficial interest. There is also undeclared income to the taxman on two properties that they rented out. It seems that money and property are sloshing around, adding additional features to the catalogue of wrongdoing. Mr Rahman, meanwhile, has declared himself bankrupt.

On the question of property, the judge referred to a particular address, 16 Prioress House, and its place within this narrative of dodgy dealings. Two THF candidates had asserted that they lived at that address. The judgment declared:

“I am completely satisfied that neither of these two THF candidates ever resided at 16 Prioress House.”

It states that they were therefore

“guilty of an offence under s 61”.

The judge drew a number of conclusions on the issue of grants, including, for the record, that

“enormous sums of public money had been paid to organisations in excess of that which Council officers had recommended and, in many instances, to organisations that had not even applied for grants”.

The judgment states that

“a total of 15 applications receiving aggregate funding of £243,500 did not meet minimum eligibility criteria and so were not scored by officers”,

and continues:

“Further, 21 applications totalling £455,700, which did meet the minimum eligibility criteria, but did not meet the minimum quality threshold score of 40, were successful in the final awards.”

The judgment went on to say:

“By way of another example, grants totalling just under £100,000 were handed out to ten organisations, all Bangladeshi or other Muslim organisations, for lunch clubs when none of them had even applied for a grant.”

It states that

“organisations deemed totally ineligible...found themselves the grateful recipients of tens of thousands pounds of public money”, and that

“£352,000 was awarded without an open application process”

from a fund called the “954 Fund”. It continues:

“Shadwell’s grant increased from £204,386 to £460,750”,

meaning that it more than doubled. Subsequently,

“Shadwell returned two THF candidates...Bow East, on the other hand, saw its grant reduced from the officers’ recommendation of £99,397—cut by roughly a third to £67,000.”

The opposite effect to what we saw in Shadwell is all too clear:

“Bow East returned three Labour Councillors.”

We can do nothing but conclude that Tower Hamlets First candidates benefited from money that their party invested locally.

The judge’s conclusion? I quote:

“Was the making of those grants corrupt? Again, this seems inescapable.”

He observed that it was bribery

“by any ethical or moral standards”,

but posed the question,

“is it bribery contrary to s 113 of the 1983 Act?”

In its formal conclusions the judgment says:

“The court is satisfied and certifies that in the election for the Mayor of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets held on 22 May 2014...the First Respondent Mr Rahman was personally guilty and guilty by his agents of an illegal practice contrary to s 106 of the 1983 Act...the First Respondent Mr Rahman was personally guilty and guilty by his agents of a corrupt practice contrary to s 113 of the 1983 Act...the First Respondent Mr Rahman was personally guilty and guilty by his agents of a corrupt practice contrary to s 115 of the 1983 Act.”

Scotland Yard dropped its investigation into electoral fraud after finding

“insufficient evidence that criminal offences had been committed”.

How does that tally with the election court’s findings? Detectives launched their investigation after Mr Rahman was found guilty of corrupt and illegal practices. How can practices with such a description not be worthy of prosecution? I have written to the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner about these matters, and have secured a meeting soon with Commissioner Hogan-Howe, when I hope to raise these and other questions.

The police findings have led Mr Rahman’s supporters to claim that he has been proven innocent of all charges. Who can blame them? As pointed out by local Conservative Councillor Peter Golds,

“if the police fail to prosecute, there are no convictions and therefore no fraud...Even a successful election petition can be swept under the carpet when the police do nothing.”

It should be noted that the judge paid tribute to Councillor Golds, by whom the petitioners “have been greatly aided”.

The Bangladeshi media in Tower Hamlets have reported events as anticipated. Mr Ted Jeory, a reporter of high reputation who has long taken an interest in these matters, says:

“The Bengali media failed miserably in their journalistic duty to hold the borough’s leaders to account. Instead of ‘without fear or favour’, there was far too much fear and they were full of favour. Lutfur...demanded almost nationalistic loyalty to his cause, and it was given. They did their readers and viewers a huge disservice.”

Mr Speaker, I hope you can imagine the consternation all this has caused in Tower Hamlets to all of our residents interested in democracy, regardless of their colour, religion or background.

On the various views of the court and its findings, I feel it is worth pointing out that, contrary to what Mr Rahman’s supporters have espoused, the judge was not interested in indulging in a wholehearted, blinkered condemnation of the former mayor. However, the judge highlighted the extent to which the former mayor’s supporters nursed and perpetrated the belief that they and their candidate were victims:

“In their minds, they were being targeted because they were Bangladeshi and Muslim: so their critics were necessarily racists and Islamophobes.”

Such swiftly dispatched gibes not only slander, besmirch and cause distress—as they are designed to do—to those innocent of such charges, but they devalue the terms and diminish the plight of those who experience and suffer real prejudice.

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

The election court says Lutfur Rahman is guilty, but the CPS and the MPS say there is not enough evidence. However, there are suggestions that other inquiries into aspects of fraud and corruption are ongoing. I would be grateful if the Minister outlined exactly what is going on. Which inquiries are still ongoing? Where do the plaintiffs stand in respect of recovering their costs? Where do voters stand in terms of having confidence in electoral arrangements in the future? The Government have appointed commissioners to rebuild the public's confidence that the system can protect against bribery and corruption, and is robust enough to prevent those who have contempt for our democracy from continuing to undermine it in the future. Can the Minister reassure us that the new Mayor, John Biggs, and the commissioners are on track to deliver?

With the greatest respect to the Minister, I had expected the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice to respond to this debate, or perhaps a Justice Minister. I received a nice letter from the Policing Minister who said that a Minister from the Department for Communities and Local Government would respond, but it is actually a Cabinet Office Minister. As he knows, I hold him in high regard, and I mean no disrespect. It does not matter to me—I want a Government response, and I am sure that he will be able to provide one. These are serious matters, so I hope that he will reassure the good people of Tower Hamlets that the authorities will defend their rights, ensure that their elections are not stolen again in future, and say that the petitioners will receive the costs to which they are entitled.

10.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose):** I hold the hon. Gentleman in equally high regard, and he was kind about me in his remarks. From the title of the debate, he will appreciate that this topic falls neatly between three different Departments; one could argue that parts of it should be responded to by the Department for Communities and Local Government, other parts by the Policing Minister, and those parts to do with electoral fraud by a Cabinet Office Minister. I am therefore wearing three hats and have three different sets of briefings, and I will endeavour to cover the entire waterfront. I am sure that we can address any follow-up questions that the hon. Gentleman has, and I will endeavour to cover all the issues he raised.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this subject. Not only is it important to his constituency and borough—it is undoubtedly crucial there—but it has resonance in many parts of the country. Thankfully, electoral fraud is not terribly common in Britain and we do not encounter it often. There is a steady trickle of allegations, and occasional successful prosecutions or problems with our elections, but it is only a trickle. As the old saying goes, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and it would be entirely wrong for us to become complacent. The only way we can maintain an otherwise enviable, widespread trust in this country's elections is by taking problems such as those that occurred in Tower Hamlets extremely seriously when they crop up. We must ensure that there is no repetition, and that anybody thinking of misbehaving in the same way finds it incredibly difficult and is dissuaded from going down that route.

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** May I put on the record my personal admiration for the heroism of those people who took this matter to the electoral court? Does the Minister agree that it would be a betrayal of their courage if the police, for reasons of political correctness, were not to follow through on what appears, in the case laid out by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), to be an open-and-shut matter of criminality?

**John Penrose:** My right hon. Friend anticipates my next remarks, because we all owe a debt of gratitude to the four petitioners. We have heard that they were pretty heroic in the way they pursued this matter. They were not dissuaded. There were plenty of points at which lesser people might have backed away, but they did not take those opportunities and they pursued the matter through thick and thin. On occasion what they had to put up with was pretty thick and pretty thin, yet they continued throughout. We owe them a debt of thanks, particularly those local to Tower Hamlets.

It was not just those four petitioners whom we must thank, however, because other people picked up the challenge. We must thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), who put the commissioners in Tower Hamlets in the first place, as well as the commissioners; the presiding judge, Richard Mawrey, QC; a number of other officials, including Barry Quirk; and local councillors such as Peter Golds for their assiduous and determined campaign. Many people rallied round the cause of democracy in Tower Hamlets, which is all to the good.

I hope the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot comment on specific details of ongoing investigations. As an experienced parliamentarian and former Minister, he will understand the constraints of what I can and cannot say. He is, however, doing entirely the right thing. He mentioned that he was about to have discussions and meetings with Commissioner Hogan-Howe and perhaps others. I hope that they can provide him with further reassurances about what is going on with the investigations. I understand that there are still investigations into grant fraud, for example, in parallel with the ongoing investigations into electoral fraud. They perhaps cannot be made public, but he might be able to get further reassurances.<sup>1</sup>

I am sure the hon. Gentleman will also pursue, assiduously and determinedly, the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) about the extremely trenchant criticisms in Richard Mawrey's judgment. While many people might have expected a prosecution to be straightforward, clearly there are different standards of proof, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and different levels of admissibility for evidence. The police and the Crown Prosecution Service need to make a judgment, but he will want to investigate the individual cases and allegations to find out what can be pursued. Local people in Tower Hamlets and the electoral community more widely will want to know how we can be sure that these sorts of cases are pursued in the strongest possible terms, whenever the evidence allows, so I would encourage him in those meetings and in pursuing those inquiries.

The hon. Gentleman asked where the plaintiffs stood in respect of recovering costs, and then gave at least a partial answer to his question by talking about the

1. [*Official Report*, 12 May 2016, Vol. 609, c. 3MC.]

ongoing discussions and investigations in respect of the ownership of assets associated with former Mayor Rahman and members of his family. There have been press stories and reports of court judgments about what has, and has not, been found to be the property of either the former mayor or his family. I understand that that process is ongoing, and again I cannot comment much beyond that, but this is not a finished story, or a set of conclusions finally reached. The mills of both God and, in this case, the justice system are grinding slowly but, one hopes, exceeding small as well.

The hon. Gentleman asked how we might take forward the broader question of how electoral fraud can be made less easy to perpetrate, though it is not easy in the first place, and how we can ensure that the consequences of electoral fraud are clear, swift and unappealing to those considering undertaking it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, the former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, is working on a report on electoral fraud for the Government that I suspect will land on my desk with a satisfactorily large and weighty thud in the next few weeks or months, with a series of recommendations as to how we can tighten the rules still further.

I obviously do not want to prejudge my right hon. Friend's recommendations, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that my right hon. Friend, having been Secretary of State and, before he entered the House, the leader of a local council, will have observed the local democratic process up close and in huge detail, and will have seen its strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the parliamentary democratic process. I cannot think of anybody better placed to come up with trenchant and closely reasoned recommendations, and I look forward to receiving them. We will all want to read them and consider them in depth.

We will have to wait and see what my right hon. Friend recommends, but I can confirm that he and I have spent time with Richard Mawrey, discussing what he saw both in Tower Hamlets and in his previous judgments—he has a track record of specialising in this area, having examined a series of these problems. Thankfully, such problems are not terribly frequent, but when they have arisen, he has been the person with the single best judicial experience in the country. We have spoken to him and, in depth, to people such as Peter Golds, whom the hon. Gentleman mentioned, so plenty of care has been taken to gather whatever information is available out there. I am sure that we all await my right hon. Friend's report.

The hon. Gentleman's final question was where the local righting of the ship had got to in Tower Hamlets. I have made inquiries of the Department for Communities and Local Government on where we have got to. The answer is, broadly, that huge progress has been made, but there is still further to go. I understand that the council has made some progress on key areas in its best value action plan—on procurement, property disposals, and elections management—and has made particular progress since the arrival of Mayor Biggs last June and the new chief executive officer, Will Tuckley, in October. There are still concerns, however, about delays in other intervention areas, particularly in respect of grants, communications and organisational and cultural changes, some of which take longer to bed in than others. Progress in those areas will need to be continued, as will close monitoring by the commissioners to make sure that the progress made is not eroded and does not start to flag.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will continue to monitor the position very closely and will not consider any variation to the current directions until there is sufficient evidence that the change has been deeply embedded and the key outcomes delivered. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want those to be the main criteria. Given the seriousness and acuteness of the problems encountered in Tower Hamlets—he ably and lucidly summarised the worst of them, but there were many others that he did not have time to go into—I am sure that he will applaud every move to make sure that there is no prospect of a recurrence, and that those standards are fully met before we get back to the widely wished-for normality in the electoral and registration arrangements there.

I hope that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's questions. Where I have not been able to because they are the subject of ongoing investigations, he will, quite rightly—I applaud him for it—speak to the police, including the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and others. I hope that he will get the answers there that he cannot get here. If he pieces the different parts of the jigsaw together, I hope that he sees an optimistic picture, albeit one in which it cannot yet be said that the problem has been solved. At least progress has been made on a problem that is being solved, even if we have not quite reached the final destination.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.27 pm

*House adjourned.*





## Westminster Hall

Monday 18 April 2016

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

### Brain Tumours

4.30 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** There are still people trying to get into this most important debate, and I am happy to allow everybody to come in and for people to stand at the back if they need to.

Before I call Helen Jones to move the motion, I should say that 30 colleagues have put their names in to speak, so I will be imposing a time limit soon—I know the mover of the motion will want to bear that in mind when she makes her speech. I should also say that those who want to make an intervention, but are also hoping to catch my eye to speak later, might consider that an unwise thing to do.

4.31 pm

**Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 105560 relating to funding for research into brain tumours.

It is a great pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and to see so many colleagues present for this debate on funding for research into brain tumours, which was the subject of the first report by the new Petitions Committee.

We began this inquiry in response to a petition that was started by Maria Lester, whose brother, Stephen Realf, died following a brain tumour. It is fair to say—I think my colleagues would agree—that we began in a state of ignorance. We did not know a great deal about brain tumours or their impact, but, as we proceeded with the inquiry, we were humbled and shocked. We were humbled by the people who came forward to give evidence to us, whether in person, in writing or on the web; it is a measure of the interest in this topic that we received more than 1,100 posts on our web thread in 10 days. All those people had been either directly or indirectly affected by brain tumour and wanted to use their experience to improve other people's chances. We were also shocked at the number of life years lost to this dreadful disease, the impact on children and the pitifully small amount of research funding devoted to it.

For that reason, we have made our report slightly different from some Select Committee reports; there are many individual stories in it and pictures of those affected. That is because we want to make it clear that this is not just a matter of statistics. Real lives, real people and real families are affected, and they are let down at almost every stage of the process, because, despite the excellent work of the doctors in this area, the system is underfunded and not properly structured, and has been so for years. That is our collective failure, because the neglect has gone on under different Governments, even though brain tumours are the biggest cause of cancers in children and in the under-40s. They account for between 15% and 25% of cancers in the

under-25s and, if we look at the statistics overall for all age groups, we see that about 60% of cancers involve the brain at some stage, meaning that there has to be treatment for that if people are to recover. Because of the age groups that are generally affected, the number of life years lost to this cancer is greater than for any other cancer, and, of course, when children are involved, the situation is particularly tragic.

A number of parents came forward to tell us what had happened to their children. A number of those children suffered from a type of tumour called diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, or DIPG, which is almost universally fatal. In this country, a child is diagnosed with one every nine days, yet few people have even heard of it. I suggest that, if they had, there would be much more pressure to increase funding for research in that area.

Those who survive, whether children or adults, face a huge burden from this disease. Many survive with serious disabilities, including physical disabilities or other things such as memory loss, personality change or cognitive disorders. Because of the huge burden of the disease, in terms of life years lost and significant disabilities among those who survive, we have made the recommendations that we have and we believe that it is time for a step change in how we deal with this most awful cancer.

That change has to begin, of course, with diagnosis, with which there are major difficulties. GPs may see only two or three cases in their professional lives, and in its early days brain tumour can mimic the symptoms of other diseases. However, 61% of people are diagnosed in A&E when they reach a crisis. We heard time and again from people who went back to their GP and went back to other doctors, often knowing that something was seriously wrong with them or with their child, but they were still not able to get a diagnosis. I suggest that we would not accept 60% being diagnosed in A&E for any other cancer and we should not be accepting it for this one.

Early diagnosis matters, because it affects the treatment options and the outcome. If we were able to diagnose people earlier, more would survive, especially among children, and there would be better outcomes for patients, with fewer survivors left with significant disabilities. That is why, I say to the Minister, we were concerned to note that the Government's Be Clear on Cancer campaign did not include brain tumour. We understand that that is because the number of life years lost is not taken into account in deciding which cancers are included, and we believe that has to change.

There are important things happening. For example, the HeadSmart campaign, which seeks to raise awareness among GPs and lists the symptoms that can be seen in different age groups, has managed to improve the time taken between people presenting to their GP and diagnosis. Again, however, we are concerned that the guidelines issued by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence in 2015 do not include lists of different symptoms for different age groups. We think that needs resolving.

**Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab):** Why does my hon. Friend think that NICE guidelines did not take that into account and include the information that we feel should be included?

**Helen Jones:** We simply do not know the reason for that, but we think that the Government need to look at this as a matter of urgency and raise awareness among GPs as part of their continuing professional development programme. It is very important that they understand this, because if the disease was caught in its early stages, that would help future research. More people could take part in clinical trials and more could donate tissue in the early stages of the disease. Research is extraordinarily important, and I will come back to that in a minute.

We heard from a number of experts, including Professor Geoff Pilkington from the University of Portsmouth, about the questions that GPs should be asking when people present with particular symptoms—it is not always a headache, of course. There can be lots of different symptoms, such as an odd smell or a pain in the spine. There is a range of symptoms that people need to be alert to, but the only real way to diagnose a brain tumour is with a scan. Again, we heard from many people who had tried and tried to get a scan but were not able to do so.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. An important factor, which she has just mentioned, is the difficulty of getting scans. Why is that difficult? Is there a shortage of scanners or is there another reason?

**Helen Jones:** Again, we were given various reasons when we took evidence, and we want the Government to consider the matter carefully. There is no doubt that if we are to improve scanning procedures, we must accept that a number of scans will come back clear. The issue is, what proportion that comes back with no tumour shown is acceptable? Surely it is better to invest in a scan than to let a tumour grow, because later treatment is much more difficult, complex and costly. We want more people to have access to scanning.

Early diagnosis is important, but it will not solve the problem without more research. Despite the excellent scientists and clinicians who gave evidence to the Committee, there is no doubt that they are working in an underfunded system. The Government response to the petition said that about 1.5% of cancer spending is devoted to brain tumours, but that includes fundamental research and non-site-specific research.

The National Cancer Research Institute told us in evidence that some non-site-specific research undoubtedly benefits brain tumour research, but it was unable to put a figure on that. We heard from Professor Tracy Warr of the brain tumour research centre at the University of Wolverhampton that brain tumours are less likely than other cancers to benefit from non-site-specific research because of their complexity and location, and the blood-brain barrier, which means that drugs that work in the bloodstream do not transfer to the brain. That is an unscientific explanation, but I am sure hon. Members will know what I mean.

We found that spending records are very unclear. The Government's own records are not clear. The National Cancer Research Institute was unhelpful when trying to find out exactly how much of the spending benefited research into brain tumours and there is no central record of spending by people who are not partners with the National Cancer Research Institute. There is no doubt that spending is low. The only figure that we can

be certain of is the 3.3% of spending on site-specific research, which is about £7.7 million a year. At that rate of progress, it is estimated that it would take 100 years for the outcome for brain tumours to be as good as for many other cancers.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree with the assessment of my constituent, Mrs Alison Hutchman, who has been living with what she calls “this devastating disease” for the last six years, about that estimated time of 100 years? Why is this terrible disease so low down the priority order?

I saw the recent death of my friend, Richard Webster, at the age of only 50, from a brain tumour, despite the loving care of his family and his long-term partner and later husband, Jamie Norton. I know only too well, as only someone who has seen it can know, what is entailed when this disease strikes.

**Helen Jones:** I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention and I agree with his constituent. Brain tumours are perceived to be rare, although my argument is that they are not as rare as we think and the number of life years lost and the burden of the disease mean they have to be tackled. We know there is a correlation between the amount of money spent and survival rates in cancer. Survival rates for those with brain tumours went up by only 7.5% between 1970 and 2015. For cancer overall, they have doubled.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): The hon. Lady is making some valuable points. Does she agree that a key issue is that a young researcher will look at the overall commitment and likely level of spending in this area during their career before deciding whether to specialise in it? The paucity of research spending in this area may mean that we do not get the amount and quality of research that is required.

**Helen Jones:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman and I will come to that.

Between 2000 and 2012, we spent about £35 million on brain tumour research. The Government have rightly said that such spending has increased tenfold. It has, but it has increased from a very low base. That £35 million is from a total of about £4.5 billion of spending on cancer research.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): The Brain Tumour Charity is based in Farnborough in my constituency. The hon. Lady mentioned the £35 million. Is that just public sector funding, or does it encompass private sector funding? The Brain Tumour Charity has already invested £14 million and plans to invest another £25 million by 2020.

**Helen Jones:** That £35 million includes spending from the voluntary sector. The report states that it is simply not good enough for the Government to leave decisions on such spending solely to the voluntary sector.

We welcome the decision of Cancer Research UK and Children with Cancer UK to prioritise spending on brain tumour research as a cancer of unmet need, but we are calling on the Government to identify the gaps in funding, to take action to remedy them and most important, to make it clear that they see this research as a priority.

We heard evidence that creating a positive research environment with an emphasis on increasing funding would not only keep our scientists in this country, but attract scientists from elsewhere in the world. Britain has the potential to be a world leader in this sort of research but at the moment we are not.

The Government said in their reply to the petition that decisions on funding are based on a number of factors, including the size and quality of the workforce. That ignores the fact that, as the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) said, this is a Catch-22 situation. At the moment, young trained oncologists are having to change specialties or leave this country to pursue their research. Without an increase in funding, we simply cannot attract the good PhD students and postdoctoral researchers we need to make progress and to build up the cohort of young scientists who will go on to research this disease and may make the important discoveries of the future.

There are other barriers to research. One is the difficulty of getting enough tissue to work on. Only about 30% of patients are asked whether they will donate tissue, yet polls show that up to 90% would do so if asked. We do not have enough specialist support nurses and, according to the evidence, we do not even have enough people who can transfer tissue from hospitals to laboratories.

The other problem that researchers come across—the Government really could act in this area—is that they must make applications to many local biobanks to get enough material to work on. Often, those biobanks have different procedures, application forms and so on. We urge the Government, while keeping safeguards in place, to try to tackle the problem of biobanking. Unless researchers have access to tissue, they cannot do the fundamental research that we need. The University of Southampton has started to use tissue left over from diagnosis but, again, the system is grossly underfunded. In the end, I am afraid the issue comes back to money if we want to make progress.

We also highlight other issues, such as the need for access to non-therapeutic drugs, which can improve brain surgery outcomes, and the need for access to off-patent drugs, which can be used for new indications. The Government said in response to the Off-patent Drugs Bill that they did not need a Bill to allow that. We need to make progress in that area urgently, but I will not spend too much time on it now, because we are pressed for time.

I do, however, want to say this to the Government. I said earlier that brain tumours may not be as rare as is perceived, and the reasons for that are simple. The numbers are going up. The system of recording has been changed. The experts who spoke to us said that they do not yet know the reasons for that. Secondary tumours are not recorded, yet they still have to be treated, and benign tumours are not recorded, but they can still kill. It is that, and the huge burden of the disease, that we think the Minister ought to take into account, or at least ought to get his Department to take into account, to deal with this issue. The five-year survival rate for brain tumours is only 19.8%. When it comes to cancer as a whole, 50% survive for 10 years or more. That is the difference, because of lack of funding and lack of research.

I hope that the Minister will look at the personal stories in our report. They are there for a reason. Let me remind people of some of them: Saira Ahmed, dead at the age of 6, Abbie Walker, also dead at 6, Lucy Goulding, who died at 16, and Stephen Realf, whose sister started the petition. An RAF officer who was apparently in excellent health, he was diagnosed at 19 and dead at 26. There are many more, whom I do not have time to name. There are those who died and those who survived—remarkable people such as Hannah Jones, a young woman who gave evidence to us and now devotes her time to promoting the HeadSmart campaign. And there are the families of those who died. In all my time in Parliament, I have never met such an amazing group of people. They had undergone the most appalling tragedies, but did not want to point the finger of blame. They simply wanted to use their experience to make life better for others. They deserve that we listen to what they say.

I say gently to the Minister that it is not often in ministerial life that one gets a chance to make a real difference. We know that Ministers get bogged down in the minutiae of every day and that things come down the chain to them, but this is a chance to make a difference. It is a chance to leave a mark that will be there long after he leaves ministerial office—not that I am hoping he will leave soon—long after most of us have left Parliament, in fact.

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Jones:** I am going to wind up my speech, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

This is a real chance to save lives, so I say to the Minister: read the report and champion its recommendations in government. That way we can have world-class scientists in this country and save the lives of many people, including young people, who will have the chance to make an enormous contribution to this country. It is as simple as that. This cancer has been neglected for far too long. That now has to change. [*Applause.*]

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order. I know this is a sensitive subject, but I am afraid that people in the Public Gallery must not clap; I am sorry.

As I said earlier, a very large number of Members have written to Mr Speaker, and they often quote the fact that they want to speak on behalf of constituents, so my aim is to get everyone in and I will now have to impose a four-minute limit. I would be grateful if colleagues could resist the temptation to take too many interventions, because that will mean that someone at the end of the queue does not get in. I know that the first speaker will want to abide by that, because of her long experience.

4.55 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on such an excellent start to the debate. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) for her excellent chairmanship

[Mrs Maria Miller]

of the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours, and to other hon Members who support her in that work.

My contribution will be succinct. As the hon. Lady pointed out, this is the largest cancer killer of children and adults under the age of 40, yet just 1% of research funding is given to find a cure or new treatments. The hon. Lady said that this felt to her almost like a Catch-22, and I think she is entirely right: a lack of research means that there can be difficulty in having effective professional development, which leads to continued late diagnosis. The fact that 61% of brain tumour patients are being diagnosed in A&E is backed up by information from my local hospital and Dr Lara Alloway, a consultant in palliative care there, who said that brain tumours are “most frequently diagnosed when people present as an emergency with stroke-like symptoms, headache or confusion. It is less common for people to be diagnosed as an outpatient.”

The lack of early diagnosis was also picked up by my local primary care trust. However, the issue is not just a lack of early diagnosis, but a lack of guidance from NICE. There are just seven pages of guidance on this matter, but more than 30 pages for blood and haematological disorders. The limited evidence base makes it very difficult for doctors and GPs to be able to diagnose in the fashion that the hon. Lady talks about.

It would be difficult to do justice to the number of constituents who have contacted me about this debate. I pay tribute to them all. I pay particular tribute to Olya Elliott, who lost her son, to Sandra Welch, who was diagnosed after a year of seeking help from her GP—that was too late to be cured—and to the gentleman who talked about his daughter, who had died at the age of 44. The list goes on, and it is very difficult to talk about it. I think that the debate today will do a great deal to send a positive message to all those constituents. I pay particular tribute also to Jan Pearson, who came to my surgery on Friday and spoke incredibly movingly about her son Tom, aged 21. He was diagnosed with an inoperable tumour on his brain stem at the age of 18. He was diagnosed because of the tenacity of his mother, who identified the symptoms after five years of insisting to his GP and other medics that he needed help and support. It was really only through her tenacity that he got the brain scan that diagnosed his tumour, but unfortunately it was too late for it to be operable.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): May I draw the right hon. Lady’s attention to my constituent, Caroline Fosbury, mother of Ella? Caroline lost her daughter at the age of 11. She said that it is a three-way cycle between support, awareness and research, and the family have started Ella’s fund to campaign for more research.

**Mrs Miller:** That positive effect in terms of fundraising is so important. When I speak to my constituents who have lost loved ones, that is often the way they can find most solace. The hon. Lady makes a very good point.

I also pay tribute to those who support my constituents who have gone through such appalling losses, particularly St Michael’s hospice, which cares not only for individuals who are going through the last hours of their lives, but for bereaved relatives and carers.

4.59 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is frustrating to have to restrict my remarks to four minutes because this is a subject about which there is so much to say, but I am delighted to do so because the restriction is an indication of the widespread interest that this debate has raised. If the Minister takes no other message from today, I hope that he will leave the Chamber understanding that this issue is now well and truly on the agenda and is not going to go away.

My interest in this matter was first piqued when the daughter of a friend was diagnosed as having a brain tumour. Her sister emailed me today:

“At age 34, my precious sister Louise was diagnosed with a meningioma brain tumour in January 2012. I felt like my heart had been ripped out my chest when I discovered this. Nothing can prepare you for the shock of dealing with such news.”

She went on to describe the treatment:

“We did not know until she woke from this surgery if she would be able to speak again because of the location of the tumour. A terrifying experience for us let alone for Louise as a wife and mother of three children.”

Of course, that was a benign tumour and, as a result of the surgery, Louise has made a full recovery, but it gives some flavour of the human cost.

Another way in which this subject came to my attention was through a constituent in Orkney. Caroline Kritchlow runs the Friends of the Neuro Ward at Aberdeen Royal infirmary, and her husband also has a brain tumour. She is a remarkable fundraiser, having raised £120,000 for the neuro ward, and I am sure she is as frustrated as I am to hear that, yet again, after three years of delays, the refurbishment of that ward—it is the last ward at Aberdeen Royal infirmary to be refurbished—has had to be put off until next year. Perhaps those responsible for that decision will see something of this debate and take the obvious lesson to be learned, which is that there really can be no further delays.

The Minister has heard the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) give a full exposition of the recommendations of the Committee’s report, which he should have. The recommendations run to three pages, and he should have them printed out, laminated and kept on his desk—they should never be far from his elbow. It would be fairly easy to make early progress on a number of the recommendations, such as on raising awareness among general practitioners, which would lead to a greater likelihood of early diagnosis. It will take longer to see the real change that we want on other recommendations, such as the recruitment of PhD students, which is an area where we see opportunity for change and where spending would make a real difference.

The Minister no doubt has a long queue of people outside his office all asking for more money. This is one instance, however, where we can say that any money spent will be transformative. Expenditure on such research will mean the change that we all want to see.

5.2 pm

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this debate. Today’s attendance is testament to how many of us have been approached

by constituents, not just now but before the petition, asking us to come and speak on this subject. I will not take up too much of the House's time.

Last November, I visited the children's brain tumour research centre at the University of Nottingham, which gave evidence to the Committee's report. The research centre is an outstanding medical research facility that provides vital support for children and their families as they undergo treatment, and for families who have lost a loved one to a brain tumour. The research centre also services Derbyshire—everyone with a brain problem has to go across to Nottingham—and it gives an outstanding service. The amazing work done in such centres is being held back, as has been said, by a lack of funding, which has been a problem for decades.

Brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of children and people under 40, yet brain tumours receive just 1.5% of the £498 million spent on research into cancers. I am in no way saying that money should be taken away from research into other cancers; rather, I am pointing to the success that increased funding has achieved in other cancers, such as breast cancer and prostate cancer, for which patients now have an 80% five-year survival rate, compared with less than 20% for brain tumour patients. The lack of funding for brain tumours creates a Catch-22 situation, because researchers are not attracted into the field as the funding is not there for them to work with. As the report states, existing levels of funding have not been sufficient for researchers, such as those at the children's brain tumour research centre, to make significant advances in their understanding of this horrific disease, although they are working very hard and feel that they are almost on the edge of a breakthrough.

As well as an increase in funding for research on brain tumours, we need greater investment in educating healthcare professionals on the symptoms of brain tumours. Too often people are misdiagnosed by GPs. That is not really the fault of the GPs, because they have to know everything about everything, which is not possible. They sometimes think that the symptoms with which they are presented could not be a brain tumour, and therefore they fail to send the patient for a scan, which is the only way to diagnose a brain tumour. That leads to a situation where 61% of brain tumour patients are now diagnosed at A&E, with children being a high proportion of them. Again, there is a Catch-22 because late diagnosis makes it harder to place patients in clinical trials to research much-needed cancer drugs. Also, the later they are diagnosed, the less chance there is of a cure.

Building on the success of the HeadSmart campaign in incorporating the symptoms of brain tumours, and the variants in children, young people and adults, into National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on cancer would help GPs to know when they are dealing with a brain tumour and would therefore increase scan referrals, which is the only way that a brain tumour can genuinely be identified. Early diagnosis would greatly increase survival rates and improve the quality of life of those who are diagnosed.

Will the Department tell us whether it believes that the current levels of funding are adequate for progress to be made on improving survival rates for this disease? We need extra funding. A constituent came to me who had been diagnosed with an incurable brain tumour. He wants more money to go into research, not to help him,

but so that the people who come after him can have better care and better diagnosis so that they can be cured. We also need the extra funding—

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order.

5.6 pm

**Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I have just a few words, and they are from my constituent, Mr Philip James of Tallarn Green, which is near the English border. Philip James is a 3D artist, and this is what he movingly wrote:

"I was diagnosed with brain cancer a few days after my 30th birthday where I proposed to my fiancée. Since then I have set a wedding date of 7th April 2017. It is my mission to help others dealing with this awful disease that has a preventable poor prognosis by doing a daily blog about how I'm fighting it and about what research I have done myself."

Mr James is chronicling his condition in a daily blog. His is a very heartfelt story and it shows one of the many reasons why we need to listen to people who are fighting and battling against brain tumours and why it is so important that we as a country spend more on research.

5.8 pm

**Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. As a member of the Petitions Committee, it is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate. I add my thanks to those who put together the petition, particularly Maria Lester and the Realf family—their love and passion for their son and brother came across in all our evidence sessions—and to all the others who came along and gave evidence. Hopefully this will be their report.

I declare that I am the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on rare, genetic and undiagnosed conditions. Given the vast number of factors that cause brain tumours, I join colleagues in using this opportunity to call on the Government to do more to redistribute research funding more fairly among different cancer groups. There are limited resources available.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I commend the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this important debate. The UK model of partnership between Government, industry, universities, the NHS and charities is the right leadership model. The Government have led the way with a taskforce on anti-microbial resistance; maybe the way forward here is a taskforce on how to deal with early diagnosis and extra funding, as well as bids from charities that would attract that funding.

**Ben Howlett:** I agree that the Government have been leading the way. No doubt we will hear from the Minister about some of the work that they have been doing to create such partnership models. I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has been delivering in that area.

Limited resources are available to fund research. A vast number of conditions fight desperately for every resource available, and researchers in every field work hard to get one step closer to a cure. It is important that we take a moment to thank all our constituents who are working tirelessly to advance medicine, find cures and improve the life chances of all of us.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): Given my hon. Friend's expertise, has he considered the point made by the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) about the loss of life years and whether it should be taken into account when we determine how to distribute our funds?

**Ben Howlett:** I agree, and as part of our report we have considered that and suggested that it be done. I hope the Government will consider a fairer funding formula in order to make a big impact on the number of life years lost. It is crucial that we strike the right balance when allocating research and development resources, both financial and otherwise, to ensure that all areas get a fair share of what is available. It is simply not right that issues such as brain tumour research continually miss out on funds.

I would like to take a moment to speak about a former councillor in my constituency of Bath, Richard Maybury, who sadly passed away around five years ago after finding that he had a brain tumour, which was unfortunately incurable. I have seen what his wife has gone through. He was in remission for a couple of years, and thereafter only palliative treatment was available. It is just one of many cases, but it brings up an important question. There are many varieties of brain tumour, some of which are curable but some of which can only be supported by palliative care. It is crucial that research is directed to all areas. Richard Maybury's wife is calling for more to be done at an international level. We should be able to work with the likes of Germany and the United States, which are leading the way in this area.

There are clear imbalances that must be addressed in order to ensure that all crucial research areas receive sufficient funding. I know that the Government are committed to ensuring that we progress further with medicine and that more and more people survive all forms of cancers, yet the shocking figures that we have heard from the Chair of the Petitions Committee and the testimonials in its evidence sessions show that the funding model must be reconsidered to ensure that research into brain tumours is not neglected.

Brain tumour sufferers have benefited from the cancer drugs fund. They will benefit from the Government's accelerated access to medicines review and from improvements to palliative care. More sufferers will benefit from genetic medicines as part of the genomics revolution, in which our country is currently leading the way. Data collection and participation in personalised medicine will improve with new emphasis from the Government. I agree with the petitioners, however, that brain tumour sufferers should not be forgotten, but should receive a fairer share of research funding. I hope that the Minister will consider this group of sufferers when making his closing remarks.

5.13 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on her detailed and concise presentation. I am here because my constituents have contacted me. I suspect that is why we are all here: we have poignant personal stories to share.

Brain tumours kill more children and young adults than any other form of cancer. Every day, 10 children and young people in the United Kingdom learn that

they have cancer. More than 16,000 people are newly diagnosed with this form of cancer each year in the United Kingdom, yet just 1% of the national spending on cancer research is allocated to this horrendous disease. I am glad to see the Minister in his place; I always look forward to his responses. I am sure that he will respond in a positive fashion and give us the hope for which everyone in this Chamber wishes, along with our constituents.

The allocation of funding is even more alarming when we consider the survival rates for brain tumour patients. Breast and prostate cancer patients, to give two examples, have an 80% five-year survival rate, compared with that of brain tumour patients, which is less than 20%. Clearly, more needs to be done on investment in brain tumour research. Can the Minister indicate what partnerships he is encouraging between universities, Departments and big business to ensure that we can move forward?

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): Our colleague the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) could not be with us today, but she lost her sister, who was completely asymptomatic, at the age of 37. That reinforces the point that discovery often occurs too late, which is why research and awareness are crucial.

**Jim Shannon:** As always, I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention.

Secondary or metastatic brain tumours are particularly important to consider. Up to 40% of cancers in other parts of the body will eventually spread to the brain. Let us focus on the key issues, such as the blood-brain barrier.

The National Cancer Intelligence Network found that 61% of brain tumour patients were diagnosed in accident and emergency, including 53% of children up to 14 years old, 25% of those aged 15 to 24 and 20% of older adults. Although there are many charities, I will put in a quick plug for CLIC Sargent and its work. Its paper, "The Best Chance from the Start", found that the rarity of cancer in children and younger people, added to the fact that symptoms can be non-specific, can make it challenging for GPs to recognise the symptoms.

Many constituents have written to me, but I will conclude by quoting two. One is my constituent Mary Patterson, a survivor. She was diagnosed, she had surgery and she is alive today, although her life is restricted. Another story involves a lady in my constituency called Heather, who writes about her late husband George:

"My own interest in this petition and upcoming debate came about because my husband, George Ramsey, died 1 July 2011 from a brain tumour, only nine weeks after diagnosis. He was just 50 years old, and had just retired from the fire service after 32 years of service. Unfortunately my husband received poor management from the neurosurgery department, and his treatment was delayed after the team ran out of time to discuss his case on two separate occasions."

An ombudsman investigated and reported to the Assembly. I conclude with this comment of hers:

"In his last five years in the fire service, he was the community liaison and youth engagement officer for the Belfast area. The chairman of the Belfast City Council stated that George's work had 'made Belfast a safer place'."

That is a touching and personal testimony. The sad thing is that it is happening to families up and down the country at this moment. Although we have the opportunity to get back on track, it is sad that it took a petition to bring us here.

5.17 pm

**Rebecca Harris** (Castle Point) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to add my voice to this important debate. I thank the Petitions Committee for scheduling it, and its Chair, the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), for her superb opening speech, which covered the issue fantastically. It is phenomenal to see so many hon. Members in Westminster Hall. That firmly assures us that the issue is now well and truly in the public eye and on the Government's agenda.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours, and I am here because I attended the funeral of an 11-year-old boy, Danny Green. No parent should have to bury a child, and no child should have to attend a friend's funeral, as I saw when Danny's many school friends made a guard of honour for his coffin, something they will never forget. How on earth can one celebrate the life of someone who died aged only 11?

All hon. Members will have received a copy of Danny's father's book, "Danny's Journey", detailing Danny's story from his first dizzy spell in November 2011 to his tragic untimely death just seven months later. It was distributed jointly by the Danny Green Fund and the Brain Tumour Charity. We should all find it shocking that, given that, as we have heard, brain tumours are the main cancer killer of children and young adults and that more life years are lost to them than to any other cancer, this receives as little as 1% of the national cancer research spend.

We have also heard that, over the past 30 years, although cancer survival rates have increased by 50%, brain tumour survival rates have increased by only 7.5%. The people involved are often children and the parents of young children, and those figures do not begin to illustrate the degree of lifelong disability that many of the survivors, of whom there are too few, also face, and the cost and burden added to their lives and those of their families.

Many small charities work tirelessly to make up the funding shortfall. To their immense credit, Danny Green's parents, Lisa and Chris, and his sister Holly have raised more than £250,000 in the short time since his death, but surely we cannot rely on the hard work of sufferers and their loved ones. Like any parent here, I would give my life in an instant if it could save my nine-year-old's, and I am certain that my mother, who has enjoyed a very full life for 82 years, would also do so if she could save anyone's child. We must consider our priorities. Brain tumours may be considered rarer cancers, but their disproportionate effect on the lives of young children and young adults means that we must give them a much higher priority.

5.19 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I start by thanking the Petitions Committee for introducing this important debate and commending my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for her excellent opening speech, in which

she eloquently made the case on behalf of the 120,129 citizens who have signed the online petition. I also commend the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who is the chair of the all-party group on brain tumours, for her leadership on the issue and her very emotional speech, which I thank her for.

Over the years, I have had to deal with a number of individual cases, as I am sure other hon. Members have. Currently, I have three, and 132 of my constituents have signed the online petition. The response from our constituents on the issue is not surprising when we realise that, as we have just heard, malignant brain tumours are the biggest killer among all types of cancer of people under the age of 40 and of children.

Also, survival rates for brain tumours have not improved in the last 30 years; if anything, on some measures they have got worse. Currently, only 40% of patients will live for more than a year after diagnosis and less than 20% will survive for more than five years. However, as we have heard, despite those shocking figures, cancer research funding into brain tumours amounts to little more than 1% of the spend on cancer research. Due to the chronic and continuous underfunding of brain tumour research, there are clear knock-on effects to the services and treatments that patients access and receive. If we continue to limit the potential progress that properly funded research might make, those outcomes will never improve. That probably explains the 30-year plateau that I have just highlighted.

As with all cancers, early detection is key to boosting survival rates. That is why it is so dismaying to find that brain tumours are not included in the Government's Be Clear on Cancer campaign. Early diagnosis not only helps to prevent avoidable death, but can relieve the stress on a patient's life, as one recent case brought to my attention by a constituent exemplifies. After visiting their local GP twice about feeling generally unwell, my constituent was told that they had all the classic signs of stress and they were prescribed antidepressants.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): My constituent, Rita Magorrian, got in touch with me about her granddaughter, Helen, who collapsed just before Christmas with a brain tumour. Helen had been to see her GP several times and had been told her problems were down to stress, but she had also been to see her optician and was told the same. As well as considering further training for GPs, does my hon. Friend agree that we need to widen the process to include opticians?

**Mrs Hodgson:** That is an excellent point, well made, and I thank my hon. Friend for it.

Two days later, when my constituent lost all strength on the left side of their body, they went straight to A&E, where it was eventually found they had three brain tumours. After receiving brilliant treatment by NHS staff and support from the Bobby Robson centre in Newcastle, thankfully my constituent is now in remission. However, that case clearly shows the need for improved awareness, as the situation would have been better if the GP had been able to spot the signs of a brain tumour sooner. We in the north-east have an excellent research facility in the Bobby Robson centre, but there are always concerns about its future, as it depends greatly on legacy and charitable donations.

[Mrs Hodgson]

It is also important that research considers the needs of patients. According to studies by Brainstrust, patients believe that more research and funding must focus on the quality-of-life issues, such as function and symptom relief, to help to improve life after diagnosis, whether the diagnosis is terminal or not.

That is reflected in the case of another of my constituents, Malcolm, who was given a terminal diagnosis of a glioblastoma multiforme, or GMB, 4 brain tumour. Despite being told by his doctor in the north-east that he was too sick for further treatment, Malcolm, along with his family, sought out specialists in London. He took the difficult and expensive decision to self-fund the life-extending drug, Avastin, which, although licensed for use in the treatment of some other cancers, was not available on the NHS for use in his case.

Malcolm is due to receive another dose of Avastin, but he wants it to be administered locally and is unable to find an oncologist in the north-east who is able to do so, even privately, so Malcolm is faced with either travelling up and down to London for that treatment every two weeks, or perhaps up to Scotland, or to Leeds or Manchester. Although Malcolm has responded well to the Avastin treatment, more options need to be available to people in his position, with treatments to improve the quality of life and, where possible, to extend life. However, that is all for nothing when there is a clear postcode lottery on access to specialists and services, as seen by Malcolm and his family.

The chronic underfunding of research into brain tumours is clearly having an impact on the lives of those who are diagnosed with brain tumours, and that cannot and should not go on any longer.

5.24 pm

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and to all hon. Members who have spoken with such passion.

We have heard how children are particularly the victims of brain tumours, so it is with great pride that I wear the daisy badge, in honour of Daisy Brooks, whose parents, Louis and Anna, have just about made it into Westminster Hall today to watch proceedings. I will briefly share Daisy's story, because it shows what is at stake here.

On 3 May 2014, the Brooks family received the worst possible news, when their beautiful and much loved six-year-old daughter, Daisy, was diagnosed with a devastating and inoperable form of brain tumour called diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, or DIPG. Daisy went from being a normal child at school one day, with absolutely no sign of illness, to being in hospital the next, and the following week she was having radiotherapy. Daisy's parents were told that there was no hope of a cure, and that they would go through the usual process and its inevitable conclusion, but they showed the tenacity that other hon. Members have spoken of, and I pay tribute to their incredible efforts. They have raised £350,000 for further research, and having seen the pictures of their daughter throughout her treatment, quite frankly, they blew me away. Daisy's parents are an example to us all.

The point is that Daisy's parents persevered. They searched online and found Professor Steven Gill at Bristol children's hospital, who is involved in the development of a software-guided robot that installs a series of catheters attached to a titanium device to deliver chemotherapy direct to the tumour. That is a risky form of surgery, but Daisy's parents were prepared to try it because they had no alternative. Daisy underwent three rounds of treatment and, although the initial results looked promising, the tumour proved too aggressive, and Daisy passed away on 17 November 2014, hours after celebrating her seventh birthday.

Less than 10% of children with DIPG live longer than 18 months after diagnosis, and survival is even rarer, but there are two positives in this situation; first, Anna, Daisy's mother, is expecting another child, as is very obvious; secondly, very positive steps have been made through that research. Research can deliver, if only we can back it. We have heard about the low priority that research into brain tumours receives. In this case, the research group—the Functional Neurosurgery Research Group—aims to identify new drugs for the treatment of brainstem tumours in children, using the new method that I have described.

I have many other constituents whom I would like to mention, but I know that other hon. Members want to raise their own constituency cases. My point is simple. My view is that I am a parent of four children, the oldest of whom is nine, but I cannot even begin to imagine what it is like to have a child, who is so vulnerable already, in the position that Daisy was in. Whenever a child is ill, we feel incredibly powerless, but we are not powerless and nor are the Government. We have the power to raise the priority of brain tumour research and I hope the Government do so, in memory of those who have suffered so tragically and so that we can deliver hope to those who, unfortunately, will suffer in the future.

5.27 pm

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) said, brain tumours are the biggest cause of cancer death among children and adults under 40 in the UK. Surely, research into that disease should be a priority in the UK and around the world.

I will talk today about five-year-old Cian Case. My friend, Huw Irranca-Davies, who has now left this place after being the hon. Member for Ogmore, has been dealing with Cian and his family for some time, and he wanted me to pass on Cian's story.

At the end of November 2015, Cian was admitted to the Royal Glamorgan hospital with acute stomach pain. A scan identified a tumour on his spine and he was rushed to the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff, so that as much of the tumour as possible could be removed. The trauma left Cian completely paralysed from the waist down, with the neurologists sceptical about how much mobility he could recover.

Cian was diagnosed with an extremely rare and aggressive cancer that affects the central nervous system and that is mainly diagnosed in very young children. The survival outcomes are not favourable. The "seeds" of this cancer had already begun to spread to Cian's brain. Fortunately,



Cian responded well to that initial dose of chemotherapy and is now receiving intensive chemotherapy to his brain and spine.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): I pay warm tribute to Carole Hughes, the inspirational woman behind Peterborough-based Anna's Hope. She is in the Gallery today. In view of the fact that cancer affects children in particular, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that specialist neuro-rehabilitation therapy centres are set up to assist children in that position and to try to get them to fulfil their ultimate potential?

**Nick Smith:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who makes an important point.

I am pleased to report that Cian continues to make good progress and that his mobility is improving weekly, defying the original prognosis. Cian's dad, Richard, is one of the more than 120,000 signatories to the petition we are discussing. He understands that cancers such as Cian's are rare, and that that is why funding may not have been forthcoming enough. He believes, however, that more research can lead to longer and healthier lives for youngsters blighted so early by this disease. I am pleased that Cancer Research UK has committed to increasing spend on research into brain tumours, and we can all welcome that good news.

It is difficult standing here today relaying the story of one family's brush with tragedy and the long road to recovery ahead, so I do not want our successors, years from now, to face the same questions, wringing their hands and saying, "Something should be done." The community has rallied around Cian and his family—the school, the rugby club and the community drop-in centre have all organised different activities to raise awareness and funds, for which the family are incredibly grateful. The Noah's Ark children's hospital, LATCH and everyone in the health service has been fantastic on every step of Cian's fight. They are all doing their bit; now it's our turn.

5.31 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for her powerful start to the debate.

I want to spend a bit of time talking about the brilliant work being done in my constituency at the University of Portsmouth. The university hosts one of the largest centres of excellence for brain tumour research in the world, led by Professor Geoff Pilkington. The department collaborates with research centres around the world and Professor Pilkington is much in demand at international conferences. The centre is a flagship research body in the UK, but it is coming to the end of its core five-year funding, which will be reviewed by international scientists at the beginning of May. Although I am sure that it will come out with a top review, the next five years of funding might depend on that. It will mean £1 million a year and the ability to apply for more grants and employ more postgraduates. It is absolutely crucial to bring in new people to increase the depth of research and it is worrying that too many top research centres are continually fighting for more funds.

The research being conducted at Portsmouth is also heavily funded by the third sector. The core funding comes from the charity Brain Tumour Research, which has provided about £500,000 per year for the past four years. That money has not only funded 10 researchers, but has acted as a catalyst for donations from other charitable and third-party organisations. The centre now has between 17 and 20 researchers at any one time.

As a centre of excellence, the University of Portsmouth attracts some of the brightest students from all over Europe and beyond. Recently, the research unit has had new staff from Portugal, Italy and other places around Europe, who are contributing significantly to our understanding of this terrible disease, but extra funding is needed to enable brain tumour researchers to stay in their field. Although charities are desperately trying to bridge the gap in funding to retain the researchers, it is not enough to prevent them from moving into other fields.

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): I speak on behalf of the many constituents in Fareham who have been affected by this devastating and indiscriminate disease, for example, Simon Tier, whose best friend sadly died because of a brain tumour and who is an indefatigable campaigner. Does my hon. Friend agree that current rates of funding are insufficient and that we need between £30 million and £35 million per year, in line with funding for research for other cancers?

**Mrs Drummond:** Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I hope that those in the third sector will continue to be helped to raise funds because it has obvious implications for the progress of brain tumour research. Those currently involved are working incredibly hard.

I had the fortune of meeting Kathleen Keatley, a final year PhD student who is sponsored by a charity called Headcase Cancer Trust, and her colleagues at their labs last month. The passion, knowledge and dedication to research that the students have should be celebrated. The work the unit is doing is truly ground-breaking. Kathleen is doing research into mitochondrial mutations in glioblastoma, which is one of the most common and aggressive brain tumours. Greater understanding of glioblastoma will improve the effectiveness of treatment. We have spoken in other debates about the role that innovative treatments have in future NHS provision and research might result in personalised treatment for those with brain tumours. At Portsmouth, innovative treatments for the most serious conditions are already being worked on but we need to invest more to encourage that development.

During my visit to the University of Portsmouth, the message was clear that more funding means that we can accelerate our learning. By increasing our funding, we can continue to attract and retain the brightest people from within, and outside, the UK.

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): I am sure that the Minister is pleased to hear about the excellence that is in evidence in Portsmouth and that call for additional funding, because funding is key to research and research is key to early diagnosis.

When my husband and I received the shock diagnosis for our son, we had just days to respond, even though he had been, at that point, under the care of the local

[Caroline Ansell]

hospital. Our situation ended in a happy conclusion, but serving as I do with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) on the all-party group on brain tumours, I know that too many stories end in grief.

**Mrs Drummond:** Life expectancy, diagnosis and treatment continue to improve for cancer as a whole, but the current lack of knowledge about brain tumours means that 60% of diagnoses happen in A&E. For many of those people, the story is one that no cancer victim should ever hear, which is that the diagnosis came too late. I am really pleased that the son of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) is doing well.

The socio-economic effect is that 21 years are lost for people with brain tumours compared with 13 for breast cancer. We need to fast track treatments from the laboratories to patients. They are available, but regulations can make progress slow and we need to find more rapid ways of improving access to drugs. It is vital that we support more funding for brain tumour research and also a quicker system of getting treatment to patients.

5.36 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on superbly outlining all the reasons why we need to take action on the issue. We should also congratulate, as a House, Maria Lester, on bringing forward the petition, along with all the others who have fought to have the issue addressed.

The stories we have heard are heart-breaking. They are emotional stories about people throughout the United Kingdom. All of us have constituents who have been affected. Those stories are demanding of a response from us as parliamentarians and from the Government—a response saying that we are listening and that we will do the right thing and ensure that we do all we can to support increased funding for research into this killer.

A constituent of mine, Katy Sutherland from Dingwall, has asked me to tell her story, which is yet another demonstration of why we must act. Katy said to me:

“My own interest in this petition and upcoming debate came about because my mum Jackie... was diagnosed with a high-grade brain tumour two and a half years ago—she had just celebrated her 49th birthday. The diagnosis came as a huge shock. Since her diagnosis she has been through two major surgical procedures and has had countless rounds of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. When you are diagnosed with brain cancer it is always a brick wall terminal diagnosis; there is no known cure.”

She went on to say:

“I was nothing short of shocked by the lack of funding into the research of brain cancer; just 1% of Government funding is allocated to this notorious killer. I have raised vital funds myself towards research by doing various runs over Scotland, but not enough to make a difference. I would never wish this horrendous, debilitating disease to strike anyone. The impact and change it has had on my family and our previously ‘normal’ lives has been huge. Watching someone you love being so brave, when you both know there is no real light at the end of the tunnel, is extremely difficult... With many cancers now curable with early diagnosis, research has come a long way with the help of Government funding. However, there is still very little known about the biggest cancer killer in the under-40s and I hope you will agree with me that this needs to change!”

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Shortly after my election to this place in 2010, I was diagnosed with a brain tumour, an experience I share with the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman). We were both able to return to the House fully fit thanks to the excellent work of surgical teams in the NHS in Sheffield and in London. Does the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) recognise that, alongside research, support for victims of brain tumours is also important? Does he recognise and celebrate the excellent work done by charities such as Headway, which supports those suffering from the consequences of brain tumours and other brain injuries?

**Ian Blackford:** I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. He demonstrates, as does the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell), that we are so lucky that people such as them have been able to come through this. It demonstrates why we need investment in diagnosis, research and support for those affected and their families—so much needs to be done, because there is so much that we are losing as a society. So many young people’s lives are being taken away. If we do the right thing by putting that investment in, we can deal with the issues and ensure that many of our people can survive this dreadful disease.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Like many Members here, a number of my constituents have contacted me who are suffering from brain tumours or have family members suffering from brain tumours. My mother is suffering from a brain tumour. No matter what I hear from them about excellent treatment and fantastic charitable work, I agree that there is no substitute for investing in research so that in future other people do not have to suffer such experiences, as so many are.

**Ian Blackford:** I hope that we have crossed that Rubicon today and that the Government will recognise the responsibility that they have. This is the last big cancer where we have not had the appropriate funding into research. Let us ensure that we take our responsibilities seriously, not only for all those here today, but for all those we can protect from this dreadful disease in years to come.

Katy’s words, which I read out earlier, are a call for action. We cannot and must not let down her or the many others who have asked us as parliamentarians to address this terrible killer. The case for increased funding is irrefutable. We know that brain tumours kill more children and adults under 40 than any other cancer. Like most cancers, the incidence of brain cancer is rising. Fewer than 20% of those diagnosed with brain cancer survive beyond five years, but despite those shocking statistics brain tumour research accounted for just 1.5% of the £498 million spent on cancer research in 2014. Less than £8 million is spent on brain tumour research.

As Maria Lester has said:

“History has shown that where funding leads, breakthroughs follow. Just look at the improved survival rates for breast cancer and leukaemia since the 1970s. I would like to add here that I do not wish to see money redirected from other cancers but overall investment increased so that brain cancer achieves parity of funding.”

Brain Tumour Research has echoed that by calling for funding to increase to between £30 million and £35 million. It has also quantified that there is an average of 6.9 deaths

of men and women under 45 for every £1 million in research spending on all cancers. For brain cancer there is an average of 82.5 deaths of men and women under 45 for every £1 million spent on research. Those statistics should shock and shame us and all, and they demonstrate why we must take action.

In conclusion, it is important that the Government respond positively to the petitioners, the Petitions Committee report and those asking legitimate questions this afternoon. I hope the Minister does that. I ask him to not let us down. Most importantly, will he give some hope to those who will suffer from this cancer by showing that we are determined to improve the survival rate by taking action and making it a priority?

5.43 pm

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): May I begin by welcoming this long overdue debate? The importance and impact of the issue are impossible to overstate and have been eloquently set out by other right hon. and hon. Members. Of all cancers, brain tumours are the biggest killer of people under the age of 40, with fewer than 20% of those diagnosed surviving beyond five years. Although welcome progress has been made in the treatment of and research into other cancers, with significant improvements in survival rates, sadly, that is not matched in respect of brain tumours. A number of problems remain.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) is sadly unable to speak in today's debate, but her interest in and commitment to this cause are well known. She asked me to mention her constituents Terry and Eileen Smith, who lost their son Michael last November, and David Bird—his wife and daughter came to see my right hon. Friend—who sadly passed away after a very late diagnosis; that came too late for anything to be done.

Those stories are echoed by that of Jake McCarthy, whose family live in Rothley in my constituency. He was a bright, talented 24-year-old who on Christmas eve 2012 lost his life to a brain tumour diagnosed too late. Jake's family and friends set up the Jake McCarthy Foundation to help to prevent others from experiencing such a tragic loss. The foundation helps to raise awareness of the symptoms and promotes the importance of early diagnosis. So far, it has raised more than a quarter of a million pounds. On 11 June we will see the third annual cycle ride to raise yet more money. Members of Jake's family who set up the foundation are here today, and I pay tribute to their bravery and the work they have done through the foundation.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): My hon. Friend is speaking powerfully about his young constituent. Does he agree that brain cancers, precisely because they affect children and young adults in the prime of life, disproportionately affect others? I pay tribute to my constituent Adam Bolton, a father of four. An owner of a small business employing 15 people, because of his treatment, he has had to sell his business.

**Edward Argar**: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the human consequences of this terrible cancer. It is clear that, while brain cancer is rarer than some, the mortality rate is very high, and awareness of symptoms and swift diagnosis are vital. It is research, however,

that holds the key to beating the disease in the long term. Other Members have cited the stark statistic that research into the disease accounts for just over 1% of the £498 million spent on cancer research, and that is truly shocking.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Many of my constituents have also raised this important matter with me. Brain Tumour Research in Buckinghamshire has requested not just an increase in funding from Government, but an absolute minimum, on which we can argue for increased funding over the years. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is the right approach?

**Edward Argar**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to see the amount of funding increased to the £30 million to £35 million proposed in the petition. I was disappointed by the Department's official response, which essentially appeared to abrogate responsibility for helping to identify and address areas with insufficient funding. I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) in asking whether the Minister thinks that the current level of funding is adequate. If it is not, what steps will the Government take not to pass the problem to the voluntary sector, but to take the lead in addressing and filling that gap?

The Petitions Committee was right to state that brain tumour patients have been let down by a lack of leadership from successive Governments. This is not a party political issue; it is about getting it right. I hope that the Minister's response, as his responses normally are, will be positive, constructive and encouraging. It is through the efforts of Jake McCarthy's family and friends and people like them across the UK that we are having this debate. We owe it to them and to Jake to rise to that challenge.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair)**: We have 15 more speakers. If they all stick to about four minutes, we should get everyone in. Members of the public have written to their MP and their MP is here. They want to hear their MP speak, so I know that everyone will try to keep to their four minutes from now on and not take too many interventions.

5.48 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for her exceptional speech and to the chair of the all-party group on brain tumours, the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), for making such a moving speech.

As we have heard, brain tumours account for 40% of all cancers in children. They are the leading cause of male deaths for 20 to 29-year-olds and they are the biggest cancer killer for those under 40. We do not have a good survival rate for brain tumours; four out of five people will die within five years of being diagnosed. Brain tumours are on the increase. Twenty-nine people a day are diagnosed, reducing life expectancy by 20 years on average, which is the highest for any cancer.

Brain tumours are the largest cause of preventable or treatable blindness in children, and childhood brain tumour survivors are 10 times more likely to suffer long-term disability than well children. This accounts for 20,000 additional disabled life years for all children

[Debbie Abrahams]

who are diagnosed each year. We have heard about the low base of research funding for brain tumours. The Minister has already been asked about that and I look forward to a favourable response.

Behind all the facts and figures are the personal stories. I was particularly moved by one of my constituents who wants to remain anonymous. He has a young family and he has had a difficult time. He told me he has gone from being a fit, healthy individual to one who struggles to do many of the everyday things that a dad wants to be able to do with his children. He was diagnosed last year at the age of 40 with a grade 2 oligodendroglioma. After an 11-hour craniotomy, during which he was awake, he has spent much of the past nine months fighting infection and undergoing extensive physiotherapy to help him to learn to walk again and to enable him to live a relatively normal life. He started radiotherapy at the Christie last month to try to control the regrowth of the tumour. Unfortunately, the nature of these things means that it is almost certainly regrowing, yet he says he is one of the lucky ones with, hopefully, “a decent number of years ahead”

of him. However, he is taking nothing for granted. He has been lucky in terms of being awarded an Access to Work grant, which has been invaluable in helping him to stay in work.

I also want to mention a young man, Christopher Clarke, who was 18 when he died of his brain tumour. He was a lovely lad. He was so cheerful in spite of the diagnosis and prognosis. He had a profound effect on his circle of friends. Even 10 years after his death, they are still fundraising for the trust that was set up in his name.

Satvinder Uppal was 54 when she died of a brain tumour five years ago last week. The real issue for Satvinder’s family was the delay in diagnosis of the brain tumour, which we have heard is common. In spite of prolonged jaw pain, severe headaches and memory issues, the tumour was not picked up when she went on various occasions to visit her GP. It was not until she collapsed at home that she was finally diagnosed at A&E. As her family said,

“The specialist cancer centre was brilliant, but getting the diagnosis in the first place was the issue.”

What does the Government plan to do to extend brain tumour research from the current low level? What will the Minister do to ensure that clinical guidelines reflect the poor diagnosis rates?

5.52 pm

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): The outcome of today’s debate is an incredibly simple one for my hon. Friend the Minister and the Department. It is to step up to the plate that the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and others have already referenced. There is an unjustifiable disparity in attention and funds, which are not being provided for research into this type of cancer, whereas others attract it. I see a role for my hon. Friend’s Department. A number of right hon. and hon. colleagues have referenced the huge and valuable local fundraising that often goes on as a result of an individual tragedy. To avoid duplication and some of the problems that the hon. Lady referenced—the access to tissue and so on—could the Minister say in his

summing up what role, if any, the Department might have in leading some form of co-ordination to try to get a national approach? However, that should not be seen as an abrogation, relying on the voluntary sector for the Department not to step up to the plate.

At the first or second surgery that I held after the election last year, a constituent called Sacha Langton-Gilks came to my surgery, and her story is replicated so many times. She had lost her son at the age of 16 to a brain tumour; he was diagnosed at the age of 11 in 2007. For five years he was treated very well with chemotherapy and radiotherapy, but underwent 11 brain operations. The cancer reappeared in May 2012 and such was the physical toll on him and the family, they decided to go for the quiet option and not to prolong his life through any unnecessary and probably futile suffering. We must do something about all those tragic stories.

If I may, I want to talk briefly about the work and the campaign of HeadSmart. I cannot understand, and neither can my constituent who works on its education side, the Department’s reticence to have HeadSmart’s booklet inserted into the little red health book of every child. We must improve education and knowledge about this. Every death that we hear about is met by frustration and a sense of futility, which could so easily be evaporated if we were able to have a better and more pronounced understanding of the subject.

We have to do more about screening. It is unjustifiable that a child in the UK with a brain tumour takes on average three times longer to be diagnosed than somebody in the United States of America and even somebody in Poland. We are the world’s fifth largest economy. We know that there is pressure on the public purse, but, given the vulnerability of so many of these young people, now is the time for action. Will the Minister work with HeadSmart and others to get the information booklet into the little red health book and also to promote the information talks that HeadSmart provides within schools? It is crucial in personal, social, health and economic education, which is not technically required in academies. That is something we will have to think about as another aspect of policy, but now is the time for the Government to step up to the plate.

5.56 pm

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I apologise to other Members: I was not here for the start of the debate because I was upstairs in a Delegated Legislation Committee dealing with the code of practice under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, so unfortunately I did not hear what by all accounts was a powerful speech by the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones). I want to thank her not only for her role in securing today’s debate, but for the quality of the Petitions Committee report, “Funding for research into brain tumours”.

I was delighted to be here for the contribution by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), whose work as chair of the all-party group on brain tumours I admire and, as a member of the group, try to support. I thank Maria Lester for the petition, which is welcome and gives us the chance to follow up on the work done by so many other people to point out exactly how little funding goes into research into brain tumours compared

with other cancers. The statistics have been quoted again and again today. I can do my little bit as well, but no matter how many times the statistics are quoted they do not become cliché-worn. It is still a shock when we consider the impact that brain tumours have.

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

Brain tumours represent 1% of cancer diagnoses and 3% of cancer deaths. They also represent 2% of all deaths under 60, so that shows us what we are dealing with. It is shocking that the Government persist in committing relatively little to specifically support research into brain tumours. That is why I want to thank Brain Tumour Research for its work in Parliament and so many other places to raise awareness and funds, and then to have those funds applied to excellent work that hopefully can transform prospects for many people.

Like others, I have been contacted by constituents about this debate, including by Anne-Marie, who wrote to me about her husband, who is 45 and was diagnosed with a glioblastoma last August. She has pointed out the major effort going on in the United States via the “moonshot” campaign, which received a lot of attention after the tragic death of Joe Biden’s son. She referred me to some of the letters that were written to Joe Biden in the context of the “moonshot” campaign. She said she identified strongly with some of those letters, which spelled out the frustrations and feelings that she and her husband experienced. Our efforts should not just be about ensuring that more funding goes into research *per se*. We must ensure that it incentivises new treatments and fosters and facilitates innovation. Doing one will help us do the others; it will make such a huge difference.

One of the reasons why my constituents are so aware of brain tumours at the moment is that the top-class footballer Mark Farren, a young man of 33, died in February. He was a record-setting and record-breaking goal scorer who played for Derry City and Glenavon. He tragically lost his battle, even though the football family—not just those in Ireland, but people here such as Wayne Rooney, Roy Keane and others—raised money to help to get innovative treatment for him. He lost his battle, but the fight goes on.

6.1 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I am a member of the Petitions Committee, which hosted this debate, and I pay tribute to our Chairman, the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), for her opening speech, in which she laid out clearly and comprehensively the argument that we need to make today. The subject of this debate is close to many people’s hearts. We have heard many tragic stories of people who have suffered from this terrible disease, but also the stories of hope of people who received treatment and survived. It is absolutely right that we are holding this vital debate.

As many hon. Members said, brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of children and adults under 40. It is the most costly form of cancer in terms of years lost. It is therefore legitimate for us to ask why research into brain tumours has been so underfunded for so long. Patients and families up and down the country understandably feel let down by the lack of action of

successive Governments. During the Committee’s research into this issue, I was particularly saddened to learn that the survival rates for brain tumours have improved little in the past 30 years. Surely we as a nation should not and cannot accept that. It is time to take action for change.

It was highlighted to us that the funding of brain tumour research is inadequate and has not been sufficiently prioritised. As many hon. Members have said, of the total amount of money spent on cancer research, about 1.5% is spent on research into brain tumours. I join those who call for the number of years lost to be a major factor in allocating funds for research.

Like many hon. Members, I have been contacted by constituents who told me their stories. I want to highlight the story of a family who do not want to be named. They battled to get to the bottom of why my constituent was feeling so poorly. His GPs maintained that he was suffering from depression. In desperation, they eventually paid for a private MRI scan, which revealed a brain tumour. Having already faced major battles to get the diagnosis, the family quickly learned that there was a lack of money for support and treatment for that devastating illness. Tragically, they do not doubt that if they had not had the money to pay for the scan privately, my constituent would not be here today. That is not acceptable. I wholeheartedly support their calls for better awareness among GPs and fairer funding for brain tumour research.

The Petitions Committee report sets out some clear recommendations to the Government, and I urge the Minister to consider them carefully. We can provide better leadership to raise awareness of brain tumours among GPs and other health professionals. We can strive for earlier diagnosis. I ask the Government a question that many hon. Members have asked: is the current level of funding adequate? If not, what can the Government do about it? It is too late to save those who have already tragically lost their lives to this disease, but it is not too late for us to take action to save lives in the future.

6.4 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on her dedication to this issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I am also grateful to Stephen Realf’s family, the supporters of the petition and the Petitions Committee for helping to bring this debate to the Chamber.

Although brain tumours are often considered to be one of the rarer forms of cancer, as we have heard, they clearly have a significant and devastating impact. Brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of the under-40s and children, and they result in more life years lost than any other form of cancer.

The Petitions Committee concluded that brain tumour research is not adequately funded and prioritised in the UK, and that the Government fail to grasp their funding responsibility and the seriousness of the concern. Sufferers have to fight for diagnosis, treatment, support, awareness, and funding. There is little choice in the treatments available, and treatment protocols may be non-existent.

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

Earlier this year, the Scottish Government announced a new cancer strategy comprising a number of different actions to help to treat cancer, diagnose people more quickly and deliver better care. It includes £10 million of additional support to enable quicker access to diagnostics for people with suspected cancer and a Detect Cancer Early programme.

There is an acknowledged need to include brain tumours in public awareness campaigns and to develop appropriate care pathways. In 2011, the UK's first brain tumour tissue bank was opened in what is now the Queen Elizabeth university hospital—a service that facilitates co-operation on research for treatments. Glasgow also has the new Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Care Centre, which is one of the most advanced NHS cancer centres in the UK. Importantly, the University of Glasgow has a brain tumour research fund, which supports local research projects—in particular, smaller projects that do not get funding from larger organisations. It also helps to enable a multi-disciplinary approach to research, which includes input from medical staff involved in front-line patient care and the scientific community. Brain tumour research and treatment must be funded appropriately across the UK.

I was contacted by my constituent, Mrs Robinson, whose husband has a brain tumour. She made it clear to me that they want the system to improve for everybody. I would like to comment briefly on the emotional impact of diagnosis. We need better psychological assistance for those affected and their families, and we need to support their mental wellbeing, alongside their physical health.

On early diagnosis research treatment and care pathways, I would like to remind hon. Members of the need for improved palliative care. I recently lost a much-loved uncle, David McGilvray, to cancer. We now have a good local facility—Kilbride Hospice—to assist families in that situation, but it was unfortunately not opened in time for my uncle to benefit from it. We need such facilities across the UK, so that families can access palliative care at their times of greatest need and people with cancer can die—if they must—with dignity.

6.8 pm

**Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) and the many others who have spoken eloquently in this debate. I have just a few small points to add to what has already been said. I have personal experience of brain tumours—the first time I became aware of death was when the younger brother of a close friend at primary school passed away. People often learn to talk about such things with a fellow child.

I want to speak on behalf of two constituents today. The first, Daniel, is in his 20s and is a very capable young man in the community. He set up a local youth club, and he is now involved in making a film about his experience of living with a brain tumour. He has explained to me that the biggest issue for him is the lack of available drug options. He would like to see more research into non-chemotherapy drugs.

Another family in my constituency who made contact with me in advance of the debate is Colin and Joyce. Their daughter Jennifer died 10 years ago due to an

undiagnosed brain tumour. Today, I am sad to report, would have been Jennifer's 32nd birthday. They have asked me to raise in particular the need for equity of access to speedy diagnostic tests, on a par with common cancers. They believe, rightly, that guidelines backed by robust research are needed to educate medical and healthcare professionals, as well as the general public, on the range of symptoms that can indicate brain tumours. The Bell family, also rightly, ask for better research into new treatments, access to clinical trials for new treatments and—this is crucial—rehabilitation therapies to improve quality of life.

The Bells are impressive in so many ways, because they lead the Norfolk Brain Tumour Support Group. I want to emphasise to people in Norfolk that that support is available to them. At the support group, I met some nurses from the Norfolk and Norwich university hospital, as well as patients. The nurses told me about not only the difficulties of diagnosis, but the complexities of treatment. The treatment pathway can be complex from the perspective of the patients and of the nurses and doctors, and there are also challenges post-discharge. In the words of the Bell family, to achieve a better future, “charities, the NHS, educational and research institutes must work together and communicate effectively. This is crucial to make the best of available resources in the current economic climate.”

Joyce and Colin Bell

“very much hope that the debate will result in increased funding being made available to improve outcomes for people affected by brain tumour”.

I strongly agree with my constituents. We must make the best use of support groups, such as our local one, and of symptom advice, such as that of HeadSmart. Ultimately, however, we must look to see whether we can do anything better in diagnosis, on the pathway once people are under care, and for their needs post-discharge.

6.12 pm

**Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for her succinct and elegant explanation of the issues and problems.

I am here to talk about my constituent James Hinnigan and his achievements since diagnosis, not least of which was to ensure that Makerfield people top the list of signatories to the petition. James was travelling with his family, but settled in Australia. Then he got a tingling sensation and his speech started coming and going. Fortunately, he went straight to A&E. He was asked to draw a diagram of a clock and, to his amazement, he could see only one side of it—he could not manage to get the other side of the clock going. The A&E staff thought he had had a stroke, but an MRI scan revealed a brain tumour, low level but operable.

James felt isolated, so he came home to Makerfield and moved back in with his parents. In Australia, however, he had read about a pioneering treatment, and he was referred to Charing Cross hospital, where they use the knife and laser. He recently had the operation, in which he was woken up during the procedure and the surgeons assessed, by talking to him, how much tissue they could remove without damaging his brain function. He has told me that he is now recovering well and

looking forward to the birth of his second child at the beginning of May. I know that we would all wish him well.

That is a remarkable story, but what is even more remarkable was James's reaction to the news. He said, "This is the hand I've been dealt and I just have to get on and play the game"—and he is certainly playing to win, not just for himself, but for all those diagnosed with that terrible condition. He approached me to discuss the problems and put me in touch with Brain Tumour Research. I learned a lot, and I truly believe that more needs to be done in diagnosis and in treatment. I said to him that I will do what I can to raise awareness.

That was not enough for James. He held a sponsored 8-till-8 spinathon, aiming to raise £2,740, which is the cost of one day's research into brain tumours. He actually raised double that amount, which was a tremendous effort—even though he had to sit on a cushion for the rest of the weekend. He also attended the event at Speaker's House, wearing a hat to promote awareness of brain tumours, only four days before his operation. He is now planning to paddleboard the Leeds-Liverpool canal to raise even more money.

That young man, who is only 36, is a fantastic role model. We owe him and all the others like him a future, which we can give them by increasing funding for brain tumour research and by prioritising a reduction in the number of early, needless deaths. Early diagnosis and pioneering new treatments must be a priority if we are not to lose James and other such people.

6.15 pm

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** The Westminster Hall Chamber is as full today as most of us have ever seen it. We are all here as a direct result of the commitment of the family of my constituent, Stephen Realf. As the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) told us in her persuasive opening remarks, Stephen lost his life in August 2014 as a result of a brain tumour, aged just 26. His sister, Maria Lester, was instrumental in setting up the petition calling for more research.

I will speak about Stephen and about Maria's campaign in his memory, but I became aware of the effect of a brain tumour on a young person many years ago. A couple I knew well lost their daughter when she was only 10 years old, which had a huge impact on her parents, so when Stephen's father, Peter, came to see me at my surgery in July 2010, I had some understanding of the effect caused on Stephen's life by a brain tumour.

Stephen's dad had actually come to speak to me about how Stephen's employer, the RAF, had been dealing with Stephen's illness. From an early age, Stephen had had an ambition to fly with the RAF, so he and his family were delighted when he was accepted as a trainee officer and started his flight training. His diagnosis came when he was 40 hours into flight training. He and his family realised that his dream of becoming a pilot would not come to fruition.

There was some talk about Stephen's role after his diagnosis, and the concern was that the RAF was not dealing with his case as quickly as it might have done. Stephen was eventually given a medical discharge, but the RAF arranged for an air marshal with responsibility for personnel and capability to deal with the delays, then telling Stephen about the changes in process that had improved their systems. It is important that the

RAF acknowledged the situation, and that Stephen was not left feeling that he was not being supported by the RAF once he was discharged. That demonstrates the need for understanding by employers, as well as by the medical profession.

After Stephen died, the family put their energy into raising awareness and raising money for Myton hospice in Rugby. In August last year, Stephen's sister, Maria, wrote an article in *The Mail on Sunday* magazine, *You*. Around that time, too, the idea of launching a petition calling for a debate in Parliament was developed. I congratulate Maria on how she set about doing that. I am delighted that the required number of signatories was easily reached, leading to us being here today.

Members across the House are now much more aware of the number of people diagnosed with this disease and of how brain cancers kill more children and adults under 40 than any other cancer. We now know that only 1% of research spending on cancer is allocated to brain cancers and how the five-year survival rate is less than 20% when there are instances of progress with many other cancers over the past 30 years.

I am proud that my constituents have played such a key role in raising awareness and pleased that they have turned what was for them such a sad time into something positive, to ensure that their son leaves a legacy of a greater likelihood of earlier diagnosis for those affected and, perhaps, of a longer and better quality of life. I very much hope, importantly, that there will be more funding for research on that devastating disease. Along with other Members, I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

6.19 pm

**Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for securing the debate and for producing, along with the other members of her Committee, an excellent report arising from the e-petition on funding for research into brain tumours. I also commend those who created the e-petition and those who signed it. Their laudable campaign has afforded us a substantive opportunity to discuss the unmet need for and chronic underfunding of research into brain tumours, the biggest cancer killer of children and adults under 40.

In the days and weeks leading up to the debate, I received a number of emails and letters from constituents outlining the shocking human cost of what is a devastating disease. Each of those missives included a personal account of the distressing experiences of the correspondent whose life had been affected by this terrible disease. We have heard many such stories today. It was striking how many of them had common themes and how the experiences of one individual and their family were echoed in the experiences of another. The Petitions Committee's report remarked on the similarities among the stories they heard and set out those common themes, which included

"difficulties and delays in getting a diagnosis; lack of treatment options; poor survival rates and the huge burden of the disease on patients and their families."

There was unanimity from patients and their families that those problems were exacerbated and perpetuated by chronic underfunding of research into the cancer, and that those problems could be fundamentally addressed

[Colleen Fletcher]

only through a significant increase in resources. They argued that there is a clear correlation between the funding for research on a specific cancer and improved survival rates and reduced incidence. Yet despite brain tumours being the most fatal of all cancers in the number of life years lost, they have for too long been the poor relation in cancer research. That is why improvements in outcomes for brain tumour patients continue to lag so far behind results in better-resourced areas of cancer treatment.

I readily admit that preparing for today's debate was an eye-opening experience, in large part because of the profoundly tragic and painful stories I received from constituents, but also because I learned that research into such a deadly disease received just 1.5%, or £7.7 million, of the £498 million national spend for cancer in 2014, and just 1% of the overall national spend since 2002. The charity Brain Tumour Research estimates that, at the current rate of national spending, it could take another 100 years to find a cure. How many more lives will be tragically cut short and how many more families bereaved during that period? The answer is not one we should countenance, so I have no hesitation in joining the e-petition signatories in calling for the Government to show leadership and ensure that brain tumours are treated as seriously as other cancers and that more resources are provided.

Through improved funding we can raise awareness of brain tumours and increase the number of early diagnoses. That in turn could increase the opportunities for research, allowing us better to understand the causes of this devastating disease and potentially to develop urgently needed treatments, which could improve survival rates and patients' quality of life.

6.23 pm

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I add my congratulations to those that have been offered to the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), who spoke to the motion so powerfully.

In addition to the moving personal stories that some of my constituents have told me, one of my motivations for speaking today is that I am proud to have in my constituency the national head office of the charity Brain Tumour Research. I pay tribute to Sue Farrington Smith and her team for the incredible work that they do. Earlier this year, I had the great privilege of attending their launch event and open day in their new Milton Keynes offices. I urge colleagues to visit them if they get the opportunity. Mine was an inspirational visit. I saw the passion and determination that the staff, volunteers, clinicians, family members and supporters put into securing better research funding, better and earlier diagnoses, and support for patients and their families.

The debate shows the value of the petitions system. I was at the office a day or two before the deadline for registering, and signatures were just below the 100,000 level. Great excitement was palpable as the number neared the magic threshold. The system works.

I want to make two brief points about the substance of the debate. First, I echo the Committee's call with respect to funding priorities being set by research bodies. I agree with its conclusion that research gaps cannot

be the sole responsibility of the voluntary sector. The Government have a leadership role too. The National Cancer Research Institute partners have an invaluable role to play, but we cannot over-rely on them. I hope that one of the Minister's takeaways from the debate will be to have a fresh look at the Government's role in identifying and addressing funding gaps.

I hope that the other point I want to make is not naive. It is about the diagnostic procedure. I have no medical background, but in the six years I have been a Member I have encountered a range of medical conditions, including some cancers—such as pancreatic cancer and neuroblastoma, which tragically took away the life of my young constituent, Henry Allen, at only four years of age—and other diseases that are not cancers, such as Niemann-Pick type C, that all have symptoms that can be difficult to identify. The research, treatment and cure will be unique to each condition, but I have found that they share a common problem of late diagnosis.

The symptoms are often not readily connected to the condition and may be general, such as nausea, pain and fatigue. GPs may see only a handful of such cases throughout their careers. Often, there is a lengthy process in which a condition is dismissed. It is often A&E, as we have heard, that makes a diagnosis later on. Alternatively, there may be a lengthy ping-pong between the GP and the consultant to find out what the condition is not, but without finding out what it is. Surely we can find a better system of diagnosis. When the obvious causes of a symptom have been ruled out, the patient could be sent for a comprehensive MOT to find out what is wrong more quickly. Funding cannot be the issue. How much money is wasted by that constant back and forth?

Earlier diagnosis is important for treatment, as well as in the search for a cure, through tissue being given for research purposes. There is so much more that could be done. I wish I could expand on that point, but I hope that the Minister responds to what I have said.

6.27 pm

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing the debate, which, as we have seen, is important.

Like other hon. Members in the Chamber, I lost a good friend to brain cancer. She was aged just 41, and it is no consolation to Joy's parents or husband, or indeed to her good friends, that she had 30 years more life than Danny Green, who was spoken of so passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris). Anyone who has read the book by Danny's parents, Chris and Lisa Green, cannot fail to be moved by their story.

A cancer diagnosis of any type is not news that anyone wants to hear, but brain cancer affects those under 40 disproportionately, and funding must be increased. The arguments for extra funding have been rehearsed many times: symptom recognition, early diagnosis, more investment in research, targeted treatment—they all take funding. However, as we have heard, it is also partly the responsibility of the research institutes to make their bids for funding in this important area. One problem is that it is not recognised that funding is there. We need to change that, and today's debate will help. I hope that raising the profile of the need for funding for research on brain tumours, through the petition and today's debate, will trigger more funding requests.



I have mentioned before in debates, and I am sure this will not be the last time I do so, that we must break down the silos that exist not only in the NHS and social care, but in research departments. It is important to consider the long-term cost to individuals and to the health service and social care if we do not invest in research. I request that the Minister look at the health economics to see what we can do and how much more money we can invest, because that will save so much more long term. The long term is important with regard to individuals and the cost of supporting them, because the nature of the treatment and the site of the cancer mean that many are left with lifelong disabilities and need a tremendous amount of support. Some of that support is offered by our amazing hospice movement, such as Treetops in my constituency, which provides incredible hospice care.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister outlined last week, spending on cancer research has gone up, but today the question is how that is distributed. I ask the Minister to do whatever he can to ensure that brain cancer gets its fair share of that increased spending and that it moves up the agenda, so that there is more investment in the research and development of new drugs and new ways of treating these people, who are predominantly young people with their lives ahead of them.

6.31 pm

**Stuart Blair Donaldson** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck, and a privilege to be able to contribute to the debate on the Petitions Committee report. I commend the Committee for its work and for the interest it has generated in the debate. I hope that that interest demonstrates to the Government what a vital issue this is for many people across the UK, and I sincerely hope the Minister will take away the points made today and consider what more can be done to fund research into brain tumours.

I have to admit I was taken aback by how many emails I received on the issue, asking me to attend the debate. It was eye-opening to learn how many people in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine have been affected by brain tumours, which I knew little about, and after listening to the debate I realise that I still have a lot more to learn. I am incredibly grateful to those who wrote to me and took the time to share their stories and experiences of brain tumours. It would take much longer than four minutes to share all those stories, but I will briefly talk about two of them.

The first story is that of Carolyn Toshney, who was the first person to raise the issue of brain tumours with me. After returning from a skiing holiday in 2009, her now-husband Mark collapsed at work and had a number of seizures. After initially being treated for meningitis, it was discovered that Mark had a brain tumour. He then underwent surgery to remove 90% of the tumour, which was initially thought to not be cancerous. Unfortunately, a few weeks later, it was confirmed that the tumour was cancerous, and Mark underwent months of chemotherapy.

Since Mark's diagnosis, Carolyn has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of, and funds for, brain tumour charities, including by working with the Friends of the Neuro Ward ARI to help raise funds for the refurbishment of the neuro-ward at Aberdeen royal infirmary; I share

the frustrations expressed by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) about the ongoing delays to that. Carolyn also made a valuable contribution to the work of the Petitions Committee's report.

Secondly, I will mention the situation of other of my constituents, who are parents. They shared the story of their young son who was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of four, just before starting primary school. Their son recently celebrated his fifth birthday in intensive care, unaware that it was his birthday, as he is still undergoing treatment. His story is incredibly moving and demonstrates how brain tumours can affect anyone, whatever their age, health or any other factor. Brain tumours do not discriminate. I want to share what they wrote to me:

"We don't know what the future holds for our little boy, but we do know that we want to help change the future for other children like our son."

As has been mentioned, for illnesses such as brain cancer, achieving accurate and early diagnosis is often the biggest barrier to effective treatment, which is why I welcome, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned, the Scottish Government's new cancer strategy, which allocates an extra £10 million to support swift access to diagnostics for people with suspected cancer. The Petitions Committee report highlighted how early diagnosis could improve the opportunities for research, because it would increase the availability of tissue samples from earlier stages of the disease, and enable a larger number of brain tumour patients to take part in clinical trials.

I once again congratulate the Petitions Committee on the report, and thank everyone who contributed and shared their experiences. I hope the Minister will listen carefully to what has been said today and act accordingly.

6.34 pm

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I add my congratulations to the Chair of the Petitions Committee, the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), on the Committee's excellent report, and to every Member on today's thoughtful debate. I pay particular tribute to colleagues who spoke movingly about their own experiences or those of people close to them.

I will briefly mention one of my own constituents, but first echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) about Sacha Langton-Gilks. It is clear that someone is a dedicated and doughty campaigner when they not only attend the surgeries of their own Member of Parliament, but pitch up at those of other Members. Sacha came to see me when I was a new MP—bringing with her the legal requirement, one of my constituents, who introduced her—and spoke incredibly movingly about her son, David. She also brought with her the HeadSmart cards and emphasised the importance of early diagnosis and the HeadSmart campaign, which seeks to bring awareness to schools, doctors and, particularly, parents. As a result of that meeting, I was able to introduce her to the leader of Hampshire County Council, who agreed for those cards to be distributed in Hampshire schools. Those cards are incredibly informative, outlining symptoms in an age-specific way and, above all, not provoking

[*Caroline Nokes*]

alarm; they just educate people. It is important that we increase awareness of brain tumours without instilling fear in people.

**Rebecca Harris:** I, too, commend the HeadSmart cards, but does my hon. Friend agree that unless the medical profession is more aware of brain tumours we will run into the problem, as we have time and again, that it overlooks parents' instincts in such cases?

**Caroline Nokes:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work as chair of the APPG, and I will highlight exactly that situation with the case of a constituent. Brain tumours are not as rare as we might think; they are the biggest cancer killer of children. That is why I argue that research and knowledge are critical.

I received an incredibly moving letter from my constituents, Charlotte Swithenbank and James Butler, the parents of Alfie, who is not yet two years old and has been fighting his cancer for more than a year. As in many cases, Alfie was not initially diagnosed. It was not until his seventh trip to the doctor in just two weeks that he was referred to Southampton general hospital. Within 36 hours of admission, he was diagnosed with a grade 3 infant ependymoma, and he has since had more than 24 hours of surgery. He has also had chemotherapy.

**Simon Hoare:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there may be a correlation between a perception that brain cancers and brain tumours are somehow lower down the pecking order and the fact that GPs are less inclined to refer? They do not necessarily see them as part of the great initiatives of the Department.

**Caroline Nokes:** To be brutally honest, I do not know, but I agree with the chair of the APPG that it is critical that the medical community be incredibly aware of such cancers and make referrals as quickly as possible.

Alfie has been for proton beam therapy in the USA and has lived in hospital for more than five and a half months of his short life. He is scheduled to have his MRI today, which is why his parents are not here; I am sure that they will catch up with the debate later. That MRI will, we hope, establish whether Alfie has gone into remission. We want that news to be positive, but as his mother, Charlotte, says, even if Alfie is now in remission, given the type of tumour he has, there is a 50% chance that it will return within seven years. As a family, they will live in fear even if he has gone into remission.

Charlotte also says that early diagnosis is key. It was her persistence in going back to the GP time and again, and refusing to accept that it was just an ear infection, that meant that Alfie's diagnosis, in comparison with many, was relatively quick. That got him referred to an excellent children's unit, which has helped him to have a fighting chance.

Charlotte has sought to convey to me how urgent this issue is. Unlike other cancers, the incidence of brain tumours is rising and the improvements in outcome that we have seen in other cancers have not been matched in brain cancers. In Southampton, we are incredibly lucky to have the Cancer Research UK unit located adjacent to the general hospital. MPs are invited there

every year to hear about the work it does and to see graphs that show that, for the majority of cancers, treatment rates are more successful and incidence is going down. However, for brain tumours, those are going in the other direction; the cures have not been as forthcoming as for other cancers.

We are all here today to convey the message to the Minister that we want more investment in research in this field, so that more parents do not have to go through what Charlotte and James are going through, and more children like Alfie have the best possible chance of a positive outcome.

6.40 pm

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Ms Buck. Along with others, I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on introducing this debate. Maria Lester should also be congratulated on raising this issue; I do not wish to state the obvious, but without her petition there would have been no debate here today, so we would not have had the opportunity to share many personal stories and to raise this important issue with the Minister. It has also been an opportunity for me personally to learn more about this subject. As a newer Member of Parliament, I am still struck by how often constituents come to us and share their very personal experiences and stories with us; it is often very moving and very touching.

An earlier speech touched on people's ignorance of this subject matter. In doing research for today's debate and in sitting here listening, I, for one, have learned an awful lot—and I am sure I have an awful lot more to learn. As we heard today, the Petitions Committee released its report on funding for research in March. That report called for more investment in research into brain tumours and revealed the distress of many sufferers and their families whose lives have been devastatingly affected. It also helpfully explored the reasons behind the historical underfunding of research under successive Governments. I was quite shocked to read that brain tumours are the ninth most common cancer in the UK and they kill more children and adults under 40 than any other cancer—yet, while the incidence is increasing, there has been little extra allocated to research. That is one reason today's debate is so important.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend makes powerful points. While I congratulate my constituent, Peter Jordan, on his efforts—he recently completed the Plymouth half marathon to raise funds for this cause—does she agree that, given the figures she has mentioned, what we need to see is real commitment from the Government to funding research?

**Wendy Morton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. Yes, I do hope that the Government are listening today. We must continue to raise this matter. As a local MP, I recently read a heartbreaking email from a grandmother about her grandson. I then received an email from a mother, telling me about her son. At that point, it hit home that the grandmother's grandson was the mother's son. It highlighted to me that it is not just sons, daughters or grandchildren who are affected, but cousins, aunts, friends and colleagues; it extends way beyond the immediate family. Those emails

compelled me to come along today and speak in this debate. The young boy sadly passed away, aged just 14, after surgery, chemo and radiotherapy, seven years after being diagnosed with a high-grade tumour. I cannot imagine how that family must have felt. Sadly, as we have heard from the many examples shared with us today, that family is not alone.

Charities, clinicians and scientists do amazing work. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) spoke about people who raise money through charities, doing sponsored runs, marathons and all manner of things for causes that are very close to their hearts. Yet, although technological advances help, brain tumours remain very difficult to treat and continue to take many, many lives each year—too many lives. I conclude simply by saying that I am looking forward to the Minister's response, especially on how to raise awareness, how to improve research and, ultimately, how to improve the outcome for patients and their families.

6.44 pm

**Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Last Friday, I had the very great privilege of spending quite a long time with Peter Realf, who is here today with his family, at the University of Wolverhampton's brain tumour research centre in my constituency. We discussed a range of things related to brain tumours with Professor John Darling and Professor Tracy Warr, who gave evidence to the Petitions Committee.

I want to make a couple of brief points to remind the Minister that money spent on generic cancer research—important though that research is—is often not applicable to brain tumour research. One cannot say that 3% of cancers are brain tumours and therefore 3% of the generic cancer research funding can be attributed to brain tumour research. There are about 120 different types of brain tumours. As Professor Warr herself pointed out to the Committee, that generic research is not applicable to many of the brain tumour situations. I repeat what she said to the Committee—it is quoted in paragraph 53 of the report:

“It is a very complex disease and a lot of the general non-site specific translational work from other tumours cannot be applied to brain tumours”.

Also, on the same page of the report, in paragraph 55—this has been mentioned earlier in the debate but it bears repeating—the actual amount, as far as one can tell, that is spent on brain tumour research in the United Kingdom at the moment appears to be in the order of £2.2 million.

I asked Professors John Darling and Tracy Warr how big the brain tumour research community—for want of a better word—is in the UK and they said that it is in the order of 100 people—very specialist people. I asked them what the chances are of scaling up if, as we hope, we get a considerable increase in research funding from the Government as a result of pressure from both sides of the House. It is all very well the Government saying they are going to increase funding for brain tumour research—as I hope they will—but if the researchers are not there to do it, we cannot scale up in a short time; it is very complex work.

The professors told me and Peter Realf that we could scale up if, for example, the funding were doubled. Some have suggested that it should go up by £35 million, but if it is £2.2 million now and that were to double, we

could scale up. The brain tumour research centre at the University of Wolverhampton—a national centre of excellence that does this work—is losing doctoral and post-doctoral students to other fields, such as that related to leukaemia, or to places such as Chicago, because the positions are not there for them in the UK. I ask the Minister to please consider this: we can scale up, we do have the skills there and we can double the research funding. It will cost about £2 million to £2.5 million a year to double the research funding—please do that.

6.48 pm

**Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I am humbled to speak after hearing so many moving personal stories. I am here because of Skye. Skye was five when he tragically died in August 2014, not from the medulloblastoma that he was diagnosed with but from the severe side effects of his treatment—the Milan protocol. We now know that a number of other children also developed similar side effects, and the Milan protocol has now been withdrawn. Skye's mother, Sally, is here in the Gallery today and since his death his family have shown extraordinary courage, raising awareness of, and funding for, childhood brain tumours and setting up the charity Blue Skye Thinking to support research so that all children diagnosed with brain tumours have a better chance of survival. However, Skye's story illustrates that, although much is working in childhood cancer treatment, some key areas are in need of urgent improvement.

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab): As the hon. Lady knows, I lost my dear wife, Val, to secondary tumours and it is a year to the day since she started to have palliative care. I very much share what the hon. Lady said about Skye's case. Does she agree that, more generally, there is a cruel paradox? Progress is being made in treating other cancers but, because of the blood-brain barrier, that increases the number of people who survive to get a brain tumour. That is a further compelling argument for more research.

**Nicola Blackwood:** The right hon. Gentleman, and friend, has made an important point and I hope the Minister will respond to it. However, we should note at this stage that the overall story of childhood cancer over the last 30 years is positive. Eight in 10 children with cancer survive five years or more, compared with just three in 10 during the 1960s. We should congratulate the Government on that because it is clear that the work and funding we put into fighting cancer is money well spent. As we have heard, unlike most cancers, brain tumours are on the rise and research is underfunded, and because the money spent on cancer is effective, we must put that right.

I want to focus on childhood cancers, for obvious reasons. Despite causing more than a third of childhood cancer deaths, brain tumours receive only 6% of childhood cancer funding. Childhood cancers account for less than 1% of cancer diagnoses in the UK and of that 700 children are diagnosed with a brain tumour every year. It is the most common form of cancer affecting children and the most lethal, killing 160 children every year.

We must consider childhood cancer funding in its own right because children's cancers are biologically very different from adult cancers and to treat them

[Nicola Blackwood]

effectively requires specifically tailored research and treatment. The effect of the funding shortage, ethical challenges and small cohorts mean that 50% of childhood cancers are part of a clinical trial and the remainder are treated using standard treatment guidelines such as the Milan protocol. There are risks with that approach.

As we have heard, cancer treatment is a brutal regime and can cause long-term disability. That is particularly true of childhood brain tumour survivors, 60% of whom are left with life-altering disability. In a few cases like Skye's, these effects can be fatal.

**Kevin Foster:** My hon. Friend is making some powerful points, as other speakers have. Investment in this area is vital. The costs of caring for those lifelong disabilities as well as preventing deaths are why the Government should invest in this area—invest to save money in the long run.

**Nicola Blackwood:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is not a subsidy; it is an investment that will reap a return.

Currently, there is no formal infrastructure to collect and share data about standard treatment guidelines. Consultants working incredibly hard to save the lives of young patients struggle with their inability quickly to access information about the potential adverse effects of very tough treatment regimes. In all my correspondence about this with NHS England and others, the response is, "We're trying, but it's very difficult." That is not good enough because all life-saving cancer innovations are difficult and, given the stakes, I simply cannot accept that the problem is insoluble. The architecture for collecting the data is in place, but the lack of formal data collection requirements and a single responsible body can have devastating consequences.

Currently, the National Cancer Registration Service and Public Health England are developing a pilot to improve data gathering and I welcome that, but it seems that it will be retrospective. It may yield research benefits, but it falls short of the real-time data necessary to guide clinicians. When Skye's consultant noted that he was deteriorating fast, she could not easily find out whether any other children on the Milan protocol had experienced the same side effects and she was reduced to phoning colleagues ad hoc to ask their opinion one by one as Skye got worse. In the end, it was too late.

In so many ways, we are making tremendous strides in the UK in tackling cancer, including childhood cancer, but the absence of monitoring the adverse effects of standard treatment for childhood cancer can lead to lifelong disability and death. In an ideal world, all childhood cancers would be the subject of a full clinical trial, but we must recognise the challenges associated with research into childhood cancers where cohorts of rarer cancers can be incredibly small and ethical issues are more complex, making it difficult to recruit participants. This means that even with increased funding, which is clearly essential, some childhood cancers will have to be treated through standard treatment protocols.

I hope the Minister—I believe he is a man of action—will listen to the arguments that all of us here have made today about funding concerns and take action to rectify data gathering and standard treatment protocols. If those

adverse effects are properly collected, recorded and shared, we may be able to avoid more cases like Skye's and to increase survival rates of childhood cancers even more.

6.55 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Ms Buck; it is incredible to see the Chamber so full. I pay tribute to the Committee and to the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for her incredible opening speech. As many hon. Members know, I am a breast cancer surgeon, so I have worked in a field that has seen a transformation since the '70s. When I was a student, half our patients would survive, whereas now, about 85% of our patients survive. We have been the recipients of the benefit of research, but what we are talking about today is an area that seems just to have been forgotten.

Although people are talking about this being a rare cancer, we are still talking about 10,500 cases a year, the majority of which are not in young people. They will be in older people. The biggest impact is in those under 40, where it is the biggest killer. We have heard that only 20% will survive five years, but what is even scarier is that only 40% will survive one year. That means that the family have very little time to come to grips with the situation or even to get their head around what is happening to them. It is therefore important that as well as research, which is the topic of this debate, we look at the service that we provide.

I hope that this debate will raise awareness not just among parents, who obviously have been going to their GP, but among GPs. Doctors need to see HeadSmart cards, or go to lectures or be updated. They also need to feel enabled to refer someone to a specialist or to refer them for a scan, because we are hearing that, when things start to get more dramatic and someone gives in and goes to A&E, they are being diagnosed. Can we not move that out of A&E? The survival rates for people diagnosed in that way are much lower, yet 53% of those under 40 will be diagnosed in that fashion.

As well as there being a poor survival rate, 60% of younger people will be left with significant disability. For one third, there will be an impact on their personality. For a half, there will be an impact on memory. A quarter will lose cognitive function or have sensory loss. That means that this is not only about those who have lost life, but about those who have lost quality of life, for whatever life they have.

This is not just an illness of the child or adult with brain cancer, or brain tumours. As we have heard, it is a disease of the whole family and everyone who is connected with it. That is why support is important. In my constituency, there is Malcolm Sargent House, which is a hospice to support children and families with cancer—CLIC Sargent contributed to the briefings that many Members received.

We talk about brain cancer and brain tumours, but actually, we should say "brain tumours", because although in other parts of the body, as with breast, we talk about "benign" and "malignant" and are delighted to get a benign diagnosis, that is not the case in the brain, because it is where we live. Therefore, even removing a benign lesion can have a huge impact on the person.

That is where early diagnosis is important because the bigger it is, the more damage there will be with surgery, which is the key treatment for these patients.

We have heard about the difficulty of chemotherapy. The hon. Member for Warrington North mentioned the blood-brain barrier. That is simply a protective mechanism of the brain to stop the poison that is knocking around in the body from getting in there, but it means that the big molecules, which chemotherapy often are, simply cannot cross the blood-brain barrier.

The right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) mentioned his wife developing secondary brain cancer. We see this in breast cancer now; we are so good at preventing liver and lung metastasis, the first sign of trouble can be someone presenting with brain metastasis. That is not even included within the type of patients we are talking about today. Those patients, however, do gain in the same way from increased knowledge about managing cancer or lesions in the brain.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned, since 2011 in Glasgow, there has been a large biobank at the Institute of Neurological Sciences, which is in the same campus as the New South Glasgow Hospitals. Many centres have biobanks. What is different about this one is that it is willing to provide tissue not just UK-wide, but internationally. Perhaps other UK biobanks could think about trying to receive and share samples with areas of the country that have no chance of having their own biobank. We read that only 30% of patients are able to donate a sample but that 90% would like to do so.

As others have recognised, this is not one disease. There are multiple sub-types, and there is a difference between childhood brain tumours and adult brain tumours, which means that, to have any meaningful research, we need to gather those small numbers together—that is not UK-wide but Europe-wide and internationally. One problem that has been mentioned is diffuse pontine glioma, which accounts for 80% of such deaths among young children. There is no treatment and no drugs; there is not even a trial. Part of what we need to do is not just funding but organisation. Representations about brain tumours need to be made on bodies, such as the Medical Research Council, that make decisions about funding.

The hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) mentioned breaking down the silos. In Glasgow, the Glasgow University brain tumour research fund not only brings in the ideas and contributions of front-line workers but is working with the tissue banks and biobanks to try to identify markers that might give us a prognosis or identify sensitivities to treatment. The institute is also considering the development of using chemotherapy and radiotherapy at the same time and of using MRI to plan that radiotherapy, because radiotherapy has an impact on people's brain and cognitive functions thereafter.

Brain tumour patients have not had the chances that we would like to see for other cancers. We have heard about many charitable groups, and I pay tribute to my constituent Amy, whose father died at 65 of glioblastoma. She set up the Small But Mighty fund, which is simply getting friends together to run, cook, bake or do whatever to raise money for brain tumour research. The country is covered with people who have turned tragedy into something positive, but the Government are giving less

money than Cancer Research UK to tackle brain tumours—£7.7 million against £9 million—which is not how it should be. Charities should be topping up and giving us wider or more innovative corners to consider, but the foundation stone needs to be Government research.

We have seen a change in mortality rates for cancers across the country, with a drop of 11%—I work in a specialty that has seen that drop. When we invest in better research, we will also have to commit to using the drugs or treatments that are developed. How often do we talk in this Chamber about the difficulty of accessing drugs for rare diseases? I call on the Minister to fund research and to remember that, when the research comes to fruition, we need to commit to using it. Other cancers have benefited, it is about time that brain tumours do, too.

7.3 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I also pay tribute to the work of the pensions committee—*[Interruption]*. Sorry, the Petitions Committee, not the pensions committee, and particularly its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones). I have pensions on the brain because the last time we both attended a Petitions Committee debate in Westminster Hall we discussed the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign. I hope she forgives me.

By my count, we have had 31 contributions to this debate, which shows that there is a large degree of unanimity on this issue, and it shows the House of Commons at its best. Our constituents have recognised that there is an issue—I pay tribute to the petitioners: not just those who organised the petition, but the many constituents who signed the petition and who have lobbied us—and we have come here today to raise some important issues on their behalf.

I thank all hon. Members for their insightful and moving contributions this evening. I particularly commend the work of the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), the chair of the all-party parliamentary group, who was obviously leading on these issues for some time before the debate. Like others, I congratulate Maria Lester and her family on the success of this e-petition. I think that is the reason why the Petitions Committee was established: so that we could delve in some detail into the issues that concern people outside the House and, in the case of this debate, those such as Maria Lester and all the other supporters who have come.

I thank Brain Tumour Research for its support, not just of the petition but of us as Members of Parliament. It has helped us to understand better some of the issues relating to brain tumours. The charity and its network of passionate supporters have been leading advocates in this area, and the work it has done in founding and supporting centres of excellence for the study of brain tumours has been quite remarkable.

As we have heard, in the last 40 years Britain has pioneered some of the most remarkable research into cancer. Our scientific research capability is the envy of the world and is the engine that drives the fifth largest economy in the world. Investigation of prostate cancer has seen significant improvement, with many drugs coming from Cancer Research UK, while the progress on breast cancer treatments, such as the UK-produced

[Andrew Gwynne]

tamoxifen, has also seen fantastic improvements in survival rates. Those are just two examples of what well-funded research can do, and we can clearly see the benefits of that in survival rates. Over the last 40 years, British cancer survival rates have doubled, meaning that 50% of people diagnosed with cancer now survive for at least 10 years. That improvement can be traced to each pound spent on research. The money funds the years of lab work and the clinical trials that are essential for producing new treatments.

However, despite the undoubted success, some patients, tragically, have been left behind—in particular, many of the 16,000 patients who are diagnosed with a brain tumour every year. The five-year survival rate for brain tumour patients is under 20%. It is not widely known that brain tumours are the largest cancer killer of children and adults under the age of 40. Hon. Members have referred to that umpteen times in the course of the debate, but a lot of work still has to be done with the general public to raise awareness of just how serious this issue is. Those statistics are even more shocking when compared with the improvements in survival rates for other cancers.

We know that research better to understand cancers and find new treatments is the way to improve survival. That makes it even more shocking that brain tumours, which account for 3% of all cancer deaths in the UK, have received just 1% of national cancer research funding. The Petitions Committee report, which we have been debating, found that brain tumour patients and their families have been consistently let down by a lack of research. That compounds the pain and suffering that these vicious diseases already cause.

The Government have a responsibility to lead research and ensure that every patient, regardless of disease, age or background, has the chance to beat their cancer and live a full life. The Government can be an extraordinary instrument for good and should be at the forefront of shaping the future of science and medicine. The current level of research into brain tumours is a stain on what in general is one of the UK's greatest strengths. It is essential that the Government make research into brain tumours much more of a priority than it is. We have heard that from across the House today.

The Petitions Committee report makes a series of recommendations that would undoubtedly make a phenomenal difference to the lives of thousands across the United Kingdom. The report calls for the Government to support young scientists who wish to pursue a career in brain tumour research. It calls for the removal of red tape and a clear statement on how usage of off-patent drugs can be widened. Those are excellent ideas that will make a significant difference. The recommendations can be supported by the creation of a national register of all current research to track all grants and current work, which will help to prevent duplication and increase the transparency of research taking place in the UK. I urge the Government and the Minister to accept the recommendations.

Before I finish, I want to raise two particularly pertinent points from the report. First, in order for the survival rate of brain tumour patients to catch up with other cancers, the Government must begin to prioritise research into cancers with lower survival rates and take into

account the historical improvement in treatments. That is essential if we are to ensure that research is targeting the diseases and patients with the greatest need and the areas where the money can make the biggest impact.

Secondly, the Government must dedicate a consistent amount of money, far above the current level, to research into brain tumours. The charity Brain Tumour Research, which, as I have mentioned, champions research across the country, has estimated that between £30 million and £35 million a year over 10 years is needed to make a significant impact on brain tumour treatment. The Government must consider committing to a similar level of funding.

I hope that the Minister, whom I greatly respect, takes on board many of the points made not just by me, but by other right hon. and hon. Members from across the Chamber in this debate and in the excellent Petitions Committee report. It is the Committee's first report, and undoubtedly not its last. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North will continue to be a fastidious and assiduous campaigner on behalf of petitioners who raise issues that have not received enough attention in Parliament. I say to her that brain tumour research funding was an excellent choice for the Committee's first report. We have had unanimity across the House today. It is now time for the Government to act.

7.12 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman):** I thank you, Ms Buck, and also your predecessor this afternoon, Sir Edward Leigh, for your excellent chairing of this debate. It has been a pleasure to serve under the leadership of both of you.

I echo many of the points made, not least those just made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne): today we have seen the House of Commons at its best, with strong cross-party support for those who put us here and who expect us to listen to them and work for them. I congratulate the Petitions Committee. One does not get to the Front Bench by rebelling against the Government very often, but I am proud that one of my first acts on arriving here as an MP was to vote for more Back-Bench powers, and I think that this is a great initiative. To see direct democracy in action, with the public petitioning the Government and bringing debates like this one, is—although challenging for us—a great thing.

I thank the Speaker for his support for the cause. I recently joined him at the Speaker's Palace at a reception for Brain Tumour Research. He has quietly done a lot of work behind the scenes in support of that and other medical issues. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and thank her not just for her excellent speech, which framed and kicked off this debate, but for all the work she has been doing behind the scenes. Equally, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) has done extraordinary work behind the scenes to bring the subject to fruition.

It would be odious to pick out individual Members, but we have had some wonderful speeches. Having said that, I will mention my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who has spoken powerfully here and elsewhere. For those who are not aware, he collapsed with a tumour, which was luckily diagnosed quickly. It is a sign that Members of Parliament experience

the things that we are sent here to deal with. The right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) also spoke powerfully about his experience of diagnosis in his family, as did the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). Disease does not respect party boundaries, and nor should we in tackling the issues that it throws up.

I want to mention Maria Lester, whose extraordinary campaigning work has fuelled much of the campaign and still fires behind the scenes, driving it with personal passion, energy and experience, as well as all the charities that have done and continue to do so much. Of course there is Cancer Research UK, but as is so often the case in my work, I see the work of the small charities, which survive on so little—on the contributions of patients and their loved ones, and on voluntary work: Brain Tumour Research, the Brain Tumour Charity, Marie Curie, the HeadSmart campaign, CLIC Sargent and Children With Cancer.

Most of all, I want to pay tribute to the patients and their families and loved ones whose experiences and whose pain drive this campaign and this issue. It is my great privilege as the Minister to see that across different disease areas, and today in the debate, and in your work, you are lifting a torch and joining a magnificent history of people who, through their suffering of disease, insist on our doing better and who drive campaigns and raise awareness, leading to increased funding. On behalf of all the right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken on your behalf, I want to say that you have spoken very clearly here today and I have heard you. As you know, Ms Buck—some people in the Public Gallery may not—Westminster Hall is often a magnificent forum for raising in the House issues of, shall we say, marginal interest in the House: important issues that do not command widespread support. Today we have seen this Chamber and the Public Gallery packed, and phenomenal interest online as well.

As the Minister for medical research, I know that what drives most patients when they experience a diagnosis is the knowledge—the reassurance—that their disease, their suffering and, in many cases, their death, will not be in vain. What people want is to know that their suffering will do some good, and through our extraordinary research and science infrastructure we are so often able to deliver on that promise. Most of the people I speak to say, “I just want to make sure that through my pain and suffering you are able to help prevent someone else’s; and if my experience of disease helps you to do that, I will have done some good.” I think that is the request that sits deeply underneath what has been said this afternoon.

There are many issues. There are issues to do with awareness, with research funding—clearly—with diagnosis and the care pathway, with treatment, whether surgery, chemo or radiotherapy, and with quality of life and aftercare. There is also a complex range of issues to do with the research, development, procurement and reimbursement pathway, with which I am dealing in a number of the reforms I am leading as Minister for Life Sciences.

It is true that there is no simple solution. It is true that there are lots of competing claims, believe me, on every pound that we spend. It is true that we all have responsibility. I worked in biomedical research for 15 years and none of the companies I ever worked with got

anywhere close to working out how we get drugs over the blood-brain barrier. The brain is an extraordinary organ that sits in a privileged place in the body, and that makes it a difficult organ to treat and diagnose. In many ways, it is the last frontier of the extraordinary biomedical revolution we are living through. We have got to the point where we can pretty much take a heart out, strip it apart, replace most of the parts, put it back in and treat disease with an exquisite range of chemicals, but we are not at that stage yet with the brain.

It is equally true that we do not run the allocation of science and research spending on the basis of political lobbying—nor should we. We allocate the funding on the basis of applications, clinical excellence, need and academic excellence. But I believe it is also true that we are sent to this place to reflect the priorities of the people who put us here, and the debate has illustrated, in a loud, civilised, cross-party and non-partisan way, that there is an extraordinary call from people for the disease to be given higher priority. I believe that democracy is about people influencing us. I did not knock on 15,000 doors to come here and say, “We’re doing enough. We’re doing something, and that’s enough.” We need to do more, so I will today announce a package of measures that I hope will go some way to address the points that have been made.

**Dr Philippa Whitford:** Is not part of the problem that funding has been allocated on the basis of incidence—how often people get brain tumours—rather than on the basis of impact, as in the deaths caused and the life years lost?

**George Freeman:** The hon. Lady, with whom I work closely on a number of issues, makes an excellent point. There are a number of criteria that drive how funding is allocated, and that is one of the things we ought to look at. If I can get to the end of my speech, I will make some recommendations about how we might pick that up and look at it.

I want to announce today that the Government accept that we need to do more in this space, committing to a number of specific actions that reflect the concerns that have been raised, both here and in the Petitions Committee and the all-party group report. I suggest that I should convene in the Department of Health a task and finish group to examine a number of the issues that have been raised here today, and to ask a question. I do not believe that as a Government we are not doing enough. We have put £0.7 billion a year into the Medical Research Council, to do the deep science on the medical frontier. We have put £1 billion a year—ring-fenced—into the National Institute for Health Research’s clinical infrastructure. We are funding the genomics programme and putting £4 billion into digital health and the informatics that go around it. The question we should ask is: surely there is more we can do to help to make that resource and that infrastructure support this particular disease area? I will say a little more about why I think that case has been made and what we might do about it.

I will not repeat all the numbers—hon. Members have heard them—but about 4,000 brain cancer cases are diagnosed each year in this country, resulting in about 3,500 deaths a year. We all know that brain tumours are very complicated—there are about 130 different types of them—and the truth is that we do not know what

[George Freeman]

causes most of these cancers. Old age is a risk factor, but as many hon. Members have said with great passion today, it is those children who are diagnosed who drive us. Four-hundred children a year are diagnosed, and we just do not understand or know exactly what is driving it. There are various hypotheses around genetic conditions and some exposures.

Unlike for most other cancers, brain cancer mortality rates have increased. According to figures from the Office for National Statistics, in the last 30 years the mortality rate for brain cancer has increased by 15% for men and almost 10% for women. Improvements in diagnostics and treatments have helped to improve short-term survival in adults, with around 49% of people diagnosed with brain cancer now surviving for at least a year, compared with around 25% 30 years ago. Long-term survival has also improved, with around 20% of people now surviving for five years or more, compared with around 10% 30 years ago. We have also recently seen an increase of more than 25% in GP referrals for magnetic resonance imaging for potential brain tumours, from about 30,000 to 50,000. Veterans of these issues will know that those are relatively small numbers over quite a long period, compared with the explosive pace of progress in a number of the other disease areas that we often discuss.

A number of Members have talked about early diagnosis, which is clearly absolutely key with this cancer, as with all cancers. Last year, a report by the independent cancer taskforce set out 96 recommendations, broadly covering six strategic priorities, including early diagnosis, and NHS England is working with partners to establish a new cancer programme to implement those recommendations. By the end of this Parliament, everyone referred with a suspected cancer will receive a definitive diagnosis or the all-clear within four weeks.

**Jim Shannon** *rose*—

**George Freeman:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he is a doughty pursuer of mine.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the Minister for his response. Will he set out the funding or help that he can give to universities? He knows I am very keen on that issue. Universities have put forward some very good medical initiatives and some new medications and medicines as well, and Queen's University Belfast is one of those universities. Can we do more with universities, business and Government? If we can, we can find the cure, which would be a big step forward.

**George Freeman:** I think we can do more and I welcome this opportunity to praise the role of Queen's University Belfast in this field; it is a centre of real excellence in cancer science.

The standard treatment by the end of this Parliament will be underpinned by a commitment of an extra £300 million from Government in diagnostics. Last June, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published updated guidance on cancer referrals, which will make it easier for GPs to think about the possibility of cancer much sooner and to refer people for tests more quickly. This guidance includes new recommendations about brain cancer in adults, children and young people.

We are investing substantially in research. That is not to say we are doing enough—I will come to that in a moment—but we are investing £1.7 billion every year in health research. I am delighted that in the last autumn statement my right hon. Friend the Chancellor ring-fenced our investment, despite some difficult public spending pressures. We spend £0.7 billion a year on the MRC and £1 billion a year on the NIHR's clinical infrastructure across the NHS. Cancer research spend by the NIHR rose by over a third during the last Parliament to around £135 million a year. Most of that investment—around £115 million—is on infrastructure. The model is that industry and charity can then run research projects through that infrastructure—I will come back to that point in a moment. That investment supports translating scientific breakthroughs into benefits for patients.

Spend specifically on brain tumour research cannot currently be separated out from total spend data for the cancer research infrastructure. I can, reassuringly, share with colleagues the information that six of our 11 NIHR biomedical research centres are conducting brain tumour research, and that the NIHR clinical research network had 30 brain tumour research studies that were recruiting patients in 2015-16. The NIHR is also funding research programmes and fellowships. For example, the health technology assessment programme is funding a £1.4 million trial involving patients who have received surgery for atypical meningioma.

The other main Government fund for health is the MRC. Over the five years to 2014-15, the MRC spent £10.9 million on research into brain and pituitary tumours, which spans basic discovery science, translational projects and early clinical trials. Both the NIHR and MRC also fund the Clinical Practice Research Datalink—the CPRD—which shares data for research. Four brain tumour studies have been published using CPRD data.

I want to mention the important role of charities. Those that follow my work will know that I have recently opened the door and made what has been described as a bold, generous and comprehensive offer to the Association of Medical Research Charities to come to the top table in the new landscape of life science research co-ordination that I am putting place. Medical research charities in this country raise £1.4 billion every year for research, from the smallest charities on the high street to CRUK, which has now become a major strategic funder and shaper of cancer policy.

I welcome the work that the 18 major charitable and public funders of cancer research are doing in the UK through the National Cancer Research Institute. Through that work and the work that the NIHR is doing with research councils, increased brain tumour research investment by charities drives increased support by the NIHR. Here is the challenge: our system works on the basis of bids and of accelerated funding. Once funding starts to drive clinical and academic results, that generates more funding, which drives more research. The danger in that model is that, unless that initial critical mass can be achieved, things can get squeezed out.

We have invited a number of applications for experimental cancer medicine centre status over this funding period, which are funded by the NIHR and Cancer Research UK. I am delighted to be able to announce that, on behalf of the arm's-length bodies, NHS England will next month publish an implementation plan for the cancer taskforce strategy, "Achieving world-class



cancer outcomes". As part of one of the specific recommendations in that strategy, Public Health England is investigating how we can use new and existing data sources to identify secondary cancers and cancer progression more generally, including for brain tumours.

I hope I have demonstrated that some progress is being made, but as I have said, I do not think that progress being made is a reason not to do more; I think hon. Members have made a powerful case that we should. We formally accept that more needs to be done. The case has been made that we need to look carefully at what we can do. As the report recommends, I will be asking the NIHR to look at publishing a national register that considers how we spend public funds across research of different disease areas and different organs by therapeutic area, not least because it is a powerful way of helping to draw in co-investment from industry and charities. I shall be raising those issues with the MRC and, having recently convened the NIHR Parliament day, suggesting that at next year's NIHR Parliament day we come back with that register and that breakdown of information.

We should look at issues around earlier diagnosis. I am prepared to announce today that we should specifically include brain cancer in the Genomics England programme, which is dealing with rare diseases and cancers, to make sure that it is properly picked up, and to talk to NICE about the point made about its guidance procedures. To pull all this together, I want to suggest that I should

convene a task and finish working group in the Department of Health to touch on other issues that have been raised, including data collection, trials, off-label drugs, research barriers and skills.

I am conscious that I need to leave the sponsor of the debate a few seconds to close, but I hope that colleagues will see in my response that I have tried both to give patients some hope that we are listening and to strike a blow for good democracy, as well as good medical research.

7.29 pm

**Helen Jones:** In the few seconds available to me I would like to thank all hon. Members who have spoken today, particularly those who were willing to share their individual stories, because that is a terribly difficult thing to do.

This debate and the inquiry that we conducted have been a vindication of the Petitions Committee process, and of our decision to take on inquiries into petitions. We have heard some encouraging words from the Minister today; we will look forward to hearing further from him. It is fair to say that we are now on the march; I hope in the future we shall continue with that.

7.30 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10 (14)).*



# Written Statements

Monday 18 April 2016

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Steel Update

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):**

On 11 April I provided an oral statement to the House regarding the UK steel industry and the steps that the Government are taking to support it.

We have secured assurances from Tata that it will be responsible sellers of its remaining UK steel operations and will allow reasonable time to find a buyer. My colleagues and I have already been in contact with potential buyers making it clear that the Government stand ready to help. We have also appointed EY to act as financial advisors on behalf of the Government. Commercial confidentiality means I cannot go into detail about ongoing discussions. However I will update the House as soon as it is appropriate.

On 11 April, Tata formally launched its sales process providing a summary information memorandum to interested parties. In the next stage of the process, Tata will release more detailed information to those parties that have expressed an interest and which have signed up to the relevant confidentiality provisions.

This is also understandably an uncertain time for Tata's customers and suppliers. The biggest reassurance I can give is the public commitment we have made—that the Government are totally committed to supporting and facilitating the process of finding a buyer for the business, as evidenced today by the information we are providing for Tata's sales document.

Many questions have been raised recently regarding compensation for energy intensive industries. We have paid out over £200 million to energy intensive industries since 2013 to compensate them for energy policy costs. Under our new scheme, launched earlier this year, covering compensation for the renewables obligation and small scale feed-in tariff costs, we have so far paid over £23 million to 12 companies, including Tata. We are continuing to rapidly work through applications and will be making further payments over the coming weeks. Our overall package of compensation and exemption will save the steel industry hundreds of millions of pounds over this Parliament.

We continue to make strong progress in Europe. The duties imposed on rebar in January are starting to have an effect. Imports of rebar in January 2016 were 99% down on January 2015.

This week the Government will again be at the forefront of efforts to tackle unfair trade practices. Today I will attend the OECD high level meeting on steel in Brussels, which will look to agree actions to tackle global excess capacity. This will be attended by non-OECD countries. It is an ideal opportunity to press China and other countries to take fast and effective action in this area.

On Thursday, the Minister of State for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise will speak at the European Steel Day conference in Brussels, organised by EUROFER (the European steel trade body), where she will continue

to work with industry and European partners to deliver on the Government's commitment to provide industry with all the support they can.

The Government are committed to doing all it can to ensure a sustainable future for the UK steel industry.

[HCWS675]

## TREASURY

### Economic Assessment

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Damian Hinds):** The Government's document "HM Treasury analysis: the long-term economic impact of EU membership and the alternatives" has today been laid before Parliament.

The document provides rigorous and objective economic analysis of the long-term impact of remaining a member of the EU, compared to the alternatives.

Copies of the report are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office. It is also available on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website.

[HCWS676]

## DEFENCE

### Armed Forces Update

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):** The Cabinet Manual states, "In 2011, the Government acknowledged that a Convention had developed in Parliament that before troops were committed the House of Commons should have an opportunity to debate the matter and said that it proposed to observe that convention except where there was an emergency and such action would not be appropriate."

The Prime Minister repeated this commitment in relation to Libya in Parliament on 16 March 2016. The convention relates to conflict decisions rather than routine deployments of the UK armed forces around the world. The exception to the convention is important to ensure that this and future Governments can use their judgment about how best to protect the security and interests of the UK.

In observing the convention, we must ensure that the ability of our armed forces to act quickly and decisively, and to maintain the security of their operations, is not compromised. The Prime Minister, the Attorney General and I have set out the Government's interpretation of the convention on a number of occasions.

We cannot predict the situations that the UK and its armed forces may face in future. If we were to attempt to clarify more precisely circumstances in which we would consult Parliament before taking military action, we would constrain the operational flexibility of the armed forces and prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of those forces, or be accused of acting in bad faith if unexpected developments were to require us to act differently. This Government have demonstrated their commitment to the convention by the debates they have held in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and their respect for the will of Parliament on each occasion.

The convention does not apply to British military personnel embedded in the armed forces of other nations as they operate as if they were the host nation's personnel, under that nation's chain of command, while remaining subject to UK domestic, international and host nation law. This is in line with international practice. To do otherwise would risk undermining the usefulness and viability of these exchanges. I have committed to increased transparency by publishing an annual update to the House on embedded personnel, the last of which was on 17 December 2015.

After careful consideration, the Government have decided that it will not be codifying the convention in law or by resolution of the House in order to retain the ability of this and future Governments and the armed forces to protect the security and interests of the UK in circumstances that we cannot predict, and to avoid such decisions becoming subject to legal action.

We will continue to ensure that Parliament is kept informed of significant major operations and deployments of the armed forces.

[HCWS678]

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Informal Energy Council

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd):** Today my noble hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth) has made the following statement:

I am writing to report on discussions at the Informal Energy Council held in Amsterdam on 10 and 11 April.

The Council featured discussions around a central theme of future electricity market design and the role of regional co-operation.

Delegates attended a series of sessions focusing on electricity market design and regional co-operation. The first session consisted of two breakout discussions; market improvements and the integration of renewables, and security of electricity supply. On the basis of the discussion, the Dutch presidency committed to presenting a set of presidency conclusions on market design to the next Energy Council on 6 June in Brussels.

Member states reached general agreement that market rules needed to be designed in such a way as to promote greater flexibility. Delegates discussed the need for strengthening intraday and balancing markets, recognising the role of scarcity pricing. With regard to the integration of renewables, discussions concluded the need to ensure a level playing field between generators of renewable energy and other producers, for example with regard to balancing responsibilities.

In the second session on security of electricity supply heads of delegation stressed the need for national governments to retain responsibility for security of supply, while recognising the need for greater regional co-operation among transmission system operators (TSOs). Delegates agreed it would be useful to settle on a common methodology for generation adequacy assessments, but retaining the ability to carry out national assessments to reflect member states' specificities and reliability standards.

Over lunch there was a panel discussion on the role of demand-side response and consumers with representatives of consumer bodies, a major energy user, an energy aggregator

and RWE. Discussions included ways to encourage domestic consumers to change behaviour through the provision of better information, particularly using smart meters; the role of energy services in reducing companies' use of energy; the scope of new technologies to provide innovative solutions to demand peaks, and links with electric vehicles.

[HCWS677]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Immigration Detention

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** The Government plan to end the routine detention of pregnant women. Similar to the arrangements put in place as part of ending routine detention for families with children in 2014, the Government will table an amendment to the Immigration Bill, when it returns to this House shortly, placing a 72 hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women. This will be extendable to up to a week with ministerial authorisation.

We have already made progress on this and the Government are clear that pregnant women should be detained only in exceptional circumstances. This is a difficult issue—we need to balance the welfare of pregnant women with the need to maintain a robust and workable immigration system and ensure that those with no right to be here leave the UK.

We expect people who do not have the right to stay here to leave voluntarily. As with the family returns process, we will be able to offer support to those who choose to leave voluntarily to ensure that individuals are able to exercise control over their departure.

However, we need to ensure that we are able to effectively manage returns for those who do not depart voluntarily. This new safeguard will ensure that detention for pregnant women will be used as a last resort and for very short periods—for example: immediately prior to a managed return; to prevent illegal entry at the border where a return can be arranged quickly, or if a pregnant woman presents a public risk.

Wider changes are under way to improve the welfare of all vulnerable people in detention through a series of reforms, including a new policy on “adults at risk”. The Immigration Minister set out details of these reforms in a written ministerial statement on 14 January in response to the recommendations in Stephen Shaw's report on the welfare of vulnerable people in detention.

The Government have listened carefully to concerns expressed in Parliament and by others and believe that the proposed amendment, combined with the wider reforms, strikes the right balance between protecting vulnerable women and maintaining effective and proportionate immigration control.

In due course the Government also intend to invite Stephen Shaw to carry out a short review in order to assess progress against the key actions from his previous report.

[HCWS679]

# ORAL ANSWERS

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