

**Monday
22 October 2018**

**Volume 648
No. 192**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 22 October 2018

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JUNE 2017)

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 648

TWENTY-THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

House of Commons

Monday 22 October 2018

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Veterans' Access to Support Services

1. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve veterans' access to support services. [907158]

13. **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve veterans' access to support services. [907171]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I recently made a series of announcements on new schemes and initiatives designed to support serving personnel and their families throughout their military careers and beyond. Those include a further package to support armed forces personnel as they enter civilian life, a veterans ID card and a new fund dedicated to supporting the careers of the spouses and civil partners of those who serve.

Nigel Huddleston: I am sure we all agree that more could be done to help veterans when they return to civvy street. Steps have already been taken to improve co-ordination and co-operation between Government

Departments on the provision of services for veterans, but what more can be done to improve co-ordination between Departments and local authorities?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. The armed forces covenant, which I know his local authorities are members of, plays a vital role in ensuring that armed forces service personnel and those who have served are able to plug into health services, help with finding a home or any other support that it is so vital for local authorities to provide.

Victoria Prentis: Would the Secretary of State consider visiting the Heyford and Bicester veterans' group, which meets once a month on Fridays in my constituency and provides a one-stop-shop for veterans and their families, where they can access all the services that they need?

Gavin Williamson: I was hoping that I would get such an invite in the near future, and one has just come along. I would be delighted to visit the group. I know that my hon. Friend does so much work there and is so supportive of them, and I look forward to seeing that at first hand.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Many veterans who have come to my constituency surgeries are being subjected to unnecessary face-to-face medical assessments in order to access social security benefits. Will the Secretary of State speak to his ministerial colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions, to stop that happening?

Gavin Williamson: I would be delighted to do that.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): As we approach Remembrance Week, we pay tribute to all those veterans who have served Queen and country, as well as those personnel still serving.

Many of the support services that veterans rely on are delivered by local authorities, but councils across the country have faced deep cuts in recent years, with the Local Government Association estimating that in

England alone they will face a funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025. There is a similar picture in devolved nations, due to cuts to the block grant. Bearing in mind the vital role that local authorities play in supporting our veterans, will the Secretary of State join me in urging the Chancellor to rule out any further cuts to local authorities in his Budget next week?

Gavin Williamson: It is very important that all parts of government, whether local or national, play a role in delivering the very best services for our armed forces. The introduction of a veterans ID card will hopefully go a long way towards helping former service personnel to access the vital services provided by local authorities. That will be an important step forward.

19. [907178] **Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State says about supporting veterans. My constituent, Lieutenant Colonel L.T., served with distinction for almost 30 years. Ever so typically for a man of his standing, he is more concerned about the investigations into the men he served with in Northern Ireland than where investigations may lead for himself. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those veterans also deserve our support?

Gavin Williamson: It is clear that both local and national Government, including the Ministry of Defence, owe those who are serving in the armed forces and those who have served a great deal of support, and we will continue to give them every bit of support that we can.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Thankfully the vast majority of personnel and veterans have very good mental health, but we know that there are challenges, particularly for early service leavers. What more can the MOD do to ensure that service members are directed to support services when they leave the forces?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. The actual mental health outcomes of service personnel are exceptionally good, but there are service personnel and former service personnel who do need a bit of extra support. The investment of £2 million in the veterans gateway is aimed at helping and supporting veterans and service leavers to access the type of support that they best need once they have left the armed forces.

UK's Defence Capability

2. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of using new and developing technologies to support the UK's defence capability. [907159]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I thank my hon. Friend for his time and for the opportunity to see the excellent Manufacturing Technology Centre in his constituency just the other week, which demonstrated to me that emerging technologies present greater opportunities but also more complex threats than ever before.

Mark Pawsey: In addition to the great work at the MTC, does the Secretary of State agree with me that an excellent example of new technology supporting military capability is the electric drive systems using anti-vibration

technology being installed on our marine vessels, which were both developed in Rugby and built in Rugby, and does he agree with me that they represent a great future for British manufacturing?

Gavin Williamson: Such technologies do represent a fantastic future for British manufacturing. If we look at the success that the Type 26 has had not just with the eight Type 26 frigates that are going to be built in Britain, but in securing orders in Australia and Canada, we can see that it demonstrates this kind of technology is not only designed in Britain, but should always be built in Britain.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am glad that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) has now timed her bobbing correctly. I call Emma Hardy.

Emma Hardy: Workers at BAE Systems in Brough have always been at the forefront of developing technology and manufacturing, but after meeting some of the workers last week I am becoming increasingly concerned about their sole reliance on the Hawk orders. Can the Secretary of State do anything to encourage BAE Systems to diversify their manufacturing and to protect jobs at the Brough site?

Gavin Williamson: The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), and I have been working very closely with BAE Systems, but also with the Qataris in securing a key order for Hawk trainer jets. The hon. Lady raises an important point about the diversity of the site. It is certainly something that I can raise with those at BAE Systems at my next meeting with them, and I will be seeing them later this month.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am delighted that the Secretary of State has seen fit to protect our amphibious capability—HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion—and their related technologies, both new and conventional. These are such crucial tools for the Marines. On that note, will the Secretary of State fully understand and comprehend the importance of 40 Commando to my town of Taunton in his assessment of future capabilities?

Gavin Williamson: I thank my hon. Friend for all she did in raising her concerns about Albion and Bulwark. On 40 Commando in Taunton, I absolutely reassure her that there are no plans to move 40 Commando from Taunton: it will be there for a long time into the future.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State surely knows that, in a world of cyber-warfare, we of course need to invest in new technology and great innovation. However, he should not forget the Cinderellas, such as David Brown Gear Systems in Huddersfield, which is making gear boxes for tanks and for our great vessels. Will he come to Huddersfield and see what we do there?

Gavin Williamson: I know David Brown very well. He is of course the man who saved Aston Martin, so there is a very famous industrial heritage there. If I am not

able to visit David Brown, I am sure the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey, will be able to do so. We will look to make sure that one of us does. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the amount of technology and ingenuity we have in this country, and we should be very proud of it. That is not always just through the prime contractors, but through the many businesses that are so dependent on defence contracts.

Mr Speaker: I urge the Secretary of State to follow my very good example: I visited the Huddersfield constituency, and the hon. Gentleman who represents it is a very good host, as is the university to boot. It will widen the Secretary of State's learning and cultural experience to go there.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): The UK's defence capability has been immeasurably enhanced by the arrival of HMS Queen Elizabeth. We saw her in New York this weekend. Will the Secretary of State consider putting together a national carrier strategy, so that for the next 50 years she has a real, important global purpose?

Gavin Williamson: We do need to have a very clear national carrier strategy, because this is not just an important part of projecting power, but a key part of our national deterrence and of making sure that nations all around the globe understand that Britain has the capability to defend herself and to protect our international interests.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Will the Secretary of State commend Cammell Laird for winning for the second time its support order for the Royal Navy? Given the level of technology in the yard, is it not well placed for the new frigate orders? Although we are careful about taxpayers' money and will not give him the hospitality that Huddersfield has offered, will he please come?

Gavin Williamson: I am getting a lot of invites and feel privileged to have so many. I congratulate Cammell Laird very much on its successful bid. It goes to show how vital money spent by the MOD is to many local economies. I shall endeavour to visit Cammell in the near future, but if I do not, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey, will certainly do so.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Government believe it is vital to future-proof technologies, so I was shocked to learn that the Ministry of Defence has given the green light—yet again—to an American company, Boeing, for the replacement of the Sentry AWACS aircraft. That has been done without any competitive process, and it has been said that Boeing is planning to use old aircraft and semi-obsolete radar. Clearly there are differences of opinion about what Boeing has to offer, so will the Secretary of State agree to an independent evaluation of all the options to be considered?

Gavin Williamson: I am sure the hon. Gentleman did not intentionally mislead the House by implying that we are going to have old aircraft. We will have new aircraft in terms of the potential procurement of Wedgetail.

We are confident that this is the best capability; it is world leading and it has the best ability to bring it to our Royal Air Force at the earliest possible stage.

Armed Forces Pay

3. **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of armed forces pay. [907160]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): As there is a bidding war, may I say that, as the last six generations of my family came from Huddersfield, I am definitely up for coming back there?

Our assessments are made with the support of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. In making recommendations, the AFPRB takes account of the need to recruit, retain and motivate suitable service personnel, affordability, the inflation target and the need for armed forces' pay to be broadly comparable with that of civilians.

Mike Amesbury: Does the Minister share my concern that all three services are running below strength, and the Government's delay in lifting the public sector pay cap has exacerbated the problem?

Mark Lancaster: I am delighted to say, and I am sure the House will wish to know, that the 2% pay award has now been paid retrospectively, and the 0.9% bonus element will be paid in two lump sums, one next month and one in March.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The frontline of our country's defence is increasingly in cyber-space, and the strength of that defence depends on the calibre of the people operating in it, such as my constituents at GCHQ. What steps are being taken to ensure that pay scales are sufficient to attract and retain the brightest and the best?

Mark Lancaster: We take those factors into consideration, and I was delighted to open the new defence cyber-school back in March. We feel strongly that cyber-skills should become part of the core skills of all our armed forces.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): How many staff under the age of 25 are paid less than £8.75 an hour?

Mark Lancaster: It will come as no surprise to the hon. Gentleman that I do not have that figure at my fingertips, but I will write to him.

Armed Forces Personnel Numbers

4. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [907161]

7. **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [907164]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): We remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the armed forces. We have a range of measures under way to improve recruitment and retention, and these are

kept under constant review. Importantly, the services continue to meet all their current commitments, keeping the country and its interests safe.

Jeff Smith: The Armed Forces Pay Review Body reports that the outflow rates—personnel leaving the armed forces—are at “historically high levels” under this Government. Why does the Minister think that is?

Mark Lancaster: Retaining our service personnel is always a challenge, and that is precisely why we are focusing hard on the offer—the opportunity to train and to serve overseas. Only this month, some 5,500 personnel are serving on Saif Sareea 3 in Oman; equally, we have servicemen serving in Estonia and on Exercise Trident Juncture in Norway. We have perhaps not previously had those opportunities to train and to serve overseas, which are key to retention.

Alex Norris: The latest armed forces continuous attitude survey shows that 67% of personnel perceive the morale of their service as low. That clearly impacts on the retention of those who serve. Did it concern Ministers to read that, and when can we expect it to get better?

Mark Lancaster: I am confident that it will get better, partly for the reasons I have just outlined. We are focusing very hard on the offer to our service personnel to ensure that people stay. That is not only about pay—we have talked about the pay award—but the opportunities we give to our service personnel and the training they receive. There are very few professions in this country where one can join with limited qualifications and then leave with a degree-level apprenticeship. That is the sort of offer we make in the armed forces, and we are determined to continue.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Capita’s Army recruitment contract has been an unmitigated disaster, so as a member of the Select Committee I was very relieved to hear the Secretary of State say in evidence to us last week that if necessary he would be prepared to sack it. The sooner the better. May I ask the Minister of State, who we all respect, whether there is any good news at all on Army recruitment that he can share with the House today?

Mark Lancaster: As my right hon. Friend says, the Secretary of State was very clear, in the evidence he gave to the Select Committee, that there is always the option of ending the contract. I am pleased to say that there is good news. This is a long process, from application stage to delivering a soldier who is trained perhaps a year later, but we are now seeing applications at a five-year high, so the hopper is being filled at a rate not seen for the past five years. Equally, the conversion rate—managing to get applications converted and on to training—is also improving. At the start of the pipeline there are very positive signs indeed.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): It is a regrettable fact that the legal pursuit of our veterans is a significant deterrent to recruitment. What concrete steps is the Department taking to bring it to an end?

Mark Lancaster: I have not seen any evidence that supports what my hon. Friend has just said, so I would be grateful if he could supply it. None the less, the point he makes about our veterans being pursued legally is

an important one. I can only refer him back to the Adjournment debate, I think on 25 June, when over 50 right hon. and hon. Members came to the House to discuss the matter. There is a consensus across the House that this is an issue we simply must address. He will be aware that the Government have consulted on the issue and we intend to publish the results of the consultation shortly.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): A scathing report by the Public Accounts Committee has found that the Ministry of Defence lacks the strategy to remedy, before 2023, the skills shortages now apparent in over 100 critical trades. Those shortages are putting an unprecedented strain on servicemen and servicewomen, with morale in freefall. When will the Government face up to the fact that personnel numbers have been plummeting on their watch, and what specific action will the Minister take to respond to the recommendations in the Committee’s report?

Mark Lancaster: We have already discussed some of the actions we are taking, but equally it is important to say that, while the hon. Lady likes to project a picture of gloom, the Army, for example, is actually over 93% manned and fulfils all its operational commitments. Our service personnel are getting opportunities today—the opportunity to train overseas, or, crucially, through training itself—that they may not have had five or six years ago. I have already talked about the fact that the Ministry of Defence is the largest provider of apprenticeships in the United Kingdom. These are some of the things that the hon. Lady might like to champion and praise for a change.

21. [907180] **Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** In terms of making a career in our armed forces a positive choice, many young people get their first taste of what life might be like in the armed forces by joining the cadets. The Scottish Government make it as difficult as possible for the cadets to recruit in Scottish schools. What will the Minister do to make it easier for young Scots to have the opportunity to join the cadets and gain the advantage of that experience?

Mark Lancaster: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced that in England and Wales, we will be increasing the number of schools with cadets, and I like to think that this is a good example. We do not recruit directly from the cadets—let us be absolutely clear. None the less, it is a fact that a large percentage of members of the armed forces were once cadets, and not only that—although the vast majority will not go on to joined the armed forces, the sorts of values that they are taught as cadets will set them up well for life.

CBRN Defence Capability

5. **Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to increase investment in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence capability. [907162]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): The UK has world-leading counter-chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear capabilities. The MOD has committed around £950 million to maintain and improve these over the next 10 years.

Stephen Hammond: The Minister will know that following Salisbury, the armed forces played a vital role in identifying the nerve agent and helping to clear up the scene. Will he reassure the House that the MOD will do everything that it can to ensure that the investment in that capability will be maintained and increased?

Stuart Andrew: Absolutely, and I pay tribute to all those who worked so carefully and so hard in Salisbury and Amesbury on our behalf. As I said, the £950 million is there to improve this over the next 10 years. That includes £48 million to help to set up a new chemical weapons defence centre in Porton Down to make sure that we maintain our cutting-edge capability in chemical analysis and defence.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Earlier this month, along with other Members of the NATO Parliament, I visited the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Centre of Excellence in the Czech Republic. One of the training courses that it runs is a skills training course for first responders—for police and ambulance personnel—who may often, as in Salisbury, be the first on the scene. What efforts is the Ministry of Defence making to make sure that we have that capability in this country?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. Of course, this is not just about the armed forces; we have to recognise that all the emergency services were there very quickly. We need to ensure that they have all the training that they need. I will speak to colleagues in other Departments to ensure that that is happening.

Capita Management of Army Recruitment

6. **Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP):** Whether his Department has plans to cancel its contracts with Capita for the management of Army recruitment. [907163]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): The Army is working closely with Capita to deliver improvements to recruitment. While there are positive indicators that measures are having an impact, I continue to monitor the Recruiting Partnering Project very closely and hold regular discussions with my officials regarding the contract.

Ronnie Cowan: Subject to a legal challenge, Capita was awarded the MOD fire and rescue contract despite an MOD financial assessment that gave the company the highest category of distress and vulnerability. With shoddy finances and an abysmal record of delivery, does the Minister agree with the MOD fire and rescue staff from my constituency that private corporations should have no place in managing MOD services?

Mark Lancaster: No, I do not think I do actually. Successive Governments have involved the private sector and I am sure that that is set to continue. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is a challenge to that particular contract at the moment, but I remain convinced that the use of the private sector in delivering the Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation is probably the right thing to do.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The private sector has had enormous success in delivering huge efficiency savings to the Ministry of Defence over decades now, but on this particular contract, there seems to be an element of risk aversion in the management of it, not least on the medical side from the people making health assessments. Is there a case for getting more military back engaged in the delivery of this contract to make the right risk assessments about recruiting?

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. He will be aware of recent work being carried out by the Ministry of Defence through a medical symposium to try to tackle these very issues. Sometimes, some of the medical reasons for not joining are frankly quite archaic. To give a brief example, if someone has had childhood asthma, they cannot join even if they no longer have it, even though the chances are that it will not return until that person is probably in their 50s, when, of course, 99% of service personnel will have left.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The Minister is celebrating current recruitment levels. Will he explain why the Scots Guards is currently under-recruited by 36%?

Mark Lancaster: I am not celebrating current recruitment levels. What I am saying is that we are all aware of the challenges facing the defence recruiting system some months ago, but given that this is a long pipeline, I am confident that the hopper at the start of that process, which can take up to a year, is now at a five-year high. I hope and I am confident that we will then see that slowly come through the system, which will result in an increase in the number of our service personnel.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The sorry saga of the Capita recruitment programme is made worse by the fact that the Ministry of Defence was told at the time that it would not work. I hope the programme will be sorted out in the short term, but until then will the Minister place a greater emphasis on retaining those superb personnel currently engaged in our armed forces?

Mark Lancaster: There are always two factors in the equation of armed forces numbers. One, clearly, is the number we recruit, and being a bottom-fed organisation, we have to keep recruiting, but equally, although we cannot retain everybody—the rank structure does not allow it—it is important that we continue to retain as many service personnel as possible for as long a career as possible. I have already highlighted some of the things we are doing to make that happen.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): May I send the best wishes of the Scottish National party to the UK team at the Invictus games? I cannot believe it has been left to the SNP to do that—but there we go!

Can the Minister tell me the total financial value of Capita's contracts with his Department?

Mark Lancaster: Once again, it may come as a surprise, but off the top of my head, no I cannot, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: According to a written answer from the Minister, the figure is £1.15 billion. This addiction to privatisation at the MOD, which I get he is ideologically attached to, is causing mayhem, from recruitment to the fire and rescue service. If he pledges to sack Capita, he will have the support of people behind him, of the people across from him and of the SNP Benches. Why won't he do it?

Mark Lancaster: The Secretary of State has made it clear that that always remains an option, but if the hon. Gentleman had listened to a word I had said over the past 10 minutes, rather than preparing his question, he might have realised that there was hope. I am confident, at the start of this process, that things are getting better.

South China Sea

8. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What assessment he has made of the security situation in the South China sea. [907165]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I pay tribute to the crews of HMS Albion and HMS Sutherland, which have played an important role in upholding freedom of navigation in the South China sea. Security in that region is vital to the UK and its global economic interests, and we shall not shy away from asserting our commitment to upholding the rules-based international system.

Kevin Foster: The continuing expansion of Chinese military activity in the South China sea, particularly around the Paracel islands, should worry anyone concerned about stability in the region, hence it was welcome to see HMS Albion there, flying the white flag—[*Laughter.*]—I mean the white ensign, but more will be necessary to reassure our allies. What are my right hon. Friend's thoughts on more forward deployment of Royal Navy assets in this region—flying the correct flag?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend makes an important point about how our allies have seen our presence in the Indo-Pacific region. We have had the largest deployment of the surface fleet in a generation, and that will continue with HMS Argyll, which is due to be on exercise with our five power defence agreement allies, and also with HMS Montrose, which will be going to the region next year. It all goes to show that our passion and commitment to the region is growing, and we will be looking at how we can expand this in the future.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): It must be remarkably tempting as Secretary of State for Defence to look at the map and long for the days when a gunboat or two could be sent. Sadly, the days when the white ensign—the white ensign!—flew unchallenged are gone. Will the Secretary of State accept the fact that our friends and allies in Taiwan greatly value British maritime presence in those waters? Has he considered the possibility—I ask him for no more than an indication that he will think about this—of visiting a port in Taiwan, just to show our solidarity and friendship?

Gavin Williamson: There might be some challenges with that, but we will always consider all options and ideas. The actions that the Royal Navy has undertaken

have brought in more allies in support of upholding the rules-based international order in the South China sea. That is what was so valuable about both Australia and France taking part in operations.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I understand from a defence company in my constituency that the Taiwanese are looking for defence contracts in this country and that the Americans are about to spend a lot of money on ships out in Taiwan. Can companies in this country go for those contracts, or is there some difficulty with that?

Gavin Williamson: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will write to him to clarify the matter.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has commended the work and the crew of HMS Albion, one of our landing platform docks in the South China sea. Bizarrely, however, the national shipbuilding strategy has defined it as not being a complex warship, unlike frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers. Can the Secretary of State explain why HMS Albion and other amphibious ships are not deemed to be complex warships?

Gavin Williamson: The national shipbuilding strategy highlighted the fact that the definition was to apply to aircraft carriers, frigates and destroyers, and the strategy was welcomed on both sides of the House.

Counter-Daesh Operations: Syria and Iraq

9. **Adam Holloway** (Gravesend) (Con): What contribution UK forces are making to counter-Daesh operations in Syria and Iraq. [907166]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): RAF strikes in Iraq and Syria will continue until Daesh has been defeated in both Iraq and Syria. In Iraq we have about 500 personnel participating in the coalition's programme of training.

Adam Holloway: Can the Secretary of State give some indication of what we are doing to maintain the momentum against a fractured Daesh?

Gavin Williamson: It is important to remember that although Daesh has been considerably weakened and the amount of territory under its control has been massively reduced, it remains a great threat. In the last month alone the RAF has made 27 strikes against it, which goes to show that the tempo of operations is not actually slowing down. We cannot take it for granted that Daesh has been defeated, and we must continue to put pressure on it.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): It is a year since Raqqa was liberated from Daesh. There is still work to be done on securing all parts of the city, but attention needs to be given to how it will be rebuilt in the future. What plans are being drawn up, and what resources are being allocated to the reconstruction?

Gavin Williamson: The Department for International Development is leading this process, and the Ministry of Defence will continue to give it as much support as

possible. We recognise the important role that must be played in respect of reconstruction following such a devastating conflict.

Defence Expenditure Commitment

10. **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect on NATO capabilities of the NATO commitment to allocate 20% of defence expenditure to major equipment. [907167]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): The 20% target for major equipment ensures that investment is directed towards NATO's capability priorities, which directly enhances the security of the alliance. The United Kingdom continues to spend more than 2% of GDP on defence, and to spend more than 20% of that on major equipment. That investment helps to keep the UK safe, and ensures that NATO remains at the heart of our defence.

Peter Heaton-Jones: The NATO commitment opens up many potential opportunities for UK shipbuilders. Sadly, however, it comes at a time when Babcock International is considering the future of Appledore shipyard, which is very concerning. Will the Minister join me, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox), in continuing to work with Babcock in committing ourselves to a long-term future for Appledore?

Stuart Andrew: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon, for the work that they are doing on an issue that I know is important to them. One of the key aims of the national shipbuilding strategy is that UK shipbuilders should be competitive in overseas markets as well as domestically, so that we can secure their long-term future. I hope that they will engage in all the competitions that exist.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): Mr Gorbachev has said that the United States' decision to withdraw from the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty is a mistake. He has said:

"Under no circumstances should we tear up old disarmament agreements...Do they really not understand in Washington what this could lead to?"

I am not naive about Russia and the threat from Russia, but what is the future of existing international nuclear non-proliferation treaties, and what additional effect will that have on NATO's budget?

Stuart Andrew: I apologise for missing the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but we want to ensure that we are a full member of NATO.

Phil Wilson: What are the implications for its budget?

Stuart Andrew: We have made a commitment to spend 2% of GDP, and we have never spent less than 2%. We are doing everything we can to work with other partners and encourage them to do exactly the same.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): NATO has always been the cornerstone of Britain's defence, so does my hon. Friend agree that the worst thing that

could possibly happen to NATO would be the arrival of a Government whose leader has said recently of NATO:

"I'd rather we weren't in it".

He has said:

"NATO, the father of the Cold War in the 1940s, should have shut up shop in 1990".

That was from none other than the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. NATO is an important alliance that we are proud to be a member of, and it is part of our defence strategy. It is extremely alarming to hear some of the views from the Leader of the Opposition.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty was mentioned earlier. Is not one of the consequences of the actions of President Trump that short and medium-range nuclear missiles will have to be relocated on UK soil?

Stuart Andrew: One of the things that we have to make clear is that we want Russia to adhere to the treaty in the first place—that is incredibly important. The treaty was incredibly important at the time it was signed. We need to ensure that they maintain the treaty and stick to the values it presents to us.

UK Cyber Counter-measures: Russian Activity

11. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the UK's cyber counter-measures as a result of alleged Russian malicious activity in Europe. [907168]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): The Ministry of Defence takes cyber-security extremely seriously and co-ordinates closely with the National Cyber Security Centre. I cannot comment on specific measures that the Department has taken, for national security reasons, but I can say that the Government have identified a number of cyber-actors widely known to have been conducting cyber-attacks around the world, and who are in fact from the GRU, Russia's military intelligence service. The cyber-attacks are a further demonstration of Russia's disregard for international institutions and norms.

Christine Jardine: As the Secretary of State says, it appears that Russia has developed sophisticated cyber-espionage and cyber-warfare capabilities that it is utilising to pursue its strategic goals. Can he assure us that the Government will provide the dedicated leadership needed to co-ordinate the multi-agency response to this threat?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady raises an important point about how we have to work right across Government, and also right across industry. That is why we have been committed to investing £1.9 billion in this area. It is about co-ordinating that, bringing people together and ensuring that vulnerabilities do not open up in the industrial sector, so we are working closely with the sector.

Syria

12. **Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the security situation in Syria on the delivery of aid to that country by the armed forces. [907170]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): The UK supports the United Nations, non-governmental organisations and the Red Cross to meet the needs of vulnerable people in Syria and refugees in the region. So far we have committed £2.71 billion since 2012.

Alison McGovern: The situation in Syria is complex and unpredictable, and many civilians are at risk. Given what the Secretary of State has just said about the financial commitment that this country has made to vulnerable civilians, I ask him to keep all options on the table and to keep talking to his colleagues in the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office to ensure that we do everything we can to get basic supplies to the civilians who need them in Syria.

Gavin Williamson: Every time there is such a request, we consider it very closely, to see how best we can offer help and support. We recognise the dreadful plight that so many people are suffering in Syria. The Ministry of Defence and our armed forces will always be there to support important humanitarian work.

NATO

14. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What assessment he has made of the importance of NATO to UK national security. [907172]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Earlier this month I met my counterparts in NATO to discuss efforts to strengthen the alliance, including further burden sharing and working with allies so that they can step up their efforts to tackle today's threats, including by deterring malicious cyber-attacks.

Luke Hall: Does the Secretary of State agree that the UK should continue to play a leading role in NATO, and that working with our allies to combat terrorism and the increasingly sophisticated threat of cyber-attacks should remain a priority?

Gavin Williamson: We should be incredibly proud of the leading role that we play; we were the first nation to commit our offensive cyber-capabilities to NATO, we have seen an uplift in troop numbers in NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, and we are second only to the United States in supporting NATO and the work it does.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Government's counting within the 2% that we spend on defence things that would never have been counted under previous Governments undermines our voice when it comes to NATO. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to confirm that current spending is simply inadequate if Britain wants to play a global role in the defence of the country?

Gavin Williamson: Britain has met and will always meet its NATO commitments, and we undertake to spend the money that is required by NATO guidelines.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): As I am sure you will vividly remember, Mr Speaker, on this very date 35 years ago the largest ever demonstration by the campaign for one-sided nuclear disarmament marched

in London. Just under 100,000 people marched—although, typically, four times that number was claimed—and the then leader of the Labour party, a lifelong unilateralist, told the rally that NATO should not deploy cruise or Pershing II missiles. If that policy had been followed, we would not have had an intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty. What assessment have my right hon. Friend and his Department made of whether that INF treaty, which has been successful for so long, has now been violated by Russia?

Gavin Williamson: It has been our clear and consistent view that Russia has been in breach of that treaty. We urge Russia to comply with the treaty.

Mr Speaker: I do vividly remember the demonstration in question, not least because, as the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) is keenly aware, at almost exactly the same time I made an absolutely splendid speech at the University of Essex student union that was based overwhelmingly on the sagacious briefing provided by the right hon. Gentleman.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for listening to Plymouth's campaigns to base the new Type 26 frigates in Devonport, in the constituency that I represent, and to save Albion and Bulwark from being cut. Can he give any further reassurance to the workers in Devonport that we will be a base for future NATO operations by confirming that we will be the home to the Royal Marines super-base as well?

Gavin Williamson: I should like to pay tribute to all the Members of Parliament in Devon and Cornwall who have campaigned so hard on the basing of the Type 26s and on keeping Albion and Bulwark. We are not going to make any early comments on the future basing arrangements, but I take note of the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Uganda

15. **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): What military support the UK provides to Uganda. [907173]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): The majority of UK military support to Uganda involves training for the African Union mission to Somalia, which includes training officer cadets at Sandhurst and senior officers at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

Dr Williams: Ugandan soldiers recently tortured five Members of Parliament, including the pop star Bobi Wine, and dozens of others. Two of those MPs might never walk again. Why is the UK training those Ugandan forces at Sandhurst?

Mark Lancaster: We are not training those Ugandan forces. Let me be absolutely clear about this Government's condemnation of the actions involving those Members of Parliament. The Ministry of Defence does not engage with the special forces command, which operates separately from the mainstream Ugandan people's defence force. It was the special forces command that was involved in that incident.

Prosecution of Veterans: Northern Ireland

16. **Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that veterans are given adequate protection from prosecution in relation to their service in Northern Ireland. [907174]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): Our service personnel perform exceptional feats in difficult circumstances to protect this country. The Government's view is that the institutions set out in the draft Stormont House agreement Bill, on which public consultation has just concluded, are the best way to ensure a fair, balanced and proportionate approach to addressing the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland.

Greg Hands: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the case mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) in the Select Committee last week? If I understood this correctly, the case related to a 77-year-old veteran who is suffering from terminal cancer and whose case has already been investigated. The soldier was cleared in 1975, and I understand that everyone else involved in the incident is now dead. Can my right hon. Friend tell us why this has happened?

Mark Lancaster: I believe that my right hon. Friend is referring to the case of Dennis Hutchings, which has been discussed on several occasions in this Chamber. Indeed, Mr Hutchings has very much become the figure who demonstrates why so many colleagues across the House are so uneasy about this process. I would like to reassure my right hon. Friend that the Ministry of Defence continues to support Mr Hutchings in every way we possibly can. This underlines why we are absolutely determined to put this right and sort out this issue.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): To echo the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), my constituent Mr Tom Lynch received a service medal that he asked me personally to return to the Prime Minister when he received a very distressing letter from the Historical Enquiries Team. Please can we have every assurance that these investigations, although necessary, will be carried out in the most sensitive manner, especially for those veterans who suffer from dementia and who are in their 80s?

Mark Lancaster: Frankly, in my 14 years in Parliament, I have found few issues on which the House is unified to such an extent. The consultation has recently closed. Speaking as a serviceman, I can only reassure the House of how keen we are to try to address this issue. I am sure there will be an announcement in the House in due course.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are about to move on to topical questions, but I advise the right hon. Members for Warley (John Spellar) and for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett), and the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen), that, having missed out on substantives, they can take their chance in topicals. I am trying to encourage them.

Topical Questions

T1. [907198] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I take the opportunity to wish our team who are taking part in the Invictus games the very best. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), is currently in Sydney supporting them, so sadly is unable to be in the Chamber today.

As we approach the centenary of the end of the first world war and this year's armistice commemorations, we remember all those who have fought and died in the service of this country. I hope that Members on both sides of the House will go to the thousands of events up and down the country to remember those who have lost their lives and pay tribute to our armed forces personnel, both current and former.

Diana Johnson: I concur with the Secretary of State's comments.

I welcome the finalised deal for the nine Hawk aircraft being sold to Qatar. It is important for the employees at BAE Systems at Brough, for skilled local jobs and for flying the flag for British defence manufacturing, but there is more to do. What further support could the Government offer to win export orders for the Hawk in places such as Kuwait?

Gavin Williamson: As was touched on earlier, we have held discussions with the Qatari Government about the order for nine Hawks. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), was out in Kuwait furthering discussions about future orders for the Hawk. We will continue to work closely with BAE Systems to land more orders to sustain Brough.

T5. [907202] **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): A constituent wrote to me about his father, who served on HMS Repulse and survived both its sinking and his imprisonment in Japan. More than 500 of his fellow sailors died aboard the ship, which is their final resting place. Today, many warships have been partially or completely destroyed by scavengers. What steps has my right hon. Friend taken to prevent further destruction of our maritime war graves?

Gavin Williamson: The whole House will be united in complete disgust at what has happened. These are war graves. We would not tolerate the desecration of war graves on land, and we should not tolerate the desecration of war graves at sea. We have instructed a survey of the site and are engaged with other Governments to ensure that, where ships are under their flags, action is taken to ensure that such behaviour does not go unpunished.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): At last month's Conservative party conference, the Prime Minister said that austerity is over, but we know that the Tories' record on defence is one of deep cuts and falling budgets. In cash terms, defence spending has been slashed by £4.9 billion since

Labour left office. Can the Secretary of State tell us by how much his party has cut the defence budget in real terms?

Gavin Williamson: The defence budget is going up in real terms year on year. We have a commitment for it to go up every year by £1 billion up to 2021.

Nia Griffith: With due respect, I have to correct the record. Between 2010 and 2017, the real-terms value of the defence budget fell by nearly £10 billion, which puts immense strain on the ability of the Ministry of Defence to meet its commitments. We welcome the long overdue pay rise for service personnel, but whereas Labour set out a clear plan to fund a fair pay rise, will the Secretary of State confirm that his Government is providing no new money to cover the cost and therefore that he will have to make additional cuts elsewhere to give our forces the pay rise they deserve?

Gavin Williamson: We all welcome the increase in service personnel pay. When I meet service personnel, whether in the UK or abroad, they particularly point out that this is the largest pay increase they have experienced since 2010.

T6. [907203] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend is well aware of the strength of feeling in North Devon on securing the future of Royal Marines base Chivenor. When will we receive a decision?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): The better defence estate strategy was published about two years ago, and the strategy remains in place as it stands. The strategy extends over some 20 years, and the Royal Navy continues to work to establish the amphibious centre of excellence in Plymouth.

T2. [907199] **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The Defence Secretary has said that for every £1 spent on defence, we get £4 in return. How can the Government square such comments with their willingness to see the fleet solid support ship built in foreign yards?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): We are currently in the pre-qualification process, which means we are making sure that we get the very best price for the ships we need. The FSS is not classed as a warship, and therefore it has to go out to international competition. We want to make sure that we have British shipyards competing for the contracts so that they become world competitors when other countries are looking to offer such contracts.

T7. [907204] **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Earlier this year, cadets in Arbroath embarked on a new era with the opening of a new £600,000 joint facility in the town. Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), will the Secretary of State underline the Department's plan for increasing investment in cadet units across the UK?

Gavin Williamson: We will be doing everything we can to increase cadet units right across the United Kingdom. Cadet units play a vital role in everything we do by sending out the message that our armed forces are important to every community in the United Kingdom.

T3. [907200] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York has four remaining Normandy veterans who fought in the second world war. LIBOR funding will be needed to give them, and their carers, the opportunity to make one last visit to mark D-day on 6 June 2019. How will the Minister ensure that they are able to pay their respects next year and that they will be able to take their carers with them to attend fully?

Mark Lancaster: The hon. Lady is right that next year is a significant anniversary of the Normandy invasions, and it is important that we get it right. We are looking carefully at the right way for the Ministry of Defence to support the event, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's work on mental health support for veterans and members of the armed forces. Does he agree that the 24/7 mental health helpline plays a vital role in supporting those personnel and needs maximum publicity?

Gavin Williamson: The helpline is an important part of everything we do, but we can never rest in looking at what more we can do to support those who are serving and those who have served.

T4. [907201] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): My Jamaican constituent applied for leave to remain after serving with the Royal Marines for seven years. He has post-traumatic stress disorder and found it difficult to cope with the increasing demands for information from the Home Office. What is the MOD doing so that service members are directed to support services when they leave the armed forces?

Mark Lancaster: We offer an enormous amount of support through the career transition partnership, and we offer mental health and, indeed, physical support to veterans. If the hon. Lady would like to write to me with the details of that individual case, I am more than happy to look into it.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I refer the House to my entry on the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I warmly welcome the combat air strategy, announced earlier this year. Will Ministers update the House on any potential discussions with future national partners?

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work closely with industry, especially BAE Systems. As we develop this strategy, four companies are at the heart of it—BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Leonardo and MBDA—but we are in discussions with other nations. I am afraid that I am not in a position to update the House on who they are.

T8. [907206] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Can the Secretary of State inform the House about what has happened to the modernising defence programme?

Gavin Williamson: We will continue to keep the House informed and we will update the House with the findings in due course.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): This follows on from the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) about the situation in the South China sea, as last week I had the pleasure to meet representatives of our allies in the region. HMS Albion gave a demonstration of freedom of waters and of navigation, and the importance of that cannot be overstated. Is this going to become a regular exercise, because our allies in the region would be very happy to see that?

Gavin Williamson: We are committed to stepping up our presence right across the Indo-Pacific area. I am sure my hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot go into operational details at the moment, but we see our Royal Navy playing an important role in upholding our values.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) deserves some encouragement at this very early stage of his parliamentary career!

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Does the Minister not understand that to export defence equipment we have to have a strong home market, and that is why other European countries insist on building vessels such as the fleet solid support ships in their own yards, with their own workers. What blind dogma is stopping these Ministers and their Department doing the same and ensuring that we make them in Britain?

Stuart Andrew: As I said a moment ago, we are making sure that we go out to international competition, because that gives value for money to this country, and we can also then invest the savings we make in other capabilities. It means that we attract the best and affordable solutions. It also brings competition at the heart of our shipbuilding strategy, because we want our shipyards to go out there and compete for international orders.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Captain Mainwaring's doughty band of men who formed the Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard are in danger of looking like special forces, on account of their ability to climb in and out of Lance Corporal Jones's converted bread van, when compared with the modern Army, which has 18,000 clinically obese soldiers and servicemen, with 398 having type 2 diabetes, 160 being on prescribed diet pills and 16 having had liposuction. When is the Secretary of State going to do something about the state of the fitness of the British armed forces?

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising this matter, but, of course, as I look across this Chamber, I do wonder whether or not this was the right establishment to be criticising the British

Army for obesity. Every year, all soldiers are required to carry out fitness tests. He will have realised, or seen, that from 1 April we are changing that annual fitness test to make sure it is more aligned with the combat roles our soldiers are required to carry out.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) *rose—*

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP) *rose—*

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Gosh, there is something of an internal Scottish National party competition. It is an invidious choice between three celebrated individuals, one of whom is a member of the Select Committee. I call Martin Docherty-Hughes.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. First, let me say that I agree with the Secretary of State that we should be mindful of the armistice we commemorate this year. I will be joining family at Westminster abbey later this year to commemorate my great uncle James from County Mayo, who fell at Passchendaele.

Asbestos kills, and it is a silent killer. I represent a constituency with the highest rates of mesothelioma not only in Scotland or the United Kingdom, but in Europe. I was therefore dumbfounded at a recent Defence Committee meeting when senior members of the Ministry of Defence seemed to be silent and unable to answer questions on the use of asbestos in Sea King helicopters between 1969 and 2016. I have even heard that two of them have been brought back into service for training purposes. Will the Secretary of State please ensure that the report that has been brought about is fully published and that we ensure that those exposed to asbestos, both civilian and military, get due compensation, if affected?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to bring this issue up. I am starting to look at it in more detail. If he would allow me, I would like to write to him with further details, once I have had more information from the Department.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) offers the Chamber on a regular basis a passable imitation of Demosthenes, but Demosthenes was not subject to constraints of time, whereas under our Question Time procedures the hon. Gentleman and other Members are. I advise him to plough through the pages of the textbook on pithy questions by the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne).

EU Customs Union and Draft Withdrawal Agreement: Cost

3.34 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): Will the Government make a statement on the additional costs of staying in the EU customs union after 2020 and provide an updated estimate of the total costs of the current draft of the withdrawal agreement?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): Every arm of Government is working at pace to firm up and put in place all necessary arrangements to ensure that we are ready to leave and chart our own course as global Britain. The Government will continue to update Parliament on the progress of the negotiations, and the Prime Minister will update the House shortly in this regard in a post-Council statement.

In respect of the customs union, common rules will remain in place throughout the implementation period to give businesses and citizens critical certainty. This will mean that businesses can trade on the same terms as now until the end of 2020. As the Prime Minister has said, a further idea has emerged—and it is an idea at this stage—to create an option to extend the implementation period for a matter of months, and it would only be a matter of months. But as the Prime Minister has made clear, this is not expected to be used, because we are working to ensure that we have a future relationship in place by the end of December 2020.

As the House will appreciate, the length and cost of any extension to the implementation period are subject to negotiations. Throughout the implementation period, we will continue to build our new relationship, one which will see the UK leave the single market and the customs union to forge our own path and pursue an independent trade policy while protecting jobs and supporting growth.

During the progression of our exit negotiations, we reached a financial settlement with the EU that did two things—honoured our commitments made during our membership and ensured the fairest possible deal for UK taxpayers. In December, we estimated the size of the settlement to be between £35 billion to £39 billion, using reasonable assumptions and publicly available data. In April, the National Audit Office confirmed that this was reasonable.

The Government are committed to upholding our parliamentary democracy through honouring the result of the referendum and remaining fully transparent with Parliament on the deal that is reached, in advance of the meaningful vote.

John Redwood: The Treasury should do some calculations, because it would be an act of great rashness to agree to extend our period when we would be in another seven-year financial period for the EU, with all the consequences that might bring. It could cost £15 billion or more for a year and we would probably have to accept liabilities that might extend for the whole seven-year financing period. Why wouldn't the EU front-load its expenses when we were still in the thing, and why wouldn't it expect us to meet the forward commitments, as it says it wants us to do as and when we leave under the existing seven-year period?

We are desperately in need of more money for our schools, our hospitals, universal credit and for our defence—[*Interruption.*] We desperately need money so that we can honour our tax-cutting pledges which we all made in our 2017 manifesto—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman, whose flow is difficult to stop—and I would not want it to be stopped.

The right hon. Gentleman must be heard. Mr Matheson, you are normally a most cerebral individual. Take a tablet.

John Redwood: Our economy is being deliberately slowed by a fiscal and monetary squeeze that we need to lift. We need tax cuts to raise people's take-home pay so that they have more spending power. All this is possible if we do not give £39 billion to the EU, and all this will be even more possible if we do not pledge another £15 billion or £20 billion for some time never, if we are now going to give in yet again. When will the Government stand up to the EU, when will the Government say that they want a free trade agreement and they do not see the need to pay for it, and when will the Government rule out signing a withdrawal agreement that is a surrender document that we cannot afford?

John Glen: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for a number of Budget representations on that point. What I can confirm is that, when the sum of £35 billion to £39 billion was agreed, it was agreed on three principles: the UK would not make its payments sooner than it would otherwise have done; it would be based on the actual rather than the forecast; and it would mean that we would include all benefits as a member state. I recognise the wide range of concerns in the House, including those raised by my right hon. Friend, but we are at a delicate stage of the negotiations and the Prime Minister will be speaking to the House shortly.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): The right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) has some brass neck. He spent eight years being a cheerleader for austerity and he comes to the House today and says that; it is unbelievable. Amid the Tory quarrelling, the Prime Minister's negotiations appear to succumb to a new failure every day. She has stood staring at the menu for two years while the Cabinet devours itself. It now seems that it may take a bit longer for her to make up her mind, demanding that the EU give further time in relation to the transition period. What we cannot fathom is how the Government are unable to negotiate our exit within the agreed period, begging instead to make it longer.

Humiliatingly, I have to say, we hear that 95% of the agreement is done, as though that is supposed to reassure us. Perhaps I may remind the Government that 95% of the Titanic's journey was completed successfully. Meanwhile, the Government have gone from discussing a backstop to discussing a backstop to a backstop, to requesting an extension to the transition. These do not signal a Government who are about to emerge victoriously.

Let me ask a couple of questions, if this 95% deal is done. First, on the EU's trade policy, during the transition, the common external tariff and customs regime will continue to apply to the UK, but third countries will

have no legal obligation to continue to treat the UK as if it were a member state. Therefore, what trilateral discussions have the Government had with both the EU and third country partners, such as Mexico, South Korea, Switzerland and all the other countries with which the EU has preferential trading agreements in place, to ensure that the UK will continue to benefit from these arrangements during the transition period? Secondly, what progress have the Government made towards acceding to agreements facilitating trade, such as the pan-Euro Mediterranean convention that facilitates diagonal cumulation of origin, during the transition period and in any deal thereafter?

These matters, along with the question of the wider trade in goods, are easily resolvable with the transition period that has already been agreed. If the Government had got their act together, there would not be talk of additional time. The only thing that is costing the Government is this useless Government.

John Glen: It is difficult to discern the precise questions there, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. The Government are in a negotiation and there are a number of issues that are not yet resolved. With respect to the final state around our future freedom to trade, those are matters that will be reported on to this House before there is a meaningful vote. So he needs to be patient a little longer as we move through that last 5% and deal with those matters.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently remind the House that there is a further urgent question afterwards and then a statement by the Prime Minister, so I shall have to take a view as to the point at which we need to move on, but I would be assisted if colleagues were extremely brief.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I am very concerned about the Government's plans because, essentially, they mean our staying in a customs union in which we will have no say on the rules for a prolonged period, at the very moment that the global economy is facing some significant risks. Can my hon. Friend explain how this is in the UK's national interest?

John Glen: I have set forward the Government's position with respect to the negotiation and the idea about a modest extension in terms of months. It will be for the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to update the House sooner, but I acknowledge my right hon. Friend's point with respect to the opportunities that exist beyond the EU in terms of finding a settlement that gives us the freedom to develop our trading relationships.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I was going to start my question by thanking the Chancellor for coming and answering questions on the cost of Brexit, but it is not the Chancellor who is here and I am afraid that the Economic Secretary is not doing a very good job of answering the questions on the cost. Can he tell us please: in the event of no agreement on staying in the customs union and the single market, what will be the loss in productivity to businesses in the UK and in Northern Ireland specifically and how many redundancies does he expect to see in Northern Ireland and in the UK? What is the loss cost to the UK economy of the

EU citizens who have chosen not to come here or who have chosen to leave as a direct result of the Brexit vote? Lastly, if he truly believes that we would be better off as a result of the UK leaving the EU without being in the customs union or the single market, can he tell us what his models say about how much better off each of us will be?

John Glen: No, I cannot give the hon. Lady a cash figure for every member of the United Kingdom, but what I can say is that the Government and the Treasury are determined to make preparations for all eventualities. That is why we are preparing 70 statutory instruments to take through this House in the event of a no deal. The EU should be very clear that we are going to be ready for all eventualities while being committed to negotiating the best possible outcome, as directed by the British people two years ago.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): Of course, it is the policy of the party opposite for us to remain in the customs union forever. That is worth bearing in mind. Will my hon. Friend give a bit of detail on what work HMRC has done, in the case that we are in the customs union but outside the EU, on who determines things such as trade preferences and who runs trade defences on behalf of this country in those years?

John Glen: I can confirm to my right hon. Friend that these are matters with which the Government are engaged intensively in the negotiations at the moment. We are also working towards securing as much autonomy as possible for the British Government in the future. That is the mandate that we have been given by the British people.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Minister told the House a moment ago that the Government expect the negotiations on the future relationship to be concluded by December 2020. However, when the Government published their backstop proposal for Northern Ireland, they said that they expected those negotiations to be concluded at the latest by December 2021. Which of those two dates represents Government policy?

John Glen: Government policy is that we have a backstop arrangement in place to fulfil our obligations and we are in negotiation over the timings of that. The Prime Minister will be coming to the House later today and the right hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to clarify with her the answer to that question.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Can my hon. Friend inform me why he thinks that there is any incentive for the EU to give us a good deal if they think that by dragging their heels they can drag us into being obliged to pay extra money to them?

John Glen: There is no expectation that this Government will seek to pay more money to the EU. We are in negotiation, as has been set out. We have made considerable progress. We have a small number of items to resolve, but the intention is to get the best possible deal for the British taxpayer in the national interest.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister break it gently to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) that, if we

[Mr Chris Leslie]

stay in the customs union and the single market—and, quite frankly, if we remain in the European Union—we will save our constituents that £81 billion that will be lost to them otherwise? That is not my calculation, but the Minister's—the Treasury's own calculations and forecasts from last December say that our constituents will be £81 billion worse off if we leave on the WTO terms of the right hon. Gentleman.

John Glen: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that I am not sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) has a lot of faith in the Treasury on this, so I feel there is little point in taking that figure back to him.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): What businesses in my constituency want is certainty and reassurance that the border will be as frictionless as possible. This is key to many sectors of prosperity in the north-west. Will the Minister confirm that the costs involved in temporary ongoing membership of a customs union will dramatically be outweighed by the benefits to business?

John Glen: The Government have to reconcile the decision of the British people to leave the EU with, as my hon. Friend says, the need to make sure that the cost to business is as little as possible. That is why it is absolutely imperative that, when we secure the final outcome of the negotiations, it is good for business, good for the economy and good for jobs.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Could the Minister set out the extra cost to UK GDP of leaving the customs union, and the extra cost to businesses in Wokingham, in particular, of the hard Brexit favoured by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)?

John Glen: My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham has spoken for himself. The reality is that, before the Government come back to the House for a meaningful vote, a whole range of data will be supplied to the House in order to make the discussion about that decision meaningful.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): I am sure that my hon. Friend, who is doing an excellent job today, is, like me, an avid reader of the Conservative manifesto, which states that the withdrawal agreement and future relationship will be negotiated side by side. Ninety-five per cent. of the withdrawal agreement has been completed, which is great news. How much of the future relationship agreement has been done?

John Glen: At this stage, we are clearly in a delicate negotiation. It is important that the two are taken together, and the Prime Minister will be updating the House on our precise position in that negotiation.

Mr Speaker: I understand that the Minister's natural courtesy inclines him to look in the direction of the person who is asking him a question, but it is helpful if he faces the House. It is not a serious sin; I am just trying to aid and counsel him in the discharge of his duties.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Government's own statistics show that leaving with no deal would put unemployment in the north-east up to 20%. What is their calculation of the effect on unemployment in the north-east of leaving the customs union?

John Glen: There are a range of assumptions around the implications of different scenarios. The Government seek to ensure that we minimise the downsides and maximise the upsides in the agreement that we come to. I recognise that significant industries in the north-east rely on certainty in that relationship, and that is why it is very important that we get it right.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): This modest extension that is only a plan is going to cost £15.6 billion. How will the Minister explain that in Southend, Salisbury and Stockport? Could we not use the money slightly better?

John Glen: I would be in a position to justify that if it were a firm outcome of the negotiations, but it is not. I have not been conducting the negotiations; the Prime Minister has, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will be able to ask her about that later.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Could I ask what the purpose of any such extension might be? Is it to replace the Irish backstop, or is it in addition to that?

John Glen: At the moment, this is an idea that has been raised. In terms of the detail of it and where it fits within negotiations, clearly the Prime Minister will be best placed to answer. I say to the right hon. Gentleman that one of the enduring principles of our negotiations is to ensure that we treat the whole United Kingdom as a single united entity. That is an enduring principle that is guiding us through these negotiations.

Mr Speaker: Succinctness as exemplified, legendarily, by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg).

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my hon. Friend say whether, if we stayed in the customs union, any revenues that came from customs would be considered to be own resources?

John Glen: I say to my hon. Friend that we need to have a fair settlement that does the right thing by the people of this country.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Minister is doing his best to accentuate the positive, as the song goes, but he knows that the cost of Brexit is already being paid by every family and every business in this country: higher prices in the shops, a staffing crisis in the NHS and a hit to the public finances of £26 billion a year, before Brexit has even happened. Can I ask him to resist the jingoism and fantasy maths of the English nationalists in the Conservative party and remember that staying in a customs union is a red line for those of us in the Labour party? The value of not returning to a hard border—

Mr Speaker: Order. Forgive me for interrupting the hon. Lady, but we have got a lot to get through, and we must make progress rather more quickly.

John Glen: I do not accept that characterisation of any of my colleagues on the Government Benches. We are seeking to secure the best deal in the national interest for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Is the Minister aware that many people on the Government Benches and in the country think that £39 billion is not worth paying, let alone any more?

John Glen: I imagine that my hon. Friend—like many of his constituents—thinks that no sum is worth paying. Of course, there are a range of views on this matter, but we have to honour our obligations, as this country does, and secure a fair outcome.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Thousands of people across Merseyside, including my constituents, are employed in the automotive and aerospace sectors. Our membership of the customs union is vital for supporting jobs and investment in our regional economy. What assessment has the Treasury made of the effect of leaving the customs union on those sectors? Does the Minister agree that only staying in the customs union will ensure the future of those sectors?

John Glen: The Government have made an assessment that means it is imperative that we come out with a solution that is right for those employers in the hon. Lady's constituency and gives the certainty that they need, because that is what her constituents will require.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I think we can agree that any extension to the transition period will be costly—£15 billion, £16 billion or whatever it is—but the problem is that we will have no MEPs to represent us, no say and no influence on any legislation introduced during that period. Does my hon. Friend agree that there should be no taxation without representation?

John Glen: My right hon. Friend makes a factual point, and no doubt those conducting the negotiations will have that at the top of their mind.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Who is offering to do a short sentence? Ah, well done—Catherine West.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): There seem to be a number of questions that the Minister is not able to answer. Is his boss available, or is he also in “the killing zone”?

John Glen: I was asked to respond, and I am happy to do my best to do so.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The extension to the transition period is designed to replace the backstop to the backstop. Given that the Irish Government and Her Majesty's Government have both said that they are not going to build the hard border, who is?

John Glen: We need to understand that the backstop is just that—it is not expected that it will need to come into force. We must secure an agreement and come to arrangements that work for both sides.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): In January, the Prime Minister promised ahead of the so-called meaningful vote that there would be a full economic impact assessment of the exit deal. Can the Minister guarantee that that will happen? How much time will MPs have to consider the deal before we have to vote on its credibility or the lack of it?

John Glen: We will have a considerable amount of material before the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who is about to come to the Dispatch Box, will have more information on that issue.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): When looking at the customs union, would it not also be wise to look at the significant benefits of being in a trading bloc of 500 million people that has delivered wealth through some 40 FTAs with some 70 countries—agreements that the Government have already said they wish to adopt if we are able to, post Brexit?

John Glen: It is important that we honour the decision of the British people and that we come out with an arrangement that gives us the optimal long-term relationship with the EU and also a chance to exploit the opportunities in the world economy beyond the EU, which is growing faster.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Last October, I asked the Chancellor in the Treasury Committee whether the benefits of feasible future trade deals outweighed the costs of leaving the single market and the customs union. He could not give me a clear response. Is the Minister any closer to giving a clear response today?

John Glen: Such an answer is dependent on so many conditions and the determination of what is in those trade deals, so I am sorry, but I cannot give a precise answer.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Is the Minister finding withdrawal from the European Union as easy and cost-free as some of those on the Government Benches behind him suggested it would be?

John Glen: Government is always challenging, and there are always issues that need to be resolved. It is self-evident that this is a challenging set of negotiations.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that the head of HMRC estimates that the cost for British business of leaving the European Union customs union would be £20 billion a year?

John Glen: I am aware of that assessment. It depends on the assumptions for the final agreement we come to, but clearly the Government are taking a range of concerned parties into account throughout this process.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): A lot has been said this afternoon about the strategic cost of Brexit, but every day thousands of civil servants are dedicating their working lives to working to the Prime Minister's direction, yet the Prime Minister is sacrificing

[Angela Smith]

the interests of the country to try to heal the divisions in her party among those on the Conservative Benches. When are the Government going to get a grip and stop wasting taxpayers' money on delivering the impossible?

John Glen: The Chancellor has made money available across-Government to help us through this process. I would acknowledge the massive contribution made by our civil service to help across many Departments of Government. The Prime Minister is committed to securing the best deal for the nation.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Leaving the customs union will cost us billions, but it is also costing dear now. Does the Minister not agree with me that, with violent crime rising, the Home Office could have done with the extra money to pay for an extra 4,500 police officers, instead of £500 million for extra customs and border officials to prepare to leave the customs union?

John Glen: There is a Budget next Monday, and it will be for the Chancellor to set out the spending settlement for Government Departments.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Will the Minister advise the patients of the Golden Jubilee Hospital in Clydebank in my constituency how patient they have got to be to have medicine regulation while Recardio is taking out its health clinical trials for new heart medicines?

John Glen: The hon. Gentleman makes a very sensible point about the urgency of securing a deal across lots of areas of our country, including the health service, and that is what the Government are engaged in seeking to resolve.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The truth is that this is typical crackpottery by the Brexit extremists on the Conservative Benches, who seem to be running the show over there at the moment. Will the Minister tell us what the effect will be on the aerospace sector and on Airbus next to my constituency of leaving and being outside the customs union, as opposed to remaining in and protecting those jobs?

John Glen: It is in the interests of aerospace and defence industries across the country for the Government to come to the right long-term solution that secures jobs and certainty about their operating environment in the UK and for trading abroad.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): Experts have found that Wales will be hit disproportionately hard, with people and communities up and down Wales hit hardest if the UK leaves the customs union and the single market. Is the Minister prepared to make that sacrifice?

John Glen: The Prime Minister and the whole Government are committed to finding a solution for the whole of the United Kingdom. I recognise the different distribution of EU funds and therefore the policy challenges that will exist for the Government thereafter.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Minister has been asked five times to identify the figures for unemployment if we leave the customs union, so let us make it easier for him: will unemployment go up or will it go down?

John Glen: What I can say is that unemployment in this country is at a record low, demonstrating the coherence of this Government's economic policy.¹

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Minister looks as though he wishes he was somewhere else, and he has referred most of our questions to the Prime Minister, for which I am sure she is grateful. He must be able to answer this question: does he stand by the Treasury forecast that this country will be worse off outside the customs union, the single market and the EU?

John Glen: What I stand by is the desire of the Government to find the best possible solution for the United Kingdom—that maximises the advantages to the UK economy of the growth in economies outside the EU. There is a range of assumptions to a range of forecasts, and the Treasury always goes into considerable depth in setting those out clearly.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Manufacturers in my constituency need certainty, yet in recent weeks we have had a backstop, a backstop to the backstop and now an extended transition. Is not the truth that the Government's chaotic approach to these negotiations is putting jobs at risk?

John Glen: We have a short amount of time to secure the best outcome for the United Kingdom. It is urgent, and I recognise that the whole country needs to have that solution.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab) *rose—*

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I will take the three remaining questioners if it is a short sentence from each—no more than that. I call Mrs Madeleine Moon.

Mrs Moon: Ford Automotive in my constituency has made it clear that frictionless trade is essential, but Canada—no matter how many pluses we put on it—is not going to work, so how will the Minister ensure that the 12,000 jobs associated with Ford are not going to be lost?

John Glen: We will secure that by observing the principles of the White Paper and getting the best deal through the negotiations.

Darren Jones: Is it not cheaper to just stay in the EU?

John Glen: This country voted to leave the EU by a narrow but clear majority. It is the job of Government to deliver on that.

1. [Official Report, 12 November 2018, Vol. 649, c. 2MC.]

Mr Sweeney: Does the Minister not accept that any firm whose operations span European supply chains will be worse off if we do not have a customs union?

John Glen: Again, that is why we have to reach a conclusion to the negotiations that leaves the United Kingdom with the best possible outcome in respect of the future economy.

Leaving the EU: Meaningful Vote

4.5 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on how any motion under section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 is to be put before the House of Commons for decision.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Dominic Raab): May I start by welcoming the question from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve)?

The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 confirmed in statute the Government's long-standing commitment to provide Parliament with a vote on the terms of our final deal. When it comes to the motion that we consider at the point when the approval of the House is sought, the decision whether the motion is amendable or not will be a matter for you, Mr Speaker, not for the Government. However, the Government have made clear our expectation, subject to your prerogatives, that the motion will be amendable. The Government's response, dated 10 October, to the report of the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, "Parliamentary scrutiny and approval of the Withdrawal Agreement and negotiations on a future relationship", stated:

"Of course, we accept that the Speaker may permit the tabling of amendments to the motion, as is usual convention."

That understanding is also reflected in our response to the inquiry by the Select Committee on Procedure, which I provided on 10 October. Both responses were made publicly available on the Committees' websites in the interests of transparency and to ensure that this House understands the Government's position on the matter—although again, I defer to the House and to you, Mr Speaker, on procedural matters that fall within the prerogatives of the House.

It will be evident to hon. Members that any amendment to the motion would not be able to effect amendments to the withdrawal agreement or the future framework, which will have been agreed at the international level between the United Kingdom and the European Union; nor could any such amendment delay or prevent our departure from the EU as set out under article 50. It is worth reminding the House that the timing of our departure from the EU is set out in international law under article 50 of the Lisbon treaty, which this House voted to trigger.

The Government committed to giving Parliament a vote on the deal, and section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 sets out how that will happen. In passing that Act, Parliament confirmed its ultimate role in delivering on the will of the British people. Approving the final deal will be the responsibility of the House of Commons alone—a responsibility I know all hon. Members will take very seriously indeed.

Mr Grieve: While I have every sympathy with procedural problems that the Government may encounter and any honest attempt at finding a solution to them, I have to say that I find the Government's position as stated in the memorandum they sent to the Procedure Committee entirely unsatisfactory. It departs from the plain assurances

[Mr Grieve]

given repeatedly to the House that we would be enabled to express a desire for alternatives when voting to reject or accept any deal.

To remind my right hon. Friend, when his predecessor, our right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), appeared in front of the Exiting the European Union Committee on 25 April, to Question 1383 from the Chair:

“Can you give an assurance that the Government’s motion on the withdrawal agreement will be amendable? Yes or no?”, our right hon. Friend replied:

“Mr Chairman, if you can tell me how to write an unamendable motion in the House of Commons, I will take a tutorial.”

Actually, one way of reading the memorandum is that that is exactly what the Government are planning to do. I might add that the promises were repeated by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on 18 April in front of the Select Committee on the Constitution, and that throughout debates on the Floor of the House in June, when we were looking at unamendable motions, no one on the Treasury Bench demurred from the oft-repeated statements that the motion on the substance of the deal would be amendable.

Could my right hon. Friend please tell the House how he can reconcile those statements with the Government’s plain submission to the Procedure Committee recommending that a vote is first taken on the Government motion and before amendments are considered? What happens if Parliament approves the Government motion, but then amends it afterwards? Are the Government suggesting that they have what they need to ratify or not? Surely the issue will be no clearer if the Government adopt their method rather than the one they are criticising in the memorandum. Why, if there is a genuine problem over uncertainty, which I do understand, have the Government not suggested allowing different motions and choices to be put to the House for a view to be expressed prior to the Government motion being put? Why does that not feature in the Government’s submission at all?

My right hon. Friend knows that a lot in this House depends on trust. If I may say to him, the difficulty with the memorandum is that on one reading of it—I am glad to hear what he said at the Dispatch Box—it tends to undermine trust in the Government’s intention to honour the commitments they gave to the House.

Dominic Raab: I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend’s question and his comments. Let me try to address them, if I may. He fears, if I understand correctly, that the Government are in favour of an unamendable motion, but in fact, as the memorandum he cites makes clear in paragraph 4:

“The approval... will be a substantive motion”—that was, I think, the first point he made—“and therefore, under existing House procedures, will be amendable.”

I hope that gives him some reassurance. It is also worth pointing out the implications that we set out in paragraph 6 of the memorandum, which was published on 10 October, which is that

“due to the legal status accorded to the motion under s. 13 of the 2018 Act,”

which I know he scrutinised very carefully,

“a clear decision on approval of the motion is needed in order for the Government to be able to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement.”

Again, I hope that that makes clear what the basic challenge is.

If I understand my right hon. and learned Friend correctly, he may wish to change the terms of the agreement that has been struck. I think that would come up against very real, practical and diplomatic obstacles. So late in the day, there would not be time to revisit the negotiation. Secondly, just from a practical, diplomatic point of view, is he really suggesting that at that point we would actually be offered different or more favourable terms? I think that that is unlikely in the extreme.

It is very important that this House is presented with a very clear decision of the most meaningful sort available, which is between the terms of the best deal that the Government can negotiate and the alternative. I hope and I am sure that that will focus minds when that point comes.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question.

May I start by saying this: I profoundly disagree with the Prime Minister on a number of issues, including Brexit, but some of the quotes and comments about the Prime Minister this weekend, attributed to Conservative MPs, Ministers or former Ministers, are nothing short of disgraceful. In a time of growing extremism, hostility and threats to those in public life, MPs should know better. The comments are, as ever, from unnamed sources. I hope the House can agree that this kind of language has no place in our politics and has to stop.

Labour has spent 18 months campaigning for a meaningful vote and for Parliament to be properly involved in the Brexit negotiations, yet at every stage the Government’s response has been to push Parliament away. We fear that this is the latest example. Labour is clear that Parliament must be able to express its view on any deal the Prime Minister brings back, yet the Secretary of State’s letter brings that into question. Of course Labour recognises that Parliament will have to approve or disapprove of any Brexit deal—it must be a decisive decision—but it is the role of Parliament, and not the Executive, to decide how that view is to be expressed.

Labour has always believed that Parliament should be able to table, debate and vote on amendments. That is consistent with paragraph 5 of the Government’s own legal advice, which makes it clear that absent a business motion being approved by the House,

“Multiple amendments may be tabled”,

the selection of amendments and the order they are taken in is

“in the hands of the Speaker”,

and that multiple amendments can be selected. I want to be clear that Labour will not support any business motion that does not meet these criteria, and I urge the Secretary of State to think again.

Dominic Raab: I thank the shadow Brexit Secretary for his comments, and I agree with him about the need for a serious, substantive debate and for the right tone for this debate. He is right that the meaningful vote needs to be a decisive decision. We set that out in the memorandum and that is what section 13 of the European

Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 provides. As the memorandum that we have published makes clear, we expect amendments to be allowed on the motion, although again, that is an issue for you, Mr Speaker. The distinction that needs to be borne in mind is between the likely impact that any procedural amendments would have on the withdrawal agreement at the international level. The shadow Brexit Secretary is far too assiduous and astute a lawyer not to know that as a matter of basic law, they could not have an effect of altering the withdrawal agreement. Also, common sense—he will know—means that it will be highly unlikely, if not impossible, for us to refer back to the negotiating table.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I gently say to the Secretary of State that of course he was in the Ministry of Justice, and in his ministerial role he helped to negotiate the passage of the Bill that eventually became the Act that is the subject of this urgent question. And I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve): this is a matter of trust, and it is quite incredible for the Secretary of State to stand up and basically say that, as a former Minister who navigated the Bill through the House, they did not understand the consequences. This is a matter of trust not just in Parliament and along the Government Benches—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows that many Members were very concerned about all of this and trusted the Government that we would have a meaningful vote—but among the people of this country, and if they think there is any breach in trust, they will not forgive this Government.

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. She will know, because it is set out in our memorandum—I know she scrutinises these things very carefully—that we are amenable, subject to the prerogatives of the Speaker and the House, to this being an amendable motion. She will also understand the need—this is why it is a meaningful vote of the very highest order—for there to be a clear decision that we are given on the deal we are confident we can strike with our EU partners, so that we know whether we can proceed to implement it.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I commend the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) not only for securing the urgent question but for the forensic way in which he has completely dismantled any credibility that the Government's position may have had. I also endorse in their entirety the comments from the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), about the appalling comments that have been directed against the Prime Minister. I disagree with the Prime Minister on a lot of things, but nobody should be issued with the kind of threats that she has been expected to cope with over the last few days.

Too much of the discussion is now about who will become the next Prime Minister. The long-term career prospects for the Prime Minister, or any of us, are infinitesimally trivial compared with what will be at stake if and when this Parliament gets a chance to do its job in a meaningful vote—that means not only a meaningful motion, but that we must be able to put forward and vote on meaningful amendments before the final decision is taken.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that meaningful amendments will be allowed and that Parliament will have the opportunity to meaningfully amend the motion before we are asked to agree the final deal? Given that we are getting hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute updates on the Government's negotiations with a select 50 or so Members of Parliament, will he tell us when the Government intend to start seeking consensus across the 600 Members of this House who are not members of the Democratic Unionist party or the European Research Group?

Dominic Raab: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, as set out in the memorandum we sent to the Procedure Committee, which has been published, there will be a substantive and amendable motion. I do not think that any hon. Member, on either side of the House, would table a meaningless amendment, so I reject the premise of the question in that regard.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that no motion of this House can overturn the two Acts of Parliament on withdrawal or the article 50 letter, which all say we are leaving on 29 March next year, and that the Government are not minded to repeal those Acts?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is right on both counts. None the less, on the meaningful vote, the motion will be substantive and amendable, and it will be for you, Mr Speaker, to decide on the scope and acceptability of those amendments.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Having read the Secretary of State's memorandum to the Procedure Committee, and paragraph 13 in particular, may I point out to him that the Exiting the European Union Select Committee's recommendation on amendments to the withdrawal agreement motion is that these be taken before the vote on the main question, not after? That is the issue. Will he take this opportunity to accept both that that is what the Select Committee recommended and that to order the vote in any other way would be unacceptable to many Members of this House?

Dominic Raab: I always respect the views of the Select Committee Chair, but the position is set out in the memorandum. We think it the proper course to ensure both a meaningful vote to which substantive amendments can be tabled and a clear decision on the outcome.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): When did the Secretary of State and the Government get the legal advice that told them they needed this so-called clean motion first? I do not remember, and I do not think my colleagues remember, it being the subject of any discussions with Ministers or Whips in relation to section 13. When did they get it and why did he feel it appropriate to break the news to the Procedure Committee and not Members of his own party with whom he had discussions?

Dominic Raab: We do not comment on legal advice, but obviously we took advice continually throughout the progress of the EU withdrawal Act, and the issue of section 13—the process and the need for it—and the importance of having a clear and decisive outcome to

[Dominic Raab]

the meaningful vote, which is the surest way to make sure it is meaningful and substantive, were discussed at length during the passage of that Act.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Secretary of State seems to be arguing that we cannot discuss any amendments in advance simply because those amendments might not be ones the Government agree with, might not give them the legal support they want or might not agree with them that there is no alternative to their motion. I am afraid they should be making those arguments when we discuss the amendments, before we discuss the main motion, in the normal way. Anything other than that is procedural ducking and diving to avoid the real substance of the debate and to avoid a meaningful vote.

Dominic Raab: I do not think there was a question there, but as the right hon. Lady will know, the selection of amendments and what the House can discuss is a matter for the Speaker. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. People can take whatever view they like, but, to be fair, the Secretary of State is always an estimably courteous individual in the Chamber, and we must hear the fella.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm once again that the choice in the meaningful vote is clear—either to accept the Government’s proposition or to leave without a withdrawal agreement?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend will know that section 13 deals at length with the procedural variations and what would need to happen in the event of Parliament not approving the deal. On the proxy debates that some hon. Members want to repeat—on the type of exit or deal we should negotiate—we have, of course, had 11 votes on single market or customs union-type variations to the Government’s negotiating mandate, and the Government in this House won each and every one.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is clear from what the Secretary of State has just told us that the Government are not offering the House a meaningful vote. How does it amount to Parliament taking back control if the Government are now attempting to gag our democracy by preventing MPs from being able to amend the motion first?

Dominic Raab: I gently refer the hon. Lady to the memorandum, which makes it clear that there will be a substantive motion. It is our view that, subject to the view of Mr Speaker, there would be amendments.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): When will the Government accept that the time for negotiations is over, and the time for appeasing factions is over? The European Union has consistently offered two options, Norway and Canada. Norway does not meet the expectations of the Brexit-voting public, and Canada does not have a majority in the House. The Government’s latest attempt to prevent Parliament from having a meaningful vote is yet more evidence that the foisting of a Brexit fudge on the Commons is imminent.

In London on Saturday, three quarters of a million people recognised those realities. When will the Government do so too? When will they give the British public a meaningful vote to obtain their informed consent to whatever Brexit is on offer, or to remain in the European Union?

Dominic Raab: It was very inventive of my hon. Friend to get that in through the back door. All I would gently say is that the basic democratic arithmetic suggests that several hundred thousand taking part in what was an impressive protest cannot trump the will of the 17 million who voted in a national referendum to leave the EU.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I think that the Minister has gone through the looking-glass and left his dictionary behind. He seems to think that “meaningful” actually means “meaningless”, and he seems to think, in his topsy-turvy world, that it is possible to amend motions after voting on them. Why does he not get a grip, get back to the real world, and give this Parliament the meaningful vote that his Government and his colleagues promised us when they accepted that amendment?

Dominic Raab: I do not think that the hon. Lady was right in either of her key points. The memorandum that we published sets out very clearly that there will be a substantive motion. It will be, in our view, subject to amendments. What we cannot have is a vote that renders meaningless the outcome of the referendum.

Mr Speaker: There has been much reference to the Procedure Committee, of which the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) is of course a distinguished ornament.

Sir Edward Leigh: The evidence given to the Procedure Committee last week was very clear. If there is no deal under section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, there will be a vote on a neutral motion. If there is a deal, there must be a meaningful vote under section 13(1). That motion is amendable, and amendments must be taken first, unless the Government produce their own business statement, and there has to be a vote on it. That is the procedure.

The important point to understand, however, is that deal or no deal, meaningful vote passed or not, can only affect the deal; it cannot affect the outcome of Brexit, because that is in statute. Only the Government can introduce legislation, so only the Government can stop Brexit on 29 March. Will the Secretary of State therefore give an unequivocal declaration to the House that in no circumstances—deal or no deal, deal rejected by the House or accepted—will Brexit not proceed on 29 March?

Dominic Raab: The Government are absolutely committed to giving effect to the referendum and leaving the EU in March next year.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Government only agreed to a meaningful vote on the final deal to avoid a parliamentary mutiny by their own side during the passage of the withdrawal Act. The Secretary of State knows that there is no majority in this place for a no-deal Brexit, but that, by implication, is what he is

offering in his memorandum. When will he change his mind—or will there have to be another case in the Supreme Court?

Dominic Raab: It is not our intention to go for no deal. We have been working tirelessly, and we continue to work, through the October Council and into November, to get the very best deal for the country. We have made clear that we could deal with a no deal scenario, but it is a sub-optimal outcome. What we want to do is get the best deal that works for the EU and the United Kingdom—for all quarters of the country.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Come off it, Secretary of State. If a motion is amendable but not in a meaningful way, it is not a meaningful vote, and this House will not take it.

Dominic Raab: All I would gently say to my hon. Friend is that there is nothing meaningless about this vote. It would be one of the most ground-breaking decisions that the House has had to make for a generation: the decision on whether or not to accept a deal negotiated by the Government with the EU that works for all parts of the United Kingdom. I hope that at that point we would have some consensus in the House on a decision to accept the deal and move forward to the implementing legislation.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Let us cut to the chase. The Government have tried to gag Parliament at every turn in this process. Now they have a choice. The position that the Secretary of State is trying to take is, essentially, that it is no deal versus the deal that the Government have. That is not politically, constitutionally or morally sound. Further to the question from the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), will the Secretary of State tell us whether he took legal advice, when he took it, and who commissioned it? Was it him?

Dominic Raab: I have not commissioned any specific, bespoke legal advice on the point the hon. Gentleman raises, but we have been informed right the way through about the implications. Section 13 of the withdrawal Act was informed by legal advice not just from Government lawyers, but from all the lawyers across the House. It was scrutinised very carefully and at length in Committee, and it will give effect to what the House voted through in the Act.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): As I understand it, all votes in this House are meaningful—that is my first point. My second point is that the Act states that the House will vote on whether or not the withdrawal agreement should stand. I might be voting against that agreement, but it will be the meaningful vote. Amendments would then follow, if that motion was lost.

Dominic Raab: Subsections (4) to (6) of section 13 set out the process, which includes the Government coming back to Parliament in a no deal scenario—it is all set out very clearly in the legislation and amplified in the memorandum that we have provided to the Committee.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Why does the Secretary of State not just confess that he has been caught red-handed trying to stitch up Parliament, again? It is the same as the way the Government would

not publish papers or share the impact assessments. They tried to grab Henry VIII powers at every possible twist and turn. They certainly will not let the public have a final say. Now he is trying to fix the arrangements so that we have amendments coming after a motion. He knows that the meaningful vote is in the legislation—it is the law. It is Parliament that decided that, and we fought very hard for that outcome. He should not undermine that or recant when it is MPs' duty to have that meaningful vote.

Dominic Raab: MPs will have their say in the meaningful vote. They have scrutinised at length every stage of the Brexit process. Of course, it is not for the Government or any Minister to set out which amendments are allowed; that will be for Mr Speaker to decide. We have made it clear that we not only accept but welcome the fact that we will have a substantive motion, and of course that means it should be amendable.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Once the Brexit deal has been secured, how long will it be before we move on to the meaningful vote, keeping in mind that Select Committees, for instance, will want to look at the terms of the deal in order to advise other hon. Members?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We obviously want to bring forward the meaningful vote expeditiously, because that will give us proper time for scrutiny of all the legislation, but there must be time for the relevant Select Committees, and indeed every hon. Member of the House, to scrutinise it carefully. We are a little dependent on the time it takes us to negotiate the deal, but I will certainly bear in mind the important point he has made.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): The reality is that the Government promised the House a meaningful vote on the withdrawal agreement, and now they are trying to backtrack and say that it is take it or leave it, in an attempt to bully MPs into accepting whatever they manage to cobble together. The Secretary of State's predecessor said:

“Under the Standing Orders of the House of Commons it will be for the Speaker to determine whether a motion...is or is not amendable.”—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 13W.]

Can he confirm that it is also for the Speaker to determine the order of those motions, and the order of any amendments? If he does not think that is the case, will he publish the legal advice that says the contrary?

Dominic Raab: It is not for Ministers to determine the ambit, remit or scope of the prerogatives of the Speaker or this House, although we will of course respect them.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Brexit Secretary has said that he needs the negotiations to be finished by the end of November. If he reaches that target, will the House vote on deal or no deal before or after Christmas?

Dominic Raab: My remarks were just reflecting the practical challenges, on both sides, for example in implementing legislation in the UK, but obviously there

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is a degree of flexibility to ensure that we have a meaningful vote and that there is as much time for legislative scrutiny and that the right balance is struck.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I will call a very small number of Members now, but colleagues will also have an opportunity to question the Prime Minister, who is always very committed to the House.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): What does the Secretary of State think the consequences would be if a majority in this House opposed the deal, opposed no deal and perhaps in those circumstances even supported a people's vote if the Government tried to thwart the will of this House being expressed and implemented?

Dominic Raab: We do not support a second referendum.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): In December last year this House voted for a meaningful vote on the final deal, and we have subsequently, and again today, been reassured that any amendments to the motion on the subject of the deal will be a matter for the Speaker. Indeed, just last week the Prime Minister replied to me that in the case of no deal, the matter would come back to this House for us to agree on next steps. Why is the Secretary of State now undoing all those good assurances by suggesting that Parliament will have only a token role in all this? Does he not accept that this is a serious breach of trust? I ask again why he sought to communicate this change to the Procedure Committee before the MPs in this House.

Dominic Raab: There is nothing tokenistic about the meaningful vote set out under section 13, which will be on the deal that we do with the European Union—good for the UK and good for the EU—or the alternative, which is to leave the EU without that deal. The procedure that my hon. Friend refers to is clearly spelled out in section 13. The memorandum to which she referred was not somehow snuck out; it was given at the request of the Procedure Committee and made public so that every hon. Member could see it.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): A number of parliamentarians are trying to establish whether article 50 can be unilaterally revoked. The Court of Justice of the European Union will hear that question on 27 November. If it says that article 50 can be revoked, does the Secretary of State accept that it would be open to this House to amend the Government's motion, ordaining them to take whatever action is necessary to revoke article 50 and get us out of this unholy mess?

Dominic Raab: The Government have no intention of supporting a second referendum or the revocation of article 50.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): For the sake of absolute clarity, will the Secretary of State confirm either that the motion described in section 13 is neutral or that Standing Orders could be disapplied?

Dominic Raab: The technical answer to my hon. Friend's question is set out at some length in the memorandum, but if there is any doubt about it, he can write to me and I would be happy to give him further clarification.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Institute for Government recommends that we have at least five days to discuss the deal that the Government reach with the EU. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that we will have at least five days for those debates?

Dominic Raab: We will have as much time as we possibly can, but the hon. Lady will know that this will in part be predicated on the time it takes to close the deal. We are confident that the remaining obstacles are narrowing and that we can get a good deal, but this will be at least partly determined by the length of time it takes to secure the end of the negotiations, and that depends on the EU as well.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): You do not need to be a procedural junkie or one of the many historians in this House to know that here we vote on the amendments first. Can the Secretary of State give us any example at all of the House voting on the amendments second?

Dominic Raab: The simple answer is that I am not sure, but I can tell the hon. Lady that we will have a substantive motion and that it will be subject to amendments, which will be for the Speaker to decide on.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Secretary of State's memorandum justifies the ordering involving the substantive motion coming first, which is highly unusual, on the basis of Standing Order No. 31, which relates to Opposition day motions. On what planet could this motion be described as an Opposition day motion?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman may well be an expert on the Standing Orders, but I would say to him that on the substance of the issue, this is clear. There will be a clear decision for this House to accept the deal we negotiate with the EU or to leave the EU with no deal. I know which side I will be on in that debate. We are confident that we can get a good deal, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will row behind it.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Secretary of State understand that for many in this House the only genuinely meaningful vote is one that allows MPs to vote for the deal or to vote to stay in the European Union, and one that must be ratified in the people's vote demanded by 700,000 people on Saturday?

Dominic Raab: We had that vote; it was in 2016 and the people decided to leave.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Is it not in the hands of the House of Commons to decide whether it wants a meaningful vote? We have Back-Bench time. I will be seeking time, with support across the House, to pass a motion that says that, if we do not approve of the Government's final position, the fallback position will be Norway and Canada, and that we will not pay money until the agreement is through.

Dominic Raab: It is not for me to decide what procedures or motions the House puts forward, but I repeat the point I made earlier: we have had 11 votes on potential single market customs union variations to the negotiating strategy, and the Government won each and every one of them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues. My normal practice is to call everybody, but there are constraints of time and we must now move on. People will have the opportunity to question the Prime Minister.

October EU Council

4.40 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Before I turn to the European Council, I am sure the whole House will join me in condemning the killing of Jamal Khashoggi in the strongest possible terms. We must get to the truth of what happened. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will make a statement shortly.

On the European Council, in addition to Brexit, there were important discussions on security and migration. First, at last Monday's Foreign Ministers meeting, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his French counterpart secured agreement on a new EU sanctions regime on the use of chemical weapons. At this Council, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte and I argued that we should also accelerate work on further measures, including sanctions, to respond to and deter cyber-attacks. The attempted hacking of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague earlier this year was a stark example of the very real threats we face. We must impose costs on all those who seek to do us harm, regardless of the means they use. This Council agreed to take that work forward.

Secondly, in marking Anti-Slavery Day, I welcomed the continued commitment of all EU leaders to work together to eliminate the barbaric crime of people trafficking. We reaffirmed our shared commitments to do more to tackle the challenges of migration upstream.

Following the Council, I met Premier Li of China, President Moon of South Korea and Prime Minister Lee of Singapore at the ASEM summit. Since 2010, our trade with Asia has grown by almost 50%, more than with any other continent in the world. I want to develop that even further. Indeed, the ability to develop our own new trade deals is one of the great opportunities of Brexit. At the ASEM summit, we discussed how the UK can build the most ambitious economic partnerships with all our Asian partners as we leave the European Union. We also agreed to deepen our co-operation across shared threats to our security.

Turning to Brexit, let me begin with the progress we have made on both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration on our future relationship. As I reported to the House last Monday, the shape of the deal across the vast majority of the withdrawal agreement is now clear. Since Salzburg, we have agreed the broad scope of provisions that set out the governance and dispute resolution arrangements for our withdrawal agreement, and we have developed a protocol relating to the UK sovereign base areas in Cyprus. Following discussions with Spain, and in close co-operation with the Government of Gibraltar, we have developed a protocol and a set of underlying memoranda relating to Gibraltar, heralding a new era in our relations. We also have broad agreement on the structure and scope of the future relationship, with important progress made on issues such as security, transport and services.

This progress in the last three weeks builds on the areas where we have already reached agreement: citizens' rights, the financial settlement and the implementation period; and, in Northern Ireland, agreement on the preservation of the particular rights of UK and Irish citizens, and on the special arrangements between us such as the common travel area, which has existed since before either the UK or Ireland ever became members of the European Economic Community.

[The Prime Minister]

Taking all of that together, 95% of the withdrawal agreement and its protocols are now settled. There is one real sticking point left, but a considerable one, which is how we guarantee that, in the unlikely event that our future relationship is not in place by the end of the implementation period, there is no return to a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The commitment to avoiding a hard border is one that this House emphatically endorsed and enshrined in law in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. As I set out last week, the original backstop proposal from the EU was one we could not accept, as it would mean creating a customs border down the Irish sea and breaking up the integrity of our United Kingdom. I do not believe that any UK Prime Minister could ever accept this, and I certainly will not.

As I said in my Mansion House speech, we chose to leave and we have a responsibility to help find a solution, so earlier this year we put forward a counterproposal for a temporary UK-EU joint customs territory for the backstop. In a substantial shift in its position since Salzburg, the EU is now actively working with us on this proposal, but a number of issues remain.

The EU argues that it cannot give a legally binding commitment to a UK-wide customs arrangement in the withdrawal agreement, so its original proposal must remain a possibility. Furthermore, people are understandably worried that we could get stuck in a backstop that is designed to be only temporary. There are also concerns that Northern Ireland could be cut off from accessing its most important market, Great Britain.

During last week's council I had good discussions with Presidents Juncker, Tusk and Macron, Chancellor Merkel and Taoiseach Varadkar, and others, about how to break this impasse. I believe there are four steps we need to take.

First, we must make the commitment to a temporary UK-EU joint customs territory legally binding so that the Northern Ireland-only proposal is no longer needed. This would protect relations not only north-south but, vitally, east-west. This is critical. The relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is an integral strand of the Belfast Good Friday agreement, so to protect that agreement we need to preserve the totality of relationships it sets out. Nothing we agree with the EU under article 50 should risk a return to a hard border or threaten the delicate constitutional and political arrangements underpinned by the Belfast Good Friday agreement.

The second step is to create an option to extend the implementation period as an alternative to the backstop. I have not committed to extending the implementation period. I do not want to extend the implementation period, and I do not believe that extending it will be necessary. I see any extension or being in any form of backstop as undesirable. By far the best outcome for the UK, for Ireland and for the EU is that our future relationship is agreed and in place by 1 January 2021. I have every confidence that it will be, and the European Union has said it will show equal commitment to this timetable, but the impasse we are trying to resolve is about the insurance policy if this does not happen.

What I am saying is that if, at the end of 2020, our future relationship is not quite ready, the proposal is that the UK would be able to make a sovereign choice

between the UK-wide customs backstop or a short extension of the implementation period. There are some limited circumstances in which it could be argued that an extension to the implementation period might be preferable if we were certain it was for only a short time. For example, a short extension to the implementation period would mean only one set of changes for businesses at the point we move to the future relationship, but in any such scenario we would have to be out of the implementation period well before the end of this Parliament.

The third step is to ensure that, were we to need either of these insurance policies, whether the backstop or a short extension to the implementation period, we could not be kept in either arrangement indefinitely. We would not accept a position in which the UK, having negotiated in good faith an agreement that prevents a hard border in Northern Ireland, none the less finds itself locked into an alternative, inferior arrangement against its will.

The fourth step is for the Government to deliver the commitments we have made to ensure full continued access for Northern Ireland's businesses to the whole of the UK internal market. Northern Ireland's businesses rely heavily on trade with their largest market, Great Britain, and we must protect this in any scenario.

Let us remember that all these steps are about insurance policies that no one in the UK or the EU wants or expects to use, so we cannot let this become the barrier to reaching the future partnership we all want to see. We have to explore every possible option to break the impasse, and that is what I am doing.

When I stood in Downing Street and addressed the nation for the first time, I pledged that the Government I lead will not be driven by the interests of the privileged few, but by those of ordinary working families. And that is what guides me every day in these negotiations. Before any decision, I ask: how do I best deliver the Brexit that the British people voted for? How do I best take back control of our money, borders and laws? How do I best protect jobs and make sure nothing gets in the way of our brilliant entrepreneurs and small businesses? How do I best protect the integrity of our precious United Kingdom and protect the historic progress we have made in Northern Ireland? If doing those things means I get difficult days in Brussels, so be it. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. Everybody knows, from the record, that there is plenty of opportunity to question the Prime Minister on these occasions, but the Prime Minister must be heard.

The Prime Minister: The Brexit talks are not about my interests; they are about the national interest and the interests of the whole of the United Kingdom. Serving our national interest will demand that we hold our nerve through these last stages of the negotiations—the hardest part of all. It will mean not giving in to those who want to stop Brexit with a politicians' vote: politicians telling the people that they got it wrong the first time and should try again. And it will mean focusing on the prize that lies before us: the great opportunities that we can open up for our country when we clear these final hurdles in the negotiations. That is what I am working to achieve, and I commend this statement to the House.

4.51 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the advance copy of her statement, and I am pleased she has condemned the horrific murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. But condemnation is not enough; what matters now is what action the Government are prepared to take. Will they now end arms sales to Saudi Arabia?

Moving on to Brexit, I hope our debate today will be conducted without some of the language reported in the press over the weekend. I have to say that every word on Brexit was anticipated: a mixture of failure, denial and delusion. The Conservative party has spent the past two years arguing with itself, instead of negotiating a sensible deal in the public interest. Even at this crucial point, they are still bickering among themselves. The Prime Minister says that 95% of the deal is done, but previously she had told us that

“nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”.

Which is it?

The Government’s Brexit negotiations have been a litany of missed deadlines and shambolic failure, and now they are begging for extra time. They promised that the interim agreement would be done by October 2017 and then by December 2017, but it was finally agreed in March 2018. The Prime Minister even missed the deadline for publishing her own Government’s White Paper on Brexit. She said it would be published by the end of June, but it arrived in mid-July, lacking any clarity on the key issues. Crucially, it arrived after the EU summit at which Britain’s proposals were supposed to have been tabled. And just last week, the Government missed their October deadline for agreeing to the terms of the exit deal with the EU—instead the Prime Minister went to Brussels to beg for an extension. The EU had already offered to convene a special summit in November to help the Prime Minister, but it now seems this has been withdrawn as she will not be ready by then either and so now December is being talked about. And the Prime Minister claims her extension of the transition period will be for only “a matter of months”. Is that three? Is that six? Is that 12? Is that 18? How many months is it? Who knows? Certainly the Prime Minister does not. But can the Prime Minister give one straight answer: what will it cost in extra payments to the EU per month during this extension? The Government are only proposing this extension because of their own incompetence.

We have had two and a half years watching the Tories’ failure to negotiate. Now even the Prime Minister does not have confidence that she can negotiate a deal by December 2020—that is another 14 months. What faith can anyone have that extending that deadline by “a matter of months” will help? Perhaps the Prime Minister can inform the House.

The Prime Minister also begged European leaders to come up with creative solutions. The country voted to leave, her Cabinet members said they would take back control, and now the Prime Minister is pleading with the EU to work out how to do it. It does not sound like taking back control; it sounds like a Government and a Prime Minister who are losing control.

The Government are terminally incompetent, hamstrung by their own divisions. The Prime Minister of Lithuania summed up the situation pretty succinctly when he said:

“We do not know what they want, they do not know themselves what they really want—that is the problem.”

I am sure—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There was too much noise when the Prime Minister was addressing the House. Mr Opperman, not only are you a distinguished barrister and a Minister of the Crown, but you are a graduate of the University of Buckingham in my constituency. I cannot believe that you were taught to behave in that way—chuntering noisily from a sedentary position—by lecturers in my constituency.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am sure the whole House would love to hear the Government’s precise and detailed blueprint. Perhaps when she returns to the Dispatch Box, the Prime Minister could set out her plan. The whole country is waiting for a plan that works for Britain, not another fudge—kicking the can down the road to keep her party in power.

Much of the current impasse is due to the Northern Ireland border—hardly an issue that can have come as a surprise to the Government. There is a simple solution—a comprehensive customs union with the EU, a solution that would not only benefit Northern Ireland, but help to safeguard skilled jobs in every region and nation of Britain, and with no hard border in Ireland, no hard border down the Irish Sea and good for jobs in every region and nation. That is a deal that could command majority support in this House and the support of businesses and unions. It is Labour’s plan—a comprehensive customs union with a real say for Britain and with no race to the bottom on regulations, standards and rights. The alternative is not no deal: it is a workable plan.

The Government do not even trust their own Back Benchers to have a meaningful vote, with the Brexit Secretary submitting a letter that told us that we must choose between a disastrous no deal and the Government’s deal—a deal that does not yet exist and for which there is now no deadline.

Brexit was supposed to be about taking back control. That is what much of the Cabinet campaigned for, and where have we ended up? Parliament is being denied the chance to take back control and, because of the Government’s vacillation, five years on from the referendum we could still be paying into the EU but with no MEPs, no seat at the Council of Ministers, no Commissioners and no say for this country. Instead of taking back control, they are giving away our say and paying for the privilege. What an utter shambles! Having utterly failed to act in the public interest, will the Prime Minister do so now and make way for a Government that can and will?

The Prime Minister: There was an awful lot in the right hon. Gentleman’s comments about process, but not much about substance, and what Labour actually wants to see. It is incumbent on all of us in public life to be careful about the language we use. There are passionate beliefs and views on this and other subjects, but whatever the subject we should all be careful about our language.

The right hon. Gentleman said a lot about process, as I said, and at one point he seemed to be asking us to set out our plan. I have to say to him that we set out our plan in the White Paper of more than 100 pages back in the summer. He talks about a future relationship of a customs union, but whatever future relationship we have,

[*The Prime Minister*]

we do have to deal with the backstop issue. Without a backstop in the withdrawal agreement, there will be no withdrawal agreement. Without the withdrawal agreement, there will be no future relationship—nothing is agreed until everything is agreed—so it does not matter what future relationship we want, we still need to deal with this backstop issue.

The right hon. Gentleman's position has been that no deal is not acceptable in any circumstances. That means accepting any deal that the European Union wants to give us, including a deal that would carve Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom. Perhaps, though, his shadow Chancellor, who made the comment that he was longing for a United Ireland, might actually welcome that.

All I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman is that, throughout all this, all we have seen from the Labour party and from him is them playing politics with this issue. One minute, they want to accept the referendum, the next they want a second referendum. One minute, they want to say that free movement will end, the next they say that free movement is still on the table. One minute, they want to do trade deals, the next they want to be in a customs union that will stop them doing trade deals. He is doing everything he can to frustrate Brexit and trigger a general election. He has voted against sufficient progress, he has tried to block the withdrawal Act, and he has vowed to oppose any deal that the Government bring back. I am looking and working for the right deal in the national interests of this country; he is putting politics ahead of the national interest.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. Friend has stated:

“We will not have truly left the European Union”—

I emphasise the words “truly” and “left the European Union”—

“if we are not in control of our own laws.”

Chequers is still on the table. Its common rulebook allows the other 27 EU countries in their Council of Ministers to make our laws for goods and agricultural products with no transcript and no effective veto and undermines the total repeal of the European Communities Act 1972. How can she possibly claim that we will be in control of our own laws and sustain the national interest?

The Prime Minister: May I say to my hon. Friend that, yes, we have proposed that common rulebook? They are rules that our manufacturers say that they will be abiding by in any case. It has been a pretty stable rulebook for many years. However, it is not correct to say that there will not be a parliamentary lock on those rules. Yes, the process of determining any change to those rules will be up to the European Union, but some of those are international standards and we will, as an independent member of the international standards bodies, have a say in relation to those rules. Parliament will have a lock. We have been clear about that and we set it out in the proposals published after the Chequers meeting in July that any decision to accept or to diverge from those rules—there is a process about determining materiality—will be one that is taken by this Parliament.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for advance notice of her statement today. I share with her the remarks that she

made about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, but may I say that the time has come to take action against Saudi Arabia? Prime Minister, stop arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Do it today.

Rarely have I listened to a prime ministerial statement met with such stony faces. Prime Minister, I have some advice: if you are looking for support, do not look behind you. The Prime Minister returns to the House today from Brussels utterly humiliated. As the clock ticks down, with just a few short months before the UK is scheduled to leave the EU and with Chequers shredded, the UK has no plan to break the impasse and no plan as we head ever closer to the cliff edge. Why? Because the Prime Minister is humiliated and hamstrung by the extreme Brexiteers in her own party.

The EU 27 speak with one clear voice; the Conservative Government squabble among themselves. The divisions within the Tory party are paralysing the UK Government. The extreme Brexiteers on the Government Benches are holding the UK to ransom, leading us all to the brink of a catastrophic no deal.

The Prime Minister comes before us today with nothing but jargon and rhetoric. It is crystal clear that the EU will not accept any deal that does not include the backstop for Northern Ireland. Those who attempt to wreck the backstop will be responsible for the no deal Brexit. The EU is not bluffing.

The comments from Tory MPs in the papers this weekend, using crass and violent language in relation to the negotiations, are abhorrent and irresponsible. Those responsible need to withdraw them and apologise—[*Interruption.*] Such language has no part to play in our public discourse, and it is disappointing that when the threats of violence against the Prime Minister are talked about, all we hear is background noise and a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the situation. Those Members should be ashamed of themselves. Threats of violence against the Prime Minister or anyone else must be called out and those responsible must be held to account. The Prime Minister must face them down, and she will have our support in that.

The Prime Minister must act to protect jobs and living standards by ensuring that we stay in the customs union and the single market. No more games. I ask her to focus her attention now on securing a deal that delivers economic protection. Will she ensure that any extended transition period must be for a clear purpose and confirm to the House today that her Government will support the Northern Ireland backstop, to avoid a no deal Brexit? Will she also commit to giving the Scottish Parliament a say in the outcome of the negotiations?

Finally, may I ask the Prime Minister to make it her immediate objective to keep us in the single market and the customs union, to focus her attentions on that and to acknowledge that she will not get any deal through this Parliament that stops short of the economic protection of jobs and living standards?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman, as I said in response to the Leader of the Opposition, that I think it is important that those of us in public life all consider the language that we use.

There seemed to be some confusion in what the right hon. Gentleman was saying about the backstop. The Government are clear that we are negotiating for a

backstop in the withdrawal agreement. The question is what the terms of that backstop are. As I have said and as I repeated in my statement, the backstop as proposed by the EU, which would effectively create that customs border down the Irish sea, is not acceptable to the UK Government, hence other proposals have been put forward. We have, as I have said, made significant progress since Salzburg in working with the European Union, particularly on the UK-EU-wide customs territory.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me to find a deal that protects jobs, and that is exactly what we have proposed to the European Union—a proposal that protects our economy, protects jobs and ensures that we continue to have a good trading relationship with the European Union, while also being able to develop new trading relationships and improve trading relationships with other countries around the rest of the world.

What is important as we look ahead to getting the deal is that although the right hon. Gentleman seems to think that the only issue that could lead to a no deal is not having a backstop in the withdrawal agreement—certainly if there is no withdrawal agreement and no future relationship, there is no deal; we are still at the closing stages of the negotiations and nobody knows absolutely what the result will be—we have to ensure that although, as I think, the best outcome for the UK is a good deal, we continue to prepare for the possibility of no deal. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that what we will not be doing is following the example of the SNP, who want to put Scotland back into the European Union and back into the common fisheries policy, which is not in the interests of Scotland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A very large number of right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, but I remind the House that there is a further statement to follow, that coming from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and the remaining stages of a Bill, so there is a premium on brevity, to be exemplified first by Mr John Redwood.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): What advantages does the Prime Minister expect to get in the future partnership arrangement that will be better than leaving and spending the £39 billion at home, with a huge boost to our economy and public services?

The Prime Minister: I believe that a future partnership that protects jobs and ensures that we have a good trading relationship with the European Union is worth negotiating for and worth achieving for the United Kingdom. There are many who say to me in this House that we want to ensure that we have good trading relationships on better than WTO deals around the rest of the world. I agree that having those good trading relationships on better than WTO deals is a good thing, and that is what I want to achieve with the European Union.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): I add my condemnation of the abuse directed at the Prime Minister. *The Sunday Times*, and *The Times* this morning, reported that Whitehall, including the Brexit Department, is now carrying out contingency planning for a people's vote. Can the Prime Minister elaborate and confirm that this has ministerial endorsement?

The Prime Minister: No, that is not correct. The Government do not support a second referendum.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Does the Prime Minister accept that should her deal fail to secure support in this House with no further road left in negotiations, so that there is parliamentary gridlock, the only and inevitable way forward—whether we like it or not—will be to allow people to decide via either a second referendum or a general election? The former would surely be preferable to the latter.

The Prime Minister: I recognise from other questions that my right hon. Friend has asked me that there is a difference of view between us on the issue of a second referendum. The people voted in 2016—they had that people's vote—and they decided to leave the European Union. I believe it is our duty—I believe it is part of the issue of faith and trust and the integrity of politicians—to deliver on what people voted for and leave the European Union.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Our position is that the backstop is not necessary, and that it is damaging. The EU has made it clear that the backstop is designed to keep Northern Ireland as part of the customs union territory of the EU. The Prime Minister gave an assurance in the withdrawal agreement that any such backstop and regulatory barriers would have to have the support of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Is that still her position?

The Prime Minister: We did put that out in the joint report, and we stand by what we put in that joint report. It is precisely that suggestion from the European Union—that Northern Ireland be kept in a customs union while the rest of the United Kingdom has a different relationship with the European Union—that this Government have rejected, because we want to ensure that we leave the European Union as one United Kingdom.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I join other colleagues in utterly condemning the use of language that we saw at the weekend, in the fond hope that we will not see any such language in the future. At the start of the Prime Minister's statement, she talked about the work that had been done on cyber-security and the OPCW. I remain very concerned about the progress that is being made on the security treaty to enable us to maintain high levels of security when we leave the European Union, so that we can continue to keep British citizens, and indeed EU citizens throughout Europe, safe.

The Prime Minister: I hope to reassure my right hon. Friend by saying that we have been making good progress on the issue of internal and, indeed, external security arrangements for our future relationship with the European Union, although discussions and negotiations are still being undertaken to ensure that we can retain the operational capabilities that enable us to work not only to keep our citizens safe, but to keep citizens across the EU safe.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Economic Secretary invited me earlier to put this question to the Prime Minister, so I will. He told the House that he expected the negotiations on the future partnership to

[Hilary Benn]

be concluded by December 2020. The Prime Minister has just spoken about a short extension of the implementation period, but the Government said back in June, when they published their backstop proposals, that they expected the future arrangements to be in place by the end of December 2021. Could the Prime Minister tell the House which of those dates represents the Government view? If she wants to continue the game of pass the parcel with the question, will she encourage the Brexit Secretary to keep the promise he made to the Brexit Committee to come and give evidence to us after the October European Council?

The Prime Minister: We are working for and expect to have agreed the terms of the future relationship by the end of December 2020, such that the future relationship can come into place on 1 January 2021. When we published the temporary customs arrangement as the customs proposal for the backstop on Northern Ireland in June, we said that, if it were necessary for that backstop to come into place, because for some reason that future relationship could not come into place on 1 January 2021, we would expect that to last no longer than the end of December 2021.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): First, may I say that I concur with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd)? I believe that most Members on the Government Benches and, indeed, in the House utterly condemn and regard with disdain the tone of some of the language used at the weekend.

Is it not the case that talk of a second referendum at this crucial stage in the negotiations can only undermine the Prime Minister's negotiating position? Will she carry on, ignore the siren voices and get the best deal she can for the people of this country?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye for their comments in relation to certain language that has been used.

I agree that it is important, at this stage of the negotiations, that the European Union is in no doubt that we will be leaving the European Union on 29 March next year and that we are negotiating our withdrawal agreement and our future relationship. My determination is to put the national interest first and get a good deal for the UK.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I have seen a number of scripts around the House of prepared questions. Given the level of interest, may I gently say that, if a colleague has a question of more than 50 words, the device that I would recommend is the use of the blue pencil?

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister and I have had many disagreements on many things, but I stand with her completely against the violent, dehumanising and, frankly, misogynistic language that we have heard. I hope the whole House will condemn it, because it demeans every single one of us.

The Prime Minister has previously said that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Can she tell the House what proportion of the future partnership agreement she thinks has been reached?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments about the use of language.

The position we are in is that 95% of the withdrawal agreement has been agreed, as I said, and a substantial part of the future relationship in relation to security, services, transport and other issues has been agreed, in terms of the structure and scope of that future relationship. The point is that none of this is finally agreed until leaders look at the package and agree the whole package together, hence nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Mr Speaker: Brevity himself, Sir Desmond Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The original technical proposal and the facilitated customs agreement have both been rejected, so what can the Prime Minister conceive that might be brought forward to solve the Northern Ireland problem in the next two or even three years?

The Prime Minister: Actually, those two have not both been completely rejected, as my right hon. Friend suggests. In fact, as I said, we have made substantial progress, and there has been a substantial shift from the EU since Salzburg in agreeing to look at the arrangements for a UK-EU-wide customs backstop, which was exactly what we put forward in the TCA.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Aren't the hard facts that the European Union will not agree anything that is not in its interests, the Cabinet is split three ways, the House is split at least seven ways, and in terms of any solution the Prime Minister comes up with, half the country will think she has gone too far and the other half will think she has not gone far enough? When will she realise that she has completely lost control of the situation?

The Prime Minister: I think, from the discussions that I have with members of the public on this issue, that the majority of them, regardless of how they voted in the referendum, now have a very simple message to all of us in the House, which is: "Let's just get on with it and leave the EU."

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): As we enter the final furlong, with 95% of the agreement reached, does the Prime Minister agree that it has been a cool and calculated approach that has led to this progress? Is it not now time, in the interests of all the businesses in Britain, which want as smooth and frictionless trade as possible, to kick on and get this agreement? Does she agree that it might even be necessary to take the whip out—all within the rules, of course—and push this further, because we have to reach this agreement as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. We should get on and focus on the end point of this, which is getting the agreement, getting a good deal for the UK and enabling us to leave on those good terms.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Will the Prime Minister be clear that she is abandoning the promise of a deal that delivers the exact same benefits, particularly as far as services are concerned, and will she acknowledge that that is yet another pledge that has been broken and therefore yet another reason for a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady looks at the various speeches that I have given throughout this process, I have been clear that there would be differences and there would be changes in our relationship with the EU. There will be, but what we are doing is proposing a good relationship with the European Union—a good trading relationship and a good security relationship—which I believe is in the interests of the UK.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The person or persons who directed violent language at my right hon. Friend have thoroughly disgraced themselves. I very much hope that they are discovered and that she will withdraw the Whip from them. What acceleration has been made on preparations for no deal since July?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for the supportive comments he has made about the language that was used at the weekend. Significant progress has been made on the no-deal preparations since July, and I commend my hon. Friend for the work that he did on those when he was in the Exiting the EU Department. One can see some of the progress not only from legislation that has been passed in this House, but from the technical notices that have been issued, which have been a crucial part of ensuring that businesses and others outside the Government are aware of what is necessary in a no-deal situation.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The Government do seem to have got themselves into a bit of a hole, so it is understandable that they wish to avoid parliamentary scrutiny, but can the Prime Minister not see that attempting to render any vote in Parliament meaningless is the very thing that lends weight to the call for a people's vote? Would she not prefer the reassurance of going back to the people to ask them if her deal, or any deal, is what they voted for in 2016?

The Prime Minister: We have been very clear that the motion will be an amendable motion, but actually there is a key here: if you went out and asked members of the public what they think MPs should be voting on, I think they would say that they would expect MPs to be able to vote on the deal that the Government bring back from the European Union.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): The only politicians' vote would be one which contrived to deny this House a meaningful say and ignored the 700,000 people who walked past the Prime Minister's door at the weekend to demand a people's vote. That is because it is important that everyone has the chance to weigh up the evidence, look at the pros and cons of the actual deal and actually give their informed consent before we undertake this major constitutional, economic and social surgery.

The Prime Minister: On the term "people's vote", we must accept across this House that we gave the people a vote on this issue, there was a people's vote, people

voted in larger numbers than they had done before and they voted to leave the European Union. My hon. Friend, like me, will I am sure be concerned about ensuring that the people actually can have some faith in their politicians, and that means our politicians delivering on the vote of the people, not telling them to think again.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister give the House an example of a greater voluntary surrender of sovereignty than the transition deal that she now proposes to extend?

The Prime Minister: First, I am not standing here proposing to extend the transition period or the implementation period. What I am doing is saying, how can we ensure that we have a choice of backstop options to ensure there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland in the unlikely circumstances that such a backstop is required? That is the basis on which this other proposal has been put forward, alongside the proposal for a UK-EU-wide customs territory, such as the Government first put forward in June.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): My right hon. Friend has been described as a "bloody difficult" person. I have always found her a very determined person—determined to deliver on the people's vote that has already taken place. Will she tell us whether she expects the final recommendations to come at 4 am, on another early plane journey, like last time?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments and say to him that all too often European negotiations end in the early hours of the morning. We shall work to ensure that we do this in a timely fashion, recognising that we need to get legislation through this House and on the statute book by 29 March next year.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Prime Minister aware that, on Friday, I was speaking in Belfast's wonderful Titanic centre? Standing there, I was reminded of that fateful journey where the navigation was got wrong, the captain got it wrong, and all the people on that ship ended in the sea. May I urge her to think again about the direction of the negotiations? The purpose of the negotiations is to keep our country safe, secure and sound. Unlike the people behind her, I support her when she does well in Brussels. Go for it and get us a good deal!

The Prime Minister: Going for it and getting us a good deal is exactly what I am working on.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I have no doubt at all that the Prime Minister thinks of every individual person in this country when she is negotiating the best possible deal, but I fail to understand how it can be a politicians' vote when nearly 700,000 members of the public took to the streets to display their dissatisfaction. I ask her again: what will she do if we come to the position of no deal, which will not get through this House? What other options are there?

The Prime Minister: We should all recall that, in the vote that took place in 2016, larger numbers of people voted than we had ever seen voting before, and the decision was to leave the European Union. We have set

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out in legislation the process that will be followed by the Government if we are in the situation where a deal brought back from the European Union by the Government and put to this House is rejected by this House.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It has been so disappointing to hear the Prime Minister be so dismissive of the 700,000 people from across our country who took to the streets on Saturday to demand a people's vote on the final deal. What does she say to the thousands of young people who led that march but who did not get a say two years ago, whose future will be most adversely affected if she ploughs on with her disastrous plans?

The Prime Minister: What I say to young people is that this Government are working to get a good deal that will ensure that they have a great future in this country outside the European Union.

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): During the implementation period, the UK would be subject to all EU rules, including on freedom of movement. Why then does my right hon. Friend continue to rule out membership of the European economic area and the European Free Trade Association as an alternative interim state?

The Prime Minister: What we are of course looking at in relation to the proposals that have been put forward is for a limited period to have the backstop that ensures no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The two proposals that have been put forward deliver on that. Where it would come to the situation, as proposed, where it was a sovereign choice for the UK, of course decisions would have to be taken about the wider issues in terms of the exact arrangements for those proposals, but the key thing is for those proposals to ensure that we have no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): Prime Minister, Chequers is dead, parliamentary maths mean that the current proposal being considered by the EU is dead, and no deal is dead because there is a pragmatic majority in this House that will prevent this economic and social catastrophe for our communities. Will she now switch to EFTA, EEA and time-limited membership of the customs union? History is always kinder to leaders who act in the national interest.

The Prime Minister: I seem to recall the hon. Gentleman asking me a very similar question last Monday, and I am afraid he is not going to get a different answer today. We are working for a good deal in terms of leaving the European Union and ensuring that we have a trading deal that protects jobs in this country.

Mr Speaker: As I often observe, repetition is not a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Will the backstop have the same legal status as a treaty? Will the agreement have the same legal status as a treaty?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The backstop for Northern Ireland will be part of the protocol that is attached to the withdrawal agreement, and the withdrawal agreement would have the status of a treaty.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Earlier this year, this House voted to stay in the European Medicines Agency, with all that means for the rest of the relationship with the EU. Can I take it, from the Prime Minister's statement that 95% of the deal is agreed, that we are indeed staying in the EMA?

The Prime Minister: The 95% relates to the withdrawal agreement. We have agreed much of the structure and scope of the future partnership. Staying in the European Medicines Agency is one of the proposals we put forward as part of the plan that came out after the Chequers meeting, our proposals for the future. That is part of the future partnership, not the withdrawal agreement.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate the frustration felt by many of my constituents and others that it is now over two years since the referendum and we have agreed that we will not regain control of our laws, borders and money for over four years after the referendum? Does she understand that for many of them and us that is already too long?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely understand. Some people have said to me that we should not have triggered article 50 when we did. I think it was important that we triggered it when we did. We took time to prepare, but then triggered it precisely in order to get this process into place. My right hon. Friend will know the process within article 50 is for two years. That is why we will leave the EU on 29 March 2019. What we are working to ensure is that we get the future relationship in place at the end of that implementation period, an implementation period that I believe was right and necessary to negotiate to ensure that for both citizens and businesses there were not two cliff-edges in the changed relationship with the EU, but we have a smooth and orderly withdrawal and movement into the future partnership.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Can the Prime Minister explain why, if she really has the interests of the people of Northern Ireland in her heart, she recently did not allow the joint leaders who backed remain in Northern Ireland to meet with her? Between them, they represent the majority of voters in Northern Ireland. Is it because she does not want to hear what they have to say because, inconveniently, it does not agree with what she wants?

The Prime Minister: Both I and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland meet the leaders of all the parties in Northern Ireland and discuss with them a number of issues, including Brexit.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): A significant number of the 700,000 people who marched for a people's vote on Saturday were people who run or own their own businesses. They are in a state of despair because they need certainty and they do not have certainty. Two and a half years ago they were told there would be a trade deal in place before we left. Now we are told we will be

lucky if we get it in two years. Is this not the truth: the Government's policy is for us to be in a never-ending transition period to a destiny that is completely unknown, over which we have no say and no control? That is something nobody voted for.

The Prime Minister: No, that is not the Government's position, that is not what the Government have proposed and that is not what the Government are working on in the negotiations with the European Union. My right hon. Friend is right in saying that business wants certainty as soon as it can have that certainty. That is why we are continuing to work to ensure we can complete the final negotiations—so that business will be able to see what the future deal is and what the future relationship with the European Union will be.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): On Saturday, more than 700,000 people marched peacefully on Parliament and reasonably requested a people's vote on the final deal. May I urge the Prime Minister to listen to those reasonable voices and resist the thuggish and brutish threats coming from some on the Government Benches behind her?

The Prime Minister: I have answered that question on a number of occasions already this afternoon. I believe it is right that we gave the people the vote in 2016. They voted to leave and we will deliver on that.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition spoke of fudge and shambles, but his policy of leaving the EU but remaining in a customs union would be precisely that. But could my right hon. Friend tell us: in such a situation, whether temporary or permanent, who looks after trade remedies and trade defences of key UK industries such as steel and ceramics? Who sets the tariff policy for the developing world, which at the moment we have through the EU but would like to do on our own? Who is responsible for trade remedies and trade preferences?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, my right hon. Friend, as a former Trade Minister—a position he held with distinction—understands these issues and their intricacies. Of course, in a customs union, trade policy—with all the issues like trade remedies and trade sanctions—will be a matter for the European Union and not the UK. I believe that we should be making those decisions for ourselves here in the UK.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree with me and many, many people in Northern Ireland about the remarks of Taoiseach Varadkar at a dinner—at which I understand the Prime Minister was not present—when showing photographs of a terrible atrocity on the border and implying that that was somehow what would happen if there was a hard border? The EU does not want a hard border and will not put one up. We will not put one up. The Republic of Ireland will not be putting one up. Who is going to put this hard border up?

The Prime Minister: We are obviously committed to no hard border, and we have made it clear that in any circumstances, including in a no-deal situation, we would be doing all that we could to ensure that there was no

hard border. We would look to work with Ireland and the European Union to ensure that there was no hard border, but there has been no commitment in relation to that.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Given how tantalisingly close we are to a deal, if time were to run out, has the Prime Minister considered, rather than having a general election or a second referendum, the use of applying to extend article 50, even if it is for a limited period, so that she can kick the ball over the line?

The Prime Minister: We have said right from the beginning that we would not be looking to extend article 50. This refers back to an earlier question from one of our right hon. Friends about people actually wanting to see that we are leaving the European Union. I think we owe it to people to deliver on this. What we want now is to have the decisions that finalise the negotiations to ensure that we get that good deal.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Would it not be more honest for the Prime Minister, rather than spinning that this is 95% done—I understand why she wants to do that—to explain that, actually, the divorce terms are merely the clearing of the throat before a five-year, or perhaps a seven-year, legal treaty arrangement on our future trading relationship? Would that not be a more honest representation? If people want to end it soon, give the people a final say so that they can decide what to do.

The Prime Minister: No, the reference to the 95% is a factual description of where we are in relation to the withdrawal agreement. Neither side in this negotiation wants to be negotiating for the period of time that the hon. Gentleman has suggested, which is why both sides will be working to ensure that we have that future relationship agreed by December 2020. I suggest that if he looks at the average time that it takes to conduct trade deals, he will see that many trade deals are done in precisely the sort of time that we are talking about.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I join those who have condemned the excessive and violent language that has been used and hold up my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as a role model, as she is always courteous, even to those who disagree with her on this important matter. Coming to the substance of it, when the implementation period was announced, it was going to be the implementation of what had been agreed. It now seems to be a period for further negotiation, not being sure of where we are going. Does the Prime Minister know where we are going?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for the comments that he made about the remarks and language that were used at the weekend.

Yes, we do—we have set out our plan and we are negotiating on the basis of that plan with the European Union. As I say, significant elements of the structure and scope of the future relationship have been agreed. The legal position, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows very well, is that we cannot sign up to legal text in relation to that future relationship until we have left the European Union. I have also said all along that when

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Parliament looks at the withdrawal agreement, it will also want to have sufficient detail about the future relationship and know what that will be. That is what we are working to deliver.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister clarify whether 95% of a withdrawal deal has been agreed with the EU? If it has, why has this House no details of it?

The Prime Minister: I will explain the negotiating process: we sit down and talk about the issues; we get to the point of having a text on the table; that text is looked at by leaders, and they take a decision on the text and the future relationship—that is the point at which the negotiations and the deal are completed; and then this House will be able to see all the details of the withdrawal agreement and the future relationship in deciding whether to accept the deal the Government have negotiated.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Given that the EU never makes its final concessions until just before any given deadline, what could possibly be gained in 24 months that could not be gained in 21?

The Prime Minister: The purpose of the backstop is to cover the circumstances in which the future relationship cannot be put in place by 1 January 2021. One example might be if it has not been fully ratified by all the Parliaments in the EU that need to ratify it—the process is going through but has not been completed by the end of December 2020. That is why the backstop is in the withdrawal agreement. It is an insurance policy for that period.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister outline what comprises the 5% that is still to be negotiated?

The Prime Minister: The backstop.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): Before entering Parliament, I spent 27 years as a commercial negotiator, but there is no blueprint for this negotiation. Will the Prime Minister assure the House that she will continue to negotiate the best deal for our country and not be knocked off course by the continuous speculation from the sidelines?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. At the very beginning of this process, I said that there would always be comments and statements outside the negotiations. What is important is that I and the Government keep our focus on the negotiations and on getting that good deal.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Let us be clear what the Prime Minister promised in her Lancaster House speech last year. She promised:

“to have reached an agreement about our future partnership by the time the two year Article 50 process has concluded”—

not during the transition period or by the end of it. Will she confirm that she will be breaking that promise, that we will not have the detail of a legally binding trade

agreement in place before we leave and that she is proposing that we pay a divorce bill of more than £40 billion without getting that trade deal in return?

The Prime Minister: I think there is a misunderstanding about the process that I thought I had explained in response to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). We cannot finalise and sign the legal text of our future relationship and trade partnership with the EU until we have left the EU, but we can know what that future relationship will be, and that is exactly what we are negotiating and will be part of the final deal.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I ask this question on behalf of those of us who support the Prime Minister and want to go on supporting her. Will she confirm what the Brexit Secretary has just said—that the procedures of the House are quite clear and that if there is no deal, there will be a vote on a neutral motion, and if there is a deal, the House will indeed be able to reject it? Will she make it absolutely clear that only the Government can initiate legislation and that while she is Prime Minister, on her watch, deal or no deal, deal accepted or rejected, she will deliver Brexit on 29 March?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am very happy to do that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union set out the position in relation to the procedures of this House in response to questions following the urgent question earlier, but I can absolutely guarantee to my hon. Friend that we will be leaving the EU on 29 March 2019.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): As the Prime Minister said in answer to an earlier question, the House will be voting not on legal certainty about the future relationship—as she keeps saying to Opposition Members—but on a political assertion. We are being asked to vote on uncertainty. Isn't that right?

The Prime Minister: No, it is not right. It has been clear from the very beginning that it is not possible for the legal treaty, free trade agreement and other aspects to be signed until we are outside the European Union. However, I have also said that we need to ensure that when Members come to vote on the overall package—the withdrawal agreement and the outline of the future relationship—they have sufficient detail to have confidence in the nature of the future relationship. An important aspect is the link that there will be between the withdrawal agreement and the future relationship, because, as the EU itself has said, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that when we leave the common fisheries policy in December 2020, she will not allow our fishing resources to be included in any future trade deal?

The Prime Minister: I am absolutely clear that when we leave the common fisheries policy, we will become an independent coastal state. We will have to sit round the table with others, and negotiate with others, as an independent coastal state, but we will be doing that on our own, for our own purposes. Of course, if the

Scottish National party had its way, Scotland would stay in the common fisheries policy, which would be bad for Scottish fishermen.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): This morning I attended a meeting of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Parties from across these islands expressed a great deal of concern about the state of the negotiations and the impact on our economy, peace and stability. The Irish Government made it very clear that putting a time limit on the backstop would rather defeat the objective, and that it must be legally certain. Does the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, the purpose of the backstop that we are negotiating is to ensure that if there is a period between the end of the implementation period and the future relationship coming into operation, we can still guarantee no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The best solution to the issue of no hard border—and this has been said publicly by the Taoiseach as well—will be achieved through that future relationship. That is why it is important for us to work on ensuring that the future relationship will be in place for 1 January 2021.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Earlier today, I met a number of business people in my constituency. From the large businesses to the small, the message was “For God’s sake, help her to get a deal over the line.” It may not be perfect—it may not be everything that we want—but a deal we must have. As the pro-business leader of a pro-business party, will my right hon. Friend ensure that she delivers that, and does so without any dogma to get in the way of it?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. That is exactly what we are doing. We are working for that deal—a deal that is good for business and good for people.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): May I say to the Prime Minister that I found the comments made about her by some of her own MPs at the weekend not only deeply offensive, but deeply misogynistic?

A No. 10 spokesman said recently that “there can be no withdrawal agreement without a precise future framework”

on trade. Will the Prime Minister guarantee that the political declaration will deliver frictionless trade with our largest trading partner—or will we be asked to vote on a blind Brexit?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments about the language that was used at the weekend.

What we will seek to do is bring to the House a deal that incorporates the withdrawal agreement, but, alongside that, sufficient detail about the future relationship so that everyone is able to see what the future relationship will be. That will cover more than trade, but trade will of course be a key element of it.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend please confirm that UK fishermen will not be subjected to an additional 12 months

in the common fisheries policy, with the crumbs that Europe throws to us, during any extended implementation period?

The Prime Minister: The interests of fishermen throughout the United Kingdom, and their concern to be out of the common fisheries policy, is one of the key issues that are at the forefront of our thinking as we look at the different options that are being put forward. I also recognise that the timing of negotiations on fishing has a particular impact here. Access to waters for 2021 will be determined in December 2020, and that is an aspect that we have already taken into account in our negotiations with the European Union.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the Prime Minister commit herself to guaranteeing unilaterally the rights of the EU citizens who have chosen to make their lives here, in the event of her being unable to strike a deal with the EU?

The Prime Minister: Yes. In the statement I made after Salzburg I made it clear that in a no deal situation we will guarantee the rights of EU citizens.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend has my full support in dealing with these complex issues through the prism of the national interest. She will know that when we joined the European Economic Community all those years ago, we did so on a cross-party basis comprising women and men of good will. Should we not now seek to replicate that, to deliver a people’s parliamentary Brexit?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. When it comes to Members across the House voting on the deal that we bring back from the European Union, I hope that all Members will recognise the importance of delivering on the vote of the British people and delivering a deal that will be good for the UK.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): In 2017 the Prime Minister went to the country to get a blank cheque for her approach to negotiating a deal for the UK, and the country said, “No, thank you.” Rather than hectoring the Leader of the Opposition, why does she not reach out, in the spirit of national unity, to try to get a deal in the interests of the country?

The Prime Minister: We are working to get a deal in the interests of the country. As I recall, at last year’s general election 80% of Members of Parliament were elected on the basis that they would deliver on the referendum.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): This morning I received a text message from Steven North, a leading councillor in my constituency and a stalwart of the Conservative party who has been delivering leaflets and knocking on doors for more than 20 years. His text read:

“How can we drag a bad deal on for a year, so that it is watered down even more? Better off sticking to the date, be firm and have no deal”.

Prime Minister, I agree with Steve. Do you?

The Prime Minister: Let me first thank Steve for all the work he has done for the party over many years—as a former councillor, I know how hard councillors work to represent their local communities. One of the problems is that there is an assumption that we are suddenly saying that we have signed up to extending an implementation period by a year; we have not done so. What we are saying is that we need to ensure that we have a backstop in the withdrawal agreement. On the proposal we put forward on a UK-EU-wide customs territory, there has been a substantial shift from the EU. We are now working with the EU on that proposal. The other proposal that has emerged is for us to have the option, as an alternative, of choosing to extend the implementation period for a short period of time, were that to be necessary. I want to work to make sure that neither of those is necessary.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Given that we have apparently made 95% progress on the withdrawal deal, what percentage progress have we made on the substantive deal? Given the answer that the Prime Minister has already given today, what percentage progress does she now think would be sufficient for the House to vote on the deal: 95%, 100%, 60% or 40%? Does she agree that we seem to be putting our finger in the wind on this one?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not agree. As I have said, we will bring forward detail on the future relationship alongside the withdrawal agreement so that the House knows what the future relationship will be.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): The Prime Minister understandably repeated that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. May I ask her equally to repeat tirelessly that it is her decision, and this Conservative Government, that will guarantee the rights of EU nationals, deal or no deal?

The Prime Minister: I know that this is an issue that my hon. Friend has campaigned on in particular. I am very happy to reassure him that it is this Conservative Government who will guarantee the rights of EU citizens, deal or no deal.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On the question of a second referendum, given where we are now, and given the promises that were made by the Leave campaign, does it not bother the Prime Minister at all that many of those who voted to leave in 2016 did so on a false prospectus?

The Prime Minister: The referendum was held and there were lively and passionate campaigns on both sides of the argument. We gave the people the decision. The people took their decision. We should now deliver on it.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that delivering on the referendum is a matter of trust and honour, and that some of her backstop delays could erode that trust? Worse, it plays into the hands of the EU, whose tactics are delay and duplicity.

The Prime Minister: It is precisely because I am aware of people's concerns about the possibility of an attempt in some circumstances to keep us in some permanent

limbo that we are looking at mechanisms to ensure that a backstop, if it is needed, is there for only a limited period of time to provide that bridge to the future relationship, and ideally it would not have to be used at all.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has told us that parts of the political declaration on the future relationship have been agreed, including on services. What has been agreed on financial services?

The Prime Minister: We have indeed made good progress, as I have said, on transport, services and other elements of the economic partnership, and on the security partnership. We are still in the process of negotiating those details so that we can bring them to the House at the point of final agreement.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): If the transition period is made longer, my understanding is that it will take us into the next EU budget period. If that happens, how much would we need to pay in? Given that we would already have left the EU, how much say would we have over what we pay in?

The Prime Minister: First, as I have made clear, I do not want, intend or expect us to have to go into a further budget period. However, were it the case that a gap appeared between December 2020 and the full start of the future relationship, I am looking at a proposal that would give the UK a choice on which of the backstop options we took forward. Obviously it would be necessary to look at the precise arrangements that would apply in both circumstances so that a clear choice could be made.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I think that the language that was directed at the Prime Minister over the weekend was absolutely disgraceful. There is real concern that the meaningful vote that this House was promised will actually become a meaningless vote. Why will MEPs have a greater say in the UK's final deal than MPs in this House?

The Prime Minister: I repeat what I said earlier: what we are looking at is an amendable vote. If members of the public are told, "Parliament is going to vote on the deal that the Government bring back from the European Union," I think that they would expect Parliament to be able to vote on the deal that the Government bring back.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Many businesses are continuing to invest, including Meggitt, with its £130 million supersite in my constituency, but a lack of certainty in the negotiations is causing many projects to be put on hold. What reassurances can the Prime Minister offer to encourage businesses to continue to invest and provide jobs for the future?

The Prime Minister: I fully recognise that we are continuing to see investment decisions being made and jobs created by businesses in this country, as we saw in the excellent employment figures last week. We want to bring about that certainty as quickly as we can, which is why we are working to ensure that we can end the negotiations and present the deal so that businesses know where they stand for the future.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): There have been several hundred extradition agreements between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in recent years. What progress has the Prime Minister made on securing the European arrest warrant for future use after March?

The Prime Minister: I am well aware of the impact that the European arrest warrant had on the ability to extradite between Northern Ireland and Ireland, which is one of the reasons—there are others—why we have been working with the European Union, and made good progress, on that and other aspects of internal security.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): At the European Council meeting were there many discussions on continuing security co-operation? As we saw with the Salisbury incident, it is vital that we continue to work with our allies, regardless of the fact that we are leaving the EU.

The Prime Minister: There was a wider discussion on the importance of continuing to work together on key security issues. Of course, the details of the future relationship on internal security, such as those relating to the European arrest warrant, are being looked at in the negotiations, but there was a very clear sense around the table of the importance of us all continuing to work together on key security issues.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The backstop is an insurance policy. Can the Prime Minister give us an example of any insurance policy she has ever seen or signed up to that was based on an expiry date?

The Prime Minister: I do not know what insurance policies the hon. Gentleman takes out, but most insurance policies have a renewal date.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I have met a great many businesses in Taunton Deane, particularly in the last week, and there is overwhelming support among them for the Prime Minister, but they all agree that they want a clear plan as soon as possible and that they do not want a permanent backstop. Can she assure me that she will press on with her endeavours and never agree to a permanent backstop?

The Prime Minister: Like the businesses that my hon. Friend refers to, I do not want a permanent backstop either. I want to ensure that we can move to the future relationship, and I do not want the backstop to have to be used at all.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Scottish Conservative MPs threaten to resign, then they threaten not to resign. They threaten to bring down the Prime Minister's Brexit deal, then they said that they might not do so. Is she absolutely certain that she has the full support of her hon. Friends from Scotland?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I also welcome the significant contribution that my hon. Friends from Scotland are making to our debates in standing up for Scotland in this Chamber.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): When Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was negotiating the handover of Hong Kong, the final agreement did not see all her

starting goals realised, but she did sign a settlement that all sides could live with and that allowed Hong Kong to flourish thereafter. Will my right hon. Friend draw courage from that precedent and ignore some of the outrageous things in the media about her and the negotiations?

The Prime Minister: Any negotiation is about two sides coming together and reaching an agreement that they can both sign up to. Does that mean that both sides get 100% of what they started off wanting? Actually, no, by the very nature of the negotiation. What is important is that we get a good deal out of this and that we work hard to get the sort of deal that we think is in the interests of this country.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I often disagree with the Prime Minister on matters of policy, but I stand in full solidarity with her against the dreadful language that was used and the threats that were made at the weekend. We have only about five months to go until the end of March, so how does she think we should work to eradicate that sort of language and those sorts of threats, particularly towards female MPs, given that we in this House are supposed to set an example?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and as I have said, I am also grateful for the comments of other hon. Members who have shared similar sentiments in their interventions. It is incumbent on all of us to be careful about the language that we use in public, and comments such as the ones she and others have made today are part of encouraging the recognition of the importance of being careful and of carefully considering the impact of the language we use.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Prime Minister has said that she does not want to extend the transition period. Will she make it clear to the EU that if the transition period is extended, we are not going to pay any more money?

The Prime Minister: I have made it very clear that I want both sides to work towards having the future relationship in place by the end of December 2020, and there is a commitment to that. If we do have to bridge, and if we have to make a choice between backstop options—assuming that these two options are available—we would of course have to look at the arrangements for that. We would be negotiating in relation to those arrangements, but we want to ensure that we get a good deal done in time to ensure that the backstop arrangement, whichever it is, does not have to be used.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The NHS and the supermarkets are now stockpiling goods, and the cost of storage is increasing. Will the Government open a compensation scheme in relation to those costs, or will they be passed down to consumers?

The Prime Minister: Commercial bodies will obviously make their own decisions about the arrangements that they have to make, and the last time I looked, the NHS was part of the Government.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I utterly condemn the violent misogynistic language that has been used, whether it be threats of stabbing from voices on my own Benches or threats of lynching from voices opposite. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom Government would never demand that a European Union member state carve off a part of itself as part of any agreement? Does she also agree that it is therefore completely unacceptable to suggest that Northern Ireland should be carved off from the rest of the United Kingdom as we go through this negotiation?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I would not require any other EU member state to do that, and it is unacceptable for the EU to require us effectively to carve Northern Ireland away from the United Kingdom with a customs border down the Irish sea. I have made that very clear, and that is why we are looking for alternative backstop proposals.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): A huge number of people marching for a democratic say on the next steps and a fresh assessment of the will of the people should not be ignored by any Government, unless the Government are perhaps not being completely full with us about what they know. Does the Prime Minister think that her deal will leave us better off than the deal we already have as an EU member—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I have been very clear that we are working for a good deal. Our best days lie ahead of us, but this is about getting a good deal, getting good deals around the rest of the world and ensuring that we build a better and brighter future for the people of this country.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's comments about the progress being made on security co-operation at the European Council. Notwithstanding the big issues that still face her in the negotiations, does she agree that the security relationship is critical, particularly in relation to combating cyber-attacks across international boundaries?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point, particularly in relation to cyber-attacks and to our continuing to work with the European Union on these issues. Concern about cyber-attacks was one of the reasons that the Dutch Prime Minister and I were keen to press the EU to move ahead on this work, to ensure that we can take measures, potentially including sanctions, in relation to this. We will continue to work with them on that.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Prime Minister has completely and utterly dismissed the 770,000 people who marched in London on Saturday and the many hundreds of thousands who would have marched if they had been able to be in London. She is going to fix the vote in this House on her withdrawal deal. What message does that send to the many millions of people who are demanding a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: I think that I have answered this question, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers that I gave earlier.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Negotiating a good deal is hard; anyone who has negotiated anything will know that it is hard to get a good deal and none of us has tried to negotiate anything like this. May I urge my right hon. Friend to continue to hold her nerve and not to capitulate, as some would have her do? I urge her to hold her nerve and negotiate the best possible deal for my constituents and our country.

The Prime Minister: Absolutely. This is the time when we need to hold our nerve as we come to the end of these negotiations, to get that good deal.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister tell us what practical steps she has taken to build consensus across the parties and across the nation on how this country should move ahead?

The Prime Minister: We are ensuring that everything we are doing is done on the basis of the national interest. That is what this Government have put first and foremost, and we will continue to do so.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I urge my right hon. Friend to pay no heed to the vile comments in Sunday's papers, but instead to remain focused on the prize of delivering frictionless trade between Northern Ireland and Ireland, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and between the UK and the rest of the EU, because so many jobs and livelihoods depend on getting that right.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I can give her the assurance that we are absolutely focused on getting that good deal and that good trading relationship that will protect jobs here in the United Kingdom.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): When we entered the common market in 1973, the fishing sector had its rights denied and its fishing waters reduced. Can the Prime Minister confirm that we will take back our coastal waters when we leave the EU on 29 March and that our fishing sector will experience the boom years that are yet to come?

The Prime Minister: Indeed, we fully recognise the concerns about the way in which the fishing industry was treated in the negotiations when we entered the European Economic Community back in the 1970s. I am clear that we will become an independent coastal state and that we will be able to take back that control. We will be able to make those decisions and negotiate on our own behalf on those issues, rather than it being done by the European Union. Also, we want to see how we can enhance our fishing industry around the United Kingdom in the future.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): My right hon. Friend said that an extension to the implementation period was undesirable. I urge her to use far stronger language when it comes to the common fisheries policy and confirm that we will no longer remain tied to the CFP beyond December 2020.

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, the interests of fishermen across the whole United Kingdom are among those at the forefront of our thinking as we look at all

the arrangements and proposals. As I have said, I recognise that there are timetabling issues in relation to our ability to negotiate as an independent coastal state once we leave the European Union. I assure my hon. Friend that we will put those concerns at the forefront of our thinking.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I welcome the comments in the Prime Minister's statement condemning the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. However, in answer to a parliamentary question from me following the murder, the British Government confirmed that they would still send high-ranking diplomats to the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh this week, despite all the spin about removing the Secretary of State for International Trade from the delegation. Following further revelations over the weekend, rather than empty gestures and words, is not a full boycott more appropriate and a strategic rethink of our relations with Saudi Arabia?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will have heard at the beginning of my statement of my deep concern about what happened to Jamal Khashoggi and what has been revealed. We need to ensure that we get absolutely to the truth of what happened. The original proposal was that Secretary of State would attend that event, and we have been very clear: it was right that we decided that there would be no ministerial attendance.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): The west midlands and the town of Redditch are creating new businesses at a record rate due to our innovative and creative entrepreneurs. Will the Prime Minister confirm to the House that she continues to strain every sinew to ensure their future prosperity?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am happy to give that reassurance to my hon. Friend. Not only in relation to our negotiations with the European Union, but in relation to our modern industrial strategy, we are ensuring that we are a great place or one of the best places in the world to set up and grow a business.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Prime Minister agree that a meaningful vote is meaningful only if votes on amendments come before the vote on the principle of the deal? If that does not happen, she will be sent home to think again by this Parliament. If she loses that meaningful vote, will she accept that she has lost the confidence of the House?

The Prime Minister: We have been very clear that the vote will be an amendable vote. Obviously, the Procedure Committee—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to listen to the answer. The Procedure Committee is considering the nature of the vote, but, as I have said to a number of Opposition Members, if he asked members of the public, they would say that they expect Parliament to vote on the deal the Government bring back.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On Thursday, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said from the Dispatch Box that he was invincibly confident that we would be an independent coastal state by December 2020. Does the Prime Minister share his confidence and will she make the same commitment?

The Prime Minister: I am confident because I am confident that we can negotiate our future relationship such that it comes into place on 1 January 2021.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It was disturbing to see the vile language towards the Prime Minister regarding EU negotiations. It affects not only the individual but their whole family. It was particularly sobering because, only a week ago, an individual was charged in relation to abusing me. People watch how we treat each other in the House and we have to act as role models. Does the Prime Minister agree that, as elected Members, we must take a raincheck and never perpetuate abuse in politics?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry to hear that the hon. Lady has been subject to abuse that has led, as I understand from her question, to somebody being charged or to action being taken against an individual. If we are to have good, healthy debate in this country on matters of policy and politics—there will be strong disagreements and strong views held—it is very important that we conduct our discussions in a way that does not lead to abuse. We need to conduct discussions in a respectful manner.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): The Prime Minister has been clear today that a second referendum is not on the table because we must respect the views of the 17.5 million who voted to leave, but is there another reason why it is inappropriate to have another referendum with remain on the agenda: it would prejudice our negotiations by creating an incentive for the European Union to give us an extremely bad deal?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right not only that we owe it to the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the European Union, but that it needs to be very clear to the European Union that we will be leaving and that there is no question of that second referendum. That was why I was surprised that the shadow Foreign Secretary has said today that, if there were a second referendum under Labour's proposal, remain could be on the ballot. That is going back on the vote that people gave in 2016.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): On the security aspect of the Prime Minister's statement, did the EU Council discuss the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty—the INF treaty—which America is expected to announce this week that it is going to leave? That will not help to bring Russia back into compliance and will be dangerous for us all. Does she have a strategy to ensure that that does not happen?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman asks whether that was discussed at the European Union Council. It was not, but a number of other security matters were. We continue to believe that it is important for that treaty to continue, but the parties to it must abide by it.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Should not the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have the opportunity to give their consent to any deal she brings back—this should also happen in the event of no deal—that makes any change to the Irish border as set out in the Good Friday agreement?

The Prime Minister: We are very well aware of the obligations and commitments we have as a result of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. We are working to ensure that we maintain all of them because we recognise the importance of the agreement.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Electoral Commission has ruled that the leave campaign broke electoral law with regard to spending limits. Does the Prime Minister believe that that in any way undermines the result of the referendum? If she does not, can she explain what is the point of electoral law?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the matter to which the hon. Lady refers is subject to judicial proceedings. We gave the people a vote. The people made their choice and we are delivering on that choice.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) that, if the meaningful vote does not succeed in this House, she intends to carry on as Prime Minister until 29 March next year and deliver a no deal Brexit. Is that really her position?

The Prime Minister: I told my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) that we will be leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019, and we will.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The status of British-Irish citizens in Northern Ireland is protected under the Good Friday agreement, which means that, if they wish, they can legally renounce their British citizenship and receive no detriment to their social or democratic rights. Will the Prime Minister therefore state unequivocally that people born in Northern Ireland will continue after Brexit to be able to be solely Irish and to identify as Irish and therefore as EU citizens?

The Prime Minister: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that if he looks at the joint report that we agreed with the European Union last December, he will see that that matter was covered and that we are guaranteeing the continuing rights of those citizens.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): No one in the Labour Party underestimates how difficult the Prime Minister's job will be when she sits at the negotiating table with her MPs trying to hammer out a deal. If she is so confident of her position and of her public support, and given her failure to build consensus and compromise in the House, instead of losing a politicians' vote on her deal, as is now likely, why will she not put her deal to the British people to have their say over, and give their authority to, the final deal?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has found an ingenious way of asking the same question that some of his colleagues have asked. I answered that question earlier. This House will have a meaningful vote on the deal and, obviously, following that meaningful vote, if that deal is agreed, we will put the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill in place. It will be this Parliament that will determine that Bill and progress it through Parliament.

I return to the point that it is so important that politicians on both sides of the House recognise that, having given the vote to the British people, we deliver on the vote of the British people and that we in no way, as the shadow Foreign Secretary and the Labour party are suggesting, attempt to go back to the people and try to tell them that they got the first decision wrong. No, they have made their decision and we are delivering on it.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Prime Minister has mentioned the unique arrangements with the Government of remain-voting Gibraltar in order to protect their economy. Why has she ruled out the same unique considerations for the people of remain-voting Scotland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that the geographical position of Gibraltar is a particular issue, and obviously arrangements have been put in place over a number of years with Spain. That situation is different from that of Scotland, which of course, as part of the United Kingdom, will be leaving the European Union. Gibraltar will be leaving alongside the United Kingdom and we will ensure that the arrangements are in place to protect its economy.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The Prime Minister has estimated that there needs to be a six-week stockpile of food and medicine. What about manufacturing companies, such as Ford in my constituency, and the small and medium-sized enterprises that provide components? What if they cannot stockpile for six weeks? Will there be compensation for industry and for those employees who may be laid off because of chaos at our ports?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will have seen the various arrangements that are being put in place, which are mentioned in the technical notices that we have issued. We are making preparations for no deal, because we have not come to the conclusion of these negotiations. I believe that coming to a good deal is the best outcome for the United Kingdom, and I think the European Union side recognises the importance of coming to a good deal with the United Kingdom. A good deal for us will be a good deal for them.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Prime Minister says that negotiations with the EU are 95% settled. The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs has been taking evidence on trade, and witness after witness has made it clear how vital protected geographical indications are to Scotland's interests. What assurances can she now give us that such protections for the unique products of Scotland and the UK will remain as strong as they are now?

The Prime Minister: Geographical indications are one of the issues we have spent considerable time considering with the European Union, because we recognise their importance. The hon. Lady says I said that 95% of everything is agreed, but 95% of the withdrawal agreement has been agreed.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): Some 1.5 million young people have not had their chance to have a say on Brexit, yet they are eligible to vote. On the biggest issue facing us since the second world war, why deny them the chance to vote on this crucial issue for their future?

The Prime Minister: If we followed the position that everybody, in any year, who becomes eligible to vote should be able to vote on this issue, we would end up with a never-ending set of votes on Brexit, rather than doing what the British people want, which is to leave the European Union and to do it on good terms.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Prime Minister has on many occasions referred to the result of the 2016 referendum. Does she accept that, in a democracy, people have the right to change their mind?

The Prime Minister: Of course people sometimes change their mind, but the Government were very clear at the time, and it was not just the Government. In the vote in Parliament, the overwhelming majority of Members of this House agreed that there should be a referendum and that the choice should be given to the British people. [HON. MEMBERS: “Not us.”] So the SNP did not think that the British people should be able to decide their future?

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): If nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, is it possible that a successful amendment to the meaningful vote could send the Prime Minister back to renegotiate?

The Prime Minister: We are talking about coming to an endpoint in the negotiations, agreeing a withdrawal agreement and the future relationship, and then bringing that agreed deal back for this House to vote on.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister is keen to avoid a permanent customs union and single market arrangement, despite some Brexiteers promising the exact same benefits. If she is unable to achieve the exact same benefits, is it time to let

the people take back control either through a general election or a third referendum—after 1975 and 2016—on this issue?

The Prime Minister: No.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Prime Minister must know that, if she continues to hold herself to ransom on the whim of the minority of Members of this House who subscribe to either the ERG or the DUP, it will be a choice between a rotten deal and no deal. When will she see sense and seek to find consensus among the 600 Members who are not members of either of those two damaging splinter groups?

The Prime Minister: I hope we will find consensus among the 650 Members of this House when we bring a good deal back to vote on.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): If we have to accept a backstop, who will set the timescale for that backstop? The Prime Minister of the Irish Republic says that they will use the veto to ensure it is a never-ending backstop. Northern Ireland would then never have the benefit of leaving the EU.

The Prime Minister: The best way of ensuring no hard border is through the future relationship. The backstop we are looking at in relation to the Northern Ireland protocol to the withdrawal agreement is to cover any gap between the end of the implementation period and the coming into force of that future relationship. I want to ensure that the future relationship is there at the end of the implementation period so there is no question of a backstop. I am also clear that there can be no question of us finding ourselves left in that backstop in permanent limbo and unable to put that future relationship in place. That is exactly what we have been clear about in the negotiations.

Death of Jamal Khashoggi

6.27 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement on the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

From the moment that Jamal Khashoggi was reported missing after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October, extremely disturbing reports emerged about his fate. On Friday, we received confirmation that Mr Khashoggi had indeed suffered a violent death, and the Saudi Foreign Minister has since described it as murder.

The Government condemn Mr Khashoggi's killing in the strongest possible terms. Today the thoughts and prayers of the whole House are with his fiancée, his family and his friends, who were left to worry for more than two weeks only to have their worst fears confirmed. After his disappearance, the Government made it clear that Saudi Arabia must co-operate with Turkey and conduct a full and credible investigation. Anyone found responsible for any offence must be held fully accountable.

On top of our concerns about the appalling brutality involved lie two other points. First, Mr Khashoggi's horrific treatment was inflicted by people who work for a Government with whom we have close relations. And secondly, as well as being a critic of the Saudi Government, he was a journalist. At the time of his death, Mr Khashoggi wrote for *The Washington Post* and had contributed to *The Guardian*. Because in this country we believe in freedom of expression and a free media, the protection of journalists who are simply doing their job is of paramount concern. On 9 October, I conveyed this message to the Saudi ambassador in person and to the Saudi Foreign Minister by telephone. I instructed the British ambassador in Riyadh to emphasise our strength of feeling to the Saudi Government at every level. Last week, my right hon. Friend the International Trade Secretary cancelled his attendance at a forthcoming conference in Riyadh. On 17 October, I met Fred Ryan, the chief executive of *The Washington Post*, and I spoke again to the Saudi Foreign Minister this weekend.

On Friday, the Saudi Government released the preliminary findings of their investigation. They later announced the arrest of 18 people and the sacking of two senior officials, which is an important start to the process of accountability. But I will say frankly to this House that the claim that Mr Khashoggi died in a fight does not amount to a credible explanation. There remains an urgent need to establish exactly what happened on 2 October and thereafter.

The incident happened on Turkish soil, so it is right that the investigation is being led by the Government of Turkey. They now need to establish who authorised the dispatch of 15 officials from Saudi Arabia to Turkey; when the Government in Riyadh first learned of Mr Khashoggi's death; what became of the body; why there was a delay in allowing Turkish investigators to enter the consulate; and why it took until 19 October to disclose that Mr Khashoggi had died 17 days earlier. This matters because only after a full investigation will it be possible to apportion responsibility and ensure that any crimes are punished following proper due process.

Last week, I spoke to both my French and German counterparts, and the House will have noticed the strong statement jointly released yesterday by Britain, France and Germany. The actions Britain and our allies take will depend on two things: first, the credibility of the final explanation given by Saudi Arabia; and, secondly, our confidence that such an appalling episode cannot and will not be repeated. We will, of course, wait for the final outcome of the investigation before making any decisions.

Hon. Members know that we have an important strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia, involving defence and security co-operation, which has saved lives on the streets of Britain. We also have a trading partnership that supports thousands of jobs. Although we will therefore be thoughtful and considered in our response, I have also been clear that, if the appalling stories we are reading turn out to be true, they are fundamentally incompatible with our values and we will act accordingly. Indeed such reports are also incompatible with Saudi Arabia's own stated goal of progress and renewal. That is why the extent to which Saudi Arabia is able to convince us that it remains committed to that progress will ultimately determine the response of the UK and its allies, and we will continue to convey our strength of feeling on this issue to every level of the Saudi leadership.

In his final column, published in *The Washington Post* after his death, Jamal Khashoggi lamented the lack of freedom of expression in the Arab world. Let us make sure that the lessons learned and actions taken following his death at least progress and honour his life's work. I commend this statement to the House.

6.33 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): First, may I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement and join him in sending condolences to Mr Khashoggi's family and his fiancée, Hatice, a lady who waited in anguish outside the consulate for 11 hours while the Saudi butchers went about their barbaric work? She wrote this weekend:

"They took your bodily presence from my world. But your beautiful laugh will remain in my soul forever."

The worst aspect of this disgraceful murder is that none of us has been remotely surprised about it. For the past three years, my party has warned about the actions of Mohammed bin Salman, first as the architect of Saudi policy on Yemen and then since his elevation to Crown Prince—doubling the rate of executions in his first eight months; kidnapping and beating up the Prime Minister of Lebanon and forcing him to resign; and jailing women's rights activists and threatening to behead them. All those things have shown a man with no respect for the rule of law, no respect for international boundaries and no tolerance for dissent, all of which spelt the end for Jamal Khashoggi.

Of course, we have seen the Crown Prince's true face most vividly in his continuing campaign in Yemen: a strategy of blockade and bombardment that has killed thousands of civilians in airstrikes and put millions of children on the brink of starvation. When we look back at his air campaign, with the bombings of weddings, funerals and school buses, we have seen a repeated pattern played out. When major civilian casualties are reported, first they deny the reports are true; then they deny responsibility; and when the proof becomes

incontrovertible, they say it is all a terrible mistake, they blame rogue elements, promise those will be punished and say it will not happen again—until the next time, when it does. This is exactly the same pattern we have seen here, which speaks of a Crown Prince who takes his allies for fools and relies on the fact that his lies will be believed, he will be exonerated and everyone will return to business as usual once the publicity has subsided—well, not this time. Enough! It must not happen again.

The Government must wake up to the reality of who the Crown Prince is. It is just seven months since the Prime Minister rolled out the red carpet for him at Chequers, fawned all over him and hailed him as a great reformer. How utterly foolish she looks now, as some of us predicted she would do. The new Foreign Secretary has the chance to be different. He has just said, as he did on Friday morning, that if these stories are true there will be consequences for Britain's relationship with Riyadh. But I ask him: how much more confirmation does he need? It is time to move on from asking what happened in Istanbul and who gave the orders—we all know the answers. The question is: what will the consequences that he promised be?

I ask the Foreign Secretary to consider three immediate steps. First, will he use the new Magnitsky powers included in the sanctions Bill to apply financial penalties on all individuals, up to and including the Crown Prince himself, who ordered and carried out this murder? Secondly, will the Foreign Secretary accept that UK arms sales for use in Yemen must be suspended pending a comprehensive, UN-led investigation into all alleged war crimes? Thirdly, more than two years on since the UK presented its draft resolution to the UN demanding a ceasefire in Yemen, will he finally ignore the informal Saudi veto hanging over that resolution and at last submit it to the Security Council? Those are three ways to show Saudi Arabia that there are consequences for its actions, three ways to end its impunity and persuade it to change its ways, and three ways to show this Crown Prince that we will no longer be played for fools—we have had enough.

Mr Hunt: I thank the shadow Foreign Secretary for her statement and I share the horror that she expressed so powerfully to this House, but I will say this: she will know that, in my position, she would not decide what actions to take until the investigation was complete. I simply say to her—*[Interruption.]* The investigation, which someone has talked about from a sedentary position, is being conducted at the moment by the Government of Turkey, and it is not yet complete. We do not yet have the results of that investigation. There is a great deal at stake that is very important for the people of this country, including counter-terrorism co-operation and the jobs of people who depend on trade with Saudi Arabia. So although I believe all of us in this House share the outrage that the right hon. Lady feels—if these stories are confirmed—we have to wait for that investigation, and I know she would do exactly the same if she was in my shoes.

I want to make this point about the three suggestions that the shadow Foreign Secretary made. First, the Magnitsky Bill is a very important piece of legislation. It cannot be enacted in this country until we have left the European Union, but we will certainly be talking to EU partners about how we can act collaboratively using

EU structures. In fact, we have already had discussions about whether we should extend our sanctions regime to individuals responsible for human rights violations, which would allow precisely that to happen. But all these actions are far more effective when they are taken in concert with our European and American allies. Those are the discussions we are all having, but what we are all saying is that it would be wrong to make any decisions until we actually know what has happened. We have heard all sorts of media reports about these recordings, but to my knowledge none of us have actually seen transcripts or heard these recordings. The Turks say that all this stuff is going to be published. We do need to wait until we can see clearly the hard evidence as to what has happened. As I have made very clear this afternoon, if they turn out to be true there will be consequences and of course it will have an impact on the relationship with Saudi Arabia.

With respect to the other two points that the right hon. Lady mentioned, the situation in Yemen is heart-breaking. There is a humanitarian crisis at the moment—

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kempton) (Lab/Co-op): There's a war going on.

Mr Hunt: Indeed there is. I spoke to David Miliband about this when I was in New York for the UN General Assembly—perhaps that name is not supposed to be mentioned any more on the other side of the House. I urge the right hon. Lady to recognise that the faults in the crisis in Yemen go both ways. Saudi has made terrible mistakes, but missiles are also being fired from Yemen into Saudi—in fact, seven missiles have been fired at Riyadh—and the Saudi coalition is acting under the authority of UN resolution 2216.

Owing to our relationship with Saudi, we are able to press them hard to embrace a political solution, and that is what I did when I met the Saudi Foreign Minister on 27 September. I spoke to him about this on 16 August. I also met the Emirati Foreign Minister on 6 and 27 September to make that point. We are able to have that influence precisely because we have a relationship, but if we took the actions that the right hon. Lady suggests, our influence with Saudi and Emirates would be precisely zero, and the humanitarian crisis would most likely last longer.

The right hon. Lady talked about arms sales. The procedures we follow in this country, as she well knows, are among the strictest in the world. They were introduced by the late Robin Cook in 2000 and strengthened under the Conservative-led coalition in 2014. Far from selling arms left, right and centre, we do not sell to a number of large markets such as China and we do not sell to friendly Governments such as Lebanon, Libya and Iraq. In July 2017, the High Court ruled that our sales to Saudi Arabia were compliant with those regulations, but we keep the situation constantly under review, and that will include any implications that arise from the results of the Khashoggi investigation.

We are consistent in our championing of human rights across the world, but when I wanted to take action against Russia for the first ever chemical weapons attack on British soil, I was told by the Leader of the Opposition not to take action—action that was later supported by our European friends—but to return to dialogue. The difference between this side of the House

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

and that side is not what we believe in, it is how we get there. It is our belief that British influence depends on British strength.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am sure the whole House joins in expressing our sympathy to the Kashoggi family and his fiancée. Can I ask my right hon. Friend to talk a little about the situation we are in with Saudi Arabia? We have gone from having something that was far from a democracy, but was at least a consultative monarchy, to what is in many ways a unipolar autocracy under the Crown Prince. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this injection of vulnerability and instability into the Saudi regime is one that we should all be concerned about, but no one more than King Salman himself, who has allowed this instability in his kingdom, his rule and his house?

Although this vile murder stands alone for its horror, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is part of a pattern of abuse of press freedom that we have seen against YouTubers, critics and other writers in Saudi Arabia, and that therefore we should be very clear that this is not an individual act? The United Kingdom has been nothing if not a bastion for free speech and liberty of expression, and we must be firm in this instance too.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks extremely powerfully and he accurately points out the fact that autocracies are inherently less stable than countries that have democratic institutions, and there is a higher risk of appalling violations of human rights. It is fair to say that in the case of Saudi Arabia over recent years there has been a pattern of deterioration, but there have also been some conflicting signals, such as allowing women to drive and other things going in the opposite direction.

What I said clearly in my statement was that the impact in terms of consequences for our relationship with Saudi Arabia will depend on the confidence that we have that these kinds of incidents cannot and will not be repeated. Giving us confidence in the reform and renewal process, which is official Saudi policy, will be essential, and that needs to take on board many of the things my hon. Friend said.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): We on the Scottish National party Benches also send our condolences to the family of Jamal Kashoggi. Like so many others in the House, we are appalled by his murder by this—frankly—criminal act, regardless of how we look at it. We have seen acts throughout the world that show that the rules-based system is clearly under threat, and that should concern us all. We have rightly called out the Russians, so what consideration is being given to similar action against those who are found guilty of perpetrating this act? What independent investigations are taking place with the UK Government?

I welcome the remarks by the shadow Foreign Secretary and others about the use of the Magnitsky provisions, and I recognise what the Foreign Secretary has said about working with our European partners, because that will be vital. Freedom of press is critical here. It is critical when journalists are targeted in Turkey, in Saudi Arabia, in Russia or elsewhere in the world. We have to

target those individuals who are found to be guilty, and the Foreign Secretary will have support from these Benches if he does so.

The Foreign Secretary remarked, on the heart-breaking scenes we have seen in Yemen, that fault goes both ways. Millions are affected by a man-made famine—a man-made disaster. He has also recognised that there is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. If fault goes both ways and there is no military solution, why are we continuing to sell arms? Why can we sell arms to one of the perpetrators of that conflict when some of our European partners have made the decision to stop such arms sales? What is the difference between the UK and Germany, for example?

Mr Hunt: Let me take all of those points. When it comes to arms sales, we have strict guidelines in place, and we are following those guidelines. They involve an independent assessment as to whether the licences that we grant for arms sales present a clear risk of a future breach of international humanitarian law. We will keep those constantly under review. With respect to the situation in Yemen, I hope that he, like me, is proud that in the last year we have contributed £170 million to famine relief, one of the biggest contributions of any country.

With respect to the rules-based international order, I agree with the hon. Gentleman and it is a grave cause for concern that there are a growing number of breaches across the world. The rules-based order that we all want to protect has to be one that is based on values. What is shocking about the stories that we hear about what potentially happened in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul is the fact that it so clearly contravenes the values in which we all believe.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned other points about which I will happily write to him.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): It grieves me to have to say this, as a friend of the Saudis for nearly 40 years, but the Saudi explanation on this matter is completely implausible, and there can be no doubt that the order for this terrible crime came from the very top. Therefore, as good friends and allies of Saudi Arabia for many years, it behoves us to be extremely robust and candid with the Saudi Government. Yes, we have vital security and commercial interests with Saudi Arabia, and we do not wish just to blow them up. It is wrong to drop an inconvenient friend, but we in this country cannot tolerate such vile and brutal behaviour, and it cannot be allowed to pass without consequence.

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend puts it characteristically powerfully, not least because of his deep understanding and knowledge of the Saudi regime. Sometimes friends have to speak very frankly to each other. All I say is that, when we have full accountability for the crimes that have been committed, which we note that the Saudi Foreign Minister himself has described as murder, that accountability must extend to the people who gave the orders for any crime that was committed and not just to the people who were there on the ground, and that is an essential part of this investigation.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I urge the Foreign Secretary to rethink the Government's policy on Yemen. Yes, he is right that we should be

proud of our humanitarian aid, and, yes, he is right that there are appalling atrocities committed by the Iranian-backed Houthis and al-Qaeda, but we need to rethink this relationship with Saudi Arabia. I urge him to consider the proposals from the shadow Foreign Secretary today for a new UN resolution, for an independent UN inquiry and, in the meantime, for us to suspend sales of arms to Saudi Arabia that might be used in Yemen.

Mr Hunt: I do hear what the hon. Gentleman says and I do think that the situation is such that we have constantly to keep under review what is happening in Yemen. Although I have been Foreign Secretary for only three months, I can reassure him that I have been very involved in what is happening in Yemen. I have had four meetings with individuals directly involved on the ground. The truth is that this is a very, very difficult situation because, as he rightly said, there is fault on both sides. The Security Council still believes that the Martin Griffiths' approach is the right one to unlock the problems there, but the situation is very intractable. Both sides still seem to have the view that a military solution is possible. That is not our view. Our view is that the only solution here is a political one and we need to see much faster movement towards a proper political dialogue.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The whole House should welcome the clear and measured statement of the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. In particular, his reference to the Magnitsky provisions and to working with our allies, which the House insisted on being passed earlier this year in the face of what was a breathtaking and extraordinary act of state terrorism. Will he use this opportunity, as the new British Foreign Secretary, to review Britain's position as a good and candid friend of Saudi Arabia and move from supporting the Saudi coalition on Yemen, which is indubitably engaged in perpetrating a famine, destroying vital infrastructure from the air and killing innocent civilians, to a position of mediation and neutrality designed to end the fighting, broker a ceasefire and secure meaningful negotiations?

Mr Hunt: I always listen very carefully to what my right hon. Friend says. I know that he has immense personal experience and connections with people in Yemen. I want to reassure him that our position on Yemen is not dictated by the strategic partnership that we have with Saudi Arabia. What we say to Saudi Arabia and the UAE is that we are absolutely clear that there needs to be a political process. I believe—I have been in the job only a short time—that the partnership that we have with Saudi Arabia and the Emirates means that our voice is much more listened to than it otherwise would be. None the less, the situation on the ground is appalling and it persists and we need to continue to do everything we can to seek a resolution.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary said in his statement that it is right that the Turkish authorities should lead the investigation. Has that been made crystal clear to the Saudi authorities who seem to be implying that they can conduct their own investigation?

Mr Hunt: That is a very important point, which is why, in my statement, I issued a list of questions that I think the investigation needs to answer to be credible.

In particular, we need to recover the body and to find out why these 15 people were in Turkey and what their purpose was. We have not heard any of that. From my perspective, having credible answers to all these things is a very important element as to whether this investigation is credible at all.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): In Riyadh, the crocodile tears of the reported condolences of Mohammed bin Salman to Jamal Khashoggi's son, Salah el-Din Khashoggi, who is under a travel ban—he is effectively a hostage for his father's opinions—are particularly stomach turning. The Foreign Secretary told us that we must have confidence that these matters will not be repeated, but I do not see how we can have confidence that that would be the case if Mohammed bin Salman remains in place. If the lessons are to be learned and we are to honour Jamal Khashoggi's life work by ensuring a more open society in Saudi Arabia where criticism is seen as an asset to good policymaking and where there is a more open press to report this criticism, it can only come if there is a change of Government at the very top.

Mr Hunt: I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said as vice-chairman of the all-party group on Saudi Arabia. What he said echoes the words of the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee as well, which is that political reform and progressing that political reform is, in the end, the only way that the rest of the world will really have confidence that this kind of thing will never be repeated. That is the point that we will be making loud and clear to the Saudi authorities.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): A free press is essential to scrutinise power wherever it may be. If the Foreign Secretary is truly to honour Jamal Khashoggi's death, as he clearly wishes to do, he will commit today to challenging anywhere and everywhere any Government who seek to persecute, torture or in any way hold back the actions of a free press. Can he tell us a bit more about what he will be doing to promote that value worldwide?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. I do agree with her because attacks on journalists are becoming more frequent and they strike at the heart of everything we believe in when it comes to our democratic process. So, what can we do? First, what have I done? I make a point of raising the issue of journalists whom I am worried about with any regime that I meet—I raised the case of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, the Burmese Reuters journalists, when I met Aung San Suu Kyi. That is a practical thing and it is very important. I want all British embassies around the world to engage in that work where we have concerns about the welfare of journalists and about due process for journalists in prison, but there is a question as to whether we need to engage in a wider campaign to highlight the issue of media freedom, and that is something that we are considering at the moment.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Further to that question, without in any way wishing to diminish the horror of what happened to Mr Khashoggi, is the Secretary of State aware that Mr Khashoggi is one of 72 journalists, citizen journalists and media assistants who have been killed so far this year, according to Reporters Sans Frontières? May I, therefore, very much

[*Mr John Whittingdale*]

welcome his statement about looking to see what more can be done to protect journalists and urge him to pursue that internationally?

Mr Hunt: I am very happy to heed the advice of my right hon. Friend on that point. I had not heard the 72 number, but it is very sobering. All I would say is that, at the moment, there is a worrying trend, almost a fashion, towards autocracy and regimes thinking that they can attack freedom of expression and media freedom with impunity. That is something that the UK could never stand aside and allow to happen.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I thank the Foreign Secretary for the gravity with which he has addressed this outrage. He should be aware that the Committees on Arms Export Controls, on which I sit, have considered that it would be a good step for this country to take to ensure end-use certification for any arms that are sold. The United States do it, and it would be a demonstrable and transparent way in which we could ensure the end use for any arms sold. Is that something that he would consider in the course of how we assess our response to this outrage?

Mr Hunt: I am very happy to consider that, and I will look into the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises with a great deal of interest and get back to him.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on striking a measured tone in an extraordinarily difficult situation. I think that things will now unravel quite quickly in the Royal Kingdom, and the United Kingdom has the opportunity to play a unique role with so many in the Trump Administration compromised by their personal relations with some of the senior Saudis. If things are to change in the region and there is to be a rebalancing, will my right hon. Friend commit to playing a leading role and indulging in some shuttlecock diplomacy to get around the UAE in particular, Oman, Egypt, Kuwait and other like-minded countries to make sure that we can be part of the refashioning of a more open Saudi Arabia, which is what we had hoped was beginning to happen?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to make that commitment. I totally agree with my right hon. Friend about the importance of the Gulf Co-operation Council states. I agree also that we still have a lot of influence and many friends across the region and that our voice is still listened to. We have an obligation to use that influence as wisely as we can.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): There have been serious allegations in recent days that individuals who were potentially involved in this incident have been in and out of Government buildings here, including this place. I can confirm one, as one of the individuals met me to put pressure on me because I had been critical of Saudi policy on Yemen. What does the Foreign Secretary have to say about these allegations, and will he be changing his public or private advice to Members of this House, journalists or members of the public about travel to Saudi Arabia or entry into any of their consulates or embassies in any other country—or, indeed, in this country?

Mr Hunt: We keep our travel advice constantly under review. For example, I have recently changed the travel advice for dual nationals going to Iran. If we think there are heightened risks, we will say so. We are aware that some of the individuals who have been talked about in the press may have visited the United Kingdom when the Crown Prince came for his official visit, and we are looking carefully into what activities they undertook.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): May I endorse the words of the Foreign Secretary in his statement and urge him to put pressure on the Saudis, first to make sure that the body of Jamal Khashoggi is found promptly and that the man is laid to rest, and secondly so that our Saudi colleagues know fine well that under no circumstances can this behaviour be tolerated? Freedom of the press, if it is to mean anything, must be something that the Saudis demonstrate forthwith as part of a meaningful move forward.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on all those points. I would add that part of the reason for the strategic partnership we have with Saudi Arabia is stopping brutality by Daesh and other terrorist organisations, which is why it is of particular concern when there are reports that the Saudi state itself may have been involved in such brutality. That is why we have to get the bottom of this.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Just as it would be perverse for the Kremlin to investigate MH17 or the Salisbury incident, it would be utterly perverse for the House of Saud to have its fingerprints anywhere near this investigation. Although I would like to see the Foreign Secretary introduce an arms embargo, I welcome his announcement about the Trade Secretary not attending the upcoming summit in Saudi Arabia. Will he confirm that it will not just be Ministers who will not be going but that there will not be one official from any Department in London or from any of our embassies around the world?

Mr Hunt: We have made the decision about the Trade Secretary. We are looking at the issue of the attendance of other British officials and we will make a final decision shortly, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I think it is highly unlikely.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): First, let me express my absolute revulsion over this incident. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must avoid grandstanding until we know the full facts of what occurred? Any journalist, including Mr Khashoggi himself, who was such a great campaigner for freedom of speech, would understand that this is essential. Does my right hon. Friend agree with that and does he agree that, as and when necessary, we will use our influence and we will act?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The issue here is that in this country we support due process, which is what the reports suggest is absolutely what did not happen in the case of Mr Khashoggi. We must be true to our principles; we need to wait until this investigation is complete and then we need to support proper due process for anyone who was responsible for his terrible murder.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Germany has halted arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The Secretary of State prefers to wait. Is he suggesting that there is some way in which Mr Khashoggi could have met his death in the embassy that would be acceptable to him, and will he accept that whatever the result of the investigation, responsibility for the murder must lie with the autocratic ruler of what has now been shown to be a murderous state?

Mr Hunt: I have made it very clear that we need to find out who was ultimately responsible for happened and act accordingly, but on the question about arms sales, I think the hon. Lady is misrepresenting the approach we have in this country, which, as I mentioned earlier, was set up by Robin Cook, a Labour Foreign Secretary. In the past few years, we have suspended or revoked licences for arms sales to Russia, Ukraine, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. In 2015 alone, we refused 331 licences. We have one of the strictest regimes in the world, and we will follow the proper processes that we have in place in the case of Saudi Arabia as well.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): The idea that a man walked into the Saudi embassy and did not walk out while his wife was outside is simply appalling, and the accounts we have heard lack credibility. I have said in this place before that I was glad to see what seemed to be progress on women's rights and opportunities in Saudi, but this is not the sort of behaviour that we can accept from an ally. May I support my right hon. Friend's demand for a robust account of what happened and his plan to take robust action?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely—we will be extremely robust if these reports turn out to be true.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): This hideous crime took place in a Saudi embassy on Turkish soil. They are two countries known for imprisoning journalists regularly with impunity. The Foreign Secretary and his Government have so far refused even to countenance the suspension of arms sales to either Saudi Arabia or, indeed, any country like Turkey. Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House whether he prioritises human rights or arms sales?

Mr Hunt: I think that the hon. Gentleman is creating a totally false dichotomy. We have a proper, established, robust and thorough regime that is designed to make sure that we do not sell arms to countries where there is a clear risk of breaches of international humanitarian law. That applies to countries such as Saudi Arabia as well as lots of countries to which we could sell arms but to which we do not, because that clear risk exists. At the same time, when we look at the representations made by British ambassadors and British Ministers all over the world and at the fact we have the third largest development budget in the world, I think that it is hard to find a country that does more on human rights, but the point is that we have to do both.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I was lucky enough to meet the Turkish Foreign Minister some 10 days ago as details were emerging of this horrific event, and he was visibly and viscerally upset by what he was being told, of which we of course do not yet know the full facts. I welcome the measured tones of the Foreign

Secretary's statement, but does he have any timescale in mind for the investigation that will take place in Turkey, and has he offered full assistance to the Turks?

Mr Hunt: I, too, had a long conversation with Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu, and I echo what my hon. Friend has said; I think he was deeply personally shocked by the story. I do not think that the investigation will take a long time to conclude. All the suggestions are that it might even conclude in a matter of days. That is very important, because we need to start proper accountability through the judicial system for the people who were responsible for this terrible crime.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): UNESCO reports that nine out of 10 killings of journalists go unpunished. The Foreign Secretary's commitment to hold Saudi to account is undermined by his Government's choosing expediency over honour and sending UK officials, diplomats, to Riyadh this week. Will he give credibility to his commitment to justice and support the call by the International Federation of Journalists for a UN convention on the safety of journalists and media professionals?

Mr Hunt: I completely reject the hon. Lady's suggestion that we are choosing expediency. As I said in answer to the last question, I do not think any country does more than we do to champion human rights in every corner of the globe. We do that sometimes at commercial cost and often at diplomatic cost, but we do it differently in different countries. With countries such as China, if we were to raise such issues publicly, we would just lose access to the people who can make a difference. There are other countries where we raise such issues more publicly. The question is whether we raise them, and we do. The idea of a UN convention could be very interesting, and I will certainly look at it.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How stable is the Saudi regime?

Mr Hunt: That is a question that I would not want to answer in a hurry at the Dispatch Box, but I echo the answer I gave to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee: autocratic regimes are inherently less stable.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments about the fear that is felt by journalists around the world. In the Council of Europe, the platform to promote the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists identifies 126 journalists who are detained across member states of the Council of Europe. The committee of Ministers stresses that the law should provide for aggravated penalties to be applicable to public officials who act in a way that prevents or obstructs investigations. The Secretary of State has spoken about the rules-based order. Is it not the case that we can do far more with friends and closer friends? Is it not our duty to do so, and to do so loudly, so that others hear us say that journalists and freedom of speech must be protected?

Mr Hunt: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I am very concerned about that growing trend. Of particular concern to me is the increasing sense among autocratic regimes that they can take this kind of action

[Mr Hunt]

with impunity. This is not something on which Britain can act alone, so we need to build an international consensus with our democratic friends across the world. We need to say that such actions are unacceptable not just in our countries but anywhere in the world, and we need to use every bit of influence we have to enact that.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I listened to the Foreign Secretary's statement with care. Could he explain further to the House how collaboration with France and Germany has worked in this instance? It shows that despite the fact that we are going through quite tortuous negotiations to do with leaving the European Union, on issues of common cause, such as the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, we can find friendship and close collaboration with our European friends and partners.

Mr Hunt: That is an important question, which is, in a way, linked to the previous statement we had from the Prime Minister. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that such incidents remind us and our EU friends of the importance of our ongoing diplomatic partnership and friendship with Europeans. In such an instance of human rights violations, it is easy for the country responsible to start picking off people who say things that it does not like. That is why standing side by side with others—not just Germany and France but, I am sure, in this case, the United States—is a very important tool to have in one's diplomatic armoury.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The integrity of the rules-based international system relies on red lines and on consequences for breaching those red lines. What has happened to Jamal Khashoggi should be a red line, but so should the bombing of a bus full of children in Yemen, and so should the detention of the Lebanese Prime Minister.

If, as appears to be the case today, the Foreign Secretary is not yet willing to put forward a UN resolution, as the shadow Foreign Secretary has suggested; if he is not willing to call for an independent investigation, as the shadow Foreign Secretary has suggested; and if he is not willing to put in place the immediate suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, as the shadow Foreign Secretary has suggested, will he at the very least make sure that not a single Minister or a single official goes to that conference, which has been dubbed "Davos in the desert"? If the Foreign Secretary sends British officials to the conference in such circumstances, all the words that we have heard today—Labour Members welcome them—will ring hollow, and he will send a message to every tyranny in the world that they can do what they like, because there will be no consequences from the democracies of this world.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is somewhat misrepresenting the Government's position. In answer to an earlier question, I said that it was highly unlikely that any British official would be attending, and we are reviewing the position at the moment. We have already said that the Trade Secretary will not be going. If we are to have red lines, they have to be credible and they have to be based on evidence. We cannot make decisions when an investigation has not yet been completed. That is against due process, and it would not be the

right thing to do. We have to allow the investigation to happen and the full facts to emerge before we take our decision.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the joint statement between ourselves, France and Germany, showing a united front on what could be an appalling crime. What further steps is the Foreign Secretary planning to take in the international community to ensure that we get the answers we need?

Mr Hunt: First, we have made it clear in our regular contact with the Saudi authorities that there has to be a proper independent investigation and a credible explanation from Saudi Arabia of what happened, and we do not believe that we have had that to date. Secondly, when the facts emerge and when they have been confirmed, we will make a judgment with our allies about the appropriate thing to do. We have had lots of suggestions today of things that we could do, and we will make a considered response. I think that we have been very clear that that response will be commensurate with the scale of what has happened.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): CNN is reporting today, based on CCTV obtained from Turkish security, that a member of the assassination squad walked around Istanbul in Jamal Khashoggi's clothes after he was killed, in an attempt to show that he left the consulate alive. That shows a level of co-ordination that must have come from the top, and I do not know how much more evidence the Foreign Secretary needs to be persuaded of that. When he is persuaded, will one of the steps that he considers be to suspend diplomatic relations with what is increasingly seen as a bandit regime?

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman were in my shoes, he would not be announcing the actions that the United Kingdom would be taking until the proper investigation had been completed. I read the same media reports as the hon. Gentleman does, and when I see the stories of a body double of Khashoggi walking around the streets of Istanbul even though his fiancée waited outside the consulate for 11 hours for him to come out, it suggests to me that the story we are getting from Saudi Arabia is not yet credible. If we are to continue this strategic partnership, we need a credible explanation for what happened and we need to see the results of that investigation. I could not have been clearer: we will take serious action if these stories turn out to be true.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): We need to encourage liberal internal reforms in Saudi Arabia, and we need Saudi Arabia as a bulwark against the spread of Iranian-backed terrorist proxies across the middle east, but how can we persuade an absolute monarchy that political assassination is not a legitimate tool of government?

Mr Hunt: That is a very thoughtful question, and I think the answer is that all absolute monarchs feel somewhat insecure about their position. The way to increase their sense of security is to go down the path of reform, because that is what creates social stability, which in the end makes countries and their populations more stable. That is what we need to encourage.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): As has been alluded to, this is not the first time that critics of the Crown Prince have been attacked. In September, a Saudi human rights activist who sought refuge in the UK—in London—was attacked in Knightsbridge, allegedly by Saudi forces, after his location was revealed on social media. In such circumstances, what is the Secretary of State doing to protect citizens and defend freedom of speech in the United Kingdom, which is particularly critical of Saudi Arabia?

Mr Hunt: We have some of the toughest laws in the world to defend freedom of speech in this country. We will always do what it takes to defend that, and the independence of our press is the most powerful weapon we have in that respect. We are looking at all these issues and I want to reassure the hon. Lady that, when it comes to media freedom, we recognise that there is a pattern of wrongdoing here, and we are very concerned about it.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): First they said that Jamal Khashoggi had left the consulate alive. Then they said that he had died in a fight. While of course it is right to listen to the third explanation from the Saudi authorities, does my right hon. Friend agree that the credibility of those explanations has been seriously undermined by their decision to publish what is manifestly implausible?

Mr Hunt: I absolutely agree. Until we get to a place where the Saudi authorities are giving an explanation that they can corroborate and that is consistent with the evidence from other sources, people will continue to ask the questions that my hon. Friend is asking, and we will continue to not feel that we can have confidence that the Saudi authorities understand the gravity of what has happened and will truly make sure that it never happens again.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Many of us recognise the important strategic and economic relationship that we have with Saudi Arabia but simultaneously believe that its actions in recent months have simply put them beyond the pale. While of course we will allow the Turks to investigate what happened on their land, will the Foreign Secretary say that there is no credibility whatsoever to the suggestion that a 15-man hit squad came from Saudi Arabia and took part in the things that we have heard about but had no links back to Mohammed bin Salman?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is making the point that many hon. Members have made, which is that the explanations we have had from Saudi Arabia about what happened lack credibility. It is vital that this changes. The world needs to know what is happening, and if the world is to have confidence that Saudi Arabia is reforming and that these kinds of things will never happen again, we need to see a different approach.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I declare an interest, as per the Register of Members' Financial Interests: from March 2016 to January 2018, I advised the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, an independent think-tank and non-governmental organisation.

All those involved in the callous, brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi have to be held accountable at every level. One way to do that would be for the United Kingdom to call for an independent investigation at the United Nations, as was done following the murder of Rafic Hariri, the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, and in the case of Benazir Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, with whom I worked for eight years before coming to this place.

What we have seen from the Government of Saudi Arabia is pathetic, inconsistent explanation after explanation. The Foreign Secretary talks about consequences, and I urge him to ensure that the consequences are firm and decisive at every level, otherwise we get into the concept of "might is right", which leads to anarchy and chaos. I welcome his statement.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have to see what the outcome of this investigation is. If it is not credible or consistent with the facts on the ground, the avenues that he suggests may well be worth exploring.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Secretary of State will be aware that his own Department has criticised Turkish authorities in the past, based on their human rights record. Can he tell us a bit more about what discussions are taking place between his Department and the Turkish authorities on this investigation? Will he commit to meet the International Federation of Journalists, as others have suggested, to talk about a United Nations convention on protecting journalists? It is unacceptable that one in 10 killings of journalists ends up with a prosecution.

Mr Hunt: We have had extensive discussions with the Turkish authorities about their investigation, and we are encouraged that they think it will only be a matter of a few days before the full results are announced. I would be happy to meet the International Federation of Journalists.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary is correct to say that the full facts of this barbaric murder have not emerged yet, but key facts have emerged. It seems utterly implausible that the top forensic pathologist from Saudi Arabia is dispatched, equipped with a bone saw, when this is something to do with a fist fight. I was also shocked to learn that that named individual who visited the consulate in Istanbul was a graduate of Glasgow University, which raises questions about the unhealthy relationship between higher education institutions in this country and Saudi Arabia. Will the Foreign Secretary consider calling on Glasgow University to strip this barbarian of his degree in the first instance?

Mr Hunt: I am sure that the university will consider doing exactly that if he is found responsible for the crimes that are being alleged, but obviously that would be a matter for the university. I take the hon. Gentleman's point; he is saying what many hon. Members have said, which is that the accounts we have heard from Saudi Arabia as to why this happened do not seem to match the facts on the ground.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State correct the record? I think he misspoke earlier when he said that the coalition Government

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

had strengthened arms controls. The Committees on Arms Export Controls said in 2014 that there was a “substantive weakening” of the controls, and the Government themselves said that there was no material change.

The Foreign Secretary referred in his statement to the judicial review of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The review said that the CAEC conducted the independent scrutiny, but the Secretary of State for International Trade refused to attend CAEC hearings last year. Will he attend CAEC hearings this year? The Foreign Secretary himself has said that the Saudi investigation into this murder is not credible, so why do the Saudis investigate their own war crimes in Yemen? Will the Foreign Secretary now demand a UN investigation into this rogue state? Will he also acknowledge that security information from this state is rarely useful, as a senior civil servant said today on the radio, and that we should suspend co-operation in that area?

Mr Hunt: It is for the Home Office to make its assessment of the usefulness of the counter-terrorism intelligence-sharing relationship that we have with Saudi Arabia. All I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that the information I have had is that it is important. With respect to his other comments, I was telling the House what I have been informed of in my briefing notes by the Foreign Office, but I am happy to write to him to explain why I said what I said.

Points of Order

7.27 pm

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I gave notice of this point of order to the Speaker’s Office this afternoon. It is about the Government’s widespread briefing in today’s papers about their taking new powers and initiatives on grade inflation in universities and whether the Minister for Universities will use the teaching excellence framework to facilitate that without having brought this matter to the House.

Amendment 23C to the Higher Education and Research Bill required the Secretary of State to commission an independent review of the TEF within a year of the Act’s commencement, requiring that the review and subsequent review must cover all aspects of the TEF and whether it is fit for purpose. The Government gave me a commitment in writing that they would announce the review by autumn 2018. Despite that, they have failed to bring anything forward on the independent review, yet today they have been briefing the press on their plans to use the TEF for this new purpose, even though they have not even announced its review. In the light of that, is it right for the Department for Education to push out policy changes on the hoof to the media, without coming to the House to give a proper statement?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As ever, he knows, and the House knows, that that is not a matter on which the Chair can rule or take immediate action, but I can well understand from his description of what has happened why he wants to bring the matter to the attention of the House, and by raising this point of order, he has very effectively done so. I hope that the relevant Minister will note what he has said, but if he does not get the response that he hopes to get in the proper way, I am sure that he will raise this matter again with the Chair through one of the orderly ways in which such matters can be raised.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hesitate to raise yet another point of order on the ongoing clinical waste fiasco, especially as Mr Speaker has very generously granted me two urgent questions about it in recent weeks. However, it seems that every time the Minister for Health comes to the House, his statement unravels within days. Last week, he was specifically asked whether it was true that unqualified drivers were driving hazardous waste from Yorkshire to Slough. He did not answer and he said he was not aware of what was happening in Slough. Now we learn, yet again from the *Health Service Journal*, that Department for Transport officials had in fact granted a special licence for this waste to be transported in this particular way, even though it is in breach of the normal safety regulations. Indeed, just last week another licence was granted—this was before the Minister came to the House—to Mitie to allow it to take waste to Slough, and yet another licence was granted to allow it to take waste to Littlehampton in west Sussex.

The Minister did not say any of this in his statement last week, so could you advise me, Madam Deputy Speaker, of an appropriate way to express my disappointment

and get it on the record? Could you also let me know whether you think that Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care are as clueless as those making decisions in the Department for Transport?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. On this second point, no, I could not let him know whether I think that Ministers are useless or perfect in the way in which they undertake their duties. That is a straight answer from me: no, I could not let him know that.

On the hon. Gentleman's very important point, he will know, as the House knows, that of course the Chair is not responsible in any way for what a Minister says at the Dispatch Box; that is up to the Minister. I assume that the Minister has said what he has said in good faith, but the hon. Gentleman has an argument with that. He has asked me how he can put his concerns on the record, and again I will give him a straight answer: he has just done so most effectively. I am sure he will get a response from the Minister, and if not, I am sure he will be able to use one of the proper forms of bringing a question of an urgent nature to this House.

We now come to the presentation of a Bill by Mr Frank Field. The notice of presentation has been withdrawn.

OFFENSIVE WEAPONS BILL

Bill to be considered tomorrow.

Business without Debate

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With the leave of the House, we will take motions 8 to 12 together.

Ordered,

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

That Patrick Grady be discharged from the Administration Committee and Marion Fellows be added.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

That Michelle Donelan be discharged from the Education Committee and Mr Ben Bradley be added.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

That Bim Afolami and Luke Graham be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Nigel Mills and Chris Davies be added.

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Paul Masterton be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Kirstene Hair be added.

WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Glyn Davies be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Guto Bebb be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Paediatric Cancers of the Central Nervous System

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

7.34 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to have been granted this important Adjournment debate. In all honesty, I wish I was not having to take part in it, but on 29 January, Cian Case, a six-year-old little boy from Llanharan in my constituency, tragically died after suffering a relapse of an aggressive cancer of his central nervous system. Cian was a young, gentle and happy young boy whose life was lost too early—far too early. It was a privilege to meet Cian at a fundraising rugby match in March 2016. I will never forget his warmth and acute sense of humour about his condition, or indeed the look of joy on his face at the fact that the community had come out in their hundreds to support him.

Cancer is a foe that every single Member will have experience of. Whether it be a sibling, a parent, an aunt, an uncle, a friend or even somebody we have just got to know in passing, Members across this House, as well as the people we serve, will have had cancer touch their lives and will know of its life-shattering effects. There is no good time for anybody to get cancer, but as I am sure you would agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is particularly harrowing and particularly life-changing to live through your child's suffering with, and eventually dying from, this terrible disease.

It may come as a surprise to many Members across the House that, on this occasion, I do not stand here to point the finger of blame at the Government or to take a swipe at the NHS in England, or indeed in Wales. Instead, I seek to tell Cian's story in the hope that we can work together, on a cross-party and cross-Government basis, to help to ensure that no family has to go through what Cian Case's family underwent.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and on speaking so movingly about his young constituent. Having experienced having a seriously ill child, I know that one vital thing in such a situation is the care that hospitals provide not just for the child, but for the parents and the carers who spend a great deal of time there. Does he agree that there should also be a focus on that as we move forward on this crucial issue?

Chris Elmore: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to him for the bravery that he and his wife, Rebecca, have shown over William. I am so pleased to see pictures of him now looking so well and on the road to recovery.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward such an important issue as an Adjournment debate. We have some three hours to complete the debate, so he has tons of time. About 400 children are diagnosed with a central nervous system tumour in the UK each year, accounting for a quarter of all childhood cancer cases. Like the hon. Gentleman, I salute the doctors, nurses and carers for all the work that they do in looking after these children. Survival rates for other cancers have significantly increased

[*Jim Shannon*]

in the past 50 years, but the same cannot be said for brain tumours. Many charities and research groups are working in collaboration to find a cure. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that more needs to be done to raise awareness, find a cure and ensure that parents are fully aware of the key signs and symptoms in babies and young children?

Chris Elmore: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. I hope my speech will go some way to highlighting that more work is needed, and to paying tribute to parents and families who have lost children through this horrendous condition.

Cian was first diagnosed with an atypical teratoid/rhabdoid tumour in 2015, when he was four years old. This type of tumour, often called an AT/RT, is a very rare and rapidly growing tumour of the central nervous system. Cian's primary tumour was found on his spine, with seeds of the cancer also found in his brain. In the majority of cases, AT/RT is associated with a specific genetic mutation, INI1, which can occur spontaneously or be inherited. However, genetic testing in Cian's instance did not indicate that he had this specific mutation. Cian's tumour was located on his spine. AT/RTs are generally located anywhere in the brain, but are most commonly found in the cerebellum—the base of the brain—and in the brain stem, which is the part of the brain that controls basic body functions. The fact that Cian's tumour bucked this trend made a difficult medical situation even more complex. AT/RT was previously thought to have been a type of medulloblastoma. However, it is now known that this is a totally different type of cancer and cannot therefore be treated via the same methods.

Mercifully, childhood cancer is rare in itself. The majority of children who are sadly subjected to this disease are diagnosed with a form of leukaemia. Brain tumours are much more rare, and AT/RTs make up only between 1% and 2% of these cases. I hope this illustrates just how tragic it was that Cian contracted not just cancer, but a cancer of the rarest of forms. This, however, is exactly why we have to do something. We have to do something to remember Cian and ensure that his legacy is that other families may be prevented from suffering a similar fate.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his wonderful speech and pay tribute to Cian's family for all they have done on this issue. Will he join me in paying tribute also to Cancer Research UK, which in the past 12 months has tripled its funding for brain cancer research, understanding that it has been under-researched up to now? Should we not be encouraging the Government and working with them to do all they can to ensure that research into these key cancers continues?

Chris Elmore: I agree entirely. I am sure the Minister will set out the extra work the Government here and the Administrations in Scotland, Cardiff and Belfast are doing.

The very fact that these cancers are rare often makes it difficult to get a research cohort together, but we cannot allow that to be a barrier to finding new treatments and even cures for such illnesses. The treatments currently available for childhood cancers in the brain or spine tumours

range from neurosurgery to radiotherapy, chemotherapy and steroids, and finally proton beam therapy. The course of treatment is tailored to the individual case, with patients typically undergoing multiple treatments. Sadly, AT/RT patients do not typically have good survival rates, and outcomes are poorer if a child has signs of tumour spread at diagnosis. We cannot accurately predict the outcome for any individual child who has developed such a tumour, but children diagnosed who are less than 12 months old are less likely to be able to fight the disease.

It will come as no surprise to hon. Members when I say that the key to fighting this disease in the long term lies in medical research. There are many competing priorities in medical research, with many historic frontiers yet to be conquered, but we must ensure that all forms of illness that cause pain and suffering receive the attention and the willingness to tackle them they deserve. I welcome the announcement from the Department of Health and Social Care earlier this year that the UK will invest £20 million in brain tumour research over the next five years. In addition, Cancer Research UK is investing £25 million to support that work. Will the Minister say what percentage of that funding will be used specifically for research into paediatric cancers?

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. This year, I have attended the funerals of two very special and inspirational people. One was well known to us in this place: Dame Tessa Jowell, who led a valiant campaign against brain cancer. I welcome the Government's response to her efforts. The other was my eight-year-old constituent Kaleigh Lau, who waged an equally valiant fight against diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma—a particularly rare form of brain tumour. May I endorse what my hon. Friend says about the importance of specific funding for childhood brain tumours, including rare conditions such as DIPG? May I also through him urge the Minister to look again at support, especially financial support, for families who travel long distances—in Kaleigh's case, to Mexico—to access experimental, often successful and life-extending, treatment? That needs to be looked at, so that in future the life expectancy of a child depends not on how much money their parents have or can raise, but on whether our Government are prepared to ensure that all children have access to potentially life-extending treatment.

Chris Elmore: I agree, and I will touch on the impact on families later in my speech. People talk of the late Baroness Jowell—Tessa—and her legacy. There can be no greater legacy than securing the additional research funding through her campaign on tackling the causes of brain tumours. Of her many great achievements, that has to be the one that will live with all of us the longest.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend will be aware of CLIC Sargent's campaign. In an event today, the charity highlighted the cost of travel for families with children who are in treatment. The average is about £200 per month. We need to do a lot more to support families and to cover some of those costs.

Chris Elmore: I agree. Often with children's cancer, one member of the family—usually the mother—has to give up their job to be a carer. That has a massive impact on the family. I completely agree with my hon. Friend that that has to be addressed.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being generous with his time, debating an important subject that has been raised several times in this House. I rise to pay tribute to two constituents—Alex Logan and Luke Stewart—who lost their lives recently. I have spoken to the Minister and others about treatment abroad, and I urge the Minister and the NHS to look more widely for possible cures and to be—I phrase this carefully—more open-minded about where the answers may lie.

Chris Elmore: I agree with my hon. Friend and endorse his tribute to his two constituents. I will speak later about some of my asks regarding international research, to which I hope the Minister will respond positively.

It is of course vital that we continue to undertake the best research possible into brain tumours in adults, but I must impress upon the Minister that it is essential that we give equal priority to childhood cancers. It is extremely positive to see groundbreaking work being undertaken in Wales, including through the Wales Cancer Research Centre, which is funded by the Welsh Government and led by Cardiff University. In recent years, it has been very positive to see the new drug/radiation combination trials coming to Wales, which could lead to new world-leading treatments being made available in the Welsh NHS. Clinicians and politicians of all political colours agree that this is an uphill struggle, but I know that it is a fight that colleagues in the Welsh Government will face head-on.

I pay tribute to the charities doing such vital work to advance research. I am pleased that the charity Brain Tumour Research is working closely with Cardiff University to fund research into some of the most aggressive forms of brain tumours. I know that Brain Tumour Research and CLIC Sargent have raised concerns about the hidden costs of treatments for the families of patients being treated for such cancers. CLIC Sargent finds that parents of children suffering from cancer spend as much as £600 a month on top of their normal travel expenses. We must work together, across health boundaries, to decrease that cost and provide financial support where possible.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Cian's parents? As a parent in a similar position, I know how difficult it is for them to talk about their personal loss and to campaign for their son. They should be applauded for their courage in allowing us to discuss this important issue.

Chris Elmore: I thank my hon. Friend for her, as ever, courteous and heartfelt intervention. I know of the trauma she is facing in her family life. Richard and Lorraine are extraordinary people, as are their wider family. I have been impressed by their courage throughout Cian's illness and, now, his passing.

We must not forget those who are lucky enough to survive such aggressive forms of cancer. Survivors often face a lifetime of other health complications, including mobility issues, cognitive challenges, infertility, growth complications and other conditions that require a high level of medical support. We must ensure that aftercare for those children is world class, and that they are able to lead as full, happy and long a life as possible.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this Adjournment debate to raise awareness of an important

health condition. He described how the tumour affecting his constituent was in the cerebellum and is now discussing the long-term effects for survivors of childhood brain tumours. Both treatment and recovery are determined to some degree by the location of the tumour, which can vary widely. I remember clearly a young patient who had a tumour so close to her brainstem—the part of the brain that controls breathing, which we do not think consciously about—that she had to live in intensive care for many months during her treatment, because at any point she could stop breathing. I remember sitting with her when she was making a cotton wool collage of a winter scene and she simply stopped breathing. When she was awake, one could say, “Breathe,” and she would make a conscious effort to breathe; if she was asleep or distracted, or no one was paying attention, she would have passed away. She needed that constant reminder. That is why it is important to ensure not only that we have research and medical treatment during illness, but that for recovery there is a multi-disciplinary team—physios, speech therapists, occupational therapists and so on—so that children who survive these awful tumours make the fullest possible recovery and can live the fullest possible lives afterward.

Chris Elmore: I agree with the hon. Lady entirely. There is clearly a need to look not just at treatment but at what comes next. If we are to improve survival rates, which we must—research is a key part of that—then we need to look at what comes next for these families and for the children who, touch wood, will survive.

Mark Tami: We must not forget mental health either. It is very important that we provide support and counselling afterwards. After what these young people have gone through, it is important they receive mental health support.

Chris Elmore: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is such an important part of the recovery that families go through. That a child has cancer is in itself a huge trauma. What comes next is so important, and mental health for both the child and the family cannot be forgotten. This again underlines the life-changing effects of cancers such as AT/RT on a child. It will in all likelihood impact on every aspect of their life.

There is a great deal of positive work happening in this House. I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debonnaire) and her colleagues on the all-party group on children, teenagers and young adults with cancer, who recently held an inquiry into patient experiences of childhood cancers, the findings of which were published this year. After discussing the inquiry with my hon. Friend, I would like to thank the Minister for the positive contribution he made to it. I ask him and the Secretary of State to look at the report's recommendations. Many are comparatively inexpensive and would make a huge difference to the children and their families who find themselves in this situation. I appeal to the Minister to update the House on his response to the all-party group's findings.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and for the very kind tribute he paid to the all-party group for its inquiry. Many of the panel members are in the House today. I would just like to add my support to what he has just

[Thangam Debbonaire]

asked of the Minister. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be good if the Government could commit to greater education and awareness? Although it is rare, the signs and symptoms of cancer in children need to be picked up early. The earlier they are picked up, the more likely it is that treatment is successful.

Chris Elmore: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I again pay tribute to her and her leadership not just on childhood cancer but on cancer generally. She is a true heroine of the cause and we are extremely grateful to have her in this House. It is clear that there is positive work being undertaken on this issue, but it has to be said that we can do more, much more, to help to tackle this disease.

Members across the House will remember when our dearly missed friend, the late Baroness Jowell, spoke so movingly, just days before Cian passed away last January, about the need to work much harder to make brain tumour research more effective. Tessa stressed the need to support the Eliminate Cancer Initiative to improve the chances of tackling this rare illness internationally. The creation of a clinical trial network around the world, an increase in the use of active trials, and the use of a global database would help to improve research and patient care. As Tessa so rightly said, through sharing knowledge across borders, and thereby at a local level across medical governance structures, we will be best placed to advance our knowledge of the most difficult and rare forms of cancers, including cancers of the central nervous system.

Making that happen will involve further investment in research into specific tumours such as AT/RT, and international collaboration to ensure that we have the best minds and the most innovative technology working on the most difficult of challenges. I believe the UK Government can be doing more to facilitate that. When Ministers visit other countries abroad, more often than not the two principal reasons for the trip are to further international trade or promote international security, both of which are of course vital. However, it is my view that in discussions with our foreign counterparts the issue of international research must rise up the agenda if we are to have any hope of accelerating our efforts in this area.

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is being very generous with his time. I am reluctant to introduce Brexit to this debate as we spend so much time discussing it, but on that specific point we have to ensure that we maintain research co-operation with other EU member states, not least so that we get the scale of rare cancers. In the week in which my local NHS trust announced it is closing the chemotherapy unit at King George hospital because of a shortage of chemotherapy nurses, may I gently ask the Minister to ensure that we recruit and retain, from both here and across EU member states, the staff we need to provide the high quality of care and treatment our constituents so desperately rely on?

Chris Elmore: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I will move on to the big B and the big C shortly.

Many of the children Cian was in hospital with had previously been sent abroad to participate in medical trials, including proton therapy. Will the Minister please

look at what more we can do to collaborate with international drug trials and trials of new therapies to ensure that we have the most up-to-date treatments available here in the UK? Just as cancer affects so many people, so our efforts to counter it must include as many people as possible. This is simply not something that we can tackle alone.

Sadly, while the majority of my remarks have been about the big C, I must, as ever, touch on the big B. As we leave the European Union, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is for us to continue to work with our European partners to fund research, and indeed to undertake research ourselves into rare cancers. It is vital that we continue to play our part in EU research and development projects of genuine international importance. We must also continue to work with the European Association for Cancer Research, because we simply cannot sacrifice the potential new cancer treatments we will uncover in the name of, in my view, a misguided sense of regaining sovereignty. Indeed, the current treatment is agreed at EU level. Having first been established in 2002, the treatment was last fully reviewed in 2009. The drugs being used to treat this type of cancer are old in relative terms, showing what a vital role international governance can and will play in helping to improve outcomes in the future. Overall, the message I want to get across today is clear. So many cancers rightly receive a great deal of attention and research funding. I would argue that, just because rarer cancers, such as the one Cian suffered from, affect fewer people, that does not mean that we should not be as targeted or as innovative in our efforts to fight them.

If you will allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to mention briefly the brilliant and selfless work Cian's family have been doing to raise awareness of this particular type of cancer, and their work in fighting for new research and treatments for such paediatric cancers. Cian's father, Richard, is in the Gallery today. I pay tribute to him and Cian's mum, Lorraine, and his siblings Dillan aged 11 and Bethan aged 9, for their bravery. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] From when Cian was first diagnosed in November 2015, to when he was told in June 2016 that the tumours had gone, through to when he sadly relapsed in November 2017, his family have tirelessly raised awareness. His community have fundraised and, since his passing, they have continued their efforts.

I pay tribute to Cian's family for all their efforts in the most difficult of circumstances. I would like to thank the whole community of Llanharan, the surrounding villages and far beyond, whose support for Cian has been unwavering. The online funding page set up following Cian's death raised in excess of £6,000, which is going to help the charities who supported Cian and his family throughout his treatment. I am sure you will agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this shows what a mark this little boy has made on his local community. Likewise, I am so proud of all the staff, pupils and parents at Llanharan primary school, the school Cian attended, who were so supportive to Cian throughout his journey and who have been there for his parents and friends since. I was privileged to attend the memorial event they held shortly after Cian died. I am always proud to serve my constituents from the many communities across Ogmere, but I have to say that being part of this outpouring of love in the most tragic of circumstances

was truly a privilege. I would like to put on record my thanks to Cian's headteacher, Mrs Price, his class teacher, Mr Arthur, and all his school friends and the wider school community for the support and generosity they have shown Cian and his family. They planted bulbs which will bloom every year in his memory, so that Cian can never be forgotten.

I admit that there is no easy answer to the issues I have raised today. It will not be solved overnight simply by throwing money at it. The sad reality is that while we seek to meet some of the challenges, other families like Cian's will sadly suffer the same anguish in the future. It is therefore essential that we raise awareness of the symptoms to look out for to ensure that this disease can be caught early, giving those unlucky few the best chance of survival. The National Cancer Institute finds that children who have developed AT/RT may experience the following: headaches, particularly in the morning; nausea or vomiting; fatigue or lethargy; difficulty with balance and co-ordination; and an increase in the size of their head. Because AT/RT develops so quickly, these symptoms can onset incredibly quickly over a matter of days or weeks. The symptoms can also vary depending on their age and the precise location of the tumour.

It is only right that I highlight the fact that many of these symptoms represent common medical conditions in both children and adults and, in the majority of instances, will not mean that a child has developed a brain tumour. If a parent ever has any doubt in their mind, however, I would always encourage them to seek medical advice. In Cian's instance, he began experiencing stomach pains that were originally thought to have been abdominal migraines. In reality, it was the pressure of the tumour restricting the spinal cord that transmitted the nerve pain on to his torso.

Cian touched the hearts of all those around him. He was a warm, fun-loving and generous boy. While tragedies like this thankfully do not happen every day, when they do happen, it is only right that we reflect, pay tribute and act to help to ensure that we prevent such instances happening again. Cian was delighted to have met the Speaker during his visit to Parliament and No. 10 Downing Street back in 2016. While I would have liked him to have had the opportunity to return to this House, sadly this will now not be possible. Instead, we must ensure that the House comes together to support those affected by cancer and send a message that our determination to beat it—across all parties—is utterly unwavering.

I thank Members from across the House who have remained in the Chamber to hear Cian's story and I thank the Minister for taking the time to consider what more we can do about this important issue. The key point I have stressed today is not party political; it is that we must continue to advance our knowledge base across the UK and, most importantly, internationally. By steadfastly supporting the Eliminate Cancer Initiative and redoubling our efforts to find new treatments, and, hopefully one day, a cure for cancers of the central nervous system, we can ensure that Cian's legacy lives on.

Cian was a young boy with his whole life ahead of him. I appeal to the Minister and every Member: let us help to ensure that more children survive such cancers in his memory.

8.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I, too, wish we were not here, but let me congratulate my friend the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) on securing this evening's debate. I commend him on his support and the incredible tribute he gave to Cian and Cian's family this evening, and on the way he has handled the debate. For those who know him, in both the Government and the Opposition, it is rather typical of the man.

From what we have heard this evening, it is clear that Cian was a very special little boy who touched many people in his short life. I have seen his "Cian's Kicking Cancer" campaign online, including the picture of him with his hands out in front of the No. 10 Downing Street door—it is a lovely photo—and I pay tribute to the determination of Cian's parents to raise awareness of paediatric cancers. The way that they have been supported by their local MP is brilliant.

As the cancer Minister, I all too often hear of the devastation that this terrible disease can bring to people and their families, but nothing is as heartbreaking as when a child is affected. I said last week in the breast cancer debate that a life lived long or a life lived short is still a life lived, and I passionately believe that a life lived, short or long, still leaves an indelible mark on this world and still changes this world forever, even in a small way. From what the hon. Gentleman has told the House this evening, there is no question but that Cian has left his mark and changed the world a little bit. We will do our best to honour that and see whether we can change it a bit more.

Every day, at least 12 children and young people are told that they have cancer. When they are born—I have children myself—we all imagine bright futures for our children and the things that we want them to do, but cancer robs many children of that future and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is relatively rare in young children, but that is absolutely no consolation to the parents of a child with cancer. It can even be worse to know that and inevitably leads to questions such as, "Why me? Why my child? They haven't made any lifestyle choices." Cancer is indiscriminately cruel, and that is one of those awful truths that we face in life.

It is great that we have so much time for this debate. I know that there has been a bit of knockabout that the business finished early again this evening, but I genuinely believe that there is a reason why that happened, and we are going to make the most of it. I start by reassuring the House and those watching that cancer absolutely is a priority for me—I think most people know that—and for this Government.

I happened to be in the Tea Room before coming into this debate and the Prime Minister popped in after her marathon stint on her statement this afternoon. She asked me what I was working on and I said that I was doing this debate tonight. We spoke about how remarkable the way in which the House comes together in these debates is and how there is a concentrated audience for such debates. I know that the hon. Gentleman has put out on social media networks, as I am sure many others have, the fact that this debate is happening tonight, and I know, many people will be watching, so let us be clear: fighting cancer is absolutely central, as the Prime Minister

[Steve Brine]

said in her conference speech, to our long-term plan for the national health service in England—I have to say “in England”, because I am an English Health Minister, and the English cancer Minister. It will build on the progress already achieved in the cancer strategy and will set out how we will achieve our ambition that some 55,000 more people in England will survive cancer for five years each year from 2028.

I am absolutely committed to ensuring that our plan transforms outcomes for children with cancer over the next 10 years. The fantastic work being done by NHS cancer doctors and nurses, as well as the invaluable support that we get from our incredible cancer community, is helping us to achieve our vision of transforming cancer services for children and young people.

As I have said, childhood cancers are mercifully rare, but 1,600 children under 15 are still diagnosed each year in the UK. Central nervous system cancers are estimated to account for 25%, with 400 children diagnosed each year. Brain cancers alone account for more than 100 CNS cancers, making each cancer extremely rare.

It is true that survival for children’s cancer has gone up over the past decade, with five-year survival for children’s CNS cancers at 75%—that is how we measure it, but, of course, if people develop a cancer in their 70s, a five-year survival rate is a more significant achievement than for those who develop a cancer when they are under five. The survival rates have gone up, but there is not an ounce of complacency in me; we will and must keep working hard to go further and faster.

Treatment of CNS cancers varies depending on several factors—age, the tumour growth rate and the location and size of the tumour—but, as the hon. Gentleman said, it will usually involve a combination of surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy, depending on the clinical need. To ensure that patients have access to the latest, most cutting-edge technology wherever they live, we have invested heavily—some £130 million—to modernise NHS radiotherapy equipment. Over the past two years, 73 trusts have had their older linear accelerators, as they are known, upgraded or replaced, and that is an important thing that we have done—[*Interruption.*] Cheltenham is one of them, says my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk)—who says that PPSs do not speak in the House? He sits there diligently day in, day out, so why not?

The hon. Member for Ogmores mentioned proton beam therapy and I want to touch on that. In the past few years, there has been an increase in the use of PBT—for those who do not know, it is an advanced form of radiotherapy—for treating children with CNS tumours. It uses high-energy proton beams to treat the cancer much more precisely. These targeted doses of treatment have less impact on surrounding healthy tissue and fewer side-effects. In childhood cancers, that is critically important—the hon. Gentleman mentioned side-effects of treatment with regard to fertility, for instance.

Until now, PBT for children has been commissioned from overseas. We have sent children to America and to Germany. That is why we have invested £250 million to provide PBT services in England. I am delighted that the first NHS centre, at the Christie in Manchester, is scheduled to begin treating patients this autumn. A second

facility is due to open at University College London Hospitals in London in 2020. I had the pleasure of visiting the Christie shortly after delivery of the giant ProBeam proton system, which is a significant engineering feat. The scale and complexity of the technology is truly breath-taking, and I am tremendously excited that we will shortly be providing PBT on the NHS in England, sparing patients the upheaval, discomfort and cost—I will come on to that—of travelling abroad for treatment.

Although survival rates for CNS cancers have been improving, some children will unfortunately suffer relapse, as we heard in Cian’s case, and treatment options can sadly be limited, even for palliative care. That is why NHS England is reviewing whether additional radiotherapy treatments, such as stereotactic radiosurgery and stereotactic radiotherapy—there is a difference—would be suitable for these patients. I am following that work closely, as I am interested in and excited by its potential.

This month, NHS England published the draft national genomic test directory for cancer, setting out how whole-genome sequencing for paediatric brain tumours and other genetic tests are now being considered for CNS cancers. I hope that introducing those tests will support better tumour identification and more targeted treatments for CNS cancers in children, and give hope to many others.

Perhaps the most exciting development in our efforts to treat childhood cancers successfully is the increasing availability of personalised treatments such as CAR-T therapy, about which there is understandably a lot of excitement in the medical community. With the introduction of more personalised and targeted treatments and different treatment options for children with CNS cancers, NHS England is reviewing how best to ensure that children receive the available treatment and from the relevant clinical team, now and in the future. We expect the availability of more personalised treatments to be a real game-changer for childhood cancers. The work is still in its early stages, and it will involve clinicians, service providers and charities as it progresses, but I will of course update the all-party group, which I will come to in a moment, as it develops.

Research, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, is a crucial part of the fight against brain tumours. In May, we announced £40 million over five years for brain tumour research through the National Institute for Health Research, as part of the late Tessa Jowell’s brain cancer mission, which includes research for children with brain cancer. I only met Baroness Jowell once, unfortunately, but I was left in no doubt about what she wanted me to do—her legendary determination was very much in evidence. I very much enjoyed meeting her and Jess, her daughter, who is carrying on much of the work.

The hon. Gentleman talked about research projects. Baroness Jowell’s mission is about stimulating quality research projects—a point that the late baroness was able to nail as soon as she started to look into it. Although the NIHR spent £137 million on cancer research in 2016-17—the largest ever investment in a disease area—it does not allocate funding for specific disease areas. It does not have a basket for each disease area. Spending has to be driven, therefore, by scientific potential and the number and scale of quality funding applications.

The baroness was very pithy and understood immediately that we needed to stimulate the market in brain tumour research to enable quality research proposals to come

forward. After that, the clinical research network, which is recruiting for or setting up more than 700 cancer trials and studies, including studies into childhood cancers and brain tumours, can press forward and do its work. Funding for paediatric cancer research is critical.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about international research. I absolutely agree that international collaboration is key for successful research on rare diseases such as CNS and childhood cancers. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that we want to work closely with Europe in science and research and that the UK is committed to establishing a far-reaching science and innovation pact with the EU, facilitating the exchange of ideas and researchers and enabling the UK to continue to participate in key programmes alongside our EU partners. Whatever “take back control” meant—one day I will be told—it did not mean that we are not to work with our EU partners in such areas. I am determined that it will not mean that, as are the Government. The Chancellor has also made it clear that he will guarantee EU structural and investment funding and underwrite payments for competitive EU research awards through the Horizon 2020 underwrite guarantee, which is a very important project.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Eliminate Cancer Initiative, which the late Baroness Jowell made sure I was acutely aware of. Its tagline “Making cancer non-lethal for the next generation” is really neat, and we certainly support it. It has huge global potential and reach. As he mentioned, given my international health brief, I travel to talk to Ministers from around the world. I was at the G20 earlier this month. The G20 and G7 have Health Minister meetings, as they should do; I certainly hope they will when we have the chair. I would like to see international research collaboration, specifically on cancer, on one of the G20 or G7 agendas. The hon. Gentleman’s point was well made. I will take it up with my officials so that, as we lobby for the chair of the next meetings, we talk about that. It would be an interesting piece of work that we as fellow Ministers could do. I know that people think that sometimes these international meetings are talking shops, and of course there is an element of that, but actually an awful lot of good stuff goes on and an awful lot of other agencies—the OECD, the World Bank, the EU—are part of those meetings. If Ministers decide that this is part of our agenda, that will make a difference and move the dial.

Several Members have talked about awareness of childhood cancers and I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said about the all-party group on children, teenagers, and young adults with cancer. I am pleased to see my friend the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debonnaire) in her place. I welcome the establishment of that all-party group on the specific needs of children and young people with cancer. It is an excellent all-party group—several of its members are or were here. I was delighted to give evidence to its patient experience inquiry earlier this year. She had some of her patient advocates there, who asked great questions as well, and I commend it for an excellent report. I do not have to do this for all-party groups—I do for Select Committees—but I have undertaken that the Department will respond line by line to its report. I will definitely do that. It is not ready yet, but it will happen.

One of the all-party group’s recommendations was on signs and symptoms, which I will come on to, and another was on the cost of travel. The hon. Member for

Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) mentioned the CLIC Sargent report that highlighted the financial impact of travel on the families of young cancer patients. It is a really good piece of work. I assure hon. Members that the Government are working to review the service specifications for children and young people with cancer. This will help us to consider how some aspects of the patients pathway might be provided more locally to reduce the travel burden for patients and their families. There is the other element: sometimes that cannot be done and people have to travel for treatment. The NHS cannot do everything brilliantly everywhere—clearly, specialisms are sometimes needed. That is why we have the healthcare travel costs scheme, which is part of the NHS low income scheme. It allows for patients’ travel costs to be reimbursed if they are in receipt of a qualifying benefit or are on a low income. The scheme helped some 337,000 applicants to receive financial help with their NHS treatment. I am very interested in the recommendations of the all-party group on that and I assure its members that I am taking great note of them.

Dr Caroline Johnson: I am pleased to learn that my hon. Friend takes such an interest in reports from all-party parliamentary groups. Will he undertake to look equally carefully at the report that will be produced tomorrow by the all-party parliamentary group for children who need palliative care, known as Together for Short Lives, which I co-chair with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell)? It looks at how we provide palliative care for children with cancer and other life-limiting and life-threatening conditions.

Steve Brine: I will now take an intervention from the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting).

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the Minister for his thoughtful response to the debate. Will he and the Department look carefully at the issue of access to experimental treatment and financial support, and also the issue of control? One of the conversations that I had with Tessa was about how she had to wrest back control over her own choice in relation to risk and access to experimental treatment.

It would be hard enough for adults to make such choices for themselves, but parents are having to make those difficult choices, too. Some parents feel that they are making the best decisions for their children in turning down the opportunity of access to experimental treatment on the basis of an assessment of the risk and the impact on the life that they have left, while others choose to access such treatment in the interests of their children. While there are challenges in respect of the governance and, perhaps, some of the ethics of those arrangements, we must put a bit more trust and faith in parents. When they choose to access experimental treatment, even if the Department will not fund access to the treatment itself, it might be able, reasonably and ethically, to provide more support than it currently provides in respect of the associated costs of, for instance, travel, accommodation and subsistence.

Steve Brine: I will look into that. The late Baroness and I talked about exactly that subject. I do not think it is so much about ethics; I think that this must be clinically led. There is a great deal of debate in the

[Steve Brine]

clinical cancer community about the toxicity of concurrent treatments. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the costs, and the importance of supporting parents who must make decisions which are hard enough when people are making them for themselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) mentioned an all-party parliamentary group of which I was a member before I was a Minister. I take all-party parliamentary groups so seriously because I used to lead loads of them. I spent hours writing reports, and, dare I say, I wish that they were sometimes taken as seriously as I take such reports.

It is in all-party parliamentary groups that a lot of good work goes on in the House. Opposition Members, who are not in government at this time, have a huge role to play in moving the dial. The smart Ministers are the ones who say that they do not know everything. The lines that the civil service gives them are often great, but they are not the be-all and end-all. I see APPGs as a brilliant and rich vein of knowledge for me, and I learn a lot from them. So yes, I will look out for my hon. Friend's work in Together for Short Lives.

My constituency contains one of the best children's hospice trusts, Naomi House and Jacksplace. My heart goes out to the child hospice movement and my respect for it is ample, and what Together for Short Lives does to represent that movement is incredible.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): There is also a fabulous children's hospice in Stoke-on-Trent, the Donna Louise Trust, which goes above and beyond its remit to support not just children with life-limiting conditions, but their families. Most children's hospices depend almost 100% on charitable giving and fundraising to undertake such work. Should not we, as a society, be considering that, and should not the state have a role in helping to provide the service when it is needed?

Steve Brine: There is a role for the state, but the hospice trust in my constituency told me many times that the last thing it wanted was to be 100% reliant on the state. It does not want to be an arm of the state; it enjoys its charitable status. I remember taking delegations from Naomi House, and from the sector, to meet David Cameron when he was Prime Minister, and I think that we could do a lot better in relation to the specialised commissioning of these services. It is still too confusing and too confused, and still too patchy from clinical commissioning group to clinical commissioning group. We are determined to do better in that regard.

Before I went off on a tangent, I was talking about awareness of childhood cancers, which a number of Members mentioned. We must improve awareness of cancer, full stop. I am very proud of Be Clear on Cancer's "blood in pee" campaign, which is part of my brief. However, as someone who has young children, I know that the challenge is striking the balance between educating children about the warning signs of cancer and frightening them about a risk that is relatively low at their age. My motto would be that the best must not be the enemy of the good.

A number of Members will know about the work of the Teenage Cancer Trust and CoppaFeel! The hon. Member for Bristol West certainly does, because of the

work that she has done in relation to breast cancer. CoppaFeel!—I still think that that is the best name for a charity that I have heard since I have been doing this job—is run by Kris Hallenga, a brilliantly brave young lady who has terminal breast cancer. It ran a superb cancer awareness campaign in schools, about which I have talked to secondary schools in my constituency. It is sensitive and evidence-based, and pitched very appropriately.

I recently took both those charities to discuss their campaigns with the Minister for School Standards, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb). As the House will know from a statement made by the Secretary of State before the summer recess, the Department for Education will be consulting on its health education guidance until 7 November. I encourage charities, all-party parliamentary groups and parents to put forward their views on how we might go further to educate children about cancer. That is critical if we are serious about prevention, which we are.

Let me end by putting on record my tribute to the NHS doctors, nurses, support staff and charities, and our colleagues in the wider cancer community—Team Cancer, as I call it—who work so tirelessly every day to ensure that our constituents, and thousands of children like Cian, benefit from the support and the expertise that give them a chance of recovery and a full life. They are true heroes. They are the ones who will oversee the potential for huge progress in the next 10 years on the cancer diagnosis, treatment and support that we hope to see.

Chris Elmore: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way again—we are in the unusual position of having lots of time, as he has pointed out. I am not sure whether this is in order, but I want to thank him most sincerely for the open way in which he has spoken and responded to Cian's story, and for the commitments he has given this evening, which will be welcomed across the House and by Cian's family, particularly the commitment to respond to the all-party parliamentary group and the international commitment on the G7 and the G20. I am enormously grateful, as I know every cancer sufferer and every family member of a cancer sufferer will be. I pay tribute to him, in a rare moment of affection and thanks in this House, which often resembles a bear pit more than anything else, because he clearly has an enormous commitment to the cause that is cancer.

Steve Brine: That is a very nice thing to say. I thank the hon. Gentleman.

In closing, we think that the NHS long-term plan, with cancer right at its heart and with the new north star ambition on early diagnosis and 75% early stage detection, will turbo-charge all that we have already achieved. We are on track to achieve that through the cancer strategy. Last Thursday, in the Westminster Hall debate on breast cancer, I said that I want to see a future where cancer has no future. Maybe I am naive and ambitious, but I want to reiterate that today, because I think that we could achieve that. If we are ever to achieve that goal, I sincerely hope that we can begin by first eradicating all childhood cancers, because many people are relying on us.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I commend the Minister, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) and everyone who has taken part in the debate for showing what this House of Commons can do when it treats a sad but important subject in a serious, hopeful and positive way. Too many people see

us as just arguing for the sake of it, so I hope that some will notice that progress can be made in this Chamber.

Question put and agreed to.

8.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 22 October 2018

[DAME CHERYL GILLAN *in the Chair*]

Autism and Learning Disability Training: Healthcare Professionals

4.30 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 221033 relating to autism and learning disability training for healthcare professionals.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. You are an expert in this issue and have campaigned on it for many years. I am sure you wish you could be contributing to the debate.

The petition text is particularly important, so I shall start by reading it to inform hon. Members fully and to put it on the record. Paula McGowan, the petitioner, wrote:

“My son Oliver was only 18 when he died in hospital on 11 November 2016. I believe his death could have been prevented if his doctors and nurses had received mandatory training. He had autism and a mild learning disability, and they weren't trained to understand how to make reasonable adjustments for him. One in four healthcare professionals has never had training on learning disability or autism. This is unacceptable. Two thirds want more training, and one in three think a lack of Government leadership is contributing to the problem of avoidable deaths. The Government must ensure all healthcare professionals get mandatory training to address the huge health inequalities facing people with autism and a learning disability.”

That is the wording of the petition which I speak to, and I open the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I point out to the many people watching or following the debate that in the main Chamber, the Prime Minister will shortly make a statement on last week's EU summit and that many hon. Members who would have liked to contribute to this important debate have faced a difficult choice, which is perhaps why we are relatively few.

I will start with some background. In 2016, Oliver McGowan died in hospital. He was autistic and had a mild learning disability, mild cerebral palsy, and partial seizures. I will read his mother's account of what happened. She is waging a powerful and brave campaign. As she told me, nothing can bring Oliver back, but she wants to ensure that lessons are learned properly, so that in future, others will be safer. She would very much have liked to deliver the account herself, but under Parliament's current rules, it is not possible for her to speak in the debate. Her account is lengthy, but it is important that it is heard in full. This is Oliver's story, in his mother's words:

“Oliver enjoyed college, playing football and was an amazing athlete, in training to become a Paralympian. Oliver loved life and being with his family. He was bright, achieving GCSE and BTEC qualifications, was a member of the school council and head prefect. He was a fit and active teenage boy and yet on the 11 November 2016, aged 18, he died in Southmead hospital, Bristol, in circumstances that his family believe were entirely avoidable. When we brought him to A&E with absence type seizures, we thought he would be in hospital for a couple of days at the most, and he would go to college the following week as planned.

Oliver had mild hemiplegia, absence type partial seizures and a very mild learning disability as a result of having meningitis as a

baby. He also had high functioning autism. His additional needs were not obvious to most people, but anxiety was a challenge for him.

When Oliver turned 17, his absence type seizures increased and on several occasions he had to spend time in hospital for investigations. His seizures caused him to become anxious, scared and agitated and due to this, his high functioning autism became more obvious.

In October 2016, aged 18, Oliver was admitted to an adult hospital having absence type partial seizures. Oliver explained the seizures as being like several bees buzzing down one's ears whilst you are trying to think and go about your day; incredibly frustrating and distracting. He was conscious throughout and was very scared and anxious.

A&E staff were presented with Oliver's hospital passport, detailing how his autism and learning disability affected him and how to make reasonable adjustments. It also detailed his allergies to antipsychotic medications. This was not read but placed in a drawer without a glance.

Several doctors were talking to Oliver at once, using complex language that was hard to understand. When Oliver wanted to walk around (a normal part of his seizure activity) he was restrained by several members of staff, which heightened his anxiety.

Oliver had said clearly to the ambulance staff, he was happy to go to hospital, but he did not want to be given antipsychotic medicine, giving sound reasoning, stating 'they mess with my brain and make my eyes go funny'. He said this again in the hospital, as did we, providing letters from previous consultant doctors explaining Oliver's reactions to medications and busy hospital environments.

Previously, when these exceptionally strong medications had been trialled to help Oliver's anxiety in seizure, we had seen Oliver's behaviour change in a way we had never seen before: hallucinating, tearing at his skin with significant increase in seizure activity. We knew that Oliver was not psychotic or mentally ill. Previous senior psychiatric consultants had said the same thing, that Oliver was not psychotic or mentally ill but a teenager who had high functioning autism and a mild learning disability impacted by partial seizures. They wrote he was sensitive to medications, especially benzodiazepines. The doctors in A&E wrote 'antipsychotic medication' in red in the allergies box on all of Oliver's ICU patient 24 hour care charts. The A&E doctor also sent an email to all doctors treating Oliver that he was sensitive to all antipsychotic medications.

Oliver was sedated and placed on life support in A&E to investigate his seizures. A few days later, whilst Oliver was still on life support and against Oliver's and our strong wishes, he was given an antipsychotic drug called Olanzapine. Doctors said it was to control his anxiety when he woke up, even though we explained to them that when any seizures had finished Oliver immediately returned to his normal mild mannered self.

Oliver never woke up; the Olanzapine caused him to develop Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome, or NMS. His brain swelled so badly it was bulging out of the base of his skull causing irreversible brain damage. We were told that Oliver would be blind, deaf, no memory, no speech and would be reliant on breathing machines including tube fed.

Oliver died on Armistice Day, a fitting day given Oliver's father is a serving senior officer in the Air Force and Oliver had lived his whole life as a military child. We can all agree that Oliver was certainly a very brave young man.”

Paula goes on to say:

“If the doctors and nurses had been trained to understand how to make reasonable adjustments for him (someone with autism and a mild learning disability), they would have known how to adapt the environment to meet his needs. There would have been no need to use a 'chemical restraint' and he would not have had the NMS reaction to this type of medication.

If doctors and nurses had had the training to support Oliver's medical, social and emotional needs effectively, they would have known how to adapt their communication, using humour to settle his anxiety in a crisis, and de-escalate the situation further. They

[*Daniel Zeichner*]

made a decision about how to manage potentially challenging behaviour as Oliver came out of sedation. They did not properly explore alternatives to using antipsychotic medication. A senior safeguarding nurse had advised a non-pharmaceutical approach. There was time to do this and consult with other professionals who knew Oliver best and were treating him in the community, as he was sedated and stable in intensive care. This did not happen although there was time.

I believe that ignorance of learning disability and autism cost Oliver his life, and we must never allow this to happen again. I believe that if Oliver hadn't had a diagnosis of autism and a learning disability, and presented in hospital with the same symptoms, he would not have been prescribed an antipsychotic. Oliver's death is not an isolated case, with evidence in relation to learning disability showing 1,200 avoidable deaths every year, and women with a learning disability dying nearly 30 years earlier than the general population."

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I can see that my hon. Friend is coming to the end of his peroration, so I thought I would intervene briefly. I understand that the Government have announced a review, but does he not agree that something a little more urgent is needed?

Daniel Zeichner: I am not coming quite to the end, but I have almost reached the close of Paula's statement. I think my hon. Friend will understand from the suggestions later in my speech that I absolutely agree with her conclusion.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman not find it shocking and surprising that younger people with autism or learning difficulties have a higher incidence of dying in hospital than older people living with those conditions? It is hard to know exactly why that is, but he is discussing the case of a very young man that resulted in a completely unnecessary death.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady is very expert on such issues. I, too, am struck by that statistic. I do not know the answer, but it is the kind of thing we need to find out about.

To conclude Paula's statement:

"Mencap's Death by Indifference report, published ten years ago, set out many areas of concern behind avoidable deaths, and these findings have been built on by the detailed information now coming out of the national mortality review (LeDeR) process. Mencap's Treat me well campaign report states that 1 in 4 doctors and nurses has never had any training on learning disability. This was our experience and is unacceptable, that's why I launched this Government petition for all doctors and nurses to receive appropriate higher level mandatory training which could have saved Oliver's life.

There needs to be a culture change in the way people with autism and a learning disability are treated by NHS doctors and nurses. This needs to be led from the top down by doctors and the GMC. It is not acceptable that people who have autism and learning disabilities die for no other reason than health professionals have not been properly trained on how to support them and work outside the limits of the medical model. We must do everything in our power to prevent future deaths like Oliver's from happening again."

That is Paula McGowan's account. She started this petition to Parliament calling for mandatory autism and learning disability training for healthcare workers. The petition now has more than 50,000 signatures, and Paula is present in the Public Gallery to watch our proceedings.

An inquest has found that the medication was not wrongly prescribed, but Oliver's family and Mencap were very unhappy with the inquest's conduct and conclusions. The family firmly believe that better understanding of Oliver's autism could have prevented his death. Paula believes passionately that Oliver's experiences should lead to change, so that a lack of understanding does not result in future deaths.

There have been other cases such as Oliver's, and every premature death of young person who is autistic or has a learning disability is a tragedy that we should be able to avoid. When Connor Sparrowhawk—or LB, as he is known—passed away in Slade House in Oxford, his mother called for:

"An effective demonstration by the NHS to making provision for learning disabled people a complete and integral part of the health and care services provided rather than add on, ad hoc and (easily ignored) specialist provision."

There are, sadly, many other cases. Only last week, for example, a high-profile case was in the media about Bethany, aged 17, who has autism and extreme anxiety. She, it seems, has been locked in a seclusion room for almost two years.

Last week, I met a local volunteer-led group, Caring for Cambridgeshire's Homeless, who help homeless people in Cambridge. I was introduced to a 21-year-old man with autism and learning disabilities who is living on the streets. His safe place: behind a wheelie bin, at the back of a shop. His case is complex, but while volunteer interventions are a lifeline for that young man, he should be getting professional medical support from those trained to understand his needs.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with my constituent, John Hobbs, whose grandson is autistic, about the need for a national database for autism and associated conditions designed for the purposes of splitting the autism spectrum into subsets?

Daniel Zeichner: I am not sure that I am sufficiently expert to answer that question straight off, because it is a complicated one, but it is certainly worth looking into further.

I shall explain some wider issues too. This weekend, I attended the excellent Volunteer for Cambridge event organised by Cambridge City Council and volunteer services, where I met Heather Lord from Cambridgeshire Healthwatch and Tara Forkin from Cambridgeshire Deaf Association. Tara told me, through the signer, about the experiences of deaf people in the health system. They, too, find that treatment is sometimes administered to them in ways they find baffling and frightening, too often with no one finding a way to listen to them. As Heather rightly asked, almost 25 years after the controversies around the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which some of us still remember, why are people continuing to have to fight the battle? Why is it not yet won?

This subject is clearly highly sensitive. The examples I have given highlight heartbreaking incidents. Clearly, we must work harder and put measures in place to ensure that other people are kept safe after we as a society have failed Oliver, LB and 1,200 other avoidable deaths each year, according to research by Mencap. Even more remains to be done, however.

We must go back to the very beginning, as access to healthcare from the start can be extremely difficult for those with autism or learning disabilities. Seemingly simple tasks—to most of us—such as making an appointment over the phone, are a barrier to many of them. If we cannot make an appointment, or if we feel anxious about doing so, we are less likely to seek healthcare, even if we are experiencing symptoms that others would immediately refer to a doctor.

Some autistic people and people with learning disabilities find expressing themselves difficult, especially if that includes discussing intimate personal health issues, whether physical or mental. Some learning disabilities or types of autism make it harder for people to work out the sensations that their bodies are feeling, which can make it more difficult for them to realise that they are ill or need support. In terms of mental health, the group therapy sessions, for example, which work so well for some people, are often inaccessible to those with autism, who can feel very socially anxious.

Last week, the all-party parliamentary group on mental health, of which I am a vice chair, published its review, “Progress of the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health: On the road to parity”, which underlined the mental health inequalities that I have been discussing. That report recommends:

“Health Education England should improve development and training of frontline care staff with a specific focus on mental health, learning disability and autism so the existing workforce is supported and equipped to deliver direct care and support to those groups.”

The report explains:

“We heard that people with learning disability or autism (or both) routinely have their referrals to mental health services turned down because some services ‘do not accept referrals from that group’. Mental illness presents very differently in people with a learning disability or autism. As a result, symptoms of mental illness can be wrongly attributed to a person’s learning disability or autism meaning that this group does not receive the treatment they need for their mental health problems.”

Also, according to the report, the esteemed Baroness Hollins, a leading member of the APPG inquiry, emphasised throughout that

“services are legally obliged to implement reasonable adjustments so people with learning disability or autism or both can engage with mental health services. This doesn’t appear to be happening.”

Many doctors and nurses of course strive to understand autism and learning disabilities, and to adapt their practice to better cater for those needs, but with increased pressures on staffing and endless demands on the time of medical professionals, alongside increased demand, that will inevitably not be the case for every single individual in the NHS. We must better equip and empower our healthcare workers.

With the right training, doctors and nurses can help autistic people and those with learning disabilities feel more comfortable and, ultimately, receive better, more focused healthcare. Everyone working in the NHS will see autistic and learning-disabled people, even if unaware of it. Some of those workers could have an inaccurate or narrow view of what someone with a learning disability looks like, or of the traits of an autistic person, due to inaccurate stereotypes or unhelpful media representation of such conditions. All frontline staff, therefore, from GP receptionists to consultants in accident and emergency,

should receive some evidence-led training about autism. The development of that training should be informed by autistic people and their families.

Paula McGowan has called for doctors and nurses to receive advanced training—tier 2—in autism and learning disability as soon as is reasonably practicable. She expressed to me that it must cover legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 1983, focusing on key areas such as reasonable adjustments to care, consent and best-interests decision making. She would like it to be

“mandatory that Oliver’s story should be used as a case study in all training”,

and for the training to be named after him: the Oliver McGowan mandatory training. As Members present will agree, Oliver’s story carries huge weight, and attaching his name will exemplify the training’s deserved importance.

We need to focus on supporting the health professionals who see autistic people and people with learning disabilities most often to understand the nuances of their health. The community is diverse, and some of the physical and mental health problems those people experience require responses different from those required by non-autistic or non-disabled people.

Dr Whitford: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I speak as a breast cancer surgeon of more than 30 years. The issue lies not so much with medical and nursing staff, who deal often with autistic people or people with learning disabilities, but with the people who do not deal with them often. It is those people—people in A&E and other hospital departments—who do not have the skills who really need training.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. Training needs to be provided to all staff, but absolutely, those who are not exposed to such people are a particular issue.

My comments so far have been decidedly non-partisan, and I hope Members from across the House are able to support most of what I have suggested. However, before concluding, I must make some observations about the staffing pressures that affect our public services—particularly changes to student nursing bursaries.

We have heard in the House many times that the current financial settlement for student nurses is insufficient given the intensity of their courses. I and many others believe that nursing students need bespoke financial support if the Government are to meet their commitment to growing the nursing workforce. Those students need support for living costs to incentivise a wider range of applications. There are many ways that can be done—through universal grants for students in recognition of their placements, means-tested grants to maintain diversity or targeted support for parents and carers, as many nursing students come to university later in life.

Since the coalition Government came to power in 2010, specialist areas such as learning disability and mental health nursing have been the worst hit by the wider staffing crisis. Those specialties struggle to recruit, since mature students are particularly likely to choose them. The Royal College of Nursing reports that there are 40.5% fewer learning disability nurses—2,176 fewer full-time equivalent nurses—today than in 2010. Despite Government claims, the removal of the NHS bursary in England failed to increase the number of nursing students.

[*Daniel Zeichner*]

Recent data shows that the number of students accepted on to nursing courses in England has fallen by a further 4% in the past year, and by 8% since student funding was removed in 2016.

Intelligence from RCN regional networks indicates that directors of nursing across England are escalating concerns about course provision. They are concerned about the stark regional variation in course provision for learning disability nursing—particularly the risk of course closures in the south of England—which may exacerbate existing regional workforce supply disparities. The huge workforce pressure risks poorer care for learning disabled people. A commitment from the Government to encourage students into learning disability nursing may improve standards of care and patient safety.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that, while Brexit dominates much of our time in Parliament, we must also have the opportunity to debate and get into the granular detail of important issues such as the one he highlights?

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. We could probably find favour across the House and across the country for moving on from some issues at the moment, but she is absolutely right—such issues are very pressing and probably of huge importance to most people, especially when failure to address them leads to the kind of tragedy we have heard about.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As a Bristol MP, I thought it was particularly important for me to be here. Southmead Hospital is not in my constituency, but the University of the West of England nursing course provision is. I back up entirely what my hon. Friend says about the difficulty of getting qualified nursing staff. If staff are to have all the extra responsibilities and training that have been suggested, we must ensure that the sector is properly resourced and that properly trained people come through into the profession.

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which I am sure we will return to. Whatever changes there are in our relationships with other countries, the shortage of qualified nurses is a huge problem—it is something like 22% in my constituency. We are unlikely to make progress on this issue unless we have the people to do it.

It is difficult to make that point at a time of such intense financial pressure on the NHS, but I remind the House that that pressure is a choice. We are a rich country, and a change in the allocation of resources could dramatically change the state of our healthcare system. However, that stress, which stems from a lack of resources, staffing, beds and specialist care, can lead to a culture in which it is difficult to provide personalised care and have the confidence to deviate from established procedure.

Let me conclude on a slightly more optimistic note. In September, in a written statement in response to the learning disability mortality review, the Minister committed to completing a public consultation on proposals for mandatory learning disability training for all health and

care staff. However, that change must be quick—we cannot afford it to end up, like so many Government initiatives, in endless consultation and no action.

In England, there is a duty in the Autism Act 2009 statutory guidance for all health and care staff to have appropriate autism training, but the implementation of that duty is poor. In response to a 2016 Public Health England survey, only 17% of localities reported having training plans for all health and care staff, while 10% reported having no plan in place. The Government must commit to mandatory autism training as well as learning disability training.

The National Autistic Society remind us:

“In August, NHS England announced that autism, alongside learning disability, will be one of its four clinical priorities in the upcoming 10-year plan to improve health services. This is a great step towards making sure that autistic people are supported by the NHS just like anyone else. Alongside tackling long diagnosis waiting times and supporting good mental health, we believe that the Long Term Plan should outline a comprehensive national training programme for all health staff.”

The learning disability mortality review, which was published in May, found that men with a learning disability die on average 22.8 years earlier than the general population, while women die 29.3 years earlier. Autistica’s research shows that autistic adults without a learning disability are nine times more likely than non-autistic adults to die from suicide—a truly shocking statistic. Mencap’s research shows that almost a quarter—23%—of healthcare professionals have never received training on learning disabilities, and almost half believe that has contributed to avoidable deaths. Beyond nurses and doctors, we need to train NHS workers such as receptionists and facilities managers on how small adjustments can hugely increase access for disabled and autistic people.

I am grateful for the opportunity to open this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. Paula McGowan’s powerful testimony shines a clear light on what needs to be done. The case is clear. We cannot risk any more cases like Oliver’s. This cannot afford to wait.

4.57 pm

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak, Dame Cheryl. I recognise your expertise and knowledge in this area. As one of the leading Members of the House, you have worked tirelessly to represent the rights of those with autism, and you took the Autism Act through Parliament. My comments will pale in comparison. Your position today prevents you from speaking, but I want those watching the debate to know how indebted Members on both sides of the House are to you for your efforts.

I speak in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Kingswood, near Bristol. My constituent, Paula McGowan, has worked tirelessly and courageously to highlight the tragic death of her son, Oliver McGowan, on 11 November 2016. Paula’s work to establish Oliver’s campaign and call for mandatory autism and learning disability training for NHS professionals led to the creation of a petition, which had been signed by 51,310 people as of around 3 pm. I am extremely grateful to the Petitions Committee for scheduling this debate on that petition.

I speak as Paula’s local representative, but what she has achieved in the face of such extreme grief and anguish is so remarkable that, in all honesty, she should

be telling Oliver's story in this debate. That story is awful and harrowing, but it needs to be told. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for putting Paula's testimony on the record. She sent me some additional personal words. It is important that I place those words on the record, too, not only for the benefit of Members present but so that they stand as a testament to Oliver and so that his death is remembered eternally in the House's official record, *Hansard*.

Paula states:

"From the moment Oliver was born, we knew that he was special and our love for him was overwhelming. Oliver was born premature and developed meningitis at three weeks of age. He was very ill and we were told they did not expect him to survive. However, Oliver began to recover. Everybody who came into contact with Oliver warmed to him and could not resist spending time with this baby.

Sadly, Oliver developed a second episode of meningitis and was incredibly ill. Amazingly, against all odds and many months of hospital treatment, Oliver's strength and determination shone through and he survived once again, and as always with that beautiful heart warming smile that everybody was drawn to. Oliver—as a result of an infarction caused by the meningitis—was left with mild cerebral palsy, focal epilepsy and later on a diagnosis of high functioning autism.

Oliver's disabilities did not hold him back. He had a can do attitude and amazed everybody with his achievements. He played for the South and North West Centres of Excellence England development football squads. He was a registered athlete with the Power of 10 and was ranked 3rd best in the country for athletics. Oliver was a member of Team Bath and was being trained to become a Paralympian.

Oliver was a natural leader and became a prefect and chair of the school council, later college. He attained several GCSE and BTEC examinations. He went on to attend National Star College in Cheltenham. Their opinions of Oliver were very complimentary, writing how he was often mistaken to be a member of staff; how friendly and kind he was, supporting students who were less able than himself; his wicked sense of humour; and the aspirations they had for him to start a sports course at a local ski centre.

Oliver brought so much happiness and fun to our lives; he always saw the best in everything and taught all of us how to look at things differently. Oliver never failed to light up a room with the sound of his laughter. He wanted to make everybody happy and did his best to achieve that. Despite his limitations, he never complained or asked, 'Why me?' He accepted everything and always with a smile. His courage and enthusiasm was inspirational. We were told by his neurologist that Oliver had a full life expectancy and it was expected he would live an independent life with a little support.

On 15 October 2015, Oliver was admitted to a children's hospital, having what we—his parents—and college staff recognised to be simple partial seizures. These caused Oliver to be anxious, agitated and confused. After several weeks of tests Oliver was discharged home and given sertraline—an antidepressant medication—to treat his anxiety. We were surprised as Oliver was not depressed. Once this medication was increased, it caused a change to Oliver's mood and increased his seizures greatly.

He was admitted back to the same hospital on 15 December 2015, but this time was given antipsychotic medications. The doctors were misunderstanding Oliver's autistic behaviours to be an ictal psychosis, and his normal autistic obsessions to be delusional behaviours. The effect on Oliver was catastrophic. Oliver's seizures threshold and anxiety deteriorated and he was eventually held against his will under the Mental Health Act, section 2. We challenged this on numerous occasions, stating we felt it was the drugs that were causing the changes to Oliver's mood and seizures.

A psychiatric bed could not be found and doctors decided to remove the antipsychotic medications. Within days Oliver's mood and seizure activity improved and he was discharged back home into our care. A community psychiatrist wrote Oliver was sensitive to antipsychotic and benzodiazepine medications.

On 15 April 2016, Oliver was readmitted back to the same hospital having simple partial seizures and was anxious. Sadly, Oliver was again given antipsychotic medications, one or more of which caused a serious side effect called oculogyric crisis. He was left like this for several hours as the doctor at first believed it was behavioural. After four hours he was given procyclidine medication. Again, Oliver's mood changed significantly. He was hallucinating, having up to 30 seizures a day—something we had never seen happen—and had problems urinating, extreme high blood pressure readings and sweating, all of which were linked to medications.

We strongly believed the drugs were the cause of the decline in Oliver's mood difficulties. It was obvious that doctors and nurses had little to no understanding of autism and how autistic behaviours could present in a person with ongoing seizures. When in seizure, Oliver was always fully conscious, and because he had no control of the seizures they caused him to be frustrated and scared.

At my request, Oliver was transferred to a specialist adult hospital, which I thought would have understood Oliver's epilepsy better. Oliver had been provided with a letter stating his reactions to previous medications. Sadly, the use of physical restraint was increased with up to eight staff being involved. Oliver was suddenly not allowed any privacy with his personal care. He had three staff sat around his bed and he was kept in a darkened room. Oliver was very frightened and he told me just how scared the staff were making him feel.

Oliver was again given different antipsychotic medications and consequently detained against his will and transferred to a specialist mental health ward. The different approach from skilled staff allowed Oliver to improve within days. The words from staff including doctors from the unit were that Oliver was not psychotic or mentally ill, and that his placement there was a total misuse of the Mental Health Act. They reduced all antipsychotic medications and Oliver was discharged after a few days into the care of a specialist learning disability team, again with a letter saying that he was sensitive to antipsychotics and benzodiazepines.

The team was very supportive and specialised in people with autism and learning difficulties. A consultant psychiatrist in learning disability wrote that Oliver was not psychotic or mentally ill. He believed Oliver's behaviours were a result of autism and mild learning difficulties and an environment that was not adapted to meet his needs.

Sadly, on 16 October 2016, Oliver had a cluster of seizures and was admitted to an adult general hospital. Oliver told ambulance staff and also doctors in A&E not to give him antipsychotic medications as they messed with his brain and made his eyes go up. He was reassured by doctors they had no intention of using those medications. We gave doctors a folder of supporting letters stating Oliver's reaction to antipsychotic medications, and it was subsequently written in bold red ink on Oliver's medical care sheets he was intolerant to all antipsychotics.

Oliver was intubated. The safeguarding officer was consulted on how to manage Oliver's anxiety when sedation was reduced. His advice to the doctors was a non-pharmaceutical approach and to use soft handcuffs. We were told we should be present as we would be able to reassure and comfort him. We were told that most people would become highly anxious when woken from being sedated. This advice was not listened to and sedation was reduced without our presence. According to staff, Oliver became anxious. He would have felt scared waking to find tubes in his throat and in unfamiliar surroundings without familiar faces. Full sedation was increased.

We were consulted by a neuropsychiatrist who had met Oliver for two 10 minute appointments in the community. She asked us about giving Oliver an antipsychotic. We made it very clear about Oliver's previous reactions to this type of medication and that she did NOT have Oliver's or our permission to administer any antipsychotic medications. Despite this, Oliver was given the antipsychotic medication olanzapine at a low dose that evening

[Chris Skidmore]

without our knowledge. The next day, we again made it clear to all doctors and nurses that they did not have Oliver's permission to administer this.

Oliver, over the next few days, developed a temperature of 42°. Because doctors said his liver function was elevated he was not given any medication to control the temperature other than a light blow up mattress filled with cold air. This was not effective. Doctors could not understand the decline in Oliver's condition and they sent him for a scan of his liver and lungs. Unfortunately, it was several more days before they scanned his brain. It was so badly swollen it was bulging out the base of his skull. We were told Oliver had neuroleptic malignant syndrome, a rare but serious side effect of antipsychotic medications.

A week later, the decision was made to turn Oliver's life support machines off. Oliver passed away several days later on 11 November 2016: Armistice Day—poignant given we are a military family."

Paula continues:

"Oliver's was a life wasted due to doctors not communicating effectively with family and practitioners who knew him well and who were in daily contact with the hospital. We believe the doctors were arrogant and ignorant and believed they knew Oliver better than his parents. They did not consult wider, when there was ample opportunity to do so.

We have since been told by the doctor who administered the antipsychotic drug that she would have given it regardless of our wishes, as she believed it was in Oliver's best interests, and she would do the same thing again given the same situation knowing that Oliver has lost his life. We understand that many people receive the medications that Oliver was given, often for managing a mental health condition, and do so without suffering the effects that Oliver had. In Oliver's case, we had clear understanding that he was sensitive to these medications and we believe they should not have been prescribed.

We believe that Oliver's death was very preventable. We believe that Oliver was given excessive drugs due to medical staff not understanding autism impacted by seizure activity. They did not ever try to adapt the environment to meet his needs, but used excessive restraint methods. They failed to make any communication with community-based professionals who were working with Oliver on a daily basis and knew him well."

A later inquest into Oliver's death concluded that the care Oliver received in the lead-up to his death was "appropriate". It stated that despite warnings from Oliver and his parents, the development of complications from medication could not have been predicted. As a local Member of Parliament, I was in contact with Paula after Oliver passed away to support her when she approached the local police and coroner's office to ask for an investigation into the death of her son. I will continue to offer all the support that I can.

In spite of that inquest's conclusions, the Government's learning disabilities mortality review programme, which investigated Oliver's case, highlighted the challenges that vulnerable people such as Oliver still face in gaining access to appropriate care. There remain serious disparities in the quality of health support and care received by people with autism and learning disabilities. The evidence shows, as has already been mentioned, that people with learning disabilities die at a far greater rate than others. Often, that can be prevented with the right care and support and better awareness and training.

Recent reports from Mencap, which has been recognised for its ongoing efforts and campaigns, found that one in four doctors and nurses has never had any type of training on learning disability. Clearly, that is unacceptable. Every person should receive the same high quality of

care, whether or not they have a learning disability. Although we have made progress in our collective understanding of autism and learning disabilities, much more needs to be done to ensure that vulnerable people receive the right support from our healthcare system when they need it most. I am encouraged that the Government have accepted all the recommendations from the learning disabilities mortality review, including recommendation 6, which proposes the introduction of mandatory training for all health and care staff. I am also pleased that they have committed to delivering that training in partnership with people with experience, including families and parents like Paula.

I welcome the Government's proposals for a consultation on options for delivering that essential training to staff, which is due to be completed by the end of March 2019. With that in mind, I would welcome it being arranged for Paula to meet the Minister to discuss Oliver's campaign and its consequences, and for this work to continue. I would also welcome the Minister and the Department continuing their close working with Mencap, the National Autistic Society, other charities and relevant organisations, and indeed Members of Parliament such as the Solicitor General, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland)—he is in his place but his ministerial role affords that he cannot speak in the debate—who have personal experience of autism. It is right to draw on that.

Lyn Brown: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman and have been really affected by his speech; I am sure he has been affected as the local MP. I pay tribute to him for how he is putting his case, but does he not agree that the review is unnecessary and that what we actually need is some action now?

Chris Skidmore: I agree that we need clarity, not only extra guidance. The review is one step in a journey that has yet to be completed. I own up to this, having been a Minister previously: there is a commitment to looking at guidance and training, but I am concerned with the implementation. Going forward, we could produce all the training, guidance and material we want, but how will we monitor the outcomes? What are we seeking to achieve?

A couple of months into my job as a Minister in the Cabinet Office, having previously been secretary of the all-party parliamentary group for disability as a Back Bencher, I wanted to look at how we could increase and encourage electoral registration among those with learning disabilities. The answer I got was, "Well, there is guidance out there already, Minister. The Electoral Commission has produced documentation." However, it was patently clear to me that it was not being implemented in polling stations across the country. I would like to see a commitment from the Minister not just for consultation and guidance to be produced but to ensure that we have accountability. The Care Quality Commission must be involved, and people must be judged on the standards introduced; this must be followed through.

In conclusion—this may chime with what the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) said—I return to the words of Paula McGowan:

"If the guidelines and principles from NHS England's STOMP—stopping the over-medication of people who have learning disabilities—project had been followed with healthcare professionals

being able to listen to family and specialist colleagues, then we firmly believe that Oliver would still be here today. We believe that Oliver's premature death should be in the public's interest, and I challenge the Government to: ask people with a learning disability, autism or both, their families and carers for their opinion and concerns about treatment; listen to all involved and show respect to those opinions and concerns; and do something about it and work in partnership with us. Specifically, NHS professionals who provide specialist care in learning disability and autism should: put people at the heart of all decision making; respect our point of view; not make decisions without us; and enable us to understand complex decisions in a way that is relevant to all and provide information and explanation.

In particular, check if your patient has a hospital passport. Respect your patient by getting down to the same level as them—don't stand if your patient is sitting. Give them personal space. Modify your language so that it is clear and precise, and don't use medical jargon. Check your patient has understood what you are saying. Effectively listen to your patient. Give your patient time. Make them feel valued and included in their treatment plan. Mostly"—above all—

“offer reassurance. In addition, liaise with healthcare colleagues in general hospitals to raise awareness and understanding of learning disability, autism and the principles of STOMP. And, above all, do everything in your power to prevent a story like Oliver's from having to be told again.”

From my own point of view, I hope that we can all work together to ensure that we do not have to stand here again, making the case for change. Let us support Oliver's campaign and ensure that his death marks a watershed moment and a turning point in how we treat those with autism and learning disabilities in the NHS.

5.14 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for a moving and harrowing account of what happened to Oliver, and to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), the local MP, who has campaigned tirelessly on this issue.

I also pay tribute to Paula McGowan, who has shown such bravery in campaigning for her son. She and her family have felt such suffering following the death of Oliver nearly two years ago—I cannot imagine the pain of losing a child. I speak for all Members when I say that our thoughts are with her and her family.

The cross-party support for the petition shows the strength of feeling of all Members of this House, who want those with learning difficulties and disabilities to receive the best possible treatment. We all want to see NHS staff equipped to make the adjustments that so often prove the difference between life and death. I am sure the Minister agrees.

It is welcome that the Government are acting broadly in line with the recommendations of the learning disabilities mortality review. However, I felt their response fell short in one particular area. Page 19 refers to the introduction of an oversight group that allows for the input of self-advocates. That is positive, and I welcome that, but the response does not spell out how success will be measured, how targets will be checked, who will decide on service changes, nor how the implementation of changes will be assessed. More effective training programmes, such as those demanded by this e-petition, are developed and led by those with learning disabilities. The Government could have been more explicit in acknowledging that.

I want to speak about Treat Me Right: an inspirational autism and learning disability awareness training programme operating across north-west London and in my constituency. For Members and those in the audience who have not heard of it, Treat Me Right has been running for 25 years. It is delivered by Certitude, a not-for-profit social care provider. The programme was commissioned by the north-west London collaboration of clinical commissioning groups last year, following a grant from Health Education England.

Although reducing the number of avoidable deaths will require a broader strategy, Treat Me Right's impact is beyond doubt. Having been co-founded by those with learning disabilities, it is now led by people with learning disabilities. It provides essential support for A&E staff, mental health teams and the London ambulance service.

Between June 2017 and March 2018, Treat Me Right trained 942 healthcare practitioners across north-west London in learning disability and autism awareness, and it will train an additional 800 NHS autism champions by the end of this year. The statistics do not tell the full story of the programme's success, but they do go some way to explain why I and other MPs nominated it for the care and compassion award at this year's NHS 70 awards.

There are two clear components in the petition's demands for NHS staff to receive mandatory training: first, the need to pinpoint critical reasonable adjustments for patients with learning disabilities; and secondly, the need to alter a damaging culture that fails people with autism or learning disabilities, preventing them from receiving the treatment they need. On that, Mencap's statistics are striking: just under two thirds of healthcare professionals—64%—said that a lack of practical resources for them and their colleagues contributes to the problem of avoidable deaths. That is shocking. Just over a quarter say that negative attitudes towards those with autism might also be a contributing factor.

Programmes such as Treat Me Right are proving to be an effective remedy. Trainers explain clearly how autism or their own learning disability feels for them, so NHS staff can learn about uniquely challenging situations that may arise during the course of their work. In addition to training, the programme offers two tailored health toolkits for people with autism—health action plans and health passports—which are essential for signposting the critical adjustments necessary on their arrival at A&E and other departments.

The Government's response to the review talks of ensuring

“vigilant and proactive support for people with a learning disability.”

How better to achieve that than through mandatory training, and who better to lead that training than those who know the specifics of living with autism or a learning disability?

I welcomed John, a co-founder of Treat Me Right, to Parliament earlier in the year. He felt strongly that the training programme allowed him to share his experience of living with Down's syndrome with NHS professionals, to tangible effect. His experience is reflected in the comments of healthcare professionals across Hampstead and Kilburn who have benefited from training by Treat Me Right. The team at Brent psychological services said that the training, especially on autism spectrum disorders, was like

“receiving a pair of glasses after not knowing you needed them”.

[*Tulip Siddiq*]

Such testimonies, and the fact that approximately 3,300 adults are registered with Brent CCG as having been diagnosed with a learning disability, mean that the work of Treat Me Right could eventually offer vital healthcare support to thousands of my constituents who have been suffering for years.

Kerry McCarthy: It sounds like a fantastic organisation. I wonder whether those lessons could also be rolled out to other public services. I have been talking to Avon and Somerset police, where there have been issues about tasering people who clearly should have been treated differently. Does my hon. Friend agree, particularly as the criminal justice system and the police often come into contact with people with autism and do not know how to treat them?

Tulip Siddiq: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that the issue is not confined to the healthcare services. It crosses borders, and she made an effective point about the police and others dealing with the challenges of autism that arise in everyday life.

Hannah Bardell: On a similar point, does the hon. Lady agree that staff in the Department for Work and Pensions should also be trained? Some of my constituents have not had positive experiences of the welfare system. I know that the staff have a difficult job, but often people are marginalised because of a lack of understanding.

Tulip Siddiq: Similar things come up in my surgeries. People come in and complain bitterly about the way they have been treated, simply because they have not been understood by service providers, whether at the Department for Work and Pensions when they needed social security, or elsewhere.

I would like the Minister to address how she will ensure that those with learning disabilities and their families will be treated as equal partners in setting targets for success and in deciding whether change is happening in the right way. How does she anticipate that all healthcare professionals, and not just a few, will get good quality learning disability training, and how will the challenge of resourcing that be met? We have heard Mencap's estimate that 1,200 people with learning disabilities die every year because of an avoidable lack of access to good healthcare: it was pointed out earlier in the debate that it seems more deaths are of young people, which is shocking. I hope that the Minister will address that situation, which is simply horrifying. I hope that, in addition to answering my specific questions, she will explain how her Department is accelerating its efforts to reduce that figure dramatically in the coming months and years.

I pay tribute once again to Paula McGowan and those seated in the Public Gallery today, because I know it has been a difficult campaign so far.

5.23 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): It is a particular pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this evening, Dame Cheryl; we are debating an issue on which you have done much, not only to raise awareness, but to transform the legislative framework in which we operate.

I thank the Petitions Committee for ensuring that time was made available for the debate, and congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on his opening speech. I pay tribute to Oliver's family in particular, and to the many other families who have done so much and worked so hard, exhausting reserves of energy and emotion that I am not sure many of us could have found, to ensure that some public benefit can come from their individual personal tragedies.

I have rather less direct personal experience of autism than many of the Members who will contribute today, but as a former governor at a special needs school that had a particular focus on autism I am familiar with many of the issues that Members have raised. As of last week I am a proud officer of the all-party parliamentary group on autism. I am fortunate to benefit from the fact that many constituents contact me to give me advice and tell me of their and their families' experience in the healthcare system. I also benefit from the advice and experience of my former colleagues, the staff and governors at the school, and the National Autistic Society, which does much important work to push forward the agenda.

As has already been said, there are clear healthcare inequalities between people who have autism and the general population. That is clearly recognised by the Government. It was recognised in their mandate to NHS England and, of course, as one of four clinical priorities in the 10-year plan published last month. Those inequalities clearly have many causes. There are many co-factors more likely to affect people who have autism, such as issues to do with unemployment, mental health and poverty; but one of the most obvious ones, which is referred to in the petition, is the interaction between the national health service and healthcare professionals, and people with autism.

For many of us it can be hard to decipher what medical professionals tell us, particularly when we are very ill and perhaps not thinking as straight as we might. For people with learning disabilities and communication difficulties, the difficulty is on an entirely different scale. For many people with autism it is a question of heightened difficulty not only in understanding what they are being told, but also, of course, in communicating how they feel physically, emotionally and mentally. It is therefore essential that understanding of autism becomes part of the mandatory training for healthcare professionals, just as it is finally becoming a core part of initial teacher training.

Like other hon. Members, I am pleased to see that the new core skills education and training framework finally sets out proposals for a tiered approach and levels of training depending on levels of contact that can be expected for people with autism. There are half a million people in England—more than 1% of the population—who we already know have autism, so there can be barely any part of the healthcare system in which any worker is unlikely to have regular contact with patients with autism and their families. So it is a core part of their job and responsibilities to be able to respond, and to make necessary adaptations in the way they behave. That is a core part of being a healthcare professional.

Dr Whitford: There are throughout society people with varying skills, disabilities or learning difficulties, so do not we need to bring that right into medical and

nursing school, and try to have a philosophy that counters what we see in society? That, frankly, is attacking the “other”. We have had so much of the politics of “other”, and attacking the “other” socially, and we need to try to get rid of that when people are at school and in medical and nursing school—not just when they have qualified.

Mike Wood: There are two important and slightly distinct points there. For mainstream education it is vital that an understanding of autism and other learning disabilities is part of personal, social, health and economic education—I do not know whether we still call it that—for precisely the reasons that the hon. Lady describes. Of course, in medical or nursing school it is vital that there is a core level of understanding of the issues for autism and other learning disabilities and of the impact they have on how people need to do their job once they have qualified and are practising and in work. That needs to be embedded from day one, but just as importantly, it must be reinforced and built on with continuing professional development.

Although there is clear evidence of inequality in many health outcomes, there is little concrete evidence yet known about how the wellness of people with autism compares with that of the general population. I hope the new framework will explicitly cover primary and community health as well as acute healthcare. Primary and community health is where much of the early interaction with patients and the wider population takes place. It could not be more important that our GPs and community healthcare staff understand the particular issues faced by patients with autism and their families, and how they should respond to them.

However, I hope the framework will go slightly further than that. I am sure that you, Dame Cheryl, might have wished to raise this issue were you not chairing the debate: the need for a GP autism register, as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, with a relatively easy and simple code so that people’s progression through primary healthcare pathways and on to an acute healthcare or a mental health setting can be tracked and we can have a better understanding of the impact of autism and learning disability on wellness and the particular challenges and experiences of people with autism.

Dr Whitford: The hon. Gentleman touched on poverty earlier. The learning disability employment gap is over 90%; if we actually want to look at the wellness of people with learning or communication difficulties, we as a society must include them, rather than parking them on the side and wasting their talents.

Mike Wood: The hon. Lady is right, and if I may give a quick plug, the all-party parliamentary group has done some important work with the National Autistic Society on precisely the issue of autism, employment and education. I understand it will be published shortly and I hope it provides a focus for a future debate.

Hannah Bardell: Following on from that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that people with autism and additional support needs have a huge contribution to make to our economy and society? As someone who has had a number of people on work experience, they have helped me to see the world in a different way. I am

sure the hon. Gentleman will have seen “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time”; when I went to see that in the west end, it was a turning point for me in understanding the world and a little window into how people with autism see it.

Mike Wood: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. That enormous employment gap is a tragedy in terms of not only the lost opportunities for those people directly affected, but the wasted opportunities for the many employers who could be benefiting from the skills of people with autism and other learning disabilities, and for wider society, which is losing the contributions that they can make.

Finally, I will touch quickly on the issue of mental health. Autism is not a mental illness, but we know that people with autism are much more likely to be affected by many mental illnesses, particularly anxiety-related illnesses, than the general population. We need to ensure that the new framework is properly embedded across mental healthcare as well as physical healthcare, so that our mental health services can ensure that people with autism get the proper services they need. Far too often, people with autism find not only that their condition means their mental health problems are not properly diagnosed at an early stage, but that, if diagnosed, their condition can interfere with their receiving the appropriate treatment in a way that might be expected elsewhere.

We must ensure that autism is one of the four clinical priorities right across the healthcare system and that the training our healthcare professionals receive reflects that. Only then can we start to address the healthcare inequalities that we see in this country and, hopefully, try to ensure that there are fewer repeats of the terrible stories we have heard this afternoon.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I think that, without compromising the objectivity of the Chair, I should probably have put on record at the beginning of this sitting that I currently chair the all-party parliamentary group on autism, in case people have not gathered that by this stage. Secondly, I apologise for the temperature in this room, which is below what I would consider comfortable standards. We have made inquiries and unfortunately we cannot adjust the temperature unless the room is vacated and the engineers come in to look at the equipment. I apologise for that, but, unusually, if anybody wants to put on their coats, they are welcome to. I understand that some people are feeling very cold in this environment and I can only apologise.

5.37 pm

Jared O’Mara (Sheffield, Hallam) (Ind): It is interesting that you mention the temperature, Dame Cheryl, because I am the first autistic MP and a symptom of my autism is that I prefer the cold and get really irritated and anxious when it gets just above body temperature. This is perfect for me—I am wearing a T-shirt.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Every cloud.

Jared O’Mara: Yes. This is one of those circumstances where Parliament has worked out in my favour, because so far my autism has not been taken into account by Parliament.

[Jared O'Mara]

I have asked for adjustments from the Speaker's Office so that I can comfortably speak more in the Chamber, because with things such as shouting, when everyone is heckling, the aggression and the loud noises mean I cannot cope. I have only been to Prime Minister's questions once because of all the shouting. A Conservative MP, who I believe was the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), was not wearing a tie, and that adjustment was made in part with reference to me, because of my cerebral palsy. Much like Oliver, I have anxiety, cerebral palsy and autism—Oliver had those three—and on top of that I have depression.

There is something called comorbidity, which means that if someone has one disability, they are likely to get another. In the autism strategy of 2009 and its update for 2014, I cannot find the word comorbidity. It is a word that needs to be in the lexicon of Government and politics, the NHS and education. The same can be said for intersectionality, which is basically about the negative symbiosis between different marginalised groups and different factors. We need to look at that, and at how being disabled means that someone is more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, including by being on benefits, unemployed or in prison.

Going off on tangents is also a quirk of my autism—I was talking about wearing a tie in Parliament and how the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East was not wearing one. One adjustment that Mr Speaker kindly made was that I should not have to wear a tie, because my cerebral palsy and the co-ordination difficulties that I have with my autism mean that I cannot do a tie. Also, wearing a clipper tie will irritate the skin around my neck. The hon. Gentleman was not wearing a tie the first time I was at Prime Minister's questions, and several Labour MPs behind me shouted at him, "Wear a tie, you scruff." Imagine how much that hurt me. I turned around and looked at them and shook my head, but I may as well have been invisible.

This is not only about my treatment by Parliament but by the Labour party; for those who think Parliament has not made many adjustments or treated me right, Labour is another thing entirely. I am not talking about Labour as a whole. I am talking about the leadership and the people who run it, and the people who run the application process. I was not listened to or asked how they could help me. They made the sum total of one adjustment for me, which was to give me an office near the Chamber.

However, I am not here to talk about me. I am here to talk about Oliver. Some people say that people with autism do not have the capacity for empathy, including Simon Baron-Cohen—the cousin of the actor who played Borat—who came up with the empathising-systemising theory. That does not resonate with me, because I can systemise and empathise, and I want to be an autistic person who gives everybody a lesson in empathy. Think about Oliver. That is not just a name, but it is good that we give him a name, because disabled people are so often treated as statistics on a balance sheet—"Can we afford to spend this money on disabled people?" The key word in "disabled people" is "people". We are people, with names.

Let us take a moment to think about Oliver. Imagine what it would have been like for him, being given that medication and being bullied and being scared, and his

anxiety going through the roof. He did not know what was happening. He looked and saw his mum and dad, who were in a state, and the doctors would not listen to them. He says, "Mum and dad, help me. Help me." Just think about what that would be like. [Interruption.] No. I am autistic. Do not do that.

Think about Oliver's mum and dad. They have lost their son. That could have been my mum and dad. A year ago, I tried to hang myself in a hotel over the road, because people were bullying me over things that I did not understand when I was 20 or 22. They made false accusations of sexism and homophobia. They did not listen to the interviews I had done. They did not listen to me talk about how I am an intersectional feminist and about equality. They did not listen to me when I said that my local pub, where I have been going all the time for 12 years, is a gay bar.

I used homophobic words, but they were the words of the time; they were on the Eminem record that I listened to at the time. It was before November 2003— [Interruption.]

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. Please try to keep on the subject of the petition.

Jared O'Mara: I know, but it is relevant—hold on.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): You are giving a very powerful testimony, but I hope that you may try to confine your remarks to the subject of the petition in hand. That would be helpful to me in the Chair. Thank you.

Jared O'Mara: I mentioned that I go off on tangents; this is an example. Basically, there is a tendency in type 1 autistic people to mimic both the world around them and their peers, to try to fit in and not get bullied. That is what I was doing, and my bullying is an example of how people with autism are misunderstood and not listened to. It has huge parallels with what happened to Oliver and with the autistic people who my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) says have committed suicide.

I managed to stop myself—Lord knows how. It was probably because I thought of my mum and my sister and my niece and my nephew and my dad. That is probably what anchored me and brought me down off that chair—well, that and the fact that I could not climb it properly because of my cerebral palsy. That sounds like a joke, and sometimes we have to laugh at our disabilities, because it is all we have. I mastered humour and making my friends laugh, because that makes people like me. Sometimes people have to do that, because of all the bullying they get over their autism and all the misunderstandings, like those Oliver went through. Sometimes all you can do is laugh.

However, I hope that, at this juncture, people do not laugh but take a moment to reflect on what it is like for Oliver's parents, and what it was like for Oliver at the time his life ended. I thank Oliver's parents for bringing the petition to the Chamber, and I thank every Member here. I am being non-partisan—I am an independent Member—and I ask Members to please show the video of the debate and give copies of their speeches to their colleagues in their respective parties. I am just riffing, as Members can tell, but by showing their colleagues the

video on parliamentlive.tv and giving them copies of their speeches, they can spread the word that people with autism are being misunderstood.

One fifth of the UK population are in the disability community, and a quarter of people will have mental health disabilities at some point during their lives. We are not being listened to and we are not being understood. Our parents are not being listened to. The respective experts in clinical psychology and psychiatry and medicine are not being listened to. It is time that we were listened to and what we want acted on.

It is time that the laws that are already in place, such as the autism strategy, the duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 and disability discrimination law, are acted on. Let us have full legal aid, and let us expand the definition of corporate manslaughter, because I believe that what happened to Oliver was corporate manslaughter, whether that fits with its definition in law or not.

5.46 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a real honour to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara), who defeated a colleague of mine at the last election. It is very powerful to hear from somebody who is directly affected. However, it is also a reminder to us all how difficult it is for an institution such as Parliament to be truly inclusive and to make sure that everybody who lives in this country has their voice heard.

I pay tribute to Oliver's family, and I echo the cross-party agreement on this issue. I am the MP for their neighbouring constituency of Bath, and since Oliver was a member of Team Bath, I feel that he is very much part of the Bath family. I say to his family: your campaign will become my campaign.

There are often shocking misunderstandings or misconceptions about people who suffer from autistic spectrum disorder—ASD—or mental ill health, and I find that the two are mixed up in an alarming way. ASD is a learning disability, not mental ill health, and it is important that we separate the two. Mental ill health might be an additional diagnosis, and many people with ASD also suffer mental ill health, but they are not the same. Mental ill health is often a consequence of misunderstanding and isolation, and can be avoided if a person with autism is diagnosed early and treated accordingly. Early diagnosis is therefore crucial to addressing not only the issue itself but the mental ill health that might be a consequence of it. All too often, even once people have an ASD diagnosis, mental illness can be overlooked. The National Autistic Society estimates that mental illness is far more common in people with autism than in the general population.

The debate is focused on training for health professionals to diagnose and understand autism better. So far, the Government have done very little on that. The petition was created by Paula, who is here today, and we have heard powerful testimony about her son, Oliver. I do not need to go over all the details of that, but I understand entirely how the inquest's outcome must have been devastating the family. Clearly, something went awry. Our laws and regulations are not fully clear about the proper training that should be given, but Paula is in the petition. Her son could possibly still have been here with us. All of us here are truly sorry, and we need to do something about it.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I rise as the Member of Parliament for Bristol North West, which contains Southmead Hospital: it was part of Oliver's story, from which lessons need to be learned. Does the hon. Lady agree that the important point here is that we evidently have strong cross-party consensus; that we must now focus our efforts not just on debate and consultation but on achieving real change in the health service and our public services generally and right across our country; and that today's debate gives us the impetus to do that?

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I have said at another occasion today that the word "Parliament" comes from the French word "parler", which means to talk, but we are also here to take action, so we must stop talking and take action. The issue of mandatory training is something that we can fix or determine here, and I very much hope that the Government will take that on board.

The urgent need for better training on autism and learning disability and the complications of the condition could not be shown more starkly than by the failings in Oliver's case. In February, the charity Mencap launched the "Treat me well" campaign, which is aimed at transforming how the NHS treats people with a learning disability in hospital. In particular, women with a learning disability suffer disproportionately from health inequalities. We have heard the statistics today; they die on average 29 years before women in the general population, and men with a learning disability die on average 23 years before those in the general male population. That cannot be overlooked. We have also heard these figures today, but that does not matter—it will do no harm to repeat them: a YouGov survey conducted in 2017 found that nearly one quarter of the health professionals surveyed had never attended any training on learning disability, and two thirds wanted to have more training, so what are we waiting for?

Any illness or disorder that is either misdiagnosed or diagnosed late leads to far greater problems down the line. Early intervention depends on early diagnosis, and early diagnosis on training of those who come into contact with the sufferers. We are calling today for better training of healthcare professionals, which is an obvious start, but why not go even further? Let us look at the settings to which young people are exposed from an early age—namely, nurseries and schools. Given that ASD is so widespread, nursery nurses and teachers should receive at least some basic training to recognise the early warning signs. Far too little is being done. In my constituency of Bath, we have an autism board, but it rarely meets and has not even set up a work plan yet. Clearly, none of this is good enough.

ASD and learning disabilities can be successfully treated to give sufferers a full life. The earlier we diagnose the problem, the better the outcome. Many people with ASD also suffer from mental health problems, often as a consequence of not being diagnosed early enough. Let us end this tragedy. I fully support the recommendations that have been made, and I hope that we have the cross-party consensus to really do something quickly.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): We now move to the Front-Bench spokesmen, and it gives me great pleasure to call Hannah Bardell.

5.53 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Cheryl. I know that other hon. Members have said this, but the work that you have done in this area, and the work of others in this Parliament, is hugely important, and its importance has never been more obvious than today. I have no direct experience other than the constituency cases that I mentioned earlier, but the level of emotion and empathy in the Chamber today is raw. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on deaths abroad and consular services and assistance, I have recently taken evidence from families who have lost loved ones abroad, albeit in different circumstances. Hearing about the circumstances of Oliver's death, and knowing that his mother and his family are here to listen to the debate, only highlights the importance of doing something and doing it well. There can be no greater endeavour for a parliamentarian than to right a wrong by taking an experience that has been devastating or traumatic, or resulted in someone's needless death, and trying to turn that experience into a positive—into change that will mean that others do not suffer in the same way.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) opened the debate with an excellent contribution. He took us through the details, of Oliver's death, as the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) did, and I have to say that although I had read some of the details, I was not aware of just how devastating and difficult what happened was, how complex Oliver's needs were and how badly he and his family were let down.

We must be very careful, because we live in a blame culture. We live in a culture in which, when things go wrong, the finger is pointed. We all know that NHS staff, in whatever part of the UK, do their very best, but there have been failings and the lessons must be learned. Oliver's death cannot be in vain. I therefore hope that the Minister will detail what she plans to do and give Oliver's family and us all a sense that there will be change. I have no doubt that the UK Government are very much behind the wish to change the system.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) talked about the work being done in her constituency through the Treat Me Right programme and the impact that that has had in north-west London. I want to mention briefly the Beatle campus in my constituency of Livingston. The Beatle School sits at the back of my mum's fence, and the building in which it is housed was my old primary school. When it shut, that was a great trauma for the local community, but it fills me with great pride that it is now a school that supports children with additional support needs: autism and a range of issues. Recently, it was awarded a Gold: Rights Respecting award by UNICEF. Its headteacher, Carol Robbie, and her staff do an incredible job, so I want to pay tribute to them.

The hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) spoke about his experience of being a governor of a school that supports children with additional support needs. Many of the speakers today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), have talked about the need for a tailored but collaborative approach. That is particularly important. In Scotland, we have championed partnership working in many of our local authorities, and we have particularly done so in West Lothian.

The point has been made that it is not just healthcare workers who should be trained but people who will be coming into contact with those with additional support needs, including in relation to autism. That is incredibly important. Whatever area we are talking about, whether it is housing, welfare or whatever, staff need to have proper and appropriate training, as do businesses. The debate has been very much opened up, and we must look at the improvements that need to happen across the board, not just for NHS staff.

The Scottish strategy for autism was published jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in 2011, and our Government in Scotland committed £13.4 million over four years to improve the lives of autistic people and their families and carers. A review was published in 2014, and I will just share some of the findings. There was the development of a menu of interventions, which meant a guide to help autistic people and their families and carers to identify available advice and support, and a mapping exercise, which sought to map out and better co-ordinate local services. That coincided with £35,000 for each of our 32 local authorities to encourage local and national organisations to develop projects to improve the delivery of local autism services. In my constituency, a number of organisations have benefited from that.

[IAN AUSTIN *in the Chair*]

In 2015, the strategy was refreshed and reframed into an outcomes approach, and it has had a significant impact on each local authority in Scotland and their services. We are not perfect, but we have done a significant amount and we are absolutely dedicated to ensuring that whatever an individual's needs are, they are properly catered for.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara). It is hard to know how to respond to his speech, because it was so powerful and so necessary. He spoke not only about autism and his needs, but the way that this place is structured. We have said it many times—I will never forget that feeling of anxiety the first time I sat in Prime Minister's questions. It was so alien. I witnessed such boorish and unbelievable behaviour—I have never seen anything like it in my life. It is not a natural environment for anybody. It fills me with great sadness that we have not been able to move on and that he still feels that he cannot attend Prime Minister's questions. I am glad that some reasonable adjustments have been made. The brave and direct way that he spoke about his experiences will be shared, and I give him my commitment that I will share it on social media and beyond, because I think it is incredibly important. If we are going to be truly diverse in this Parliament and make better decisions for the people across these islands, it is vital that we have Members with different needs, abilities and perspectives, and the hon. Gentleman has epitomised that.

I cannot imagine what Oliver's family's experience has been like. What Paula and her family have done takes incredible bravery. I wish them well with their campaign, which we will carry in our hearts. I hope we will all play our part, and that the Minister will give Oliver's family positive words and actions, to ensure that nobody ever again goes through the experience that he and his family did.

6.1 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I am pleased to speak with you in the Chair, Mr Austin, which I think is a first for you and me. I pay tribute to Dame Cheryl—who was in the Chair until a few moments ago—for her work in this House on autism. I thank the Petitions Committee for bringing forward this debate. It is sometimes important that the Petitions Committee does not wait for 100,000 signatures, but is prepared to move earlier on an important topic. I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for his excellent speech.

I know people were anxious about this debate, because it coincides with the statement from the Prime Minister on the October EU summit, but we have heard from a number of hon. Members. There were interventions from my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown), Hartlepool (Mike Hill), Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and Bristol North West (Darren Jones), and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). We heard speeches from the hon. Members for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), Dudley South (Mike Wood) and Bath (Wera Hobhouse), and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara), who spoke very movingly. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) and the Scottish National party spokesperson, the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell). There were concerns about the clash in timing, which was really unfortunate.

Like everyone else who has spoken, I congratulate Oliver's parents, particularly his mother, Paula McGowan, on their persistence in ensuring that Oliver's case was brought to our attention through the e-petition, which now has 51,351 signatures, according to the latest figure I have seen. She has raised the vital issue of how we treat people with autism and learning disabilities in our health and care services.

The e-petition, which calls for the introduction of mandatory training on autism and learning disability for healthcare professionals, states:

“One in four healthcare professionals has never had training on learning disability or autism. This is unacceptable. Two thirds want more training, and one in three think a lack of Government leadership is contributing to the problem of avoidable deaths. The Government must ensure all healthcare professionals get mandatory training to address the huge health inequalities facing people with autism and a learning disability.”

The Government response says:

“Everyone has the right to high quality, safe health care so it is crucial that all health workers are given the skills and education to confidently deliver care that meets the needs of all their patients. This is a priority for the Government.”

If this is a priority, let us end this debate by discussing the action that we need to see.

Some 10 years ago, Mencap published the campaign report “Death by indifference” in response to the ongoing poor treatment and care in the NHS of people with a learning disability, and their premature and avoidable deaths. One of the main contentions in that report is that diagnostic overshadowing is a key barrier to people with a learning disability getting equal treatment. Diagnostic overshadowing is when doctors make dangerously faulty assumptions about people with a learning disability, revealing an overall lack of training, skills and understanding. They may wrongly believe that a presenting

problem is a feature of someone's learning disability and that not much can be done about it, which can often lead to the wrong diagnosis of a medical condition that needs treatment. That report came out 10 years ago.

In its report, the former Disability Rights Commission called for “improved staff training” explicitly to reduce the risk of diagnostic overshadowing and unequal treatment. “Death by indifference” led in 2008 to the report “Healthcare for all”, an inquiry into healthcare for people with learning disabilities. Its first recommendation was that:

“Those with responsibility for the provision and regulation of undergraduate and postgraduate clinical training, must ensure that curricula include mandatory training in learning disabilities. It should be competence-based and involve people with learning disabilities and their carers in providing training.”

That was 10 years ago, but Oliver's case underlines the degree to which people with learning disabilities and autism still do not get the healthcare treatment that they should expect from any civilised, compassionate society.

On a slightly different note—it is all of a piece—last week, I raised in the House the case of Bethany, a young autistic woman who is being held in seclusion in a private hospital, in a locked, cell-like room and fed through a hatch. We have heard too frequently in recent months of more cases showing the mistreatment, neglect and abuse of people with learning disabilities and autism.

Oliver's tragic case typifies cases in which people with learning disabilities have died avoidably in healthcare settings. He was a young man with a full life expectancy, who had overcome so many challenges to excel as a footballer and an athlete. He inspired and enriched everyone he met, but he was let down repeatedly, because clinicians simply did not understand the nature of his autism.

Oliver's death was the result of a catalogue of failures and communications that were not adapted to his needs. Repeated warnings that Oliver was not to be given antipsychotic medication were ignored with fatal consequences. The parallels between Oliver's case and those reported 10 years ago in “Death by indifference” show just how little progress has been made in giving clinicians the right training about people with learning disabilities and autism. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge mentioned, Public Health England's 2016 survey found that only 17% of localities reported having an autism training plan across all health and care staff, while 10% reported having no plan in place.

Oliver's case was included in the learning disabilities mortality review, which revealed scandalous health inequalities between those with autism and learning disabilities, and those without those conditions. Want of better clinical training causes those scandalous health inequalities. Men and women with autism, a learning disability or both simply should not die 20 or 30 years before those without either condition. That report was published on the morning of the local election results, when attention was inevitably directed elsewhere, which looked like an attempt to bury the findings, causing even more distress to the families of those who had died avoidably. In the words of Dr Sara Ryan, the mother of Connor Sparrowhawk, who tragically lost his life as a result of the negligence of Southern Health, the NHS trust charged with caring for him, it made it seem that the lives of their relatives “simply don't count.”

[Barbara Keeley]

As with earlier reports, the cases reported in the learning disabilities mortality review reinforce just how much more Government, and our health and care system, need to do to give people with autism and learning disabilities the good quality healthcare and social care that they ought to expect as a right, and to which they are entitled in law. The lack of training given to clinicians played a pivotal role in Oliver's death and the deaths of many other people whose cases were included in that review.

As we have been reminded, almost one quarter of clinicians surveyed subsequently by Mencap revealed that they had never attended any training specifically on learning disability. More than half of clinicians would have welcomed more on-the-job training to enable them to provide better support. We have an NHS workforce that would welcome the training and a Government response that says that giving the skills and education to healthcare staff is a priority, so we now need to inject some urgency into moving forward.

Oliver's case, the case of Connor Sparrowhawk and the cases of 1,200 people with learning disabilities who die an early death each year make that an urgent task. We need swift action, not further consultations. We need a culture change. Doctors are the decision makers and they must own the development of the training in autism and learning disability.

I hope the Minister will reflect on the debate and treat the introduction of mandatory training as an urgent priority. Can she tell us the Government's timetable for implementing mandatory training following the close of the current consultation? What progress is being made against the recommendations of the learning disability mortality review, particularly the introduction of a named healthcare co-ordinator and the plans to help providers to make reasonable adjustments?

In the last 10 years, we have had reports, inquiries and reviews on the serious matters we have discussed in the debate. Now is the time for action to develop the training that clinicians and other staff working in health and care need. Now is the time for clinicians to own the culture change that would bring about what we all want to see—the Oliver McGowan mandatory training.

6.11 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Austin, and that of your predecessor, Dame Cheryl, who has done more to further the cause of people with autism than any other Member of Parliament. I put on record my thanks to all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. There have been some impressive and high-quality contributions. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for bringing the case before us and the Petitions Committee for permitting the case to be brought. I also thank the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) for his testimony, although he is no longer here. I am sure we all agree that it was incredibly powerful, extremely important and exceptionally brave.

It is hard to hear the story of Oliver McGowan, which inspired the debate and the petition that triggered it. I am the mum of a teenage boy a bit younger than

Oliver, so I find it heartbreaking to even think about what Paula and her family have been through. I have been in this role for nine months, and one of the great honours of the job is being able to speak to some incredible, awe-inspiring people, but surely the most amazing of them are the mothers who have turned the unthinkable heartbreak and anger at the loss of a child into a crusade for change.

Dr Sara Ryan, who has already been mentioned, whose son Connor Sparrowhawk drowned in a bath while under the care of Southern Health, is the most remarkable campaigner for the way that we support adults and children with learning disabilities. Another example is the incredible Paula McGowan, Oliver's mum, who I met last month. To say that I feel humbled by her story is a massive understatement. The way that she has been fuelled by the unspeakable tragedy of Oliver's death to fight, to battle and to campaign to ensure that other children and parents do not have the same experience is incredibly brave and courageous. She is nothing short of an inspiration, and she inspires me to strive to tackle the inequalities that people with autism and with learning disabilities face and to do my best to prevent further avoidable tragic loss of life.

The health inequalities between people with learning disabilities and autism and the general population are well understood—virtually every hon. Member present has mentioned them. In recent years, there have been ongoing efforts to address them, but the shameful case of Winterbourne View Hospital is an example of how things have not worked.

It is a sad fact that it takes an avoidable tragedy to spur the action that we want. Since then, significant programmes of activity have been devoted to tackling the inequality that has blighted the experiences of people with learning disabilities in society—inequality is not confined to health and social care. That activity is not only about reducing the number of deaths that may have been preventable, but about improving people's genuine experiences of care, reducing the use of restrictive interventions, increasing health and wellbeing, and ensuring that people are not hospitalised when they can be better supported in the community.

The existence of the learning disability mortality review programme—LeDeR—testifies to our commitment to reduce the number of preventable deaths among people with a learning disability. LeDeR is focused on learning disability, but has important lessons that relate to the care of autistic people. The programme, led by the Norah Fry centre at the University of Bristol, was introduced to ensure that local evidence-based action is taken to improve support for people with a learning disability. The result is that commissioners are focusing their attention on their local mortality rates and the reasons for them, and are highlighting the further national action that is needed. We must learn from those deaths quickly and translate that learning into effective remedial action that prevents any repetition.

In May, the University of Bristol published the second annual LeDeR report, which showed that 13 deaths had involved circumstances where an individual's health had been adversely affected by entirely avoidable external factors. The report also found that, based on the examples that were reviewed, the median age of death is 23 years younger than the general population for men and 29 years younger for women. It makes for shocking and chilling

reading. LeDeR is ongoing, so many reviews are still to come. Since then, there has been significant action to increase the number of reviews undertaken, including NHS England investing an additional £1.4 million in support of them. Hon. Members from across the House will feel, as I do, that the report is a stark message that we need to do much more to ensure that people with a learning disability receive the best quality care.

In the Government's response to the LeDeR report, which we published on 12 September, we set out a clear action plan to make progress against each of its national recommendations. The key theme is that of facilitating better care for people with a learning disability by sharing information on their needs and by making reasonable adjustments to improve access and the responsiveness of services to meet those needs. It highlighted some actions that I am glad to say were already well under way, as well as many new actions.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister has used the word "action". If we had been able to discuss the Government's response to the LeDeR report, which came out the day before the conference recess, I would have said to her that there is very little action in it. The whole point of the cross-party feeling of the debate is that we want action. There are an awful lot of consultations in the response but, as I highlighted in my speech, we have had 10 years of reviews, starting with the report that came out 10 years ago. The Minister used the word "action"—can we not just get on with some?

Caroline Dinenge: We have accepted every single recommendation in the LeDeR report, and the only reason we are consulting on the recommendations about training is that we have to do that to introduce legislation and change the regulations. We need to do that properly and ensure that we take on board the experiences of people from a wide range of backgrounds so that it actually works. Training is already in the guidelines for healthcare professionals, but the hon. Lady and many other hon. Members have said that it is simply not happening. This is not about action for the sake of it or to say that we have ticked a box to make it happen, but about meaningful action that will save lives. That is why I want to get it right. I am not going to hang around; it will be done to a timescale, which I will explain more about in a moment.

An example of action is that NHS England is working with NHS Digital to add a reasonable adjustment flag to digital care records to indicate the potential adjustments that people with a learning disability may require. The flag will be available to all organisations that provide care. It will support improved communication between patients, their carers and clinicians and lead to more personalised, safer patient care and better outcomes. That capability is being developed for piloting in the NHS summary care records application this summer. We are also exploring with NHS England and NHS Digital the potential for a comparable autism flag.

We have also commissioned Oxford Brookes University to look into best practice in co-ordinating the support for people with a learning disability and a long-term condition. Hon. Members have raised the difficulties that autistic people and people with learning difficulties experience in communicating their needs to health professionals, and also highlighted the importance of hospital passports in overcoming these difficulties and

ensuring that their hospital stays are safer and more comfortable. However, I know that Oliver had such a passport and it was not read, so that needs to be taken into consideration as well.

As part of our governance arrangements for the autism strategy, we have set up a task and finish group on health, care and wellbeing, which is looking at barriers to care. We will ask it to consider how we can best disseminate tools such as the hospital passport, to ensure that patients receive effective, personalised care.

Of the new actions, the one that most concerns us today is the commitment to consult on mandatory training. I believe that the steps we are taking will address the shameful inequalities that people with learning disabilities continue to experience. Everybody has the right to receive effective, compassionate and dignified care, and having a learning disability or autism should not be a bar to that.

I am absolutely committed to ensuring that all staff have the skills that they need, whether for learning disability or autism, to deliver excellent and compassionate care. We are already taking forward actions in this area, which I will set out before moving on to discuss mandatory training.

We have supported the development of the learning disability core skills education and training framework, which sets out three tiers of knowledge and skills in relation to learning disability. We are also working towards the development of an autism core skills and competency framework for health and care staff, and for staff in organisations with public-facing responsibilities.

In addition to the existing criteria for professional regulation and registration, there are also existing health and social care regulations that are designed to ensure staff have had appropriate training. However, it is clear from the tragic deaths of Oliver and the many, many like him that that is not enough; we need to go further. One of the recommendations in the LeDeR report echoes the petition in saying that there should be mandatory learning disability training for all health and care staff.

We welcome that recommendation and we have made a commitment to consult formally on it, and we will conclude the consultation by the end of March. I can also confirm that we will include autism within this consultation. My aim is not to mess around with this work, as I have already articulated; the Government's plans will be published by the summer and regulations could be introduced by the end of 2019. A formal consultation is essential if we are going to change regulations, which is one of the routes by which we can ensure that training is absolutely mandatory.

I appreciate that several hon. Members have asked me specific questions about all sorts of logistical issues, what the content of the training should be and how it might be different for different staff groups. Of course those are all the sorts of issues that we will consult on. We need to canvass the widest possible range of opinions and we clearly are not in a position now to guess the outcome of the consultation. If it was up to me, I would want to embed this training in initial training through all the professional bodies, royal colleges and training providers, having it at all levels of health and social care, so that anybody who has any role in a health and care setting would be mandated to receive some level of

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

this training, obviously with different levels of training for people who work in reception and for those who are medical staff.

One of the key elements of the recommendations in the LeDeR report is that people with learning disabilities should be involved in the training. We will work with people with learning disabilities and autism, and with the groups that represent them, such as Mencap, in shaping the consultation and identifying the key questions that we have to ask. I am absolutely thrilled to say that Paula McGowan has agreed to help us with this.

The petition also refers to mandatory autism training. Of course, LeDeR looks at the deaths of people with learning disability rather than autism, but when it comes to inequalities and the patient experience there are clear parallels between the experiences of both groups and in the sort of reasonable adjustments that might be made to support both groups. It would be a missed opportunity if we did not consider in our consultation the training requirements of staff to better support autistic people as well those with learning disabilities.

Our response to LeDeR and the implementation of Building the Right Support are part of wider efforts to tackle inequality for those with learning disabilities and autism. I will briefly highlight three of these efforts in particular that have great potential. First, there is quality checkers. NHS England is developing toolkits for GP services and mental health in-patient services. These will support people with a learning disability to act as quality checkers, to examine services from their perspective and to have a dialogue with providers and commissioners on what needs to improve.

Secondly, and so importantly, there is stopping the over-medication of people with a learning disability, autism, or both, which is known as STOMP. This national programme brings together multiple organisations in the health and care field, with a common purpose to stop the over-medication with psychotropic medicines of people with a learning disability, autism or both.

Finally, commissioning guidance on autism services, and an accompanying best practice toolkit for local health and care commissioners, are due to be developed shortly and are expected to be available by next spring.

As we develop the consultation on mandatory training, it is particularly helpful to hear these issues and concerns, which hon. Members and their constituents want to see being addressed. We will reflect on, and listen to, those issues and concerns in our consultation. The consultation document will be issued in the new year, giving us sufficient time to conclude the formal consultation period by the end of March, and of course I am extremely happy to discuss with any hon. Member, or any lord in the other place, any particular issue that they would like to see reflected and indeed tackled by the consultation at any time, either before or during the consultation.

Barbara Keeley: I asked the Minister earlier whether she could give an outline of the timetable after the consultation. When does she believe that we will see regulations to make this training mandatory?

Caroline Dinenage: I believe I have already answered that question. I said that I would like the Government plans to be published by the summer and the regulations to be amended by the end of the year.

Barbara Keeley: Can the Minister give a date, rather than a seasonal time?

Caroline Dinenage: I am afraid that I am not the scheduler, but that would be my aspiration as the Minister. Obviously, I do not have the timing for the Government, the Chambers and what have you, but that is definitely my aspiration.

It is absolutely vital that we do everything in our power to get this matter right. We owe it to Oliver and to the many, many young people with autism or learning disabilities whose lives have been tragically shortened. We owe it to Paula and Tom, and to the many parents and family members who have suffered unimaginable grief. We owe it to ourselves—a country should be judged on how it cares for its most vulnerable and on this, we must not be found wanting.

6.27 pm

Daniel Zeichner: I thank all hon. Members for their excellent contributions today; both the speeches and the interventions have been of a very high quality and very thoughtful. Of course, they have also widened the debate beyond just the mandatory training issues to how people with autism and learning disabilities are treated in general. I thought the points about the employment gap in particular from the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) were very telling.

I suppose what struck me when I saw Paula's original statement was the point where she urged staff not to always reach for the pharmaceutical approach. Important though mandatory training will be, and it is vital that we achieve it, I also think that training takes us only so far. I think that staff throughout the national health service need to have the time, the space and the confidence to treat people as individuals and hear what they are actually saying to them. That is a big transformation and a big challenge for everyone in public services, and I hope that it is something that we can try to work towards.

In conclusion, on behalf of all Members, I pay tribute once again to Oliver's mum, Paula, for the very, very powerful campaign that she has waged. I think we can all agree that the final outcome from this process that we would like to see is the Oliver McGowan mandatory training being applied as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 221033 relating to autism and learning disability training for healthcare professionals.

6.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 22 October 2018

DEFENCE

Call-out Order: Air Policing Operations

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): Changes made by the Defence Reform Act 2014 allow reservists to be called out under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 if it appears to the Secretary of State that it is necessary or desirable to use members of a reserve force for any purpose for which members of the regular services may be used. Reservists called out under this power may be required to serve for a period of up to 12 months.

A new order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service in support of the United Kingdom's contribution to air policing operations.

With the changing international strategic threat, I consider there is a requirement for an order that enables the mobilisation of reservists to support tasks which provide for, or contribute to UK air security and policing, including associated strategic tasks. This order also provides for related activity elsewhere in the world, including, for example, the protection of the UK's overseas territories, providing force protection for air assets, in so far as the activity provides for, or contributes, to the continued security of the UK, its overseas territories, service people and assets.

The order takes effect from the beginning of 1 November 2018 and shall cease to have effect at the end of 29 September 2019, making it coterminous with other standing call-out orders.

For operations that fall outside the scope of these orders, for example military aid to the civil authorities, or warfighting, or for operations which are likely to involve a large number of reservists, I would expect to make separate call-out orders.

[HCWS1023]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Cross-Border Access: Electronic Access in Criminal Matters

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): Until the UK leaves it remains a full member of the European Union with all the rights and responsibilities this entails. The Government will continue to consider the application of the UK's right to opt-in to, or opt-out of, forthcoming EU legislation in the area of justice and home affairs on a case by case basis, with a view to maximising our country's security, protecting our civil liberties and enhancing our ability to control immigration.

The Government have decided not to opt-in to the proposal of the European Parliament and the Council on European production orders and European preservation orders for cross-border access to electronic evidence in criminal matters.

Law enforcement access to data held by service providers is an important issue and we support the underlying objective of improving cross-border access to electronic evidence. However, from the start of discussions on this issue, we have not supported the need for new EU legislation. That is because it is not clear that new EU legislation will be a practical and effective way to address the global issue of providing lawful access to data held anywhere in the world.

[HCWS1024]

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 22 October 2018

WORK AND PENSIONS

Universal Credit

The following is an extract from the Opposition day debate on Universal credit on 17 October 2018.

Ms McVey: In less than 10 months, my ministerial colleagues and I have met over 500 colleagues, charities and stakeholders; come to the House on 56 occasions; visited 46 jobcentres, service centres and pension centres; tabled 34 written ministerial statements; and appeared in front of Select Committees 12 times. My Department has published 637 responses to parliamentary questions, 153 pieces of guidance, 102 statistical releases, 30 research reports, and 23 consultations. We have gone to great lengths to be open.

[Official Report, 17 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 653.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Ms McVey):

An error has been identified in my speech.

The correct wording should have been:

Ms McVey: In less than 10 months, my ministerial colleagues and I have met over 500 colleagues, charities and stakeholders; come to the House on 56 occasions; visited 46 jobcentres, service centres and pension centres; tabled 34 written ministerial statements; and appeared in front of Select Committees 12 times. My Department has published **2,637** responses to parliamentary questions, 153 pieces of guidance, 102 statistical releases, 30 research reports, and 23 consultations. We have gone to great lengths to be open.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment and Support Allowance Underpayments

The following is an extract from the Urgent Question on Employment and Support Allowance Underpayments on Thursday 18 October 2018.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker, for having to head off to the Select Committee meeting in a moment.

Will the Minister confirm how much of the £1 billion underpayment now being cited is due to payments made before October 2014, thanks to the Child Poverty Action Group's successful court action, and thanks only to that? When Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs makes someone overpay tax going back years due to official error, they are paid interest and often compensation. Will the Minister confirm that these ESA recipients, who are often in a much worse position than taxpayers, will receive similar interest payments backdated to when their payments should have been made?

Sarah Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for that question. I know that she does fantastic work on the Work and Pensions Committee, and no doubt we will discuss this further at the Committee.

Let us be really clear about what happened. The advice that the Department got was that section 27 of the Social Security Act 1998 applied. That was why we felt we had to make the decision to back-pay to 2014. When additional information came forward from the National Audit Office and the Child Poverty Action Group about official error, the Secretary of State took the decision that, of course, we must do what the law says and go right back to the point of conversion. It was not in any way that the Government were trying not to do the right thing. We have proactively been utterly transparent and open with the House about this error, and we want to fix it as soon as possible.

The hon. Lady asked about the two phases. The first group of people that we are looking at date back to pre-2014 and the second group are from 2014. We have started to make payments to both groups of people, and so far we have paid out £420 million to the pre-2014 group. *[Official Report, 18 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 793.]*

Letter of correction from the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton):

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George).

The correct response should have been:

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady asked about the two phases. The first group of people that we are looking at date back to pre-2014 and the second group are from 2014. We have started to make payments to both groups of people, and **we will pay** out £420 million to the pre-2014 group.

JUSTICE

Sport and Recidivism

The following is an extract from oral questions to the Secretary of State for Justice on 9 October 2018.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I am glad that the Minister prefers sport to chain gangs, but can he tell the House when the use of sport for prisoner rehabilitation will be the norm, rather than the exception?

Edward Argar: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight again the importance of sport. The report published by Professor Meek in the summer, of which we have accepted 53 of the 54 recommendations, sets out a clear direction of travel—that is, alongside education and developing skills, and provisions for mental and physical health, sport plays a key role for prisoners in the rehabilitative process.

[Official Report, 9 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 11-12.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar):

An error has been identified in the response that I gave to the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey).

The correct response should have been:

Edward Argar: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight again the importance of sport. The report published by Professor Meek in the summer, of which we have accepted **11 of the 12** recommendations, sets out a clear direction of travel—that is, alongside education and developing skills, and provisions for mental and physical health, sport plays a key role for prisoners in the rehabilitative process.

Topical Questions

The following is an extract from topical questions to the Secretary of State for Justice on 9 October 2018.

T3. [907012] **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Over the conference recess, the inspectorate of probation published a report into the Merseyside community rehabilitation company. The report observes that the approach to reviewing risk of harm is limited, putting vulnerable people in danger. Have Ministers read the report, and what will the Department be doing to ensure that vulnerable people in Liverpool are given the protection that they need?

Rory Stewart: We take the report very seriously, as we take all reports, including the recent report on domestic violence. It is absolutely right to say that we need to improve the risk assessment, the programme plans and the frequency of meeting. **We are doing a consultation at the moment, to which we invite the hon. Lady to make a submission,** on exactly what we can do to tighten up procedures for the CRCs. They have reduced reoffending by 2%, but there is much more that we can do on the quality of delivery.

[Official Report, 9 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 22.]

Letter of correction from the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart):

An error has been identified in the response that I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger).

The correct response should have been:

Rory Stewart: We take the report very seriously, as we take all reports, including the recent report on domestic violence. It is absolutely right to say that we need to

improve the risk assessment, the programme plans and the frequency of meeting. **We have recently conducted** a consultation on exactly what we can do to tighten up procedures for the CRCs. They have reduced reoffending by 2%, but there is much more that we can do on the quality of delivery.

Topical Questions

The following is an extract from topical questions to the Secretary of State for Justice on 9 October 2018.

T5. [907014] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Given the criticisms contained in the report produced recently by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation, what assurances can the Minister give that all community rehabilitation companies' contracts will stipulate that the probation officer qualification is absolutely necessary for the safe supervision of cases in which domestic violence is a factor?

Rory Stewart: As I have said, we have looked very seriously at the inspectorate's domestic violence report. It is worth bearing in mind that this has been a problem in many probation services across the world, and that it was, in fact, a problem before the CRCs were introduced. We are looking closely at the question of qualification **during the current consultation, which will run for a further six months.**

[Official Report, 9 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 23.]

Letter of correction from the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart):

An error has been identified in the response that I gave to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith).

The correct response should have been:

Rory Stewart: As I have said, we have looked very seriously at the inspectorate's domestic violence report. It is worth bearing in mind that this has been a problem in many probation services across the world, and that it was, in fact, a problem before the CRCs were introduced. We are looking closely at the question of qualification.

Ministerial Corrections

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