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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 26 May 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Rape Offences: Conviction Rates

1. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What assessment he has made of reasons for variations between police force areas in conviction rates for rape offences. [905092]

13. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of reasons for variations between police force areas in conviction rates for rape offences. [905131]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): There are a number of factors at various stages that are likely to have an impact on conviction rates for rape, but the Crown Prosecution Service is committed to improving the rate by working closely with partners in all police force areas. To provide the consistency of approach that is necessary, networks of violence against women and girls co-ordinators have been established.

Cat Smith: CPS national guidance suggests that improvements have been made through the appointment of rape specialist prosecutors. However, their success is entirely dependent on the evidence referred to them in the first place, as one of my constituents, who was raped while away at university, found to her distress. Will the Solicitor General comment on any link between reported offences of rape that are never referred to CPS rape specialist lawyers for a decision to prosecute and the conviction rates for rape in police force areas?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I listened with some concern to the case she cited. I am glad to say that in her area—the north-west—the area rape and serious sexual offences unit has been generating an improvement in the conviction rate, which has gone up by almost 10% in the last year. However, she is right to talk about the earlier stages, and the co-ordination I mentioned is all about early investigative help, which should make the experience for victims better. Experience shows that attrition rates are far too high.

Diana Johnson: So why does the Solicitor General think there is a difference between rates in police forces, with 35% being one of the lowest rates and 80% the highest? What specifically can the CPS do?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Lady is right to refer to those regional variations, which are concerning. I am glad to see a strong commitment to a greater national approach to this issue. That is why the setting up of RASSO units in every area is vital. The CPS has recruited a further 102 specialist prosecutors, with a further phase of recruitment due to take place, which will help to drive conviction rates up.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Northern Ireland, there were more than 28,000 incidents with a domestic motivation in 2014-15, and there were 2,734 sexual offences, including 737 cases of rape. Not only are conviction rates too low across the UK, but the number of incidents is still too high, particularly considering that many victims of domestic violence do not come forward. What steps are the Government taking to reduce the number of offences? Have they considered an education programme for boys and girls in school?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful, as always, to the hon. Gentleman. I am happy to say that, in England and Wales, the overall number of cases being brought—not just of rape but of associated violence and sexual abuse in a domestic setting—continues to increase, which means justice for thousands more victims year on year.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): What steps has the hon. and learned Gentleman taken to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service discusses with the police the type of evidence that needs to be on the file sent to it to secure a conviction? Has he reviewed with the Home Office police forces that are accused of putting too many rape cases in the “no crime” category without investigation?

The Solicitor General: To answer the hon. Lady's latter point first, that is obviously an operational matter for the police, but the general principles and policy issues arising from it are important. That is why the Attorney General and I take great interest in the important work of the RASSO units—the specialist prosecutors—that work with the police at an early stage to identify the sort of evidence that is needed to secure convictions. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that point.

Serious Fraud

2. **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What steps the Serious Fraud Office is taking to help prevent serious fraud and other economic crimes. [905093]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Over the past 18 months the Serious Fraud Office has secured, for example, its first contested conviction for rate rigging, its first conviction of a corporation for offences involving bribery of foreign officials and its first deferred prosecution agreement.

Ian C. Lucas: But in 2015, as a result of the 3,000 cases reported to the dedicated fraud line, the SFO opened only three cases. What is the reality of why the SFO does so much less than the Government's rhetoric suggests?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate, I am sure, that there is more than one body in the system that prosecutes fraud. The Serious Fraud

Office deals only with the most complex and difficult cases, so it is not surprising that of all the cases reported, not all of which will be prosecuted by anyone, it deals with only a small proportion. It is set up to deal with the most difficult and complex cases, and that is what it does.

14. [905132] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Is it not important that not only the Serious Fraud Office but all other Government agencies have access to communications data in order to ensure convictions?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Communications data are important in the prosecution of all types of offending. For example, the vast majority of prosecutions in terrorism cases involve such data, but they are also used in relation to fraud. That is why the Investigatory Powers Bill currently before the House is so important.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Attorney General conscious of the fact that there is a deep problem in the Serious Fraud Office, in that it is underfunded and under-resourced and cannot attract the greatest talent for complex cases? Is he aware that it is believed that £400 million of British taxpayers' money is still affected by the disaster with the Icelandic banks and should be retrieved? Will he look at the close relationship that the SFO has with the big accountancy firms, which do not have the necessary expertise in-house, and will he look particularly at Grant Thornton in that respect?

The Attorney General: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will recognise that I am not going to comment on specific cases. He will understand that it is the responsibility of the director of the Serious Fraud Office to decide whether to open investigations and prosecutions. In fact, the core funding for the Serious Fraud Office has increased, not decreased. It also has access to so-called blockbuster funding to enable it to take on very large and substantial cases when the need arises. Were it to retain that core capability throughout a given period, it would sometimes not be using it to its fullest extent when such cases were not on its books, which is an appropriate way to proceed. We will always make sure that the Serious Fraud Office has the funding it needs to prosecute the cases it ought to prosecute.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I listened carefully to that response from the Attorney General, because this week's report from Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate into the Government's arrangements for the SFO found that the blockbuster funding model does not represent value for money and is incompatible with long-term strategy for building prosecutorial capability and capacity in-house for future investigations and prosecutions. Will he look at alternative funding models to ensure that the SFO is on a sustainable footing and not, in effect, subject to a Treasury veto?

The Attorney General: The hon. Lady will recognise that the report from the chief inspector, which I asked him to produce in order to look at the way in which the Serious Fraud Office is governed, was a very balanced report that also put forward some very positive points about the way in which the Serious Fraud Office has

improved under the direction of the current director. She is right, however, that questions were asked about the funding model. There is a balance to be struck, as I indicated to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). We have to make sure that the Serious Fraud Office has the money it needs, and we will. The director will never refuse to proceed in a case for lack of funding, so there is no Treasury veto as she suggests. However, we have to balance the need for that money with the need not to have unused capacity that is being paid for by the taxpayer. The blockbuster funding model has so far been considered to strike that balance correctly, but I will of course look carefully at what the chief inspector says, and we will consider whether further change is appropriate.

Pro Bono Legal Services

4. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [905096]

6. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote the provision of pro bono legal services. [905098]

7. **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [905099]

8. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [R] [905100]

11. **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [905129]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): As Government pro bono champions, the Attorney General and I continue to support, through our co-ordinating committees, a number of projects that reinforce how important pro bono work and public legal information are, not just domestically but internationally.

Bob Blackman: Clearly the actions of certain lawyers bring the profession into disrepute, but thousands of people across the country achieve justice through pro bono work. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that lawyers who give their time free of charge are helping justice in this country?

The Solicitor General: In the last financial year, £601 million-worth of work was provided pro bono by lawyers in private practice—that is, barristers, solicitors and legal executives. They recognise that the time they give makes a real difference to people who would otherwise be denied access to justice.

Maggie Throup: Small community-based charities that provide services such as community transport, luncheon clubs and after-school activities play an important role in our society, but they often operate under immense financial pressure. What is my hon. and learned Friend doing to encourage more law firms to provide pro bono

legal services to those small charities, to help them cut their running costs and focus their resources on making a difference in our communities?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. It is right to pay tribute to the existing pro bono commitment by the legal professions, working alongside the voluntary sector, to providing trustee support and other advice to a range of local charities in both her constituency and mine, and in many other communities the length and breadth of the country.

Mims Davies: Does the Solicitor General believe that public legal understanding has caught up with the legal changes in relation to sexting and revenge pornography?

The Solicitor General: Public legal education has an invaluable role to play. I have seen at first hand in schools how the Citizenship Foundation, with the support of lawyers, runs sessions on issues such as social media and the law. The particular issue that my hon. Friend raises is extremely sensitive and important to young people in particular, and I believe that running the appropriate courses can teach them about the consequences of such criminal acts.

Michael Tomlinson: The legal profession may have its detractors, but one of its finest traditions is that lawyers are encouraged to undertake pro bono work. What more can be done to take pro bono work into our schools, both in Dorset and across the country?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, as a barrister of some distinction in the south-west, speaks from experience about his work and the role of pro bono in the profession of which he and I are part. I urge him to liaise with law firms in his constituency, which he will know well, to spread that work through schools and colleges in his part of Dorset and the wider area.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) will put that tribute on his website in a matter of minutes.

Dr James Davies: I thank the Solicitor General for his replies on this topic. How can the Government further help the efforts of charities such as LawWorks, a pro bono legal advice service supported by the Law Society that targets the most needy and has offices across the UK?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is right to mention LawWorks, which has been an active member of the pro bono co-ordinating committee for several years. Since October 2014, the Ministry of Justice has provided funding for the litigant in person support strategy, which is designed to help third sector organisations deliver increased support to litigants in person. I am sure that he will put that on his website.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I have done a fair bit of pro bono legal work in my time as well. It is often a substitute for inadequate access to legal aid, which was greatly cut under the last Government. Will this Government consider using interest on client account for legal aid? Each solicitor in private practice

has to have a client account in which the client's money is kept separately and earns interest. In some jurisdictions, such interest is used to fund legal aid. The Government should consider that for England.

The Solicitor General: I appreciated the constructive part of the hon. Gentleman's question, and my colleagues in the Ministry of Justice should look at the idea. I am cautious about compulsion, however, because one of the great things about pro bono is that it is voluntary. It is all very well for him to criticise the Government for cuts to legal aid, but he will remember, because he was a Member of Parliament at the time, the so-called Access to Justice Act 1999, when a Labour Government destroyed civil legal aid, so I will not take lectures from the Labour party.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I have always been a supporter of pro bono work—both while I was a practising barrister, before I entered this House, and since—but does the Solicitor General agree that because pro bono work is voluntary, as he said in his last answer, that is precisely why it could never be used as a policy solution to sort out the Government's cuts to legal aid?

The Solicitor General: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, neither the Attorney General nor I—nor, indeed, the Government—advocates pro bono as a substitute. It is an adjunct to legal aid, and it always should be.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Nobody will deny the worth of pro bono, and everybody will welcome it, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) said, it is no substitute for access to justice. So that we know which areas get that justice, will the Solicitor General agree to publish a list of how many hours of pro bono are available in each geographical area? That would help us to know whether there is access to justice.

The Solicitor General: With respect to everybody who works in the pro bono area, I do not want to detract from the important work of pro bono by pretending that it is somehow a legal aid service. It is not; it is voluntary. It is a vital part of what it is to be a lawyer. Not only does it provide a benefit for those whom it serves, but it is an important part of the career development of lawyers. The Conservative party is committed to funding our legal services, and we are spending just short of £2 billion a year on legal aid. It sits very ill for the Labour party to lecture us about the amount we spend on legal aid when it merrily cut legal aid while in office.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): I declare an interest in that my wife is a part-time tribunal judge and legal aid lawyer.

We all praise the work of lawyers who give up their time to offer advice and assistance, just as we praise law centres and citizens advice bureaux, but does the Minister agree that those individuals and organisations cannot possibly fill the gap left by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012? In April 2010, more than 470,000 people received assistance on social welfare matters. Just 12 months after LASPO, the number was down to 53,000—a drop of 90%. Will the Minister please urge the Justice Secretary to bring forward the promised review of LASPO?

The Solicitor General: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. Again, although I think it is absolutely right for us to celebrate the work of barristers, solicitors and legal executives in providing pro bono work and public legal education, this country still enjoys one of the most generous and widespread legal aid systems in the world. That is something of which we should be proud and which we should celebrate. It is absolutely wrong for the Labour party to seek to take the moral high ground given that I watched it cut the legal aid system during its 13 years in power.

Disability Hate Crimes

5. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What assessment he has made of reasons for variations between police force areas in conviction rates for disability hate crimes. [905097]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): A number of factors are likely to have an impact on the variation in conviction rates for disability hate crimes. I am actively considering them, and I believe that the best practice to provide consistency of approach is the network of hate crime co-ordinators that the Crown Prosecution Service has established, which includes a focus on the important issue of disability hate crime.

Debbie Abrahams: I thank the Solicitor General for his response, but there were an estimated 62,000 disability hate crimes in 2013, only 574 of which resulted in prosecution. As he said, there was huge regional variation in the prosecution rate. Is he as concerned as I am about that, and will he be a bit more specific about how he will address it to ensure that convictions for disability hate crime do not depend on where people live?

The Solicitor General: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady, who will know that I have a long-standing interest in the issue. In fact, I travelled to her region, the north-west, some months ago and met a local advocacy group based in Preston that deals with third-party reporting. Naturally, a lot of people with disabilities do not have the confidence to go straight to the police. I believe that through third-party reporting mechanisms we can bridge the gap between the 62,000 cases she mentioned and the small number of prosecutions. We have to improve that rate.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): These are terrible crimes. One of the problems is inconsistency between police areas. Does the Solicitor General agree that an important role for the College of Policing is to make sure standards are consistent throughout the country?

The Solicitor General: The right hon. Gentleman is correct in his assumption. There was an invaluable round table at the national College of Policing in September, which I attended and spoke at, involving regional leads from all parts of the country. It was designed precisely to deal with hate crime, and disability hate crime in particular. By sharing best practice, such as the third-party reporting mechanisms I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, we can improve and raise the rates in relation not just to hate crime but to all crimes committed against people with disabilities.

Scotland Act 2016

9. **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What discussions he has had on devolution to Scotland with the Advocate General for Scotland since Royal Assent was received to the Scotland Act 2016. [905127]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): As the House would expect, I very regularly meet the Advocate General for Scotland, and my conversations with him cover a wide range of topics.

Margaret Ferrier: Human rights are not conferred by the new Scotland Act because they are already devolved—they are not listed in schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998. Does the Attorney General accept that changing Scotland's framework of human rights will require a legislative consent motion from the Scottish Parliament?

The Attorney General: I am always amazed at the ingenuity of Scottish National party Members in asking the same question in a slightly different way every time we meet for parliamentary questions. As the hon. Lady knows, because she has previously heard the answer, the Human Rights Act 1998 is not a devolved matter but a reserved matter, and the whole United Kingdom Parliament will consider it when we bring forward proposals for change.

Mr Speaker: Ingenuity is a valuable parliamentary commodity.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I am genuinely mystified at our apparent ingenuity. Clearly, human rights are not listed in schedule 5. Schedule 5 is the exhaustive list of reservations, and human rights are not on it. What is the legal basis for the Attorney General's assertion? Human rights are devolved to Scotland.

The Attorney General: Mr Speaker, I am not sure how many times I can get away with giving the same answer. The position is as I have set out: the Human Rights Act is a matter for the UK Parliament. I entirely understand SNP Members' frustration at having to sit in a UK Parliament, but I am afraid that that was the decision of the Scottish people and they are going to have to live with it.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Disabled People: Employment

1. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on progress towards the Government's employment target for disabled people. [905112]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): There are 365,000 more disabled people in work than two years ago. Our ambition to halve the disability employment gap is a key priority of this Government.

Diana Johnson: Ministers promise that people currently in the work-related activity group will not see their payments reduce, but all new claimants from April 2017 will see such a reduction, including many people who have learning disabilities and need the same support as people currently in the group. How will further cuts in the incomes of disabled people help to get them into work?

Justin Tomlinson: First, to be clear, those who would be in the support group will see no changes at all. On the specific area of those with learning disabilities, my Department, jointly with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, has set up a taskforce, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). We are looking at the best ways of accessing the apprenticeships scheme to help those with learning disabilities to have a greater chance of taking up an opportunity to work.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that there have been detailed conversations about the value of the Access to Work programme and that the Government continue to be committed to it? The scheme was raised with me at the weekend by two disabled working people in my constituency who are concerned that the Government are not committed to it and that they may be let down.

Justin Tomlinson: The Access to Work programme is one of the incredibly important levers we are using to meet our commitment to halve the disability employment gap. I am delighted that funding has been increased to provide an additional 25,000 places a year, which builds on our near record number of just short of 37,000 people who benefit from the scheme.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What rationale was there for the Secretary of State for Work and Pension scrapping the White Paper on the health and work programme and punting the issue back to a Green Paper for an indeterminate time? Surely punting it into the long grass will, from a health or disability perspective, harm the chances of people returning to work.

Justin Tomlinson: My discussions with stakeholders give a very different view. A Green Paper gives an opportunity for stakeholders with genuine, first-hand real life experience to help shape our future policies and make sure that we do the very best for vulnerable people in society.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): The jobcentre disability employment service has a ratio of one adviser providing support per 600 disabled people. That key cause of concern was highlighted by a Work and Pensions Committee inquiry in December 2014. Does the Minister believe that that inadequate ratio is part of the reason the Government are set to fail to reach their employment targets for people with disabilities?

Justin Tomlinson: First, 365,000 more disabled people have come into work in the past two years, which we are proud to celebrate, but there will be further work towards our bold ambition to halve the disability employment gap. We recognise that support in jobcentres is important. All job coaches have extensive training and are multi-skilled, but we acknowledge the feedback from the Select Committee report and will be increasing the numbers.

Employment: Women Returnees

2. **Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):** What steps the Government plan to take to encourage and support women returning to employment. [905113]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Women returnees often have large amounts of skills and experience that offer great value to our workforce. We have invested in up-front personalised jobcentre support and will extend it to parents of children aged three or four from April 2017. Our wider package of reforms includes the new national living wage, more affordable childcare and flexible working, which will all further support women to make the transition back into work.

Patricia Gibson: Single parents, the majority of whom we know are women, will be hit hardest by the Government's cuts to work allowances. Does the Minister agree that those cuts will damage financial incentives for low-income women, acting as a barrier to returning to work?

Caroline Dinenage: The national living wage will have an impact for women more than anyone. It will make such a massive difference to women, and to single mothers in particular. The Government have getting women back into work in mind in a lot of what we are doing, which is why we are seeing more women in the workplace than ever before.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Will the Minister consider allowing flexible working for women returning to work after having a child from the outset, as a default, rather than them having to wait six months before they can ask for that privilege?

Caroline Dinenage: We have a package of measures for women who are returning to work: affordable and flexible childcare, flexible working—up to 20 million people in the UK can now apply for that—and shared parental leave. That package really supports women who want to return to work.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As the Minister will know, many women who wish to go back to work find that they are essentially earning wages to pay for childcare. With that in mind, what are the Government doing on part-time and flexible hours for those women who want to go back to work but have been discriminated against because of their need or desire for more flexible working?

Caroline Dinenage: I was one of those women—under the Labour Government, I was literally working to pay for my childcare. I am so proud that this Government have done more than any other to make childcare affordable and flexible; that is why parents with children aged three to four will be able to access up to 30 hours of childcare.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We will get to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) in due course. He need fear not.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): While this Government have cut workers' rights, attacked trade unions' ability to organise and legislated to block women's access to justice, the EU has protected maternity rights, strengthened paternity rights and upheld our fundamental rights. Does the Minister agree that EU membership will protect rights for women returning to employment?

Caroline Dinéage: I do not agree that this Government have undermined women's rights, but I agree that the EU has done an enormous amount to protect them.

Sentencing Policy: Child Neglect/Abuse

3. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of reasons for gender differences in prison sentencing for people found guilty of child neglect and abuse. [905114]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinéage): Child neglect and abuse are absolutely abhorrent crimes, and those who are guilty must be brought to justice. Sentencing decisions are a matter for the independent judiciary and not Government. Those decisions take into consideration a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offence, aggravating and mitigating factors, and a guilty plea. Our sentencing framework is gender-neutral.

Philip Davies: Despite what the Minister says, according to the Ministry of Justice's figures for the last available period 33% of men convicted of cruelty and neglect of children were sent to prison, but only 15% of women were. That does not sound gender-neutral to me. Notwithstanding the fact that those figures are clearly far too low, given that, as she made clear, these crimes are abhorrent, will she explain why there is such a huge discrepancy between the two figures? Given the nature of these crimes, she surely cannot trot out her normal answer that women are not being sent to prison so that they can spend more time with their children.

Caroline Dinéage: Every case is different, and, as I have said, the sentencing framework is gender-neutral, and the same criminal offences, maximum penalties, guidelines and principles of sentencing apply to every case. I say gently to my hon. Friend that data can be used to prove anything. In 2014 the average custodial sentence for child cruelty or neglect was the same for men and women, but in 2015—according to figures from the Ministry of Justice—on average women received longer sentences than men for child cruelty or neglect.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Minister seen recent disturbing evidence of women who have been convicted of non-violent crime, often fraud, who are given horrendously long sentences when they should be serving their punishment by working in the community?

Caroline Dinéage: As I have said, the judiciary is rightly independent of the Government, but the Justice Secretary is keen on considering alternatives to custody, particularly when an individual might have child caring responsibilities. That is why we are putting a lot of effort into things such as electronic tagging.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that universal access to family planning and maternity services is paramount for the health and equality of women and girls? How will she ensure that migrant women access maternity services in the UK when they have no means of paying for those vital services?

Mr Speaker: This is in relation to those in prison, having been found guilty of child neglect and abuse—it is fair to say that it is a testing question.

Caroline Dinéage: I am not aware that birth control is a massive issue within women's prisons—I certainly hope it is not, but I will take a look at that.

STEM Careers

4. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to encourage girls and women to take up STEM careers. [905115]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): My Department has set an ambition for a 20% increase in girls' entry to A-level mathematics and science by 2020. We fund programmes in schools and colleges to encourage young people to take qualifications in science, technology, engineering and maths, and to improve achievement in those subjects. Those working in science and technology careers are paid on average 19% more than those in other professions, so motivating girls to study those subjects is important if we are to eliminate the gender pay gap.

Maria Caulfield: Nursing is now a graduate-entry profession, and STEM subjects form part of the course for student nurses. Once they qualify, student nurses take on the role of many junior doctors in prescribing medication and ordering investigations, so does the Minister agree that nursing is a STEM career to which young women, and indeed young men, should aspire?

Nicky Morgan: I know about my hon. Friend's own nursing background, and I agree that nursing is a fantastic career for young women, and indeed young men. We are committed to strengthening careers provision for young people across England, and projects funded through the Careers and Enterprise Company's investment fund will do just that. She may be aware of a project led by Skills East Sussex that seeks to improve the work-readiness of young people, the take-up of apprenticeships locally, and the gender balance in key sectors.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Owing to ongoing cultural stereotypes and a lack of visible role models, many women do not realise the fantastic career opportunities that engineering and STEM subjects offer until they have left formal education. What is the Minister doing to ensure that routes are available for retraining older women, particularly through adult education and lifelong learning?

Nicky Morgan: I agree it is important that we tackle perceived gender stereotyping or bias in certain careers. We have funded programmes in schools, and I have mentioned things such as the STEM Ambassador network. After that come apprenticeships—the Minister for Skills bangs that drum at every opportunity—and the opportunity for someone to earn while they are learning.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): More young women entering Scottish universities are choosing to study science, technology, engineering and maths, and they now make up 48% of all those gaining degrees. Will the Minister look towards Scotland as an example of how to encourage more women into STEM subjects?

Nicky Morgan: As I said in last night's debate on the Gracious Speech, I spoke to the Cabinet Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland earlier this week. There are always ways in which we can learn from each other. I should mention Loughborough University, which I represent as a constituency MP, as it has the highest number of women engineering undergraduates in the country.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I recently visited the Thales site in Crawley and saw some wonderful high-quality engineering jobs; unfortunately, not enough of them are held by women. Will the Government heed the recent findings of the CBI that over 90% are not receiving the careers advice they need, and support face-to-face careers advice from age 11, which would assist more women to enter engineering careers?

Nicky Morgan: I have been very clear since taking up the role of Secretary of State for Education that we need to look at careers guidance. That is why, in December 2014, we announced our backing for the Careers & Enterprise Company, which was set up to bridge exactly that gap between schools and colleges and the world of work. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that starting early is very important. I hope that he, along with all Members across the House, has spoken to his local enterprise co-ordinator, through the local enterprise partnership, to support the work of the Careers & Enterprise Company.

Older Women in the Workplace

5. **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support older women in the workplace. [905116]

7. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support older women in the workplace. [905118]

12. **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support older women in the workplace. [905124]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Older women have a whole range of skills and experiences that are extremely valuable to employers and potential employers. We are publishing a new employer-led strategy later this year, which sets out how we can help people to have fuller working lives. We will continue to challenge outdated perceptions about older workers and actively promote the business benefits of employing them.

Dr Davies: Does the Minister agree that the key issue for older women in employment is flexibility, as they very often face caring duties? Indeed, of all carers more than half are aged over 50 and they are disproportionately female.

Caroline Dinenage: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we have invested £1.7 million to look at the best ways to support carers to stay in employment, including exploring how businesses can give employees with caring responsibility more help through flexible working and setting up carers surgeries. We have extended the right to request flexible working, with more than 20 million workers now eligible.

Alex Chalk: Age discrimination remains a problem. I am delighted to hear the Government are taking the matter seriously, but what concrete steps can be taken to ensure that older women, who are increasingly important as the pension age increases, get the opportunities they deserve?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is vital that women are supported in returning to work following a break in their career. I recently attended the launch of the Barclays and Women's Business Council "Comeback Toolkit", which is a fantastic example of innovative working practices and inspirational case studies, such as their "Bolder Apprentice", Lucille Galloway. She spoke passionately about how returning to a role in the workplace has transformed not only her life but the lives of those around her.

Lucy Allan: Does the Minister agree that 50 years ago women experienced far greater degrees of discrimination in the workplace, and that the impact of that discrimination is still affecting their prospects today? Does the Minister also agree that changes to the state pension age compound the difficulties and challenges women face?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is right to point out that we have made great strides in gender equality, and I am incredibly proud of that. The average woman who reached state pension age in 2015 will get a higher state pension income over her lifetime than any woman who has reached state pension age at any point before her. We have legislated for an independent review every Parliament to ensure that any future changes are fair, affordable and sustainable, and that no one is unduly penalised.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Given that women are having children later in life, what thought has the Minister given to extending statutory paternity leave to six weeks to enable women to get back to employment more quickly?

Caroline Dinenage: We do want men to take the shared parental leave already available. The signs are that men are beginning to do that, but we need a cultural change to encourage men to take their share of shared parental leave.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I want to mention just one workplace. While it is perfectly right that someone in his late 70s should be a regular presenter on BBC television—he is younger than I am—can the Minister imagine a female of that age in the same position? Is that not a form of age discrimination by a public body?

Caroline Dinenage: I am obviously in favour of older male television presenters, particularly of news programmes, but absolutely we need many more female counterparts.

9. [905120] **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is vital that the civil service shows leadership in this regard. In 2011, women finally achieved parity at the top of the civil service, but since the Prime Minister gave himself the power to choose the top jobs, he has painstakingly reassembled the glass ceiling, and now only 18% of permanent secretaries are women. Will Ministers commit to publishing the gender breakdown of all applicants and those shortlisted for the top jobs in the civil service?

Caroline Dinéage: This is a really important issue. Four of the permanent secretaries appointed in the last year are women, but we want more and that work will continue.

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

6. **Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): What plans the Government have to mark International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2016. [905117]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): The UK is proud of its record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, which is why the Prime Minister and I hosted a reception at No. 10 to mark IDAHOT. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has announced that approximately £900,000 from the Magna Carta fund for human rights and democracy will go to projects working with LGBT communities around the world. Several Departments, including mine, also flew the rainbow flag in a show of support.

Ben Howlett: And a lovely reception it was too! This year, IDAHOT drew everyone's attention to the importance of institutions being able to further LGBT rights. To mark the day, I joined Members from across this House and the other place to highlight the benefits of our membership of the EU to further those rights. Does the Minister agree that the EU has done an awful lot to protect the rights of minority communities across the UK and EU?

Nicky Morgan: I agree that it was an extremely enjoyable reception and that the EU plays a key role in improving the lives of LGBT people in Britain, the EU and internationally. We work closely with the Commission, the Council, the European Parliament and member states to improve the lives of LGBT people across Europe. Through our membership of an EU national focal points network, we can share our approach to LGBT equality law across Europe.

11. [905122] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): According to recent figures published by Transgender Europe, there have been 117 murders of trans and gender-diverse people in Europe since 2008. Will the Minister commit to working with our European partners to end transphobia across our continent?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Lady raises a really important point. It is why our membership of international networks, including the EU, is so important. I am proud to say that the UK can lead the way in tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. We are also investing money, of course, in our own schools to make sure that the next generation shows tolerance towards everybody.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Notwithstanding the benefits, or otherwise, of the EU, would my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of marking this international day is better forms of screening for diseases that affect LGBT people, one of which, of course, is the human papilloma virus?

Nicky Morgan: Putting our differences aside on the EU, I am delighted to say that the public health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), today laid a written ministerial statement in the House stating that from June this year Public Health England will start a pilot to see whether it is possible to offer the HPV vaccination to men who have sex with men and are attending sexual health service clinics. The pilot will eventually reach up to 40,000 men at high risk of attracting HPV. I hope that the House will welcome this move.

13. [905125] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): A transgender constituent of mine who is being held in custody is having a very difficult time in a men's prison. The Minister will recall that two transgender women died in men's prisons at the back end of last year. We were promised a review. What discussions has she had with the Justice Secretary and how close are we to some outcomes from that review?

Nicky Morgan: If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise a specific case with Ministers, we will be pleased to look at it. The Government are firmly committed to ensuring that the needs of transgender prisoners are fully met. The Ministry of Justice has carried out the review and it will be published shortly.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The global focus of this year's international day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia was mental health and wellbeing. Does the Minister share my concerns about the impact that local government cuts are having on LGBT mental health organisations in the UK, and will she take steps to protect LGBT mental health services?

Nicky Morgan: I agree with the hon. Lady that mental health services are incredibly important for all people. This issue has been raised with me by members of the trans community and more broadly. I cannot agree with her that this has been caused by changes to local government finance. There is a much broader issue of making sure that services are available to people as and when they most need them.

Women in Business

8. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support women in business. [905119]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinéage): We are absolutely committed to supporting women in business. I am delighted that Britain has been named the best place in Europe for female entrepreneurs. We have invested £2.2 million in our women and broadband programme, enabling them to take advantage of technology to start or grow their business. We have also run 19 nationwide "meet a mentor" sessions to provide help, support and encouragement for female entrepreneurs.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful for that answer. Wimborne Women in Business are fearless in promoting their own businesses locally, but broadband speeds in parts of Dorset remain frustratingly slow. What more can the Minister do to engage in this subject and ensure that women in business in Mid Dorset and North Poole have access to adequate broadband speeds?

Caroline Dinéage: We are working very hard to ensure that 95% of UK homes and businesses get access to superfast broadband. Coverage in Dorset will continue to improve during 2017 through a Government and local enterprise partnership-funded ultra-fast programme, which I hope Wimborne Women in Business will appreciate. Through the Dorset Go Digital women and broadband programme, we have supported almost 100 women in the past six months alone to take advantage of this and develop the digital skills they need to start or grow their business.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that if there were more women at senior levels in business, we might have fewer advertising campaigns such as that by Calvin Klein, featuring overtly sexualised images of young women, including what are known as “upskirt” shots? Will she join me in urging Calvin Klein and similar organisations not only to be more responsible in their advertising, but to donate some of the profits they have made to charities that are solving rather worsening the problems women face in society?

Caroline Dinéage: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to point out this sort of irresponsible advertising, and I recently met the advertising industry to discuss the issue. She is also right to say that we need more women on boards. Currently, 26% of the people sitting on FTSE 100 boards are women—more than ever before. This is an issue on which we will continue to work—on boards, but in the executive pipeline as well.

Revenge Porn Helpline

10. **Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Government’s revenge porn helpline. [905121]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): Let me be clear that revenge porn is an abhorrent crime. The pilot of the revenge porn helpline has received approximately 4,000 calls, relating to 785 cases since its launch in February 2015, sadly indicating a clear need for the important practical and emotional support it provides. The helpline has been successful in removing over 1,000 illegal images online.

Mrs Miller: That demand for the revenge porn helpline reflects the fact that there were more than 1,000 police reports of online revenge porn last year, yet two thirds of those cases saw no action taken because of problems with the evidence or victims withdrawing. When will the helpline and this new law be matched with police training and the option of anonymity for victims?

Nicky Morgan: The Chairman of the Women and Equalities Committee raises an important issue. We criminalised revenge porn in early 2015. Last year, there were 82 prosecutions and 74 cautions. Thousands of

police officers are trained in digital crime, and revenge porn is used as a specific case study in the College of Policing mainstreaming cybercrime training programme. We must ensure that victims report the crime. I will certainly raise this matter with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary when I next see her.

Topical Questions

T1. [905102] **Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): I hope that hon. Members will join me in welcoming the introduction of topical questions to Women and Equalities oral questions. Along with the introduction of the Women and Equalities Committee in the last Session and the cross-government Front-Bench presence here today, we are sending a powerful message to the public about the importance that this Government and this House place on equality. I am delighted that at the recent G7 Education Ministers meeting in Japan, I was able to persuade all Ministers to recognise the need to address the discrimination that children might suffer, including because of their sexual orientation or gender. That was captured in the formal summit communiqué.

Anne McLaughlin: I am delighted to be asking the first Women and Equalities topical question.

One group of victims of domestic violence who are not entitled to access protection consists of women whose immigration status is dependent on their partners, the perpetrators of that violence. I have raised the issue in two Westminster Hall debates in recent weeks, and two Ministers have agreed to make representations to the Home Secretary about it. Will the Minister—probably the most relevant Minister in this context—add her voice to calls for equality for all women in those circumstances?

Nicky Morgan: Let me begin by welcoming the appointment of Angela Constance as the Cabinet Minister with equalities responsibility in the Scottish Government. I very much enjoyed working with her when she had the education brief in the last Government.

I will certainly look at the issue that the hon. Lady has raised. As I have said, I shall be meeting the Home Secretary soon, and I will add it to our agenda.

T2. [905103] **Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con):** During a recent visit to Crossrail, I was delighted to learn of the major contribution that women have made, at every level, to Europe’s largest infrastructure project. Given that both HS2 and Crossrail 2 are on the horizon, will the Minister tell us what action has been taken to retain those women and their skills, which are so important to the future of our infrastructure projects?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): As a result of the Government’s unprecedented investment in transport infrastructure, opportunities for women in construction will continue to grow, and we must build on Crossrail’s excellent example. The industry already has some great role models, including Ailie MacAdam, who led the team that delivered the channel tunnel rail link, managed the

construction of St Pancras International, and was a delivery director for Crossrail. I hope that many young women will follow in her footsteps.

T3. [905104] **Stuart Blair Donaldson** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): The Scottish National party is committed to reviewing and reforming gender recognition law in Scotland so that it is in line with best practice for people who are transgender. Will the Minister join me in applauding that approach, and will she press for such legislative change here, through her own Department?

Nicky Morgan: As I have made very clear, discrimination on any grounds is abhorrent, and the Government want it to end. There is more discussion now about issues facing the trans community, and I pay tribute to the work of the Women and Equalities Committee, which has published an important report on transgender issues. The report made a number of recommendations to Departments throughout Whitehall; we are studying those recommendations, and will respond to them fully in due course.

T4. [905105] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Will the Minister join me in congratulating The R&A on barring Muirfield golf club from hosting the Open championship in the light of its decision not to admit women as members? Does she think that the club should put that right, and admit them?

Nicky Morgan: In short, yes, I do.

T6. [905107] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What conversations has the Minister had with the Home Office about the equalities implications of the Prevent strategy? In a written submission to the Home Affairs Committee, terror watchdog David Anderson QC said that the strategy would benefit from an independent review, expressing the concern that

“aspects of the programme are ineffective or being applied in an insensitive or discriminatory manner.”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): I think it will be clear to the hon. Lady from the Home Office representation at this session that such conversations are taking place, but I note the point that she has made.

T5. [905106] **Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): By the age of six, young girls have begun to decide which roles are for them and which are for boys, often to the detriment of careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In many cases, that is because certain toys are marketed for girls, and most science toys are marketed for boys. What plans have the Government to show that young girls do not have to limit their career aspirations?

Nicky Morgan: I know that my hon. Friend is passionate about this issue. As I have said, no career should be off limits because of factors such as gender, race or sexual orientation. Careers education in primary schools, including initiatives such as Primary Futures, is important to broadening horizons and bringing children's learning to life. I mentioned the Careers & Enterprise Company earlier; I hope that Members in all parts of the House will support their local enterprise co-ordinators.

T7. [905108] **Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): Given the importance of the health and work programme, which supports disabled people who are unable to work or gain access to work, will the Minister ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to publish his Green Paper as a matter of urgency, so that disabled people do not have to wait any longer to access support?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): The Green Paper gives a fantastic opportunity for stakeholders, with their first-hand experience and knowledge, to help shape the policy, and, where there is local best practice, to look for ways in which we can scale that up.

T10. [905111] **Seema Kennedy** (South Ribblesdale) (Con): What steps is the Minister taking to increase the number of female headteachers?

Nicky Morgan: The White Paper on education that I published in March reinforces our commitment to develop a diverse supply of school leaders. More than 450 women are benefiting from our equality and diversity fund, and earlier this year I announced a women in education network to support women's career progression. I have called on exceptional school leaders to come forward and pledge to coach women into leadership, and 300 have already signed up to do so.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Minister support the introduction of “X” passports?

Nicky Morgan: This matter was raised in the Women and Equalities Committee's report. Evidence was taken on it and it is something that we are considering, along with all the other issues in that report.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Secretary of State very kindly referred to the Select Committee earlier. We have produced two reports so far in our short existence: one on the gender pay gap and one on transgender people. One of those reports is now five months old, and we have yet to receive a response to either of them. When can we expect those responses?

Nicky Morgan: I always say that if you want something done, ask a busy woman, and they certainly make up the majority on the Women and Equalities Committee. I am delighted to see that it has been so busy. My right hon. Friend mentions two reports: one on transgender issues and one on the gender pay gap. They make recommendations for cross-government co-operation. I want to ensure that we get the best possible responses, but I expect to publish them shortly.

Mr Speaker: I hope that “shortly” means well before the summer recess. That seems to be a very tardy response indeed. This is really not very satisfactory.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): In February, Women for Refugee Women made freedom of information requests on the number of pregnant women being detained under immigration rules. What has happened since has been described by politics.co.uk as

“an instruction manual in obfuscation and delay”.

Can the Minister explain why the Government are so reluctant to reveal this information, and tell us when they will finally release the data?

Karen Bradley: The detention of pregnant women under Immigration Act powers occurs only in limited situations, either when there is a clear prospect of early removal or in exceptional circumstances. Very few pregnant women are detained. Central recording of the number of detained women who have disclosed their pregnancy started in August 2015. Options for the collection of wider data on pregnant women are being considered as part of the implementation of the Immigration Act 2016, which has just gone through this House.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure the Minister will be aware that, against a background of tens of thousands of gun murders every year, 11 states in the United States have decided that the question of who uses which bathroom is the key issue affecting public safety. Will she assure me and the House that our Government will not go down that path and that they

will focus on real public safety priorities rather than the ones being imagined as a result of prejudice in the United States?

Karen Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and I am more than happy to have a conversation with him about his concerns. This is not something that has been raised with me previously.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) to put his urgent question, I would emphasise that although it of course covers an extremely important matter—and is, by definition, urgent—exchanges on it should be completed by 11 o'clock. We have the business question to follow, and a ministerial statement by way of an update on the steel industry and a very heavily subscribed main debate thereafter. The time limits will therefore need to be strictly enforced.

Brain Family: Deportation

10.34 am

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) *Urgent Question*: Mòran taing agus madhainn mhath, Mr Speaker. To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on the impending deportation of the Brain family from Dingwall.

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): By convention, Ministers do not usually comment on individual immigration cases on the Floor of the House. However, I am happy to waive that convention today to properly address the question raised by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford).

Kathryn Brain came to the UK in 2011 on a tier 4 visa, which expired in May last year, with her husband and son listed as her dependants. On 25 May last year, Kathryn Brain applied for leave to remain under tier 4 of the points-based system, again with Mr Brain and her son listed as dependants. In June, this was granted to December last year. In December, an application was made for leave to remain under article 8 of the European convention on human rights—the right to a family life—which in March was refused with an out-of-country right of appeal.

In this time it has of course been open to the family to make a tier 2 skilled work application under the points-based system. On 12 April, I exceptionally extended the 28-day grace period after their leave expired, during which a valid tier 2 application could be made, to 11 May. Upon hearing that Mr Brain had submitted a job application with an appropriate employer, I subsequently extended the grace period further on 28 April to the end of this month. We have not yet received an application from the Brain family for leave to remain under the points-based system, but we will consider any application that they make. I am meeting the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber again this afternoon, but he can be assured that the family do not face an imminent risk of immediate deportation.

More broadly, it is important to recognise the UK's excellent post-study offer. There is no limit on the number of international graduates who can remain in the UK to take up graduate-level work, provided that they secure a graduate job paying an appropriate salary. Since 2010, visa applications from international students to study at Scottish universities are up 9%. I look forward to meeting the hon. Gentleman again later today to discuss the matter further.

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, although I must say that the question was to the Home Secretary. After all, it was the Home Secretary who briefed the Chancellor when he responded to my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) at Prime Minister's questions yesterday.

The family came to this country under the fresh talent initiative that was put in place by the previous Labour Administration in Edinburgh, with the support of the Home Office, for students studying at Scottish universities, who would then qualify for the post-study work visa. That was the commitment that this Government made to those coming to Scotland in 2011. In this case,

the Government have taken retrospective action to deny the rights that this family would have been granted under that legislation. It is a breach of trust and of faith from this Government.

I want to help the Minister. The number of people who came under the fresh talent initiative has now dwindled to virtually zero. We are asking the Government to recognise the commitment that the family have made to the highlands and to Scotland. I look specifically to seven-year-old Lachlan, who is in Gaelic medium education in the highlands. He reads and writes in Gaelic, not English. He speaks English, but it is a different thing to be able to be educated in a different language. The thought of deporting that young boy back to Australia, where he will be two years behind his peer group, is shameful. That is where the human rights aspect comes in.

I can tell the Minister today that Kathryn Brain has now been offered a job at the new GlenWyvis distillery in Dingwall. It is a start-up business that will offer a job and prosperity not only to Kathryn, but to others. We need to recognise that the family should be given the right to stay today. Give them the time to qualify for the tier 2 visa. Show some compassion and humanity. All of us should be judged on our actions. For goodness' sake, Minister, do the right thing today.

James Brokenshire: I have met the hon. Gentleman to discuss this case previously. He says that I should show compassion and humanity, but he will know that I have already exercised discretion not once but twice in this case on the basis of representations he has made on the family's behalf. I obviously listened carefully to what he said, and I look forward to meeting him later to hear more about the details that he has relayed to the House this morning and to reflect further on his representations.

I want to correct slightly some of the facts that the hon. Gentleman has presented. He said that the family came here under the fresh talent scheme, which closed in 2008 and was replaced by the post-study work scheme under tier 1. The latter scheme was closed by the coalition Government and that announcement was made on 21 March 2011. From the information that I have, the Brain family arrived in the UK on 14 June 2011. There are clear issues to consider about post-study work opportunities and moving from the tier 4 study route into tier 2. I was pleased to note in the latest figures that I have seen that around 6,000 people did that in the last year for which information is available.

It is important that the Scottish Government continue to play their part in creating an enterprise economy, using their powers to create jobs and opportunities for the hon. Gentleman's constituents and to provide a route for people who study at our universities to get graduate-level employment. The previous arrangements simply did not work. They allowed abuse to take place and resulted in people moving into low-skilled employment, not reflecting the education that they obtained. However, I wish to reflect further on the comments that the hon. Gentleman has made to me today, and I look forward to meeting him later.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): There is nobody more passionate about having a robust immigration policy than me, but I just wonder whether the Minister would agree that this may be a case where the Government are

being too harsh on people from outside the European Union, as a direct consequence of having free movement of people from within the European Union.

James Brokenshire: I say to my hon. Friend that when dealing with issues of migration it is important that we take steps both outside Europe, where the majority of net migration continues to come from, and inside Europe. Therefore, our approach is to look at this in both ways, but, as I have indicated, I will certainly reflect on the further representations that are made to me.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): First, I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the Brain family, who came here in good faith and have been let down by this Government. Their case is yet another that highlights the chaos of the immigration system under this Government. The Brains' situation will be familiar to many Members in this House, who will have seen their own constituents faced with deportation owing to changes in the immigration rules. Let us be clear about what is involved here. This family came to the UK on a Government scheme specifically designed to attract people to relocate here. They entered legally, they have integrated into their community and they have fully embraced its way of life. That they should now be faced with deportation because of Government changes shows the problems caused by the constant chopping and changing of the immigration rules by the Home Office. These changes are retrospectively made, in a desperate attempt to meet targets on net migration that the Government have consistently missed and show no sign of meeting any time soon—it just adds insult to injury.

The highlands of Scotland have for centuries faced the problem of depopulation. The population of Scotland has barely grown in the past 100 years. As the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) correctly said yesterday; the Brains' case is not an issue of immigration, but of emigration. Our immigration system must allow us the flexibility to meet the needs of our communities. It must not focus solely on an arbitrary number put in place from Whitehall. Of course there must be rules to govern immigration, and it is important that these rules are enforced, but this is also an issue of compassion. Should we really be uprooting a young family, who came to the UK legally and in good faith, from the lives they have built here? Should we be deporting children whose whole lives have been here, to a country they barely know?

I would like to ask the Minister a few questions. Why do the Brain family no longer qualify under the original visa terms under which they came to the UK? I understand what the Minister said about extending the application process, but given that these terms were changed by the Government, what support has the Home Office provided to assist this family? Why is the Home Office making this an issue of immigration, as opposed to one of emigration, as under the original scheme?

James Brokenshire: I say to the hon. Lady that the help provided has been the discretion that has already been applied in this case, not once, but twice, in allowing extra time for the family to regularise their stay. It is therefore completely incorrect to suggest that we have

taken a blinkered approach or have simply applied a strict one, although she has sought to criticise us for that.

On post-study work, it is important that the House understands that we made these changes not to target some simple number, but to deal with abuse in system, which this Government inherited from the last Labour Government. We had students arriving in this country who could not speak English and were using this route as a mechanism not to study but to work. We have, however, shown that we are prepared to listen in this case. In continuing to reflect on it, we have already taken representations from the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, who is representing his constituents. As I have indicated, that is what we will do, but I make the point that the family have known for at least five years what the requirements would be. They have known of the need to get a graduate-level job. We wish them success in securing that, and obviously I look forward to hearing further representations on this matter.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): This case highlights the fact that Scotland's migration needs are really very different from those of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland's migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?

James Brokenshire: Our immigration policy is formed on the basis of the whole of the UK and of the needs of the UK in attracting skilled and talented people to contribute to our continued economic growth, which is what I have underlined to other hon. Members in the answers that I have given. On the shortage of skills, we do recognise and reflect on the fact that there is a separate shortage occupation list on which we prioritise the visas that are given to people coming to work in the United Kingdom. The reason we took the step that we did in relation to post-study work is that we saw abuse of it. Some have referred to the fresh talent scheme. Well, the information from the Scottish Government's social research in 2008 indicated that only 44% of applicants had remained in Scotland at the end of their two years' leave under the scheme and that many people had come to London and the south-east rather than staying in Scotland.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): We have heard a great deal about the fresh talent scheme. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fresh talent scheme that was run under the previous Labour Government was indeed flawed and did not lead to skilled migrants settling in Scotland?

Mr Speaker: Order. That is all very well, but it has nothing to do with Government policy now, or the particular case with which we are dealing. We must deal with things in an orderly way.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Brain family enjoys support throughout the highlands and islands. I have heard of many similar cases over my years as a Member of Parliament. The Minister is absolutely right to say that we must have a system that works for the whole of the United Kingdom, but the truth of the matter is that the current system does not work for communities such as those in the highlands and islands, the rural north-west of England, Cornwall or mid-Wales. Will he look again at the way in which the rules operate and understand that the immigration needs of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow are very different from those of the highlands and islands, which again are different from those in other regions of England and Wales?

James Brokenshire: The point that the right hon. Gentleman makes is one that a number of hon. Members have made this morning, and I have already said that there is recognition of that within the immigration rules. Some have asked whether there should be separate salary thresholds for different parts of the United Kingdom. Again, I say that they should be careful what they wish for, because on the median-level salaries, that might lead to an increase in the salary thresholds for Scotland as contrasted with where the national salary limits actually sit at present. I have been very clear on the fact that we have listened carefully on this specific case, and I will continue to do so.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Home Affairs Committee, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and other Members of this House have warned the Government that the post-study work rules just do not work, and that they result in the kind of mess that we have this morning. The Minister talks about abuse, but the only evidence that has been given by a previous immigration Minister is of one person who was found at a checkout at Tesco who was working instead of being a student. I say to him that if there is abuse, deal with it, and do not let it affect genuine people who want to come to this country. The Minister says that he has exercised his discretion twice. I am glad that he has discovered discretion, because he has not used it in the past on a large number of cases—especially mine. He should exercise it once more and allow this family to stay.

James Brokenshire: The right hon. Gentleman highlights the abuse that we saw under the previous student arrangements. I point to the fact that 920 sponsors under the previous student arrangements have had their sponsorship withdrawn as part of the reforms, which have ensured that we have the quality that we want. We want to attract skilled and talented people to come and study at our universities. The Russell Group universities have seen a 7% increase in the number of international students coming to study at their institutions. I think I have underlined to the House this morning that I have considered this case carefully and that I have exercised discretion. I will certainly continue to listen to the representations made by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, and I will always consider representations made by all hon. Members across this House, but it is important that discretion is exercised exceptionally; otherwise we start to undermine the rules themselves.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I have recently had a substantial increase in the number of people telling me that immigration lawyers will not take their case. That appears to be a result of changes in procedure, meaning that there is little chance of success even when right is on the side of the appellant. Why will not the Government take the opportunity afforded by the Brain family case to re-assess their immigration rules and procedures and introduce that note of compassion, as well as helping those who benefit our economy to stay in the UK?

James Brokenshire: We always keep our immigration rules under review and, as I have indicated again this morning, we are always prepared to look at cases that may be brought to us and examine them to make sure that they are assessed properly, but it is important that we have clarity within those rules. If we seek to exercise discretion all the time, obviously that starts to undermine the very rules that we are seeking to uphold.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): A week before the Scottish referendum the Prime Minister said that if Scotland wants to stay in the UK, all forms of devolution are there and all are possible, yet when at least 95% of Scotland's MPs, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament want to keep just one family in the highlands of Scotland, it seems that nothing at all is possible. Young Lachlan Brain is in a Gaelic school in Dingwall—one can hardly get a more Scottish name than Lachlan—yet the Westminster Government want to throw him out. May I ask the Minister one question: has he identified a school in Australia where Lachlan can continue his Gaelic education?

James Brokenshire: We continue to discuss with the Scottish Government the possibility of examining reform in relation to international higher education students. We welcome the continuation of those discussions. The UK has an excellent record in relation to the post-study offer available to graduates of Scottish universities. As I have indicated again this morning to other right hon. and hon. Members, I will continue to listen to the representations that are made in respect of this case and consider them carefully.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Instead of spending time and resources on the deportation of this family, is it not time that the Home Office got its actions right and ensured that dangerous criminals such as Noureden Mallaky-Soodmand, who attacked people in Stockton, are deported after their first offence, rather than waiting for them to offend again?

James Brokenshire: This Government take very seriously the removal of foreign national offenders and those who pose a threat to this country. The hon. Gentleman will see from figures released today that the numbers of foreign national offenders who have been removed are at a five-year high. We continue to work across Government to achieve more, and I will reflect on the specific case that the hon. Gentleman has referred to me.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on his urgent question and commend the work of my right hon.

Friends the Members for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and for Moray (Angus Robertson), and our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament and the First Minister for the attention that they are giving to this case. By his very admission at the Dispatch Box today, the Minister has made it clear that the family find themselves in their present position as a direct result of changes in the rules. It is another example of this Government's continuing lack of attention to and understanding of the positive effect that immigration has on this country. They are allowing rhetoric on immigration to fuel the EU referendum debate. It is time for this Minister to stand up, do the right thing and prove that "Project Fear" in relation to immigration will not be allowed to win the day in the EU referendum.

James Brokenshire: The Government certainly do recognise the contribution that skilled and talented people from outside this country can make to our economy, and I have been very explicit about the way in which our immigration rules are designed to facilitate that. We announced the closure of the post-study work route in March 2011, which was before the family arrived. However, I will certainly continue to reflect on further representations and to consider those—and, indeed, any further application that the family may wish to make—very carefully.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Does this case not confirm that UK immigration policy simply does not work for Scotland? Scotland needs families like the Brains—we need dynamic young families such as them to come to live and work in Scotland. We have different demographic challenges, and we simply do not share this Conservative Government's obsession with immigration figures. Will the Minister at least start a conversation with us about a sub-national immigration policy throughout the United Kingdom so that we can fashion an immigration system fit for Scotland?

James Brokenshire: We have an immigration policy that we continue to reform to ensure that it acts in the best interests of this country. I do not accept the characterisation that the hon. Gentleman gives. We will remain open to discussions with the Scottish Government about a range of issues. We are very clear about attracting skilled and talented people. There are ways in which people can move from education into work, but it is important to have that separation to avoid the abuse that we saw in the past.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Should the Minister not bear in mind two things? First, since he has come to the Dispatch Box no Conservative supporters of his have supported in any way the decision the Home Office has made. Secondly, would it not be appropriate to understand the strength of feeling that Opposition Members have expressed throughout these exchanges? It is always important to recognise when the House of Commons feels very angry and upset over a decision, and I hope the Minister will bear that in mind.

James Brokenshire: The only decision that is outstanding from the Home Office at this stage is the extension of time that we have given the family on two occasions to make a further application on the basis of employment in Scotland or the rest of the United Kingdom. Of course I will continue to reflect on representations, and

that is precisely what I will be doing in the meeting I will hold later today with the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The Government have gone back on their word—that is what has caused this problem. We hear a lot from the Government about their thoughts on one nation. Which nation does the Minister think is benefiting from this obtuse and retrospective immigration arrangement?

James Brokenshire: Again, I remind the hon. Lady of when the decision was announced to close the post-study work route—in March 2011—and of when the family arrived. They obviously have had many years to know what the situation is. I obviously wish them success, and I will continue to reflect on representations.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Is it not the case that the head-shaking from those on the Government Front Bench and the fact that two of the people who were sitting there have not been able to stay for a full half-hour demonstrate the Government's attitude? On immigration policy for the UK as a whole, is it not time to revise the £35,000 threshold? Clearly, there are wage differences regionally, so that threshold needs to be reviewed.

James Brokenshire: No. Again, that rule has been clearly set to show progression and, therefore, benefit to the UK economy, whether in Scotland or elsewhere. Obviously, we have provided certain exemptions in relation to certain sectors. However, I think that that rule benefits the UK.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Meal do naidheachd—I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on the passionate way in which he has represented his entire constituency. This family are desperate to contribute to the highlands, and the highlands are desperate to keep them. What gives anyone the moral right to impose a decision on the highlands that nobody in the highlands wants?

James Brokenshire: Ultimately, the family need to find employment at the appropriate level. That is why I have made the points that I have about the Scottish Government and the work they do to see that there is a strong economy that is creating the jobs that actually create the environment people need to stay and work in Scotland. That is the important part of this.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As an MP for a rural constituency—one that is experiencing depopulation—I am dismayed that the Government are preparing to throw out of Scotland a family who have moved into the highlands and who are contributing positively to their community. Why are the Government determined to make our depopulation problem worse by sticking to this unfair and unjust action? The rules are clearly out of date and outmoded.

James Brokenshire: As I have indicated, there is no immediate prospect of the family being removed from the UK, and obviously we remain open to any further application that they may wish to make. I stress the point about the ability of the Scottish Government to create the jobs and the environment needed for people to stay.

Point of Order

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, we had the first ever topical questions session in Women and Equalities orals this morning. I warmly welcome that, and I want to put on record my thanks to the Leader of the House and to the Minister for Women and Equalities for supporting their introduction. Unfortunately, we had a few teething problems with the new arrangements that meant that I was unable to raise the topical—indeed, imminent—issue of the importance of the impending European Union referendum for women. Given the alarming suggestion by the Employment Minister that we could scrap half of what she called “the burdens of...employment legislation”—

like maternity leave and part-time workers’ rights—by leaving the European Union, may I ask you, Mr Speaker, whether she has indicated to you her intention to come to the House to make a statement about her intentions?

Mr Speaker: I have received no such indication at all, but I hope that the hon. Lady is satisfied that she has put her point on the record, which I think was her principal—indeed, perhaps her only—concern. If there are no further points of order—I sincerely hope there are not, because there should not be, and therefore there cannot be, and therefore there will not be—we come to the business question.

Business of the House

11.1 am

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Will the Deputy Leader of the House please give us the future business of the House?

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The business for the week commencing 6 June will be as follows:

MONDAY 6 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Investigatory Powers Bill (day 1).

TUESDAY 7 JUNE—Conclusion of the remaining stages of the Investigatory Powers Bill (day 2).

WEDNESDAY 8 JUNE—Opposition day (1st allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 9 JUNE—General debate on carers. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 10 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 13 June will include:

MONDAY 13 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Policing and Crime Bill (day 2).

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 13 June will be:

MONDAY 13 JUNE—Debate on an e-petition relating to foreign aid spending.

Melanie Onn: I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in wishing many happy returns of the day to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and to my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). Happy birthday!

Today is the last of six days of debate on the Gracious Speech, and I think we have all reached the same conclusion: this Government are completely hamstrung by Europe.

“The government has nothing to do, nothing to say and thinks nothing.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of the sad man on a train, Michael Portillo. It is the British public who are paying the price for the Government’s paralysis. Will the Deputy Leader tell us why the Government dropped plans for a Bill to include the names of the bride’s mother on marriage certificates? The current system is a patriarchal throwback; society has moved on. We support the move in principle, so what is stopping them? May we have a statement on how the Government plan to meet their manifesto commitment to halve the disability employment gap, given that there was no mention of that in last week’s speech?

The Government could not even bring forward a ban on wild animals in circuses. The Prime Minister said he would do that in the previous Parliament, but did not. The Conservatives promised it in their 2015 manifesto, but so far, nothing. Only two travelling circuses in Britain still use this cruel practice; it really cannot be that difficult to introduce a ban. I wonder whether it has anything to do with the fact that the company that trains the animals for the circuses is based in Witney?

May we have a statement on NHS recruitment in the light of the study from the National Union of Students and Unison published yesterday showing that scrapping bursaries for student nurses will deter 2,000 people from training for careers in the NHS? The health service already has a recruitment problem, and nursing remains on the occupational shortfall list, so why do the Government insist on making it worse?

There has been much debate about debates this week, specifically the TV debates for the EU referendum. What should the format be? Who should the speakers be? For the sake of the viewers, I think we should pick the most entertaining advocate for each side. For Brexit, I suggest the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), and remain could be represented by the former Conservative Mayor of London.

For those who complain that it would not be a fair and balanced debate, let us imagine how it would play out. On the unlikely prospect of Turkey's ascension to the EU, pro-EU Boris might again say:

"I believe our generation has a historic chance...to build a bridge between the Islamic and the Christian worlds", and:

"What are we saying if we perpetually keep Turkey out of the European Union just because it's Muslim?"

Brexit Boris, on the other hand, could recite his poem in which he insultingly found a rhyme with Ankara and suggested that the Turkish Prime Minister had an inappropriate relationship with a goat. [*Interruption.*] I'll get there.

On America, pro-EU Boris could point to his joint US-British citizenship and once again stress the importance of our special relationship, while Brexit Boris could suggest that we should not pay attention to President Obama because he is "part-Kenyan". Brexit Boris might bemoan the European regulations that ban bunches of more than two bananas—a claim that pro-EU Boris might call "demented".

For their closing statements, Brexit Boris could read from his column in *The Daily Telegraph* in which he announced he would be backing the leave campaign, while pro-EU Boris could read from the same column in the same edition, which he wrote in case he decided to back the in campaign.

The serious point is that the next Prime Minister will not be chosen by the public; it is Conservative party members who will have the final say on our country's leader. All I will say to them is that they should look across the Atlantic, where their sister party is trying to put into office a two-faced populist who is completely without principle, who incites violence against journalists and who is willing to say anything, no matter how offensive or plainly false, as long as it takes him a step closer to power. They should ask themselves whether they really want to do the same here.

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) for her questions about the business. I also extend my birthday wishes to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and the Leader of the Opposition, and to my hon. Friends the Members for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish).

I congratulate the 20 Members who won today's ballot, particularly the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson). I feel somewhat sorry for their staff,

because they are probably already fielding hundreds of emails and phone calls. Nevertheless, we look forward to their proposed legislation, which we will debate in due course.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby talked about Europe. She and I are united on the matter: we both believe that Britain will be better off staying in a reformed EU. However, she overestimates the issue with regard to the Conservative party. We are absolutely united and are a one nation Government. The Scottish National party voted against the British people having their say, and the Labour party used to vote against it, but at least we agree that this important issue will be settled for a generation on 23 June. I look forward to the result.

Today we will conclude the debate on the Gracious Speech, which the House and the nation have welcomed as the next step in delivering security for working people, increasing life chances for the most disadvantaged and strengthening our national security. We have important Bills to finish—we will conclude our deliberations on the Investigatory Powers Bill next week—before we start our programme of 21 new Bills in our one nation Queen's Speech, which will enable us to make further progress.

In the past six years, 31 million people have received a tax cut. Millions of young people are starting apprenticeships and getting into skilled work. The national living wage is benefiting 3 million workers, and more people are being given the chance to own their home. The Queen's Speech builds on those measures and uses the opportunity of a strengthening economy to go further.

We will have a chance to debate measures including giving every household a legal right to a fast broadband connection, if they request it; reforming and speeding up the planning process to help build more homes; introducing a lifetime individual savings account to help young people save for their future; speeding up adoptions and giving children in care more support; making prisons places of education; and preventing radicalisation and tackling extremism. [*Interruption.*] Somebody said that we discussed that last week. Of course, we are still debating the Gracious Speech and we will discuss 21 Bills during this Session.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is in the USA this week as part of a cross-party parliamentary delegation, further cementing the special relationship between our two countries, although I do not know whether he has met either presidential contender. I was also with an all-party parliamentary group this week on a visit to the Chelsea flower show, which is another marvellous institution. I visited a garden called "A Suffolk Retreat", designed by Frederic Whyte in partnership with the Pro Corda Trust, which provides world-class ensemble training to exceptional musicians. I particularly want to mention it because it is based in my constituency. I really hope that we can bring the garden back to Suffolk.

While I was at the Chelsea flower show, I noticed the melinis flower and the melliendendron, which is lightly fragrant with pale pink fleshy flowers—very apt for the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. I do not know whether the shadow Leader of the House is also into gardening, but I suggest that he might like to christen a new variety of rhododendron the "Rhonddadendron".

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby referred to several important pieces of legislation, and I suggest that she should be patient. We won the election last year and there are still four years of this Government to go. I am sure that, in due course, the Government will fulfil their commitment to some of the measures that she mentions.

It really matters to me that we try to achieve some cross-party consensus on the fact that we need more nurses. The Labour party led an important debate on the matter the other week. I thought that the approach was interesting, because we have a shared view on the outcome but have proposed different solutions for achieving it. The bursary route has limited the number of people who can become nurses. We are proposing a way in which more people can become nurses, and that will be good for our NHS. I am conscious of the fact that many people want to speak, so I will finish on that, and I look forward to further business questions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As the House will know, my normal practice is to seek to accommodate everyone who is interested in coming in on the business question. That is, of course, much more challenging today, given that there is a statement to follow and no fewer than 49 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in the main debate. Therefore, there is a premium on single, short supplementary questions without preamble, the seminar on which will be led by Rebecca Pow.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am deeply honoured, Mr Speaker. Thank you. May we have a debate on microplastics? Evidence suggests that microplastics found in cosmetics and personal care products that we all use, such as shower gel, shampoo and even toothpaste, are getting into the watercourse and damaging marine life, and they are potentially a hazard to human health.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend raises a really important matter, and I know that the Government are looking at it carefully. The vitality of our oceans and our rivers is important for nature and for our country. Businesses are trying to eradicate these things from their products, and the Government are working on that with them and encouraging them to do so. Some people might say that this is a good example of something on which we can work with our European neighbours to ensure that action goes across many more markets so that we can eradicate these potential dangers. I am sure that the Government are leading on that matter.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I wish I could thank the Office of the Leader of the House for sending me a note to tell me that the Leader of the House would not be here this morning; if they had done so, my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) would certainly have done business questions. That is another obvious failure by the Leader of the House.

We need an urgent debate on the Representation of the People Acts. The Prime Minister effectively admitted at the weekend that the Conservative party had broken electoral law. To be fair, according to him it was just a “misdeclaration”—an honest mistake—as though our electoral laws were some sort of optional extra. Our electoral laws are in place to secure the integrity of our democracy, and any transgression must be viewed as a very serious matter. That is why this week I have reported the Conservative party to the Metropolitan police to ensure that this is properly investigated. Now is the time for the Government to start to take these issues seriously. We need a debate on the Floor of the House so that we can properly consider the matter.

Even though he is not here, I am sure that the Leader of the House will be thrilled to learn that the Scottish Parliament will today formally back EU membership. Only a couple of Tories will vote against it; all other MSPs will support the motion. May we have a debate about the impact on our devolved legislatures and the consequences of a leave vote, particularly given that the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday conceded to the Scottish Affairs Committee that no contingency plans are in place if Scotland is dragged out of the European Union against our national collective will? We need to know what the consequences will be for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if we are dragged out, particularly if we do not vote to be taken out of the European Union.

Lastly, I do not know when the Leader of the House intends to bring forward his legislation to reform the House of Lords in response to the Strathclyde report, but we must have an opportunity to table an amendment so that this House can vote on the abolition of the House of Lords, with Labour reformers and Conservative Members who are very unhappy with the other place joining us to rid this nation of that circus of donors and cronies once and for all.

Dr Coffey: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman was not listening because the Leader of the House announced today’s arrangements last week. I am very sorry that we will not hear from his hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh). When I was at the Chelsea flower show, I spotted the tansy flower, also known as the golden button, which I thought would be very appropriate for SNP Members with their yellow rosettes.

The hon. gentleman talked about election expenses and similar issues. Frankly, I know that SNP Members are very happy to get their choppers out and about around the country, but they should really think about whether they want to continue that particular debate. It is not a matter for the Government, and in relation to what the hon. Gentleman mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made no particular assertion.

I recognise SNP Members’ opposition to the House of Lords. I respect them for the view they hold and I appreciate that it is included in their amendment on which we will vote later today, but I am sure there will continue to be other opportunities in the future. Indeed, SNP Members, none of whom had a private Member’s Bill during the last Session, now have three of the top seven slots for private Members’ Bills, so—who knows?—they may have a chance to bring forward legislation of their own.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): At the heart of the European Union referendum is the question of democracy and the democratic deficit. May I draw attention to the European Scrutiny Committee report that has come out this morning on the lack of a democratic system in the Council of Ministers? Voters are clamouring for facts in the referendum. Some 55% of our laws come from the European Union, the bulk of which are made by officials and nodded through by Ministers, while there is no information about how the 50% of decisions made behind closed doors are reached, according to this unanimous report by the European Scrutiny Committee. How are such decisions arrived at and at what price? Will the Deputy Leader of the House give us a debate on this matter?

Dr Coffey: There was a debate on this matter in February, shortly after the Prime Minister announced the EU referendum, and a national debate is going on right now. It is important that people participate in that debate and use this opportunity to vote. Frankly, UK Ministers work very hard to further the interests of the UK within the European Union, and long may that continue. Nevertheless, on the kind of information being given out, may I recommend the House of Commons Library website—www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/eu-referendum/? The Library is putting out briefings that any member of the public can read and perhaps use to inform themselves in making their decision on 23 June.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for the business statement. The House will have noted that she announced that on 9 June there will be a general debate on carers, sponsored by the Backbench Business Committee. That is a legacy of the last Session. We cannot meet as a Committee until the party managers on both sides of the House appoint or reappoint their members of the Committee. May I ask them to expedite that process so that we can meet as early as possible after the Whitsun break?

Dr Coffey: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his re-election. I am sure he will have another good year of showing leadership in providing many interesting debates. I echo his words, and I look forward to the Backbench Business Committee being back in business so that many of the requests made to me today can be queued up and, in time, debated.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): In Potters Bar, there are proposals for more than 750 new houses to be built on the edge of town, but in a neighbouring local authority. Will the Deputy Leader of the House find time for us to debate the importance of the duty to co-operate in local planning processes so that planning decisions properly take into account the needs of residents in places such as Potters Bar?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is important to deliver housing. There is already a duty of co-operation between councils, but I am sure he will be able to refer to that further when we discuss the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill in due course.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): May we have a statement on why the Government will not adopt my nifty, ready-made private Member's Bill on adding mothers' names to marriage certificates? The Queen's Speech was a bit light, so there is plenty of room for it. The Deputy Leader of the House has just said that there are 21 new Bills; please make it 22.

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady has been campaigning on this issue for some time, and is not alone in doing so. She will have heard the Prime Minister acknowledge its importance in the past. There are several years of this Parliament still to go, so she should continue to be patient.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): May we have a statement by the Business Secretary on the yesterday's demise of Courtaulds, the last hosiery manufacturer in the country? It has thrown 320 people—mainly women—out of work, so may we have a statement on what the Government can do to help such a company?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right to bring that up. I am sure that it has been a devastating blow to the local economy in Belper, and I hope that administrators will be able to help keep at least some of the jobs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills will be here shortly to give another statement; I will make sure that he is aware of her request.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Two of my constituents, Mr Matthews and Mrs Southward, have been in touch with me about the care of their family members during recent stays in hospital. Breakdowns in communication between staff seem to have contributed to very poor standards of patient care, leaving the patients and their families very distressed. May we have a debate on how we can ensure that we have the best standards of care in our hospitals?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady is right to speak on behalf of patients—ultimately we have to be patients' champions in our constituencies. There are no Health questions for some time, so this would be a subject for the Backbench Business Committee to consider for a topical debate. I put on the record my thanks to the Care Quality Commission, which has been leading the way with inspections. It has been trying to highlight such issues and to make hospital boards come together to ensure that the patient always comes first.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Many people benefit from lower airfares and lower mobile roaming charges as a result of our being in the EU. Research published this week has shown that the average cost of holidays could increase if we leave. May we have a debate on the impact on tourism—domestic, inbound and outbound—should we leave the EU?

Dr Coffey: The Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who has responsibility for tourism, will be here to answer questions in the first week back after the recess. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) is absolutely right to highlight the potential increase in costs connected to leaving the EU. Of course, I wish to

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

encourage domestic tourism as well. I am sure that a lot of people will be coming to Aldeburgh and Southwold, including the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), who is coming on Saturday to campaign with me for Britain to stay in the European Union. My hon. Friend has raised an important issue, which I hope the country will take notice of.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the Land Registry? Many people are opposed to its privatisation, so may I have an assurance from the Deputy Leader of the House that that will not be sneaked into the planning and infrastructure Bill and the Land Registry therefore sneaked out of the ownership of the British public?

Dr Coffey: It is not a case of the Government sneaking things in, as the hon. Lady suggests. We have a very transparent process. We have set out our agenda for the next year, and she will have the time to debate that issue as and when it arises.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the Deputy Leader of the House tell us whether there are any plans for the House to sit on Saturday 25 June, in case the country votes to leave the EU and there is a change in Government, or we have to mobilise for war, as the Government have suggested, or introduce a Bill about airfares, or plague has broken out? Are we going to sit on Saturday 25 June?

Dr Coffey: I am not aware of any plans for that. The country has a really important decision to make on 23 June. This Government and Parliament will listen to the decision of the people and act in due course. My hon. Friend and I are on different sides of the argument, but I am sure that he will come back on 27 June and work alongside Government Members to progress the important measures in the Queen's Speech, which will help this country in the future.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): May we have a statement on the responsibilities of local councils to protect green open spaces in their ownership—such as that on the ex-Brumby hospital site in Scunthorpe—when they develop their own landholdings?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and it is important that guidelines in the national planning policy framework are enforced. Ministers from the Department for Communities and Local Government will be answering questions on the first day back after the recess, and he may wish to raise the issue with them.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): The closure of Rugeley B power station was confirmed last week and will mean that leisure facilities will also close. Will the Deputy Leader of the House join me in calling for other local facilities and groups to come forward to support those who are affected and need to be rehomed, and may we have debate about local community and leisure facilities?

Dr Coffey: I know my hon. Friend has worked hard on that matter for her constituents, and the decision will obviously be disappointing for those affected. She is right to try to engage the community to provide facilities

for the activities that were ongoing. Has she considered the asset of community value process, to try to protect some of those important facilities?

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This is Children's Hospice week. Charlie House, a fabulous charity in my constituency that supports families with children who have life-limiting conditions, is fundraising to create a purpose-built facility in Aberdeen, bringing support closer to those who need it. Will the Deputy Leader of the House make time for a debate on charities such as Charlie House that provide vital support for children with complex disabilities and their families?

Dr Coffey: I am delighted to hear of progress in fundraising for Charlie House, and raising the issue in this House is an important way to advertise it—many hon. Members across the Chamber will be doing similar things. The hon. Lady raises an important matter, and I hope that she will be able to secure an Adjournment debate on that subject, which I am sure would be well attended.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): This weekend Plymouth, and the rest of the country, will commemorate the battle of Jutland, and last night my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) secured a debate on that important event. Will the Deputy Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to all those who participated in Jutland, including my grandfather, and the contribution that they made to European and world peace?

Dr Coffey: I echo what my hon. Friend has said. When he listened to the debate he will have heard our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, (Mr Evennett) saying that he will attend the ceremony and that his own grandfather was also involved in that battle. We must pay tribute to those who fought to keep peace, and being part of the European Union is a way to try to ensure that we have trade and prosperity, rather than destructive war.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Given that we are now just a few weeks away from commemorations to mark the 100th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, what plans do the Government have to hold a debate in this Chamber, so that Members from across the House and every corner of the country can reflect on that most traumatic but momentous time in our country's history?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that important centenary. I am not aware that the Government have planned to set aside time to debate that issue—indeed, when the reforms went through, such matters were put in the hands of the Backbench Business Committee, but I am sure that many people would co-sponsor such a debate, which will probably be one of Parliament's finest this Session.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Yesterday, the other place appointed a Select Committee to consider long-term NHS sustainability. Given pressures on our national health service, can we consider whether such a Committee might be established in the elected House?

Dr Coffey: That is the first time that I have heard a request for a new Select Committee. It would perhaps be more appropriate for the Health Committee to investigate that issue further, so I will pass the matter on to its Chair, our hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston).

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I apologise for labouring this point with the Deputy Leader of the House, but following the difficulties that some MPs seem to have landed themselves in over election expenses, will the Government invite the Electoral Commission to produce updated regulations covering local and national election expenses? That would help to clear up some of the uncertainties about accounting for election expenses, so will she make Government time available to debate that issue?

Dr Coffey: The Electoral Commission is, rightly, independent of the Government. The right hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. I am sure the Electoral Commission will not be shy in coming forward with potential for discussion, but it is important that the Government do not interfere in any investigation.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May we have an urgent debate to assess whether legislation is needed to stop management companies taking advantage of freeholders? I represent retired constituents from Woodland Mews in Heathfield, who, despite being freeholders, are being taken advantage of by a property company over their communal areas. The list is so long, Mr Speaker, that it would cause you distress if I read it out.

Dr Coffey: I understand entirely what my hon. Friend is referring to. It is an interesting part of the law. The people better placed to answer his specific queries will be at the Dispatch Box on Monday 6 June.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Constituents of mine who work for, or who have experienced trying to get in touch with, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will not at all have been surprised this week by a National Audit Office report highlighting how job losses have led to the loss of up to £97 million last year and the tripling of call times. May we have time for a debate on this matter, not least for those who have spent many frustrating hours trying to get through to HMRC hotlines?

Dr Coffey: I recognise what the hon. Lady says. It is frustrating to have to wait a considerable time. HMRC civil servants are dedicated and focused on ensuring people pay the correct tax in the first place, which is important in preventing frustration later. I note her point, however, and will make sure the Treasury is aware of it.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Yesterday, over 100 guide dog owners visited Westminster Hall to highlight discrimination. Their access all areas campaign raised awareness of discrimination against the partially sighted because of their dogs. May we have a debate on disability equality training to ensure that that important issue is addressed?

Dr Coffey: It was wonderful to see so many assistance dogs in Westminster Hall yesterday and to see how beautiful animals can help people to lead fulfilling lives. My hon. Friend is right to point out the terrible frustrations when people, who do not seem to have been adequately trained, frustrate the fulfilment of lives. I will ensure that this issue is referred to the Department for Work and Pensions. I also want to thank Simon and Jo, who came up from my constituency to see me. I intend to take up further local action myself.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): May we have a debate on cyberbullying, and in particular its impact on young people? There are instances of cyberbullying perpetrated by those outside the UK who are using jurisdictional issues to evade the law.

Dr Coffey: I am sure we both agree that cyberbullying is completely unacceptable. It may be worth the hon. Lady pursuing this matter with the Minister responsible. If loopholes in the law are preventing positive action, we can try to close them if at all possible. I will refer her question to the relevant Minister.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): Does my hon. Friend consider, as we see yet another misplaced, misjudged and costly consultation from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and its thankfully departing chairman, that now is the right time to discuss, in a cross-party debate in a grown-up way, the lessons of the past six years at least, particularly as it is noted by many non-establishment colleagues that the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has no representatives from the 2010 and 2015 intakes? That is a shocking oversight, Mr Speaker. You and colleagues from across the House will be relieved to hear that I am very happy to volunteer to help to remedy that.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend has had a long interest in IPSA—as do we all. A consultation is under way and it is important that Members respond to it. We know the reasons why IPSA was set up, but that does not mean we cannot put across our views on how we need a regime that best helps us to help the people we represent and does not curtail our efforts in that aim.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): As the Deputy Leader of the House will be aware, I have been asking since November for a meeting with the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). I have an open cast coalmine in my constituency that desperately needs proper restoration. Owing to the financial shenanigans of the company that owns it, a large body of water will be left unrestored. I have now received a letter from the Minister saying that her diary is too busy and too full for her to meet me. May we have a debate on how much time Ministers are spending campaigning for Brexit, rather than doing their parliamentary work?

Dr Coffey: I think the hon. Lady raised this issue in last summer's pre-recess Adjournment debate. I replied then and thought I had been helpful, but I will encourage

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

the Minister responsible to see what she can do. I will not make promises prior to 23 June but I will do my best.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Ceramics, bricks, tiles and pipes are important industries providing valuable jobs across the UK, including in my constituency, where clay from local quarries is used in brick manufacturing. May we have a debate in Government time on the strategic importance of bricks and ceramics, especially on how best to support these industries so that they are well placed to meet ongoing and future demand for bricks and house building?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend raises a serious point about an industry that is hugely important to ensuring that UK plc keeps motoring and that people have homes to live in. I would encourage her to apply to the Backbench Business Committee, when it meets shortly, because I am sure that many people would be interested in such a debate.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): It was announced on Tuesday that Polestar, a printing works in my constituency, would close with a loss of 650 jobs. That followed the loss of 600 jobs at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and 700 jobs at HSBC. This has all come in a short period. As well as immediate help for the Polestar workers, could we have a debate on what the Government can do to assist areas where a multiplicity of significant redundancies are announced across different sectors in a short period?

Dr Coffey: I recognise that job losses such as those at Polestar will be a blow to the local economy, but the Government are committed to the northern powerhouse and to Sheffield. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has been working closely with the local council and the local enterprise partnership to produce an enhanced devolution deal. That landmark deal includes £328 million in growth deal resources for the next five years. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can work with the council and the LEP, as BIS has done, to ensure that we create new jobs for the future.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In view of the ludicrous claims that the price of holidays will increase if we exit the EU, will the Government find time for a debate on how to boost tourism to English seaside resorts in order to replace the lost holidays abroad? Also, if my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) wishes to make representations to the Prime Minister, he might like to know that he will be in Cleethorpes on 25 June to mark the national celebration of Armed Forces Day.

Dr Coffey: That is just another reason to visit Cleethorpes—en route I am sure people will drop into Great Grimsby, the constituency of the shadow Deputy Leader of the House. We want to encourage people to relax and enjoy themselves, but if people are to enjoy domestic, as well as foreign, tourism, we need a strong economy and increasing wages, so it bears repeating that if the British people choose to leave the EU—it will be their choice, if they make it—they should be aware of the possible consequences for the economy and jobs. I hope they choose to remain.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I draw the attention of the Deputy Leader of the House to early-day motion 47 on blacklisting compensation payments.

That this House welcomes the recent public apology and admission of wrongdoing made by eight major construction firms in the High Court, and the settlement reached between the construction workers, Unite the Union, GMB and UCATT trade unions, the Blacklist Support Group and their legal teams with those construction firms that will mean that 771 blacklisted workers will share an estimated £50 million in compensation; praises the work of the Blacklist Support Group, the justice campaign and support network for those caught up in the UK construction industry blacklisting scandal; notes that trade unionists, safety campaigners, journalists, academics and environmental activists were all blacklisted by big business; further notes that blacklisting was exposed in 2009 after a raid on the offices of the Consulting Association that operated the blacklist on behalf of the major companies, and that trade union members were denied work over many years due to their trade union activity on previous building sites, raising concerns over asbestos, poor working conditions and unpaid wages; notes the investigation on this subject carried out by the Scottish Affairs Committee in the last Parliament; notes with concern media reports that senior police officers attended meetings of the blacklisting organisation; and calls on the Government to conduct a full public inquiry into the scandal of blacklisting.

Eight multinational companies have settled cases with hundreds of blacklisted workers in the construction industry. Will the Government make a statement or hold a debate in Government time on this scandal and allow hon. Members to demand a full public inquiry into blacklisting?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman will know that blacklisting is illegal and that appropriate things can be pursued where it is shown to have happened. I suggest that he try to secure a debate in order to raise these matters in more detail, and I am sure that a Minister will respond in due course.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The Prime Minister once said that immigration had

“placed real pressures on communities up and down the country. Not just pressures on schools, housing and healthcare—though those have been serious—but social pressures too.”

Can we have a debate on how the Government's approach to reducing immigration to the tens of thousands is going? In such a debate, we would realise that the only way to control immigration, which he wanted to do, is to leave the EU. The clue is in the title: free movement of people.

Dr Coffey: The Prime Minister and the Government are still committed to reducing net migration to tens of thousands. We have strengthened measures through the Immigration Act 2014. The United Kingdom has created more jobs than the rest of the European Union put together in six years, so I do not think people should be surprised if some of those jobs have attracted people in the EU to come and work here. Nevertheless, the pledge still stands, and I am sure my hon. Friend will work alongside us to make it happen.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): *The Times* published the headline: “Imam beaten to death in sex grooming town” on 20 February. The editor could not be bothered

to respond to concerns and IPSO—the Independent Press Standards Organisation—refused to take up the complaint. It was clearly Islamophobic, disrespectful to the victim and derogatory to the town I represent. May we have statement on when we will have a press regulator with some teeth?

Dr Coffey: I understand why the hon. Gentleman is distressed by that headline. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will be here on the first Thursday after our return, so the hon. Gentleman might want to pose that question directly to him.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May we have debate about the Avon and Somerset police? We are now on our sixth chief or acting chief constable, and we have a police and crime commissioner who is completely out of control. The current chief constable is under investigation for historical sex allegations. He has been investigated once already, and can be read about in *Private Eye*. May we have a debate, because we need to know whether we have the Keystone Cops or the Avon and Somerset police force—and nothing in between?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right to point to the importance of people having confidence in the local police. I expect that the police and crime commissioner has just been re-elected with a new manifesto, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to hold this person to account in fulfilling the strategies that were outlined.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Will the Deputy Leader of the House join me in congratulating FC Halifax Town on their outstanding victory in the FA Trophy at Wembley on Sunday? Will she allow a debate to discuss how best to encourage people to participate in sports at all levels?

Dr Coffey: I certainly want to congratulate FC Halifax Town; it must be fantastic to lift a trophy at Wembley. The hon. Lady is hopefully aware of the sport strategy launched by the Government, which is specifically focused on how to increase participation in all sports. Ministers will be in their places on the Front Bench on the first Thursday after our return, so she can raise her question again.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we have a statement from the Government confirming that their “works of fiction” Department, which has been busy producing pro-EU propaganda over the last few months, is going to be closed down? What measures are being put in place to ensure that the purdah rules are properly enforced in the last four weeks of the referendum campaign?

Dr Coffey: The Government have fulfilled what was set out in the European Union Referendum Act 2015, which was to provide information and analysis. The Government are doing this online through documents, but also through the booklet that was sent to households across the country. Purdah starts tomorrow. The Cabinet Secretary is, I think, writing to permanent secretaries to ensure that appropriate steps are taken. I am sure that the civil service will act appropriately.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Pakistan, another Ahmadi Muslim was murdered in a target killing in Karachi on Monday night. To date, 30 Ahmadis have been murdered there on grounds of faith—but not a single attacker has been brought to justice. In Indonesia on Sunday, an Ahmadi mosque was attacked and destroyed in central Java. Will the Deputy Leader of the House agree to a statement on what the Government are doing to tackle intolerance and extremism against Ahmadis and to call on countries to make adequate provision for that?

Dr Coffey: I am not aware of the details of that particular situation. The best I can do is to ensure that the appropriate Minister replies directly to the hon. Gentleman.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I wonder whether the Deputy Leader of the House noticed that the UK representative in Lonely Planet’s top six places for travellers to visit in Europe this summer is not London or the Lake district, but Warwickshire, with its main attractions being Warwick castle, Stratford-on-Avon and the recently announced “world rugby hall of fame” being created in the birthplace of the game. This will be important to my constituency, so may we have a debate to consider how investment in tourism can stimulate local economies?

Dr Coffey: Culture Ministers will be here answering questions on 9 June. Let me say, though, that going to Warwickshire is always wonderful, especially to celebrate the oval ball, while there will be celebrations of the round ball shortly with the European championship.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May we debate why the Government want 50 fewer elected Members of Parliament but keep on creating more unelected Tory peers? The hon. Lady’s party received 36.8% of the votes at the general election, but 43.7% of the House of Lords already consists of party political Tory peers. Will her party stop creating peers, and drop its plans to gerrymander the House of Commons?

Dr Coffey: The purpose of the Act that was passed during the last Parliament was to ensure that constituencies were of equal size, and I thought that very fair. I find it extraordinary that there are 40 MPs in Wales, representing considerably smaller constituencies than the average in England and Scotland. Someone who says that he believes in fairness should accept that that is what the electorate deserve.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I welcomed this week’s news that the west of England, including Bath, had received £2.2 million of Government funds to increase access to walking and cycling. Does my hon. Friend agree not only that that will benefit health, but that the subject of walking and cycling should be raised during debates on the infrastructure Bill?

Dr Coffey: That is an interesting suggestion. We already have walking and cycling strategies, and transport questions may provide opportunities to debate their effectiveness further. I am sure that cycling around Bath is a very pleasurable experience, as well as being particularly good for the thighs because there are so many hills.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): This week the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has been grilling the Government on whether or not they are meeting their obligations under the convention on the rights of the child. May we have a debate, in Government time, on whether the Government are meeting those obligations, with particular reference to the two-child policy and the rape clause?

Dr Coffey: I know that the hon. Lady has been pursuing a specific issue in relation to this matter. I think that the Government can be confident that they are supporting children. New measures in the Queen's Speech will do even more to help children in care, and I hope that that is something on which the hon. Lady and I can agree.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): The performance of Southern Rail is increasingly shocking. There were 156 cancellations on Monday and 208 on Sunday, which affected not just my constituents but passengers across Surrey, Sussex and London. May we have an urgent statement from the rail Minister to establish how we can deal with that shocking situation?

Dr Coffey: No commuters like to be late for work because of errors over which they have no control, and I understand why my hon. Friend's constituents are particularly frustrated. No transport questions are due for a while, so I will bring the matter to the attention of the rail Minister.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Two years ago the two Newport Members of Parliament, the local trade union and the workforce said with one voice that privatising the then profitable shared services in the town would be a terrible mistake. Last week the National Audit Office announced that privatising those services and handing them over to the failing French company Steria has cost the country £504 million. When can we debate the cost to the nation of Ministers' following their own canard—their own political, doctrinaire belief—that everything public is bad and everything private is good?

Dr Coffey: The Government do not share that view, which is why we are ensuring that the NHS is in public hands and will continue to be so. I am not aware of the specific case to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, but he knows that Ministers appear at the Dispatch Box daily to answer questions.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Today marks the start of the world-renowned Hay literary festival in my constituency. Over the years, many Members have attended the festival to sell their books, whether they are books about crime or fiction, or their autobiographies, or perhaps even a combination of all three. Will my hon. Friend allow time for a debate supporting the literary industry in this country?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that that would be a very popular debate. No doubt my hon. Friend will gather support for it through the Backbench Business Committee. The Hay literary festival is an important international festival, at which we welcome people from around the world. I know that the *Daily Mail* sketch writer lives nearby and is pushing his book, so I expect my hon. Friend will see him there as well.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am sure that the Deputy Leader of the House will join me in welcoming the launch of Kilombero rice from Malawi by Just Trading Scotland. It will now be stocked in branches of the Co-op across Scotland.

Our opportunities to discuss issues of food security and fair trade are limited, given that there are only two sessions of questions to the Secretary of State for International Development between now and the end of September. Will the Deputy Leader of the House look into the rotation of questions as a matter of urgency, to ensure that Members have a chance to give all Departments a fair crack of the whip?

Dr Coffey: The rota is fairly well established, and it is important that every Government Department is brought to the House to answer questions, so this is just one of those timing things. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be able to find time through Westminster Hall or other debates to hold the Government to account on that matter.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last week the Government won a High Court case against big tobacco, which has paved the way for the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products, and this week AXA insurance has announced its withdrawal of £1.2 billion of investment in the tobacco industry. May we have a debate in Government time on the new tobacco control strategy, so that Members across the House can have an input into it before the Government publish it?

Dr Coffey: I know that this issue always generates a lot of interest, and I am sure that the appropriate Health Minister would be willing to respond to a debate on it. My hon. Friend has made his case so eloquently that I am sure that neither you, Mr Speaker, nor the Backbench Business Committee would deny him the time to hold such a debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Time is becoming very constrained and it is almost certain that some people will not get in, but brevity will help.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): May we have a statement or debate on the rationale and details of the UK-Sudan strategic dialogue and the Khartoum process—the EU horn of Africa migration route initiative—both of which pretend that Sudan is simply a transit route for refugees, when it is in fact a significant source country of refugees fleeing the predations of a regime that has been indicted by the International Criminal Court but is now being indulged by those two processes?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments, but as of now there are no plans for such a statement or debate.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): The River Hamble games are fast approaching, as is the summer of sport. May we have a debate highlighting the activities of the many brilliant volunteers who keep our community supports clubs alive and keep our after-school activities

happening? We need to discuss how we can help them maintain a work-life balance in the light of their contribution to the development of future athletes.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend makes an important case. I think she should join up with the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) to secure a debate on the benefits of sport.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Within the last hour, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—ignoring the concerns expressed by the Public Accounts Committee, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and this House—has announced that it is pressing ahead with its plans to close the BIS policy office in Sheffield. Will Ministers come to the House to explain why they have signed off on a decision that adds to the Department's operational costs, flies in the face of the Government's policy of moving civil servants out of London and fatally undermines claims about the northern powerhouse?

Dr Coffey: I understand that the Department has issued a written ministerial statement today—[*Interruption.*] Or it is due to issue one. The decision was reached after consultation with staff and trade unions. It has been a difficult decision, but the Department has chosen to base all policy roles in London by 2018. The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is sitting on the Front Bench, and I am sure that he will have heard the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Residents in Brigstock are fighting an unwelcome and unwanted speculative planning application from the developer Gladman. Many villages in my constituency have been targeted by such applications in recent years, but East Northamptonshire Council has stood up for the residents and thrown the development plans out. May we have a debate on how to ensure that developers get the message?

Dr Coffey: The Government have put forward the national planning policy framework, and a local plan has to take account of appropriate future development. Also, Department for Communities and Local Government Ministers will be here on the first day we are back after the recess.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The Deputy Leader of the House will be aware of the ropey employment practices that have emerged out of the implementation of the so-called national living wage, from cutting holiday time to abolishing paid breaks. May we have an urgent debate to ensure that employers are complying with the spirit, and not just the letter, of the law?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady is right to raise this point; it matters that employers play their part. The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is sitting on the Front Bench and will have heard her comments. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has also supported those views, and he will be here to answer questions on the Tuesday after we get back.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): In my constituency, the only international aid agency in Glasgow—Glasgow the Caring City—will close its doors

this week because of a decision by a shambolic arm's length external organisation controlled by the Labour party to hike its rent by 400,000%. May we have a debate on the unaccountability of ALEOs across the UK and on how they treat charities across the UK?

Dr Coffey: I am unsure whether that is a matter for the Government, as it sounds like a local issue, but the hon. Gentleman is of course right to use the House in order to make his point.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Also in the last hour, the Government—in this case it was the Justice Secretary—have announced the closure of HMP Kennet in my constituency. Will the Deputy Leader of the House tell me why that was done by written ministerial statement and not by oral statement? Why was it rushed out on the last day before a recess? The Justice Secretary should have been here so that Members on both sides of the House could have scrutinised the decision and its impact on staff and the community, coming as it does at a time of an overcrowding crisis in our prisons.

Dr Coffey: It is no secret that the Government are seeking a programme of prison reform. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the plan is to close certain prisons and build new prisons that are effective and fit for the 21st century. I am unaware of the precise details, but it is fairly standard practice to issue such things through written statements.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): We might consider today my amendment to the Loyal Address on the threat that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership poses to our NHS, but the Government show no sign of genuinely listening. Having seen at first hand the damage done to the NHS by big businesses such as Virgin Care, I want a clear, unambiguous statement that the Government will reject any treaty that gives such companies a private court system that puts their interests over ours. Will the Deputy Leader of the House provide time for a Minister to give that assurance?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady is right that we are concluding the debate on the Queen's Speech today. The Government are confident that the TTIP treaty poses no threat to the NHS. I recognise that her view may differ from mine, but there is no need to be concerned. The European Commission is also well aware of the matter in its negotiations.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It costs more than £3,000 to train to be a HGV driver, leading to a shortage of 45,000 drivers in the industry. For every training package that the Government paid for, there would be a payback of six to 12 months of welfare savings. Will the Deputy Leader of the House rattle together the heads of the Secretary of State for Transport, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor to seek common sense?

Dr Coffey: This issue affects my constituency as well, so I have been lobbying fellow Ministers. It is important to say that plans are due to be announced. It is clear that advanced career loans also apply to such courses, so I encourage people in my constituency to take advantage of them now.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is approaching 12 years since Gary McCann was killed in road traffic accident in India. Since then, his brother, my constituent Paul McCann, has been seeking information, and eventually justice, following this tragic incident. Despite his best efforts, however, he has been given no updates about any criminal proceedings in the Indian legal system, and the Indian high commission has been frankly woeful in supplying information to Mr McCann. May we please have a debate on how people such as my constituent can get the information and support to which they should be entitled? Twelve years is far too long to have to wait for answers.

Dr Coffey: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman and the family are concerned about the matter, and I will share it with Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I welcome the UK Government's commitment to making access to broadband subject to a universal service obligation. Is the Deputy Leader of the House aware of the Scottish Government's objective of delivering 100% access by 2021? May we have a statement on whether the UK Government will commit to matching that ambition and to ensuring equality of funding across the UK?

Dr Coffey: We are ahead of them, Mr Speaker—we already have universal access to 2 megabits per second for people who want broadband. Our universal service obligation is due to be in place by 2020, not 2021, and I hope that it will include all of Scotland.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): NHS Protect is supposed to investigate fraud in the NHS, but it has been inspecting one senior manager for more than two years without reaching a conclusion. May we have a debate in Government time on whether the organisation, which was set up under the previous coalition Government, is not actually fit for purpose?

Dr Coffey: Understandably, I am not aware of the individual details of that case. It would probably not be appropriate to comment on it on the Floor of the House, but I will ask a Health Minister to follow up with the hon. Lady.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Balfron High School in my constituency was built using the private finance initiative scheme, which was invented by the Conservatives and pursued by the Labour party. It has a capital value of £16 million, but the Stirling taxpayer will pay £71.1 million for it. It has now been discovered to have structural defects and has been partially closed, meaning that the children have to be driven to schools in Stirling—a total distance of almost 40 miles. May we have a debate on the great PFI swindle?

Dr Coffey: PFI has been debated in the House before, and in the last Session the Government undertook to renegotiate some of the contracts. I am conscious of the disruption that is being caused to children's education, but the suppliers should bear the risk of that and provide appropriate remedies.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the progress of the Greater Manchester further education area review? Theresa Grant, the chief executive of Trafford Council and chair of the steering group, has warned that it would lead to a fragmentation of colleges in Greater Manchester.

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady raises an interesting point. Given that Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers are not going to be here to answer questions for some time, I shall ask the further education Minister to look further into the matter.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Will the Deputy Leader of the House allow time for the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to bring forward a debate on the work and health programme? The White Paper has been scrapped and there is now a Green Paper. Such a debate will allow the whole House to consider help and support for disabled people to get into work.

Dr Coffey: I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman brought such a debate forward through the Backbench Business Committee, it would be very popular. It is important that the Government continue to press on with our reforms, which are helping more people into work. It is a record we are proud of, but we want to make sure that even more disabled people are working.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): May we have a statement on the recommendations of the review on antimicrobial resistance as soon as possible?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this is a very high priority for the NHS. Work is being done to try to ensure that we have more appropriate prescriptions, in recognition of the fact that AMR is declining. We need to ensure that the matter is looked at carefully, and I will raise it with Health Ministers, given that this will not be dealt with in the House for the next fortnight.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Oil is trading at above \$50 a barrel, which is welcome, but yesterday we had the sad announcement of 475 job losses at Shell, mostly in Aberdeen and from its offices in my constituency. The tax cuts and the establishment of the Oil and Gas Authority are welcome, but this announcement makes it clear that more needs to be done. May we have a statement from the relevant Secretary of State about what more can be done to support this great industry?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman should be aware of the extensive support that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change have given to the industry. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be able to apply for a debate, when we can discuss those policies in much more detail.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Given reports of recent racist attacks against asylum seekers who live behind red doors on Teesside, may we have a debate about how the Home Office manages the COMPASS—commercial and operating managers procuring asylum support—contracts, and its monitoring of the services provided through G4S and its subcontractors?

Dr Coffey: We know that issue has already been debated in the House, but the Home Office Ministers will be back here to answer questions shortly, on 13 June, when I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be able to raise it again in more detail.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I attended the UK pipe band championships on Saturday, which were held very successfully in Paisley for the first time. The team behind the bid to secure the title of UK city of culture 2021 indicated that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had delayed publishing the dates involved in the competition. Will the Deputy Leader of the House give the Culture Secretary a nudge to publish a written statement setting out the said dates, as Paisley is very much ready and eager to get on and win?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that Paisley would be a very fine city of culture in the UK—there will of course be other candidates. I will nudge the Secretary of State, but if he still has not done that by 9 June, he will be here then to answer questions.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I was grateful for the birthday wishes from the shadow Deputy Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House.

Tomorrow, I will be attending “Time to Talk”, an event in Pontypool in my constituency that is designed to look at combating feelings of loneliness, particularly among retired veterans and older people. May we have a debate in the House on the very important issue of people who feel isolation from our society?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that issue, especially on his birthday. Tackling isolation is important, as I am sure all parties will agree. DCLG Ministers will be before the House soon, when perhaps he will be able to ask a more detailed question on local strategies.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): In the light of the severe criticisms directed against the Government in today’s European Scrutiny Committee report, may we have an early debate in Government time so that Members can hold the Government to account for their abject and wilful failure to co-operate with proper parliamentary scrutiny of important European legislation?

Dr Coffey: I think our Parliament has very robust procedures on scrutinising European matters. The biggest question will of course be decided by the British people on 23 June, after which I hope we will continue to have a European Scrutiny Committee so that we can debate matters further.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May we have an urgent debate on how towns such as Huddersfield uniquely combine a strong manufacturing base with a thriving university? If we do not stay in the European Union, such towns will be devastated.

Dr Coffey: Even I would not go that far. I do know that the people of Huddersfield will be devastated as and when the hon. Gentleman announces his resignation—I am sure that that is many years away. Before then, he will continue to champion their interests, and I am sure that the whole House supports him in doing so.

Steel Industry

12.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on Britain's steel industry.

Yesterday, Tata's board met in Mumbai and reviewed progress on the sale of its UK steelmaking assets. Ahead of that meeting, I travelled to India for discussions with Tata's leadership. I arrived back in London just a few hours ago. I use this opportunity to stress the importance of Tata continuing a responsible and effective sales process, which I commend it for doing so far. I raised various challenges and issues that had been flagged up by potential buyers, and I reiterated the Government's willingness to support bidders who can deliver a sustainable and successful future for British steelmaking.

Understandably, Tata wants the sales process to be as swift and as straightforward as possible. However, it assured me that it remains absolutely committed to being a responsible seller. There are a number of credible bids on the table, all of which we discussed. Tata is now studying the proposals closely before making a decision on which to take through to the next stage of the sales process. We will be continuing our dialogue with the bidders and with Tata while that happens.

This remains, quite rightly, an independent commercial process. It is not the Government's job to pick a winner or to back a specific bid. What we can do is listen to Tata, listen to the bidder and work with everyone involved to remove potential barriers to a sale. For example, we are today launching a consultation on options to deliver clarity and security for British Steel pension scheme members. This follows representations from the trustees of the scheme itself and from Tata.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and his team for all their hard work in making this consultation happen. The House will appreciate that commercial confidentiality stops me offering a running commentary on the sales process itself. Indeed, all the bidders have signed a non-disclosure agreement. However, I will continue to update the House on progress whenever it is appropriate to do so, and to work around the clock to support British steelmaking and British steel workers.

That support has already seen tens of millions of pounds of compensation paid to energy-intensive industries, which will exempt them from new renewable policy costs. It has seen us become the first Government to implement new guidelines, making it easier for the public sector to buy British steel, and it has seen us consistently standing up for British steel in Europe, including calling for tariffs on a range of Chinese imports where there is evidence of unfair trade.

As yesterday's demonstration by steelworkers reminded us, this is ultimately about people—about the hard-working men and women who make British steel the best in the world. We owe it to them, their families and their communities to do everything we can to secure the future of their industry. That is why my colleague, the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, and I have been fighting for British steel since long before the current crisis hit the headlines, and it is why we will continue to fight for British steel for as long as it

takes. We are very pleased to have been supported in this fight by the First Minister of Wales. We are also receiving constructive support from trade unions, particularly Community. By putting aside political point scoring and focusing on what really matters, we are together forging a secure and sustainable future for British steelmaking. I commend this statement to the House.

12.9 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement and for advance sight of it. I am surprised that he failed to mention any of the details of the consultation paper on pensions that his Government published today.

I agree with the Secretary of State's assessment of the importance of our steel industry to the UK economy. No one who saw the steelworkers march through London yesterday can fail to be moved by the sight of a dedicated and skilled workforce fighting for their industry. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's trip to Mumbai, along with the First Minister of Wales, to meet the Tata board yesterday—his direct engagement with the board is better late than never. I also welcome his confirmation that Tata is acting as a responsible seller. That is vital for the future of the industry here and I, too, commend Tata for it.

The British Steel pension scheme, especially the liabilities it now brings with it, is clearly an issue that requires resolution. Any resolution must protect the pensions of the scheme's 130,000 beneficiaries, but it must also ensure that it avoids setting a potentially dangerous precedent for the millions of other occupational pensioners who currently enjoy retail prices index indexation rights. I recognise that there are no easy options. I welcome the consultation which has been published today by the Department for Work and Pensions, although the timeframe for responses is very short and the document has been published on the last day before a recess.

The suggested move from the RPI to the consumer prices index for the British Steel pension scheme risks setting a very worrying precedent for other occupational schemes. As the House will know, this change is currently illegal. Why has the Secretary of State said nothing about the details of the pension consultation he has published today? Can he now say a little more? Is there agreement across Government on the principle of the changes to sections 67 and 68 of the Pensions Act 1995, which would reduce indexation from RPI to CPI for this scheme?

What assurance can the Secretary of State give me that this proposed change will not be extended to other occupational schemes? Can this change be sensibly and safely ring-fenced? If not, the position is very difficult. What guarantees can the Secretary of State give the House on the future management of the British Steel pension scheme if such concessions limiting future benefits to pensioners are conceded now, especially on the administrative costs and the charges of the scheme going forward? Are there any other options that were considered by the Secretary of State but not included in the consultation, such as safeguarding the scheme on the public books, as was done with the postal scheme and the mineworkers?

Finally, has the Secretary of State considered the effect on the incentive to save for the wider workforce if accrued pension rights can be arbitrarily reduced in this way, as the consultation paper suggests?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and questions. She mentioned the demonstration yesterday. She is right that it reminds us that ultimately this is all about people. I was pleased to note that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise attended that demonstration, alongside the Leader of the Opposition—two unlikely bedfellows but united in this cause to find a long-term sustainable future for our steel industry.

The hon. Lady, understandably, focused her questions on the pension scheme. I will answer as many of her questions as I can and provide more detail. I note that she is a former Pensions Minister herself and I take very seriously what she says. She has a great deal of experience in this area. While the consultation continues, I would be more than pleased to sit down with her and her colleagues and discuss matters in more detail, as I know will my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of time. It is a four-week consultation, as I think she knows, but time is of the essence. The steel industry is in a very difficult state. As I mentioned in my statement, Tata is looking to secure a sale as soon as possible. It has been responsible with the timeframe so far, but I hope the hon. Lady understands and agrees that timing is very important. With the timeframe that has been set for the consultation, I hope we have plenty of time to consider all the stakeholders that have responded.

On the consultation itself, one of the first important points to make is that it is the scheme's trustees who have asked us to look at current legislation, because they believe that changes would lead to better outcomes for their members. So this is a product of the scheme trustees approaching us directly. Under the scheme's current rules, they have the ability to make all the changes that they have proposed, but they are prevented, rightly, by legislation—the Pensions Act 1995. They have asked us whether we would consider removing that portion of the Act in the case of their scheme, and their scheme only.

It is clear from the consultation document—it was clear already—that the scheme is in deficit, so it is very unlikely that any situation can come about where, unless some of those changes are made, the scheme can be prevented from entering the Pension Protection Fund. That is not to say that there is any issue with the PPF; it is one of the strongest backbones of our pensions system. It is envied around the world and it provides an excellent safety net for so many people, but the scheme trustees have put forward this proposal and it is only right that we consider it.

I will not go into detail about how the proposal, if it were taken forward, would affect certain groups of members, but it is very important to emphasise that if the proposal were implemented it would not be the Government making any changes; those would be something that the scheme wanted to do because it believed that it would mean that in almost every case its members would be either better off or no worse off. That is the belief of the scheme trustees and it will be tested by the Pensions Regulator.

It is worth highlighting the fact that the Government have not made any decision. We are considering the pension trustees' proposal. It is right to consider this and to consult widely, and for the Government to determine later whether it is the right thing to do.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement about the possibility of Tata Steel being bought and carrying on as a business. That is very similar to Courtaulds, which closed down in my constituency yesterday. There are people looking to buy the business, keep it running and keep 320 people employed. May I have an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss that?

Sajid Javid: I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. This is an incredibly sensitive issue, which must be handled with extreme care. That is why I am disappointed that there was not more detail in the statement today. It raises more questions than it answers. We wish to see the Government act where they can, and as quickly as they can, to support and save the UK steel industry. As I have said on so many occasions in this House, we on the SNP Benches are keen to support steel communities represented across this House.

As the shadow Secretary of State said, we are concerned that the proposal could set a dangerous precedent that undermines workplace pensions and incentives to save in order to secure dignity in retirement. Roy Rickhuss, general secretary of Community, said this morning that the union was not "taking anything off the table", but that it was important "that any change in the law to save steelworkers' pensions would not have an adverse impact on other pension schemes." Mark Turner of Unite made similar comments this morning. That is why the SNP believes that it would be highly inappropriate for the UK Government to push the proposal through without further careful consideration.

In that vein, what discussions has the Minister had with the unions and others in the industry? How will the scheme work? How will pensioners currently in the scheme be affected? Will there be a disadvantage for future scheme members? Will he commit to set aside more time in this House so that all the issues can be teased out and discussed in a timeous fashion to support the industry and to ensure there are no wider unintended consequences?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He quoted Roy Rickhuss, the leader of the Community union. Roy is right—we need to tread carefully. This is a very important issue and it is right, as the hon. Gentleman said, that we do not set any precedents that the House may later come to regret. At the same time, it is also right that we listen to the trustees, and indeed the unions and Tata itself, on this proposal and consider it very carefully. I am sure the House will have more time to look at it in more detail, and there is a lot more information in the consultation that has just been published. I understand that the hon. Gentleman may not have had enough time to look at that just yet, but the consultation period will give us the time we need to look at the issue very carefully.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for what he is doing to try to save this valuable industry, but I would just add—I say this as a pension fund member myself, albeit a small one—that I am slightly concerned by these proposals, so I hope we will proceed with great caution and with thought for all those who are likely to be seriously affected by them.

Sajid Javid: Many members of the pension scheme may well be concerned, and that is why it is absolutely right that they have full information from the Government in the consultation. I understand that the chairman of the trustees has today welcomed the Government's move, but, at the same time, he has said that the trustees themselves will write to all the members. I welcome my hon. Friend's recognition that this is all about not only getting the best outcome for the members but sustaining the long-term future of our great steel industry.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I welcome the Work and Pensions Secretary's rhetoric in today's written statement, when he says:

“Britain's steel industry is an important part of our economy and this Government is working to help the industry secure a long-term viable future.”

However, may I push the Business Secretary on the risk that steps that are taken could set a dangerous precedent, whereby companies abdicate their responsibilities to the members of their pension schemes? So is this deal purely for steel, or are the Government extending it to other strategically important sectors of the economy or to companies that are identified as crucial to the UK? Is the Government's preferred option the precedent of the Royal Mail scheme in 2012 in distinguishing between past and future service contributions to members' pensions in the steel industry?

Sajid Javid: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments. First, there is no deal, and there is no preferred option; this is a very open consultation. As he will see, there are a number of options the Government are looking at, but no decision has been made. As I mentioned earlier, we are very wary of setting a precedent. I can assure him that this is very much about this scheme, and this scheme only, in these very unique circumstances.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): As Ministers know, those of us who recently visited the Tata site in Corby with the Business Minister had a very good discussion about what the future holds for it. We heard about the time and investment that are needed to see the plan through. As part of his discussions not only with potential buyers but in Mumbai, has the Secretary of State had any indication that the investment we so desperately need in Corby will be forthcoming?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Of course, he is rightly concerned about Corby and about the operations Tata Steel UK has in his constituency. There is a lot in this process that is commercially sensitive, and it would not be appropriate for me to discuss it in public. However, seven bidders have already come forward. A number have put forward much more detailed, serious bids, and Tata is seriously considering them. Many of them include a future for all the operations that Tata Steel UK currently has.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Although the House is naturally concentrating on steel jobs and steel pensions, the Secretary of State must be aware that there are thousands of other schemes, covering millions and millions of members, that are equally difficultly placed at the current time, and I am sure he will find it difficult to gate this to just one scheme. Therefore, may I make a plea that, when we return from our short break, we have an opportunity to discuss the longer-term repercussions of the announcement he has made today so that there can be a feeling in the House as to what the next moves might be to defend what has been one of the great successes of the welfare state—occupational pensions?

Sajid Javid: I always listen carefully to what the Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee has to say, particularly on this type of issue, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss this further. He makes a very important point: this should not be seen as a general look at pensions rules. We are lucky, as a country, to have a very robust pension system; when things do go wrong, there is a lifeboat that works. However, as I said earlier, this is very much about this scheme, although I would be happy to discuss this further with him.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The Secretary of State's consultation represents an important potential point-of-principle change. Will he tell the House whether the change to indexation alone will put the fund into surplus? If the fund is still in deficit after this change, is there not a possibility that a future PPF referral will mean a double whammy for the workforce?

Sajid Javid: The pension trustees believe that their proposal will move the scheme into surplus and make it stable. However, it is worth emphasising that the Pensions Regulator will be very much involved. If this actually did go ahead, the Pensions Regulator would rightly have to be satisfied with it, and there would also have to be a number of other safeguards.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): There has been speculation in the media that Tata Steel may in fact decide to retain the business. Will the Secretary of State explain what role Tata Steel would play in dealing with the pension scheme if that were to happen?

Sajid Javid: There is all sorts of speculation on this issue in the press, but what I can tell the hon. Gentleman, who has been very committed to this process—we have discussed it in person a number of times—is that Tata remains committed and very focused on the sales process. As I mentioned earlier, there are seven potential bidders. The next step is to narrow the field—that is important—so that we can all focus, along with Tata, on the most credible bids. The Government stand ready to work with those bidders.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): There is concern on both sides of the House about what would happen if the pension scheme was changed for Tata Steel. However, would not the sale be more attractive if we went to the root of the problem—the dumping of Chinese steel? Why can we not follow the example of the President of the United States, who has just put tariffs of 588% on Chinese steel?

Sajid Javid: Tariffs do have a role to play where there is evidence of unfair trade. The good news is that, where that evidence has come up, we have worked with our colleagues in the EU—and my hon. Friend's colleagues in the EU—and been able to take action. In almost every case where a tariff has been introduced, it has resulted in a fall in Chinese imports of almost 90%. That shows us that the process is effective.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): My father-in-law is a British Steel pensioner. What does the Secretary of State believe will happen regarding the recent deals with Liberty and Greybull if the British Steel pension has to be absorbed into the Pension Protection Fund? Will he also remind the House how much money the Treasury has already made as a result of the state taking over the miners pension fund and receiving half the surpluses every year?

Sajid Javid: If this pension fund ended up in the PPF, the outcome would be different depending on the particular circumstances of this group of members. Where those members are existing pensioners—so they are receiving their pension already—they would typically continue to get 100% of their pension, but the indexation would change to the statutory minima, which is typically CPI.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I know from my discussions with Ministers about the future of the Scunthorpe works that the Government have been grappling with the issue of business rate support for the industry. Is the Minister able to advise and update us on any progress that has been made on additional relief?

Sajid Javid: Business rates are an important component of costs for many industries. The Government have already taken action. In the last Budget, we announced that business rates would be indexed to CPI rather than RPI; by 2020, that will save business £370 million. Regarding steel, there are specific proposals. While we do keep these things under review, we are also very much focused on many other ways in which we can help the industry.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State or the scheme trustees had any preliminary discussions with the Pensions Regulator about this potentially very risky and precedent-setting proposal?

Sajid Javid: Yes I have, as have the Secretary of State for Work and other Ministers. That underlines the fact that if any of the proposals in this consultation went ahead, it would require the full support of the Pensions Regulator.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): My right hon. Friend referred to the fact that this is all about people. Will he update the House on what support is given to steelworkers and the wider community?

Sajid Javid: Some of the best support that we can provide is the confidence that we have given to the sales process to secure a long-term future for Tata's assets in the UK. My hon. Friend will know that, for example, we have talked about helping with financing on commercial

terms, with potentially hundreds of millions of pounds of financing, including a potential equity investment, on commercial terms, of up to 25%.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): In Scotland, the Tata plant in my constituency, Dalzell works, has already been sold on, but current and former steelworkers in Motherwell and Wishaw will rightly be concerned about their pensions, now frozen in the Tata scheme. Will the Secretary of State provide assurances as quickly as possible to my constituents that their future pensions are secure?

Sajid Javid: It is important that the hon. Lady knows that no pensions are frozen. The scheme is working as it should. The reason this consultation has come about is that, as I have said, the scheme trustees believe that this may lead to a better outcome for all members, including her constituents.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. What assurances can he give the House that in his able work to aid the steel crisis, the crucial principles that members should always have the final say, and that employer pension promises, once made, should always be delivered, are protected?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that. Of course, we must do everything we can to maintain integrity in our overall pension system. In this particular case, it is important to examine carefully the trustee's belief that exploring some of the alternatives laid out in the consultation would be a better outcome for their members than the alternative.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that the last Tory Government to deal with a major occupational fund was the Major Government way back in 1994, when they privatised all the pits and then did a deal with the detested Union of Democratic Mineworkers in order to get the thing on the pension fund settled? The result was chaos, and the net result was even worse after that, because it meant that the Government were able to get their hands on billions of pounds from the miners pension fund, and then at the end, when me and my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) were calling for a little bit of state aid to save the last remaining pits, that lousy, rotten Government would not find a penny.

Sajid Javid: I am not sure that has anything to do with today's statement.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I know that the Secretary of State and the Business Minister will do all they can to secure as many jobs as possible and to make sure that the pension scheme pays out to as many as possible, but will he assure us that whatever deal is done, it will be sustainable and we will not be back here in two years' time facing the same challenges in the steel industry?

Sajid Javid: I can assure my hon. Friend that no deal has been done. This consultation is about exploring options that have been brought to us by the trustees, and it's right that we look at that. As a further assurance,

[Sajid Javid]

I can tell him that the regulator would have to be involved, as well as a number of other safeguards, if we went ahead.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I appreciate that the timescale in this consultation has to be short, but will the Government commit to publishing a full impact assessment on what this means for people? My constituents have suffered so much in the past six months, and if they get another kicking like this, it will be absolutely disgraceful. The Government have acted shamefully on the British steel industry—please, please look at what the impact of this will be.

Sajid Javid: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady. Rightly, many people, including her constituents, will want to know what impact this could have. I think they would equally want to compare it with the alternative as well, and judge for themselves whether they would be better off with the proposal from the trustees. There is a lot more information in the consultation document, but I am sure that over the next few weeks more will be available.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I welcome the statement by my right hon. Friend. As these important discussions about the pensions continue, will he assure me that all the rest of the work to support the steel industry continues? With that in mind, may I congratulate him on his announcement on rolling out the guidance on procurement practice to the whole public sector, and ask what he is doing to ensure that UK steel companies are aware of bidding opportunities and are best placed to win contracts?

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I can absolutely assure her that we continue with the rest of the work, which began a long time ago, including on energy costs, emissions regulations and unfair trading, but of course on procurement as well. One of the streams on procurement, as she suggested, is ensuring our procurement pipeline. Over the next five years we have the biggest infrastructure pipeline of any Government, and that is well known to all steel suppliers and producers.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I acknowledge that the Secretary of State and the Business Minister have both visited Stocksbridge, and they will now fully understand that the plant makes some of the very best steel in the world. On that basis, it is really important that we have a responsible buyer for the business. Will the Secretary of State give further details of the timetable, which would be an indicator that Tata is committed to finding a responsible buyer, and tell us how the pensions consultation timetable fits into the overall timetable for the sale of the Tata UK holdings?

Sajid Javid: I enjoyed my visit last week to Stocksbridge in the hon. Lady's constituency, where I could see for myself just what a strong and valuable business it is. I agree with her comments about the business. In terms of the timetable, I mentioned earlier that Tata itself wants a swift process, but it has not set out a specific timetable. That is good, because there is some flexibility in that. The pensions consultation is a four-week

consultation. If the Government were to take any of the proposals forward—again, I stress that it is an “if”—it will be based on the evidence that is returned in the consultation. Then we would want to make sure that it is done as quickly as possible in order to help the sales process.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I understand that there are a number of credible bidders in the sale process. Are there options for those bidders to work in partnership to help to seek solutions for the pension scheme and for the UK steel industry more widely?

Sajid Javid: Seven bidders have expressed interest so far, and that field will now be narrowed down—I cannot tell my hon. Friend exactly to how many, because I do not know at this stage. Where there are bidders that may want to work together, I am confident that Tata will take that seriously.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): What ongoing discussions has the Secretary of State had with his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence about protecting the steelmakers and processes involved in the Successor programmes, such as Sheffield Forgemasters in Sheffield? These are important not just for the UK economy but for the ability of this country to provide an independent nuclear deterrent.

Sajid Javid: There have been regular meetings with our colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and with the companies, including Sheffield Forgemasters, that specialise in some of the steel that is required for our defence purposes. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that, for example, the new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers will use some 95,000 tonnes of British steel.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): While words of support from Labour Members are always welcome, has the Secretary of State made an assessment of the impact that the climate change levy introduced by Gordon Brown has had on the steel industry? What steps are the Government taking to support other energy-intensive industries such as the china clay industry that is so important to my constituency?

Sajid Javid: That is an important point: energy costs are important for all energy-intensives, including steel, ceramics and many other industries. We have already introduced compensation for the green policy costs to industry, and that already saves the steel industry, including Tata Steel, £80 million, and we are now moving further towards an exemption, which could save another £400 million by the end of this Parliament.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): As well as yesterday's march, Nissan held an event in Parliament celebrating the excellence of the supply chain, which includes the Zodiac line in Llanwern, and highlighting the skill and dedication of the workforce. In these difficult times, will the Secretary of State be specific about what Ministers are doing to ensure that customer confidence is being maintained?

Sajid Javid: Unfortunately I missed that exhibition because I was not here, but my right hon. Friend the small business Minister attended it and I agree with the

hon. Lady about the Zodiac line's importance to our excellent automotive industry. We have been in touch with Nissan and, indeed, all our other major auto producers, as well as many other companies that rely on British steel, particularly from Tata's operations. We have been making sure that they have confidence in the sales process so that they can be secure that the supply will be there for the long term.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and the small business Minister for all the work they continue to do on this matter. I want to raise the question I raised last year about problems with the quality of imported steel, particularly in the construction industry. What work is the Department continuing to do on that?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. British steel is known for its quality worldwide, not just at home. There have been cases where companies have come to regret some of the steel they have imported. It is important that the Government continue to play a role, alongside the industry, to highlight that.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): The Secretary of State speaks of urgency when it comes to the pension consultation, but does he agree that if he had acted with urgency years ago, when we raised the underlying problems, we would not be in the desperate situation we are in now?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady is right to mention urgency, and that is why this Government are acting as quickly as they can. To be fair, she should speak to her party leadership and ask why, in the last Parliament, the then Leader of the Opposition, shadow Chancellor and shadow Business Secretary did not use the word "steel" once in the House of Commons.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's efforts to save as many steel jobs as possible, and he obviously also has to look at the pension funds. Would any prospective change to pensions legislation include a ballot of scheme members so that they could give their approval?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Under the current scheme rules, the trustees have the right to make the changes they have proposed, but what is preventing them from doing so is legislation. When the trustees discuss the issue and communicate with their members, it is important that they provide full information.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The Secretary of State mentioned the support of the First Minister and the trade unions. Likewise, Plaid Cymru is resolute in its support of the steel industry; in fact, we proposed some practical and detailed measures that would have supported it many weeks ago. However, does he accept that our support is contingent on the pensions of current steelworkers and steel pensioners not being affected?

Sajid Javid: If the consultation proposals do not go ahead—it is important to note that the Government have not made a decision—it is very likely that the scheme will end up in the Pension Protection Fund,

because of the size of its deficit. Of course, we and officials are happy to discuss the issue in more detail with the hon. Gentleman, but when he makes his determination I urge him to keep in mind what the alternative might be.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the actions that have been taken so far. He will be aware, however, that this is not the only industry or business where the company is in distress and pensions are affected. The BHS situation, for instance, affects employees in my constituency. Will he, therefore, confirm that this proposal is being considered only because of the desperate need to save jobs in the steel industry, and that any changes would apply purely to the company in question?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have excellent protection for pensions when things go wrong in this country. We can all be proud of that. I think that we all agree that this is a unique situation. The Government said that we would look at all options and it is right that we have this consultation.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The Secretary of State said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) that this issue was not related to the mineworkers pension scheme, but there are lessons to be learned from it. Members need to understand that in 1994 it was estimated that the Treasury would get £2 billion out of the scheme over 25 years, but it looks like it will get £8 billion over 25 years, when retired miners and miners' widows are struggling to survive. That is the lesson. What is the Treasury going to take out of the proposal if it is involved? Let us not let what happened in 1994 happen again.

Sajid Javid: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the options that may have been used in the past are not being considered. The consultation document is clear and relates specifically to the British Steel pension scheme.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Thousands of members of the pension scheme at the old Round Oak steelworks in my constituency may need a buyer to ensure that we have a stable steel industry, but one of the obstacles to securing such a buyer has been the withdrawal of trade credit insurance over recent weeks. Will the Secretary of State do everything he can to ensure that appropriate guarantees are available?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. The provision of trade credit is a commercial matter for Tata, but I am confident from what I have seen that the company can identify solutions. We are monitoring the situation very closely.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's reassurance that Tata remains committed to being a responsible seller. Will he confirm that Tata has responsibilities in relation to the pension scheme and that we will make sure that it delivers on them, in partnership with other stakeholders, in order to deliver the Secretary of State's stated aspiration that no pensioner will be worse off after the process is completed?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the scheme sponsor, Tata Steel UK, has responsibilities to the pension scheme. The reality is that the scheme is in a deficit of, depending on how we measure it, anywhere between £700 million and £1.5 billion, and perhaps even higher on a buy-out basis. It is well understood that the company is not able to cover that deficit because of its financial troubles. That is why the scheme trustees have made their proposal, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that, while we should not rush to any decision, it is right to consider it.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that paragraphs 141, 142 and 143 of the consultation are clear that, should the Government decide to regulate for change on indexation, revaluation or transfer, and the scheme were then to make a surplus, that surplus would be used in the best interests of members and not transferred out?

Sajid Javid: I can confirm that, should the changes proposed by the trustees take place, whatever surplus or change to the value of the scheme they bring about will be for the benefit of the members and no one else.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): I declare a financial interest for the 30 years I worked in the steel industry and the pension I receive, although it is meagre compared with the amount I will be entitled to next year for 30 years in this House. Should we not recall that steelworkers have served the nation well in an industry that is usually dirty, usually dangerous and always skilled? It is right that we look at the situation—I respect the difficulties of this—and say that the nation cannot have a manufacturing base unless it is built on foundations of steel. Is there not something repugnant about expecting pensioners, who have given so much, to pay for this rather than expecting the nation, which owes so much to the steel industry, to do so?

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the steel industry is absolutely vital. It is important for our economic security and our national security, and that is why the Government will do everything we can and leave no stone unturned in our attempts to find a long-term, sustainable solution for Tata's assets in the UK.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The steel industry has been crying out for the lesser duty rule to be scrapped, but the Government have shown utter reluctance to do that. UK Steel recently brought forward a possible pragmatic solution to the lesser duty issue to change how tariffs are calculated without necessarily scrapping the rule outright. What is the Secretary of State's response to that proposal?

Sajid Javid: There was a meeting of the EU trade council last week, which the Minister for Trade and Investment attended. We think that improvements could be made to the trade defence mechanisms, particularly around speeding up investigations and reviewing how duties are calculated. We do not think that there is evidence to support changing the lesser duty rule, but further improvements can be made.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Tata Steel products plant in my constituency is part of the sale deal with Greybull. I thank the Minister for Small

Business, Industry and Enterprise for the meetings she has had and the discussions we have had to secure that site. The workers at the plant are very concerned about their pensions. Some of them have been there for more than 40 years, and they are distressed and worried. They have been loyal employees, and they have given their working life to the plant. Will the Minister assure me that he understands how worried they are, and will he give them an assurance that they will get their full pensions?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady rightly refers to the hard work of the steelworkers—those in the industry now and those who have worked for it in the past—in this pension scheme. It is absolutely right that we listen to the trustees and see whether there is anything that the Government can do to bring about a better outcome. That is why we have announced the consultation. I am sure that when the hon. Lady has had time to go through it in detail, we will be able to speak further about the best way to take that forward.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): What consideration have the Government given to the impact that steel industry problems will have on the manufacturing industry and the economy across these islands and particularly in Northern Ireland, where rolled steel and other products are imported through Warrenpoint harbour and docks in my constituency?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady highlights the importance of the steel industry to manufacturing in the UK, whether it is our auto industry or our aerospace industry, and to the infrastructure needs of this country. That is one reason why we are doing everything we can to help.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): May I thank the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise for coming to visit Outokumpu and representatives of Forgemasters in my constituency, and for enabling my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and me to join in the conversation? That was really helpful. For the future not merely of Tata but of firms such as Forgemasters and Outokumpu, when are the Government going to act to take away from them the unfair burden of having to pay 85% more for their energy than do their competitors in Germany?

Sajid Javid: Again, the issue of energy comes up in the House, and hon. Members are right to raise it. That is why we have taken action with the compensation scheme, which is now effective and which is helping all steelmaking companies, including Outokumpu, and that is why we are going further with the exemption. We keep the matter continually under review.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): There are 133,000 members of this pension scheme, and I should say that they include many of my constituents, and my father. Given the enormous amount of work that so many people have put into their pensions, does the Secretary of State agree that even though time is extremely short in this four-week consultation, in order to be fair to all those people it must be as wide as possible and consider both the short-term and the long-term effects?

Sajid Javid: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have explained the sense of urgency in finding a credible buyer for Tata's steel business in the UK. He is absolutely right to stress that the consultation should be wide-reaching and that we should make sure that it brings out the fullest information possible so that when a decision is made, it is made with all that information in mind.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Recently, Conservative MEPs were split over granting the Chinese Government market economy status. Can the Minister confirm for the House whether the Government's position is still to grant market economy status?

Sajid Javid: The EU Commission is doing a detailed assessment of the question of market economy status for China. We await the outcome of that, and then we will respond. It is worth reminding the hon. Gentleman that even if China was granted market economy status, it would not prevent us from taking action on tariffs.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We ought to remind ourselves what pensions are: deferred income. I have some concerns when I hear the Business Secretary talking about a scheme that could go from a deficit of £750 million to one of £1.5 million and end up, as a consequence of the proposed changes, in surplus. We should recall that that is cash that should go to pensioners. Before the House votes on the matter, as it will have to do, we need the full actuarial assumptions so that we can understand the implications. We need to have a proper and thorough debate on the matter and consider the consequences for other occupational pension schemes. These issues are very serious and must be debated fully.

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Much more information needs to be available on any proposal that is brought to the House. As I say, the Government have not made a decision on this, but I think it is entirely responsible of the Government to listen to what the trustees have to say at this point—after all, they are legally responsible and have fiduciary responsibility for all their members—and to put these proposals in the consultation. Before action, if any, is taken, there needs to be a lot more information.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The steel industry would not be in the state it is in were it not for dumped Chinese steel. Does the Minister personally back market economy status for China, which could make the problem much worse?

Sajid Javid: It is fair for the hon. Gentleman to raise the issue of Chinese steel, because we have all seen the massive increase in Chinese output of steel over the last decade, but it would be wrong for Members to assume

that that is the only issue facing the industry. Regarding market economy status, as I mentioned, a review is being conducted by the Commission. Once it has reported, we will consider it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): The penultimate choice: Geraint Davies.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Five years ago, I asked the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time whether he understood that the Chancellor—he is just taking his seat—

“unilaterally setting the minimum price for carbon in Britain will drive out inward investors such as Tata Steel”

in Swansea Bay. He responded:

“I will of course listen to the hon. Gentleman, but I think that Ratan Tata knows a bit more about his business than he does.”—
[*Official Report*, 30 March 2011; Vol. 526, c. 338.]

Having failed Tata, will the Secretary of State now promise, first, fully to fund the pension fund, indexed to RPI, so that we do not short-change pensioners or cause contagion in the pension industry; and, secondly, to ensure a 25% Government share for the long run so that investors, whether Tata or others, have confidence investing in the future—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the Secretary of State.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of energy costs. He should bear it in mind that although it is an important component of steelmaking, the total cost is often in the low single digits. Of course, that does not make it unimportant, and that is why we have taken action. We have introduced compensation and we are moving towards exemption, which will help.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Last but certainly not least, Madeleine Moon.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Talking to steelworkers yesterday, I heard over and over again how highly skilled members of the workforce were being poached by other industries. Does the Secretary of State appreciate the importance of maintaining the confidence of the skilled workforce in the steel industry? Perhaps one way he could do that would be to give an assurance today that public sector contracts will always specify a high percentage of British-made steel.

Sajid Javid: I hope the hon. Lady will agree that the Government have done a great deal to bring confidence to the sales process through changes in procurement, where for the first time we have allowed for economic and social factors to be taken into account when making those decisions. In addition, I think that what the Government have said about helping with finance on commercial terms has helped to provide confidence to the industry.

Point of Order

12.59 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Have you had any notice about whether a Communities and Local Government Minister intends to make a statement on devolution to a combined authority in East Anglia? As we speak, the chief executive of Adnams brewery and Lord Heseltine are shuttling around the three counties of East Anglia offering jobs, offering budgets, getting rid of public bodies and, in short, rearranging this country's constitutional settlement on the hoof. Is it not incumbent on Ministers to explain to the House what changes are envisaged and to demonstrate that there is proper accountability for such decisions in respect of existing and future legislation?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I have just checked, so I can say that we have received no notice—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman might be interested to hear the response, although I presume he knows it already. I assure him that we have had no notification at this stage. Nothing has been received by the Clerk or the Speaker's Office. I can, however, tell him that Government Front Benchers are all ears and will be taking that point away. It is certainly now on the record.

Let us see whether we can now make some progress.

Debate on the Address

[6TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 25 May).

Question again proposed,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

The Economy and Work

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected amendment (e) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and amendments (c) and (d), which will be moved formally at the end of the debate.

1.1 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I beg to move amendment (e), at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to deliver for working people, to protect public services and to address the black hole in the public finances; further regret that the Government's economic policy has unfairness at its core and includes tax cuts for the wealthy while failing to deal with inequality; regret the refusal of the Scottish Government to use its new tax powers to put an end to austerity in Scotland; regret that the Government is presiding over the worst decade for pay growth in nearly a century; call on the Government to adopt Labour's Fiscal Credibility Rule to invest in a sustainable economy for the future and to adopt Labour's Tax Transparency Enforcement Programme to tackle tax avoidance; regret that the Government has failed to defend the UK steel industry, believe the Government should reform the lesser duty rule and call on the Government to give Parliament a vote on giving China market economy status and to adopt Labour's 4 Point Plan to save the steel industry as a part of a long-term industrial strategy; further call on the Government to reverse the cuts to Universal Credit work allowances; and call on the Government to abandon its misguided proposals to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998.”

I rise to speak to the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, myself and several colleagues.

Last week was the first time I had actually visited the other place to listen to Her Majesty read the Queen's Speech. Usually, I avoid the crush and stay here to have a chat with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner). I have to say that my admiration for the Queen was immensely increased by her ability to keep a straight face while reading the fictional drivel that is called the Queen's Speech.

The Queen's Speech before us demonstrates conclusively the massive distance between the Chancellor and the real world. It opened with an extraordinary piece of doublespeak. The Government apparently think we live in a “strengthening economy”. They are seemingly not paying attention to their own statistics and their own forecasts. After precipitating the slowest recovery in modern British history, the Chancellor is now presiding over a recovery built on sand. Business investment has slumped again—by 0.5% in the first quarter, according to this morning's figures—and the Office for Budget

Responsibility's most recent forecasts are for downward revisions in business investment across the life of this Parliament. Consumer debt is rising at record rates, and is forecast to remain at unprecedented levels. The current account deficit has reached record highs. We are borrowing more than ever before from the rest of the world as a result. We are not, as the Queen's Speech claimed "living within our means"—far from it, on the Government's own figures.

Productivity has slumped under this Government. The gap between what the average hour worked in Britain produces and what the average hour worked in the US, France or Germany produces is bigger than it has been for a generation. Every hour worked in Germany produces one third more, on average, than it does here. Low productivity is the sign of a weakened, damaged economy. It means lower wages and more insecurity. The slump that has occurred in productivity has been far worse in this country under this Chancellor than in any comparable G7 economy. It is what has caused the Office for Budget Responsibility to revise its future forecasts downwards.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend accept that in the 10 years of the Labour Government to 2008—pre-crash—the economy grew by 40% and that, after the banking crash, we left debt at 55% of the economy in 2010, a figure that is now 83%? Does that not show a failure to grow the economy effectively or to manage productivity?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I just say to the hon. Gentleman that he has already tested the patience of the House and should not continue to do so? I care about colleagues on both sides of this House and will make sure that everybody gets in, so—unfortunately—interventions must be very short. The list of speakers is very long, and I do not want any Members to miss out.

John McDonnell: I do not want to be discourteous to any Members, but as you suggest, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take only a limited number of interventions.

On the crash, let us be clear—[*Interruption.*] Well, let us talk about the crash. The policy of deregulating the banking system, turning the City of London into a casino, was the policy pursued by the Conservative Government for the previous 30 years.

Let us move on to the criterion of growth. Growth has been revised downwards for every year for the rest of this decade, and when the OBR revised its forecasts downwards, the Chancellor's entire Budget plan was shot to pieces. He has been left with a £4.8 billion black hole of committed spending, but there is no committed funding. It is nonsensical to claim, as the Government's Queen's Speech did, that the public finances are being placed on a "secure footing" when there are gaping holes in the Budget and the Institute for Fiscal Studies thinks there is only a 50:50 chance of meeting the Government's own fiscal surplus target. This is betting the nation's finances on the equivalent of tossing a coin. There is nothing responsible and there is nothing "secure" in setting unrealistic and politically motivated targets for public spending cuts.

It is useless to preach to us about the need for a "stronger economy" when, by his actions in office for six years, the Chancellor has methodically undermined

the economy. This was his choice. Austerity was a political choice, not an economic necessity. We all now live and are still living with its consequences. Because it was the wrong choice to make, the Chancellor has failed, and it is the British people who are bearing the cost.

The Chancellor has piled failure upon failure, but at the centre of it all is the failure to sustain productivity. Productivity is the key to growth in any modern economy, and the surest way to achieve increased productivity is through increased investment. Increased investment means installing new equipment and replacing old infrastructure, yet business investment remains weak. When business investment is weak, the Government should step up to make sure vital, world-class infrastructure is provided—from high-speed rail to high-speed broadband. There is now consensus from the International Monetary Fund to the OECD, and from the CBI to the TUC, in urging Governments—not just in this country but across the world—about the need to invest in the future, but this Government are clinging to their fiscal surplus target, which is set actually to cut real-terms Government investment over the course of this Parliament. Mr Deputy Speaker, you could not imagine a more perverse and inadequate economic policy.

Behind the failure to invest lies the failure of our economic institutions. Too many of them have been captured by special interests or place short-term gain ahead of long-term growth. We have major corporations, which are sitting on a cash pile of up to £700 billion, paying out high salaries to senior executives while failing to invest. It is no wonder that in the past month we have seen a series of shareholders revolts against the remuneration packages of some chief executives.

We have a Business Department that does not actually believe in supporting business and refuses even to mention the words "industrial strategy". In Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, we have a department for tax collection that does not believe in collecting taxes—not, at least, from major corporations. That was demonstrated by the fact that when it struck a deal with Google that reflected an effective tax rate in single digits, the Chancellor calls it a "major success". I have written to the Chancellor to make sure he urgently contacts the French authorities, so that any information they find during their investigation into Google's Paris headquarters is shared with us to give us a better understanding of Google's operations in the UK.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us exactly how much money was raised from Google when Labour was last in power?

John McDonnell: It is interesting to note that the inquiry into Google was started under the Labour Government. It is also interesting that the last assessment that was made, not by us but by the *Financial Times*—an independent organisation—said that the measures introduced by that Labour Government would reap tax rewards 10 times greater than anything introduced by this Government. After six years, the Chancellor has no one to blame but himself.

The Queen's Speech furnished us with plenty more unreal promises. The Government say that they "will support aspiration and promote home ownership".

[John McDonnell]

Tell that to the hundreds of thousands of our young people who now have no serious chance of ever owning a home of their own. Home ownership has fallen to its lowest level in decades on this Chancellor's watch. Rough sleeping has risen in London by 30% in the past year, the biggest rise since the current reporting procedures were introduced. Nearly 70,000 families are now living in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation. Nine in 10 under-35s on modest incomes could be frozen out of home ownership by 2025 according to independent analysis.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): That phenomenon is not just happening in London; we now have tents in the streets of Manchester. Is that not a shocking indictment of this Government's housing policy?

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): It is a shocking indictment of a Labour council.

John McDonnell: I have a Conservative council. In my constituency tonight I will have possibly 200 families living in bed and breakfasts. There are individuals sleeping in our parks and along the canals. In my constituency, we have reinvented the back-to-back, where one family rents the front of a house and another rents the back. We have beds in sheds rented to families. It is a disgrace. This Government have been in power for six years and homelessness has escalated.

According to the Queen's Speech, the Government will "spread economic prosperity". Tell that to the steelworkers I met in Redcar, where the Government failed even to mothball the plant to save their local futures. Tell that to the British Home Stores workers facing redundancy as their boss, Sir Philip Green—a Government adviser—stripped their business clean.

In the Queen's Speech the Government said they will "continue to support the...Northern Powerhouse."

That will be why they are closing its Sheffield office and threatening another six offices across the north with closure. That will be why, of the top 15 infrastructure projects with the most public funding, one is in the north.

In the Queen's Speech, the Government say not that they will tackle poverty and deprivation, but that they will redefine them. The Chancellor's shameful response to the 1 million people using our food banks every year is to

"introduce new indicators for measuring life chances".

His failed austerity programme has a human cost, with 500,000 more children in this country forced into poverty and nearly 13 million people now living in poverty. More than half of those people are in work. This Queen's Speech offers no solutions to those who have barely enough to feed their families and cannot pay to heat their houses. Instead, the Government will simply make sure that they are counting those people's misery properly.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Will the shadow Chancellor consider celebrating the fact that one third of the working constituents in Bexhill and

Battle are receiving a pay rise because of the national living wage, taking those people off the breadline and further up the pay scale?

John McDonnell: I would celebrate it if it was a real living wage and if many of those people were not also suffering from cuts to universal credit.

The reality is that after six years of desperate efforts to impose cuts on our economy, against the best available advice from the economics profession itself, the Chancellor is staring an entirely predictable failure in the face. He started out with such high-flown promises. There was going to be a "march of the makers", yet today, manufacturing is still smaller than in 2008. There was going to be a rebalancing of the economy, yet today for every three jobs created in London just one is created in the rest of the country. There was going to be a modernised tax service, but, as the National Audit Office pointed out in a damning report earlier this week, the quality of service at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has collapsed in the past year as a result of staffing cuts. He promised increased investment, but he cut Government investment spending and now plans to cut it further. In 2010 he forecast the fastest recovery in living memory, but he has delivered the slowest recovery in modern British history.

Let us talk about job creation. The Chancellor and his Government have, perhaps understandably, clung to the job creation figures. Every month they are greeted with rare enthusiasm by Ministers. The reality is that two thirds of those in poverty—nearly 9 million people—are in work. [Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The Treasury Bench does not need to be echoing all the way along. Can we give it a break? The Chancellor will be speaking soon and you will expect me to treat people in the same way. I expect the shadow Chancellor to be heard, not shouted down. [Interruption.] Now, I have been very good so far, but I do not want to hear any more. I am sure that the Whips Office could do with someone to go and make a cup of tea. If they do not want one, I might later.

John McDonnell: Mr Deputy Speaker, you are a class act. The shout was, "Do we welcome the jobs?" Of course we do, but let us be clear: too many of the jobs created since 2010 have been poorly paid and insecure. Some 800,000 people are now on zero-hours contracts. Insecurity at work has been made worse by the undermining of employment rights by the Government. There is no need for that.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Trussell Trust, which provides the food bank in Southwark, is providing food bank support to hundreds of people in work? It estimates that 10% of the people it serves in central London are in work.

John McDonnell: We welcome new jobs, but insecurity and poor pay mean that the numbers in work who are going along to get support from food banks is growing rather than reducing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

John McDonnell: I will press on, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I know we are under time pressure.

All this is the direct result of a failure to invest. Too many businesses have substituted cheap labour for expensive investment. To be frank, they cannot be blamed for that, as the Government have set the lead, cutting their own investment spending. Low investment and weak productivity have real-world consequences. They mean talent wasted and opportunities lost. Some people are stretched to breaking point, working long hours just to make ends meet. Others are left to languish, desperately searching for extra hours. Even the Government's own forecasters do not expect wages to recover before 2020.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: I will in a second. Millions of people are now self-employed, but their average earnings have fallen by 22% since the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) became Chancellor. The Queen's Speech tells us that the Government plan to create an economy

“where work is rewarded.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who work hardest are being punished with cuts to tax credits, but tax dodgers and the super-rich are rewarded with tax cuts.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): On the subject of jobs, the former Leader of the Opposition—he is a proven winner who the shadow Chancellor and the current Leader of the Opposition want back on the Front Bench—said that the Government's policy would cost 1.2 million jobs. Does the shadow Chancellor concede that that was plain wrong?

John McDonnell: As I said earlier, rather than invest, employers have tried to use cheap labour, and that has had an impact on wages and living conditions, which is unacceptable.

This Government have failed and will continue to fail on every measure they set themselves. They have failed in their target to reduce the debt, on their welfare cap target, and on their target to close the deficit. The Government have lost their way. Gone is the pretence of being the new “workers party”, as was trumpeted so loudly last summer. That disappeared when they started cutting in-work benefits. The Government wander around from crisis to crisis, looking for another U-turn to make. Cuts to personal independence payments were scrapped, as was forced academisation. Measures to address the tampon tax and cuts to renewables subsidies were abandoned. Only one policy directive seems to hold this sorry excuse for a Government together, and that is the policy—in defiance of all sound economic advice—to impose spending cuts of a viciousness not seen in this country for generations.

There is consensus across this House that a strong economy is the foundation on which all else can be built. This Government have not created a strong economy—strong on rhetoric perhaps, and strong on creative accountancy, as the last Budget revealed, but the Chancellor's economy is a jerry-built structure that rests on a recovery built on sand. The Chancellor has had plenty of opportunities to “fix the roof when the

sun was shining”—as he so memorably put it in happier times—but he has simply failed. That would have meant taking a different approach, and we all hope that once the referendum is out of the way, the economy will pick up. Without change, however, the trajectory for our economy is clear.

We are trapped in a low-wage, low-skill, low-investment and low-productivity economy. We need a Government who adopt a sensible and credible fiscal rule, enabling long-term and patient investment in our economy, and we need a Government who use record low interest rates to invest in the future. As a minimum, the Government should now invest in the infrastructure, skills and technology that can help to transform how this economy operates. We need a Government who clamp down on tax avoidance. They could go further and overhaul a tax system that is manifestly failing to levy fair rates on those who can pay the most.

We need a Government with an industrial policy who back the steel industry, and who work with our European partners to clamp down on the flooding of our markets with cheap subsidised Chinese steel. The Government could also seek to transform the institutions that govern our economy, from the Treasury to the great corporations, unlocking potential that is otherwise wasted when vested interests dominate decision-making. The Queen's Speech was an opportunity for the Government to accept that austerity has failed and to change course, but it was not taken. If the Government cannot write a speech for Her Majesty to undo the damage they have inflicted and set out a confident course for this country's economy, it is clearly time for Labour to lead the way.

Let us be explicit: Labour rejects the failed and cruel austerity programme adopted by this Government. Instead, working in partnership with business, entrepreneurs and workers, Labour would create an entrepreneurial state to support innovation, create wealth, and drive growth, and we would share the proceeds of that growth fairly. By investing in our economy, Labour would lay the foundations of a new society that is radically fairer, more equal, and more democratic—an alternative based on a prosperous economy that is economically sound, environmentally sustainable, and where such prosperity is shared by all.

1.23 pm

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): On the last day of debate on the Queen's Speech I rise to support our plan, which offers security and opportunity to working people in this country. That is what the British people entrusted us to deliver in the general election almost exactly a year ago, and that is what we commit to providing in the programme for the coming year.

There is, of course, a bold programme of social reform. We offer the biggest reform of the prison service since the Victorian era, so that we protect the public, and punish wrongdoers while also giving them a chance to rehabilitate themselves and contribute to society. We will overhaul social care and adoption to improve the life chances of some of the most vulnerable young people in our country, and we will continue to improve our education system, raising standards in schools so that our children are equipped with the skills they will need to lead fulfilling lives. We will reform our universities

[Mr George Osborne]

so that they remain the best in the world, and are agents for social mobility at the forefront of expanding human knowledge. We will address the crisis of childhood obesity that is damaging our children's health and threatens to overwhelm our health service unless we act with a new sugar tax on soft drinks. None of those reforms to improve our healthcare, security and social care would be possible without the bedrock of financial stability and prosperity that our long-term economic plan is delivering.

Geraint Davies: Does the Chancellor accept that if the best universities raise their prices, the poorest will be deterred from going? Instead of getting the best students, we will get the richest, which is simply wrong.

Mr Osborne: I do not agree with that. Evidence shows that as a result of university reforms introduced by the Labour Government—which the hon. Gentleman used to support—and by the coalition Government and now this Conservative Government, not only are a record number of students going to our universities, but a record number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are going. I find it extraordinary that a Labour party that introduced tuition fees is now promising to scrap them and create a £10 billion hole that will presumably be filled by taxes that are paid by those who did not go to university and have lower incomes. That is the so-called progressive policy of the so-called progressive Labour party.

Neil Coyle: The Chancellor says he is proud of the Government's track record on social care. How many fewer older and disabled people receive social care services from local authorities now than when he took office in 2010?

Mr Osborne: We have put more money into social care, and we have allowed the precept to be applied by councils, many of which have taken up that option. As a result, more money will go into social care in the coming years. That is what we have done, but we could not do any of those things such as support social care or universities without a sound economic policy. I listened in complete incredulity to yet another speech from yet another shadow Chancellor promising yet more billions of pounds of spending, borrowing, and extra taxes. It is as if the scorching experience of the financial crash eight years ago, and the crippling deficit with which Labour saddled this country, never happened.

When the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) mentioned the record of the Labour Government he kept saying, "Up until 2008", as if he had forgotten that the biggest crash in modern history was while the Labour party was in office. It is a bit like saying to Mrs Lincoln, "Apart from the assassination, did you enjoy the play?"

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): Will the Chancellor remind the House of whether he met his deficit target for 2015?

Mr Osborne: The deficit has come down by another £16 billion. When I first stood at the Dispatch Box as Chancellor of the Exchequer we had a budget deficit of

close to 11% of our national income, and £1 in every £4 that we spent on everything from hospitals to schools and police had to be borrowed. This year that figure is projected to be below 3%, and we are projected to have a surplus by the end of this Parliament.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Will the Chancellor also remind the House what he has managed to do to employment rates in this country while cutting the deficit?

Mr Osborne: A record number of people are in work and we have created almost 2.5 million jobs in this economy. Yesterday at the end of my remarks I referred to a report that the Labour party has produced on its future. This independent inquiry is chaired by the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas). Let us see what Labour says about Labour:

"A tsunami of aspirant voters sank Labour... Voters abandoned Labour because they believed Labour lacked economic credibility... the perception was that it would be profligate in government... Labour is losing its working-class support... Labour has marched away from the views of voters... Labour is becoming a toxic brand."

That is the Labour party's own verdict on the Labour party. It concludes by saying—

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely this is meant to be a debate about the Queen's Speech, not the Labour party?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): How the Chancellor chooses to use his speech is up to him. I would have thought that, since it is his Queen's Speech, his focus would be on that, but it is up to him.

Mr Osborne: We cannot talk about the Queen's Speech unless we know what the alternative might look like. This is what the Labour party says about itself: it says the Labour party is becoming increasingly "irrelevant to the... working people in the country."

If we think Labour has learned any lessons, this is what has happened today. The leader of the Labour party has today appointed someone called Andrew Fisher as the head of policy for the Labour party. This is a man who campaigned against Labour candidates at the general election in Croydon. This is a man who took part in the 2010 student riots and boasted about breaking through police lines, scaring the police and hurling abuse at them. This is what his economic policy consists of: public ownership of all land in the country; nationalising all banks; and returning to a three-day week. This is the man who has just become the Labour party's head of policy.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is interesting that the Chancellor is talking about Labour's future when his own is so shrouded in uncertainty. On his own record, has debt as a percentage of GDP gone up or down since he became Chancellor?

Mr Osborne: An 11% budget deficit means the debt is added to every year. Until the deficit comes right down, we cannot get the debt down. That is what we are doing and why we want to avoid an 11% budget deficit.

Another sign of how the Labour party is changing is the motion it is asking us to vote on tonight. It contains an intriguing clause that relates to Scotland. It states that they

“regret the refusal of the Scottish Government to use its new tax powers to put an end to austerity in Scotland”.

That is code for Labour wanting to put up taxes in Scotland. If it does not want the Scottish Government to use their tax powers to put up taxes to put an end to austerity in Scotland, how does it propose to do it? Labour fought the election in Scotland proposing a 1p increase in the basic rate of income tax. That was the Scottish Labour party’s policy, which was so successful in that election. Here, the UK Labour party is putting that into a parliamentary motion and asking the Labour party to vote on it tonight. We have a report from the Labour party saying that it is irrelevant to working people; the head of policy wants to nationalise land and return to a three-day week; and the parliamentary Labour party will be voting tonight to increase the basic rate of income tax. That is the state of the Labour party today.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The Chancellor has taken us through what has been happening in the Labour party recently. May I ask him to comment on what has been said about him and his leader by the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who took through welfare reform over the past five years? He called the Prime Minister “disingenuous” and the Chancellor a liar and “Pinocchio”. Where does that leave you, Chancellor?

Mr Osborne: We worked together to bring welfare bills down and to make work pay. I am working with the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) to carry on that record in government. We will go on building that strong economy and the sound public finances that underpin a fair society.

Julian Knight: I thank the Chancellor for giving way. He is being most generous. I note that the Chancellor has been reading from the “Labour’s Future” report. I wonder whether he has seen the executive summary, which states:

“Labour lost because voters didn’t believe it would cut the deficit. The Tories didn’t win despite their commitment to cut spending and the deficit: they won because of it. The Tories were trusted to manage the country’s finances, Labour was not.”

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If the verdict of this report is that Labour is on life support, the policies of the shadow Chancellor are “do not resuscitate”. That is what he is condemning the Labour party to.

John McDonnell: The right hon. Gentleman is more interested in talking about Labour’s policies than his own. May I remind him that the Tory party just lost every mayoral election in the recent elections?

Mr Osborne: Labour had the worst results for an Opposition party in more than 30 years and were reduced to third place in Scotland. And Labour Members think that that is a good set of results! As far as we are concerned, if they want to carry on in this parallel

universe that suits us just fine. Meanwhile, we are going to get on with governing the country, improving the economy and reforming our society.

The Government have made huge progress in the past six years. We inherited one of the weakest economies in the advanced world, which had had one of the biggest crashes. It is now one of the fastest-growing economies in the advanced world. We inherited an economy in which millions of people risked losing their job, and hundreds of thousands had. We now have a record number of people in work. We reduced the budget deficit. Our commitment to the northern powerhouse has seen investment projects in the region increase by 120% in the past two years. The verdict of the IMF in its recent examination of the British economy is clear:

“The UK’s recent economic performance has been strong, and considerable progress has been achieved in addressing underlying vulnerabilities.”

It said growth was robust and that

“the unemployment rate has fallen substantially, employment has reached an historic high, the fiscal deficit has been reduced, and financial sector resilience has increased.”

That is the independent verdict of the IMF. In the past, article IVs have been critical of the British economy; now they celebrate what we have achieved.

Many challenges remain, of course, and that is what the economic reforms in the Queen’s Speech will address. There is the immediate crisis in the global steel industry. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has just outlined to the House all our efforts to secure jobs here at home. There is a long-term challenge facing western societies of how we increase productivity growth. Improvements in productivity drive lasting improvements in living standards. That is a challenge for all countries. Indeed, the latest figures today from the United States show that productivity is set to fall this year for the first time in 30 years.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman mentions the steel industry. The judgment of the people of Teesside is not as favourable as he seems to think it might be. There is a nationwide proposal for innovation, research and development on the table from the Materials Processing Institute that would propel our steel industry through the creation of academy centres. Will the Chancellor encourage the Business Secretary to attend the site and examine the proposal for himself? It would benefit the whole industry,

Mr Osborne: It has been a very difficult time for steelworkers and their families on Teesside. We have provided financial assistance to those families. We have worked with local Labour authorities to help to remediate the site and bring more jobs and opportunities into the area. I will take a very close look at the proposal. As part of the Government’s industrial policy, we are supporting research and innovation through such things as the Catapult centres, which have been a real success.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I am listening carefully to the Chancellor’s comments about investment in research and innovation, which is important for improving productivity in the steel industry. On that basis, will he reconsider the case for business rate relief for the installation of new plant and machinery by big industries such as steel?

Mr Osborne: I personally looked closely at this proposal, and it would cost more than £3 billion a year. It is a very expensive tax reduction, only a small proportion of which would go to the steel industry and none of which would go to the steel industry in Wales, where rates are devolved to the Welsh Government. That is why we have not taken that step. We have done other things to reduce business rates for small businesses and changed the uprating of business rates for all firms, including large industrial firms, to the consumer prices index, which will bring a massive saving over many years, but I judged that the hon. Lady's proposal to help the steel industry was a sledgehammer and that only a small amount would get to the steel industry. It is better to use other forms of direct support for the industry. That is why we took the decision we did in the Budget. We thought there were better ways of helping.

The economic reforms in the Queen's Speech continue what we are trying to do to improve the productivity growth of the British economy so that Britain, unlike many other advanced western economies, sees its living standards not stall but continue to rise. That is why we have increased expenditure on transport infrastructure, even in straitened times, and many projects, such as Crossrail, are now close to completion. That is why we introduced the apprenticeship levy—to drive up skills—accepting that low skills had been an endemic problem in the British economy for many decades; and that is why, in part, we introduced a national living wage—not just as a measure of social justice but to tackle low pay and drive up productivity in the workforce.

We will not rest there. The Queen's Speech sets out a raft of other things. Measures in the Finance Bill will continue to make work pay by raising tax thresholds, helping 20 million people with an income tax cut and taking 4 million of the lowest-paid out of tax altogether. We are also making big changes in corporate taxation by closing loopholes, restricting interest relief and preventing the diverting of profits, while reducing rates of business tax to ensure that we remain the most competitive place in the world to do business.

The digital economy Bill will ensure that Britain remains at the forefront of the information revolution and provide the broadband network that is the equivalent of the canals, railways and motorways of the past that previous generations built for us. That is why, as mentioned in the Queen's Speech, we are introducing the legal right for anyone to request a 10 megabit connection and encouraging more private investment into this vital artery of the modern economy; and why we are making sure that Britain is at the forefront in the revolution in driverless cars.

We are boosting competition with the better markets Bill and putting our new National Infrastructure Commission on a permanent statutory footing, for which people in both political parties have been calling for decades. It will now be one of the permanent fixtures of our country and has already made recommendations, under the excellent leadership of Lord Adonis, to improve transport connections in London, with Crossrail 2; to improve connections in the northern powerhouse and across the Pennines; and to plan for the future of our energy supplies by being able to store energy. All those recommendations, accepted by the Government, are now in the Queen's Speech. I am also delighted that we

have reached an agreement with Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, that Andrew Adonis will help develop the Crossrail 2 proposal, which is vital for our capital.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The Chancellor mentioned energy. Despite the Government's welcome move on the headline rate of tax, a further 475 jobs, predominantly in Aberdeen, have been lost at Shell. Despite their welcome announcement, it is clear that more needs to be done. Will he engage with us and the industry, through the Finance Bill, to focus particularly on exploration so that we can find and get at the 20 billion barrels of oil that remain in the North sea?

Mr Osborne: I saw the unwelcome news about the Shell job losses. Working with the Scottish Government, we will do everything we can to help the people who have lost their jobs and make sure that this industry, vital to our country, is protected at a time of low global oil prices. That is why we have worked with Aberdeen on the new city deal and to improve the harbour; and that is why, in the Budget, we chose, as the big tax measures in this area, the abolition of petroleum revenue taxation and a halving of the supplementary charge. We are ready and stand willing to help this industry at this difficult time, because it is world class and we want to make sure we get as much oil out of the North sea basin as we can.

We are also addressing, in the Queen's Speech, other challenges in the British economy, such as the low savings rate, which we have had for many decades. We have reformed pensions and given pensioners access to their pension pots—250,000 pensioners have already made use of that innovation. I can also tell the House that today at our request—we asked it to impose a charge cap on exiting those pensions—the Financial Conduct Authority has announced that there will be just a 1% cap, which is lower than the range it was consulting on.

The Queen's Speech also contains a proposal for the lifetime ISA that I announced in the Budget, so that young people no longer have to choose between saving for their home and saving for their retirement. In the words of Martin Lewis, the personal finance guru, it is the biggest change in personal savings this country has ever seen.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): Martin Lewis, a very good man, just so happens to come from Weaver Vale. Will the Chancellor remind the House that pensions have gone up by more than £1,000 since the Government introduced their measures in 2010? I am proud of what they have done for pensioners through the triple lock. Will he remind the House of the good work we have done?

Mr Osborne: As a result of the triple lock on pensions, we have made huge strides in eliminating pensioner poverty in this country and seen the biggest real increases in the basic state pension for generations. I am proud that that has happened under a Conservative Government.

One of our biggest reforms, which also features in the Queen's Speech, is the radical devolution of power across our United Kingdom. We have already devolved substantial new tax and spending powers to Scotland; there is a major piece of proposed legislation for Wales;

we are creating powerful new elected mayors, which are proving an attractive opportunity for shadow Cabinet members who think that their careers are not going anywhere in this place; and we have radical reforms to business rates, which people have talked about for many decades. When we came to office in 2010—when the Prime Minister first became Prime Minister—80% of council revenues were handed down in central Government grants, almost all of which were ring-fenced. Now, by 2020, 100% of local government revenues will stay with local communities. That is giving power to the people in a devolution revolution.

With record employment and one of the fast-growing economies in the advanced world, it would be easy to think, “Job done”, and to take our foot off the accelerator. By doing so, we could avoid controversy, duck confrontation and settle for a quiet life, but if we did that we would be failing the British people and would watch as their living standards and opportunities slowly declined. I did not come into politics to see that happen. I do not want to turn around to my children, as we watch other nations power ahead, make the new scientific advances, build the new high-speed railways and embrace the latest technologies, and say, “That used to be us. That used to be Great Britain.” I want this country and the people living in it to be the great success story of the 21st century. To make that happen, there will be controversy and battles ahead—making change and confronting vested interests are always difficult—but this Queen’s Speech demonstrates that we are ready and that when it comes to standing up for the hard-working people of Britain, we are up for the fight.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I want to warn the House that there will be a speech limit of four minutes after the SNP spokesperson sits down, which will allow us to include all 41 Members wishing to speak, if there are no interventions. I would be grateful if people could bear it in mind that when they take an intervention they are taking time from Members further down the list.

1.49 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the Gracious Speech. I am conscious of the time, so I shall be as brief as I can. Before I talk about the measures contained within this Queen’s Speech, it might be worth reflecting on what is missing from it, particularly in economic terms: an alternative to Tory austerity; real action on productivity, innovation, trade and exports; and addressing the crying need for genuine inclusive growth so that people do not fall further behind and the UK does not forgo GDP growth as it has in the past over decades as a result of rising inequality. All that is absent. As to the most important steps that should have been included in this programme for government, the Government could and should have sought to reverse the damaging impact of austerity, to reverse inequality and to stop cuts to our vital public services, which actually promote a positive economic impact. Again, all those things are missing.

It is almost as if this Tory Government are so consumed with bitter in-fighting over Europe and the EU referendum that they have pared back this legislative programme to

the bare minimum required to give even the vaguest impression of a Government who are still functioning—not matter how rotten and divided they are over Europe.

The Gracious Speech could have announced an emergency summer Budget, putting an end to all the austerity that has strangled economic growth and seen the Chancellor fail to meet every single target across his key economic indicators: debt, deficit, borrowing, trade and exports. We could have had an economic plan comprising a series of economic measures to usher in an inclusive, prosperous economy through investment in infrastructure and key public services. We could have had signalled flagged-up provision for a modest increase in public expenditure. As we argued at the election, 0.5% could release something in the order of £150 billion for investment in infrastructure and our public services—spending to grow the economy, while ensuring that public sector debt and deficit continue to fall over the Parliament. That would have been sustainable and fiscally responsible.

Jeremy Quin: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten us as to whether the Scottish Parliament has any plans for an emergency Budget by using the tax-raising powers it now has?

Stewart Hosie: We are using every single power available to us, and we will use all our powers over taxation when they come. How we choose to do that will be a matter for the Scottish Government. What I suspect we will not do is to impose a 5% increase on the poorest workers in Scotland, which was a plan posited by others and led them to come third in the election.

This Queen’s Speech could have been used for the delivery of vital and urgent aid to support trade and exports, and for measures to stimulate investment and growth to turn round what is now recognised in the real world as this Chancellor’s failed stewardship of the economy, which has seen the trade deficit widen to its worst level since the crisis in 2008 and will see the Treasury miss by £300 billion its own target of doubling exports to £1 trillion by the end of this decade.

We could and should have had a fair tax Bill, simplifying the UK tax system and delivering greater tax transparency; and, vitally, measures such as a moratorium on this Government’s programme of HMRC office closures. We should have had the establishment of an independent commission to simplify the tax code and strengthen tax transparency by guaranteeing that beneficial ownership of businesses and trusts—here, in the Crown dependencies and in the overseas territories—would be made fully public.

We should have had an energy security and investment Bill, facilitating an export-led sustainable energy sector. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) said, we should have had a comprehensive strategic review of tax rates and investment allowances in the North sea. In addition, we should have had a review of securing the future energy supply of the UK and an ending of the UK Government’s commitment to the failing Hinkley C nuclear project. We should have been directing investment instead into renewable energy and into carbon, capture and storage. Those, among other initiatives, would have formed the basis of solid economic proposals to grow the economy. What we

[*Stewart Hosie*]

ended up with in economic terms was a digital economy Bill, a criminal finances Bill and a better markets Bill. I shall deal briefly with those Bills.

We understand the benefit of digital connectivity and welcome the roll-out of superfast broadband, which has the potential to boost productivity. According to a Deloitte report commissioned by the Scottish Futures Trust last year, increased digitisation could boost the Scottish economy alone by around £13 billion. Increased digitisation and reach across Scotland would also have a direct impact on improving productivity, business creation, jobs, earnings, exports and tax revenues—and many more positive outcomes for public provision. The report suggested that if Scotland were to become a world leader, we could see a significant increase in GDP, something in the order of 6,000 extra small and home-based enterprises and potentially an extra 175,000 jobs by the end of the decade.

We therefore welcome moves by the UK Government to provide digital infrastructure, but we are unconvinced that this digital economy Bill will turn round the UK's persistently poor productivity levels in the way that it might have done. We are particularly unconvinced about whether the implementation of this digital plan, particularly the broadband roll-out, will deliver—not least because we have evidence that the UK Government have failed in this regard before.

As long ago as July 2013 the National Audit Office reported on the Government's then broadband programme, saying that broadband roll-out was 22 months late. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee reported last year that the UK's target dates for broadband had been changed many times, raising concerns that the target for delivering superfast broadband to even 95% of the UK was in jeopardy—in other words, not very good with targets at all. We nevertheless welcome the UK Government's commitment to introducing a universal service obligation, not least because it was in the SNP manifesto and we believe that if it can be fulfilled, it would bring particular benefits to rural communities.

We welcome, too, Government moves to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, but the criminal finances Bill does not go far enough to combat this systemic problem. Following the release of the Panama papers, my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) called on the Prime Minister to go further with measures to crack down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, pointing out that illicit cross-border transfer financial flows are estimated at around £1 trillion a year, which is 10 times more than global foreign aid budgets combined. We believe that the Prime Minister and the Government should prioritise bilateral tax treaties, not least with places such as Panama and other tax havens, as part of the global efforts to co-ordinate better against tax avoidance.

Furthermore, we call on the UK Government to embolden compliance by guaranteeing that the beneficial ownership of companies and trusts is made fully public. It is also the case, as I alluded to earlier, that the UK has one of the most complicated tax codes in the world. That leads to a loss of tax yield and perpetuates opportunities to exploit loopholes. We have called on

the Government to bring about a just tax system, which will assist in ensuring that all taxpayers are given a fair deal.

In our alternative Queen's Speech, we call for the Treasury to convene a commission and report back within two years, following a comprehensive consultation on the simplification of the tax code. With a simplified—not a flat tax code—tax system, the Government could boost yield, encourage compliance, and avoid exploitative loopholes such as the Mayfair loophole. While we welcome the long-overdue measures by the UK Government to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, we wait with interest to see the detail of these measures.

Whatever good may come of this, however, the counterproductive decision to close 137 HMRC offices will strip local businesses and individuals throughout the United Kingdom of the support that they need to ensure that they comply with the law. If they are to tackle tax avoidance at all levels and continue to provide local support when it is needed, the UK Government must place a moratorium on HMRC office closures. We take the view that, by and large, individuals and business want to contribute to society by paying tax, and that a high proportion of the SME tax gap—caused not by fraud, but by genuine error and miscommunication—could be dealt with by removing the threat to local offices. It is extraordinary that, although tax compliance is now at the heart of much of our economic debate as it has not been for decades, the HMRC workforce have been cut by 20% since 2010.

The final Bill that comes under the broad heading of “the economy” is the better markets Bill, whose main purported benefits are to give consumers more power and choice through faster switching and more protection when things go wrong. That is welcome. The Bill would simplify the way in which economic regulators operate to make life more straightforward for business and cut red tape, and would also speed up the decisions of the Competition and Markets Authority for the benefit of businesses and consumers alike. That too is welcome.

The intention is to deliver a manifesto commitment to increase competition and consumer choice, particularly in the energy market. However, while we welcome Government moves to challenge rising energy prices by encouraging market choice, the Bill does not go far enough to combat the problem of fuel poverty at a structural level. According to the UK means of calculating fuel poverty, in 2014 some 2.5 million households were in fuel poverty. According to the methods used in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, over the last three or four years the figures have sat between 30% and 40%. The structural issue here is not a shortage of gas or electricity, it is not necessarily a shortage of competition, and it is not necessarily the ability to change suppliers quickly; it is a shortage of money to pay for the gas and electricity coming into the house.

I am sure that there are good intentions behind many of the economic measures in the Gracious Speech, but they are simply too little, too late.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): My hon. Friend has referred to fuel poverty. The Chancellor mentioned Martin Lewis. Is my hon. Friend aware that I was at a conference with Martin Lewis this week, at which he denounced universal credit as particularly hurting the

poor and their ability to save and to pay for energy? The very person whom the Chancellor mentioned is the person who is actually—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. That was a very long intervention. I have already said that there is a very limited time for a very large number of Members to speak.

Stewart Hosie: I was not aware that my hon. Friend was with Mr Lewis, but what he has said does not surprise me in the slightest. For all the talk of an increase in the minimum wage, I think that anyone on the progressive side of politics understands that a real living wage will be undermined by the Government's cuts to in-work benefits and tax credit.

The Government are failing in respect of almost every key economic indicator. They have missed nearly every target that they have set themselves. The numbers—not the rhetoric—demonstrate beyond doubt that their claim to economic credibility is in tatters. We are asking for a genuine, comprehensive plan for trade, exports, innovation and productivity, and a genuinely rebalanced and fair economy. The Chancellor said that trade and exports would underpin his strategy for growth, but the UK current account deficit now stands at a record £96 billion, its highest ever cash level. The Chancellor promised a doubling of exports to £1 trillion by the end of the year, but exports fell last year to £511 billion. They are going in the wrong direction. On innovation, we continue to compare poorly with our competitors, and the Chancellor's decision to change innovation grants to loans sends the wrong signals.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Hosie: No, I will not.

On productivity, we continue to lag behind other major economies, and our productivity rise is barely half the level of the rise that we saw during the pre-crisis period.

All those failures need a concrete plan to put them right, but instead we simply have spin and slogans such as “the march of the makers”, “the northern powerhouse” and “the long-term economic plan”. Those are empty, shallow words from a rotten, hollowed-out Government.

2.5 pm

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): The Gracious Speech tells us that

“legislation will be introduced to ensure Britain has the infrastructure that businesses need to grow.”

In the next sentence, we are promised measures to improve access to high-speed broadband. Both those commitments are of huge importance to my constituency, and to the wider Anglian region of which it forms part.

The region is badly served by transport infrastructure. It has two railway lines, both of which are inadequate. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) has chaired a great eastern main line taskforce, and I have been charged with chairing a west Anglia main line taskforce. We have both illustrated the weaknesses in the present system and the importance of those lines to the development of business in our areas, but—

understandably, given the short time that is available—I will concentrate on the west Anglia line taskforce. We have noted that, given Cambridge, Stansted, greater Harlow and the upper Lee valley opportunity area in Greater London, there is huge potential for growth, and jobs and housing will multiply over the next few years. That is a stark contrast with some of the tales of woe that we have been hearing so far during this debate.

One thing that is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech is the decision on where extra runway capacity will be provided in the London area, although one suspects that that decision will come quite soon. However, no choice will enable the capacity to be used other than, in the interim, at Stansted, and that brings into focus the inadequacy of the railway line that connects London with Stansted. It is not just a matter of getting passengers there; it is also a matter of getting the workforce there. I am proud to say that, for reasons related to the policies of the Government whom I support, the unemployment rate in my constituency has now fallen to 0.6%. Clearly, if job vacancies are to be filled, people must be conveyed to those jobs, and the railway is one of the most efficient ways of doing that. We must press on. Now that the Chancellor has made the imaginative decision to back the Crossrail 2 project, it is essential for the work in preparation for that project to begin with the four-tracking of the west Anglia main line. I hope there will soon be decisions that ensure that we do not wait beyond 2025 for the line to improve, because otherwise the date might slip to 2033, which would be unthinkable.

Broadband offers new methods of working, which may help some people to travel slightly less often than they have had to up to now. The face of rural England is changing: people are being dispersed, and some small businesses exist at the high-technology end. Superfast broadband is essential to those people and businesses, and they need clarity about what is available, whether from BT or from the other commercial providers. I hope that local authorities will be encouraged to show everyone what is available, so that implementation can take place more quickly. There must be equality of provision, so that everyone can expect the same standard.

My constituents commend the priority that has been given to those matters in the Gracious Speech.

2.9 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Chancellor for the £5 million he earmarked in the Budget for Shakespeare North. May I press him a little further and ask him to waive the VAT on the construction costs?

I want to talk today about the link between poverty, economic progress and education. Before doing so, however, I should perhaps say a word about my position on the EU referendum. In the previous referendum, in 1975, I chaired the “Huyton says no” campaign. That merry band of naysayers was a fairly eclectic group consisting of Labour party Young Socialists, the Communist party of Great Britain and two Tories who ran a ballroom dancing academy. Fortunately, the people of Huyton sensibly listened to our local MP at the time, Harold Wilson, and voted to stay in.

The argument that I want to advance today takes its inspiration—fittingly, in the centenary year of his birth—from Harold Wilson's “white heat of technology” speech.

[Mr George Howarth]

Key to his argument in 1963 was that we needed to adapt to changing economic realities by embracing the challenges presented in science and technology. It also included an element about the importance of education as a pathway out of poverty. My argument is that we now face a similar challenge. How do we compete in a rapidly changing global economy? Do we, as some international corporations would suggest, adopt zero-hours contracts and other insecure forms of employment, or do we incentivise innovation and educate and train our workforce to take advantage of the opportunities that innovation creates? The first option is, in my view, a self-defeating race to the bottom.

However, we have to face up to some uncomfortable truths, one of which is the decline in manufacturing in the UK. In 1972, 32% of the UK's GDP came from manufacturing. By 1997, that percentage was down to 14.5%, and by 2013 it had dropped further to 10.4%. The economic levers available to the Chancellor and the Government need to be remorselessly focused on creating incentives for innovation, using not only the taxation system but the export guarantee system and everything else available to ensure that the opportunities that exist in the world are brought within the reach of our country.

We also need to talk about education. We have serious problems with education in Knowsley. I do not want to go into too much detail, but we have a serious problem of under-attainment at GCSE level.

Andrew Gwynne: I just wonder how many secondary schools in Knowsley are academies.

Mr Howarth: That is the point. Out of the six secondary schools in Knowsley, four are already academies, so that is clearly not the solution to the problems we face. My own belief is that we need to start from scratch and completely rebuild the education system. Nothing should be protected from proper scrutiny or from modernisation. The curriculum, the public examination system, educational institutions and even the underlying philosophy behind education need rigorous questioning and frankly need to be radically redesigned to meet the real challenges that we face in the world. If we do not do that, areas such as Knowsley will continue to lag behind. We can, however, make bigger and bolder choices to meet the challenges and harness innovation and education as the twin engines of tackling inequality, deprivation and the random economic effects associated with where people live. Surely there is only one choice, and that choice must be progress.

2.14 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): There is nothing wrong with being an ideologue if you temper it with some restraint and reason. I confess that I am an ideologue for lower taxes, for less state regulation and for the supremacy of this Parliament. That is what I have worked for, with my colleagues, all my life here, and I judge every Queen's Speech by how it advances lower taxes, deregulation and more devolution.

However, I think we should be wary of imposing our ideas on other people in a forced manner. We used to argue consistently that the one-size-fits-all neighbourhood comprehensive was wrong and causing a decline in

educational standards. We therefore led the charge for academies, but I do not believe that we should force county councils, particularly rural county councils with small private schools, to academise all their schools. I understand why the Chancellor made that announcement in the Budget—I know where he was coming from and I agree with his long-term plans on education—but I welcome the compromise that has been made in relation to small rural private schools.

The same attitude applies to devolution and to mayors. I am a strong advocate of devolution. The fact is that central Government have imposed too much control on local government for too long. In Lincolnshire, we welcome devolution and we were prepared to have a very simple system in which powers were devolved to a board run by the leaders of the district councils and county councils, but there was no enthusiasm for an elected mayor in a large rural county. I welcome the fact that the Chancellor is still sitting in the Chamber, and I am sure that he is listening to what I am saying. I hope that he will also listen to the local people and not impose an elected mayor on us. That concept might be fine for Manchester, Birmingham or London, but it is not necessarily appropriate for a large rural county such as Lincolnshire.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I represent a large rural community that has not had the benefit of being offered a mayor. Does not my hon. Friend think it is worth trying having a mayor, to see how that might enhance rurality?

Sir Edward Leigh: We can certainly try it, but the difficulty is that we would have parish councils, district councils, a county council—which, by the way, the Conservatives have controlled for most of the last 100 years—an elected mayor, a police and crime commissioner, a Member of Parliament and a Member of the European Parliament. It would just be too much, frankly. Too many jobs for the boys!

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Would my hon. Friend consider jobs for the girls too?

Sir Edward Leigh: Absolutely. My hon. Friend has made some important contributions to our debates in the past year and I welcome what she says. I know that she has taken an interest in tax credits, and I believe that we have to make more progress in cutting welfare in order to cut the deficit, but it is probably a mistake to cut the welfare benefits or tax credits of people who are already on small incomes and depending on their tax credits. We have to give plenty of warning if we are going to do that. That is surely the lesson that we should learn from the debate on the raising of the pension age for women. We should have given proper notice of that. We did give 20 years' notice, but we did not write to every woman saying, "Dear Mrs Jones, your pension age will be increased in 20 years' time." That is what we should have done, and we should learn from that.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), I am an enthusiast for lower regulation and lower taxes, but we have the longest tax code in the world, and there is still much progress to be made in that regard. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor

knows, because I have said this to him again and again, that I hope he will try to simplify the tax and benefit system with every Budget he introduces. I hope that he will strip away allowances and converge taxes so that we no longer have armies of accountants advising people how to avoid tax. We have made all too little progress on simplifying and converging our tax system. I know that it is difficult. I know that we cannot do it all in one step. I know that we cannot have an absolutely flat tax system because the top 1% of earners pay 25% of all taxes. I know all that, but we should make more progress every year in simplifying and merging the tax system.

Before I sit down, the Chancellor talked about announcements that have been made today, but there was an important announcement on immigration figures. The fact is that we still have net migration of 300,000 people into this country every year. It is absolutely unsustainable. We welcome people from eastern Europe coming to work here. I more than any other welcome Polish people and their culture of hard work. However, net migration of 300,000 people a year, fuelled by the imposition of the living wage on businesses and by an unreformed tax credit system, is simply unsustainable, particularly for London and the south-east. There is a vision of Britain leading the world towards free trade, controlling its own borders and proclaiming the supremacy of Parliament, and that is why, on 23 June, I for one shall be voting to leave the European Union.

2.20 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh). The circulation of “Labour’s Future” on the Tory Benches is obviously having an impact on some of the policy areas outlined by the hon. Gentleman, such as the forced academisation of schools and the plight of the working poor. Today, I will focus on tax transparency and prison reform.

In the Gracious Speech, Her Majesty said:

“My government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and to strengthen national defences.”

I certainly do not disagree with those sentiments, although I would question the strength of our economy. We debate the Queen’s Speech with a referendum on our membership of the European Union looming, the outcome of which could affect the Government’s ability to turn those words into action. It is my belief that our economy and security benefit enormously from our membership of the European Union and they would be at risk should we leave. Whatever happens on 23 June, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the power and responsibility that we have today as a national Parliament to tackle the challenges facing our country and to institute change. Unlike the defeatism and politics of despair expressed by politicians arguing to leave the European Union, I proudly believe in a British democracy that allows us to act independently of the EU while strengthening Britain and the EU through our membership.

We need a strong economy, but it will work only if everyone from the cleaner to the chief executive and from the corner shop to the corporate giant is paying their fair share of tax. On prison reform, crime robs our

economy, ruins lives, demoralises communities and costs us more and more every time a prisoner returns to a life of crime.

Within the world of multinationals, aggressive tax avoidance, hidden behind corporate walls, is denying Britain and many other countries the taxes they are due. That is why tax transparency is the single most important thing that we can achieve. While international and European action is deserving of support, it should not paralyse the UK Government and stop them from taking a lead especially if multilateral proposals are not good enough. We need public, country-by-country reporting, which is why I will be seeking to amend the Finance Bill, in line with my ten-minute rule Bill of the previous Parliament, to ensure that that happens. I have cross-party support, including the support of every member of the Public Accounts Committee, and organisations dealing with development and tax transparency and fairness support my endeavours. I hope the Government will support them, too, because it is important to know not only what we should be getting, but what businesses in the developing world are doing and how developing countries are being denied what they should be taking in tax, having to rely on international aid instead.

Turning to prison reform, the Government announced that prison governors

“will be given unprecedented freedom and they will be able to ensure prisoners receive better education”,

but the story so far is not encouraging. The 2014-15 report of Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons states:

“You were more likely to die in prison than five years ago. More prisoners were murdered, killed themselves, self-harmed and were victims of assaults than five years ago.”

Assaults on staff were up 40% in the five years of the previous Government. All that comes while prison staff numbers are cut.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady recognise the role of legal highs in creating a volatile situation in prisons? Does she welcome the Government’s decision to introduce legislation to outlaw them?

Caroline Flint: Of course I do. I was proud to introduce drug testing on arrest for acquisitive crime to ensure that we could get prisoners into drug treatment before they even entered the prison system.

We had some 24,000 prison staff in 2010, but that number was reduced to just over 14,000 by June 2014. To tackle the illegal drug trade in prisons, we need staff and we need them to be able to do their job. I have three prisons in my constituency, two of which are closed. I have met Tim Beeston, governor at HMP and YOI Moorland—he is not even mentioned as the correct governor on the Ministry of Justice website—and he is committed to doing more, but he cannot do it alone. I have met and spoken to Mike Rolfe, chair of the POA, formerly the Prison Officers’ Association, about the problems facing his members and how they would like to do more. I commend the research produced by my union Community and its charter for safe operating procedures, which I am pleased to support.

We must recognise that the prison system is full of people whom the education system failed, and we need to do more. Why is it that we have mandatory assessment of literacy and numeracy, but it is not mandatory for

[Caroline Flint]

someone to undertake education while in prison to improve those skills? If sentences are too short, continuing education should be a condition of probation upon release. That requires joined-up policies in and out of prison. It requires upskilling the Prison Service staff who provide education and training. I look forward to the Government's announcement, but words are cheap; actions work.

2.26 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I welcome the reference in the Gracious Speech to improving Britain's competitiveness and making

"the United Kingdom a world leader in the digital economy."

Since 2010, the UK has—I should perhaps say the people of the UK have—created 2.9 million jobs. Jobs do not appear out of thin air; they exist because of the entrepreneurship of the people of the UK. Our unemployment rate has fallen from 8% to 5.1%. That is still too high, but it is an achievement. We need to maintain a high level of employment while tackling the major risks to our economy, which are the twin deficits of the balance of payments and the budget, and low productivity when compared with other countries. The two are interrelated. Higher productivity leads us to be more competitive, both domestically and internationally, to improved exports and lower imports, and to greater growth, with the corresponding tax revenues.

Long-term analysis of our productivity shows that there are three main issues. First is insufficient investment in research and development, the latest technology and infrastructure over not just the past year or six years but decades. Second is weak management. We have some fantastically managed businesses, but we also have some with below-average management. Third is inadequate education and training. The Government are working on all three areas, and, again, they are all linked. High-quality R and D and good management both depend substantially on a well-educated population. Weak management will prioritise the status quo over risky decisions to invest and train for the future. The Government have taken action through growth in apprenticeships and technical education and by placing an emphasis on the quality of apprenticeship and standards in schools, which are absolutely critical. I want to highlight the recruitment of teachers, which is a real difficulty in certain areas, such as maths and science, but I know that the Government are well aware of that and are working on it.

Investment in R and D and technology comes down to the availability of people, the willingness of companies to invest and the incentives to do so. Incentives cost, so I urge the Government to concentrate resources for investment in R and D on businesses that show the greatest willingness to invest, which are more likely to generate long-term growth and jobs.

Much has already been said about infrastructure, but with the advent of HS2, the road network really needs strengthening in my area of Stafford. I ask the Government to look at that, because we might otherwise find that we get gridlock in an incredibly important area of the country while HS2 is constructed.

Britain is a world leader in the digital economy, which is also vital for competitiveness. The largest private sector employer in my constituency is now General Electric, which sees its future as a digital business. As its chief executive Jeff Immelt has said:

"If you went to bed last night as an industrial company, you're going to wake up this morning as a software and analytics company."

My ambition for Stafford is for it to be a leader nationally in this digital economy. Not just manufacturing companies, such as General Electric, Perkins, JCB and Bostik are taking it seriously; we have a thriving community of software businesses that are growing steadily. We have financial services; risual, Microsoft's 2015 partner of the year; Connexica, which supports the NHS; iProspect, which deals with digital marketing; and forensics. We also have three signals regiments, which will provide a very good workforce for the future when the servicemen and women complete their service. The future is digital, and the digital economy Bill is a strong part of that.

2.30 pm

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): This Queen's Speech did nothing for the people I represent in my constituency. The Government should not have wasted taxpayers' money on all the pomp and ceremony, as they could have sent a 140-character tweet telling people what was in it. The Prime Minister's aim of course was to stop the unrest in the Tory party, which is pulling itself apart over the referendum. He did not even achieve that, because only days after the Queen's Speech we had rebel Tory MPs joining us in opposing the undemocratic, corporatist Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. If the Prime Minister gets a message from that, it should be to dump TTIP in its entirety and defend our NHS.

As I alluded to earlier, there is more detail on the back of a bus ticket than there was on that waste of vellum that was handed to the Queen. What did the Government say? They said we are going to create a spaceport—what a laugh! We are still waiting for a decision on another runway in London, yet they are talking about sending tourists to the moon in a rocket! That is absolutely daft. They are talking about privatising the Land Registry. That destructive move is even opposed by the Competition and Markets Authority. Only this Tory Government and only this Chancellor would contemplate gifting a valuable public service—a body responsible for registering the ownership of residential and commercial property—to a bunch of spivs and speculators. That proposal is wrong and the Government should withdraw it. Their move to end a fair rating system will cheat the people in poorer areas while enhancing and enriching the people in areas such as Kensington and Mayfair. It echoes the usual Tory motto: "To them that have most, give more. Give the lower paid and the middle earners nothing."

This Queen's Speech, taken together with the recent Budget, fell apart quicker than a badly assembled chest of drawers, and it just shows how this Government are disintegrating in front of us. Britain and areas like mine were crying out for a Queen's Speech that values people, and champions decency and fairness. We needed the creation of good jobs with better incomes. We needed to build better homes which people can afford. We needed raised standards in schools, not academies. We

needed to resuscitate the NHS, which is ailing from Tory neglect. The country deserved a Queen's Speech that fixes the problems and gives us solutions. What we got was a second-rate mishmash intended to win a referendum. On behalf of the Jarrow constituency and the people I represent, I will be proud to walk through and vote against this Queen's Speech.

2.33 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I am pleased to be part of this debate on the final day of our consideration of the Gracious Speech—it is my second one. We are discussing vital matters focused on the economy and work. I am pleased to see action being taken on sugar levels, as tackling that issue is vital in my constituency, where diabetes and amputations stretch the NHS.

The apprenticeship levy is part of this Queen's Speech. It will be introduced in 2017 for larger employers, and I truly welcome it. Apprenticeships are a fantastic way to help young people or to help older people to change career or re-skill. It was a real pleasure on the day of the Queen's Speech to meet Calum from Hedge End, who is an Airbus apprentice. We are very lucky to have Eastleigh College, which puts apprenticeships at the heart of education and where Baxi supports a gas training centre—we are very short of gas engineers.

The Chancellor well knows that in Eastleigh we have B&Q, but he is also well aware that in Eastleigh we need the vital Chickenhall Lane link road. Only under this Conservative majority Government has real progress been made on bringing that forward. The link will increase productivity and reduce queues, so I am delighted to see it in the Budget book.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that our rail infrastructure in Hampshire has not had any investment for 60 years and that we need more investment to improve our transport, which will help productivity in both her constituency and mine?

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with what my hon. Friend says. It takes an hour to get between Portsmouth and Southampton, and that situation is untenable. We need it to take an hour into Waterloo from Portsmouth. Such investment will improve travel to Southampton airport, which will also see positive benefits from the Chickenhall Lane link road. That will also deal with the standing traffic coming into the town, where air quality is a real problem. Last Friday, I met the Solent local enterprise partnership, which is keen and ready to finalise its bid and make its business case to the large local major schemes fund. I thank the Chancellor for the support for this project in Eastleigh.

I welcome the commitment to build 200,000 starter homes, and I would like women in refuges to be given higher priority on housing lists. That will achieve more safety for their children and more stability in schools, and it will improve their life chances, which is what we wish to see in this Government's programme. In Eastleigh, we have recently seen town centre land that would have been ideal for housing given away and designated for a car showroom and two drive-throughs—this in an area where there is a problem with air quality. That is the kind of unhealthy and unwanted town centre regeneration

that I am not keen to see in my constituency. I pay tribute to the local campaigners who have sought to point out the perversity of the application.

Hon. Members will not be surprised to see that I intend to discuss the ongoing lack of a local plan in Eastleigh—there are no neighbourhood plans in Eastleigh. Planning to protect green spaces and planning for more affordable homes, and more transparent planning rules are vital in Eastleigh, where there is a strategic vacuum. It is crucial that the pace of the progress that central Government are making is matched by local authorities picking up the pace and dealing with this issue. Sadly, Eastleigh Borough Council continues to fail its residents by ignoring calls for local plans. I sincerely hope that it gets on with it, for the sake of residents and businesses, and that the planning Bill can help and take full effect in our area.

I also want us to protect our green infrastructure, as it is important. We need to protect our chalk streams and areas such as the River Itchen, where one might see my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) fly fishing or angling alongside local anglers. It is very important to support such infrastructure and stop the pollution of vital rivers. Our Bill will promote green spaces over brownfield land, which is currently not being distributed properly in my constituency. Residents in Bishopstoke see and feel this; there is no localism in Eastleigh and no local plan.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): My hon. Friend does a tremendous job for her constituents. Does she agree that a neighbourhood plan, giving locals a referendum, is the way forward to plan for housing and infrastructure?

Mims Davies: Absolutely. Locking residents out of the planning process continues to make housing an adversarial issue, whereas our communities need to work together to bring forward the infrastructure that we see proposed in the Bill and the tie-in that residents need. I should thank my hon. Friend at this point. Areas such as Botley are struggling on GP recruitment because of ongoing issues with a local plan and the fact that they cannot recruit the clinicians they need. I thank her for her work in encouraging clinicians and nurses to come forward in these important careers. Getting more women into STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and having that opportunity will help our local communities to grow and thrive.

The biggest decision of our generation will be made next month and it is clear that whatever the outcome it will have an effect on our economy. Clearly, opinions are divided, occasionally on the Benches in this Chamber and occasionally, as we see if we read *The Times*, in the Tea Room. But is it crucial that once we have voted we come back together—this Conservative majority Government—and unify, so that we can continue to deliver this strong economy and the services we need for all our constituents.

2.39 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). I echo many of the comments about the economy made by my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, particularly in relation to productivity, with the latest figures showing the largest quarterly fall since 2008.

[Angela Smith]

I acknowledge that the Government have issued a challenge to areas such as mine to play their part in tackling the productivity and economic growth gap by developing devolution in the form of the northern powerhouse. I for one accept that challenge. I accept that Sheffield city region has to raise its game. We have to play our part and believe in ourselves, which we have not done for a very long time. Quite simply—as one employer said to me today in an email—we must believe that we have the skills, knowledge and ability to surpass London and become a generator of great wealth again.

However, the Government must play their part too, and at the moment they are not doing so. The announcement today about the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the relocation of staff from Sheffield to London belies everything that the Government have said on this point, but they can remedy the situation. I will be watching carefully the development of the infrastructure plan. In particular, I will be looking for confirmation that the new trans-Pennine links between Manchester and Sheffield will be given the green light, as they are essential to the future of the northern economy.

I will keep up the pressure on the Government to support a positive outcome to the steel crisis. Funnily enough, the crisis in South Yorkshire has triggered a revival in the faith and the confidence that we used to have in ourselves and in our engineering prowess. My plea to the Government today is: please do not let us down. We believe that we are the best steel producers in the world. If the Government believe in us, we will deliver.

Let me turn now to the biggest threat facing the economy in the next few years—the instability that is currently characterising our political system. Let us be clear about this: in the UK, politics is polarising. We know that it is happening on the Labour Benches, as we have shifted to the left. On the Government Benches, Brexit is tearing the Conservative party apart, and the centre ground is disappearing before our very eyes. What on earth happened to the politics of the art of the possible? This movement is happening globally. In some countries, the polarisation is even greater. One has to look only at Austria last week and at Holland, where the three mainstream parties are set to secure, in total, just 40% in the elections next year. As we have seen, even the US is not immune from the phenomenon.

Globalisation is one of the main causes of the situation. I echo the words of Mr Blair who said today that the problem of the centre ground was that it looks

“as if we are managers of the status quo and not changers of it”.

It is a worrying trend, and polarisation of the political sphere is creating a vacuum that could visit lasting damage on the social and economic fabric of this country. We bear a responsibility to resurrect the relevance of pragmatic politics. We need to demonstrate that centre-ground politics can deliver a progressive, prosperous and secure future for the people of this country. If we do not do that, the future of this country and its economy is very much in danger.

2.43 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), who is an excellent member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

May I take the unusual step of offering congratulations to the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), the Leader of the Opposition, on his birthday today? He and I share the same birthday date—I am still trying to work out what else we share.

I welcome the Gracious Speech and the continuation of our very good economic policies, which are enabling our businesses and our constituents to create more jobs. We are reducing taxes to lower-paid workers and stimulating this economy and reducing debt at the same time. In particular, I welcome the greater emphasis on the digital economy, and the fact that we are giving every household a legal right to fast broadband. That will be a challenge.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend welcomes the Government's announcement of the universal service obligation on broadband, but will he join me in asking the Government to look at extending that obligation not just to residential properties but to business properties? In places such as Devon and Cornwall, it is crucial that our businesses get connected to superfast broadband as well.

Neil Parish: I could not agree more. We are talking about people and about businesses. Out in the rural areas, we have many very good businesses, farms and individuals who need broadband and superfast broadband. I am talking about not just the money that needs to be put in to getting broadband into these areas, but the fact that we need to use every technology available. The Blackdown Hills and part of Exmoor are in my constituency, and not all areas will get fibre optic cable however we try to do it, so there needs to be both wireless and satellite operations. We must ensure that we get that broadband out. It is essential that we put as much pressure as we can on BT and others to deliver, as there is, at the moment, too much of a monopoly. There is not enough competition out there delivering broadband to all of our constituents.

I also welcome the modern transport Bill and the fact that we will have to change our taxation on cars. We have spent too many years concentrating on reducing the tax on diesel cars only to find now that nitric oxide appears to be the killer and that we need to re-educate people to buy hybrid cars and electric cars. We need to do a great deal to change people's attitudes towards what they buy. There has been too much concentration in the past on the amount of carbon coming from a car, rather than on the nitric oxide, which is causing so many of the hotspots in our cities.

I also welcome the education Bill, and the fact that we are stepping back slightly from the idea that we will impose academies across the country. A Conservative policy is much more about evolution than revolution. Therefore, we must give people a chance to get there. I have many rural primary schools and small schools in my constituency. There is this idea of bringing together 3,000 or 5,000 children. I would probably need between

50 and 100 schools to create that number of pupils. We must be careful about how we deliver such a policy. There is also another problem: some local authorities are better education authorities than others, and that must be taken into account when considering changes.

I also welcome the lifetime savings Bill. The idea that we can help young people and people on lower wages to save is essential. In the past, not only did Labour spend too much taxpayers' money, but we spent too much as individuals and did not save enough. I know that Governments love people to spend so that it boosts the economy, but there is also a great need for people to have greater savings. That is what we want to see happening.

I welcome the fact that the Queen's Speech is very much a continuation of the Government's policies in order to keep going. The one thing we must not do is change course. We must keep bringing down the deficit. On 23 June we need to make sure that we keep this country in the European Union so that we can prosper and grow our economy.

2.49 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The sugar tax is an interesting proposal, but the Government have left some careless loopholes in their plans. I am not sure whether you often drink milkshakes, Madam Deputy Speaker, but they are not particularly healthy drinks. One brand has 19.2 grams of sugar in a 200 ml bottle, which exceeds the recommended daily allowance for four to six-year-old children. A milk drink linked to a well-known confectionary brand has 36 grams of sugar in a 376 ml bottle, exceeding the RDA for seven to 10-year-olds. Finally, another popular milkshake drink has 50.8 grams of sugar in a 471 ml bottle, which far exceeds the RDA for adults.

None of those products is covered by the Chancellor's sugar tax. That is a serious loophole because parents may infer from their exemption that these drinks are healthier. The response that I received from the Treasury states that "milk contains calcium and other nutrients which are vital to children's health." That is true, but if the goodness of milk is adulterated by huge volumes of sugar, the health benefits are seriously undermined. It would be sensible to include such drinks within the scope of the sugar tax.

There is another loophole that affects us as grown-ups. Pre-mixed alcoholic drinks such as cans of vodka and Coke or gin and tonic do not come within the scope of the sugar tax either. It cannot have escaped anybody's notice that adults, too, struggle with obesity. They will not get an exemption from the sugar tax at the till, but there is a loophole if they choose to purchase vodka and Coke separately, rather than as a premixed drink. These drinks should be brought within the scope of the tax, as that would have benefits for all of us.

I am deeply concerned by the way in which this Government's approach to the economy rewards those who are already at the top of the heap and punishes those who are already struggling. Experts from Sheffield Hallam University laid out the brutal impact of that. Their report, "The uneven impact of welfare reform—the financial losses to places and people", ought to bring shame on this Government. As I suspect that, sadly, Treasury Ministers will not even give it a glance, I will use this opportunity to lay out some of the key findings.

The report states that the cumulative loss experienced by claimants since 2010 is £27 billion a year—£690 for every adult of working age. The report finds that the welfare reforms are uneven geographically, hitting the most deprived communities hardest. The departing Secretary of State confessed as much to Andrew Marr, saying that the Tories were attacking benefit payments to people who "don't vote for us". In the constituency of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in the Three Rivers area, the anticipated loss to claimants by 2020-21 will be £190 a year. In Blackburn the situation is much worse. Claimants there will lose £560 per year.

In Scotland, because our ability to make other choices is limited, we have made a difference, but Scots will still lose out to the tune of £320 per adult per year. We have been able to take the edge off. We have mitigated the bedroom tax, we have restored council tax benefit, and we will not bring in pay to stay. I very much look forward to the Scottish Government making use of the social security powers coming to us in the Scottish Parliament, because we are committed to everyone in Scotland, not just those who happen to vote for us.

In Glasgow claimants will lose out by £420 per year. This is money that is not ringing in the tills in the communities that I represent. It is money that ordinary people desperately need to put food on the table. It is money that my constituents need to heat their homes. It is absolute wickedness to punish people for the circumstances they are in, and worse because they are people who did not vote Tory.

I reject this economic model, which condemns people to a lifetime of poverty. The lasting effects of such social policies are still there in Glasgow, a hangover from the time of the loss of heavy industry, and of clumsy Scotland Office policy that built the new towns that left so many behind in poor quality housing. I commend to the House the recent report by the esteemed Glasgow Centre for Population Health, "History, politics and vulnerability: explaining excess mortality in Scotland and Glasgow", which seeks to explain why Glaswegians continue to die younger than they should. The policy of this Government and of previous Governments has a lot to answer for, and we must not make the same policy mistakes now.

2.53 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate the Government on including in the Queen's Speech a measure to introduce a levy on sugary drinks manufacturers. I do so because it cannot be acceptable in our society that we continue to allow 25% of the most disadvantaged children to leave primary school not just overweight, but obese. I congratulate the Chancellor on looking at the evidence that the gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children with childhood obesity has been increasing, based on data from the child measurement programme.

It is important to tackle the problem and to look not just at obesity, but at the effect on children's teeth. We know that the commonest reason for primary school children to be admitted to hospital is to have their rotten teeth removed. The Chancellor is right to target sugary drinks manufacturers. As the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) pointed out, those are empty calories with no nutritional value whatsoever.

[Dr Sarah Wollaston]

When we see that a third of teenagers' calorie intake from sugars is from sugary drinks, it is right that we do everything we can.

The measure is progressive. I welcome the contribution that it will make as part of a wider strategy to tackle childhood obesity. It will encourage manufacturers to reformulate their products to bring in lower levels of sugar. I would like the Chancellor, perhaps when he responds to the debate, to set out what he is doing alongside manufacturers to encourage them to introduce a price differential associated with the levy bands so that we can guide people to make healthier choices.

I particularly welcome the fact that this money will be hypothecated. As a result, we will see a doubling of the school sport premium for primary schools. We will also see an expansion of the breakfast club programme in the most disadvantaged areas, and up to 1,600 schools will benefit. The accusation that is often made is that the levy is regressive, not progressive, but that is countered simply by the fact that it is the most disadvantaged communities that will benefit most from hypothecation.

Like the hon. Member for Glasgow Central, I urge the Chancellor to go further and to extend this measure to milky drinks with high levels of added sugar. Milk is good for children, and we should be sending a clear message that it is good, but milk with nine teaspoons of sugar in it is not good for children's health or their teeth. I also agree with the hon. Lady's point about alcoholic mixers. I therefore hope that the Chancellor will look again at extending this measure, because I think much more benefit could come from it if he did.

On the other proposals in the Queen's Speech, I thank the Chancellor for the measures he will introduce on broadband. As a Member representing a rural community where businesses and local residents alike are disadvantaged by not having access to high-speed broadband, I think these measures will be very welcome. Likewise, I welcome the commitment to bring forward a fair funding formula for schools such as those in the west country, which have been severely disadvantaged up until now.

I know that many other Members want to speak, so let me say in closing that I welcome the measures in the Queen's Speech. This is a bold and brave Chancellor—the Health Committee called for bold and brave measures to tackle childhood obesity, and that is what we have seen from the Chancellor in this Queen's Speech. I hope he will stiffen his sinews, resist the efforts of the drinks manufacturers to oppose this measure and encourage them to look at how they can improve the health of our nation and our children by supporting reformulation.

2.57 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I would like to concentrate my remarks on the help to save scheme—or should I call it the reinvigorated savings gateway? It is welcome that the Government have recognised the importance of saving and particularly of matched saving—one of the best ways of encouraging people to save. Analysis by StepChange shows that 44% of people on low incomes have a lower chance of getting into debt if they have savings of about £1,000—that is half a million people who would be prevented from falling into debt.

However, I have a few issues with the design of the scheme. For example, two years is a very long time in which to have to save regularly. Some 14 million people experienced at least one income shock in the past 12 months—that might be because of a job loss, a cut in hours, illness or a new baby. If money is withdrawn, people will lose the bonus they feel they have already gained. People on low incomes know they are going to experience some income shocks, and that could discourage them from saving.

We all know that it is good to save and that it is very worthy, and we all start things with good intentions. For example, when we join a gym, we intend to go every week—of course would do—but imagine if we had a two-year contract saying we had to go every week. Crucially, therefore, there should be some measures in the Government's proposals to allow for irregular savings, where people cannot afford to put money into the scheme one month—after all, we have all missed the odd week at the gym. Things do crop up, and we should allow a couple of withdrawals.

We also need to look at the behavioural economics of people in relation to the scheme. People may need some encouragement and some incentives to join—for example, prize draws. We all know that people spend the odd pound on a lottery ticket in the hope of winning something, and encouraging people to save by offering them the incentive of a prize would be important.

I would like to say a quick word about financial education, which is really important. I am pleased that academisation has been taken out of the Queen's Speech. However, there is a lack of financial education in the curriculum, and it should start earlier. My experience is that primary education is really important. I had a great scheme with a great tutor, Vernon Fuller, who ran a wonderful course for primary students over 10 years ago. I would love to see how they are getting on now.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady join me in congratulating the all-party parliamentary group on financial education for young people, which this week launched its report, of which I was the chair, calling for more Government support for financial education for primary school children, because children form their money habits at the age of seven?

Yvonne Fovargue: I will indeed. I read that report with interest, as financial education has always been an interest of mine, but I have to say that it is not a silver bullet.

All efforts need to be made to keep people out of the hands of the payday lenders and the rent-to-own sector. We need to make sure that support is given to alternative providers of finance such as Fair for You, and that they have a level playing field. For example, real-time data from everyone, including the banks, must be available to new market entrants so that they can make fair assessments of lending. We must also make sure that those data are accurate, as I have had reports of data from various companies being quite inaccurate.

Talking of fairness and level playing fields, I support the calls for transitional arrangements to help the women who have been adversely affected by the mishandled increasing of the state pension age. Perhaps I should declare an interest in this as a woman who was born in the 1950s. I urge the Under-Secretary of State for Work

and Pensions, the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara), to revisit this unfairness during the passage of the pensions Bill.

I welcome the savings scheme, but I would like it to be designed to reflect the real lives of people on a low income: the real life that has bumps in the road on quite a few occasions; the real life where sometimes buying a new pair of shoes or going out for the day with the family is more important than putting money away for a rainy day. I hope that the Government will recognise this in the design of the scheme.

3.1 pm

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) on her typically thoughtful speech. I particularly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on continuing, in his speech, the march of the makers. That stood in stark contrast to the march of the Marxists that characterised the shadow Chancellor's speech. We certainly make things in the midlands and in Tamworth. We make great cars at Jaguar Land Rover, great engines at BMW, world-class circuit boards at Invotec, and fine braking systems at Alcon. We are making the jobs that people want to do, and we need to make the homes that people want to live in in the west midlands.

I congratulate the Government on their work with the Help to Buy scheme, which Bovis tells me has been seminal in getting people on to the property ladder. However, we need to do more to get SMEs back into the supply chain—SMEs that left the industry owing to mergers and acquisitions in the 1980s and the housing market crash in 2008. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will use all his artistry, eloquence and influence to prevail on the Communities and Local Government Secretary to encourage big firms like Bovis to franchise out part of their land bank to SMEs. That de-risks Bovis and other big developers because it takes some of the costs away from them, but also helps SMEs to get into the industry again because it removes some of the up-front costs of planning. I hope that the Government will consider that thought. While they are at it, I hope that they will also look at the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. SME developers in my constituency tell me of the length of time that it takes for the inspectorate in Bristol to conclude its appeal decision process. Sometimes very straightforward decisions can take up to six months. If we can speed up that process, possibly by upskilling and up-staffing the resources there, then we can take some of the weight off those SMEs' shoulders.

We need to build homes, and we also need to build the infrastructure around them. I welcome and congratulate the Government on the infrastructure plan and the work of Lord Adonis and the Infrastructure Commission. May I encourage the Government to look at one of the "Cinderella" infrastructure projects of the midlands—the A5 corridor, which runs through Leicestershire, through Warwickshire, and up into Staffordshire? I can assure the Chancellor that he will have a lot of support from me and my hon. Friends the Members for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) and for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), who is in his place, and my hon. Friends the Members for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), all of whom want the road to be

upgraded and dualled so that we can build the homes near it for people to do the jobs that are being created in the midlands.

This was a Queen's Speech for aspirational people who want to do the right thing and get on. That is why we made gains in the local elections in my constituency just a few weeks ago. In a town that had nearly 30 Labour councillors 16 years ago, there are now just seven. After the general election, the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) was quite right to write in his, I hope, non-ironic document, "Labour's Future":

"Labour lost because voters didn't believe it".

They did not believe Labour in 2015, and I assure the House that they did not believe it last month either.

3.5 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): The Queen's Speech included a local growth and jobs Bill, which is intended to localise business rates, but councils fear that the Government's approach will be unfair. Given that Ministers have given no indication of how they intend to go about achieving it, we can use only their past behaviour as a guide, and that is very worrying indeed.

The Government's council funding cuts clobbered the poorest 10 councils with cuts 23 times bigger than those experienced by the 10 richest councils. This year's £300 million cuts relief fund was gerrymandered to ease the pain in those Tory-voting areas that had suffered the least, while offering nothing to those areas that had suffered the most. It is no wonder that the National Audit Office is investigating that perverse decision.

If business rate localisation is gerrymandered in the same way, it will stifle growth in those parts of the country that need it most, thereby creating more poverty, fear insecurity and alienation.

This is all part of the Government's ongoing refusal to challenge inequalities of power and wealth right across the society. The social contract that underpinned our society has been shattered. The promise was that if someone worked hard, they would get on, and if they could not work, they would be looked after. Today, however, even if someone works hard, they might not be able to pay the bills or put a secure roof over their family's head, and if they cannot work, they risk being thrown to the wolves.

There are parts of my constituency in Croydon North where too many people feel left behind because work is insecure and incomes do not cover the basic household bills. Globalisation is certainly creating great innovation, wealth and opportunity, but it is being allowed to leave too many people and their communities behind. It is sharpening inequality, moving populations on an unprecedented scale, threatening the environment and stoking political and religious fundamentalism. Alongside strengthening regulation at the centre, devolution should be used to put real power into people's hands to challenge the blatant unfairness of the system and to build communities' capacity to manage those great changes on their own terms.

Just across the river from Parliament stands a newly built tower full of luxury apartments kept empty by foreign investors, while on the streets below there is a housing crisis. What a powerful symbol of just how far we have gone wrong.

[Mr Steve Reed]

Anger is rising across the industrialised world. If people do not have faith that a system is working fairly for them, they will kick back against it. When legitimate concerns do not get heard by the political mainstream, they push towards the margins. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said earlier, politics is polarising in a dangerous way. People are angry about a political system that is failing them, elites that are exploiting them and wealth and opportunity that are bypassing them; but instead of addressing all that, the Government are fuelling forces that are pushing inequality to breaking point, and the consequences of that will be as dangerous as they are unpredictable.

3.9 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): In the Most Gracious Speech, Her Majesty spoke of the Government's intention to support the northern powerhouse. I welcome support for the regions and the regeneration of local economies across the country, but I particularly welcome the recognition of the importance of manufacturing to that regeneration. My constituency and the midlands have strong manufacturing traditions, and I look forward to hearing more details about the midlands engine, and not least about the £250 million investment fund. Our region has been significant in the economic recovery, and we have 96,000 more businesses than we had in 2010.

Although the economy has moved in a positive direction in recent years, particularly in terms of falling unemployment, we should not be complacent about the manufacturing sector. In that spirit, I call for the creation of an industrial strategy.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Hear, hear.

Chris White: Thank you. There is a clear need to boost exports, and the Government's target to reach £1 trillion-worth of exports by 2020 is ambitious. An industrial strategy would boost confidence for investors through greater stability in the system and clear direction from the Government, as well as allowing the Government to be held to account over the period to which the strategy applies. For a Minister to come to the House annually and to be scrutinised on cross-departmental support for such a vital part of our economy can only be to everyone's benefit.

I turn to the make-up of the strategy. A central, cohesive and comprehensive document could shape clear objectives for the sector, outlining steps that the Government intend to take to provide a framework for industry to grow. In addition, there could be a clear statement from the Cabinet Office, acting across Departments, along with annual reports to Parliament detailing supportive measures taken in the interests of manufacturing.

This Government, and perhaps any Government, typically respond well to objectives and targets that give clear focus and consistency, such as a target of 3 million new apprenticeship starts by 2020. An industrial strategy would encompass a wide range of policy areas: apprenticeships, higher education, Catapult centres, innovation and the supply chain. We need to ensure that

Departments do not operate in silos, and that our whole system works in harmony, so I would add energy policy, smarter procurement, access to finance and infrastructure. Implementing a strategy would be a major step forward, considering that the manufacturing sector is less able than others to respond to circumstances quickly. A long-term vision is, therefore, essential, and it will encourage investment in the UK.

Looking ahead, we will need to compete internationally in innovation. The reshoring of production must be a central aspect of our approach, and I see innovation as key to that aim. We can help innovation to flourish in the UK by supporting through-life engineering services and improving the availability, predictability and reliability of complex engineering products to deliver the lowest possible whole-life cycle cost. Initiatives such as high-value manufacturing catapults, Industry 4.0 and TES were not even on the table in 2010. I would add, however, that no matter how attractive an industrial strategy might be, we must make sure that we start with a long-term economic plan.

3.13 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) who made a thoughtful speech. I concur with him on the importance of an industrial strategy.

The Chancellor spoke today about the Government's plans for devolution. I want to focus on that and, in particular, on the importance of devolution for the economy and jobs in the Liverpool city region. The number of young people in the Liverpool city region who are not in education, employment or training is significantly above the national average. Among 16 to 18-year-olds, the national figure is disturbing at 4.7%, but the Liverpool figure is 6.3%—one in 16 of those young people—which is far too high and a key challenge.

The agreement between the combined authorities and the Government does several things. It devolves the adult skills budget; it moves the responsibility to work on employment support for harder-to-help claimants, so that the city region will work with the DWP; it devolves the apprenticeship grant for employers; and it institutes an area-based review of post-16 education and training. There is huge potential to provide more quality and employment apprenticeship opportunities, and I hope that the combined authority and, next year, the newly elected Mayor will work with the Government both to use these powers and to explore what further devolution is needed.

The challenge of youth unemployment is enormous. I welcome the fact that it has fallen in recent years, although I share concerns about the quality of some of the jobs that have been created, particularly for the large number of young people on zero-hours contracts. Even with that fall in youth unemployment, our rate is double that of Germany. Part of the reason for this is the quality of the technical and vocational education that we provide in contrast to Germany's.

I welcome the fact that we will have an area-based review in Liverpool, and I recognise that the failure fully to address the issue of vocational education is a long-standing failure by Governments of both parties. However, I seek assurances from Ministers that the

Liverpool city region will have the powers it needs to reshape and restructure local skills to meet the demands of a changing economy. I welcome the powers that are being devolved, but I would like us to go further. It is not sufficient for the city region to lead on skills at 19-plus; I want it to lead on skills at 16-plus and, in fact, I want it to lead on skills at 14-plus and to address the issue of 14-to-19 education.

Last week, I urged the Education Secretary to look at the potential for the devolution of powers held by her Department. There is a very strong case for the powers of the regional schools commissioner to be devolved. Liverpool city region could then take the lead in the planning and commissioning of school and other education places. It would be an opportunity for local communities, employers, young people and others to shape the education and skills programmes that we need.

Devolution is not just about power, but about funding. Liverpool city region has been hit hard by cuts in central Government funding since 2010. I support and welcome devolution, but this must not be an exercise in devolving the blame for cuts. I urge the Government to look again at the scale of the cuts taking place in cities such as Liverpool. The Chancellor spoke about localisation and I recognise its strong advantages, which my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) set out so eloquently, but for the poorest parts of the country, such as the city of Liverpool, there is a big downside. We stand to lose substantial resources, and I ask the Government to think very carefully about how they implement this change. If we get it right, devolution can make a real and lasting difference, creating the properly paid, high-quality jobs for the future that Liverpool city region needs.

3.17 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my colleague on the International Development Committee—the Chair of the Committee—the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg).

To have a strong economy, we need a strong society. That is why I welcome the many references in the Gracious Speech to improving life chances, especially for the young and disadvantaged. The Children and Social Work Bill and the prisons and courts reform Bill are particularly welcome in helping to give a second chance to those who, in so many cases, never had a first chance.

Last week, the review of prison education by Dame Sally Coates, “Unlocking Potential”, proposed that to improve the life chances of prisoners, a holistic vision of education is needed for them, including family and relationship learning and practical advice on parenting and financial skills. It is heartening to note that the Government have agreed to implement the review in full.

Another excellent report that has also just been published is Lord Laming’s “In Care, Out of Trouble”, in which he says:

“Remedial work and rehabilitation are essential but prevention is so much more rewarding and fruitful for the young person and wider society.”

He says that good parenting “creates the solid foundation” to give the child the best start, and that the “essential ingredients” are security and stability. He says that

“in this context...young children develop self confidence, trust, personal and social values and optimism. Loss, neglect or trauma at this early stage in life often result in profound and enduring consequences.”

That is why the commitment in the Gracious Speech to “increase life chances for the most disadvantaged”

by tackling

“poverty and the causes of deprivation, including family instability” is so welcome.

Addressing this challenge is urgent. The needs are widespread, and not just for those at risk of entering the care or criminal justice systems. Years of evidence-based research by the Centre for Social Justice has shown it is demonstrably the case that growing up in a family where relationships are dysfunctional, chaotic or insecure is not only a key driver of poverty in itself, but a driver of other causes of poverty such as addiction, mental health problems, behavioural problems, poor educational attainment, worklessness, depression and debt. Teachers and mental health charity workers in my constituency tell me that disturbingly increasing levels of poor mental health among children, including very young children, frequently result from insecure family relationships.

Suella Fernandes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recently announced change to the measurement of life chances—from one based on an arbitrary relative income to one that takes into account worklessness in households and educational attainment—reflects the multifaceted nature of poverty and achievement?

Fiona Bruce: I do indeed. I also think that we should include family instability in that statutory footing.

Yesterday, Relate published a report on couple relationship distress in the UK. It states:

“Good quality, couple, family and social relationships are the basis of a thriving society...central to our health and wellbeing...poor quality relationships have far-reaching consequences. Inter-parental relationships have...been recognised...as a major determinant of children’s life chances.”

However, Relate’s analysis estimates that almost one in five of adult couple relationships in the UK could be characterised as a distressed relationship, meaning one with a severe level of relationship problems that has a clinically significant negative effect on a partner’s wellbeing. The figure for partners with children under 16 is even higher. Encouragingly, however, Relate also says:

“A broad range of relationship support services are effective at improving relationship quality.”

I hope Ministers will read the report and note its recommendation that we need to

“expand access to a spectrum of support for good quality relationships, overcoming barriers of accessibility, availability, and affordability to ensure that anyone who needs it can benefit from support.”

I look forward to the publication of the Government’s life chances strategy. I hope that it recognises that poverty of relationships is a severe limiter of life chances, and that substantially increased support for stronger family relationships is needed in every local community. It is important to provide somewhere in every locality where people can go for such support and advice, at any stage in their family life—whether they are starting a family, bringing up toddlers or teenagers, coping with supporting an elderly parent, or simply a couple going through a rocky patch.

[Fiona Bruce]

The troubled families initiative has been successful in providing intervention and support at a crisis stage. Let us learn from that, but provide support much earlier, when families feel they need help. Let us normalise asking for help and providing it. There cannot be a family in the land that would not benefit.

3.22 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I must confess I thought the Queen's Speech was fairly awful. It was not awful in its individual proposals on things such as prison reform or bus regulation, all of which have some merit. It was certainly not awful because of the delivery of it by Her Majesty the Queen, who even sounded reasonably excited by the news of a forthcoming state visit from the Colombians—something we can all get behind. It was awful because it lacked any sense of big thinking and any grand design for the state of our nation. As a constituency MP I see so many challenges and so many things I want to change that listening to the modest list of measures we heard last week only left me frustrated.

What makes me so impatient about those shortcomings is that I believe that with better leadership and a better Government, we could do so much better. We are a country where the divide between the very affluent and everyone else is too great, and where owning a home, having a decent job and being able to have a good family life are increasingly unattainable for too many people. Eight years after the financial crisis, our economy is still too dependent on the financial services sector, house prices and consumer spending, and is still too reliant on London and the south-east. There are obscene levels of extreme poverty and destitution, and homelessness is almost back to 1980s levels.

We have an ageing population, but core public services such as the NHS and social care simply do not have enough money. Our welfare system is not fit for purpose; it gives too little support to many people while creating welfare dependency in a small group of others. We have chronic skills shortages in several major industries; that in turn fuels record immigration levels. Our lack of any kind of industrial policy has left several key sectors such as steel facing the abyss.

Some parts of our economy are overtaxed, particularly through the outdated business rates system, and other parts do not pay the tax they should. I could go on, because nothing in this Queen's Speech made me feel as if our Government are considering these problems; in fact, nothing in it made me feel that the Government have a desire to do anything more than try to hold the Conservative party together over the next 12 months.

Suella Fernandes: I note the hon. Gentleman's criticism of the Queen's Speech. Does he share the same opinion about Labour's future as that written by a member of his party, which said that Labour lacks credibility on the economy?

Jonathan Reynolds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the extra time, and I will come on to those wider criticisms.

In some respects the Queen's Speech was frankly dishonest. Whatever one's view of the necessity of austerity, or the success of the Government's deficit reduction

programme, it is simply not true to say that public services are being reformed to help the hardest to reach—they are being reformed to remove them from the hardest to reach. It is also not true to say some of the deepest social problems in society are being tackled when some—homelessness, for example—are clearly getting worse. In Greater Manchester, one of the most dynamic parts of England, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) has said, an entire community of people are now living in tents in Manchester city centre. That is not what success looks like. I am all for measuring life chances better, but we do not need a new set of indicators to understand that taking money from people who have serious disabilities—as the Government have repeatedly tried to do—will make their lives harder, not better.

If I were writing the Queen's Speech, I would ask for it to include three things. First—this was echoed by the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White)—we need a formal industrial strategy in the UK that is focused on making British industry as globally competitive as it can be. Secondly, we need a royal commission on the welfare state, to consider what will be required in an age of rapid technological change and digital self-employment. Thirdly, we need serious democratic reform, so that future Queen's Speeches are much better than this one.

The tail-end of the Queen's Speech contained a miserly reference to the supremacy of the Commons. If the Government do not want to lose so much legislation in the Lords, they should try to make better legislation. I do not believe the Lords to be the hotbed of democratic socialism that Ministers seek to portray. This Queen's Speech was not a programme to transform our nation or tackle our biggest problems. It was all filler and no killer—a pick 'n' mix of pet projects; a holding card until the next Conservative leadership contest reveals that party's true direction. Britain deserves a legislative programme that engages our public, ignites our economy, and inspires our future. Britain deserves a lot better than this.

3.27 pm

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak about this Gracious Speech, which puts opportunity and life chances at the heart of our society. It is a one nation Queen's Speech, and Britain is forecast to grow faster than any other major advanced economy in 2016. Growth is forecast to exceed 2% each and every year this decade, meaning that in 10 to 15 years we could be the biggest economy in Europe, outstripping the German economy. Average weekly wages have risen by 2.1% since last year, and the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that 2.9 million workers will benefit directly from the introduction of the national living wage, and estimates that a further 6 million could see a pay rise as a result of the ripple effect.

This Government were elected to back working people, and the best way to do that is to let them keep more of the money they earn. The personal allowance will rise further to £11,500 by 2017-18, giving 31 million people across the country a tax cut. This Queen's Speech makes it easier for people on low incomes to save. The lifetime savings Bill will introduce a help to save scheme, providing a 50% Government bonus on up to £50 of monthly savings, helping more than 3 million of the lowest earners to put money aside.

Over the past year, we have got on with delivering our manifesto commitments to give people security and opportunity at every stage of their life. Some 16% of working age people in the UK are disabled or have a health condition. The Government are committed to halving the gap between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people, to ensure that disabled people have opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations. We spend around £50 billion every year on benefits to support people with disabilities or health conditions, which is 6% of all Government spending. That represents 2.5% of our GDP, and is significantly above spending in countries such as France and Germany, and the OECD average of 2.2%.

In the past two years, 365,000 disabled people have moved into work, with more than 3.3 million now in employment. Halving the disability employment gap, means helping around 1 million more disabled people to achieve their ambition of finding work. Later this year, I will be holding my first Weaver Vale Disability Confident fair. I give the Government credit for bringing forward this fantastic scheme to truly challenge attitudes to employing those with disabilities.

As a Cheshire MP I can say that INEOS Chlor and Tata Chemicals are significant employers for those living in Runcorn and Northwich. I recently met Ginni Rometty, the CEO of IBM, to talk about cognitive technology and artificial intelligence. Cognitive technologies are the future for this country.

Energy-intensive industries, and the jobs associated with them, are almost exclusively located outside of London. They are often high-skill, high-wage jobs. They form a vital part of the northern powerhouse, and regional growth and development. I am committed to closing the north-south divide. Our great northern cities and regions can be greater than the sum of their parts. The northern powerhouse is underpinned by world-class transport linking our great cities and regions to drive up productivity and our economic revival.

Colleagues will know that I have been campaigning to reinstate the Halton curve line for many years now. I am delighted to report that the final business case was examined by the Liverpool city region combined authority in April and it has approved the plans. That is significant because it will enable travel from north Wales to Cheshire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester.

This is a one nation Queen's Speech from a one nation Government. As someone who was born and grew up on a council estate, the Conservative party is the party of aspiration. I commend the Speech to the House.

3.31 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Over the past number of days, we have heard from Opposition Members that new ideas and new legislation in the Queen's Speech have been thin on the ground. Unlike the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), I do not think the measures in the Queen's Speech will address poverty or help those who have been hit hard by the pernicious welfare cuts that have caused deeper poverty in my constituency. That is not something I particularly like, because I want to see greater wealth creation and greater income creation.

It is clear that the forthcoming referendum has had an inhibiting effect on the Queen's Speech and the Government's ambitions for this year in Parliament. We can debate at length whether inhibiting the Government is a good or a bad thing, but I can only say that I am disappointed they have not done more to address the widening social, economic and infrastructural inequalities that are opening up across these islands and leaving too many people behind, particularly in the constituency I represent in Northern Ireland.

On rural broadband, the widening divide between winners and losers is well embodied by the ongoing failure to provide rural communities access to reliable high-speed broadband. New technology provides the potential for rural communities to be more closely connected to the wider world of commerce, culture and government but despite that, a report from the European Commission found that over half of rural areas still do not have access to high-speed connections. In fairness to the Government, I welcome the commitment in the Queen's Speech to provide households with a right to high-speed connections. However, I am concerned about what that really means. Who will be responsible for delivering this right and who can rural communities turn to when they have been let down? I hope the Government are sincere in their intentions, but I must remain sceptical until further proposals are brought forward—hopefully in time to meet the Prime Minister's own broadband targets.

There has been no attempt, despite a letter signed by the Northern Ireland MPs, to reduce VAT on tourism—a fiscal measure and fiscal flexibility that would aid tourism in an area where we have to compete with the south of Ireland. A report published today says that we have the lowest level of disposable income and the highest number of visitors. The issues of air passenger duty and VAT on tourism have to be addressed.

On our farming communities, the regional inequalities that exist for Northern Ireland farmers place them at a severe financial disadvantage to their counterparts in Britain. That may be a market issue, but it has to be addressed urgently.

Finally, on the upcoming EU referendum, there is no doubt that, for Northern Ireland, a vote to remain will be of the greatest benefit to the local economy. In that respect, I urge the Government to ensure that the issues of poverty and deprivation and broadband connections and the needs of our tourism industry are properly and equitably addressed.

3.35 pm

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie). On this occasion, I sadly did not agree with everything she said, but I enjoyed her contribution.

The Gracious Speech contained many encouraging Bills for the coming parliamentary year, but I would like first to welcome the small charitable donations Bill, which innumerable sports clubs and charities in my constituency will welcome with open arms. For too long, our local charities have been hampered by the lack of gift aid on their bucket and other small donation collections, so I am pleased that this will now be addressed. The fact that the Government want to allow local sports clubs the opportunity of gift aid on their small

[Chris Davies]

donations might be a saving grace for many local sports teams, but for some it might do more than put a little extra money in their pockets; it might go as far as to give them another season. Young farmers clubs might also benefit from the Bill. For those who do not know, young farmers clubs are groups of young people who get together and organise a wide range of events and community activities throughout the year, encompassing everything from barn dances to rural skills and debates on current affairs. My local Brecknockshire federation recently held a hustings on the EU, though I shall not go further into that one.

For me, however, the Queen's Speech is not all plain sailing, as I have concerns over the economic consequences of the Wales Bill. Wales does not need further devolution to Cardiff Bay. At a time when the UK economy has chugged back into life and is now on track to further prosperity, owing to the hard work of the Westminster Government, giving further powers to the Labour Cabinet in the Welsh Assembly will slam the brakes on in Wales.

If we truly care about the Welsh economy, we have to ensure that powers over tax and other economic measures are held where the people of Wales want them. With the commitment in the Queen's Speech to abolishing the need for a referendum on giving the Assembly tax-raising powers, I am concerned that constituents will not get a voice over whether this important power is placed in the hands of the devolved Government. It is not just my constituents who are worried. Many local businesses are concerned about the effect on them. Ultimately, the future of Wales and the devolved settlement should be for the people of Wales to decide, but the commitment in the Queen's Speech does not give them a voice.

That voice is important. I hear a great deal about the importance of the northern powerhouse and the southern powerhouse, but where in this cacophony is the rural powerhouse? As I am sure many are fully aware, farming is one of the UK's staple industries. In my area—but not just in my area—it is also the main driver behind the local economy. The agri-food sector employs more than 10% of the total UK workforce, and the food and farming sector is worth more than £100 billion to the UK economy. Farming is a great job creator. Farmers need a workforce of labourers and contractors of all descriptions. Sheep and cattle need feed grown by other farmers. When livestock are taken to market, there is an auctioneer—I was one before I entered the House—and auctioneers need clerks and staff. Finally, when livestock are taken to slaughter, the abattoirs need expert butchers and high-tech machinery, which has to be designed by someone—the list of jobs goes on and on. Yet farming is facing hard times. Milk and lamb prices are falling, and farms across the country are facing grave difficulties. We must do all we can to help support this vital industry, which does so much for the rural economy. I hope that the better markets Bill will include assistance for farmers by cutting red tape for the farming community and that other vital rural industry—tourism.

Finally, I would like briefly to touch on the digital economy Bill and how it will be of great benefit to my constituents and businesses and to the rural economy more widely—[*Interruption*—]but I will have to leave that to somebody else because I have run out of time.

3.39 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): In the few minutes available, I shall primarily address issues relating to the criminal finance Bill. In introducing the subject, I can do no better than recognise the extremely thoughtful contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) on Tuesday. In his peroration, he made these comments in referring to the Bill:

“we in this country are very bad at dealing with white-collar crime, and there is growing awareness of that. If someone wishes to rob a bank, they go to the LIBOR market; they do not put on a balaclava and pick up a shotgun—that is much less profitable... I hope I can be reassured that the Bill will tackle not just tax evasion, which is quite rightly high on the public agenda, but money laundering.”

He concluded this part of his speech by saying:

“London is still the money-laundering capital of the world.”—[*Official Report*, 24 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 450.]

The right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly pointed out the nature of the challenge we face. Many of the biggest crooks are working in the City of London. This is a major challenge that we should all be willing to address. It would be commendable if the Government eventually produced a very strong Bill, but as is sometimes said in my part of the world, “I hae ma doubts”.

If people's behaviour and motivation are so important, that raises a fundamental concern in my mind about the flawed approach to economics that seems to dominate much of current thinking. We find that Treasury civil servants and central bankers have presided over not only corrupt practices and economic failure, but intellectual failure, too. For example, their devotion to what most people know as neo-classical economics led to their failure to anticipate the largest recession since the 1930s, and revealed their powerlessness as policymakers in the face of the subsequent stagnation of output.

The penchant of the neo-classicals for putting all their eggs in the basket of simple mathematical and statistical forecasting is based on remarkably few variables, which leads them to ignore economic problems that are not easy to measure—whether they be legal or illegal. Even Mervyn King in his book “The End of Alchemy” hinted at this critique when pointing out the failure of existing models to take into account critical changes such as the political reforms in China that led to its rapid growth. I add the inability to see how attractive the City of London has become to—

Graham Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Roger Mullin: Certainly.

Graham Evans: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned London on several occasions, which makes me wonder whether there are no issues with people from Edinburgh. I remind him that Sir Fred Goodwin was a Scotsman in the Royal Bank of Scotland at the time. The hon. Gentleman should not insinuate that crooks end up only in London.

Roger Mullin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the extra minute, but I never implied that at all. If he had been here at the beginning of my speech and was listening to it, he might have realised that I was citing the words of the right hon. and learned Member for

Rushcliffe, who was sitting in the same place on Tuesday, and it was he who raised this very issue. If the hon. Gentleman wants to take issue with the castigation of the City of London, I suggest he looks to his own colleagues rather than to me.

Time does not permit me to go into a more detailed analysis of what needs to be done, so let me make a few suggestions. I think it would be useful if we vastly strengthened support for whistleblowing to give employees within banks and financial institutions greater confidence in raising issues such as suspected money laundering and the management of illegal assets.

As I reflect on what my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) said, I believe it would be wise for the Treasury to convene a commission into the simplification of the tax code. Put simply, the more complicated we construct a tax code, the easier it is for those with mal intentions to find their way into securing gains for themselves at the expense of others. I hope we get a Bill of some substance. I hope that the Government truly wish to address those vested interests that do us all so much harm.

3.44 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): It is, as ever, a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), and I am grateful to him for his advice. As a neo-classicist myself, I now know that I need to keep an eye on my variables. I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for saying that it is an even greater pleasure for Conservative Members to know that there is now an effective Opposition in the Scottish Parliament, keeping an eye on his colleagues and what they are up to, up north.

I listened to every word of not only the hon. Gentleman's speech but that of the shadow Chancellor. I do not know whether the shadow Chancellor rehearses his speeches in front of his colleagues, but, if so, he may have allowed himself a wry smile when he referred to the need to replace old worn-out infrastructure with something more effective. Having read "Labour's Future"—a very Little Red Book!—I can only imagine that the shadow Chancellor's advisers, Messrs Fischer and Varoufakis, have got their work cut out in the years ahead.

In the short time that remains to me, I want to say some positive things about what is a very positive Gracious Speech. I serve on the Financial Inclusion Commission, an honour that I share with the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), and I am particularly interested in the way in which the Government are setting out to improve financial inclusion and resilience. The scale of the problem, highlighted by an excellent paper published earlier this week by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Financial Inclusion Commission, is immense, but the Government are taking positive steps.

I welcome fee-free basic bank accounts, the lifetime ISA and the continuing successful roll-out of auto-enrolment, but I particularly welcome the Help to Save scheme, from which up to 3.5 million low-paid workers could benefit. I do not for one second underestimate the difficulty, for many families, of saving £50 a month, but from my experience of credit unions I know that some do, and if they do it through that scheme, they will be better off to the tune of £1,200. I welcome the scheme

for its direct impact, but I welcome it even more for the culture of financial resilience that it could provide. Curbs on payday lending will get us only so far. Any step that helps to boost resilience, and thereby reduces demand for those crippling services, is to be welcomed.

Our main focus, however, must be on encouraging resilience by promoting national economic growth, and the Gracious Speech is imbued with policies that will enhance productivity. As has been mentioned a number of times during the debate, establishing a legal right to broadband connections will enhance productivity, and will also aid financial and social inclusion.

The Government's commitment to transport is well founded. The performance of Horsham's local rail operator, Govia Thameslink Railway—not helped by the current industrial action—is woeful, but I recognise the Government's commitment to investment in the line.

In the context of transport and productivity, the Davies commission made an unequivocal recommendation in favour of Heathrow. It said that Gatwick would deliver half the economic benefit, that it had insufficient transport connections, and that it would fail to provide the hub airport that Britain needs. For the sake of our national productivity, let us get on with expanding Heathrow.

Finally, let me welcome fair funding for schools. It will assist the recruitment of maths and other STEM teachers in West Sussex, and it will help to drive future productivity, enable us to create a generation throughout the country who are better equipped to seize the opportunities that the Government are creating, and boost financial inclusion and resilience.

3.48 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): There are measures to like in the Queen's Speech. I argued for a soft drinks industry levy 15 years ago, although I warn the Government that it makes no sense to tax sugar while simultaneously cutting funds for sport in schools. Obesity must be tackled first and foremost through exercise, not through stand-alone measures like the sugar tax. The prison and courts reform Bill, if it is a genuine attempt to turn what is currently a penal system into a correctional and rehabilitation system, will certainly have support, and will bring about a much-needed transformation.

So there are measures to like, but beware: nothing shows the weakness of an Administration more than a failure to include big, controversial Bills in a Gracious Speech. This Queen's Speech certainly contains policies that are wrong. The education Bill, for example, with its academisation programme and its national funding formula, marks an appalling return to the old obsession with structures rather than standards. The formula will take £18 million from schools in Brent, and will call that fair. We have reception classes with 29 children speaking 21 different mother tongues, and an 8.6% per pupil spending cut for them is not fair. It is wrong.

My point is that the Government have run out of steam or are too insecure about getting support from their own Members to risk big controversial measures. So perhaps in a spirit of mendacious assistance, I shall set out the Bill that I believe the Government could and should have placed at the heart of the Gracious Address. A green growth Bill would set a clear trajectory for the UK to lead the world in today's low carbon industrial

[Barry Gardiner]

revolution just as we did 250 years ago in the coal-powered industrial revolution. Such a Bill would deal with energy, land use, water resource, transport and green city infrastructure in an integrated and sustainable way.

A green growth Bill would also transform the Treasury model from its current fixation on GDP growth to one that focused on wealth maximisation. To understand that GDP and wealth are not the same, one only needs to recall that the 2013-14 floods were the single biggest contributor to GDP in 2014 while simultaneously ruining thousands of people's lives. GDP measures productivity, not wealth. A green growth Bill would make our country focus on what really mattered.

Businesses currently extract an estimated \$7 trillion globally from the environment each year. This is in the form of free non-renewable goods and the equally free renewable services that they utilise. However, that \$7 trillion does not appear on balance sheets; these are free goods—or externalities, as classical economics prefers to call them. No Government account exists to chart their contribution to the national wealth, yet they represent the annual income from a gigantic asset base that is quite simply the precondition of all other economic activity. What sort of economic managers do we have who fail to quantify an asset base of this magnitude and importance?

A green growth Bill would establish natural capital accounting so that by measuring nature we could make its contribution to our economy visible and allow for effective decision making. Such a Bill would appoint a Chief Secretary to the Treasury equivalent who would examine not just departmental resource and departmental expenditure limit budgets but their natural capital and ecosystem services depletion as well. Our natural capital debt is arguably a much more urgent issue than our financial debt, yet our Governments are failing spectacularly to reverse the decline in that asset base.

3.52 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), but I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Gracious Speech. I do so for three main reasons. First, it recognises that businesses create jobs. Secondly, it confirms that we want to ensure that people keep more of what they earn. Thirdly, it allows the Government to support families in looking after themselves better in the years ahead.

Businesses are creating jobs in North East Hampshire and the surrounding area, and people in my constituency are doing very well under this Government's long-term economic plan. The reality is that only 0.5% of the economically active people there are unemployed. That is excellent news, but we must not be complacent. There are still 255 people who need work, and we must ensure that we create the opportunities for business to provide it. That is why I am pleased that small businesses will be helped by the universal service obligation for broadband. That is a major issue in some of the more rural parts of my constituency. People often want to set up their own business in those areas, and they need to be able to access the internet but cannot do so at the moment.

Further, I want to make the point on behalf of my constituents that their taxes must be well spent. They expect that, because North East Hampshire receives just over £350 per head on average in benefits, which is the lowest amount of all the constituencies in the country. This is a result of the strong economy, and taxpayers recognise that while there should be a welfare state to act as a safety net, it must not be a lifestyle choice. That is why it is important that we help people to keep more of what they earn, to incentivise work. The tax-free allowance has risen to £11,000, and we must go further in the future. Three million people pay no income tax at all, but many people in my constituency pay the higher rate of income tax. The rise in the threshold to £43,000 is a good step, but we must go further. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was on to something when he talked about the "squeezed middle". It is true that there are people with reasonably paid jobs who need support because they still find things tough. That is what we are trying to address by increasing the threshold for the higher rate, and I encourage Ministers to go further.

The last thing that I want to cover in the time available is the most local issue of all: families and life chances. It is right that we create good schools for everyone and that people's lives should not be dictated by where they came from, but by their skills and abilities and by where they want to go. A key part of all that is the family in which they live. I am pleased that the Conservatives, in coalition with the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015 and now in a Conservative majority Government, have recognised marriage in the tax system. The marriage allowance is an important step, but we should go further, because family breakdown costs the Government and taxpayers £48 billion a year. If we could tackle just a fraction of the family breakdown in this country, not only would we save taxpayers' money, but we would improve people's life chances. All the research shows that people with stable family backgrounds enjoy better educational prospects and better jobs in the future. While we must focus on ensuring that individuals get life chances, this is also about ensuring that we bring the public finances under control. By doing all these things, we will do just that.

3.56 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): After years of abandoning and punishing the most vulnerable people in society, we get a Queen's Speech that talks about introducing legislation to tackle some of the deepest social problems and to improve life chances for the most disadvantaged. However, we all know the truth: this Government's grand rhetoric is rarely matched by policy. In fact, their policies tend to be regressive and punitive, pushing more and more people into poverty. No one living in poverty is there as a result of their own doing; the perpetuation of poverty and the rise in child poverty since 2010 is a clear failing of Government.

A recent report from Sheffield Hallam University, also referred to by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), looks at the uneven impact of welfare reform, revealing that the north yet again takes the biggest hit on welfare reform while the south, outside London, remains largely unscathed. Some 83% of the overall financial losses fall on families with children. The north-east alone is set to lose £620 million

a year by 2020-21, which is a loss per working-age adult of £380 a year. South Tyneside, the council which covers my constituency, is the sixth worst-affected local authority. Even the introduction of the living wage has left the lowest-paid workers little better off, if at all. One of my constituents, a carer, is now in a desperate financial situation because the new living wage has taken her over the threshold to be eligible for carer's allowance. An extra £8 a week has cost her £62 in lost benefits.

If this Government really care about life chances, they would not be running into the ground the services people that people rely on the most. They would not have closed over 800 Sure Start centres. They would not be presiding over a crisis in teacher recruitment. They would not be focusing resources on adoption to the detriment of social work that can keep families together. They would not be presiding over the collapse of the NHS and social care. They would not have made such a mess of the benefits system to the extent that more than 1 million food parcels have been handed out. Disabled people would not be losing more than £1,500 a year. The terminally ill would not be being declared fit for work and having their income slashed. Homelessness would not have doubled since 2010. We would not have rising wealth inequality in areas blighted by high unemployment. The Children's Society has reported that children and young people in Britain are among the unhappiest, unhealthiest, poorest and least educated in the developed world.

This Queen's Speech identifies an impotent and careless Government whose numerous U-turns reveal deep problems at the core of their policy making. Of the 30 announcements, we have heard 28 of them before, because we have for the past year had to put up with a Government obsessed with internal politics. We all know that the EU referendum has nothing at all to do with whether or not we are better off in or out of Europe. The Government have taken up precious parliamentary time with a prolonged, unedifying fight between—[*Interruption.*] You can have your say later. It is a fight between two middle-aged public school chums over who is going to run the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Even though that was said from a sedentary position, it is not "you" who has had your say—it is "he" who has had his say.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am going to end by saying that if this is the Prime Minister's last Queen's Speech, I am sure it is not a legacy that he or anyone on the Government Benches should be proud of.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. After the next speaker, I will have to reduce the time limit to three minutes. People will have to start speaking very quickly and take limited interventions. Still on four minutes, however, is Mr Craig Tracey.

4 pm

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Many of the measures in the Gracious Speech will bring benefits to North

Warwickshire and Bedworth, but, in the short time available to me today, I wish to focus on the digital economy Bill. The Bill is vital, not just in my constituency, where there are large pockets of rural communities, but across the whole of the UK, if we are to maintain our position as the fifth largest global economy.

I want Britain to be at the forefront of innovation and to be a nation where technology continually transforms the economy and society, but for that we need to up our efforts in creating a world-class digital infrastructure and delivering on our manifesto commitment to roll out universal broadband. We have made great strides since 2010, when fewer than half of UK properties had access to superfast broadband. Now, 90% of households enjoy it, and that figure is set to increase to 95% by 2017. Many of the benefits are clear: better connectivity brings more choice, more opportunities and greater competition; new markets for businesses are opened up, not just within the UK or the confines of the EU, but globally and in emerging markets; and consumers are more empowered, finding it easier to access a wider range of goods and get access to their finances. But there are other, less recognised benefits that greater connectivity brings: it can help to keep families in touch, including our military based overseas; it can ease pressure on our health services; and it can combat other social issues, such as loneliness, particularly in isolated rural areas. I have long championed the case for high-speed broadband. A great example of these benefits in operation is Prezybox, an online retail company in the village of Austrey which operates from a farm building. It is wholly reliant on the internet, but has now been able to grow to employ 25 local people, thanks to the connectivity that has been delivered.

I have two observations, however, that I would like to share with Ministers. First, there needs to be better communication with local communities, both before and after the installation of new services. I have been contacted by many constituents who were not aware of the roll-out plans in place for their area and the fact that they were soon to be connected in any case. Once the service is activated, it is vital that the next steps are strongly communicated to those who now have access. I have lost count of the number of constituents who think that once the upgraded broadband is available their speeds will automatically increase. They do not realise that they have to activate a superfast service or often that they can pick from a range of providers able to offer them that service.

My second point relates to the not spots—the 5% who by 2017 will still not have access to superfast broadband and whose number the National Farmers Union puts at 1.2 million households, and the 10% who will still not have access to mobile phone coverage. Many of these affected areas will be rural and farming communities, and I know of several areas in North Warwickshire that offer little or no coverage, and slow download speeds, often of dial-up proportions. We must do everything we can to ensure that these communities are connected as quickly as possible, so as not to be left behind by the digital revolution.

It is clear that the demand is there, so what I am urging the Government to do is act decisively and look at all the available options. In all likelihood, these remaining properties are going to be the most difficult to reach so, in the best of entrepreneurial British spirit,

[Craig Tracey]

we may need to be creative and innovative. There are opportunities to look at alternative providers who can create separate infrastructure projects. There is the option of providing greater access to satellite provision. Importantly, we need to encourage community projects, for which there is currently no public sector funding.

In conclusion, many things in this one nation Queen's speech will bring great benefit as they are implemented, not just to my constituents, but to the UK as a whole. The continued focus of this Government on a digital economy can leave a legacy for generations to come.

4.4 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the Queen's Speech debate today if only for three minutes. As many people, both inside and outside this House, have remarked, this speech has felt a bit like a damp squib, or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) said, all filler and no killer. Perhaps that is because all eyes are on the referendum. It is astonishing that the Tories have been waiting for a majority Government since the 1990s and have already run out of ideas by their second Queen's Speech. That takes some doing.

As far as the economy is concerned, the sum total of Bills in this Queen's Speech does not add up to the comprehensive plan that would put the recovery on a more sustainable footing, or allow our citizens to meet the challenges of the labour market as it is today and also, more importantly, as it will be in the future. We are not producing enough secure, well-paid jobs, and the Government have presided over record low pay growth, so we badly needed a clear, bold and comprehensive productivity plan, which is totally missing from this Queen's Speech.

The Chancellor has been the steward of the UK economy for the past six years, but unfortunately for all of us he appears to be a one-trick pony struggling with his only trick. His only real plan for the economy is deficit reduction, and he continually misses his own targets. We know that he failed to eliminate the deficit in the last Parliament as promised and figures released by the Office for National Statistics on Tuesday showed that the Chancellor had missed his borrowing target from last year by £3.8 billion, with the deficit still standing at £76 billion. Manufacturing remains 6.9% below 2008 levels, and our export performance is really worrying. Although services continue to outperform, we are still lagging behind on goods exports, with the widest shortfall since records began. It is worth remembering that, in 2011, the Chancellor said that our exports were critical to our economic growth, and that he was going to double the value of exports to £1 trillion and increase the number of exporters by 100,000. His record shows that exports were not even mentioned in last year's Budget because there has been only a tiny increase in the value of exports since 2011. In fact, the number of exporters has fallen between 2013 and 2014. The Chancellor will try to blame the global cocktail of risk, but many of the problems are of the Government's own making, because of their failure to do any serious heavy lifting in rebalancing the UK economy.

What we really needed from the Queen's Speech was a proper productivity plan, not just a vague ragbag of old failed policies that the Government have tried

to put together under a new label. We needed a fresh start for exports, so that our performance in exports can start the rebalancing that our economy so urgently needs.

4.7 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): It is always a very great honour to stand up in this Chamber and speak for my constituents, whom I am so proud to represent.

On the first day of this debate, we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman). In an eloquent speech, she reminded every Member of this House of the incredible opportunities that we all have, each and every day, to change things for the better and to fight for the causes that we care about. She paid tribute to the willingness of Members from all parts of the House to work collaboratively in cross-party groups and friendships to fight for shared causes.

For all the disagreements that there are—on both sides of the House and in our own parties—there is a common desire to serve our constituents to the best of our ability and make whatever small difference we can in a world that all too often seems filled with injustice.

The Gracious Speech contained within it the very measures that drove me to fight so hard against the odds to come to this place. I am talking about social justice, social mobility and life chances. At its heart, the Gracious Speech is all about hope and possibility—specifically for those who have never had it easy. This Queen's Speech was about tackling the barriers and obstacles that often stand in the way of too many and that rob them of the hopes and ambitions that they might otherwise realise.

I am proud that this Government have placed a commitment to strong families at the heart of this speech, as it is a strong family that will give a child the very best start in life. Some might dismiss that as insubstantial froth or, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) put it, “fictional drivel”, but a strong family is at the core of a successful and thriving society. It is the children in struggling families, the children in care, the children in the our youth offending system who are denied the hope, possibility and chance of something better.

Too many do not want to talk about the underlying causes of disadvantage. We should not shy away from doing so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) rightly said, it is about family breakdown, addiction, mental health difficulties, repeat spells in prison and homelessness. Getting out of that cycle is so difficult.

Strong families take many forms. My mother was a single parent with five children, who struggled hard to keep our family together. She taught me that you can set your mind to anything and achieve it. You might have to fight harder, you might have to try harder, and there might be obstacles in your way that others do not face, but do not let that stop you.

I want for others the ability to make their way in the world, no matter where they came from and no matter what obstacles they face. That is why I wanted to come to this place to fight for those who are too often written off and whose lives could take another direction if only they had the chance.

4.10 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): It is self-evident that investment, jobs and skills are the key to solving many of the problems facing the country. That is no less true in my constituency, so I shall touch on those topics.

There has been a slowdown in private sector investment owing to the impact of the recession and slow or stagnant recovery in the north. In my constituency, the only recent significant industrial investment is in a facility in Netherton at a manufacturing printers. The most strategic investment is in the new deep sea berth in the port of Liverpool at Seaforth. However, although there are plans to build a new road or a reconstructed road to the port, the plans for rail freight are abysmal, with just £10 million investment over the next three years. Perhaps there should be a halt to the road development until we get a better and more symbiotic relationship between rail and road investment there.

Bootle constituency has a chronic deficit of private investment as its employment base is in the public sector, at 23% in the borough of Sefton compared with 17% in the UK, and private sector job increases have not replaced public sector job loss. This is compounded by the underinvestment in public infrastructure on rail, ageing water and sewerage systems and undersupply of electricity to development sites. I hope the devolution deal will deliver on its promise to attract more investment into the area.

I want to give a thumbs-up to Mayor Joe Anderson, the chair of Liverpool city region combined authority, who has robustly made that case for the whole of Merseyside, as Ministers will testify. Gaining investment and jobs stimulated by the Liverpool2 development and improved road and rail access connecting it to the northern powerhouse will be critical.

On jobs, the stagnant recovery is reflected in job levels in Bootle, although the recession has not affected chronic unemployment. The issue of skills is a bone of contention nationally. We have managed to raise the level of skills, but there must be something wrong with an economy that can spend £20 million on a garden bridge across the Thames and £10 million on rail investment in one of the largest ports in the country. There is something wrong with that system and it must change. I hope this Queen's Speech will change it, but I doubt it.

4.13 pm

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd).

I welcome the Queen's Speech because it builds upon the Government's already strong progress over the past six years and gets Britain fit for the future. For example, on jobs, since 2010 and during the course of this Parliament, employment is set to rise by 3 million, which is a huge achievement. In Havant the number of people on jobseeker's allowance has more than halved since 2010.

I welcome the Gracious Speech not only because it strengthens Britain's economy today, but because it prepares our economy for tomorrow by equipping the country to lead in what is becoming known as the fourth industrial revolution, helping to create jobs and strengthen economic growth. The first industrial revolution used steam power to mechanise production, the second used electricity to create mass production, and the third

used information technology to create the internet and launch the digital revolution. Now a fourth industrial revolution builds on the third, characterised by a fusion of technologies that blurs the lines between the physical, the digital and the biological.

At the core of this fourth industrial revolution are advances such as high-quality manufacturing, robotics, the new digital economy and life sciences. The fourth industrial revolution is a systematic shift that will transform the world's economy in the decades ahead, and it is because of this Queen's Speech that Britain's economy and workforce are set to play a leading role.

I therefore welcome the digital economy Bill, which will give Britain world-class digital infrastructure. People in Havant and across the country will benefit from the new broadband universal service obligation, which will, for the first time, enshrine in law a right to the fast broadband connections that underpin every aspect of the digital economy and modern life.

Just as Britain pioneered the steam train and the jet engine, we are poised to be leaders in the next generation of transport innovations. I welcome the modern transport Bill, which places the UK at the forefront of new technologies, such as driverless cars. It shows investors that we in Britain are committed to transport innovation and the many jobs that will be created by it.

If we in Britain are to lead the fourth industrial revolution, to create jobs and to grow our economy, we cannot just sit back and watch this revolution pass us by. We have to give our businesses and communities the tools to strengthen our economy and to create those much-valued jobs up and down the country, in constituencies represented on both sides of the House. That is what I believe this Queen's Speech does. It deserves the support of the House, and I will be voting for it in the Lobby this evening.

4.15 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): In the 1980s, the UK Government decided to abandon the shipbuilding industry in my constituency. The subsequent catastrophe resulted in the loss of thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs and the decimation of an industry that people could take pride in. The UK Government pulled the plug from shipbuilding without even the façade of a workable regeneration programme for Inverclyde. By 1987, companies reliant on the shipyards began closing, and the area's male unemployment rate skyrocketed to 25%.

The IBM facility in Spango valley was highlighted as an example of the skilled, sustainable and long-term employment that could offset the decline of traditional industries. In March 1988, Margaret Thatcher visited the IBM site to champion the cause of the private sector and to explain how it would save Inverclyde in the wake of the shipyard closures.

If we fast forward to the present day, we find the Queen's Speech promising to spread economic prosperity, but we now know that, by the end of 2016, there will not be a single IBM job left at the Spango valley site. Two other major employers in Inverclyde—Sanmina and Texas Instruments—have also recently announced job losses. The cumulative financial and emotional toll of these losses on individuals, families and the wider community is impossible to quantify.

[Ronnie Cowan]

There are successful companies in Inverclyde, but the area is still trying to set sail against the winds of economic stagnation and population decline. I have written to the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister for Employment to ask them to visit Inverclyde to see the potential our area has to offer.

I know that many other constituencies across the UK are suffering from economic pressures, but Inverclyde seems to have suffered disproportionately for decades. We have had 30 years of economic decline, 30 years of depopulation and 30 years of UK Government indifference.

We are not looking for handouts. The people of Inverclyde are resilient and have an invaluable work ethic, but they lack opportunity. We need more than a token visit or a reactive taskforce every time a major employer announces redundancies. We need a workable plan for regeneration, and we cannot wait 30 more years for it to be implemented.

After the pain of the 1980s, the UK Government have a historical debt to Inverclyde. The Conservative Government of the time had an undesirable zeal and commitment to closing the shipyards. Sadly, that has not been matched by an equally energetic and unwavering commitment to regeneration. Some may say that this is ancient history, but my office deals with constituency cases every day that are a direct legacy of the decisions made by the UK Government in the 1980s.

I hope that the UK Government, as the only Government in the UK with the full range of economic powers at their disposal, will be part of the solution. If they are unwilling to help, they should give the full range of powers required to the Scottish Government and let them get on with the job.

4.18 pm

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Somebody once told me that there is no such thing as luck. Luck, they said, is a place where opportunity and preparation meet. Many of us in this Chamber will have grown up with everything pretty much sorted: a stable family, a decent household income, a great education and good health—that perfect mix that prepared us to control our lives and to make use of opportunities that came our way.

When we talk about a life chances strategy, therefore, we are talking about identifying the things the Government can do to plug the gaps for individuals who are not as fortunate as us and for whom one of those key ingredients is missing. I applaud the Prime Minister for making this one of the essential themes in his work. It is certainly why I came into politics. Now we have the challenge of translating that policy aspiration into detail. That challenge is huge, not just because we are still recovering from economic turbulence, but because one of the solutions cannot be so easily measured, nor have metrics attached. People transform the lives of others, with hearts, heads, promises, support, mistakes sometimes, but above all trust.

Returning to my premise that this is all about opportunity and preparation, Government can certainly develop policy to provide the opportunities, and they have done that very well already, with an improving economy, record levels of employment, an increase in the minimum

wage, transformation of the benefits system, investment in the NHS, and help to buy schemes. Admittedly, we would all agree that we have much more to do on affordable housing, especially in constituencies like mine, and we are still uncovering the enormity of the mental health challenge, but overall those policies will provide those essential opportunities, and many millions of people are benefiting from them already. Focusing on the preparation part of the luck equation, how do we help those who do not have those building blocks? When I think of all the people I know who have transformed their lives, the single common denominator has, without fail, been another person. There may have been Government interventions in the mix somewhere—a grant to set up a business, perhaps—but alone that would not have been enough. When you really need to turn your life around, you need another human being to help you.

Every Government Department has a role to play. Ministers need to identify where people touch their Departments and embed the big society in their areas of responsibility. The Department for Communities and Local Government has been fantastic on troubled families. Croydon Council is doing amazing work to break down internal silos to put the best interests and potential of its residents at the heart of everything it does. I applaud the Department for Education for its work on local employees being mentors for children. What about the parents, too? Think of Billy Elliot's father! Our GPs are also at the heart of this support, but Lord knows, they are at breaking point and they may need the extra funding to be provided now.

Another army of mentors and champions is desperate to help this revolution—those in the third sector, almost totally frozen out of the Work programme but desperate to get involved. We should bite their hands off and bring their expertise to the centre of this debate. One thing they have in abundance, far more than any politician or Government, is trust in the people they want to help.

4.21 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There is a growing army of people in this country for whom the economy is no longer working. They will have looked hopefully at the Government's plans for the next year and found that there is nothing there for them. It is simply not good enough that we have a Prime Minister who is happy to sacrifice an entire parliamentary Session tinkering at the edges because he is too afraid of causing even more divisions in his own party. How much of what is in this agenda will even see the light of day anyway? This Government have made 24 U-turns in the past year alone. It is unprecedented to see a Government offer so little so soon into a new Parliament. Just a year after a general election, we have a zombie Government and a Prime Minister who cannot wait for it to be 28 days later.

Yet there are serious problems that need to be tackled now. For the first time in a decade, child poverty is rising under this Government. There has been a worrying increase in the number of children relying on food banks—up by 13% in my constituency in the past year alone. What was the Government's response? They rebranded the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission by removing "Child Poverty" from its name, and attempted to remove the statutory duty to

measure child poverty at all. The chair of the commission notably said that young people now face an “existential crisis”—a crisis that this Government seem determined to exacerbate.

What will our economy look like for the workers of tomorrow? The sad reality is that manufacturing in this country is in long-term decline, and I see nothing from the Government to rebalance the economy either on a sectoral or a geographic basis. In my constituency, economic growth is hampered by the lack of investment in key infrastructure projects such as the electrification of the Wrexham to Bidston train line or improvements to the M56 motorway, yet grandiose schemes continue to take shape elsewhere in the country. Getting better connectivity in my constituency is undoubtedly the key to unlocking growth, but we are told that any improvements to the M56 will not even be considered until the end of the decade, and there is currently nothing on the horizon to improve the rail line. People in parts of my constituency have no reliable access to public transport at all, yet Crossrail alone is earmarked to receive nine times more funding than all the rail projects from the north’s three regions combined.

What of the growing ranks of the self-employed? Julie Deane’s independent review for Government on self-employment appears to be gathering dust on the shelf. The review found that the number of self-employed in the UK is at an all-time high of 4.6 million, and that the number is growing and the trend set to continue. That group now represents 15% of the UK workforce, making a considerable contribution to the country’s economy.

The report makes a number of important recommendations and I want action to be taken on one in particular:

“Government should consider extending support to the self-employed in areas where there is discrepancy between support for the self-employed and support for employees.”

It also makes a recommendation with regard to those who are self-employed through necessity. There is no doubt that there are people who should not be classed as self-employed, but because they are classified as such they are offered no basic protection, such as the minimum wage. Urgent action needs to be taken on the reclassification of self-employment.

In conclusion, this has been a missed opportunity to tackle the inequalities that exist by region, gender, age and employment status.

4.25 pm

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

Rural broadband is a key issue and it has been raised by Conservative Members. I know that broadband is an issue in some urban areas as well, but it would help the rural economy significantly. It will not address the farming crisis that some Members have mentioned—the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) highlighted a number of difficulties in the agricultural sector—but it will help bring better perspective to the rural community and to farmers in particular.

On the anti-corruption summit, Her Majesty’s Speech said that

“legislation will be introduced to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion.”

I hope that that works in Northern Ireland, because we have a huge problem with fuel laundering and smuggling, and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs does not seem to be getting to the root of it. It is almost an economy—an illegal economy—in itself, but it exists in Northern Ireland and we really need to grapple with it. I ask the Government to provide more powers to the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland so that it, rather than HMRC, can be the lead partner. That would be hugely beneficial and productive.

I do not have much time, but I want to touch quickly on the proposed adoption legislation, about which I speak from a personal perspective. It is vital that additional legislation is promoted to help all these young people and to give them a fair and equal chance. Education legislation has also been proposed, and I make a plea for co-operation between the education authorities and those who will be responsible for the adoption provisions. Adoptive kids are sometimes short-changed by the education sector, because those involved in it are not fully aware of the needs of adoptive and looked-after children.

I welcome the proposed adoption legislation, although I know that it will apply only to England because it is a devolved matter. Northern Ireland does not even have adoption legislation—we still rely on a children’s order. I do not know about the other devolved regions, but there is a huge gap in the legislation in Northern Ireland. These young people need the best start possible in life, and one way of doing that is to provide facilities and support, by which I mean not just assessments, but action by local authorities.

4.28 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): The Queen’s Speech was a missed opportunity to change course on the decision to make cuts that will result in 2.5 million working families losing more than £2,100 a year, the impact of which will be to hit the vulnerable people in our society the hardest. The opportunity provided by universal credit to create a simpler benefits system is being undermined by financial decisions and, as a result, we are failing to protect vulnerable groups in particular.

I want to focus on a vulnerable group who are often overlooked, namely young carers. At present, severely disabled adults who are living without a non-disabled adult to provide care for them may be eligible to receive the severe disability premium, which is intended to help them with the additional costs they face. The Government have proposed to have no equivalent of the SDP in universal credit. They propose to use the savings from the SDP to raise the level of benefit paid to those entitled to receive the higher disability addition. However, once universal credit has been fully implemented, severely disabled people with no adult to assist them will be entitled to about £58 less a week than those in the current system.

Between the Office for National Statistics censuses in 2001 and 2011, there was a 20% rise in the number of unpaid carers. As a Welsh MP, I am particularly concerned about the issue, because Wales has a higher proportion than England of young carers providing unpaid care. More than 11,500 children in Wales aged between five and 17 provide unpaid care. If their parents do not have

[Christina Rees]

support and protection through universal credit, those children will face additional disadvantage. In four out of 10 households with a disabled lone parent, children help them for more than 15 hours a week. Around 25,000 disabled lone parents receive the severe disability premium. In those families, young carers, especially children aged over 10, are taking on a significant caring role.

The impact of the loss of SDB could be very severe: 83% of those who are eligible for it said that a reduction in benefit would mean that they had to cut back on food, and 80% said that they would have to cut back on heating. Will the Government please consider implementing the Children's Society recommendation that universal credit should include a self-care element to provide additional support to disabled adults who have no other adult to look after them, to help them with the additional costs that they incur and to ensure that the burden of additional care costs is not placed on young carers?

4.31 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees). The Prime Minister declared this to be a one nation Queen's Speech for a one nation Government. He said that his Government were a Government for whom

"economic security always comes first"—[*Official Report*, 18 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 22.]

He said they were a Government with a "long-term economic plan". But, once again, we have seen nothing to substantiate those grand plans. All we have seen is stasis.

The British economy in its current state is best described by the saying, "All that glitters is not gold." At first glance there is the semblance of a positive picture, but scratch away at the surface and a very different story emerges: a story of low productivity, ballooning personal debt, a yawning trade deficit, creaking infrastructure, a dangerous over-reliance on financial services and a growing chasm between London and the rest. To put it simply, our economy is too unbalanced and too unstable to be resilient and to serve the British people. It is too short-sighted, too inward looking and far too unequal.

In my constituency, we have seen the costs of the Government's failure. For more than a year my Labour colleagues and I have called on the Government—we have raised the issue more than 230 times since the general election—to snap out of their stupor and take action to stand up for British steel. We were met with a mixture of indifference and incompetence. Only when the crisis became a PR problem did the Government wake up and seek a last-minute fix to a problem that we have pointed to for a year. The steel crisis really sums up the Government's approach: it is a problem only when it hits the front pages. If the Government had a real long-term economic plan and a real strategic approach to governing Britain, the crisis could have been averted. Instead, we have a Government with a long-term economic plan that is not a plan at all but a bookkeeper's to-do list. They are focused only on reducing costs without giving any thought to the generation of revenue through

sustainable growth. They think that the solution to everything is to reduce the size of Government and retreat from the challenges of the future rather than addressing the faulty foundations of our economy. That is why the Queen's Speech was yet another missed opportunity, and that is why I shall vote against it this evening.

4.33 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): My part of the country is an area that is rightly perceived to be successful. Cambridge is, in many ways, a model for the future of Britain, with many innovative, high-tech, high-skill jobs linked to world-class research embedded in excellent local institutions. Public and private are mutually interdependent, and not seen as being at odds.

Last year, as part of the city deal process, the local business-led organisation Cambridge Ahead worked with all the local partners, at the Government's request, and developed "The Case for Cambridge", which was a powerful, evidence-based argument for what was needed to maintain that success. We should be implementing that case but, instead, we have lost almost a year on an extraordinary and bungled attempt to shoehorn three counties together into a devolution deal with an elected mayor. A few weeks ago, following an over-subscribed Westminster Hall debate on the East Anglia devolution deal, I suggested that the House have a more substantial discussion not only on the East Anglia deal but on the wider issues, because what is happening across England—this bungled mix of devolution and local government reorganisation, or lack of it—has profound consequences.

At this time of all times, with the parallel debate on the relationship between Westminster and Brussels, what an opportunity this was to have had a proper consideration of how each level of government could work with another, based on mutual respect. Instead, we have had a debate on Europe that has been intellectually largely bankrupt and a devolution process that in the east was reduced to, "You've got three weeks to make up your mind", and "Oh, you've got to have an elected mayor or two".

What is really needed and what the business community in particular is crying out for is the imagination, the freedom and the flexibility to unlock the massive potential that exists in and around Cambridge. Unfortunately, our strengths are also our weaknesses, and we struggle on housing and transport. There are so many possibilities, including the proposals put forward by the London-Stansted-Cambridge Consortium, which would unlock growth between Cambridge and London if only we could take advantage of such opportunities.

There are other threats to Cambridge's knowledge economy. Having already trebled tuition fees for university students and scrapped maintenance grants, the Government now want fees to rise again. Few students will welcome paying more when so many feel that their contribution is already too high. When they make comparisons with other countries, they are right to feel aggrieved. We are all pleased that the Government have promised to protect the dual funding system of research, but there are real risks that such separation will be eroded over time.

Let me conclude by making the wider point that whatever the strength of a research-based, high-tech economy, we still need to make sure that the benefits are

shared fairly. When I look at the rising number of people turning to the Cambridge food bank, see more and more people on short-term and zero-hours contracts and see the visible evidence of more and more rough sleepers on the streets of Cambridge, it is clear the economy is working for some but by no means all. One looks in vain for measures that will address that very real unfairness, while the measures on housing and benefit changes passed in the last Session will make the situation in my city worse, not better. Those are all reasons why I will oppose the Government tonight.

4.36 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP) *rose*—

Hon. Members: Hooray!

George Kerevan: Wait for it. This afternoon, the Chancellor promised us a better markets Bill to improve competition. We on the SNP Benches are in favour of that and will give it what help we can, depending on what is in the Bill. It is a matter of record that, in the UK, we have the most monopolised banking system in the western world. Four big banks dominate, with 80% of the market share. If we want genuine competition and better markets in finance, we need to have six, eight or 10 banks of a similar size. Until we have that, there will be no better markets or better competition.

Here is a tale: the two main regulatory bodies set up by this Government and this Chancellor to ensure more competition and better markets in finance—the Competition and Markets Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority—have failed to deliver. Why is that? There is a suspicion among SNP Members, and I suspect among Government Members, that those regulators are perhaps looking over their shoulder at the Chancellor and asking themselves, “Does the Chancellor really want us to close down, intervene in or break up those banks? Maybe we are being told to say one thing and to do another.” That is why, when we look at the small print of the Bill, we will want to see whether this is just shadow boxing and a subterfuge that allows the Chancellor to get up and say, “I’m in favour of competition, but actually—shush, shush—don’t do anything about it”, or whether it will really have teeth to take on the big banks.

I want very quickly to look at some of the things that are going on. The FCA has brokered a deal with the big banks on arbitration for small businesses who have suffered mis-selling and been bankrupted. Unfortunately, the FCA has turned a blind eye to the fact that the big banks are now signing up solicitors across the UK, including in Scotland, so that those solicitors, who are on the banks’ books and waiting for work, will not take up the cases of small businesses who feel that the arbitration process has gone against them and want to take the banks to court.

Roger Mullin: Corrupt.

George Kerevan: I hear from a sedentary position the word “corrupt”. I will not use that word, but I will certainly be looking to the Chancellor and this Government to make sure, through this Bill, that such practices by the big banks are done away with.

Finally, in my constituency of East Lothian, RBS has just announced the closure of its only branch in the town of Prestonpans. That is a surprise because the population of East Lothian is growing, and we are about to have 10,000 more houses in the general area of Prestonpans. Banks do that kind of thing: they do not care about their customers. This Bill has to reverse that, and that is the test we will apply to it.

4.39 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): I am delighted to see that the Chancellor has come back to join us for the close of what has been an excellent debate today, to hear the Opposition’s view that, by any stretch of the imagination, this Queen’s Speech is a desperate missed opportunity. It could have addressed the deep-seated problems in our economy or the poor quality of work experienced by so many under this Conservative Government. Time and time again this afternoon, I have heard right hon. and hon. Members lament those problems, and ask in their different ways where the meat was last week.

Where was the Bill to address the deep-seated problems in our economy, and the yawning inequality that is spreading across Britain? For example, where was the Bill that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) put it, could boost our economy through investment in our public services? What a question to have to ask on a day when the Government have sacked 250 BIS workers in the heart of the northern powerhouse in Sheffield. The Government should reflect on that.

The Government should also reflect on the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth): where was the Bill was to revive manufacturing? My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) asked where the Bill on tax transparency was. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn)—that mighty place—made a barnstorming speech lambasting the Chancellor and the Government for preparing to flog off the Land Registry as another private sector monopoly.

The Government should also reflect on the powerful speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who are continuing their fight to stand up for steel jobs just 24 hours after the brave steelworkers came to London to petition the Government to save their jobs and protect their pensions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) asked, where was the Bill to sort out education and the savings crisis in Britain? My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) asked where the Bill was that could deal with the rising tide of destitution that is sweeping Britain under the Tories. He reminded us that in the great city of Manchester there is now an emerging tent city. What an unbelievable token of this Government’s failure it is that people are living in tents at the heart of one of our greatest cities. Where were any of the Bills to deal with any of those problems? Where was the Bill to support the self-employed or to support carers? Where was the Bill to reverse the cuts to universal credit or to really deal with devolution?

I have my own question for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor: where was the Bill to save the steel industry? Today of all days, when

[Owen Smith]

we have had a half-baked announcement by the Work and Pensions Secretary—[*Interruption.*] I support the fact that there has been a written announcement, but decry and deplore the fact that he did not have the nerve to come to the House to explain what some of the downsides might be, because we have heard scant evidence from the Government on what this situation means for some of the steelworkers. [*Interruption.*] I have said I support it—he keeps chuntering. I support the production of the consultation document and the fact that he is looking at the issue, but he should have done it a year ago. That is the truth—he should have been addressing it long since.

When the Secretary of State replies to the debate, he will have the opportunity to give us some of the answers that we did not get from his right hon. Friend the Business Secretary today, such as who will definitely disbenefit as a result of the changes? What precedent will be set for other industries? Are we content to see other industries in future take a similar route and shift uprating of pension benefits from being in line with the consumer prices index to being in line with the retail prices index, with workers losing out? He needs to tell the House how he will ring-fence that so that it affects only steelworkers.

Now I come to think of it, where was any sort of industrial strategy in the Queen's Speech? One of the most telling contributions today was made by the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White). I do not know whether it is just because he looks a bit like me that the brother wants to come over to our side—[*Interruption.*] He could be a Welshman with an inside leg that length. He sounded like a Labour man when he spoke earlier. He asked, essentially, "Where is the industrial strategy? Wouldn't it be marvellous if the Tories had one?"

Chris White *rose*—

Owen Smith: I'd love to give way—tell us, where is the industrial strategy?

Chris White: I remind the hon. Gentleman that at the end of my speech I said that for an industrial strategy to happen, we need a long-term economic plan.

Owen Smith: I heard it. There was that one soundbite, that one belated effort to draw back from the brink, but we had three and a half minutes of the hon. Gentleman attacking the Chancellor before then, and complaining that there was no industrial strategy.

What do we have in the Queen's Speech? We have a bit of nonsense about spaceports and electric cars. In Port Talbot where people are worrying about the steelworks, they are not too bothered about spaceports unless the Government are planning to stick one in Aberavon and create 1,000 jobs. This is window dressing. Where on earth is the industrial strategy? Where is the Bill to deal with this country's productivity crisis, which is greater than just about anywhere else in the western world? Where is the Bill to deal with disabled people who under this Secretary of State are languishing on the scrapheap? Where is the Bill to halt the spiralling of personal debt to record levels? The Chancellor used to talk about the

problem of debt, but he never speaks about personal debt or the fact that consumers are the basis on which he is trying to rebuild our economy. Where is the Bill to deal with the fact that our earnings are flatlining in Britain? The Queen's Speech contains not a sniff of any such Bills. Many Labour Members have suggested that that is because the Government have run out of ideas and the Chancellor has run out of steam, but I do not think he has—I am looking across at him and he is looking as fit as a butcher's dog. He has his 5:2 diet and a personal trainer on-tap. He looks full of ideas—he is certainly full of it.

The real reason why none of those things were in the Queen's Speech is because they do not fit with the narrative that says that everything is tickety-boo with our economy. We have the makers marching, jobs for everyone, and the new national living wage: "Nothing to see here, move on, move on. Let's keep going with where we are". Of course that is absolute nonsense, because on every measure in every serious analysis of our economy, the Government are missing their targets. The deficit was meant to be cleared long since, but it is £76 billion. The national debt is meant to be falling as a proportion of GDP, but it is now £1.6 trillion—£600 billion more than when Labour left office. The Chancellor used to talk about not bequeathing debts to future generations, but that debt has increased by £600 billion on his watch.

What about business activity? It has gone through the floor. What about corporation tax receipts? We used to be told—I remember it well—that the secret to getting all that extra foreign direct investment, receipts and investment was slashing corporation tax rates, but just this week are told that that figure is down to 5.1%. That is not the mark of an economy that is booming by any stretch, and little wonder, because our trade deficit is at a record high. The gap between our exports and imports is bigger than it has ever been. [*Interruption.*] It is £13 billion, if the Chancellor wants to quibble about it. That is a big problem for him, and it is happening on his watch and because of him. That is the reality of this country's economy, and the consequences for working people are significant.

The Government continually point to the jobs market as the one bright spot, and Labour Members welcome those new jobs. [*Interruption.*] I welcome those jobs, as I welcome every new job. We believe that people in this country are better off if they are working, but that will not stop me asking what people are earning. What if they are taking home less than they used to, and their wallets are getting thinner at the end of the month as a result of the poor quality jobs that Britain is now generating? What if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is compounding those ills by cutting work allowances under universal credit?

I was at the Elephant and Castle jobcentre earlier this week, and I heard what a great problem low wages are. The Chancellor is making his savings, and the Government are going gangbusters as people move from Labour's better resourced, more generous tax credits over to the less generous, universal credit under his Government. He will hit the £10 billion of savings that he wants, but on the backs of working people in this country. They are the people who are paying the price for this failing economy and this failing Chancellor. He looks at me across the Dispatch Box. I simply wonder when his

Back Benchers are going to realise that he is failing them, as well as failing the country. If we look at the record it tells its own story: he is the third-worst-performing Tory Chancellor on growth in the past 60 years and he is the worst-performing Tory Chancellor on the economy bar none. We need to get rid of this Chancellor. We need a vote against the Queen's Speech tonight. We need to vote for Labour.

4.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): It is a real pleasure to conclude this debate on the Gracious Speech. I thank all hon. Members, on both sides of the House, who have made contributions today. A wide range of subjects has been covered by Members from all parts of the United Kingdom and from both rural and urban communities. It has been a very good debate.

As the Prime Minister made clear, the Queen's Speech is about using the strong economic foundations we have built to make a series of bold choices that will help to deliver opportunity for all at every stage of their lives. Improving life chances starts as a foundation for ensuring a healthy, strong and growing economy. Through our long-term economic plan, that is what we are doing: the deficit is being cut, the economy is growing and it is forecast to grow faster than in any other G7 economy this year.

It is true that, thanks to the strength in the economy, we have seen some remarkable things in our labour market in recent years: we have seen the highest level of employment on record ever and the annual rise in the employment rate is the largest anywhere in the G7. Now, we are not complacent. We know we need to go further. However, we also know that behind this picture of national economic recovery are hundreds of thousands of individual stories of people whose lives have been transformed. In the past year alone, over 400,000 people have moved into work. We have more women in work than ever before. In the past two years, more than 300,000 more disabled people have moved into work. We have also seen big increases in youth and long-term employment. I am delighted that the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, for the very first time in six years, has at the Dispatch Box welcomed the fact that unemployment is falling.

Let us just remind ourselves that since 2010 more than 2.5 million people have moved into work. That is more than the whole population of the fantastic city of Leicester moving into work each and every year we have been in government. It means 764,000 more households in work. It means nearly half a million more children growing up seeing a mum or a dad go out to work each day. By any measure, that is a really encouraging record. We salute, in particular, our small businesses and our entrepreneurs who are the real engines of this jobs recovery, something recognised in the excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena).

This recovery has not happened by chance or by accident, and we know that we need to go further. It happened because we had a clear economic plan for jobs and growth. I see a couple of Opposition Members shaking their head. Let us remind ourselves of what they left behind in 2010. Unemployment had risen by

nearly half a million. The number of women out of work went up by a quarter. Youth unemployment rocketed by 44%. Long-term unemployment doubled. Nearly 1.5 million people had spent most of the previous decade on out-of-work benefits. That was an appalling record of wasted lives and wasted potential left by the previous Labour Government. The fact is that during 13 years in government, the Labour party stopped believing in the power of work to transform people's lives. The Labour party gave up on welfare reform. It became the party of welfare over work. It was far too relaxed about parking people for a whole lifetime on benefits. That is why it takes Conservatives in government, with Conservative values, to bring the reforming spirit needed to transform the life chances of people in our—
[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It is impolite to make a noise when the Secretary of State is speaking. Members should be arguing with him, not chattering about him.

Stephen Crabb: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As one nation Conservatives, we will not be complacent, write people off or walk by on the other side, and that is why we are developing a plan for transforming life chances.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The Secretary of State talks about life chances and the Queen's Speech talks about parenting classes for families. Will he reflect on what use parenting classes will be given that low-income, in-work families are ever more reliant on food banks to put food on the table? What use is a parenting class if they cannot afford to put food on the table?

Stephen Crabb: All the evidence shows that the top three drivers of disadvantage and poverty are worklessness, low educational attainment and family instability. The hon. Gentleman talks down the value of supporting parental stability and families, but they have an important contribution to make.

It is a sign of the underlying strength of the economy that there are more than 750,000 job vacancies across the country, but there is another story here too. For a teenager leaving care; for a father coming out of prison wanting to turn his life around; for a single mum shouldering enormous burdens, on which point my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) touched insightfully; for someone overcoming an addiction to alcohol or drugs; for a young person with a mental health condition—for all of them, I want those job vacancies to represent a world of opportunities too. But for too many, taking one still feels a world away. That is why we are determined to improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged in our society. We are not just talking the language of social justice but, as the Queen's Speech shows, taking the action needed to make a real difference to people's lives.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I am grateful to the Government for accepting the amendment, in my name and that of many other right hon. and hon. Members, calling for a Bill to protect the NHS from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Will the Secretary of State tell the House when the Bill will be published or its contents made

[Mr Peter Lilley]

known and assure us that it will be before the referendum? If it is not, we will know that something fishy is afoot and that the only way to protect the NHS is to vote to leave the EU.

Stephen Crabb: I am absolutely clear that our national health service is protected from TTIP.

One group in society who have faced particularly difficult barriers are disabled people. We are committed to our ambition to halve the disability employment gap, which we must do by learning from and listening to those who know most about what works—disabled people themselves. That is why I will be publishing a Green Paper later this year. I want to consult and engage fully with them and their representatives to build a strategy that we know will work. I hope that Members on both sides will see it as an opportunity for us all to move forward together.

The Queen's Speech demonstrates the Government's commitment to improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged while delivering security for people in work and strengthening our national security so that we keep our country safe. I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) on our Bill to improve adoption. Our education for all Bill will ensure better outcomes for children, especially those in disadvantaged homes and communities. Our higher education and research Bill will allow the creation of new universities so that young people have more choices for continuing their education.

That is the kind of society I believe in, but I also believe in a society that gives people a second chance, which is why we welcome the prisons and courts reform Bill, which will put a greater focus on rehabilitation in our prisons, greater support for prisoners with mental health conditions and better education and training. At the heart of the Queen's Speech are real reforms that provide support for the most disadvantaged at the start of life; support for people making those big leaps in life, such as leaving care; and support later in life for those looking for a second chance. None of those reforms would be possible without the foundations of a strong economy, but at no point in the last six years has Labour shown any willingness to recognise that point. We will never forget how night after night, in the last Parliament, Labour trooped into the Division Lobby to vote against every single measure we introduced to fix our national finances. It opposed all our efforts to reform welfare and restore the value of work.

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 189, Noes 300.

Division No. 2]

[4.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Allen, Mr Graham
Abrahams, Debbie	Anderson, Mr David
Alexander, Heidi	Ashworth, Jonathan
Ali, Rushanara	Austin, Ian

Bailey, Mr Adrian	Gwynne, Andrew
Beckett, rh Margaret	Haigh, Louise
Benn, rh Hilary	Hamilton, Fabian
Berger, Luciana	Hanson, rh Mr David
Betts, Mr Clive	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Harris, Carolyn
Blenkinsop, Tom	Hayes, Helen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Hayman, Sue
Brake, rh Tom	Healey, rh John
Brennan, Kevin	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Brown, Lyn	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Hillier, Meg
Buck, Ms Karen	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Burden, Richard	Hollern, Kate
Burgon, Richard	Hopkins, Kelvin
Burnham, rh Andy	Howarth, rh Mr George
Butler, Dawn	Hunt, Tristram
Byrne, rh Liam	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cadbury, Ruth	Jarvis, Dan
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Johnson, Diana
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Jones, Gerald
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Jones, Helen
Champion, Sarah	Jones, Mr Kevan
Chapman, Jenny	Jones, Susan Elan
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Kane, Mike
Clwyd, rh Ann	Kinnoch, Stephen
Coffey, Ann	Lamb, rh Norman
Cooper, Julie	Lammy, rh Mr David
Cooper, Rosie	Lavery, Ian
Cooper, rh Yvette	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Coyle, Neil	Lucas, Ian C.
Crausby, Mr David	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Creagh, Mary	Madders, Justin
Creasy, Stella	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Cruddas, Jon	Mahmood, Shabana
Cryer, John	Malhotra, Seema
Cummins, Judith	Mann, John
Cunningham, Alex	Marris, Rob
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Dakin, Nic	Maskell, Rachael
Danczuk, Simon	Matheson, Christian
Davies, Geraint	McCabe, Steve
De Piero, Gloria	McCarthy, Kerry
Doughty, Stephen	McDonald, Andy
Dowd, Jim	McDonnell, John
Dowd, Peter	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Dromey, Jack	McInnes, Liz
Dugher, Michael	McMahon, Jim
Durkan, Mark	Meale, Sir Alan
Eagle, Ms Angela	Mearns, Ian
Eagle, Maria	Morden, Jessica
Efford, Clive	Morris, Grahame M.
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Mulholland, Greg
Elmore, Chris	Onn, Melanie
Esterson, Bill	Onwurah, Chi
Farrelly, Paul	Osamor, Kate
Farron, Tim	Owen, Albert
Field, rh Frank	Pearce, Teresa
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Pennycook, Matthew
Flello, Robert	Phillips, Jess
Flint, rh Caroline	Pound, Stephen
Flynn, Paul	Qureshi, Yasmin
Fovargue, Yvonne	Rayner, Angela
Furniss, Gill	Reed, Mr Jamie
Gapes, Mike	Reed, Mr Steve
Gardiner, Barry	Rees, Christina
Glass, Pat	Reeves, Rachel
Glendon, Mary	Reynolds, Jonathan
Green, Kate	Rimmer, Marie
Greenwood, Margaret	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Griffith, Nia	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey

Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark

Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Holly Lynch

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg

Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat

Gibb, Mr Nick
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David

Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Purglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok

Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David

Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Sarah Newton and
Stephen Barclay

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included in the Gracious Speech.”.—(*Mr. Lilley.*)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.

Question agreed to.

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question to add:

“but regret that the measures set out fail to meet the challenges facing the majority of people living in the nations and regions of the UK; call in particular for your Government to change course on plans for austerity spending cuts, which are damaging the UK’s economic growth and punishing the incomes of hardworking people, and to consider a modest investment in public services to stimulate economic growth; and further call on your Government to withdraw proposals to waste as much as £200 billion on new nuclear weapons, to go further than the recommendations of the Strathclyde Review by abolishing the House of Lords, to work more respectfully with the nations and regions of the UK to deliver meaningful devolution, to acknowledge its responsibility as a member of the international community in contributing to the resolution of the refugee crisis in Europe and to acknowledge its responsibility to outline a positive vision for the UK’s continued membership of the EU.”.—(*Stewart Hosie.*)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 52, Noes 303.

Division No. 3]

[5.15 pm

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Arkless, Richard
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Boswell, Philip
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan

Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Day, Martyn
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Durkan, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Hosie, Stewart
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Law, Chris
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mc Nally, John
 McCaig, Callum
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.

McGarry, Natalie
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Monaghan, Carol
 Mullin, Roger
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O’Hara, Brendan
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomson, Michelle
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Ann
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Collville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evnnett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella

Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justice
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi

Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Redwood, rh John

Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie

Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggan, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Sarah Newton and
 Stephen Barclay

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 237.

Division No. 4]

[5.27 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian

Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver

Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David

Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline

Spencer, Mark
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggan, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

Sarah Newton and
 Stephen Barclay

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy

Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise

Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Ian C.
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert

Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, Keir

Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Vicky Foxcroft and
 Holly Lynch

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament, but respectfully regret that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included in the Gracious Speech.

Address to be presented to Her Majesty by Members of the House who are Privy Counsellors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. By an unusual coincidence, our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament have been casting votes in Divisions this evening as well, and 106 MSPs have voted that Scotland should remain in the European Union while eight have voted against, including one Oliver Mundell MSP, who is, I believe, acquainted with the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). That might explain why the right hon. Gentleman wanted to veto his candidacy. However, my point is this: the MSPs cast their votes in almost less time than it took this House to appoint the Tellers for the first Division, nearly 40 minutes ago. I wonder what routes are open to those Members who would like to see our voting procedures vastly modernised to bring forward proposals for reform.

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that that is a matter initially for consideration by the Procedure Committee, of which I had thought he was himself a distinguished ornament.

Patrick Grady indicated assent.

Mr Speaker: The nod of the head has sufficed to confirm that my recollection is correct. What is more, the Committee is chaired, with alacrity and distinction, by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), so the wise heads on that Committee can deliberate on the matter and take evidence as they see fit, and even pronounce in due course, and then the normal processes of the House will be available, and probably required, for the matter to be further considered. I have expressed views on that matter in the past, but on this occasion I will spare the House that burden. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order.

Coal Authority (Compensation Procedures)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

5.41 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to discuss the case of my constituents, Mr and Mrs King of No. 61 Myrtle Terrace, Tipton, Mrs Freeman of No. 59, and Mr and Mrs Shaw of No. 57, all of whom purchased their homes between 1975 and 1980. Prior to purchasing their homes, and as a condition for receipt of a mortgage, they were required to have a search for mine shafts in the immediate vicinity of their properties. It was conducted by the National Coal Board, which is now known as the Coal Authority.

All the searches confirmed that the properties were “clear” of any mine shafts. I have a copy of the letter sent to Mr and Mrs King’s solicitors from the NCB surveyor. It is dated 12 November 1980 and states clearly that

“the property is clear of disused mine shafts and adits as shown on our records.”

Fast forward to 2011: the Coal Authority wrote to the owners of these properties, indicating that it wished to carry out an inspection for old mine workings in the immediate vicinity. Imagine their surprise and horror when, following the inspection, it was confirmed that Mr and Mrs Shaw had a mine shaft immediately under their kitchen floor and that both of the other properties had shafts very close by in their gardens. It is fair to say that it was most homeowners’ worst nightmare. I reassure the street’s other residents by emphasising that the inspection identified no other mine shafts in the immediate locality.

It appears that the location of the shafts was identified on maps from 1870—I have a copy of one myself. The Coal Authority and its predecessor body, the NCB, had maps with these locations in their possession, certainly since 1936. It would appear that when the surveyor certified the location as clear from mine shafts, they totally failed to identify them from the records that they had in their possession.

My constituents have had extensive correspondence with both the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Coal Authority, neither of which will accept responsibility for the inaccuracy of the original NCB report, and they have been met with nothing more than an evasive smokescreen designed to obscure the relative level of their culpability.

When confronted with such evidence, the usual tactic of the Coal Authority has been to give reassurances on safety and to point to compensation schemes that are available in the event of damage or subsidence arising from instability. That ignores completely the stress arising from the doubt and uncertainty caused by these revelations and the wider financial implications of purchasing a house with mine shafts underneath or in the immediate vicinity. Those concerns were not helped by the fact that in 1999, which is in most people’s recent memory, a house in nearby Moxley disappeared down a mineshaft and, I believe, subsequently a considerable number of adjacent properties had to be demolished.

The safety of the houses is not the only concern; residents are also worried about the reduction in the resale value of their properties. The Department of

Energy and Climate Change, in correspondence with the residents, has suggested that the Coal Authority has no responsibility in relation to property devaluation and that its responsibility is limited to subsidence claims, which may, in some cases, result in the loss of value. To counter that, the residents obtained an independent evaluation, in which the surveyor suggested that “usually the likelihood of subsidence problems related to old mine shafts is remote, and consequently the location of a mine entry should not significantly alter the value of a property.

However, the public’s perception of properties located within the zone of influence of a mine shaft is usually negative, and this is often the case with their surveyor and solicitor, upon whose advice the public rely.

From a logical perspective the value of the property should only be marginally affected. However the public perception is not always based on logic and it is likely that one will find with a resale of a house within the zone of influence of a mine shaft will prove more difficult than would normally be the case”.

That is a masterpiece of understatement. The surveyor went on to say that, from their 25 years’ experience, the location of a mine entry under a property with no records of it being filled could deduct 30% from the resale value of the property, and potentially up to 50%.

That does not deal with the added issue of mortgage lenders, who are often reluctant to lend on properties with mine shafts nearby. That is not altogether surprising, because I cannot believe that anyone would pay the full asking price for a house with a mine under the kitchen. I would not; perhaps the Minister would like to confirm whether she would. If she would, I am sure that my constituents would be interested.

My constituents have been left trapped in houses that could be sold at only a fraction of the asking price of properties of similar size in the area. They are effectively denied the option normally available to people of their generation of selling their house and moving to suitable accommodation that might be more appropriate to their needs as they get older. The devaluation of my constituents’ homes was accepted by the listing officer when the properties were revalued for council tax purposes in December 2013. The properties were revalued downwards to reflect what had happened.

By failing to provide my constituents with proper, sound advice, the NCB denied my constituents the opportunity to make an informed choice about the initial purchase of their homes. Not only would they probably not have proceeded with the purchases, but even if they had wanted to, it is unlikely that their mortgage provider—the then Midshires building society—would have given them mortgages on those properties. The residents believe that the actions of the negligent surveyor sentenced them to spending the next 25 years paying a mortgage on properties that they could never hope of selling at prices comparable with those of unaffected properties.

Residents’ demands for compensation were met with complete indifference by the Coal Authority, which resorted to a breath-taking abuse of logic to justify this indifference. The Coal Authority claims that because the information was available in 1980 to the surveyor, who failed to identify it within the time limit, but was only revealed in a subsequent inspection 31 years later, they could not claim because the time had expired. In effect, the residents are excluded from claiming because they failed to identify an error made by the National Coal Board when the only evidence that could be used to identify the error was in the hands of the National

Coal Board and its successor, the Coal Authority. The only other way in which they could have satisfied that particular demand was to have taken their own initiative and to have dug up their kitchen floor or back garden to identify whether there were any rogue mineshafts.

My constituents took their case to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The ombudsman’s report confirmed maladministration in the way the Coal Authority handled their complaint, and it recommended a small sum of compensation for each complainant. It also confirmed that DECC is responsible for any errors in NCB mining reports, and criticised the Coal Authority for failing to advise the complainants of that fact. However, the ombudsman’s remit was confined to adjudicating on the process of dealing with the complaint, not on the merits of the complaint itself. Therefore, the substantive issue of compensation for my constituents is still unresolved. They are still condemned to living in houses they cannot sell at a realistic market price, as a result of mistakes made by the NCB and which are now the responsibility of DECC.

Mine searches are a vital part of the process of purchasing properties. They allow the purchaser to make an informed decision about whether they want to proceed on a property. A positive or negative search vastly affects the value of a property. My constituents paid full price for their property, based on the assumption made by the National Coal Board—the experts—that the property was clear of mines. This was clearly negligent because the surveyor clearly did not access the correct records to make the informed decision on which my constituents relied.

My constituents have done everything right. They have worked hard, got on, paid taxes and bought homes. Now, however, because of an oversight over 30 years ago by a professional specifically employed to avoid such a situation, they are unable to enjoy the fruits of their labour and are trapped in properties they have no hope of selling for their normal market value. My constituents have no way and no process by which they can have their case heard and adjudicated without recourse to a court of law. It is unjust that people of their age and financial circumstances have to invest in what might be an expensive legal process to obtain justice.

I ask the Minister and DECC to ensure that the Coal Authority treats sensitively any future complainants with issues of this nature and give them appropriate guidance about how they can best get redress for their particular concerns, as the Coal Authority clearly did not do in this case. To do that, there needs to be a change of culture and a change in the ownership of responsibility for these issues. I also ask the Minister to set up a tribunal and an adjudication service within DECC, to which people affected by such an issue—there may be many others now or in the future—can take their complaint, and have it assessed by experts and adjudicated on, so that they do not have to suffer in the way that my constituents have suffered.

Not only were my constituents denied the right to make a properly informed decision when they brought their homes, but they are now being denied the right to receive compensation for an error that was not of their making and was beyond their control, and which will have a significant impact on their finances for the rest of their lives.

5.54 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadson): I sincerely thank the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) for securing this debate on what I fully recognise is a very serious issue for his constituents. I will start by providing some background on the work that the Coal Authority undertakes and, in particular, on its procedures relating to subsidence and compensation, which are highly relevant to his constituents' situation.

The coalfield areas of England, Scotland and Wales cover some 26,000 sq km, or 11% of those countries' surface area. Since the start of the industrial revolution, human settlement has followed natural resource availability, industry and employment. The coalfields are consequently some of the most densely populated parts of the UK. Some 7 million properties lie within them; 1.5 million properties lie above workings where coal has been mined at depths of less than 30 metres, and at least 172,000 coalmine entries are known about.

Although there is little active coalmining today, centuries of underground and surface extraction have created a huge legacy of environmental issues and public safety hazards. The Coal Authority was therefore created under the Coal Industry Act 1994, when the previously state-owned coal industry was privatised, to regulate the industry and manage those legacy issues. It helps DECC to manage the UK's energy legacy safely and responsibly.

A substantial legacy of mining hazards remains in many major conurbations. One third of the 172,000 documented coalmine entries are in urban areas. Surface collapses above abandoned workings and shafts present the most common risks to the public. A 24/7 hazard line allows the public to report mining hazards around the clock, enabling immediate responses. Approximately 1,000 surface and subsidence incidents are reported each year, about half of which are found to be mining related.

The scale of the issue means that costly proactive remediation of the surface effects of shallow mineworkings and mine entries is carried out only where there is a higher risk to persons or property. Known shafts represent zones of risk. In 2008 the Coal Authority therefore began a mine entry inspection programme to identify such areas for proactive remediation. To date some 130,000 shafts have been inspected, 1% of which have required remedial treatment.

That brings me on to the remedies for property owners where coalmining-related damage occurs. In a coalmining area, a home or property may be damaged by coalmining-related subsidence. If a property has suffered such damage, there are powerful remedies under the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, as amended by the 1994 Act. Responsibility for dealing with a claim rests either with a mining company or with the Coal Authority.

The authority manages the effects of past coalmining, including those subsidence damage claims that are not the responsibility of licensed coalmine operators. That includes responsibility for remedying and meeting the costs of subsidence associated with coalmines, for public safety and for administration of claims for coalmining subsidence damage from property owners.

The authority's work on handling subsidence and safety issues associated with former coalmines is a statutory duty under both the 1991 Act and the 1994 Act.

Those duties were established to protect the public and their property from the potential impacts of past coalmining. The 1991 Act sets limits to that liability by defining coalmining subsidence damage and setting time limits for liability.

Where a claim is made and the Coal Authority is found to be liable, in general it will carry out repairs to a property. Those repairs should make good the damage, but in certain circumstances the Coal Authority will pay compensation instead of making repairs. If a home becomes unsafe or uninhabitable because of subsidence damage, there are arrangements for people to be provided with, or receive payment for, equivalent alternative accommodation. If a home has been damaged by subsidence and cannot be sold at its former undamaged value, the Coal Authority may—depending on the circumstances—be under an obligation to buy it for its undamaged value. Where property has been so badly damaged that it has to be demolished, the Coal Authority will either rebuild it, or pay compensation based on its full market value in its undamaged condition. I hope that background has been helpful in setting out the size of the issue and how it is dealt with in statute.

Turning to the hon. Gentleman's constituents in Myrtle Terrace, it is important to note that there is no statutory basis for the award of compensation for any perceived loss of market value due to the mere existence of a shaft or coal workings in the vicinity of a property. The legislation and protection that it affords covers only actual subsidence damage that has been caused by a shaft or mine entry. For the residents of Myrtle Terrace—and other residents in coalfield areas—future prospective purchasers of their properties are afforded enormous protection first by the powerful remedies of the subsidence legislation, and secondly by an insurance product on a prospective buyer's mining search report that offers protection against loss sustained by the owner of the property, and the lender, if any new problems or adverse conditions are revealed in a subsequent coal and brine search report that were not revealed by the original report to which the policy was attached. Thirdly, the Council of Mortgage Lenders advises that the presence of a mine entry within 20 metres of a property will not, in principle, be a barrier to obtaining a mortgage.

Compared with other types of risk, such as flood risk or other types of mining, purchasers are significantly better off. No house insurance policy is required for coal subsidence, as all expenses are paid for actual damage. Although it is a matter for individual lenders and insurance companies, they have the reassurance offered by the powerful remedies of the subsidence legislation to manage their risks.

At the point of last inspection, there was no actual subsidence damage to the properties under discussion. However, if residents are aware of any issues caused by the presence of those shafts, the Coal Authority will re-inspect properties for any signs of coal mining-related damage. I completely sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and I realise that this will be a disappointing reply for them. However, I hope he will appreciate that it is not affordable or practical to underwrite non-existent damage for 7 million properties.

Question put and agreed to.

6.3 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 26 May 2016

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

BIS Consultation

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): Today the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has announced its decision to create a combined BIS headquarters and policy function in London to deliver a simpler, smaller Department that is more flexible and responsive to stakeholders and businesses by 2020. This involves basing all policy roles in London by 2018 and closing the St Paul's Place office in Sheffield.

Everyone affected will be able to stay in post in their current location until January 2018 and if they choose to take up a post in London there will be financial assistance for travel available for the first three years.

Anyone choosing to leave will benefit from the best exit terms currently available in the civil service. The support package on offer will include money for re-skilling, career coaching, and time off to look for other jobs.

The executive board and ministerial team take the future of staff affected by this decision, and the contribution they have made, very seriously. We are aware this decision will directly affect people's lives, livelihoods and families and it has therefore not been taken lightly. Support for staff has been and remains our priority.

This unanimous decision has been reached by the BIS executive board after the Department conducted a consultation with staff and with the departmental trade unions which closed on 2 May. Inevitably it has been a period of uncertainty for staff but the consultation period has enabled the executive board to reflect on its proposal, to hear from staff, to take into account the equality analysis, and to consider the alternative business models which have been put forward.

Following the recent spending review, BIS has set itself the target of becoming a more flexible and efficient Department, as well as reducing its cost to the taxpayer. We have committed to deliver reductions in the Department's operating expenditure which equate to around £350 million by 2020. Savings of this magnitude can only be delivered by fundamentally changing the Department's overall business model in a way that works for a smaller workforce with more streamlined structures in a demanding service and policy environment.

BIS 2020 is the transformation programme to deliver that new business model—creating a Department that is simpler, smaller, and better for users by 2020. As a transformation programme it is ambitious. It means reducing our operating costs and associated headcount by 30% to 40%; more than halving our 45 public bodies; and rationalising customer support, grant giving and digital service delivery. It also involves reducing our locations from around 80 sites to seven business centres plus a regional presence across the country. These business

centres will each focus on a key area of business activity bringing together expertise and helping us to build our capability.

One of these business centres will be a combined BIS headquarters and policy function in London. Crucial to this decision was bringing together BIS' policy capability which is currently dispersed across 14 offices, and locating it near Ministers, Parliament, and other Government Departments in Whitehall.

Over the course of this Parliament our policy function will reduce from around 2,000 roles to around 1,500 roles, reflecting the size of the Department's pay bill on our operating expenditure. As we get smaller we need a simpler structure that allows staff to interact easily and to respond rapidly and flexibly to Ministers, Parliament and other stakeholders. Being more flexible, agile and re-deployable enables us to respond to the challenging demands of modern Government. The steel crisis is a recent example of where we have had to urgently re-deploy large numbers of staff to address an urgent priority.

Operating split site and split team working as we become smaller would put an increasing strain on our organisational effectiveness which is why the executive board has concluded that a combined headquarters and policy function is the most effective model to continue to serve Ministers and stakeholders flexibly, effectively and sustainably.

[HCWS30]

Higher Education Student Support

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): I can confirm that I am laying regulations today, which are subject to parliamentary scrutiny, to launch a new postgraduate master's loan.

Students will be able to apply for a loan of up to £10,000 as a contribution towards the cost of an eligible postgraduate master's qualification. The loan will be available to eligible students under the age of 60 undertaking certain full or part-time master's courses in any subject from academic year 2016-17 onwards. Repayment will be on an income contingent basis to ensure the loan is affordable.

By delivering on this manifesto commitment we will be helping to remove the financial barrier faced by many wishing to study at this level and providing students with the means to invest in their futures.

[HCWS14]

Consumer Protection: Resale of Tickets

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid): Together with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, I am today laying before Parliament an independent report by Professor Michael Waterson, on the outcome of his "review of consumer protection measures concerning online secondary ticketing facilities".

The report is required by Section 94 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015. The report is available at: www.gov.uk website and is available in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Government will carefully consider the report's recommendations and will be providing a response in due course.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Waterson for his time and diligence in carrying out this review into an important topic for consumers.

[HCWS12]

Post-Foreign Affairs Council (Trade)

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Trade and Investment (Lord Price) has today made the following statement.

I represented the UK at the EU Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) in Brussels on 13 May 2016. A summary of the main discussions follows.

EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)

Trade Commissioner Malmström introduced CETA and made clear that the EU now needed to implement the deal. The Commission intended to sign the deal at the end of October at the EU-Canada summit. A consent vote in the European Parliament would then follow in late 2016, or early 2017. I urged rapid implementation of CETA. I and most of my counterparts from other member states were of the view that this trade agreement should be mixed as it contained areas of member state competence.

TTIP

Commissioner Malmström highlighted good progress on some areas but that work remained on others. The Commissioner's aim was to finalise TTIP under the Obama Administration. Before the summer, negotiators were therefore working towards full consolidated texts in most areas. The EU was also pushing for a new US procurement offer.

All member states reiterated their desire for a balanced and ambitious agreement. I pressed for conclusion of an ambitious deal in 2016, pointing out that with projected economic gains from TTIP of €250 billion globally, each month's delay was €8 billion foregone for the EU economy. I signalled the UK's desire to see the Commission table a market access offer in financial services.

Trade-related aspects of the recent communication on steel

Commissioner Malmström outlined the Commission's response so far to the steel crisis, and went on to set out the latest Commission ideas for disapplying the "lesser duty rule" (LDR), and redefining the methodology for calculating the injury caused to industry. She finished by announcing that the Commission had that day launched an anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese imports of hot-rolled coiled steel. Discussion revolved around whether LDR needed to be disappplied in extreme cases.

I lauded the Commission's efforts on the steel crisis so far, including the announcement on hot-rolled coiled steel. I said that trade defence modernisation was needed, and the UK was keen to play a constructive role in finding a solution. But on LDR, the evidence suggested that the rule had been working and had delivered the right results.

WTO Post-Nairobi

In preparation for the 11th WTO ministerial conference (December 2017), Commissioner Malmström said the EU should focus on the areas where it could add most value, i.e. on the development of rules rather than market access negotiations, and on sectoral initiatives.

[HCWS10]

CABINET OFFICE

Indemnity for Petition Officers (Recall Petitions)

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Department concerned to present to Parliament a minute giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

Insurance for specific elections has historically provided extremely poor value for money, with claims made under such cover being smaller than the cost of the insurance premium. An indemnity therefore provides better value for money and this approach has been taken for elections since 2009.

On this basis, I have today laid a minute setting out the Cabinet Office's proposal to indemnify petition officers for claims that arise out of the conduct of their duties in relation to the Recall of MPs Act 2015. This Act requires a recall petition to be held if one of the provisions under section 1 of the Act is met in relation to an MP. The responsibility for the conduct of the petition will rest with the petition officer for the constituency in which the petition is to be held. Section 6 of the Recall of MPs Act 2015 provides that every constituency is to have a petition officer for a recall petition and identifies who the petition officer is for each constituency: in England and Wales, it is the person who is the acting returning officer for UK Parliamentary elections for the relevant constituency; in Scotland it is the returning officer for UK parliamentary elections for the relevant constituency. The petition officer is an independent entity, separate from both central and local government.

We will also provide a certificate confirming that we will bear any employee liabilities of the returning officer which would otherwise be covered by insurance procured under the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. An indemnity was previously provided by the Home Office to returning officers for the 2012 Police and Crime Commissioner elections and Cabinet Office regularly provides indemnities for UK parliamentary and European parliamentary elections. HM Treasury has approved the indemnity in principle.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-05-26/HCWS35/>

[HCWS35]

TREASURY

Double Taxation Conventions

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A double taxation convention with Uruguay was signed on 24 February 2016 and with the United

Arab Emirates on 12 April 2016. The text of each convention has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and will be made available at: www.gov.uk website. Each text has been scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons.

[HCWS27]

Insurance Fraud Taskforce

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): The Insurance Fraud Taskforce was established as an independent body by HM Treasury and the Ministry of Justice in January 2015 in order,

“to investigate the causes of fraudulent behaviour and recommend solutions to reduce the level of insurance fraud in order to ultimately lower costs and protect the interests of honest consumers”.

The final report of the Insurance Fraud Taskforce published on 18 January 2016 made 26 recommendations to tackle fraudulent activity ranging from organised or premeditated crime to opportunistic fraud. It is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/insurance-fraud-taskforce-final-report>.

The Minister of State for Civil Justice (Lord Faulks) and I are very grateful for the work of the taskforce members, and to all those who contributed to it. We are particularly grateful to David Hertzell for his efficient stewardship of the taskforce.

The report highlighted the particular problem of fraud in relation to low value personal injury claims and the Government have established a programme of reforms in this area, particularly in respect of whiplash claims. We are pleased that the report’s recommendations reflect and support that reform programme. The Government accept each of the recommendations addressed to it and we will set out in due course how we propose to implement them. However, there needs to be a concerted effort by all those involved in the insurance process to tackle this serious problem, which is estimated to cost policyholders up to £50 each per year, and the country more than £3 billion. We therefore expect organisations tasked with taking forward recommendations to do so with urgency. The Government will do what they can to assist and, in order to make sure that all of the recommendations are actively pursued, we will seek an update on progress later in the year.

[HCWS28]

Counter-terrorist Asset-freezing Regime

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): Under the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (TAF 2010), the Treasury is required to report to Parliament, quarterly, on its operation of the UK’s asset-freezing regime mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1373.

This is the 18th report under the Act and it covers the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2016.¹ This report also covers the UK implementation of the UN ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaida organisations asset-freezing regime (ISIL-AQ) and the operation of the EU asset-freezing regime in the UK under EU regulation (EC) 2580/2001 which implements UNSCR 1373 against external

terrorist threats to the EU. Under the ISIL-AQ asset-freezing regime, the UN has responsibility for designations and the Treasury has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under the al-Qaida (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011. Under EU Regulation 2580/2001, the EU has responsibility for designations and the Treasury has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under part 1 of TAF 2010.

Annexes A and B to this statement provide a breakdown, by name, of all those designated by the UK and the EU in pursuance of UN Security Council resolution 1373. The one individual subject to a designation, which has been notified on a restricted and confidential basis, under sections 3 and 10 of TAF 2010 is denoted by “A”.

The table attached sets out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter ending 31 March 2016.

Legal Proceedings

Moazzem Begg, who was previously designated under TAF 2010, lodged an appeal on 3 November 2014, challenging the Treasury’s decision to revoke rather than quash his designation. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

One individual, C, designated under TAF 2010, lodged an appeal against his designation on the 26 May 2015. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

Mohammed al Ghabra’s challenge of his listing under the EU ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaida regulation was heard by the CJEU in February 2016. Judgment is to follow.

There were no criminal proceedings in respect of breaches of asset-freezes made under TAF 2010, during the reporting period.

Annex A: Designated persons under TAF 2010 by name²

Individuals

1. Hamed ABDOLLAHI
2. Imad Khalil AL-ALAMI
3. Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER
4. Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB
5. Manssor ARBABSAR
6. Usama HAMDAN
7. Nur Idris HASSAN NUR
8. Nabeel HUSSAIN
9. Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN
10. Mohammed KHALED
11. Parviz KHAN
12. Musa Abu MARZOUK
13. Khalid MISHAAL
14. Khalid Shaikh MOHAMMED
15. Abdul Reza SHAHLAI
16. Ali Gholam SHAKURI
17. Qasem SOLEIMANI
18. A (restricted designation)

Entities

1. Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
2. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)
3. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)

4. Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation
5. Popular Front for the Liberation of PALESTINE—General Command (PFLP- GC)
6. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine— (PFLP)
7. Sendero Luminoso (SL)

Annex B: Persons designated by the EU under Council Regulation (EC)2580/2001³

Persons

1. Hamed ABDOLLAHI*
2. Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER*
3. Ibrahim Salih AL YACOUB*
4. Manssor ARBABSAR*
5. Mohammed BOUYERI
6. Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN*
7. Khalid Shaikh MOHAMMED*
8. Abdul Reza SHAHLAI*
9. Ali Gholam SHAKURI*
10. Qasem SOLEIMANI*

Groups and entities

1. Bu Nidal Organisation (ANO)
2. Al-Aqsa E.V.
3. Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade
4. Babbar Khalsa
5. Communist Party of the Philippines, including New People's Army (NPA), Philippines
6. Devrimci Halk Kurtulu Partisi-Cephesi—DHKP/C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Army/Front/Party)
7. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)*
8. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*
9. Gama'a al-Islamiyya (a.k.a. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya) (Islamic group—IG)
10. Hamas, including Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem
11. Hizballah military wing, including external security organisation
12. Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)
13. Hofstadgroep
14. International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF)
15. Islami Büyük Dogu Akincilar Cephesi (IBDA-C) (Great Islamic Eastern Warriors Front)
16. Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF)
17. Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (a.k.a. KONGRA-GEL)
18. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
19. Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
20. Popular Front For The Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)*
21. Popular Front For The Liberation of Palestine— (PFLP)*
22. Sendero Luminoso (SL) (Shining Path)*
23. Teyrbazen Azadiya Kurdistan (TAK)

¹ These figures are correct as at 30 September 2015

² For full listing details please refer to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/current-list-of-designated-persons-terrorism-and-terrorist-financing>

³ For full listing details please refer to: www.gov.uk

* EU listing rests on UK designation under TAFSA 2010

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Education, Youth, Culture and the Sport Council

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council will take place in Brussels on 31 May. Baroness Neville-Rolfe, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for intellectual property will represent the UK at the both the culture/audiovisual and the sport sections of the Council.

Culture and audiovisual

The Commission is expected to present its draft proposal for a recast audiovisual media services directive. The audiovisual media services directive seeks to ensure the effective operation of the internal market for television broadcasting services by ensuring the free movement of broadcasting services throughout the EU. This new proposal follows a Commission consultation on revision of the existing directive, to which the UK submitted a detailed response.

The presentation will be immediately followed by a policy debate on revision of the audiovisual media directive and the promotion of European content. The UK intervention will reiterate the key messages in its response to the Commission consultation, including the importance of maintaining the country of origin principle that means a channel is regulated in the country in which it is licensed, rather than each of the countries to which it broadcasts.

The Council will then be asked to adopt Council conclusions on the role of Europeana for the digital access, visibility and use of European cultural heritage. The conclusions will emphasise the importance of promoting access to cultural heritage through digital channels and will propose that Europeana moves to a more sustainable funding model by October 2017. The UK intends to support the adoption of the conclusions.

Sport

Turning to the sport sector, the Council is expected to adopt draft conclusions on enhancing integrity, transparency and good governance in major sport events. The draft conclusions look to ensure that integrity, transparency and good governance are present through all stages of a major sporting event, including feasibility, bidding, preparation, organisation, evaluation, and legacy. The UK has already embedded these measures into the bidding processes for major sporting events and so intends to support adoption of the conclusions.

This will be followed by policy debate on improving governance in sport. The debate will be focused on the role Governments can play in the promotion of integrity and governance of sport. The UK will intervene to share examples of work the UK is already carrying out around governance and integrity in sport and to highlight the Prime Minister's recent anti-corruption summit and the domestic charter for sport and governance code, which will be launched later this year.

Other Business

The European Commission will present information on the forthcoming European year of cultural heritage (2018). This will then be followed by information from the French delegation on the interoperability of digital

content. The Council will then be presented with information on the recent World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) meeting in Montreal. This information will be provided by the EU member states representatives in WADA: Belgium, UK and Malta.

The European Commission will then present information on this year's European week of sport and introduce recent Commission studies on i) specificity of sport, and, ii) the contribution of sport to regional development through the structural funds.

Additional items will also be presented by Italy, on funding of the European youth orchestra, and Poland, on the financing of cultural projects under the European regional development fund.

Finally, there will be a presentation from the Slovak delegation on the work programme for their incoming presidency of the Council of the EU.

The UK will also be represented at a high-level structured dialogue on sport after the main Council meeting. This dialogue has been organised by the Netherlands EU presidency to facilitate an exchange of views between member state Ministers, the EU Commissioner responsible for sport and leading representatives of the IOC, EOC, FIFA and UEFA on enhancing dialogue and co-operation regarding major sport events.

[HCWS29]

EDUCATION

LSCB Review and Government Response

The Minister for Children and Families (Edward Timpson):

Today I am publishing Alan Wood's review of the role and functions of local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs), along with the Government's response.

Local agencies—police, health, local authorities, schools—are the frontline when it comes to safeguarding our children and it is vitally important that they work together to ensure children are protected from harm. There is widespread evidence that the current arrangements, delivered through LSCBs, are not always as effective as they need to be. That is why we asked Alan Wood to carry out this important review, which looked at local multi-agency arrangements, the child death review process and how the intended centralisation of serious case reviews could work.

Alan's wide experience in the sector has been invaluable and I thank him for his hard work in undertaking this review and the radical, inquiring approach he has brought to it. I am also grateful for the valuable contributions made by all those who put forward their views as part of Alan's far-reaching consultation.

The review sets out a wide range of proposals. The Government response sets out in detail our plans to introduce a stronger but more flexible statutory framework. This framework will support local agencies to work together more effectively to protect and safeguard children and young people, embedding improved multi-agency behaviours and practices. And it will set out clear requirements for the key local partners—the local authority, the police and the NHS—while allowing them freedom

to determine how they organise themselves to meet those requirements to improve outcomes for children locally.

We intend to bring forward legislation on revised multi-agency working arrangements as soon as possible to implement these changes.

We have already proposed some changes, through the Children and Social Work Bill, in relation to new arrangements replacing the existing system of serious case reviews. We intend to establish a child safeguarding practice review panel, to review cases which are complex or of national importance. We will also bring forward further changes to address the need for good quality, rapid local reviews, linked to the reform of multi-agency working arrangements.

Finally we plan to amend arrangements for child death overview panels (CDOPs) as part of these reforms. We will put in place arrangements to transfer national oversight of CDOPs from the Department for Education to the Department of Health, while ensuring that the keen focus on distilling and embedding learning is maintained. That reflects the very high proportion of child deaths which have a clinical or public health cause.

These important reforms will take time to implement and I recognise that change can be difficult to manage at local level. It is very important that the local agencies currently engaged in LSCBs continue working together to keep children safe while preparing for the future.

[HCWS32]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Planning Act 2008: Hornsea Offshore Wind Farm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I have been asked by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make this written statement. This statement concerns an application made under the Planning Act 2008 by SMart Wind Limited on 30 January 2015 for a proposed development known as the Hornsea offshore wind farm (zone 4)—project two (“the development”).

The development would consist of up to 300 wind turbine generators, each with a capacity of between 6 MW and 15 MW, approximately 89 km east of the East Riding of Yorkshire coast. The total installed capacity of the development would be up to 1,800MW. The Planning Inspectorate's examining authority commenced examination of the application on 16 June 2015 and the examining authority's report was delivered to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on 16 March 2016.

Section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008 requires the Secretary of State to make her decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority's report unless she exercises her power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the House of Commons announcing the new deadline.

The deadline for the decision is to be extended to 16 August 2016 (an extension of two months). This extension is to enable the Secretary of State to obtain further information in order to fully assess the possible

impact of the development on the southern North sea possible special area of conservation for harbour porpoise, and to ensure that her duties in relation to the requirements under regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 have been met.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant development consent for the development.

[HCWS11]

Carbon Capture and Storage: Yorkshire and Humber

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): This statement concerns the application made by National Grid Carbon Limited under the Planning Act 2008 on 18 June 2014 for the construction of a pipeline of approximately 75 km in length from the White Rose carbon capture and storage project to the coast at Barmston in the East Riding of Yorkshire (“the pipeline project”).

The proposed pipeline project would transport carbon dioxide from industrial emitters and electricity generating stations fitted with carbon capture infrastructure to an offshore pipeline system and a storage facility under the North sea. Consent applications for the offshore pipeline system and the proposed storage facility are being considered outside the Planning Act regime.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make her decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority’s report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the House of Parliament announcing the new deadline. The deadline for the decision on the pipeline project was 19 May 2016 having been extended from 19 November 2015 by way of my written ministerial statement of 19 November 2015 [columns 21-22 of the *Official Report*].

The Secretary of State has decided to extend the deadline for the decision to 31 August 2016 to allow consultation on the need case for the pipeline project given the decision to refuse consent for the White Rose CCS project on 13 April 2016 and consideration of other relevant outstanding issues.

The decision to set the new deadline for the project is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent for the project.

[HCWS21]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), represented the UK at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 17 May in Brussels.

There were four main agenda items. The presidency introduced the first debate on climate and agriculture since the COP21 agreement. The target is to cut 40% of emissions by 2030, which requires legislation on national targets and includes initiatives such as LULUCF (land use, land use change and forestry). Commissioner Hogan, DG Agriculture, sought to reassure the Council of the need to balance food security

with climate targets. In a full round table, all member states supported ambitious climate goals as long as they do not compromise food security, and there was a general call to include and strengthen environment CAP tools.

The Commission then presented the Eurobarometer results, which show significant public support for the EU’s work and standards on animal welfare. All member states except Austria and the Czech Republic pushed the Commission to establish a platform to share best practice on implementation and enforcement between themselves. Commissioner Andriukaitis, DG Sante, agreed to present his plan at the next Council.

The Czech Republic raised an issue about the different qualities of multinational branded food products sold across the single market. Commissioner Andriukaitis encouraged any member states to send any evidence of consumers being misled to the Commission.

Commissioner Hogan then made a short presentation on the state of play of CAP simplification. He gave a summary of direct payment simplifications enacted so far, and made it clear that greening simplification would be discussed in June Council. There were interventions, including from the UK, on the proposed yellow card system. The UK reiterated requests made in March Council on audit and controls simplification.

Commissioner Hogan then moved to update member states on the market situation support measures. During this agenda item four related AOBs were addressed: the crisis situation in the milk market; the situation in commodity markets; severe damages in agricultural production due to late frost and snow; and geographical indications during international trade negotiations.

There was a full round of interventions from member states who maintained their existing positions on the market crisis. The UK intervention focused on sustainable solutions to improving the market situation and noted progress made in these areas such as increased export opportunity, the work of the market taskforce, and the new meat market observatory that will be up and running by the summer

Any other business items

Austria requested that TTIP be discussed. Several member states had complained about a lack of transparency in sensitive TTIP negotiations. Commissioner Hogan intervened about this and other trade deals. He reminded Council that his objective was to conclude deals, but that he was looking at the big picture. On Mercosur, the Commission had amended the EU offer but he warned the Council that there would be a compromise on agriculture at some point.

The Commission reported back on the recent G7 agriculture meeting in Japan. He noted valuable conclusions had been reached, with formal cooperation having been agreed on anti-microbial resistance and animal disease.

Poland introduced the proposed NEC Directive, and described the impact it could have on agriculture. They noted that reducing ammonia emissions would be costly for farmers, particularly medium-sized farms. Commissioner Hogan reported that Commissioner Vella was looking for a compromise in trilogues.

[HCWS15]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 May and I attended the General Affairs Council on 24 May. The Foreign Affairs Council was

chaired by the high representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council was chaired by the Dutch presidency. The meetings were held in Brussels.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2016/05/23/>

EU—Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting

Immediately before the Foreign Affairs Council, EU Foreign Ministers met with the Foreign Ministers of the six Eastern Partnership states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine) to review progress on the Eastern Partnership initiative since the EU-Eastern Partnership summit held in Riga on 21-22 May 2015. Ms Mogherini concluded it was a positive meeting, reconfirming commitment and unity in the partnership.

Foreign Affairs Council

In her introductory remarks, Ms Mogherini welcomed the adoption of a mandate to begin negotiations to revamp the EU-Mexico global agreement. She noted that a joint communication on EU policy for the Arctic had been adopted at the end of April, and suggested the council have a full discussion of this in June.

Libyal Operation Sophia

The Council agreed conclusions setting out the decision to extend the mandate of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia by one year and to expand it to include capacity-building and training of the Libyan coastguard and implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya. In that context the Government welcome the recent letter from the president of the presidency Council of the Government of national accord, Mr Serraj, requesting support from and expressing readiness to co-operate with the EU.

It is important that planning for this new mandate is completed as quickly as possible so that these new tasks can begin. The Government will work with other EU member states and international organisations, as well as with the Libyan authorities and countries in the region, to achieve this. The Government share the view expressed by Ms Mogherini and the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, that there is scope for greater co-operation between the EU and NATO in the central Mediterranean; and is working with partners in both organisations to take this forward.

EU Daesh/Iraq/Syria regional strategy

The Council considered a review of the March 2015 regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Daesh threat and adopted conclusions. The EU and member states discussed priority areas for Iraq, including governance reform, economic reform and development, humanitarian assistance, and stabilisation, all of which are reflected in the conclusions. An EEAS/commission options paper on increasing EU efforts in Iraq will be circulated in July. Responding to UK-led efforts, the EU agreed to step up its efforts within, and contribution to, the global coalition's campaign against Daesh. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition based on the principles of the Geneva communique?, including the establishment of a

transitional governing body, which is needed to bring a lasting peace to Syria, defeat Daesh in Syria and allow refugees to return home. Ministers agreed that there can be no peace under Assad, who is responsible for the vast majority of attacks against civilians and deaths in the country during the civil war. The EU will support the international Syria support group's call for full humanitarian access to all those in need in Syria and for compliance by all parties with the cessation of hostilities. The EU will step up support to the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee (HNC), representing the Syrian opposition in the UN-brokered talks in Geneva.

EU Global Strategy

Ms Mogherini updated Ministers over lunch on the preparation of the EU global strategy on foreign and security policy. The strategy will identify and describe EU member states' interests, priorities and objectives, existing and evolving threats, challenges and opportunities and the instruments and means to meet them. The Government support this initiative, which complements the UK's strategic defence and security review, and have engaged regularly with Ms Mogherini during its preparation. The Government believe that the global strategy can enhance UK and other member states' foreign and security policy by covering the full range of external action tools and setting broad direction, rather than proposing detailed action on specific issues.

External aspects of migration

Ministers exchanged views on the external aspects of migration and adopted conclusions. The Foreign Secretary raised the need to focus on implementation of the outcome of the Valletta summit and for effective EU co-ordination ahead of upcoming international events such as the world humanitarian summit and high level meetings taking place in the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2016.

Ministers agreed without discussion a number of measures:

The Council adopted conclusions on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Council adopted conclusions on South Sudan.

The Council adopted a decision finalising the conclusion of the association agreement between the European Union and Georgia.

The Council adopted a decision finalising the conclusion of the association agreement between the European Union and Moldova.

The Council adopted the EU position to be taken on the draft declaration of the union for the Mediterranean ministerial conference on regional co-operation and planning.

The Council established the EU's common position for the 45th meeting of the European Economic Area Council to take place in Brussels on 25 May.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2016/05/24/>

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 May focused on preparation of the June European Council and the rule of law.

The presidency informed the Council that due to the change in date of the June European Council, the GAC will now take place on 24 June in Luxembourg.

Preparation of the June European Council

The GAC discussed the agenda for the European Council on 28-29 June, which the Prime Minister will attend. The Council agreed the draft agenda which will cover: migration; jobs, growth and investment; external issues; and the outcome of the UK referendum.

On migration, I welcomed the progress made since the EU-Turkey summit and emphasised that additional work needed to be done to tackle the upstream pressures, in particular looking at the Sahel, Somalia and Libya routes.

On jobs, growth and investment, I said that it was important to fully implement the single market, and in particular improve access for services across Europe and the digital single market.

Rule of Law

The Council held its second annual rule of law dialogue, which focused on the current challenges related to the integration of migrants into member states. In particular, the Council discussed the importance of ensuring both the rights of migrants and values shared by member states are respected.

[HCWS13]

Jaguar Land Rover

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I would like to inform the House that the British embassy in Beijing has accepted an offer, from Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), of nine vehicles for their official fleet.

The value of this arrangement is around £340,000. The new vehicles will replace a range of official vehicles, of many foreign brands, that are currently used by the embassy. Under the arrangement, JLR has offered to purchase nine existing fleet vehicles at second-hand value of £115,000, and provide the new vehicles by way of gift of a value of £225,000.

The saving to the British taxpayer from this arrangement is estimated to be around £300,000, which represents the cost of replacing the nine vehicles by other means. JLR is the UK's leading exporter of goods to China, and this arrangement will help promote British excellence in manufacturing. The new vehicles that JLR will provide have been made in the UK, using British steel.

I am satisfied that this arrangement properly constitutes a gift to the embassy from JLR and conforms to all procedures governing such transactions. All other manufacturers based in the UK, who produce vehicles in the UK, were approached about future fleet requirements. The embassy will own the vehicles outright and use them for official business requirements only.

[HCWS11]

HEALTH

HPV Vaccination

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I am today announcing that a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination pilot for men who have sex with men (MSM) will start this June.

Since 2008, an HPV vaccination programme for girls has been delivered to help prevent cervical cancer, which also confers a benefit for many boys over the life course.

HPV infection is also associated with ano-genital and oral cancers, and genital warts. In November 2015, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised that a HPV vaccination programme should be introduced for MSM aged up to 45 years who attend genitourinary medicine (GUM) and HIV clinics, subject to procurement of the HPV vaccine and delivery of the programme at a cost-effective price.

Through this pilot, the HPV vaccine will be offered during existing appointments at selected GUM and HIV clinics in England to test delivery in these settings. Public Health England is in the process of agreeing which GUM and HIV clinics will take part in the pilot. A full roll-out of an HPV vaccination programme for men who have sex with men will be dependent on the progress and outcome of the pilot.

[HCWS17]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Counter-Extremism Strategy

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Many people in this country of different faiths follow religious codes and practices, and benefit from the guidance they offer. Religious communities also operate arbitration councils and boards to resolve disputes. The overriding principle is that these rules, practices and bodies must operate within the rule of law in the UK. However, there is evidence some Sharia councils may not follow this principle and so, through the Government's counter-extremism strategy, I committed to commissioning an independent review to understand whether, and the extent to which, Sharia is being misused or applied in way that is incompatible with the law.

I am pleased to announce Professor Mona Siddiqui's appointment as chair of the review, the terms of reference, and the appointment of the panel.

Professor Mona Siddiqui OBE is a highly respected professor at the University of Edinburgh, specialising in classical Islamic law, juristic arguments, and contemporary ethical issues, who was appointed OBE for services to inter-faith relations. Professor Siddiqui will be supported by a review panel consisting of Sir Mark Hedley, Sam Momtaz and Anne Marie Hutchinson OBE QC. Imam Sayed Razawi and Imam Qari Asim will serve as advisers to the chair and panel. Together these individuals represent a wide range of experience and expertise.

Sharia law review terms of reference

Many British people of different faiths follow religious codes and practices, and benefit from the guidance they offer. Some religious communities also operate arbitration councils and boards which seek to resolve disputes. There is, however, some evidence that Sharia councils may be working in a discriminatory manner.

This review will be a full, independent review to explore whether, and to what extent, the application of Sharia law may be incompatible with the law in England

and Wales, such as legislation around equality. The review will also examine the ways in which Sharia may be being misused, or exploited, in a way that may discriminate against certain groups, undermine shared values or cause social harms. It will not be a review of the totality of Sharia law, which is a source of guidance for many Muslims in the UK.

This review will focus on issues including:

- the ways that Sharia may be being used which may cause harm in communities;
- the role of particular groups and Islamic authorities in England and Wales;
- the role of Sharia councils and Muslim arbitration tribunals;
- the treatment of women—particularly in divorce, domestic violence and custody cases; and
- seeking out examples of best practice in relation to governance, transparency, and assuring compliance and compatibility with UK law.

[HCWS19]

Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): A meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council was held on 20 May. I attended on behalf of the UK.

The Council began with an adoption of the A items, before a discussion on the current migration situation. The Commission reminded Ministers that the EU-Turkey agreement of 18 March has had a significant impact but needs to be implemented in full, and that it had assessed Turkey as a safe third country for the purposes of returns from Greece. Supported by a number of others, I intervened to emphasise the need to get returns working properly, calling on the Council to support the Commission's assessment.

The Council then moved on to talk about the central Mediterranean route. I supported the Italian position on the need to enhance our efforts upstream and highlighted the need to build on successful approaches such as the Niger centre. I and others emphasised the importance of proper asylum processes, including appropriate use of detention, and screening.

A number of member states also intervened to highlight the difficulties with relocating migrants from Italy and Greece. The UK does not, of course, take part in the EU's relocation mechanism.

The presidency concluded that the Council had expressed political support for returning migrants to Turkey and reflected this position in its post-Council press statement.

Next, the presidency chaired a discussion on Schengen visa policy in the context of the revised Schengen visa suspension mechanism and specific proposals to lift Schengen visa requirements for Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo and Turkey. All Ministers were in agreement that benchmarks must be met prior to any liberalisation. The UK welcomed the revised visa suspension mechanism and the possibility of triggering it on public security grounds. Ministers agreed a general approach on the visa suspension mechanism, allowing the presidency to begin trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament.

The UK also noted the close relationship between liberalisation and the wider EU relationship with these countries; it would be important to establish clear and firm expectations on security and migration. The UK is not a member of the Schengen border free zone, so neither the visa suspension mechanism nor the Schengen visa programmes for Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo and Turkey will apply to the UK.

The presidency concluded that the Council expected further reporting on Kosovo and Turkey once all benchmarks had been met, that Georgia would go to COREPER the following week for agreement to start negotiations with the European Parliament, and that Ukraine would be discussed further.

Finally, the presidency updated Ministers on the negotiations for the European border and Coastguard. The European Parliament had not reached a position. There had been no significant change since the general approach was agreed in April. The UK will not participate in this measure.

[HCWS31]

Report of the Biometrics Commissioner

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Today I am publishing a report of the Biometrics Commissioner, on the retention of biometric material by the police on the grounds of national security, which I asked the Commissioner to prepare the following publication of his second annual report on 11 March 2016.

The Biometrics Commissioner, Alastair MacGregor QC, is appointed under section 20 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. His responsibilities are:

- to decide applications by the police for extended retention of DNA profiles and fingerprints from persons arrested for serious offences but not charged or convicted;
- to keep under review national security determinations made by chief officers under which DNA profiles and fingerprints may be retained for national security purposes;
- to exercise general oversight of police use of DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints.

I am grateful to Mr MacGregor for this report. No redactions to it have been made on the grounds of national security.

Copies of the report will be available from the Vote Office.

[HCWS25]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foreign Affairs Council for Development

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Baroness Verma) has made the following statement:

On 12 May, I attended the Foreign Affairs Council for Development in Brussels. The meeting was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign

Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini. She also hosted a joint lunch with the Afghan Minister of Finance, Eklil Hakimi, which discussed the preparations for the upcoming Brussels conference on Afghanistan, in September this year. A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted will be deposited in the Library of the House for the convenience of members.

Revision of the European Consensus of Development in light of the 2030 agenda

The Council discussed the prospects of updating the 2005 European Consensus on Development—the EU’s overarching development strategy. Discussion of a new European Consensus on Development in light of Agenda 2030 focused on the links between development policy and the areas of security, humanitarian, migration. I led calls for a long-term approach, with our commitment to 0.7% and the “Beyond Aid” agenda at the heart of implementation. Also discussed was the need for modernised, innovative financial instruments, with general support for a greater role for the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Trade, private sector and sustainable development

Council conclusions on global value chains, which the UK had strongly supported, were adopted with agreement on the integral role of the private sector and trade for sustainable development. The garment initiative was held up by Development Commissioner Mimica as a good example of a multi-stakeholder and the “policy coherence for development” approach. I highlighted the UK’s promotion of the involvement of the private sector in sustainable development in recent years, and argued that it is clear that to achieve the 2030 Vision for sustainable development more investment capital is needed from the private sector.

Afghanistan conference

Discussions were held on the forthcoming Brussels conference on Afghanistan, and Council conclusions on this subject were adopted with the UK’s full support. The Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October 2016 is a key opportunity for the international community to reaffirm their ongoing commitment to Afghanistan’s security and development. During the lunchtime session, Afghan Finance Minister Hakimi presented the Afghan National Unity Government’s new national development strategy to the Council.

Joint programming

Council conclusions on joint programming were agreed, which stated that the approach will remain voluntary. I emphasised the point that local context is key when discussing the suitability of a particular programme. Consideration of this should drive decisions, and joint programming should complement, not replace, bilateral relationships and programmes. This view was echoed by a number of other member states and supported by the Council conclusions.

Migration and development

Council conclusions on forced displacement were agreed by the Council. More broadly on the subject of migration, Commissioner Mimica said that the emergency trust fund for Africa agreed at the Valetta summit in November 2015 was an important tool, and urged member states to support and contribute to it. I set out the UK’s support for the trust fund, but called for greater consistency in its operation, as well as an ongoing commitment to strong oversight. I also noted that the EIB could play a key role in responding to the causes of the migration crisis.

Preparation of the World Humanitarian Summit

Conclusions were adopted by the Council concerning preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit, which took place from 23-24 May in Istanbul. It was the first global summit on humanitarian issues, and it came at a time of unprecedented need. The Council were agreed that the summit would be an important opportunity to take ambitious and practical steps that will drive real change on the ground.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-05-26/HCWS33/>

[HCWS33]

World Humanitarian Summit

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): I would like to update the House on my recent visit to the world humanitarian summit, where I headed the UK delegation.

The world humanitarian summit took place from 23 to 24 May in Istanbul. It was the first global summit on humanitarian issues, and came at a time of unprecedented need: around the world, 60 million people have been forced from their homes and 37 million children out of school in conflict-affected countries.

The summit was truly global, bringing together participants from Governments, the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organisations. Leaders welcomed the UN Secretary-General’s agenda for humanity as well as his five priority areas: global leadership to prevent and end conflicts; upholding the norms that safeguard humanity; leaving no one behind, moving from delivering aid to ending need; and investing in humanity.

It was one of a number of important events this year, including February’s supporting Syria and the region conference in London and the UN Secretary-General’s high-level meeting on refugees and migrants and the Obama summit on global refugees in September. The summit was a key moment following the global goals agreed last year, galvanising political attention on how to better serve those most affected by conflict, extreme poverty and environmental change.

At the summit I was able to demonstrate UK leadership in addressing global crises and advance our UK objectives to:

Secure a new approach to protracted crises, including situations of long-term displacement of large numbers of people. The UK effectively built on the important legacy from the successful supporting Syria and the region conference in February, scaling up the approach that the UK pioneered in the Syria region as a global model for protracted crisis and displacement—going beyond people’s basic needs and investing in education, jobs and livelihoods. As part of this, alongside existing commitments to Syrian children, I committed an extra £30 million of support to a new joint fund for education in emergencies which was launched at the summit to help make sure no child misses out on an education. The Education Cannot Wait fund aims to reach more than 13.6 million young people living in emergency situations with quality education over the next five years, and all crisis-affected young people by 2030.

Strengthen commitment to the protection of civilians in conflict. I reaffirmed the UK’s commitment to compliance with International humanitarian law and ending impunity, galvanising support on protection of the medical mission and preventing sexual violence in conflict. There was strong consensus amongst participants that a lack of compliance is causing significant levels of suffering and displacement, as well as prolonging conflict. There was widespread agreement that conflict resolution and protection of civilians are the only sustainable solutions. We will now need to build quickly on this momentum.

Call for a reformed humanitarian system, including smarter financing. The summit marked the beginning of a new relationship between the humanitarian and development

communities, with widespread agreement of the need to work together better. The UK led the way to secure agreement to a “Grand Bargain” on more efficient humanitarian financing. This will change the way donors and agencies do business, including by adopting common standards to put affected people at the centre of the response, streamlining reporting systems and increasing the use of cash-based approaches in crisis situations. UN agencies pledged a more systematic use of shared analysis and planning. The UK, alongside other partners, will continue to drive this reform agenda in the months and years ahead.

Ensure a stronger focus on protecting and empowering women and girls in crises. I also committed to put gender equality at the heart of 21st-century humanitarian action, going beyond protection and making sure girls and women have a voice, choice, and control—even when crisis hits.

Overall, the summit was a success with widespread agreement that the humanitarian system needs to reform and an emerging consensus on the way forward, in particular a renewed commitment to compliance with international humanitarian law. Improving the architecture to tackle forced displacement and migration was a major theme running throughout the summit as was the need to ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind: girls and women, youth and people with disabilities. A more effective and efficient global humanitarian system will help to build global security and prosperity—which will, in turn, help advance the security and prosperity interests of the UK.

The summit provided us with a compelling agenda for change—now we need to deliver. We will hold participants to their commitments, particularly the UN, and renew our efforts to roll out a new approach in crisis-affected countries.

[HCWS24]

JUSTICE

Prisons

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): This Government are committed to making sure our prisons become places of reform, where offenders can change their lives and turn away from crime. Alongside giving governors more freedom to innovate and introducing sharper accountability, we are also investing £1.3 billion in a high-quality, modern prison estate.

We have already announced that we will build new prisons that have better education and work facilities and close ageing and ineffective prisons. As part of these reforms I can announce today that the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) will not be renewing the lease with Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust for the site at HMP Kennet. The prison will therefore close by July 2017.

The staff at HMP Kennet have been undertaking excellent work with the prisoners from Merseyside and surrounding areas. The prison however does not provide an ideal environment for the rehabilitation of the men it holds. Its design and layout make it difficult to operate, it has the highest levels of crowding in the estate and is one of the most expensive category C prisons in the country.

Closing facilities like that at HMP Kennet will enable us to invest the money in a modern prison estate, with facilities for training and rehabilitation that help prisoners turn their lives around.

[HCWS20]

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) reported in March 2015 on Women in the UK Intelligence Community, and today I am laying the Government’s response before both Houses of Parliament. The Government and all agencies wholeheartedly agreed with the ISC’s statement that,

“Diversity should... be pursued not just on legal or ethical grounds—which are important in themselves— but because it will result in a better response to the range of threats that we face to our national security”.

I am grateful to the Committee for its thorough examination of this issue. Our response provides an update on the progress that has been made over the last year. I am determined to see positive change, recognising that it will take time to achieve the full impact we want.

Since the publication of the ISC’s report, all three agencies have increased their focus on all aspects of diversity, and have taken concrete steps to attract, encourage, and support women. The ISC rightly pointed to the benefit of sharing initiatives across the intelligence community, and I welcome the joint activities the agencies have delivered, and their collaboration with international partners.

Diversity strengthens our public sector organisations. Ensuring the agencies reflect the country they serve will be essential in enabling them to respond to the complex threats we face. This has been a positive year for promoting all forms of diversity in the intelligence community, as their exceptional commitment to inclusion has been externally acknowledged and celebrated. But there is more to be done to sustain our efforts and build on this success.

[HCWS23]

TRANSPORT

HS2 Phase 2a

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I am today announcing to the House the Government’s package of measures to provide assistance to owner occupiers along the line of route for phase 2a of the High Speed 2 project (west midlands to Crewe).

This announcement responds to the public consultation the Government conducted from November 2015 to February 2016 on the long-term property compensation and assistance schemes for phase 2a. A Command Paper setting out the Government’s detailed response to the consultation and way forward has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament today.

Following detailed consideration, the Government are to implement the following long-term property compensation and assistance schemes for phase 2a which are based upon schemes already in place for phase 1

(London to west midlands) of the route. They will apply with immediate effect and replace the temporary exceptional hardship scheme that has been in place for phase 2a since 2013.

Express Purchase—owner-occupiers may be able to sell their property to the Government at its full unblighted market value (as it would be if there were no plans for HS2), plus 10% (up to a maximum of £53,000, known as a home-loss payment) and reasonable moving expenses, including stamp duty.

Need to sell—this scheme does not have a boundary and is available to owner-occupiers who can demonstrate a compelling reason to sell their house but are unable to do so other than at a discount because of HS2. The Government will pay the full, unblighted value for these properties.

Rent back—is available if a property that the Government has purchased under any of the HS2 property schemes is suitable for letting.

Extended homeowner protection zone—where a property is removed from surface safeguarding, an owner-occupier will in most instances continue to be able to apply under express purchase for a period of five years from the date the property ceases to be affected by the directions.

Further measures will be provided in rural areas where the line runs on the surface in recognition that the short-term effects on communities can reasonably be expected to be much more marked in these areas. This rural support zone (RSZ) will cover the area outside safeguarding up to 120 metres from the centre line of the railway. The RSZ will run from the connection with phase 1 near Fradley in the west midlands to the A500 south of Crewe. The schemes available in the RSZ are:

Cash offer—this is a lump sum payment of 10% of the unblighted open market value of a property. This payment is a minimum of £30,000 and is capped at £100,000. This scheme will be available to eligible owner-occupiers from today until one year after phase 2a first opens for public use.

Voluntary purchase—eligible owner-occupiers will be able to sell their home to the Government for its full unblighted value. This scheme will be available from today until one year after phase 2a first opens for public use. This scheme will be made available when Royal Assent is obtained for the phase 2a hybrid Bill.

Homeowner payment scheme—those beyond the rural support zone and within 300 metres of the centreline of the railway will, following Royal Assent of the HS2 phase 2a hybrid Bill, be able to apply for a homeowner payment ranging from £7,500 to £22,500.

I also confirm that we are going to make a number of changes to the discretionary property assistance schemes which will apply to phase 1 and phase 2a. They will be implemented with immediate effect. Key changes include:

NTS health and mobility—we have added additional guidance on health and mobility whereby HS2 Ltd will give wider consideration to an applicant's health and mobility and suitability of their current property.

Valuations for NTS, EHS and RSZ—we are going to permit the use of local valuers in the valuation process.

I believe these refined schemes demonstrate our continued commitment to provide a package of compensation and assistance schemes for owner-occupiers along the HS2 route that far exceeds what is required by law in recognition that HS2 is an exceptional project. I am confident the schemes we now have in place represent the best possible balance between supporting affected communities and providing value for money for the taxpayer.

[HCWS24]

Rail Franchising

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): I am pleased to inform the House that my Department has published its refreshed programme for rail franchising. Through this my Department is setting out an ambitious plan for new rail franchises that will give passengers high-quality rail services.

It is making it clear to the whole rail industry that competition for rail franchises is the best way to secure services for passengers at good value for the taxpayer.

Through our plan for the railways we are making journeys better for everyone—we are reducing crowding, cutting journey times and improving trains and stations across the country. This supports our regional economies, creating jobs and opportunities and connecting people to business.

During this Parliament my Department has already delivered the new Northern and TransPennine Express franchises which will oversee a massive £1.2 billion private-sector investment in our rail services. This includes hundreds of brand-new modern trains, thousands more seats, more services. Together this will deliver a modern, 21st century service for passengers, help to close the economic gap between north and south and help bring the northern powerhouse to life. We expect to continue to deliver similar results for our upcoming franchise competitions.

Private sector competition is good for passengers, local communities and taxpayers. That is why as part of our latest schedule we have started the competition for new franchises for the Intercity West Coast, East Anglia, South Western, East Midlands and West Midlands. I am confident that, through these franchises we will deliver the rail network this country needs.

I am placing a copy of the franchising schedule in the Libraries of the House.

[HCWS34]

WORK AND PENSIONS

British Steel Pension Scheme

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): Today I am publishing a consultation on options for the British Steel Pension Scheme. Britain's steel industry is an important part of our economy and this Government are working to help the industry secure a long-term viable future. As part of this work we are considering the future position of the pension scheme. The consultation includes a full range of options that consider whether and how the scheme could be separated from the existing sponsoring employer and whether it will be necessary to reduce the benefits within the scheme. The consultation will run until 23 June 2016. I will place a copy of the consultation document in the House Library.

[HCWS16]

Petition

Thursday 26 May 2016

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH

Closure of Garforth Clinic

The petition of residents of the Elmet and Rothwell,

Declares that the decision of the Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust to close Garforth Clinic removes ease of access to local health services for elderly and disabled patients; further that it removes podiatry, adult dietetics, children's speech and language therapy, psychological therapies, musculo-skeletal, cardiac and weight management services from Garforth; further that it removes access to a local warfarin clinic for those without personal transportation; further that it highlights a failure to comply with statutory functions of an NHS Trust; further that the Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust has failed to identify a sustainable alternative or detail how neighbouring health centres will cope with increased demand; further that the Trust has failed to reference pressure from Leeds City Council's Core Strategy, which plans to build thousands of additional dwellings around the town; and further that the Trust withdrew from a pre-arranged public meeting with our Member of Parliament and City Councillors at which residents were hoping to explain their personal concerns over the removal of local health services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to encourage the independent Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust to review its decision to close Garforth Clinic; arrange a meeting with residents to answer concerns; and re-consult with patients on the impact that such a closure will have.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Alec Shelbrooke, *Official Report*, 03 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 143.]

[P001687]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer):

Configuration of health services is a matter for the local NHS. Any changes must meet the four tests for service change: they must have support from GP commissioners, be based on clinical evidence, demonstrate public and patient engagement, and consider patient choice.

Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust advises that during 2014/15, it undertook a programme of service review and redesign affecting the majority of services. As a result of this programme, a number of services identified the need to change and reduce the number of locations from which care was delivered.

The Trust advises that there was a full public consultation for 12 weeks from August to November 2015. Proposed changes included the removal of services from Garforth Clinic and the subsequent closure of the building. The Trust sought feedback from patients, carers and other stakeholders by a variety of methods during this period and advises that the views of both local councillors and MPs were sought.

The Trust Board received a report outlining all comments and questions received during the engagement period. The report also set out mitigating actions to support the most vulnerable members of the public.

The Trust advises that it continues to provide the same level of service to Garforth residents. Most services are now provided at the nearby Kippax Health Centre, with additional clinics having been arranged. A local voluntary transport scheme helps those who have difficulty accessing services which have relocated. The Trust is monitoring the changes and engaging local community groups to advise on service changes where appropriate. The Trust hopes to arrange a further public meeting within the Garforth community to provide feedback on progress with service changes and the proposed sale of the clinic building.

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 26 May 2016

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Bangladesh

The following is an extract from questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 24 May 2016:

Alex Cunningham: The Minister has said that he has talked to the Bangladeshi Government, but does he really think that that Government are taking sufficient steps to tackle the issue of violence against LGBT people?

Mr Swire: Clearly I do not. We have a certain amount of leverage in Bangladesh—we are the largest grant aid donor, giving £162 million in 2015-16—so our voice has some influence there.

[Official Report, 24 May 2016, Vol. 611, c. 382.]

Letter of correction from Mr Swire:

An error has been identified in the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham).

The correct answer should have been:

Mr Swire: Clearly I do not. We have a certain amount of leverage in Bangladesh—we are the largest grant aid donor, **allocating £162 million for 2016-17**—so our voice has some influence there.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 26 May 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ATTORNEY GENERAL	661	WOMEN AND EQUALITIES — <i>continued</i>	
Disability Hate Crimes	667	International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia	675
Legal Services	664	Older Women in the Workplace	673
Rape Offences: Conviction Rates	661	Revenge Porn Helpline	677
Scotland Act 2016	668	Sentencing Policy: Child Neglect/Abuse	671
Serious Fraud	662	STEM Careers	672
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	668	Topical Questions	678
Disabled People: Employment	668	Women in Business	676
Employment: Women Returnees	670		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 26 May 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	13WS	HEALTH	27WS
BIS Consultation	13WS	HPV Vaccination	27WS
Consumer Protection: Resale of Tickets	14WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	28WS
Higher Education Student Support	14WS	Counter-Extremism Strategy	28WS
Post-Foreign Affairs Council (Trade)	15WS	Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council Statement	29WS
CABINET OFFICE	16WS	Report of the Biometrics Commissioner	30WS
Indemnity for Petition Officers (Recall Petitions)	16WS	INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	30WS
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	20WS	Foreign Affairs Council for Development	30WS
Education, Youth, Culture and the Sport Council	20WS	World Humanitarian Summit	32WS
EDUCATION	21WS	JUSTICE	33WS
LSCB Review and Government Response	21WS	Prisons	33WS
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	22WS	PRIME MINISTER	34WS
Carbon Capture and Storage: Yorkshire and Humber	23WS	Intelligence and Security Committee	34WS
Planning Act 2008: Hornsea Offshore Wind Farm	22WS	TRANSPORT	34WS
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	23WS	HS2 Phase 2a	34WS
Agriculture and Fisheries Council	23WS	Rail Franchising	36WS
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	24WS	TREASURY	16WS
Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council	24WS	Counter-terrorist Asset-freezing Regime	17WS
Jaguar Land Rover	27WS	Double Taxation Conventions	16WS
		Insurance Fraud Taskforce	17WS
		WORK AND PENSIONS	36WS
		British Steel Pension Scheme	36WS

PETITION

Thursday 26 May 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH	9P	
Closure of Garforth Clinic	9P	

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Thursday 26 May 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	1MC
Bangladesh	1MC

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**not later than
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CONTENTS

Thursday 26 May 2016

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 661] [see index inside back page]

Attorney General

Minister for Women and Equalities

Brain Family: Deportation [Col. 683]

Answer to urgent question—(James Brokenshire)

Business of the House [Col. 692]

Statement—(Dr Thérèse Coffey)

Steel Industry [Col. 715]

Statement—(Sajid Javid)

Debate on the Address (Sixth day) [Col. 732]

Amendment—(Jeremy Corbyn)—on a Division, negatived

Amendment—(Stewart Hosie)—on a Division, negatived

Main Question, as amended, agreed to

Coal Authority (Compensation Procedures) [Col. 812]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 13WS]

Petition [Col. 9P]

Observations

Ministerial Correction [Col. 1MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
