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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 30 April 2019**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 30 April 2019*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Youth Entrepreneurship

1. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to promote youth entrepreneurship. [910590]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** First, I would like to update the House: unfortunately, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth will be unable to join us this morning due to a family illness.

Our young people provide an invaluable contribution to the UK economy—they are more than twice as likely to be entrepreneurs as their peers in France and Germany—and we are supporting them. The start-up loans programme has provided over £60 million in loans to 18 to 24-year-olds since 2012. To further realise young entrepreneurs' potential, I have asked the Prince's Trust to lead a review to identify the barriers that they face.

**Sir David Amess:** In 2017-18, recent graduates from the University of East Anglia set up 247 start-ups employing 1,015 people. Will my hon. Friend reassure me that the Government will continue to fund these schemes, as they mean so much to young people and help to create a vibrant economy?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Through our industrial strategy, we recognise the valuable contribution from the creation of spin-outs and start-ups by businesses from university. That is why we have committed to increasing higher education innovation funding from £160 million to £250 million per year by 2020-21. This will help to increase universities' capacity to engage in commercialisation and work with business.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister aware that recent research from Sheffield University and King's College London shows that young entrepreneurs face a very bleak future? In particular, the impact of leaving the EU on many of the very

constituents who voted leave is a drop of between 17% and 20% in GDP. That is ruinous for so many of our industrial towns. What is she going to do about it?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, but it is true that young people in the UK are twice as likely to be entrepreneurs as those in France and Germany. Our percentages for young entrepreneurs are significantly higher. We are committed to our industrial strategy. I have asked the Prince's Trust to undertake the review so that we understand specifically what the barriers are for young people and come up with a package to be able to help them.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on her inspired decision to appoint the Prince's Trust, which is a wonderful organisation that does magnificent work. Will it concentrate on 18 to 30-year-olds, and when is she expecting it to report?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to highlight some of the details of the youth entrepreneurship review. It has started and the board will be announced shortly. It will be looking at 18 to 30-year-olds, and we are hoping that it will report in the autumn. He is absolutely correct: the Prince's Trust does amazing work with young people from all types of background. In fact, there is already a programme with the Prince's Trust and Innovate UK that provides mentoring to young people and makes available loans of up to £5,000.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Scottish Government's 2018-19 Budget means that 90% of firms in Scotland pay lower rates than they would if they were based elsewhere in the UK. Given that 55% of individuals will pay less tax than they would in the rest of the UK, what lessons do the Government plan to take in terms of supporting Scotland's young entrepreneurs and those elsewhere in the UK?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The hon. Gentleman highlights specific differences within Scotland, but we are interested in making sure that young people are able to follow their dreams and aspirations whichever part of the country they happen to be in. We are announcing the young entrepreneurs review so that we can look at all the different barriers, including access to finance—something that the Government and I, as the small business Minister, take very seriously—and make sure that we create the right environment for our small businesses to start up, thrive and grow.

#### Small Businesses

2. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps he is taking to support small businesses. [910591]

10. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support small businesses. [910600]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, employing over 16 million people, and they make a collective contribution of over £2 trillion. We have provided nearly

£5.9 billion of finance to over 82,000 small businesses across the UK. We have also just announced an additional £200 million for innovation for British business.

**Theresa Villiers:** What discussions has the Minister had with landlords running small businesses about the proposed abolition of section 21 notices? We all want to help renters, but we need to take care that we do not pass new laws that might actually make it harder for vulnerable people to get rented accommodation.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. We want both to encourage good landlords to stay in the sector and to make sure that proposals do not impact on supply. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will be consulting landlords and looking at similar changes in Scotland. However, I reassure her that we recognise that small landlords, or incidental landlords, may have different requirements and they will therefore be very much part of the consultation.

**Sir Henry Bellingham:** Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to Snap-on UK Holdings in King's Lynn in my constituency? It now employs 141 people and has recently won two Queen's awards for enterprise and international trade. It is currently exporting to France, Poland, Italy and Spain, and it is trying to open up markets in Asia and Africa. What can she do to encourage other businesses in the country to follow Snap-on's example and boost their exports, boost our economy and create jobs?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the excellent work of Snap-on UK Holdings, which has won a Queen's award for enterprise. Businesses in North West Norfolk have benefited from 60 start-up loans, totalling nearly £500,000. They also have the growing business fund, which provides grants of up to £500,000 per business, where there is an opportunity to innovate and grow and create jobs.

**Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab):** Small businesses often rely on each other for mutual support; that is certainly the case in my constituency. Will the Minister please explain to her colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions how detrimental it would be for small businesses and the town centre economy if they relocate 250 jobs out of Merthyr Tydfil town centre as part of their push to centralise jobs and services?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about our high streets. Obviously, the Government play an important part in that respect in making decisions that affect our regions. I would like to reassure him about what we are doing for high streets and the retail sector. With the Retail Sector Council, we are looking at business costs and elements around skills and employment on the high street. We remain committed to making sure that our high streets remain the heart of our communities. I will make sure that I do everything in my capacity as Minister to achieve that.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Can the Minister outline any initiatives that are being considered to offset high street rates to encourage businesses to not only

trade online but have a presence in local high streets? Some of my constituents have done that, and they have been quite successful.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point with regard to traditional retail and online sales. I have spoken with the likes of Amazon and eBay, and one thing I have been extremely surprised at is that they have worked with small businesses that have started online but then invested in bricks-and-mortar retail outlets. We need to work to make sure we have a mixed economy, and I have outlined the work we are doing with the Retail Sector Council, particularly looking at business rates and other issues.

**Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con):** I congratulate the Minister on the work she does for small businesses. She will know that one of the major challenges small businesses face is not just with late payments but with getting prompt payments and reasonable terms from bigger businesses. Will she ensure that the Government do all they can to end the scourge of late payment? Will she also ensure that the prompt payment code has some teeth so that it actually does the job it is supposed to?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting prompt payment. It is a particular focus within the Department to tackle late payments, which can be very damaging to small businesses. This week, the Chartered Institute of Credit Management has announced that there are 17 businesses that I have removed or suspended from the prompt payment code to make sure that we highlight where bad practice is occurring. We want to bring business with us. We do know that late payments can have a major impact on small businesses, and I therefore stand committed to ensuring that we do all we can as a Government to end this poor practice.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** This morning I met Matt Dowling of the Freelancer Club, who adumbrated to me some of the terrible situations that freelancers have faced when trying to be paid, often being coaxed into working for nothing for things like experience. Will the Minister meet me and Mr Dowling to discuss how we might crack down on that?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Absolutely. I reiterate that this Government do not support the culture of poor payments and late payments. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the concerns of those in a particular sector who might face trouble getting paid for legitimate work. I would be very happy to meet him and that organisation.

### UK-EU Trading Relationship: Industrial Strategy

3. **Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op):** What assessment he has made of the effect of uncertainty of the UK's trading relationship with the EU on the delivery of the industrial strategy. [910592]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** As the hon. Gentleman will know, there are huge opportunities for advanced manufacturers, especially in his region, and the sector

benefits from a minimum of frictions in trade, so it is very important that we conclude a deal with the European Union.

**Mr Bailey:** I thank the Secretary of State for that reply and commend him for his approach. Boosting productivity is the declared objective of the industrial strategy, but it is plummeting at the moment due to Brexit uncertainty. Does he agree that it is absolutely essential that we get an early Brexit deal that delivers both a customs union and frictionless market access to the EU, because otherwise it is doomed to failure?

**Greg Clark:** I am a bit more optimistic than the hon. Gentleman in that respect, not least because of the announcement just yesterday from the Advanced Propulsion Centre, which he knows very well, about the opportunity of nearly £5 billion for manufacturers, including in the west midlands, to participate in the growing market for electric vehicle batteries. It is therefore crucial that we drive productivity forward. He will also know of the work that Jürgen Maier is leading, as part of the Made Smarter Review, to capitalise on the opportunities. However, as I have always been clear with the House, we can best advantage those manufacturers if they are able to continue to trade freely and without frictions with the European Union.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Government have held discussions with a range of businesses, including those with complex customs requirements and those that export and trade mainly with the European Union, in formulating all their plans?

**Greg Clark:** I and my colleagues meet very regularly—every day—with businesses in all sectors and in all parts of the country. I think that there is a strong feeling in the business community that we need to bring to a resolution the question of our future relationship with the European Union. The longer this situation goes on, the more attractive investment decisions are put on hold, and they could be creating jobs now.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The most recent quarterly economic survey from the North East England chamber of commerce shows a reported mark-down in sales and exports from the north-east. It states:

“We frequently hear from members that uncertainty over Brexit is delaying investment and hiring decisions for their businesses and their customers.”

What specific north-east-focused steps are the Government taking to ensure that the north-east business community and local jobs will not be affected by that, given that the Government’s own analysis shows that any Brexit outcome will affect the north-east the hardest?

**Greg Clark:** One specific north-east-focused step is to invite the hon. Lady to vote for the deal that has been put before the House.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): The steel industry is, rightly, a key part of the industrial strategy. In that context, what early discussions has the Secretary of State had on the steel charter and the key asks contained within it?

**Greg Clark:** The discussions that we have had are intended to ensure that the steel sector, which is of fundamental importance to this country, can benefit from some of the manufacturing opportunities that we have talked about. As we expand our production of vehicles, as I hope we will do, there will be a strong requirement for steel, and through the proposed strategy we will ensure that that is British steel.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s industrial strategy states that manufacturing is crucial to the economy and promises to support businesses to access international markets and drive up exports. However, according to Make UK, stockpiling in the UK is now the highest of any G7 nation ever, as manufacturers try to protect themselves from Brexit uncertainty. Chambers of commerce across the country report falls in cash flow because money tied up in stock is not available to drive exports or pay wages. Cash flow is the lifeblood of manufacturing and the cause of up to 90% of business failures. Whatever the eventual outcome of the Government’s Brexit shambles, British manufacturers must be in business to meet its challenges, so will he now commit to providing financial support?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady quotes Make UK. The chief executive of Make UK, with whom I meet almost every week, has said:

“Make UK has consistently supported the Government’s withdrawal agreement as it removes the risk of no deal and delivers a sensible transition period which is vital for the needs of manufacturers.”

I think the hon. Lady and I have a joint view on the importance of manufacturing, not least in the north-east. I hope that she will have the flexibility and pragmatism to come together—I am talking to her colleague the shadow Secretary of State—and agree a way forward in line with what Make UK recommends.

#### **Solar Households: Smart Export Guarantee**

4. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): When his Department plans to publish its smart export guarantee proposals for new solar households. [910593]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** The smart export guarantee will pave the way to a smarter, more flexible energy system and ensure small-scale low-carbon generators are paid for the electricity they export to the grid. Yesterday, we published a consultation on the SEG draft licence conditions. We intend to start the legislative process for the smart export guarantee before the summer recess. There are already encouraging signals from the market and suppliers are beginning to voluntarily offer smart export tariffs.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I think a lot of people in the sector will feel that the delay is not acceptable. Does the Minister agree that the Government must mandate a fair minimum floor price to prevent suppliers from taking advantage of solar households and other small-scale solar generators? The energy price cap is there to ensure suppliers sell power at a fair price. We need a similar mechanism to ensure they purchase at a fair price, too.

**Chris Skidmore:** That will be part of the consultation. We will set out our final proposals for the guarantee as soon as possible—as I said, before the summer recess. In the meantime, the right signals are already emerging. Energy suppliers are voluntarily bringing forward smart export tariffs.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): As we have heard, rather than publish a smart export guarantee that actually works, the Tories plan to further stifle the industry by hiking VAT on solar. Is it not time that the Minister's Government stopped the Tory war on renewables and started taking climate change seriously by following the leadership of Scotland's First Minister and declaring a climate emergency?

**Chris Skidmore:** The hon. Gentleman fails to mention the success story that is solar photovoltaic. Over the past eight years since May 2010, under the coalition Government and this Government, 99% of capacity has been deployed. That is 49% of the total investment in the EU. We have installed more than twice as much solar capacity as any other European country—more than Germany, France and Australia combined. That is something he should welcome rather than talk down.

**Drew Hendry:** The Minister has his head in the sand over climate change. Last week, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee concluded that the UK could not credibly adopt a net zero emissions target without greater investment in new technologies. If the Tories will not act, when will they devolve the powers to Scotland, so the Scottish Government can show them how to do it?

**Chris Skidmore:** On the net zero target, we will obviously wait on the Committee on Climate Change report, which will be published on Thursday 2 May. I am sure the hon. Gentleman welcomes the Government's success story on solar capacity and renewables. In comparison with the early 1990s, emissions have come down by 40% while the economy grew by 72%. There is more to do—there will always be more to do—but we are on the right track and doing the right thing. Solar capacity has reached 30 GW, compared with an estimate of 10 GW to 12 GW. We continue to ensure we exceed our targets.

### Sustainable Packaging

5. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he has taken to promote the use of sustainable packaging. [910594]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson):** The Government are committed to building a globally competitive and sustainable packaging industry through research and innovation. As we announced in the UK's first bioeconomy strategy at the end of last year, we are providing up to £60 million to transform the plastics economy through the industrial strategy challenge fund, so that we can establish the UK as the world's leading innovator in smart, sustainable packaging.

**Rachael Maskell:** The Government's response to plastic use has been woeful, with a 4% increase in plastic use just last year. There is now more plastic in our oceans

than fish. In the light of this environmental calamity, will the Government make a new commitment to ensure that only organic-based packaging material is in place, with no more plastics by 2025?

**Andrew Stephenson:** The UK has committed to being a global leader on this topic. We have already taken more than 15 billion plastic carrier bags out of the economy, we are consulting on a deposit return scheme and we have introduced proposals for a world-leading new tax on plastic packaging that does not meet minimum thresholds. There is always more that we can do, but there is an awful lot that we have already done.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Does the Minister recognise the contribution of the UK packaging manufacturing industry, which has annual sales of £12 billion, employs 85,000 people and makes up 3% of the UK manufacturing base, in working closely to increase the percentage of recycled material by using innovative new technologies and materials?

**Andrew Stephenson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The UK plastics industry is vital to our economy, employing more than 170,000 people. This new challenge for the sector allows it to create new jobs as it embraces our challenging targets and ambitions in this area.

20. [910612] **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The UK plastics pact is an important part of our achieving a circular economy and preventing plastics from ending up in our oceans. However, one year into this seven-year commitment, we still do not have the information on whether the warm words have been matched by firm action. Will the Minister introduce transparent benchmarking and reporting mechanisms, so that we can all hold the Government and the plastics industry to account?

**Andrew Stephenson:** Most major supermarkets are signatories to that pact, and we have certainly seen some go further than others. A lot of lessons can be learned. It is a mixed picture at the moment, so I am certainly keen to keep this area under review. I particularly praise Morrisons, which has come out with a range of things on this, but there are many other supermarkets available that are working hard on this topic. We all have to work together on this—consumers, business and the Government.

### Business: Start and Growth

6. **Adam Afriyie** (Windsor) (Con): What recent progress he has made on meeting the Government's ambition to make the UK the best place to start and grow a business. [910596]

**Andrew Stephenson:** To encourage the next generation of innovative entrepreneurs, our modern industrial strategy announced the biggest increase in public research and development funding on record—an extra £7 billion by 2021-22. We have also launched an independent review of the barriers facing young entrepreneurs, and we have published a review of the barriers facing female entrepreneurs.

**Adam Afriyie:** I very much welcome that answer, and I very much welcome the Minister on his debut appearance at the Dispatch Box. I would also very much like to welcome him to Windsor, where residents of the royal borough have the lowest council tax in the country and residents of Bracknell Forest have low council tax but also high-quality services. That is why so many talented people come to Windsor to live and work. Will the Minister join me in recognising the good work of the Thames Valley Berkshire local enterprise partnership and the two key local authorities in making the Windsor constituency a great place to live, work and, above all, to start and run a business?

**Andrew Stephenson:** I agree with my hon. Friend and welcome his support for the good work of the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP and his local councils. My officials will work with his LEP and its local authority partners to produce a local industrial strategy for Berkshire that will boost productivity and support business start-ups. That is in addition to the £142 million local growth fund investment that we have already made in the county.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Similarly, in my constituency, young entrepreneurs trying to set up businesses, particularly in the digital sector, face a real shortage in the availability of electricity through the district grid—an issue identified by my local LEP. Will the Minister agree to meet me and the LEP to see what can be done to improve the situation?

**Andrew Stephenson:** We are working closely with LEPs on this issue, but I will be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): To be the best place to grow and start a business means having consistent rules and regulations. My brilliant local Medway Licensed Taxi Drivers Association has raised a real concern about Uber operating in Medway without having the same rules and regulations as association members. Will the Minister meet me and that brilliant association to look at those rules and regulations, to ensure that they are fair? I declare an interest: I have relatives in that trade.

**Andrew Stephenson:** My hon. Friend is a huge champion of his constituency, and particularly its small businesses. That meeting would probably be more appropriate with the small business Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), and I am sure that she will be happy to take such a meeting.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Minister agree that after our eventual departure from the EU the growth of more small businesses and the expansion of existing small businesses, freed from bureaucracy, will be central to the economy of the entire United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland?

**Andrew Stephenson:** Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. I was proud to be a small businessman myself, employing eight people, in my life before politics. We are ranked in the top 10 globally as a place to do business, and this Government will continue to do everything it can to support small business.

## Fracking: Methane Leakages

7. **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he has taken to reduce methane leakages as a result of fracking. [910597]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** The UK has many years of experience regulating the onshore oil and gas industry, and measures are in place to minimise methane emissions. The Environment Agency issues and robustly enforces legally binding environmental permits regulating methane emissions. Under these permits, operators must have an agreed gas management plan to detect leaks and make repairs over the lifetime of site operations. They must also monitor emissions before and during shale gas operations.

**Geraint Davies:** The Minister will know that NASA and satellite data show that 5% of the methane from fracking is leaked through fugitive emissions and that methane is 85 times worse than carbon dioxide for global warming, which makes fracking worse than coal for climate change. Will he meet me to discuss my fracking Bill, instead of listening to Jim Ratcliffe, the richest man in Britain, from Ineos, who is hellbent on Brexit to avoid the environmental controls on fracking currently imposed by the European Union?

**Chris Skidmore:** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and I would emphasise his comment about feeding in space data research. It highlights the importance of the UK space industry in looking at environmental issues. The Government also have a grant funding and environmental monitoring programme led by the British Geological Survey in respect of shale gas sites. All the information for that is publicly available. I also note that the MacKay-Stone 2013 report concluded that the carbon footprint of UK shale gas would be much less than that of coal and comparable to that of imported liquefied natural gas.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): There is no fracking in Scotland, there has been no fracking in Scotland and, under the SNP, there will be no fracking in Scotland. If we going to be serious about the climate emergency, there should not be fracking anywhere in the United Kingdom, so will the UK finally follow Scotland's lead and rule out fracking on these islands?

**Chris Skidmore:** Unfortunately, residents and households in Scotland still need to use gas, given that 85% of UK households use gas for heating, and it is right that we look at opportunities to meet our energy demand. Some 47% of gas was imported in 2017, but if we do not take action, this could rise to 72%. We want to increase our opportunities for generating electricity through renewables. In quarter 3 of 2018, just 2.5% of electricity was generated by coal, compared with 40% in 2010, so we are going in the right direction, but we cannot forget that people will be using gas in Scotland.

## Science Sector: International Collaboration

8. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote international collaboration in the science sector. [910598]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** As announced in the spring statement, I have invited Professor Sir Adrian Smith to provide independent advice on potential future funding schemes in the context of the UK's future ambitions for European and international collaboration on science and innovation. I also look forward to welcoming delegations from over 50 countries to the EUREKA global innovation summit in Manchester this May.

**Bob Blackman:** Our world-class scientists collaborate across the world, with the EU and beyond, and that collaboration is vital for further research and innovation in this country. Horizon 2020 is a ready-made platform for that collaboration. Will my hon. Friend commit to joining the Horizon 2020 programme as we leave the EU?

**Chris Skidmore:** The Government have committed to guaranteeing all existing Horizon 2020 projects before Brexit. That was issued in August 2016 and demonstrated the Government's commitment early on to protecting our scientific partnerships. We then had the underwrite extension in July 2018 which said that even once we had left the European Union—for two years up until December 2020—we would commit to funding those projects for the lifetime of them. We are now moving into negotiations on Horizon Europe, which is the successor scheme to Horizon 2020. I took part in the EU Competitiveness Council in February—I hope also to attend on 28 May—and it is our ambition to associate into Horizon Europe. On investment, my hon. Friend will be well aware that through our world-class universities we put in £4 billion and got back £5.7 billion in investment.

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Even at the height of the cold war, there was a surprising level of collaboration between Russian and UK nuclear physicists. Will the Minister assure me that there will be similar collaboration when it comes to the skills that we have in the UK—particularly at Dounreay, in my constituency—in nuclear decommissioning, which is an industry that we could export and which could make a lot of money for the UK?

**Chris Skidmore:** I entirely agree, and I pay tribute to the UK nuclear decommissioning sector. As science Minister, I have seen the innovation that is being developed. I recently announced £93 million for a robotics for hazardous environments programme involving about seven universities across the UK, which are looking into how we can use robotics more effectively to help nuclear decommissioning. I am delighted that that is now being transferred to Fukushima in Japan. The Government are ensuring that scientific collaboration is international. We will publish an international research and innovation strategy shortly, and I shall welcome any opportunities, involving any countries, to continue that work.

#### **Supermarket Sector: Employment Contract Terms and Conditions**

9. **Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab):** What recent representations his Department has received on proposed changes to employment contract terms and conditions in the supermarket sector. [910599]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** I regularly meet representatives of the supermarket sector, both individually and through the Retail Sector Council, to discuss a range of issues. One issue that the council has identified as a priority is employment. The Government have committed themselves to upgrading workers' rights and protecting the most vulnerable workers in all sectors through the good work plan. That represents the biggest upgrade of workers' rights for over 20 years.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** I apologise for arriving late, Mr Speaker. I am delighted to have the opportunity to ask the Minister to support Mrs A, who has worked for Asda for 30 years. Her take-home pay, and that of 3,000 other members of staff, will be cut because of changes in the pay structure masquerading as an hourly increase. Paid breaks will be reduced, the night shift will be changed, and bonuses will be slashed. Will the Minister join me in supporting Mrs A and ensuring that she keeps what she is earning now?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady was not late for her own question. Her principal responsibility is to be in her place to ask her question, and we are delighted to see her. She does not need to be too apologetic; in fact, she does not need to be apologetic at all.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise those questions. She is a strong campaigner for workers in her constituency, and we have met on a number of occasions to discuss some of the issues involved. Obviously we want Asda employees to receive the remuneration to which they are entitled. It is true that a consultation is taking place on changes that may be introduced towards the end of the year, but, in general, terms and conditions are subject to negotiation between the employer and the employee. While it is always open to either party to enter into negotiations on the terms of contracts, if employees are subject to changes in terms to which they have not agreed, they can take legal action.

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** The Minister is right to champion workers' rights, because ours is the party of the workers. However, there are still too many examples of employers not paying the national living wage. What further steps will the Government take to ensure that the national living wage is enforced and workers receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue. He is right: we are the party of the workers, which is why we introduced the good work plan, the biggest reform of workers' rights for 20 years. We are committed to enforcing the national minimum wage and ensuring that people receive the remuneration that they deserve. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has identified £24.4 million of arrears that affected more than 200,000 workers last year, which was an increase on the previous year. We have almost doubled the budget for enforcement since 2015, and we remain committed to ensuring that people receive the national minimum wage when they are entitled to it.

### Climate Change: Discussions with DEFRA

11. **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on tackling climate change. [910601]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** Tackling climate change is a cross-Government priority. Just last week my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth made an oral statement outlining the Government's climate change priorities. Ministers in the Departments for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs meet regularly to discuss matters including waste management, agriculture, forestry, resource efficiency and the environment Bill. We will host the upcoming Inter-Ministerial Group on Clean Growth to discuss the report from the Committee on Climate Change and the UK's offer to host the United Nations Conference of the Parties in 2020.

**Luke Pollard:** After the Government's refusal to declare a climate emergency, may I ask the Minister what he has personally taken away from the visit of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg and her most powerful advocacy on the need for urgent action?

**Chris Skidmore:** I think we will be having a thorough debate on this issue of climate change emergency in the Opposition day debate tomorrow. When it comes to my personal role as the Minister with responsibility for science, innovation and research, I entirely agree that we need to be making more investment in climate change technology in order to reach our target of 2.4% of GDP on research and development. We have already announced our missions in relation to clean growth. I absolutely believe we should be listening to the experts—that includes the scientists—and learning from climate science, wherever that may be, to make sure we can reduce our emissions.

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): Since the Rio summit in 1992, the UK has actually decarbonised more than any other G7 economy, while growing our economy the most at the same time. However, we need to do more, which is why I am looking forward to the Committee on Climate Change report on Thursday. If it does indeed recommend a net zero target, will the Minister commit to ensuring that that is something the Government will very seriously consider bringing into law at the first opportunity?

**Chris Skidmore:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the achievements that have been made in recent years, but it is important that we redouble our efforts. The Committee on Climate Change report, which will be published on Thursday, was commissioned by the Government, and the Government will be taking actions on the back of its recommendations. It is important that we look to continue our actions, but it is also important that we do so with our international partners. We have the UN summit taking place in September and future COPs, including the one we would like to host in 2020.

19. [910611] **Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): The Committee on Climate Change says that we need to double our production of onshore wind in the next decade; instead, it is likely to halve because of this Government's ideological opposition to it. We are not on target to meet our fourth and fifth carbon budgets, let alone achieve net zero, so will the Government end their ideological opposition to onshore wind so that we can hand a better planet on to future generations?

**Chris Skidmore:** I would not call listening to local communities and reflecting on the need to create sustainable communities locally "ideological opposition". We need to work with everybody—all citizens. There has been talk of citizens' committees, so why not ensure that local communities are able to reflect on the benefits of renewable energy in their communities, and begin such dialogues with them, rather than call them ideological opponents of renewables? I do not think that is very fair on those communities.

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I would like to send the thoughts of Opposition Members to the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth. I welcome this Minister to his place and look forward to our exchanges over the Dispatch Box.

In 2016, the UK's carbon emissions fell at 6% a year, and in 2017, emissions fell at 3% a year, but in 2018, the figure was 2%—just a 2% fall—so at a time when action should be ramping up to tackle the climate emergency, can the Minister explain why the UK's progress is slowing down?

**Chris Skidmore:** I do not recognise that. The fact is that we have met our first and second carbon budgets over the 2008 to 2012 and 2013 to 2017 periods. We have managed to reach those targets. Turnover for clean business was up 7% in 2017, contributing £44.5 billion to the economy. When it comes to ensuring that we look at our clean growth strategy, we have set out quite clearly opportunities to halve the energy use of new buildings by 2030 and to establish the world's first net zero carbon industrial cluster by 2040. By comparison with our European neighbours, we are racing ahead—we are leaders in this field—and we want to make sure that we can continue to do so.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** With respect, the Minister is alluding to the UK's emissions cuts since 2010, when the UK still benefited from policies put in place by the previous Labour Government—policies that the Conservatives have now scrapped. Secondly, it is irrelevant, quite frankly, to climate physics whether the UK is doing slightly better or worse than other countries that are also failing to take the necessary action.

I ask this in good faith and in all seriousness: does the Minister accept that the UK's stalling progress is related to banning—in effect—onshore wind, reducing almost all support for solar power, scrapping the zero-carbon homes standard and selling off the Green Investment Bank? Will he be honest about the challenge, and work with Labour and Members right across this House on turning this around, so that we can truly tackle climate change and properly seize the economic opportunities within the green economy?

**Chris Skidmore:** It is important to recognise that 56% of electricity power generation is now based around low-carbon economy generation and that 33% of that is from renewables, up from 7% in 2010. Coal represents 2.5% of our electricity generation, and last weekend the UK went 90 hours without any coal electricity generation for the first time since the industrial revolution. As we are now involved in the fourth industrial revolution, we want to ensure that we continue to power through and that we can adopt more renewables for the future.

### Renewable Energy Sources

12. **Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): What plans the Government have to expand the use of renewable energy sources. [910602]

16. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What progress he has made on promoting renewable energy generation. [910606]

18. **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): What progress he has made on promoting renewable energy generation. [910609]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** Last year, renewable generation provided a third of our electricity and, as I have stated, over the Easter weekend we went 90 hours without any coal generation. Both were new records. Our next contracts for difference allocation round will open next month. We are driving down the cost of clean technologies and investing £2.5 billion in low-carbon innovation.

**Anna McMorrin:** Far from leading the way, the UK has plummeted to the bottom of SolarPower Europe's league table of 20 world markets in solar, and we are one of the few EU countries not providing any support at all to solar power. Not only has solar had all support removed prematurely but it is being hit by wave after wave of fresh damage, making it harder to meet our climate targets. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister meet me to discuss the damaging net effect of the Government's policies on solar and on the transition to clean energy?

**Chris Skidmore:** I am sure that the Minister for Energy and Climate Change will be happy to meet the hon. Lady, but as I have stated, photovoltaics is a UK success story. We have seen 830,000 installations, and I have mentioned the smart export guarantee tariff that is being designed. We want to ensure that this will be able to generate profit for those companies, and that we continue to be able to lead Europe on this.

**Mike Wood:** Eliminating net carbon emissions by 2050 is both ambitious and achievable. Does my hon. Friend agree that the progress made over the past decade demonstrates that, where there is the political will, it is possible to reduce emissions while supporting economic prosperity?

**Chris Skidmore:** Absolutely. We need to deliver ambitious reductions in emissions, considering our long-term targets in the light of the latest science. That is why we have asked the Committee on Climate Change for advice on

our long-term targets, including that net zero target. The committee's advice will be published this Thursday, and we will consider it carefully.

**Kirstene Hair:** Of course we have a record to be proud of when it comes to renewable energy, but we should always continue to be as ambitious as we have been. How significant has the UK's contribution been to ensuring that Scotland meets its renewable targets?

**Chris Skidmore:** The Government are firmly committed to the renewables industry, and Scotland has benefited proportionately more than the rest of the United Kingdom under existing policies. It will continue to benefit from future investment. Fifteen Scottish projects have been awarded contracts for difference with a total capacity of 2.57 GW, and the Government and numerous other public sector organisations have provided £15 million to fund the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney, which is one of the world's leading wave and tidal demonstration centres.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The truth of the matter right now is that, far from expanding the source of renewables, the Government have narrowed the use of renewable energy in recent years. Of course we should strongly support the development of offshore wind, but the Minister must acknowledge that marine and tidal power has been almost strangled at birth by the Government's indifference and even active hostility, and that onshore wind and solar PV have been severely hampered by adverse Government decisions on support and planning. On lack of support, will the Minister answer a specific question? Why is he sanctioning a VAT rate rise to 20% on solar power while at the same time maintaining a rate of just 5% on coal and fuel oil?

**Chris Skidmore:** The industry has invested more than £92 billion in clean energy since 2010. As I have stated, renewables now generate 33% of our electricity, and 52.8% comes from low-carbon sources. As for the VAT issue, we are working with organisations and companies to ensure that we can get the best possible deal when it comes to renewables. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth will be happy to discuss the matter with the hon. Gentleman in further detail, but we are committed to ensuring that we have a wide range of renewables, including marine energy and offshore and onshore wind, to make sure that we can continue to drive up our renewable capacity.

14. [910604] **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Thirty gigawatts of installed solar shows that it is an essential tool to ensure clean growth and is vital in our fight against climate change. Despite the Treasury's consultation, does the Minister agree that it should keep the reduced VAT rate for solar, which was guaranteed as recently as 2016?

**Chris Skidmore:** The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) also reflected on that, and it is vital that renewables remain an important part of our energy generation mix. Our clean growth and industrial strategies set out how we will build progress in all such areas, but I am sure that the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth will be happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) to discuss the issue.

### Businesses in Taunton Deane

13. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support businesses in Taunton Deane constituency. [910603]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson):** The Heart of the South West local enterprise partnership, which covers both Somerset and Devon, is receiving £239 million through the local growth fund to drive regional economic development. That includes an investment of over £24 million in projects in Taunton Deane, such as the redevelopment of Taunton station and improvements to junction 25, which is one of the largest investments that we have made in the south-west through the local growth fund to date.

**Rebecca Pow:** I welcome the Minister to his new role. Will he join me in congratulating all those involved in the development of the new headquarters for the UK Hydrographic Office, the opening of which I attended in Taunton last week? Will he also join me in supporting the endeavour to use its expertise in marine data to open a marine geospatial innovation centre at Firepool in Taunton to open up opportunities in the blue economy?

**Andrew Stephenson:** I will of course join my hon. Friend in congratulating those involved in the opening of the new UK Hydrographic Office headquarters in her constituency. It is a world-class natural asset. The UKHO is working with local partners to scope the feasibility of developing a marine geospatial innovation centre in Taunton, and it plays a key role in the south-west's local industrial strategy.

### Workers' Rights: Trade Union Discussions

15. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What plans he has to hold discussions with trades union representatives on increasing workers' rights. [910605]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** Informed by my regular discussions with trade unions, we have extended worker rights, and both Houses agreed last month to close the Swedish derogation loophole to protect agency workers. On 1 April, we celebrated with union representatives the 20th anniversary of the national minimum wage. The day was marked by the rise in the national living wage, which has delivered the fastest pay rise for the lowest paid in at least 20 years, benefiting nearly 1.8 million workers.

**Martyn Day:** The Scottish Trades Union Congress general secretary, Grahame Smith, has said that the Scottish Government's

"Fair Work Action Plan demonstrates a commitment to using the powers the Government has at its disposal to deliver Fair Work, which is good for workers and good for business."

Will the Secretary of State do his bit by introducing a real living wage? If not, will he devolve the policy so that the Scottish Government can?

**Greg Clark:** What the hon. Gentleman did not mention is that this Government introduced the national living wage, and we have just increased it to its highest-ever level, benefiting millions of people around the country. I would have thought that he would welcome that.

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): There are many warm words from the Government on workers' rights, but to say that the Conservatives are the party of workers is a joke, because their actions in government tell a different story. Strong economies are almost always underpinned by strong trade union rights. Germany, Sweden, Norway and Denmark all have extensive sectoral collective bargaining coverage, which has been used to reduce income inequality and drive up wages. The hostility towards trade unions and the dismissal of collective bargaining here is not just bad for workers but bad for the economy, creating a vicious cycle of lower wages, reducing tax revenues and lowering spending. The obsession with undermining union rights is self-defeating. What is the Secretary of State doing to break the cycle?

**Greg Clark:** If you want to be the party of workers, you need to be the party that creates work. There are 1.5 million more people employed in work as a result of this Government's policies, and of course we want to make sure they are in good jobs. The effort of our industrial strategy is to drive up productivity, which is necessary if pay rates are to increase over time. The hon. Lady should acknowledge the reforms, brought in partly as a result of the Matthew Taylor report, that have closed the Swedish derogation, which her party failed to close over 13 years in office.

### Topical Questions

T1. [910615] **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** Nearly 30 years ago Margaret Thatcher made a speech at the UN General Assembly in which she described

"what may be early signs of man-induced climatic change."

Ever since then, the UK has continued to lead the world on this issue. The UK, yet again, broke its coal-free power generation record, which now amounts to more than three and a half days without any electricity being generated from coal, over the weekend—the longest period since the industrial revolution in which coal has not been burned for power in this country.

Later this week we have another seminal moment in which the independent Committee on Climate Change will report back, at the Government's request, on how we can set a date to achieve net zero emissions—once again, this country is leading the world on climate change.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I am sure the House will wish to join me in paying tribute to the management, the workforce and the emergency services who dealt so effectively with the explosion at the steelworks in my constituency on Friday. We wish the two men who received minor injuries all the best.

The predecessor of the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) promised the last meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on steel and metal-related industries that he would host a meeting of steel sector stakeholders, supply chains and steel MPs to

discuss the failure to develop a steel sector deal. Will the Minister now commit to honouring that commitment and to meeting us as soon as possible?

**Greg Clark:** First, I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the workers at Port Talbot and to the emergency services, which responded with characteristic bravery and dispatch to deal with that very worrying incident. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), and I spoke to the company and the trade unions the next morning, and we are all relieved that the situation was not worse. Of course, we send our sympathies to the workers affected.

As the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) knows from an earlier answer, we are clear on the importance of the steel sector for the future of manufacturing generally, and I take a personal interest. These are early days for the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, but I know he shares my enthusiasm, and perhaps we can both come to that meeting.

T4. [910619] **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): British businesses in all sectors currently benefit greatly from the ability of UK-based law firms to advise and act for them on contractual, regulatory and intellectual property matters when they conduct business within the European Union. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking with other Ministers to ensure that commercial advantage is not lost as we leave the EU?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend, who chairs the Select Committee on Justice, makes an excellent point on one of our principal sources of export earnings. More than that, the pre-eminence of law in the UK brings firms from jurisdictions around the world to do business here. We are determined that we should maintain our good relations across the continent and that we should keep up to date in our practices. He will know that, through the industrial strategy, we are investing in the regulators' pioneer fund to make sure that legal services take their place at the cutting edge of innovation.

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): On 4 April, the Office for Product Safety and Standards published its investigation into Whirlpool and the ongoing issue of its product safety. The report was lambasted by consumer organisations, including Which?, as weak. Just days later it was revealed in the media that Whirlpool allegedly paid one consumer to stay silent after she was forced to flee with two young children as a blaze engulfed her home after her dryer had been modified. Can the Minister tell us whether the OPSS was aware of those allegations and, if not, whether it will now reopen its investigation in light of the accusations?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue, and I commit to making sure that I speak to the OPSS about the allegations she has highlighted and what further information we can ascertain. She is right, in that I laid a written ministerial statement before the House on 4 April. I

have to let the House know that the OPSS has written to Whirlpool asking it to take action, and it has 28 days to reply to that. I stand ready, as the Minister, to make sure that consumer safety and protection is at the heart of what we are doing and that we take further action where necessary.

T7. [910622] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): Many of my constituents still access some form of off-grid energy. While the Department looks to introduce a cleaner form of energy, will it also look at the cost impact of energy? Many of these people are also in fuel poverty and would like not only a clean form of energy, but a cheap one.

**Greg Clark:** I recognise the situation my hon. Friend describes; in his rural constituency, this is a big problem. In the spring statement, we announced that the future homes standard would ensure that all new buildings, including those in rural areas, are equipped with low-carbon sources of heat and power by 2025. We also recognise the importance of households that are off the gas grid and have them in mind as we deal with the energy companies in terms of their tariffs.

T2. [910616] **Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): This Government are not even hiding their disdain for Scottish business, with one of them telling the BBC recently:

“Once you’ve hit the”—

Brexit—

“iceberg, you’re all on it together”.

When will the Minister accept that if he will not provide that level of security and that lifeboat, the Scottish people will, by voting for independence?

**Greg Clark:** It is a sad reflection that the job creation that has taken place in Scotland lags behind that in the rest of the UK. I fancy that one reason for that is that Scotland has acquired a reputation for being the highest-tax part of the UK. So I hope the hon. Gentleman would reflect on these causes and advise his colleagues in Holyrood to take a different course.

T9. [910624] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): England is currently the only home nation that provides no central Government investment to improve domestic energy efficiency. To address this deficit, will the Secretary of State take up the Committee on Fuel Poverty's proposal for the introduction of a new clean growth fuel poverty challenge fund?

**Greg Clark:** I am aware of the advice from the committee, which we will consider carefully. My hon. Friend will know that the energy company obligation has been reformed to concentrate on fuel poverty, but we are grateful for the committee's advice and we will respond shortly.

T3. [910618] **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I know that the Secretary of State will agree with more than 80 cross-party MPs who came together yesterday to say that to realise the northern powerhouse vision, we need the economic commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2. Will he communicate that to

aspirant Members from his party who want to see a race to the bottom in the next Tory leadership race? The north will not tolerate that.

**Greg Clark:** Across the country, it is crucial that we invest in infrastructure. If we want to compete with other nations across the world, we need to make sure that our businesses and our people can count on fast connections, and that includes between our great cities.

**Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con):** Now that I am not bound by the ministerial code, or indeed collective responsibility, I feel that I can speak my mind about sector deals. I think they are absolutely brilliant, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to point out some of the achievements made on delivering the commitments made between the Government and industry.

**Mr Speaker:** I cannot say that I had noticed that the hon. Gentleman was previously all that closely bound.

**Greg Clark:** That was my experience, too, Mr Speaker. Goodness knows what my hon. Friend will be like now that he is on the Back Benches. May I pay tribute to the fantastic work he did in securing so many of the sector deals? He got to know very well the needs of particular industries and sectors. Let me pay tribute to the creative industries sector deal, for example, which this very weekend launched a new immersive technology version of “Peaky Blinders”. I do not know whether he is a fan of that series. If he is—

**Mr Speaker:** What is it?

**Greg Clark:** “Peaky Blinders” is an award-winning programme, which my hon. Friend will be able to experience in virtual reality as a result of the sector deal done with our creative industries, particularly the gaming industry.

T5. [910620] **Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab):** A recent report by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders estimated that the UK could lead the world in connected and autonomous vehicles. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that UK car manufacturers can seize this opportunity?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady will know that the investment that is being made through the industrial strategy in testbed facilities and data centres for connected and autonomous vehicles is geared towards making Britain the go-to place in the world for the development, deployment and manufacture of such vehicles. As the hon. Lady takes an interest in the sector, I would be delighted to invite her to see and meet some of the companies involved in what is a great set of possibilities for this country.

**Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con):** Shared parental leave is a good option for new parents, but the Secretary of State will know that take-up remains low. Will he consider introducing a stand-alone period of parental leave just for partners, to help families to balance work and childcare?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. She is a keen champion of rights for parents. I agree that fathers and partners have a key role to play in

caring for their children. The shared parental leave and pay scheme gives parents more choice and flexibility and challenges the assumption that the mother will always be the primary carer. Last year, the Government ran a £1.5 million campaign to promote shared parental leave and to increase its take-up, and we are preparing a further campaign for later in the year. I assure my hon. Friend that we always keep these things under review. I am keen to meet her in the near future to discuss her particular concerns.

T6. [910621] **Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab):** The Government’s industrial strategy has recently drawn criticism for neglecting steel. The UK steel charter was mentioned earlier; will Ministers attend the launch of the charter on 20 May and sign up to it on behalf of the Department, to maximise opportunities for UK steel in uncertain times?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson):** I look forward to working with the UK steel sector and have already had several engagements. Steel overcapacity remains a significant global issue that requires international solutions, but here in the UK we have already done a range of things, including identifying more than £3.8 billion a year of UK domestic requirement for steel.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are running out of time—indeed, we have run out of time—but I know that the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), who is a practitioner of caring and sharing, will want to be pithy to accommodate colleagues.

**Sarah Newton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Yesterday, the Princess Royal helped to mark a significant milestone in the exploration of deep geothermal energy in Cornwall, as the deepest and hottest hole on the UK mainland has been successfully drilled. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meet me to discuss what more the Government can do to support this potentially scalable new source of renewable energy?

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** I congratulate my hon. Friend’s constituents on the work they have done on geothermal energy, which is an exciting form of renewable energy. I am going to Cornwall on 24 May, so I will see whether I can meet my hon. Friend. I know that the University of Exeter is involved in the project, and I would be keen to pursue the matter further.

T8. [910623] **Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** I came to the House today hoping for some passion and leadership from the Secretary of State. There is a real opportunity for British business and universities to tackle climate change with innovation and enterprise. What do we get today? The dullest Question Time I have ever seen in this place.

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Gentleman should celebrate the fact that, when it comes to renewable energy, we are the leading nation in the world for the deployment of offshore wind. We are creating jobs right throughout

the country, and many constituencies have people in good jobs because of the leadership in renewable energy that we have displayed. We will go further in the years ahead.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Solar plus battery storage will soon be commercially viable without any subsidy. Is now the right time to plan for a huge deployment of solar on every public building, school, hospital and prison?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. If there is the possibility of more renewable energy than was previously contemplated and we can store it, we will solve our energy needs for the future, thereby helping business and consumers. I shall take up my hon. Friend's suggestion.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): My constituent was made redundant from Carillion last April after 11 years' service as a cleaner. She has been passed from pillar to post, from PwC to the insolvency services. Will the Minister please look into this case as a matter of urgency?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I would welcome it if the hon. Lady passed me the details of her constituent, so that I can follow up that matter.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): In North Devon, we are proudly playing our role in clean energy generation with two major wind farms. Does the Minister agree that, to ensure our security of supply and to get the best climate change outcomes, we need a mix of clean energy generation?

**Chris Skidmore:** Absolutely. It is important that we put that mix in place. We have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) about looking at other forms of renewables. There is also carbon capture and storage. We need to ensure that we look at new technologies to be able to deliver a low-carbon future.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The enterprise finance guarantee scheme and its continued use by the Royal Bank of Scotland is still causing controversy. Even this week, we have seen discussions from the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) around the use of debt. Will the Minister, or the Department, discuss with the Treasury how this scheme and its legacy are now operating?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising that matter at BEIS questions today. I will happily take on that challenge.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Small businesses in Cleethorpes are suffering because of yet another two high street bank closures. Individuals and businesses need both the counter services and expert financial advice from banks. Indeed, banks are important to the vitality and viability of our high streets. Will Ministers assist local authorities in establishing financial hubs, where financial institutions can come together and provide that service?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise concerns about banks pulling out of our high streets. Those concerns have also been raised by many other MPs across the country. High street banks do offer a valuable service for consumers, and that is why I am grateful to the Post Office for renegotiating the banking framework, which will offer better payments to postmasters providing banking services in those high streets. However, he is quite right: we do need to work closely with local authorities at a regional level to make sure that the services being offered on the high street are those that people wish to see.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Will the Minister confirm that the Secretary of State for Scotland put in writing his objection to onshore wind finding a route to market in Scotland? Why will the Government not release that correspondence in the interests of transparency?

**Greg Clark:** I am not aware of the inquiry that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I will follow it up with the Scottish Secretary.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Ah, where is young Graham? I was going to call the fella.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) anticipated my question.

**Mr Speaker:** Well, that is a novel phenomenon—a Member who takes the attitude that someone else has asked the question and therefore says that he will desist. That is a most admirable trait, if an uncommon one.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and the Competition and Markets Authority have both published reports calling for change in the UK audit industry. Will the Secretary of State undertake at the Dispatch Box that the power of the big four audit firms in the UK will not stop this agenda for change?

**Greg Clark:** I will give that commitment. I am very pleased that the Competition and Markets Authority has launched that report and made some interim recommendations. We will be looking at them during the weeks ahead. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that this is a sector that is fundamental to the confidence that we have in businesses right across the country.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Everybody wants to do their bit by recycling, but it is absolutely infuriating when we get to the supermarket and all the fruit and veg is wrapped in plastic. Then there is the exciting moment when we get home to the kitchen and see that there is a little sign, which looks like the packaging is recyclable, but then we read the words, "Not yet recyclable". What on earth do they mean by that? Are we meant to keep it all until, suddenly, somebody announces that it is now recyclable? Are we meant to put it in the attic or store it in a cupboard? What are we meant to do? Surely, we should ban those words. The packaging is not recyclable and it should not be available.

**Chris Skidmore:** I entirely sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's frustration on this point. I hope that he also noticed when it came to the London marathon this weekend—congratulations to all hon. Members from all parts of the House who took part in that marathon—that the water was in bottles made not of plastic, but of compostable seaweed. As a science Minister, I can say that a key issue is looking at what we can do to develop alternative forms of plastic, but we have to work with local authorities and supermarkets to make that happen.

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** I know—from chairing the all-party parliamentary group for small and micro-business, and from talking with west Oxfordshire businesses—that one of the major challenges that small organisations face is finding sufficient people of the right skills to grow their businesses. What are Ministers doing to provide a national strategy to ensure that our young people have the skills they need for the future?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group; he is extremely passionate about this subject and does a lot to champion small businesses in his constituency. We

have outlined a £1.3 billion investment in UK talent and skills to attract the best. We are also keen to work with businesses—particularly small ones—to ensure that we are delivering on our apprenticeship targets. We have seen some fantastic results when young people have been brought into organisations and been given the training and workplace experience to grow and thrive. I very much hope to champion such schemes as we go forward.

**Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab):** The other week, I was shocked to meet a constituent who had worked in care for nine months solidly without being given a single day off, while on a zero-hours contract. Such workers, who are vulnerable, need protection for their rights at work. Will the Secretary of State look at bringing in group claims for industrial tribunals and representative cases so that workers do not have to stick their head above the parapet?

**Greg Clark:** I was pleased to meet the hon. Lady yesterday to discuss this matter. I share her concerns about the case that she mentioned and take her suggestion very seriously. As I have committed to her, we will take this forward together.

## Overseas Students: English Language Tests

12.46 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his review of the cases of overseas students falsely accused of cheating in Test of English for International Communication English language tests.

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes)**: Test centres operated on behalf of the Educational Testing Service were the subject of a BBC “Panorama” programme in February 2014 that aired footage of the systematic cheating in English language tests at a number of its UK test centres. Further investigation demonstrated just how widespread this was, and the scale is shown by the fact that 25 people involved in organising and facilitating language test fraud have received criminal convictions. They have been sentenced to a total of over 70 years’ imprisonment, and further criminal investigations are ongoing.

There was also a strong link to wider abuse of the student visa route. A National Audit Office report in 2012 made it clear that abuse of that route was rife and estimated that in 2009—its first year of operation—up to 50,000 people used the tier 4 student route to work, not study. Most students who were linked to this fraud were sponsored by private colleges, many of which the Home Office had significant concerns about before the BBC investigation. Indeed, 400 colleges that had sponsored students linked to the ETS had already had their licences revoked before 2014.

Over the course of 2014, the ETS systematically analysed all tests taken in the UK dating back to 2011—more than 58,000 tests. Analysis of the test results identified 33,725 invalid results and 22,694 questionable results. Those with questionable results were given the chance to re-sit a test or attend an interview before any action was taken. People who used invalid ETS certificates to obtain immigration leave have had action taken against them.

The courts have consistently found that the evidence for invalid cases created a reasonable suspicion of fraud and was enough for the Home Office to act upon. It is then up to individuals to refute this, either through appeals or judicial reviews. Despite this, concerns have been expressed about whether innocent people could have been caught up in this. The Home Secretary has listened to the apprehensions of some Members, including the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), and has asked officials for further advice. The National Audit Office is also currently in the process of concluding an investigation into the handling of these issues, and this is expected to be published next month. Obviously, the Home Secretary has taken a close interest in the issue and will be reviewing the conclusions of the National Audit Office, and he will make a statement to the House once he has had time to consider the matter in full.

**Stephen Timms**: I thank the Minister for her answer, and I am pleased to see the Home Secretary in his place. I congratulate him on achieving one year in his role

today. On his first day in the post, I asked him to take a careful look at this issue, and he said that he would. On 1 April this year, I asked him for an update. He said:

“We had a further meeting to make some final decisions just last week, and I will be in touch with him shortly.”—[*Official Report*, 1 April 2019; Vol. 657, c. 799.]

But in the month since, nothing has been announced. Many students face desperate hardship and need urgently to know the decision, because their future depends on it.

As the Minister said, the Home Office cancelled the visas of those who ETS claimed, from its analysis, had definitely cheated. The claim by ETS that almost 97% of those who sat their test had cheated seems completely implausible, but we will let that pass. Colleges had to expel those who had their visas cancelled. By the end of 2016, there had been more than 35,870 refusal, curtailment and removal decisions in ETS cases and more than 4,600 removals and departures. One estimate is that at least 2,000 of those denied visas are still in the UK.

In-country appeals were not allowed, but some have got cases to court. A growing number have convinced the courts that they did not cheat. One showed that he never actually took a TOEIC test, yet he had his visa cancelled because it was alleged that he had cheated in one. It has proved extraordinarily hard for students to obtain from ETS the recordings said to be of them taking the test. One computer expert told the Appeal Court that ETS’s evidence is worthless. The Appeal Court has criticised the Home Office’s evidence and said in 2017 that it was unlawful to force students to leave the country in order to appeal. Many of those affected speak excellent English so had no motive at all to pay someone else to take the test for them.

Thrown off their courses and denied any refund of their fees, the students cannot study or work. Some invested their families’ life savings to obtain a British degree. The savings have gone. They have no qualification and no income. They depend on kindly friends but say they could not endure the shame of going home with nothing, having apparently been convicted of cheating in the UK. Understandably, mental health problems are rife. Does the Minister agree that those who lost their visas on TOEIC grounds but remain in the UK should have the opportunity to sit a new test and, if they pass, obtain a visa in order to complete their studies and clear their names?

**Caroline Nokes**: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I will return at the outset to the comments I made about the National Audit Office report, which is expected to be published next month. The Home Office has been working closely with the NAO to provide information and evidence, and it is right that the Home Secretary has the opportunity to reflect on the report, consider its findings and come back to the House with a statement.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the court cases that have happened. Under the appeals framework, which is set by Parliament, and the Immigration Act 2014, there are no in-country appeals in the student route, through which these visas were issued, but the Home Office is taking a pragmatic approach. It is important to reflect that we are talking about fraud perpetrated back in 2014, and many people who have ongoing ETS litigation will potentially now have the right to bring a

human rights claim. If they are refused under the human rights route, they will then generally have an in-country right of appeal.

There were an enormous number of cases where fraud was found, and matching showed that a number of individuals had taken repeat tests on behalf of thousands of people. There was a criminal trial at the start of this month, which saw a further five convictions. While I appreciate the strongly held beliefs of the right hon. Gentleman, it is important that we reflect that this was fraud on an industrial scale, and we should react responsibly.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary BBC group, because it was the BBC's "Panorama" exposé that showed shocking examples of people reading out answers to those sitting the exams. As the Minister said, people have been convicted of fraud. While I have every sympathy with the individual cases, can the Minister ensure that we take very seriously the fact that our international standing as a centre for students will be harmed if we do not root out those who do wrong?

**Caroline Nokes**: My hon. Friend will be reassured to learn that 400 colleges that had sponsored students linked to ETS already had their licences revoked before the BBC "Panorama" programme. I am conscious that the student route was linked to widescale abuse, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister acted swiftly when she was Home Secretary to remove the licences of a number of bogus colleges. As I said, it is important that we work with the NAO, reflect on its findings and find a way to move forward and assist those who might have been wrongly affected.

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The Government's treatment of innocent students has been unacceptable. Driven by the hostile environment and the net migration target, about 34,000 students' visas have been cancelled. Can the Minister tell us how many of those cases are ongoing? Are any of these students currently in immigration detention? What steps is she taking to identify and compensate students who were wrongfully removed?

The TOEIC visa scandal has been rumbling for years. The Government have lost case after case in the courts. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) has been raising the issue in Parliament for over a year, and students have been protesting outside Parliament. The Home Secretary told Parliament a year ago that he would look carefully at the issue, but no concrete action has been taken. Does the Minister appreciate the urgency of this issue? Thousands of students are living in limbo, unable to work or study while they attempt to clear their names.

The Windrush scandal exposed a culture of disbelief in the Home Office, motivated by removal targets rather than careful consideration of cases. We were promised a culture change, yet the Home Office is again being investigated by the National Audit Office for its cruel and ineffective handling of immigration cases. Does the Minister accept that the years of suffering these students have endured is a result of the coalition Government's decision to remove legal aid and appeal rights?

We need a swift resolution to all outstanding TOEIC visa cases. The students have asked to be allowed to re-sit the English language tests, and that is a sensible suggestion. The UK's reputation as a welcoming place for international students is suffering tremendously. International students are vital to our universities. They enhance the experience of UK students and further our soft power abroad, not to mention subsidising the fees of home students, but reports over the weekend suggested that EU students will be required to pay international fees, which the Minister could not confirm or deny yesterday. We now have the TOEIC visa scandal. What will be next?

**Caroline Nokes**: The hon. Gentleman has chosen to focus on a very small number of students who may have had incorrect results. What we know, and what the evidence shows, is that our response back in 2014 was driven by systematic fraud that was perpetrated in colleges and has seen significant criminal convictions and sentences of 70 years. We are working with the NAO and through the courts. As I said, the Home Office has taken a pragmatic approach to the judicial reviews and appeals coming through the courts, recognising that many of these individuals have been in the country for a significant period. Of course, the ability to speak English in 2019 does not necessarily mean that an individual did not cheat in 2014 or could speak English to the required level then.

I would like to comment more on what we are doing for international students. The UK has a proud track record of attracting an increasing number of students to this country. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the commitment in the White Paper to continue to have no cap on the number of foreign students coming here and to make a more generous offer for post-study work arrangements for students who choose to come here. It is important that we support our world-class institutions and celebrate the fact that we have five British universities in the top 20 universities globally, and that we saw over the course of the past year a 10% increase in the number of tier 4 visas being applied for.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I was pleased recently to go on a visit to China with the all-party China group, and we met many students there. The dream of many of those students was to come to the UK to go to university. It is therefore absolutely right that we tackle any fraud, and I am pleased by and thank the Minister for the way that she is dealing with this. We have to give clear signals that our world-leading education remains world-leading and that we have an open door for international students to come here to take advantage of that supreme education.

**Caroline Nokes**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the brilliance of UK universities. I would like to point to the increasing numbers of Chinese and Indian students at the university in my constituency, Southampton, which has done a brilliant job of attracting students from overseas, as indeed have many other institutions countrywide. We do ourselves a disservice if we turn a blind eye to abuse and fraud within the student route. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister,

[Caroline Nokes]

when she was Home Secretary, took strong action in 2014 to close down bogus colleges, and she was absolutely right to do so.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): First, I give my sincere congratulations to the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) not only on securing this urgent question but on the manner in which he has relentlessly pursued this issue, which is finally getting the attention it has long deserved. For far, far too many people, this episode represents an absolute travesty of justice. When the Home Office discovered that ETS had completely failed to prevent widespread cheating—indeed, that some ETS staff were actively involved in facilitating it—it should have sacked the company and sought compensation from it. Instead, unbelievably, the Home Office asked ETS to mark its own dodgy homework and re-check the tests. How can that possibly be justified? The Minister referred to evidence, but in fact we are talking about the totally opaque say-so of ETS, on which basis the Home Office decided that thousands of students were guilty, and their lives were subsequently ruined. There is an abundance of evidence that a large number were totally innocent. They deserve an apology, and much more than that. Will she, at the very least, reverse the draconian repeal of in-country appeal rights that deprived many of justice? Will she agree to all that cross-party MPs have been demanding, including, as the right hon. Gentleman said, new tests and restored visas for those who pass, because that is the bare minimum that needs to be done to right this wrong?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman will of course be aware of the expert report by Professor Peter French that concluded that false matches were likely to be very small—in the region of 1%—and more likely to give people the benefit of the doubt than to falsely flag people as having cheated. The courts have always said, even when finding against the Home Office on individual facts of a case, that the evidence was sufficient to make accusations of fraud. Of course he will recall from our exchanges during the passage through Committee of the Immigration Bill that this company was suspended from the immigration rules in July of that year and that the Home Office did take legal action against ETS in a case that was settled last year.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The National Audit Office said that up to 50,000 apparent students came to the UK to work, not study, under the Labour Government back in 2009-10, so obviously action needed to be taken to stamp out abuse. I appreciate the Minister's tone in being willing to listen to the current concerns. Can she assure me that the UK will continue to be open to genuine international students and that we will not put a cap on the numbers who can come here? [Interruption.]

**Caroline Nokes:** As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary just said from a sedentary position, "More open". Those words are included in the immigration White Paper that was published in December last year. We indicated that there would be no cap on international students and that we wished to make the post-study

work regime more generous. However, it is important to reflect that this was about systematic fraud being perpetrated. We took action to stop it then. We must continue to be robust in making sure that we have high standards and requirements for English language testing—that is very important. I absolutely agree that we must celebrate the success of our universities and continue to work hard to attract international students.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the NAO investigation into this issue. I sense from the Minister's tone that, while she obviously cannot anticipate the NAO's report, she is expecting it to raise questions about decision making in individual cases. In that light, may I ask whether she and the Home Office are now looking much more widely at some of the issues that have been persistently raised about the inaccuracy of Home Office decision making in very important immigration cases? What is being done to address some of the cultural problems that have been raised time and again about these decisions, which have such a huge impact on people's lives and have to be got right?

**Caroline Nokes:** It would be wrong to prejudge the NAO report, but I would like to reassure the right hon. Lady that Home Office officials have worked closely with the NAO, providing it with information and evidence where requested. As she will know, we are conducting a number of reviews in the Home Office, including, following Windrush, the Wendy Williams lessons learned review, and the forward-looking borders, immigration and citizenship services review. Every day in the job as Immigration Minister, one sees individual cases of people who are impacted by our policies and our rules. It is important that we reflect very closely on that and make sure that we have a review of our BICS system that provides the human face of the Home Office that both the Home Secretary and I are very keen to ensure is seen.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): International students coming to this country are a vital source of our soft power because they are friendly disposed to the United Kingdom after they have studied here and returned home. However, it is clearly important that those people can speak English before they arrive. What message is my right hon. Friend taking to the British Council and other institutions that work abroad to encourage young people to learn English before they come to this country so that they can satisfy the tests and fulfil their destiny?

**Caroline Nokes:** It is really important that this is a matter not simply for the Home Office but for the Foreign Office and for Government Departments across the whole piece. We want to encourage foreign students to come here to study at our world-class institutions because we know that when they return home after a period of study they take fond memories with them and have a relationship with the UK that lasts throughout the rest of their lives. It is therefore important that we continue to work to promote our great universities. As part of that, there are a number of campaigns, including the GREAT campaign, which does fantastic work promoting the benefits of study in the UK. It is important that that should be a joint piece of work with the Home Office, the Foreign Office and the Department for Business,

Energy and Industrial Strategy to make sure that we continue to promote the UK as a brilliant place to study.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I echo the very decent sentiments that have been expressed by Members in all parts of the House regarding our horror for the innocent students who are caught up in this trap. I have been here for two years and I am not an expert in home affairs, but there does seem to be a bit of a case history with the Home Office. We have had misfortunes and carelessness, and now we have this. Is now not the time for the Government to seriously consider taking responsibility for immigration, and all we are talking about today, and putting it into a separate Government Department where Ministers can concentrate solely on that?

**Caroline Nokes:** It is important to reflect that this was a fraud perpetrated in 2014. It is not new. The Government responded then to a systematic fraud, took action and we have seen criminal convictions as a result. However, the hon. Gentleman has made an interesting suggestion about the future of the immigration directorate within the Home Office. Unfortunately, the Home Secretary left moments before he made that point, but I am certain that it will not be lost on him.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What happened to some members of the Windrush generation, through no fault of their own, was simply inexcusable, but at the root of these cases is a fraud that was conducted on a quite industrial scale. Is it not hugely insulting to members of the Windrush generation to try to draw a parallel between the two cases?

**Caroline Nokes:** I certainly would not draw a parallel. This was criminal behaviour and there have been significant sentences imposed on those who were perpetrating the fraud. Indeed, there are ongoing criminal investigations whereby we may yet see more convictions. It is important that we take stock of this and that we reflect on the NAO report when it is published and made available to us. As I have said, the Home Secretary will come to the House and make a full statement when we have the NAO findings. He continues, and indeed I continue, to review this situation and work out what is the best way forward.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): There is no doubt that we are concerned not about those who have committed crimes but about the innocent people who have been caught up in this. If the Government were so confident in ETS, they would not have stopped using ETS. In that context, what financial settlement was reached between the Home Office and ETS after its licence was revoked?

**Caroline Nokes:** As I mentioned earlier, the licence was revoked in July 2014, and the Home Office moved swiftly to revoke that licence. Action was taken against ETS but, because of the commercial sensitivities, I am afraid I cannot divulge details. However, I will ascertain from Home Office lawyers whether I can write to the hon. Lady and let her have that information.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): No one doubts that there was criminal behaviour and cheating, but it has been weeks since we were promised a decision by

Ministers, months since we met the Home Secretary to outline concerns about people who had been wrongly implicated, and years during which these students have had their lives left in complete limbo, with them suffering mental ill health, financial hardship, family breakdown and a whole range of other detrimental consequences as a result of being accused of cheating—wrongly—by the British state. When will the Government finally get their act together? The longer this rolls on, and the longer people are caught up in expensive judicial action or lengthy, bureaucratic immigration appeals, the longer that is wasting their time, wasting their lives and wasting taxpayers' money. Enough is enough.

**Caroline Nokes:** I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that those who were found to have a questionable result following the ETS investigations were given the opportunity to take a second test to establish their ability to speak English, so they could have taken that option. He was quite aggressive in his questioning, but I must reiterate that I think it is right, and the Home Secretary thinks it is right, to wait for the outcome of the NAO report, which we expect next month.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Nobody is claiming that everybody is innocent. The Minister has quoted legal cases, and those who are guilty deserve everything that they get. However, the Home Office has also lost judgments in the courts. ETS evidence is quoted by the Minister, but that evidence has been challenged and undermined, and now we have a National Audit Office inquiry. Will the Minister confirm that she believes and accepts that there are some innocent students caught up in this mess?

**Caroline Nokes:** It is important to note that there have been a number of legal cases where students have challenged the decision through judicial review and subsequent immigration appeals. Some of those cases have been upheld by the courts, but not in all instances was that because those people were not thought to have cheated in the test; it was actually because they had been in the UK for such a long time that they had an established article 8 human rights claim to be here, and the Home Office is taking a pragmatic approach to those cases. However, I am very conscious that we have legislation that requires there to be no in-country right of appeal under the student route, and these people were here under the student route. It is right that we wait for the NAO findings, that we reflect on those and that we find a way forward.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): One of my constituents, who had been in the UK since 2005, was detained in Dungavel for 10 days because the Home Office claimed she had overstayed and had used deception in her TOEIC test. Neither of those things was true. The first tier tribunal found in her favour; the Home Office appealed, and the appeal was thrown out. It appealed to the upper tier tribunal, but the appeal was then withdrawn. My constituent has been fighting the Home Office for five years. Will the Minister apologise to her and let her and her three-year-old daughter get on with their lives?

**Caroline Nokes:** Unfortunately, the hon. Lady has not provided any information, and I cannot comment on an individual case on the Floor of the House, but if she cares to write to me about the case, I will look at it.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) on raising this issue and pursuing it so strongly. People's lives have been put in limbo. Since 2014, my constituent Mr Muhammad Arsalan has not been able to work, study or get access to the NHS. That is not because he has been found guilty based on any evidence, but because he has been found guilty by association. If people have cheated, they should face the full force of the law. However, my constituent has not been able to appeal, because he is in country. Yes, he can now challenge on human rights grounds, but that takes time and money. Will the Minister therefore look at the suggestion from my right hon. Friend that, dependent on the outcome of the current investigation, she consider the idea of these people being allowed to sit another test to prove that they are competent in English?

**Caroline Nokes:** As I have said, we are going to wait for the findings of the NAO. However, it is important to confirm that the Home Office is looking at a range of options as to how we can find a way forward from this situation. The Home Secretary has been pleased to meet a number of Members on this subject. It is a recurring subject of parliamentary questions and Westminster Hall debates. We are looking at it closely, and I hope we will find a way forward when we have had a chance to reflect on the NAO findings.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister rightly talks about the importance of international students, but she will know that our market share fell from 12% in 2010 to 8% in 2016. We are falling behind competitor countries because of reputational damage, and that reputational damage has been added to by people being treated wrongly in this case. Will the Minister therefore tell the House what she will do to restore our reputation and to address some of the concerns about policy issues that have led international students to choose other countries over Britain?

**Caroline Nokes:** It is important to reflect that overall numbers are up—indeed, they are up 10% in higher education institutions in the last year alone. Of course we want to make sure that the UK can still provide a good and attractive offer to students. I commend to the

hon. Gentleman the White Paper published in December, which sets out some of the ways we plan to make that possible.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Yesterday, we had an urgent question about tuition fees for EU nationals post Brexit. Can the Minister confirm whether EU nationals will be required to sit the TOEIC test post Brexit?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank the hon. Lady for that question. At the current time, there have not been any policy decisions that I am aware of with regard to the English language test. However, it is important—and we have said very clearly in our White Paper—that we will have a single, global system for immigration, where people from all countries will be treated equally.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) for securing this question, and I welcome the NAO's investigation into this issue. I have no doubt that there was systematic cheating, but I seriously doubt the scale—the ETS figures show that only 3.5% of the people who sat the test did not cheat, which seems incredible. What assessment has been made of the number of people whose visas were revoked who are still in the UK, and what would the cost be of allowing them to sit a new English test?

**Caroline Nokes:** I made the point earlier that evidence of ability to speak English now does not provide evidence of ability to speak English back in 2014. What the courts have consistently found is that the evidence we had in 2014 was sufficient to make accusations of fraud. This was wide-scale, and we saw enormous numbers of proxy tests being taken on behalf of individuals for a wide variety of reasons. The Government acted swiftly to clamp down on bogus colleges and to revoke the licence of ETS. However, it is important that we reflect on the situation of those who remain in this country and, as I have said, the Home Office has taken a pragmatic approach when looking at the article 8 claims of individuals who have been caught up in the TOEIC issue.

## Social Media and Health

1.18 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** I would like to update the House on yesterday's social media summit and the progress we have made on tackling online harms to health. We called this summit to bring together the principal social media companies, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Google and others, as well as the Samaritans and the eating disorder charity Beat. It was the second such meeting I have held, along with the Education Secretary and the Minister for suicide prevention, on how we can protect people—particularly children—from online content that promotes eating disorders and self-harm and suicide, as well as on how we address the growing problem of anti-vaccination misinformation.

Social media companies have a duty of care to people on their sites. Just because they are global, it does not mean that they can be irresponsible. We have been resolute that we will act to keep the internet safe, especially for children, and I am grateful to the companies for their engagement.

We have all seen and heard about tragic cases of vulnerable children turning to self-harm and even taking their own lives after accessing graphic images online that promote and even encourage suicide and self-harm. In the same way, we know that online content on eating disorders can be extremely harmful to vulnerable children and young adults. I have met the parents of children, brought up in loving homes, who had no idea of the dangers that their child was being exposed to on their smartphone or tablet while they were supposed to be safe at home. We all know of parents whose children have been affected, and for all of us this is very close to home.

We must do everything we can to keep our children safe online, so I am pleased to inform the House that, as a result of yesterday's summit, the leading global social media companies have agreed to work with experts from the Samaritans to speed up the identification and removal of suicide and self-harm content, and to create greater protections online. They will not only financially support the Samaritans to do the work; crucially, suicide prevention experts from the Samaritans will determine what content is harmful and dangerous, and the social media platforms committed to either removing it or preventing others from seeing it, and to helping vulnerable people get the positive support they need.

The mainstream media already have well-established codes of practice and training for removing material that promotes suicide and self-harm. In my experience, the British media act with great responsibility on the matter, and it is time that social media companies did the same. This partnership marks, for the first time globally, a collective commitment to act, to build knowledge through research and insights, and to implement real changes that ultimately will save lives.

The social media companies also gave us an update on the actions they have already taken. Following the first summit in February, Instagram now has a policy globally of removing all graphic self-harm imagery, and other sites have also taken action, but there is much more to do and more content to remove. Importantly, the commitments that the companies made at yesterday's

summit are what the Samaritans asked for, and they are a positive step forward. The progress that we have made so far shows that we can effect positive change, but I know that the House feels strongly that just because these companies are global does not mean that we as a House cannot determine society's rules and expectations. On this we are prepared to act too.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport recently published the online harms White Paper, which sets out the proposed regulatory framework for addressing online harms. It sets out a new statutory duty of care to require companies to take more responsibility for the safety of their users and tackle harm caused by content or activity on their services. Compliance with this duty of care will be overseen and enforced by an independent regulator, which will be responsible for producing codes of practice that will explain what companies need to do to fulfil their duty, and the robust action they need to take to remove illegal or harmful content. The White Paper also proposes the sharing of information, research and best practice to improve the understanding of harmful content across the industry.

The summit also allowed us to discuss how we can work together to tackle another online danger: the spread of anti-vaccination misinformation. Since Edward Jenner's discovery, vaccination has saved hundreds of millions of lives around the world. Few innovations have reduced human misery so much. After clean water, vaccination has prevented more deaths and disease than anything else in human history. The science is settled: vaccination saved lives. It protects not only our children but other vulnerable people who cannot do anything about it themselves. Failure to vaccinate puts their lives at risk. The rise of social media now makes it easier to spread lies about vaccination, so there is a special responsibility on social media companies to act.

Coverage for the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine in England decreased for the fourth year in a row last year, to 91%. There was a steep rise in confirmed measles cases last year, from 259 to 966. We forget that measles is a horrible disease. We have one of the most comprehensive vaccination programmes in Europe. The well-documented problems in America and on the continent are worse than here, but we are determined to get ahead of the problem, because failure to vaccinate has real and devastating consequences. Our action to promote vaccines is not limited to removing anti-vaccination misinformation online; we are promoting the objective facts about the importance of vaccination and increasing funding to primary care to improve access, and our prevention Green Paper will set out further actions.

Social media can be a great force for good and can help us promote positive messages, but it is the responsibility of us all to ensure that this new technology, with all its great potential and power, is moulded to the benefit of society. We will not duck this challenge. I commend this statement to the House.

1.25 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op):** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. These social media platforms must be made to take responsibility for the harm caused by the

[Jonathan Ashworth]

dangerous fake news they host, because they are helping to fuel a public health crisis. He talks about the actions that platforms such as Instagram have taken since February, but I have just searched on Instagram and found images and videos of graphic self-harm; there are 8 million posts with the hashtag #suicide—from a quick glance, many are distressing—226,000 posts with the hashtag #killmyself, and 249,000 posts with the hashtag #selfinjury. I found similar pro-anorexia posts and the normalisation of eating disorders. I am sorry to have to share those examples with the House, but I think that we have to understand the scale of the challenge we face. As the father of two beautiful daughters, aged seven and five, I would be devastated if they saw such posts as they grow up.

Dangerous content should be blocked and taken down. I look forward to the Samaritans' recommendations, so can the Secretary of State update us on the timescale? He talked about the online harms White Paper, but we need action immediately, so can he tell us when the proposed legislation will come before the House? When will the new regulator and duty of care be enforced? Can he guarantee that there will be criminal sentences for executives for serious breaches? In what circumstances would the maximum fine of 4% of global turnover be applied? If, God forbid, something similar to what happened to Molly Russell—I am sure that the whole House will want to praise her father for his brave campaigning—should happen to another child, what action would be taken against the social media companies?

I have also been able to find dangerous anti-vaccination propaganda on platforms such as Facebook, at a time when measles outbreaks are on the increase across Europe and the United States and in parts of the United Kingdom. Unvaccinated children are being turned away from schools in parts of Italy and banned from public areas in parts of New York. I would hate to see that happen here. UNICEF has warned that more than half a million children have missed their measles vaccination, which means the UK now has the third-worst ranking of all high-income countries. As the Secretary of State said, take-up of the MMR vaccine has now declined for the fourth year in a row, making coverage for the vaccine the lowest it has been since 2011-12.

I know that the Secretary of State said on the radio last week that he was considering banning unvaccinated children from schools in England, but we urgently need a clear vaccination action plan from the Government. This cannot be about penalising families. Yes, we need intervention with social media platforms when the legislation is in place, but while we wait for the legislation will he consider instructing Public Health England to launch an online social media campaign, on the platforms that are currently sharing anti-vaccination propaganda, to challenge those dangerous myths?

Will the Secretary of State also accept that our falling vaccination rates are not just about online activity? Public health services have been cut by £800 million. Our health visitors have been cut by 8% in recent years, and our school nurses by 24%. General practice has faced a funding squeeze, and GP numbers are down by 1,000 since 2015. At the same time, 2018-19 marks the first year that we have seen a reversal in the percentage of children receiving vital health check-ups on time

since the measurement of these figures began: 14.5% of children are not receiving a six to eight-week review on time; 24% are not receiving a 12-month review on time; and the number of mothers over 28 weeks pregnant receiving their first face-to-face antenatal contact with a health visitor has fallen for the second year in a row. Will he therefore commit today to reversing public health cuts and restoring health visitor numbers, and will he invest in general practice so that we can meet the 95% national vaccination coverage rate, as recommended by the World Health Organisation? When does he expect us to meet that 95% rate?

Children are 20% of our population but 100% of our future. We must always put their health and wellbeing first. Yes, there has been some progress, but we need further action from the Government today.

**Matt Hancock:** I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who has provided leadership on this agenda from his position as shadow Secretary of State. I am glad, listening to his response, that we agree very broadly on the direction we need to take. The agreement across the House is valuable in demonstrating to social media companies the clear consensus on the need for them to act, and to every parent in the land the importance of vaccination. That cross-party support is very, very valuable.

I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Ian Russell, the father of Molly Russell, whom the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), the Minister for suicide prevention, met this morning. He has been brave and eloquent in bringing these issues to light. I pay tribute to him and thank him for how he has spoken about what needs to be done. I know he is as determined as we are to ensure that action translates into saving more lives.

We agreed, after the meeting yesterday, to reconvene in two months' time, by which time I expect further action from the social media companies. As I said in my statement, we have already seen some progress. I am glad that some of the global algorithms and global terms and conditions have been changed as a result of action taken by the UK Government. It is very important that we keep the pace up. In two months' time, we expect to see further action from the social media companies and progress by the Samaritans on being able to define more clearly the boundary between harmful and non-harmful content. In each area of removing harms online, the challenge is to create the right boundary in the appropriate place. It is the challenge when tackling terrorist and child abuse material online, so that social media companies do not have to define what is and is not socially acceptable, but we as society do. I am delighted that the Samaritans will formally play that role on material relating to suicide prevention and self-harm, and that Beat will do so on material relating to eating disorders.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the online harms White Paper. We are currently in the middle of a 12-week consultation. I hope he and everybody listening to this who has an interest will respond to it. We are clear that we will have a regulator, but we also genuinely want to consult widely. This is not really an issue of party politics, but of getting it right so that society decides on how we should govern the internet, rather than the big internet companies making those decisions for themselves.

I have to say that the tone from the social media companies has changed in recent months and years, but they still need to do an awful lot. I look forward to working with him and others across the House to ensure we can deliver on this agenda.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's work on this issue. Will he comment on stand-alone posts, tweets or messages which on their own do not seem that intimidating or threatening, but which have a cumulative effect that is nothing short of bullying, harassment and intimidation that can cause mental health problems for many of our young people? Will he ask social media companies to not just look at single posts, but at the cumulative effect of people trying to intimidate others?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. In fact, the cumulative effect of posts on mental health, in particular eating disorders, came up in the discussion yesterday. We have to look at what the social media companies call the density of content—I think my hon. Friend put it rather better as the cumulative impact of lots of different posts. Social media companies' algorithms are powerful enough to understand that and pick up on it. We need rules in place so that action can be taken when it is spotted by those algorithms.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I too welcome the statement, the two summits that have already been held and, in particular, the announcement of funding to Samaritans. However, the scale of the task is absolutely huge. The scale of the donation to Samaritans is actually quite small by comparison both with that and with the profits the companies make. They are expected to make profits of £50 billion just this year. It is important to talk about preventing the promotion of eating disorders, self-harm and suicide, and I welcome that approach.

As chair of the all-party group on vaccinations for all, I particularly welcome, in World Immunisation Week, the Secretary of State talking about anti-vaccination. As the shadow Secretary of State said, the drop in uptake is caused not just by online, but by complacency. People have forgotten that measles is a killer. It used to kill 2.5 million people a year across the world. We have seen an outbreak in Europe, where 82,000 cases have led to over 70 deaths. It is important that we tackle misinformation. It is also important that we make it easy for busy mothers to get their children vaccinated by having health visitors and district nurses who try to help. It is partly that that has allowed Scotland to keep the rate above 95%, but we, like everywhere else, are still seeing that rate drip down and fall by 0.5% or 1%.

On the online harms White Paper, I welcome the talk about a regulator. I hope it will actually be a regulator and that there will not be voluntary or self-regulation. I would like to know when it is actually going to happen. Like many other pieces of proposed legislation, it is still in the long grass and the situation is urgent.

**Matt Hancock:** The regulation of online harms will indeed be statutory. As I said, we are in the middle of a consultation on how, rather than whether, to put that in place. I am sure the hon. Lady will want to feed back,

although I know her SNP colleagues in the Scottish Government in Edinburgh have been kept abreast of developments.

The hon. Lady raises complacency and financial resources. I will address both points. She is absolutely right that part of the problem is a complacency about some killer diseases, partly because we have hardly known them in this country for generations. As I said in my statement, measles is a horrible disease and a killer; it is deeply unpleasant. So, too, is rubella. Rubella might be hardly noticed by a pregnant woman. There might be a rash for three or four days which comes and goes, but the impact on the baby is permanent and very, very serious. On measles, rubella and other diseases, we have to be absolutely clear with the public about the consequences not only for their children but, even worse, for vulnerable children and adults who, maybe because they are immunosuppressed or very young, cannot have the vaccination. Their lives are directly threatened by a parent who chooses not to vaccinate. We need to be very clear and stark about that.

The hon. Lady mentions that the social media companies have contributed to Samaritans. That was Samaritans' ask for this stage of putting together the organisation and experts it needs to provide clarity on the boundary of what is and is not acceptable in this space. I would, of course, be perfectly prepared to go and ask for more if more is needed. What is more, we are bringing forward a digital services tax. Historically, the global tax system has not worked well in taxing such companies fairly, because of the nature of how they make their money. We have worked for years to try to get a global consensus on how to tax them. We are now clear that we will bring forward the tax next year in the UK, regardless of whether we can get global consensus.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I applaud the Secretary of State for taking this initiative, and I certainly endorse the comments about the good of vaccination. However, I hope that the warm words of the social media companies that he recounted are matched by actions, because I am afraid that that is not the experience of the Home Affairs Committee, which again saw a woeful performance from the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube representatives who appeared before us last week.

Is the Secretary of State aware that it is not only a question of taking down or not allowing content on which those companies are not doing their job properly, but of the algorithms that they use actively promoting more extreme versions of what people may be searching for, whether that is material on the extreme right wing, terrorism, radicalisation or self-harm? Is he convinced that those companies will actually put their considerable money where he thinks their mouths are and make sure that serious interventions are made to stop this stuff being promoted to some of our most vulnerable citizens?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is a man after my own heart on this. Am I convinced? I am convinced that social media companies have committed to it, and it is our job to keep them to those commitments. That is why I have pushed for a long time for a statutory regulator in this space, and I am delighted that the Government are bringing one forward.

[*Matt Hancock*]

For years, we in the House asked social media companies to do something, and there was an argument that, because they are global, we cannot really impact how their algorithms work. That is just rubbish. We are the legislator for this country—we set the rules, and we have a big role in setting the norms and expectations of what happens here. Just because a platform is global does not mean that it can be outside the rule of law of this country, so we will legislate in this space, and there will be a regulator that will be able precisely to keep track of those commitments and make sure that they are followed up. Having said that, the last two meetings have been positive, and we have seen changes as a result. What we have not yet seen is all this content being removed, so there is clearly a long way to go.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the work that the Secretary of State is doing. However, following the question of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), a fellow member of the Home Affairs Committee, surely it is time to do much more on these algorithms, which push people into more and more extreme behaviour? I heard from a mum whose daughter had suffered from an eating disorder who was still being targeted with dieting videos on Instagram. That material was not too extreme to remove, but it certainly should not have been targeted at her daughter. The mum could get nothing done about it.

Our Select Committee staff set up a new YouTube account and were searching for news or politics, but they were increasingly targeted by extreme far-right material promoted by YouTube. Those algorithms push people to extremes—for profit. Surely it is time for much greater transparency and accountability on the entire business model and the way that it promotes all sorts of problems?

**Matt Hancock:** The short answer is yes. My responsibilities as Health Secretary are to do with the impact on health, especially mental health, and eating disorders and self-harm are part of that. A separate but connected matter is anti-vaccination messages, which are a type of misinformation, or in some cases disinformation—actively pushed false information.

The social media companies say that they are removing this material from being promoted. For instance, graphic self-harm imagery will be taken down from Instagram. Our challenge is to make sure that that is done properly, because ultimately only if social media companies change their algorithms can we make this happen. That is why the new regulator is so important.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's initiative in this area and what he has told the House today. Through my work on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, I have been utterly horrified looking at online content relating to bulimia and eating disorders, and to what I describe as extreme online misogyny. That relates to the algorithms that Members have mentioned. Does the Secretary of State agree that we need to see inside those companies' black boxes? Unlike areas such as taxation, in which companies go to

the easiest regime, if we set the bar high on online content, they have to comply and put their house in order.

**Matt Hancock:** I pay tribute to the work that the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee has done in this area, both when I was Culture Secretary and since. Its work and the approach it has taken are groundbreaking, and that has played a part in the change in attitudes that we have seen from the social companies, which at least now accept that it is their responsibility, as well as the principle that they have a duty of care to people on their sites.

As my hon. Friend says, there is clearly an awful lot to do to get to where we need to be. If we step back from this whole question, the technology that has brought about social media companies is still relatively new; it is only 15 or 20 years old. Around the world, the way in which society has responded to it has not yet matured. The good social media companies now get the fact that they have such an impact on society that a regulatory framework is necessary, and in fact have welcomed the White Paper that we introduced as an approach that could be replicated around the world. My hon. Friend is quite right that, once one country or jurisdiction gets this right, it will be taken as a model elsewhere, so that, ultimately, the power of this amazing new way in which we communicate—by God, Mr Speaker, in this House we all use it—can be for the good, and we can mitigate all the downsides that come with it.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but for too long internet companies have been too slow to protect children from the risks of suicide and other harms such as online hate and the threat of far-right and religious extremists and terrorists. He will be aware that, internationally, companies such as Facebook have fallen very short and were accused by the United Nations of playing a "determining role" in the genocide in Burma. This is a massive problem, and it is right that Britain should lead the way. Is he speaking to his counterparts in other Departments? Will he make sure that the legislation actually ensures that companies are responsible for content, as well as ensuring that there are strong, large fines if they continue to fail?

**Matt Hancock:** We have proposed fines as called for by the hon. Lady, and of course this is a cross-Government effort. My responsibilities are the health impacts, but technology has an impact right across the board, including on the quality of debate in our democracy, which is a Cabinet Office issue, and with regard to terrorism content, which is a Home Office issue. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport leads across the board and the Prime Minister herself has led global debates on this. The hon. Lady is quite right to point out that there is a broad range of impacts, and we work together to tackle them.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): The shadow Secretary of State referred to the proliferation of pro-anorexia content online. Is the Secretary of State aware that tech giant, Amazon, sells books under the category of "pro-ana", which purports to show anorexia as a healthy lifestyle? Does he share my revulsion that those books are available online, and will he call on Amazon to take this content

down immediately? Will he look at whether tech giants such as Amazon can be brought into the remit of the online harms White Paper?

**Matt Hancock:** I will absolutely look at the matter raised by my hon. Friend, as it is alarming and distressing to hear about it. Amazon sells physical goods for the most part and surely has a duty of care to those who buy them, in the same way that a shop has a responsibility for what it sells. My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I will follow up. I will write to her with more details.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I, too, welcome the statement by the Secretary of State, not least because I survived measles as a very small child and my family talked for a long time about how worrying and scary it was. On the other issue, as well as taking action against the social media companies, the long-term NHS plan talks about an increase in proportionate spending on child and adult mental health services. What will he do about that? What will the proportion be? I ask because it is crucial to fighting this problem.

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that there will be an increased spend on mental health services across England—a £2.3 billion increase. It is the fastest-growing area of spend in the long-term plan. We are investing £33.9 billion in the NHS in cash terms, and the fastest proportionate rise in spend is in mental health services. That is an important part of this, although there is an awful lot that the social media companies can do to reduce the demands on those services by reducing the negative impact on mental health. The whole House can agree that the hon. Lady being alive and here, having survived measles, is another reason why it is important to get this right. It would have been the House's loss had the measles won.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The drop in vaccination rates is not only an annual problem but a cumulative problem, as more and more young people in society are not immunised against these childhood diseases. Can I urge my right hon. Friend not only to undertake a social media campaign to encourage parents and children to take up the vaccinations, but to target the messages so that people know where they can go to get them, how they can do it and the importance medically of doing so?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is exactly right; in fact, that work is under way. I should have mentioned in response to the shadow Secretary of State that Public Health England has a targeted programme of positive information. We can use data and social media better to target messages at those who need them in exactly the way that he proposes. That work is in hand.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the consultation. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and the suicide prevention Minister for taking part in the launch of my all-party parliamentary group report on new filters and the impact of social media on young people's mental health. I am also grateful to the Secretary of State for agreeing to have a meeting with me next week to discuss the content of the report. One

thing that is not in the consultation and which has not been mentioned today is the idea of a social media-health alliance bringing together social media companies and other groups—not just groups such as the Samaritans but young people's groups and social work groups—that can formulate, collate and undertake more research into the impact of social media on young people. Would he consider this idea and even take a lead in forming it, as his Department does with gambling and other compulsive disorders?

**Matt Hancock:** I will certainly consider it and I look forward to talking to the hon. Gentleman about the idea more next week. Dialogue in this area is critical, but we should not only have dialogue; we also need concrete legislative action, but I am grateful for what he has said about the work that has been done. I am glad that he is also working in this area, and I look forward to discussing it with him more.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Three million of the four million videos taken down by YouTube in the last six months were identified and removed by artificial intelligence. What greater role does the Secretary of State see for technological development in helping to reduce online harm and keep people safe online?

**Matt Hancock:** Artificial intelligence clearly has a role in identifying material that needs to be removed in the same way that it is now being used to remove terrorist content. We are talking to companies that may be able to do this, but we also need to identify what material should be taken down and what should be left up. Defining that boundary is critical to training artificial intelligence to do its job, hence the importance of the decision to ask the Samaritans to do the work of identifying the boundary so that we can train artificial intelligence to identify what needs to be taken down.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP) *rose*—

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I call Alison Thewliss.

**Alison Thewliss:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. My tactic of wearing a dress so big I can hide a colleague behind it is working.

Will the Secretary of State look at the harm that celebrity endorsements on social media can do to young people? The Empowered Woman project in Scotland highlighted how Marnie Simpson of “Geordie Shore” had been plugging Thermosyn diet pills, which are marketed as “skinny caffeine”. When I asked the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about that, he said that the UK Government were looking at “user-generated content, not necessarily commercial activities”—[*Official Report*, 8 April 2019; Vol. 658, c. 73.]

Celebrity endorsement veers into the commercial area, however, and has a very significant effect on young people in terms of body image and eating disorders.

**Matt Hancock:** My colleague the suicide prevention Minister is looking at this area, particularly endorsements of cosmetics, and I am sure she would be very happy to talk to the hon. Lady.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): My generation growing up might have feared bullying in the playground, but largely home was a refuge and place of safety. The problem for the current generation is that they can find themselves being bullied 24/7 because of social media. It is little wonder that when I contacted Twitter after seeing some rather libellous material it told me that in its view it was not abusive, even though it was against the law in this country. Does the Secretary of State agree that until social media companies understand that they have to operate under the norms and laws of this country, and not just abide by Californian norms, they will never reform?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend puts it exactly right. That is what the duty of care is all about. The argument—we hear it less and less, to be honest—that these are international companies and so will abide by somebody else's laws, thanks very much, is wrong and out of date, as the online harms White Paper makes clear. We must establish a proper enforcement mechanism to ensure that it is the rules that this House sets—occasionally amended by the other place—that define the law of the land and that we do not have a wild west. This action to protect people's health is just one part of the response needed to make the internet safe, especially for children.

**Carol Monaghan:** Thank you for calling me so early, Mr Speaker. [*Interruption.*] It couldn't be any worse.

My son contracted measles one month before he was due to receive his MMR vaccine because of a dip in numbers being vaccinated, so I very much welcome the Secretary of State's statement about tackling anti-vaccination posts on social media. Last year, the Select Committee on Science and Technology carried out an inquiry into the impact of social media on young people's health, and one of the statistics presented to us was quite disturbing: 50% of young people between the ages of 11 and 16 had seen pornographic images, and many of them had stumbled across them. When I spoke to my 11-year-old daughter, she confirmed that she had seen images that upset her but had been too scared to speak to me about it. What is the Secretary of State doing to alert parents to the dangers of social media and to give

them guidance on how to speak to their children and identify when they might have seen things online that have upset them?

**Matt Hancock:** Mr Speaker, that question was so good it is only a pity it was not asked earlier in our exchanges.

I want to address two important points. First, the hon. Lady's son is a case in point of how, if parents do not vaccinate, they endanger not only their own children but other people's. It is because of a failure to vaccinate that these diseases still exist, and it is children who are too young to be vaccinated who are at risk. She has made the case more powerfully than anybody for the importance of vaccinating and keeping vaccination rates up, and I am grateful to her for sharing that personal experience. On the second point, she is quite right that we all have a responsibility to act, and act we will.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): It is a privilege to have the last word.

The whole House is concerned about the effect that the internet can have on young people's mental health, and I welcome the action that the Secretary of State is taking. Is there truth and accuracy in the reports that Wikipedia did not attend yesterday's summit? If so, does he share my disappointment, and does he feel that Wikipedia must take this issue seriously and engage with it?

**Matt Hancock:** Unfortunately, those reports are true. I share my hon. Friend's disappointment that Wikipedia did not attend either of the two summits, despite having been invited. At yesterday's summit, we agreed that we would get in touch with Wikipedia in robust terms, because it is not acceptable for it to shirk its social responsibilities either.

If I may say so, I think that the statement and the responses to it have shown that there is unanimity in the House. Every speaker has mentioned the need to tackle anti-vaccination misinformation and the social media organisations' responsibility and duty of care in relation to the health—mental and otherwise—of people on their platforms. The House speaks with one voice, and the social media companies, and the internet companies that have not yet engaged should listen.

## Point of Order

2.1 pm

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In 2017, the Department for Work and Pensions changed the wording of the ESA65B letters to GPs, wrongly informing them that they no longer needed to provide fit notes for ill and disabled patients who had been found to be “fit for work”. On 18 March this year, in response to an oral question from me, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said that the letter had been

“cleared by both the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners.”—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 769.]

However, letters published yesterday by the BMA and the RCGP state that they do not have the authority to clear, approve or otherwise sign off DWP policies.

The “Ministerial Code” clearly states:

“It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.”

I have written to the Secretary of State urging her to come to the House and correct the record. I seek your advice and guidance, Mr Speaker, on how to ensure that that is done promptly.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, and for her courtesy in giving me notice of her intention to raise it.

I have received no indication from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions of an intention to come to the House to say anything about this matter. It is, of course, incumbent on each and every Member to take responsibility for words spoken in the Chamber—that is to say, for their accuracy. In the event that the Secretary of State feels that it is necessary to correct the record, I expect that will happen. Meanwhile, because I cannot be the arbiter of whether such a correction is required, all I can say is that the hon. Lady has made her point with force and alacrity, and it will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench.

## Climate Change (Net Zero UK Carbon Account)

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

2.3 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require that the net UK carbon account by the year 2050 is zero.

This Bill would create a legal obligation, the first in any G20 country, for the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Let me be clear: the Bill is radical, and necessarily and unapologetically so. The circumstances of climate change are so serious that nothing less will do. Importantly, however, its central target is achievable.

Climate change is not some future, theoretical possibility; it is a present, practical reality. The five warmest years in recorded history have been since 2010. Here in the UK, Easter Monday was the hottest on record. In January, Australia experienced its warmest month ever, causing power outages after fuses overheated. Glaciers are retreating almost everywhere in the world, from the Alps to the Himalayas. The Ross ice shelf in Antarctica, which covers an area about the size of France, is melting 10 times faster than expected, according to Cambridge University scientists. Last year, wildfires broke out as far north as the Arctic circle. Some Members have seen changes with their own eyes. During a debate earlier this year, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) spoke powerfully of going back to the great barrier reef after 25 years to find magnificent corals bleached and dead.

We can choose to dismiss these events as a coincidence, ignoring the fact that they have taken place alongside soaring levels of greenhouse gases. We can choose the comforting observation that the Earth’s climate has shifted in the past, ignoring the fact that those shifts have tended to happen slowly, over hundreds of thousands of years. Alternatively, we can listen to the overwhelming majority of climate science—to all intents and purposes, a scientific consensus. The conclusions are clear: evidence of humankind’s influence on the climate is compelling and established beyond all reasonable doubt. We therefore need to act.

Although the Bill seeks a new radicalism in the way in which this issue is tackled, it is only right to recognise that it would not be proceeding from a standing start. The United Kingdom has a strong record of global leadership in this regard. That includes the moment when a British Prime Minister and trained scientist, Margaret Thatcher, went to the United Nations and, unequivocally, made a link between human behaviour and environmental harm. She said:

“It is mankind and his activities which are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways.”

She did not retreat behind the convenient excuse that the UK is responsible for only a small fraction of world emissions—about 1%. That would be weak and evasive, and it is not the British way; nor, in fairness, was it the British way under a Labour Government. In 2008, the then Government introduced the Bill that became the world-leading Climate Change Act, which enshrined in law a commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 80% from 1990 levels. That Bill was passed by a huge cross-party majority, with only a handful of objections.

[Alex Chalk]

Indeed, since 1990, we have cut our emissions by a full 42% while our economy has grown by two thirds, which means that, on a per capita basis, we have reduced emissions faster while also growing our economy more than any other G7 nation. That is not my verdict, but the verdict of PricewaterhouseCoopers. Last year, a record amount of UK power was generated from renewable sources, with more than 30% coming from renewables and more than 50% from low carbon sources overall. As the sun shone over the Easter weekend, the UK went for 90 hours and 45 minutes without generating any electricity from coal, smashing the previous record of 76 hours. Meanwhile, our country is making huge strides in protecting biodiversity through, for instance, marine conservation zones.

However, despite that strong track record, we know that we have to do so much more if we are to keep control of our climate. Although our current trajectory sets us on course for an 80% reduction in our emissions from 1990 levels by 2050, the science is now clear: if we continue to pump even that remaining 20% of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, it is very likely that climate change will accelerate, and with it global temperatures. Indeed, if we stay on the same path, our children can expect to grow up in a world of surging sea levels, more insecure food supplies, degraded wildlife and destroyed coral reefs. We also risk the deeply alarming prospect of hitting climate tipping points—such as the melting of arctic permafrost and the subsequent release of huge stores of frozen greenhouse gases—which could cause us to lose control of our climate for good.

All this presents a heightened risk of conflict over scarce resources. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) has made the point that one of the biggest future risks to international security is the climate fence around Bangladesh and the possibility of rising waters forcing tens of millions of people up towards the border with Kolkata.

So why 2050? To answer that question, we must recall the Paris climate accord, under which Governments across the world committed themselves to keeping global warming

“well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels”,

and making efforts to limit it to 1.5°. However, the special report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published in October 2018, states that if there is to be a realistic chance of meeting the 1.5° target, global carbon dioxide emissions will need to reach net zero by about 2050, with net zero for all greenhouse gases reached in future years. The report warns that there are only a dozen years in which to take action. It also states that the impact of 2° warming versus 1.5° is profound. At 2°, more than twice as much wildlife faces a major shrinkage in range. At 2°, sea levels will be 10 cm higher. At 2°, the number of people exposed to water stress would be 50% higher than it would be if we kept to 1.5°.

If we are to apply the brakes on what could easily become the runaway train of climate change, we have to reduce emissions drastically, and do so as soon as feasibly possible. Our young people realise that, as I know from speaking to them in Cheltenham and beyond. Only last week, I met Balcarras students who have

set up Sustain, a Young Enterprise team promoting environmental education. Their energy and sense of mission is inspiring and uplifting.

Although this Bill was conceived before the Extinction Rebellion protests, those demonstrations were a timely reminder of the growing democratic drumbeat across the generations for the new radicalism about which I have spoken. That has been reflected in this place, too. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) compiled a letter calling for net zero, which was signed by 191 right hon. and hon. Members.

Importantly, this Bill would create a framework for a project of national economic renewal that is credible and realistic, and one that can generate opportunities for future generations. Unrealistic targets create false hope. The Energy Transitions Commission is a coalition of business, finance and civil society leaders, chaired by the former financial regulator Lord Adair Turner, and its members are drawn from across the spectrum of energy-producing and using industries. In its impressive report, entitled “Mission Possible”, it indicates that it “strongly believes” that the objective of limiting global warming—ideally to 1.5°, and at the very least below 2°, by 2050—is achievable in developed economies, so it can be done, and I look forward to reading the conclusions from the Committee on Climate Change report on Thursday.

There is growing enthusiasm from business, too. Tesco and Unilever back the move to net zero. The National Farmers Union is advocating net zero for agriculture by 2040. Vattenfall and ArcelorMittal are building facilities to make emissions-free steel. In cement—a notoriously energy-hungry sector—experts believe that improved building design can reduce total demand by 34%. Hydrogen could potentially be used as a heat source in steel and chemicals production.

British ingenuity from Brunel to Dorothy Hodgkin has placed the UK at the cutting edge of technological advances in science and engineering. We have the talent and the vision, and we need the political will. There are those who say that not all the technology is there yet, and up to a point that is true, but it does not mean we should not start the project.

It is time for what some have referred to as “cathedral thinking”. When Sir Christopher Wren started St Paul’s, he did not have a definitive design for every last aspect, and the dome ended up being radically revised as improved building technology made a more ambitious design possible. We need to start the project, and then row in behind the target with an ambitious programme of policies on issues ranging from house building standards to transport, agriculture and planting more broad-leaved trees. In due course, the rest of the world will need this technology. Ours can be the country to develop it, perfect it and sell it. This shows the real power of net zero—not just a project of moral necessity, but one of economic renewal, too.

Of course, we cannot do this alone—that is why the UK is bidding to host the vital UN climate change conference in 2020, so that we can leverage our climate leadership—nor will this be easy, but there is the great prize of a healthy planet, teeming with life and echoing to the sounds of rich and vibrant biodiversity; the prize of a society united in a common purpose of preserving

our environment and holding back climate change; and the prize of an economy at the cutting edge of scientific and manufacturing technology. Let us go for net zero.

2.13 pm

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): I think it is important that an alternative point of view should be expressed in this short debate, and that is what I intend to do.

I was one of the Members of this House who voted against the 2008 Climate Change Bill on Third Reading, and I have no regrets whatsoever about having done so. Indeed, the line that those of us who voted against that Bill took has been endorsed in a very important report, issued last year to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the Climate Change Act 2008, in which it was described by Rupert Darwall as

“History’s most expensive virtue signal”.

That was obviously an expensive virtue signal, but what my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) is proposing would be an even more expensive and extravagant virtue signal. *[Interruption.]* It would be well to remind my hon. Friends—some of them are right honourable—of somebody whom I think they held in high esteem. In 2011, the former Member for Tatton the right hon. George Osborne told the Conservative party conference:

“We’re not going to save the planet by putting our country out of business. So let’s at the very least resolve that we’re going to cut our carbon emissions no slower but also no faster than our fellow countries in Europe.”

At the 2017 election, many of my right hon. and hon. Friends were elected, as I was, on the basis of a Conservative party manifesto that promised there would be an inquiry into energy costs. Soon after the election, that inquiry was set up under the auspices of the Government, and the inquiry—the cost of energy review—was carried out by the distinguished Oxford energy economist Dieter Helm. I find it extraordinary that my hon. Friend made no reference whatsoever in his introductory remarks to the contents of the Helm report, let alone to its conclusions.

Dieter Helm supports, as I do, the objective of cutting greenhouse gas emissions, but his overall verdict is one of the most damning to be found in any official report on any Government policy in any field. He concluded that continuing with current policy would perpetuate the crisis mentality of energy sector crises, which, he says, are likely to worsen. The report states that this is “challenging the security of supply, undermining the transition to electric transport, and weakening the delivery of the carbon budgets. It will continue the unnecessary high costs of the British energy system, and as a result perpetuate fuel poverty, weaken industrial competitiveness, and undermine public support for decarbonisation.”

It is extraordinary that although the Government commissioned that report, they have in effect never responded to Professor Helm’s conclusions. It is almost as though there is a collective state of denial about all this. That is why I think it important, before we engage in any more expenditure on virtue signalling, to pause for a moment and think about the need to carry out proper cost-benefit analyses before we implement changes in legislation.

Nothing my hon. Friend said in his opening remarks spelled out the specific benefits that will accrue to people in the United Kingdom, as against elsewhere, as a result of this extraordinary act of self-indulgence,

whereby we will unilaterally condemn our economy to problems that no other economy is prepared to suffer. He has not set out at all where the benefits will come from, so we have had neither the costs nor the benefits set out. That is exactly one of the problems there was with the climate change legislation in 2008.

I recognise that I may be in a minority in this House in articulating this view, as indeed I was in 2008, when a number of us voted against the primary legislation, but however emotionally charged this issue is, I do not believe we should ignore our responsibility as legislators to look in a hard-headed way at the costs and benefits that will accrue to our country. I am not going to seek to divide the House on this issue today, because—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is very discourteous for Members to witter away from a sedentary position when another point of view is being expressed. The hon. Gentleman might not wish to test the will of the House, but if he wished to do so he would be at liberty so to do. He is entitled to make his speech and to be treated with courtesy by everybody, so those who are not behaving with courtesy ought to reconsider their behaviour.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** I am grateful to you for that intervention, Mr Speaker. I am sure that none of my colleagues needs to be given lessons in how to conduct themselves in this Chamber, because I know that at heart they are all very polite people, but sometimes their emotions get the better of them. I fear that that is what has been happening today.

The reason why I will not seek to divide the House today is that, as a matter of principle, I believe that anybody who wishes to bring in a private Member’s Bill should be free so to do. They should not expect that Bill to go through on the nod when presented to the House, but I see no reason why we should not allow people to bring in private Members’ Bills, and that is what the motion seeks to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham seeks the leave of the House to bring in his Bill, and I certainly do not wish to deny him that right.

While I am speaking, I should like to remind the Government of something. Perhaps this is going to be a Parliament of only one Session, which could go on for two, three, four or five years, but let us remember that during each Session of Parliament, a proportionate number of days should be given over to private Members’ Bills. By extending this Session, seemingly indefinitely, the Government should be under a duty to provide more days on which we can debate the sort of measures that my hon. Friend has brought before the House today. As things stand, his Bill will not be able to be debated in this Session because no other days have been set down for private Members’ business.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Alex Chalk, supported by Zac Goldsmith, Rebecca Pow, Mr Simon Clarke, Richard Benyon, Vicky Ford, Kevin Hollinrake, Sarah Newton, Paul Masterton, Jenny Chapman, Helen Goodman and Tonia Antoniazzi present the Bill.

Alex Chalk accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 384).*

## National Insurance Contributions (Termination Awards and Sporting Testimonials) Bill

*Second Reading*

2.23 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a small and narrowly drawn, but nonetheless important, Bill. It aims to provide a welcome simplification of the tax treatment of termination awards and sporting testimonials. The corresponding rules determining the income tax treatment of termination awards and sporting testimonials were legislated for in the Finance Acts of 2016 and 2017. At that time, it was made clear that we would return and replicate those rules in national insurance legislation in due course, to ensure that there was not a persistent misalignment. Implementation of the measures in this Bill will replicate those rules in national insurance legislation. By the nature of national insurance, it is required to have a separate piece of legislation from the Finance Bill.

These measures were first announced at Budget 2015. They were then consulted on and published in draft in December 2016. They were subsequently reconfirmed at Budget 2018, so it is reasonable to say that they are expected by those affected and have been subject to much scrutiny. Together, they mean that a 13.8% class 1A employer national insurance charge will be applied to income derived from termination awards and sporting testimonials that are already subject to income tax.

Let me first set out the measure that covers termination awards. Between 2013 and 2014, the Office of Tax Simplification reviewed the tax treatment of employee benefits and expenses. The OTS published an interim report in August 2013 identifying termination awards as one of a number of priority areas. It found that relatively few employers and employees properly understood the regime. There was confusion, and the regime was therefore ripe for reform and simplification.

The OTS specifically identified three areas of misunderstanding on which it recommended we take action. First, certain forms of termination awards are exempt from employee and employer national insurance contributions and the first £30,000 is free from income tax. However, there is a common misconception that the first £30,000 of any termination payment is automatically tax free. Secondly, many employers believe that this exemption applies where in fact it does not, and thirdly, employers are unaware of the different income tax and national insurance treatment of termination payments.

Following the OTS recommendations, the Government announced at Budget 2016 that they would be reforming the tax and national insurance treatment of termination awards. As I said, the reforms to the income tax treatment of termination awards were legislated for in the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017 and took effect from April 2018. The Government confirmed at Budget 2018 that the associated reforms to national insurance legislation would be in place for April 2020. However, the fact that termination awards are currently subject to different income tax and national insurance treatment has created confusion,

and that is what we are attempting to deal with today. Moreover, the current misalignment incentivises an admittedly small number of well-advised employers to disguise final payments as compensatory termination awards that benefit from a national insurance charge exemption. These reforms will close that loophole.

The Bill will place a 13.8% class 1A employer national insurance charge on income derived from termination awards on amounts over £30,000. However, I want to assure hon. Members that, when it comes to employee national insurance, these payments will remain entirely exempt. We have chosen to continue to ensure that employees will not face any additional liability as a result of these changes in terms of employee national insurance. This measure will raise around £200 million per annum for the Exchequer, which will make an important contribution to our public services. As this is a Budget measure, this sum has already been reflected by the Office for Budget Responsibility in its projection for the public finances.

Let me turn to the second measure in the Bill, which deals with aligning the employer class 1A national insurance treatment of income from sporting testimonials with the income tax treatment. As many hon. Members will be aware, a sporting testimonial is a one-off event—or series of related events—held on behalf of sportspeople who have played for a certain club for a long time. This often takes the form of an exhibition match involving famous players from the past and present. The testimonial can be used to raise money for the sportsperson before retirement, or sometimes to raise money for charity. The relevant income tax changes were debated and came into force from April 2017. As stated at the time of the Finance Bill—later the Finance Act 2016—the rules governing sporting testimonials are now changing to give clarity to the national insurance treatment as well.

Currently, when a sporting testimonial is non-contractual or non-customary, it can be organised by a third party, rather than the club or employer, to raise money without it being subject to NICs. Where the employer arranges the testimonial, or if it is part of the contract, or if there was an expectation that the sportsperson would be entitled to one, the testimonial is already subject to income tax and NICs.

**James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con):** Is there a sense of how common it is for a testimonial to be contractual? We all know that it is commonplace in cricket and football for players to have testimonials or similar events, so one assumes that most of them are contractual.

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, and our analysis is the same. Last year, only around 220 sporting testimonials of any kind took place in the United Kingdom, and a large number will have been contractual. Certainly, the highest-profile ones, such as those of premiership footballers or leading cricketers for significant county clubs, are usually contractual. As I will go on to say, because the measure has a one-off £100,000 threshold during the career of the sportsperson, a large number of those 220 testimonials will fall below the threshold. Less high-profile sportspeople, who will perhaps have lower earnings, are likely to be within the threshold. We are talking about a small number of

relevant testimonials and, as hon. Members will see in the Bill's accompanying documents, the measure will raise a negligible sum. Our motivation is primarily the simplification of the tax system and the avoidance of doubt for sportspeople and those advising them, rather than to increase revenue materially.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Minister is making a clear point. I want to speak mainly for the cricketers of Somerset county cricket club, and I declare an interest here, because my husband, who is an auctioneer, has helped to raise money at many of their testimonials. A testimonial can make an important contribution to a player's salary, especially those who have played for a long time. Will the Minister clarify that the legislation will clear up the situation, which does seem somewhat confusing? We do not want players to feel hard done by, but we have to take the right amount of tax and we must be fair. Will he also clarify that the proposals are fair and that players who may earn less will not be jeopardised?

**Robert Jenrick:** Yes, and I must also declare an interest as a member of Nottinghamshire county cricket club. We have given the matter a great deal of thought. The proposal was raised several years ago, as I said, and we consulted at that time with the sporting bodies, including the England and Wales Cricket Board. It was my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Gauke), then the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who discussed the matter with the cricketing bodies. When the proposal was first brought forward, the threshold was £50,000 but, having spoken with the sporting bodies, we made the decision to increase it to £100,000, making it significantly more generous and allaying some of the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) sets out.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Let us hear from Essex county cricket club.

**Vicky Ford:** I just wanted to declare an interest as a member of Essex county cricket club. I thank the Minister for supporting cricket.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is not a problem as long as we do not forget the great county of Lancashire. [*Laughter.*]

**Robert Jenrick:** Very good. I re-emphasise not only that there is a £100,000 threshold, but that this is about fairness. All sportspeople who have a contractual right to a testimonial, which is commonplace, will have been paying income tax and national insurance on the benefit from that for some time, so this measure merely provides a greater degree of certainty and fairness. Of course, some of the clubs organising such testimonials will be smaller, or they may involve testimonial committees, so providing them with the clearest possible advice will be helpful. It will also ensure that there is no doubt in their minds when doing a good thing that is in the interests of players who may be at the end of their careers or may have been injured prematurely.

From April 2020, non-contractual and non-customary testimonials arranged by third parties will now be subject to NICs above a £100,000 threshold. A third-party

testimonial committee will be liable to pay the class 1A employer NICs charge on the amount raised above £100,000. These types of testimonials will not be subject to employee NICs, to ensure that the sports person is not adversely affected. Again, as with the termination awards measure, we have chosen to act in relation to employer national insurance contributions, not employee contributions, so there remains a benefit to individuals in that respect.

I reassure hon. Members that the vast majority of sportspeople will be unaffected by the Bill because they will not exceed the £100,000 threshold. As I have said, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs estimates that only around 220 testimonials occur each year, most of which will remain unaffected as they either fall below the £100,000 level or are part of a previous contractual arrangement, which is commonplace in most sports.

Although the measure will bring in negligible revenue—we estimate less than £3 million a year—its value comes in the alignment and simplification of the tax and NICs treatment of sporting testimonials and clarity for those taking part in testimonials or those on sporting testimonial committees. Sporting bodies and other relevant stakeholders are expecting the changes, because our intention to make them has been known since at least 2015. As the changes required an NICs Bill, there has been a short delay, but that is what we are attempting to do today.

In conclusion, it may be a small and narrowly drawn Bill, but it is none the less important and includes two measures that simplify our tax code. Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I would like greater simplification of the tax system, but that journey must begin with single steps, and we are taking one of those today in simplifying the tax code in two significant respects that will have real-world consequences for individuals, who will benefit from a simpler system. The Bill will also raise a significant sum for public services and support our continued efforts to improve the public finances. It brings the national insurance and tax treatment of termination awards and sporting testimonials into closer alignment, and I commend it to the House.

2.37 pm

**Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): The condensed national insurance Bill before us is a shadow of its former self. I would have liked to be able to say that I was bowled over or knocked for six by the Minister's speech, but there were more own goals than anything else. It is far from the extensive Bill that was promised by the Chancellor's predecessor at the 2016 Budget, which included the Conservatives' 2015 manifesto pledge to abolish class 2 national insurance contributions. Instead, that manifesto pledge, like many of the Government's promises, has quietly been sent to the landfill, barely even being recycled in this five-clause Bill. As for scrutiny, we have not even been able to amend the last three or four Finance Bills, but I am pleased that we will have an evidence session in Committee. I will be grateful for small mercies because we may be able to tease matters out a little more.

The cannibalisation of the national insurance Bill, which has been driven by the Chancellor's volte-face on a tax cut for 3 million self-employed workers, reflects once again why the Conservative party has long ceased

[Peter Dowd]

to be the party of the self-employed in particular and business in general. To many observers this will be viewed as another missed opportunity—one of the many opportunities that this Government have missed—to seriously address the relationship between the growing levels of self-employment in the UK and the levels of taxation and national insurance contributions that are paid.

The rushed timetable of this Bill has shown, once again, the Government's complete lack of respect for parliamentary convention and the procedures of this House. The Opposition were notified only last Wednesday of the Government's intention to timetable the Bill's Second Reading, with an updated version of the Bill published last Thursday. The Government do not know one day from the next, although they do try to live from one day to the next. They gave parliamentary colleagues just one sitting day to examine the content of the Bill before today's debate. The Government might not take their legislative responsibilities seriously, but the Opposition do.

Of course this is nothing new. Members have become accustomed to the Government's handling, or mishandling, of legislation. The Government are engulfed in chaos and infighting on Brexit, and *The Times* reported yesterday that their rushed introduction of this hollow, some may say vacant, Bill is a further desperate attempt by the Prime Minister to keep this zombie Parliament in session.

Unwilling to face the electorate and unable to bring her dead-in-the-water Brexit deal back to Parliament for the fourth time, the Prime Minister is attempting to pack parliamentary business in the hope of avoiding an early Queen's Speech that would no doubt be opposed by the Democratic Unionist Party and her own Back Benchers. This is a new embarrassing low for a Government who are all at sea. It is high time that the Prime Minister did the honourable thing and set a date for a general election and her departure. We have a kakistocracy dressed up as a Government.

The Bill is comprised of two key measures: the introduction of a new national insurance contributions charge for employers on the taxable element of termination payments above £30,000, as the Minister set out; and the introduction of a national insurance contributions charge on income from non-contractual sporting testimonials over £100,000.

The new class 1A employer NICs charge will be levied at 13.8%, if I understand it, and its introduction will align the NICs treatment of termination awards and income from non-contractual sporting testimonials. On the face of it, the Minister would have us believe that these changes are technical and benign. However, there is nothing technical about fundamental changes to the treatment of termination payments either for the employer paying them or for workers facing redundancy, who regard this final payment as an evaluation of the work they have done for their employer.

Termination payments, therefore, have both an emotional and a financial significance, and the amount awarded is often determined by painstaking and careful negotiations between managers and trade union representatives. A good employer might offer a generous termination payment to an employee as a sign that, even though they have had to make them redundant, it is not a judgment on the intrinsic worth of staff who are leaving.

However, a likely by-product of the Government's proposed employer NICs charge is that it will incentivise employers to reduce the level of non-statutory termination payments to employees so that the overall level of non-statutory payments declines. This will diminish the level of termination payments available to workers who lose their job, while increasing the amount that the Government receive in NICs receipts.

The tax information and impact note for this measure goes to great lengths to clarify that this new charge will be limited to employers, and the Minister asserts that the Government have no plans to make further changes to the £30,000 statutory threshold, yet the Government's own policy note states that this additional cost for employers will be reflected in lower wages.

The Office of Tax Simplification, which the Minister mentioned, noted in 2015 that imposing tax and national insurance contributions on all termination payments is "likely to have a significant cost impact for some people, particularly those lower paid employees who may...often be the ones receiving smaller termination payments".

Despite the clear impact that this measure will have on workers and employers alike, the original consultation noted that the Treasury had failed to undertake a distributional analysis of the impact of this new charge. With that in mind, will the Minister confirm whether, a few years on, that remains the case?

Similarly, the Chartered Institute of Taxation has raised concerns that the Bill does not set out how the new class 1A charge will be collected by HMRC, stating that it will instead be left to secondary legislation—more secondary legislation, the Government's default position. The Treasury says it anticipates that the charges will arise and be paid in "real time," rather than after the end of the tax year. However, tax experts note that this is a break from normal practice and will prove extremely cumbersome, requiring additional resources at a time when the Government are continuing their disastrous reorganisation of HMRC.

**James Cartlidge:** It is always a great pleasure and highlight to hear the hon. Gentleman talking about distributional analysis, but does he agree that, where we have what are effectively exceptional one-off payments that are hard to predict, it can be difficult to undertake such analysis? Sometimes we just have to be honest and accept that a measure is relatively minor. Although the money it raises is significant, we are unlikely to have the sort of data he is asking for.

**Peter Dowd:** It might be a minor measure, but the actual impact on individuals is potentially significant. I am interested in the impact it might have on individuals who lose their job, and not necessarily the capacity or otherwise of the Government to make an assessment of that. I focus my attention on those who may not get another job for a considerable period.

I now turn briefly to the second measure in the Bill, which seeks to introduce a similar NICs charge on non-contractual sporting testimonials for employed sportspersons. I look forward to leading the Government's testimonial sooner rather than later.

Sporting testimonials have become a key part of our nation's rich sporting history, presenting an opportunity for fans to pay tribute to sportspersons who are coming to the end of their playing career. I come from Liverpool,

a city with a fantastic football team, Everton, and another football team, Tranmere Rovers. There is another team whose name I cannot remember; it has slipped my mind.

Under the Government's proposal, the new class 1A employer NICs charge will apply after the first £100,000 and will make the controller of the sporting testimonial, usually an independent committee, liable to account for the charge where the employer is not organising the testimonial.

Although the Opposition recognise the logic of applying employer NICs to non-contractual sporting testimonials, where the money is going not directly to a sportsperson but, rather, to a testimonial committee, we are concerned that the majority of income from such testimonials comes from fans who make voluntary payments. If this measure is passed, there will be a clear inconsistency in the NICs treatment of voluntary donations or tips at sporting testimonials compared with the treatment of cash tips in the service sector, where the employer is not involved. That is something we will seek to address in Committee.

This condensed national insurance Bill is further evidence of the Government's perpetual desire to shift the tax burden from the well-off to workers. Rather than tackling tax avoidance and raising taxes to ensure that the wealthy and large corporations pay their fair share, the Government are yet again introducing measures designed to raise additional revenue for the Exchequer from the termination payments of workers.

The introduction of a new employer NICs charge will inevitably lead to employers reducing non-statutory termination pay, leaving workers worse off when they have just faced the trauma of losing their job. To put it simply, this measure is unfair, cynical and disproportionate considering the scarring effect it will have on workers compared with the limited amount of revenue it will raise. We cannot support this, but we will look at it in more detail in Committee.

2.49 pm

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Before I start discussing the Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope you will not mind my saying that it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), as always, but it is a particular pleasure to follow the brilliant speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) about climate change and his Bill about the net zero UK carbon account. It was one of the finest speeches I have heard since entering this place. It was an inspiring speech on an incredibly important subject.

Having said that, although I intervened on the hon. Gentleman to say that this was a minor matter, that does not mean it is unimportant. I meant that it was minor in terms of the revenue, albeit that its revenue is important and welcome. We should add that it has been baked into the Government's accounts, so if anyone were to oppose it, they would have to suggest where £200 million a year of revenue was going to come from, as we would be spending this money on public services, from which we will all benefit.

Given the context of politics today, I would understand it if someone sitting in the Public Gallery or watching this debate elsewhere were to look at the title of this debate, "National Insurance Contributions (Termination

Awards and Sporting Testimonials) Bill", and think to themselves, "With all that is going on in the country—with these Union Jack and European Union flags outside, and all the talk about European elections, local elections, Nigel Farage back out on the stump and so on—is this really what we should be debating?" I would say that this Bill is important because, in its own way, it is the future of taxation in this country. Members may think that that is an odd thing to say, but we are going to be seeing a lot more of this type of Bill on taxation: measures that deal with specifics. I would not necessarily say that it deals with avoidance, but it is certainly a tidying-up measure that brings in welcome revenue.

Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, the Bill has little noticeable impact. Why do I say that? Ever since the early 1990s—since the 1992 general election and the 1997 one—and for the time being perhaps, the days when one of the main parties would go into a general election promising to change one of the main rates of taxation have gone. When I was elected in 2015, the Government we served in had specific legislation saying that we would not increase the main rate of national insurance. I think it also said we would not raise the main rates of income tax and VAT. There was legislation about the aid budget. We then found out that we would not increase tax on the self-employed and we would not increase the main tax on the employed. In fact, we changed inheritance tax. You soon run out of anywhere left where you can change any substantive tax, which must have been a concern in the Treasury; you are left with those yet to come and the good, old-fashioned national credit card. Our party has tried to avoid using that as much as possible. If Labour were successful at the next election, I am not sure it would be quite so successful on that—I think the card would take something of a hit.

The reason we support these types of measures is not because we welcome tax increases per se. In the context where the Government have pledged not to increase main rates of tax—I am sure Labour would be the same, although perhaps not on corporation tax—and in a political climate of no parliamentary majority, it is difficult to pass those "more radical" tax changes. So we will see more and more of these types of changes. We may call them tidying-up exercises or tax simplification measures—we have had many similar measures called "anti-avoidance"—but the point is that in total they bring in a lot of revenue. We are talking about significant revenue—£200 million a year is significant. If we put that in the context of the police budget, we see that it is a significant sum, so it is important. I will certainly be supporting this measure. I do not know whether the Labour party will, because I was confused by the hon. Gentleman's speech. Perhaps we will get some clarity later.

One thing we should be wary of is that the specific area of taxation we are changing and increasing here is employers' national insurance. I declare an interest, as an employer. I am a controlling director of a small business and have been for many years. It is fair to say that there are pluses and minuses with using employers' NI as a method of obtaining revenue for Her Majesty's Treasury. On the upside—this is why I have sympathy with this measure—it is saying, "Here are a lot of similar activities and it just so happens that in some of them employers' NI is not paid. It is in the other ones,

[James Cartlidge]

so we are harmonising the situation.” That is perfectly fair and reasonable. We have seen this in other contexts, with the classic one being IR35; people, often knowingly and perhaps sometimes unknowingly—it is hard to say—have constructed their tax affairs in such a way that, in effect, they are not having to pay either some employees’ taxes or the costs that there would be for a traditional company paying employees of paying employers’ NI. It is important always to consider the application of employers’ NI because, if it is not applied fairly, it can offer a perverse incentive in the tax system and create strange behaviours.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has talked about people who became self-employed and were not genuinely self-employed—I cannot recall the precise phrase he used, but we all know what that means. It means that someone is setting up their tax affairs in such a way as to reduce the amount of taxation they pay, rather than doing so because they are a plumber who, by their very nature, is going to be self-employed.

I was a mortgage broker before I came to this place. My business expanded beyond that, I am pleased to say, but when I started out it was always interesting to receive applications from people who were using personal service companies. This was a real problem, and understandably so. They had the benefit of not paying the tax, but the downside was that it was hard to get a mortgage because they were not technically a permanent employee. The banks and building societies used to take the view that they should therefore have to show three years’ accounts, which was often difficult for a first-time buyer. I encountered this issue many years ago and it is a perennial one. It is an important issue we need to continue to look at, so it is important that we have this measure before us today, examining the application of employers’ NI.

When I served on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, when I was first elected, we held an interesting evidence session on gig employees—self-employed people or workers, whichever way one describes them, in the gig economy. These are people whose position is ambiguous. The Matthew Taylor report identified these people: they work for one employer and have all the characteristics of an employee, but are technically, because of their tax situation, self-employed. They thus have less security than other workers and cost their employer less. Interestingly, when we held the evidence session, I asked four of the largest such companies, including Hermes and, as I recall it, Amazon, whether they would consider paying into a form of auto-enrolment for the self-employed, were Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs able to set up auto-enrolment so that it could be applied for by the self-employed, particularly those who work for a single company, and they all said yes. I hope we will see progress on that. The point is that there has to be the fair application of employers’ NI, in order to avoid abuse of the system and, ultimately, those in employment, of whatever form, having less security, less entitlement to benefits and so on.

The point about sporting testimonials is timely. Cricket was mentioned, and I am sure you will be aware, as I am sure you will be there, Mr Deputy Speaker, that at 7 pm the England and Wales Cricket Board will be out in

force on the Terrace to celebrate and mark the build-up to this year’s cricket world cup. I am sure you have had many invitations already. Others have declared an interest in that they are cricket supporters. I do not know whether that is an interest, but I am a supporter of Middlesex. I very much enjoy going to watch them and have done for many years, having been born in Edgware, in Middlesex. Those who spoken about this are absolutely right; testimonials are part of the fabric of cricket, football and so on. The key point to make, which has been mentioned but must be stressed, is that testimonials can be used to raise not just money for the Exchequer but considerable sums for charity. I believe Wayne Rooney’s testimonial raised £1.2 million, of which £1 million was donated to charity. In 2006, Alan Shearer raised £1.6 million in his testimonial, with most of it going to charity, as I understand it. Although there is a tax issue involved, we should recognise that these higher grossing testimonials, often involving fantastic sports stars and shown on television, are raising a lot for charity.

**Peter Dowd:** These testimonials are very important. A former Liverpool football player, Jamie Carragher, a Bootle lad, also had a testimonial and he put the best part of £1 million into his Jamie Carragher 23 Foundation. That is worth a mention.

**James Cartlidge:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning the other Liverpool team, as it were. They seem to be doing quite well this season. It is a good and important point to make, because it sounds to me as though a relatively small number of sportspeople will have to pay a bit more tax in the coming years as a result of the Bill—there are a small number who do not have testimonials agreed contractually—but it is fair to have fairness.

Let me conclude on fairness. The hon. Member for Bootle and I have had one or two exchanges on Treasury matters over the years. He finished with quite a stirring wind-up, saying that with this Bill we were somehow supporting the rich—that classic old storyline that we were the party of failing to crack down on tax avoidance by the rich and were instead hitting the poorest. Well, what is the threshold in the Bill? It is £100,000.

**Peter Dowd:** What about redundancies?

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Gentleman can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe the limit for testimonials is £100,000. [Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman mentions redundancy payments from a sedentary position; he can correct me if I am wrong again, but I do not think the Bill affects redundancy payments. It is about other, voluntary termination payments. On the subject of terminations, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be delighted to hear that I shall now terminate my speech, but I will support this very good Bill.

3 pm

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Let me start by saying that I agree with almost everything that the Labour shadow Minister said. I will not make any cricket puns because I do not know anything about cricket—I will just stay out of that one—but I will make a point of mentioning that Aberdeen is obviously the greatest football team and should be mentioned first in any discussion of sporting prowess.

First, on the issues raised by the Labour shadow Minister about the Bill process, I share his concerns about the fact that we were told we would be getting the Bill before it had been introduced to this place. That is a real concern. Perhaps the Treasury drew the short straw again, and when the Government announced that they would have a Second Reading of a Bill but panicked because they could not work out which Second Reading it should be, they scrambled around and said to the Treasury, "You guys must have something", and the poor Treasury Ministers were dragged here to present this Bill.

The serious point is that this is a highly technical Bill and we have had a very short time to look through it. I looked through the explanatory notes, as I am wont to do in these circumstances, but they do not talk about the amount of consultation that was done or the number of people who contributed to that consultation. I am aware that perhaps there are tax information and impact notes that do talk about the amount of consultation that was done, but it would have been useful to have that information in the explanatory notes so that we could be clear about how many individuals and organisations had come to the Treasury and said, "These are the good things and the bad things about the Bill." That would have put us in a much more informed position, although I am sure we will get into the meat of that discussion in Committee.

On the intention behind the Bill, it was announced some time ago that there would be changes in this policy area and it has taken a while for the Bill to come through. Why has it come through now? If it has been intended for some time, why has it taken so long for the Bill to come before the House? Was it just that the Treasury drew the short straw, as I said, and had to bring a Bill to the House today and just had to find something? It would be useful to know something about the timing for the Bill, why it has come along now and what the logic behind that is.

I have a couple of questions on some of the specific things mentioned in the Bill. In introducing it, the Minister said that if there is a contractual obligation that there will be a testimonial, that will be treated differently, but also talked about cases in which there is an expectation that there will be a testimonial, which to me does not mean the same thing as a contractual obligation. I am not clear what the Treasury means by an expectation of a testimonial. Somebody could score a goal in every single club game they have ever played, but that does not mean they have a contractual testimonial obligation. I would expect, though, that that person would probably get a testimonial for being such a big part of their football club. Is that what is meant by "expectation"? If not, will the Treasury confirm exactly what is meant by that word in the Bill?

On the amounts for testimonials, the explanatory notes say:

"The new Class 1A liability does not affect individuals as it is to be paid by the controller of the sporting testimonial."

That seems a bit disingenuous to me, because although it does not affect the individual's liability, it does affect the amount of money they will get. Has the Treasury done any maths on how much less sporting individuals will get from their testimonials because this liability might have to be taken off before the money is handed

over to them? It seems to me that, rather than being something quite removed, it will have a direct impact on individuals.

The Chartered Institute of Taxation got in touch with me with queries about some things in the Bill. On the £100,000 limit, the institute said:

"The intention is that the NICs rules will replicate this and only impose Class 1A NICs on the amount chargeable to income tax. We have reviewed the NICs Bill and it charges to Class 1A the amount that is 'general earnings'. We assume this means the amount above £100,000...but it is not clear. The termination payments legislation refers specifically to the amount chargeable under the Income Tax (Earnings & Pensions) Act 2003. It is surprising that the same approach has not been adopted here."

Why has the Treasury taken a different approach to the drafting of this legislation to that taken to the drafting of the termination payments legislation that was passed previously?

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): There is another question, about the definition of who is an employee and who is an employer. There have been various examples in the courts of people being treated as employers when they were actually employees. There is still a bit of obscurity about that when it comes to tax, which creates a lot of difficulty for people.

**Kirsty Blackman**: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. When in a moment I talk about the termination awards for individuals, I will discuss that specific issue.

On termination awards for employees, the explanatory notes say:

"The new Class 1A liability does not affect individuals as it is paid by the employer."

The reality is that, again, it does affect individuals, because they will receive less money. If the employer is going to give out a pot of £40,000, they will be giving some of that to the Exchequer, instead of to the individual as they currently would. The details show that the Exchequer expects to receive £210 million for 2023-24 as a result of the change; do Ministers expect individuals to receive £210 million less and that that money will go to the Exchequer instead, or do they expect employers magically to find some more money and to continue to pay employees who are leaving their organisation the same amount as before, while paying a slice to the Treasury as well? It would be useful to know how much less the Treasury expects individuals to receive as a result of the change, not just how much the Treasury expects to receive.

The NICs change is the only example of a class 1A charge on cash earnings that the Chartered Institute of Taxation could find. Why has the Treasury decided to take the route it has chosen? Class 1A contributions are normally paid in respect of things such as benefits in kind, rather than on cash earnings. The Bill seems to me to make a fairly fundamental change to how NICs are treated and to the different classes of NICs. It would be useful to know why the Treasury has decided to make this change. Is it part of some sort of long-term plan to use class 1A charges on cash in other circumstances? Or will they continue to be used mainly on benefits in kind?

It seems to me that it is a bit of an ad hoc change. Perhaps the Treasury is putting forward some grand plan, or perhaps it is just a small change. I have asked

[Kirsty Blackman]

similar questions about the recent changes to the Financial Conduct Authority and the Bank of England. It seems that a lot of small ad hoc changes have been coming through with no blueprint for where the Treasury expects to be at the end of the process and what it expects the system to look like at that point. It would be useful to know more about that.

I would like to know about a few main things. On the £100,000 for sporting testimonials, is the Bill intended to operate in the way things operated under the previous legislation on sporting testimonials, but the language in the Bill is just unintentionally a bit woollier? On employees, we have that issue with the class 1A charge; does the Treasury intend to make further changes to class 1A contributions, or is this the last change it expects to make? We expect secondary legislation to come through as a result of the Bill, to tighten things up and make further changes in future, but when is that expected to come—in this Session, or quite close to the Bill's implementation in 2020? If it is the latter and the secondary legislation does not come through in enough time, it might be difficult for employers to make sensible decisions.

3.10 pm

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman). The two of us often seem to be in the Chamber at a similar time discussing tax issues.

These measures have been a long time in process. Back in the Budget of 2016, there was talk of a consultation on trying to align more closely national insurance with tax treatment. I note that, today, the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury said that this is a form of simplification of the tax system. I might disabuse him of those thoughts by telling him to look more closely at the new rules regarding post-employment notice pay within payments in lieu of notice as part of termination payments. Far from being simple, it is actually rather complex.

As I said at the very start, these proposals have been making their way through this House in various forms. There were some delays because of the unexpected election in 2017, but they did find their way into a draft Bill in December 2016—the National Insurance Contributions Bill. Some proposed changes came through in the 2017 Budget, which included the scrapping of class 2 national insurance for the self-employed—currently £3 a week—and a corresponding increase in class 4 national insurance contributions for the self-employed. They were highlighted as fairly controversial at the time, but I did not share that view. I was quite supportive of the increase in class 4 national insurance because of the generosity, as I saw it, of the new state pension that came into play. That slight increase in the class 4 national insurance rate was, I felt, a fair quid pro quo for the quite substantial increase in the new state pension, but, for whatever reason, that measure was not taken through. I had some serious concerns about scrapping class 2 national insurance, and I will explain why.

The lowly paid self-employed person may not hit the threshold for class 4 national insurance contributions, which is, I believe, something above £8,500, but is more likely to have paid class 2 national insurance contributions and so would be ticking up a national

insurance record into the future. Given that WASPI women have concerns about where they find themselves today, I was worried that this House and future Members of this House—I will probably be long, long gone—would face a raft of new people saying, “Where’s my pension. I have been self-employed all these years.” They would then be told, “Ah, but you didn’t pay any national insurance; you didn’t pay class 2, and you certainly weren’t earning class 4.” I was pleased to see that that idea disappeared and that we are back to what was the old system.

We have had this £30,000 threshold for tax-free redundancy payments—let me put it in easy terms—for quite some time. It could be argued that we have been at that level of £30,000 for too long. I did a bit of research before today and found that the last time that the £30,000 threshold was raised was with effect from 6 April 1988. It must have been considered to be the right rate at the time—it was an increase in rate from £25,000 to £30,000. I did not manage to find out when the £25,000 rate was first implemented, but it must have been deemed at the time to have been the right rate for what was a tax-free settlement, or payment, for years of service within a company. It was obviously deemed to be the right amount for people to adjust to a new work situation, or to act as a bridge towards retirement for people who were getting towards the end of their normal working life, which was perhaps more traditional in those days of the ’80s. I know the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) raised some of those points in his speech.

Having consulted the Office for National Statistics for inflation increases since 6 April 1988, I found that £100 then is now worth £266 today. Applying that inflationary increase from 1988—no more, no less—that £30,000 would inflate to £79,800, or in broad terms £80,000. However, I do understand—for the record I am a member of the Chartered Institute of Taxation and a chartered accountant—that there is probably a perception that the £30,000 settlement payment has been a target to hit rather than a proper target for any other reasons. Hence we now have this fairly complicated formula for payments in lieu of notice. Changes came in on 6 April 2018, including this whole concept of post-employment notice pay. It was really to recognise the difference between contractual payments in lieu of notice and non-contractual payments in lieu of notice. I will not bore the House for too long with the formula that applies, but it is a fairly beefy one: it is basic pay multiplied by the number of days from the last day of employment, divided by the number of days in the last pay period, minus the amounts paid on termination—a formula given the letter T. Therefore, far from it being a tax simplification measure, the PILON rules have added quite a layer of complication to a figure of £30,000 that, in due course, should have been given adjustment for inflation in any effect.

We are now left with PILONs—the new PILONs assessment of what they are actually worth—holiday pay, and any restrictive covenants being included within that £30,000 limit that is tax free and national insurance free. Above that, we have the normal rules of tax and—in complex speak—employers’ class 1A national insurance coming into play. What we are likely to see in terms of adjustment, in answer to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North, is an increase in employer contributions to pension schemes as part of a settlement on the way out, which is not any bad thing. There is nothing wrong with that.

We have a very powerful and strong message to tell about auto-enrolment. It must be the right thing for all employees now. We are now running into millions, and there will be a fund approaching tens, if not hundreds, of billions in due course, and that must be to the good, as people accumulate their own pension funds. We will look back at auto-enrolment and see it as one of the most successful and vital measures that any Government could have implemented. It is like any other measure. It sounds expensive—it means a percentage off salaries, which will always be unwelcome particularly in times of low inflation, and it means that people might see their take-home salary go down—but there will be a lot of thanks from many employees in due course that these funds have been accumulated. If, in trying to circumvent, in an entirely legitimate way, paying the class 1A national insurance on these amounts—for normal employees over £30,000—employers provide more funding to a pension scheme, then that is something as a *quid pro quo* that the Treasury should actually support.

These measures should have come into play in April 2019. They were deferred last year for a further year, which is mentioned on page 42 of the official Red Book. Therefore, far from saying that these things have come out of the blue and have not been considered, they have been consulted upon since 2016. They nearly got somewhere, but were deferred for another year. Therefore, in terms of planning and getting that together, there is plenty of time for employers to make any due adjustment. I have really concentrated on part 1 of the Bill.

Let me turn to the sporting side of things and the £100,000 limit. There have been a lot of discussions on this subject, because we are talking about huge figures, especially when the very well-known sports stars have their testimonials. When there are millions of pounds involved, these people—who are already very wealthy—often decide to give all the money to charity, which is a laudable ambition. I suppose that the one downside of this type of legislation is that it is possible for the employer in such cases to suffer the national insurance on an amount that the recipient has never actually received because he or she has decided to put it through their tax return as a very generous donation to charity.

This subject brings out the debate about certain limits in our tax regime that have not been touched for a very long time. What was the purpose of the £30,000 threshold? There was a reason for it in 1988, but does it still apply in the modern employment market? Perhaps people do not work as long for the same employer now; that feature is probably slightly different today from how it might have been in 1988. What should the figure be? Does it deserve flexing up? We could have a similar debate across other bits of the tax code—perhaps including inheritance tax.

Lots of parts of the tax code have fallen behind inflation. They were originally there for a reason. Some were introduced when the Labour party was in government, but now that we are in government perhaps there is a debate to be had about what these things were for in the first place, as part of the tax simplification process. But if there is any fear or threat that there has been manipulation of the tax and NI system, it is right that these payments should be part of the normal weft and weave of what we are doing with national insurance. I therefore have

no difficulty supporting the Bill, and I wish the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury every success in its progress through the House.

3.21 pm

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay), who always talks about these issues from a professional perspective, related to his work before he first entered this place. It was very interesting to hear his comments, and I will return to some of them as I set out the Opposition's summary of our concerns about the Bill.

When the Minister was introducing these measures, he said that they were expected. As many Members have said, they most certainly were expected. In fact, they were introduced a lot later than we had anticipated, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) pointed out. In fact, the Government's paperwork associated with the measures indicated that some revenue has been lost as a result of that late presentation. The hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) noted that the figures here were "baked in" to the Government's accounts. Well, if he looks at the accompanying paperwork to these measures, he will see that it actually appears that those expectations have had to change given the late presentation of the Bill to the House. Of course, Labour would take very different decisions on taxation. We believe that the rates for the very best-off should be increased for the top 5%, that a different approach should be taken to corporation tax and, in particular, that we should not be focusing on trying to increase tax on those people who have, above all, lost their jobs—of course, that is part of the focus of this legislation.

I will, however, start by discussing the sporting testimonials element of the Bill. These measures would see NICs treatment of sporting testimonials charged to class 1A NICs, mirroring the tax liability. As has been mentioned, this would only apply to testimonial payments exceeding £100,000. Many members have already noted that the situation—I hesitate to say "playing field" because we have definitely had enough puns in this debate—has changed since these testimonials were introduced, when many players were not earning enough money adequately to save for their retirement. Particularly in football, which is the sport that I know best in this regard, players at the very top levels are earning more than enough throughout their lifetime not to have to rely on these testimonial payments for future revenue. It is therefore appropriate that clubs as employers, or the testimonial committees that would be providing the payments, look to make these national insurance contributions.

The public are rightly angry about the amount of tax avoidance that the wealthiest in this country engage in, but I am concerned that these measures do not come close to addressing systemic issues within football, particularly around taxation. As I understand it, as of January, HMRC was looking into the financial affairs of 173 players, 40 clubs and 38 agents. Now, I have little doubt that the Minister is itching to mention the case of Rangers football club when he responds to the debate—I am well aware of the case that was taken against Rangers—but I think we need to contrast what has occurred in our country with developments in Spain, for example, where firm action has been taken against the extremely well-paid

[Anneliese Dodds]

players who sought to artificially avoid tax. We have not seen similar action taken here. For example, the problem around image rights companies was known about for quite a long time before action was firmly taken. It is an insult to the thousands of volunteers at clubs across the UK—who scrimp and save to ensure that the players are paid, the grounds and stands are properly maintained, and records are properly kept—to see some of those at the very top get away with sharp practices.

Ministers must be aware that testimonials are actually becoming less common as a means of ensuring financial security for players and that the funds from testimonials are very often donated to charity, as many hon. Members have mentioned. I would like some more detail from the Minister about the perceived impact of this legislation on funds being donated to charity. Yes, in some cases funds may pass straight to a charity, but in other situations they go to charity eventually—via a player. In fact, if one looks at the charities that have benefited from the most recent testimonials, many have been foundations associated with particular players. The Minister said that, of the previous 220 testimonials that have been examined in relation to coverage by such measures, most would not have been covered because the testimonial was contractual or because its value was less than £100,000, but he did not talk about testimonials where charitable donations were concerned. I am a little bit worried that this quite important source of funds for charities might not be getting the consideration it requires as part of the Bill. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that in his closing remarks or provide more detail in Committee.

I turn to the impact of the Bill on termination awards. The Bill would introduce a new 13.8% class 1A employer NICs charge to any part of a termination award that is already income tax liable. The Minister has stated his contention that abuse exists in this field, with the claim that some employers might be disguising final payments as termination payments. Again, we really need to see concrete evidence. We have probed on this issue in previous discussions on Finance Bills, but we have not been provided with evidence of abuse. Actually, from memory, consultations carried out in this area did not suggest that there was widespread evidence of abuse. Surely, we need that evidence before considering these measures in detail.

In fact, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) explained very clearly, this measure on employers' national insurance contributions on termination awards is likely to lead to employers being much less generous with non-statutory termination awards and to leave people worse off at a time when many of them are most vulnerable. That could have severe implications for the individuals concerned, but it could also have wider economic implications. I was interested to learn that around 30% of all small businesses founded in the UK in recent times have been started in response to redundancy, with many people only having the resources to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions because of their termination award. It is necessary to think about those wider impacts.

The Government maintain—indeed, we heard it again this afternoon—that this measure does not affect individuals, as it is paid by the employer, but that surely is not the case. In fact, the Government themselves

predict in the material presented alongside the Bill that the measure would reduce wages overall by 0.1% over the year 2020-21. It is crucial that the Government undertake more detailed consideration of the likely impact of this measure.

As has been discussed, this is not the first time that this Government have sought to narrow the scope of tax relief on redundancy and termination payments. In the 2017 Finance Bill, they removed any exemption for payments in lieu of notice from the tax-free scope of payments for injuries. As Members will remember, that was very concerning with regard to workers' rights, which are one of the main aspects of compensation in discrimination cases. The Opposition rightly contested that change.

Again in the 2017 Finance Bill, the Treasury provided itself with the power to vary the tax-free amount for other termination payments. Trade unions raised their concerns about that measure, as they believed that if the Treasury further lowered the tax-free threshold, it would incentivise employers to lower non-statutory termination awards even further. Indeed, the TUC has suggested that the tax-free element should be increased rather than decreased. I was interested by the comments made by the hon. Member for South Thanet, who noted that the value of the £30,000 threshold has been eroded significantly over time and would be worth more than double the amount if it had kept pace with current prices.

The Opposition remain concerned that the Bill still includes the power to potentially vary the NICs threshold upwards or downwards without proper scrutiny in this place, and I hope the Minister will be able to rule that out today. I also hope he will return to this in legislative form, to make it crystal clear that the Government do not intend to reduce the threshold.

I note that the guidance published alongside the legislation emphasises that

“no statutory redundancy pay on its own will be affected”.

That implies that non-statutory redundancy pay could find itself affected, exactly as the Opposition have warned. Can we have a clear statement that we will not see, via secondary legislation, tax and NICs being applied to voluntary redundancy payments for individuals with two years, or more or less than two years, of continuous service?

The Minister will be aware that this kind of application of class 1A NICs to cash earnings is highly unusual, to put it mildly. That point has been underlined by the Chartered Institute of Taxation and was made eloquently by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North. This appears to be a set of rather ad hoc changes. The hon. Member for South Suffolk, in a wide-ranging and interesting speech, suggested that the Bill is part of a general push to simplify the tax landscape, particularly when it comes to the relationship between payment as an employee and other forms of payment. In reality, we have seen an increasing complication of that landscape. We have not seen an alignment between the tax treatment of individuals and their employment treatment. Instead, we see an increasing bricolage of measures to try to deal with the disjuncture, with what is happening around IR35 being a good example. One would hope that the Government will start to try to get a grip of this issue in a more determined and less ad hoc fashion in months to come—if, indeed, they have months to come.

There is one last administrative issue that I want to mention. We have had referred to us by experts in this area the fact that HMRC has suggested that the charge will arise and be paid in real time, rather than at the end of the tax year, as is the case with other class 1A charges. That seems to require a new process—again, additional complication—for submitting information through the pay-as-you-earn real-time information submission and for HMRC to have to adopt a different process for allocating the different elements of that payment. There are already many issues with it allocating real-time information payments into the wrong pots. This seems to suggest additional complication, and we need the Government to rethink this and consider an annual payment, rather than a real-time one. This change potentially comes at the same time as other significant forms of upheaval within the tax system, from making tax digital to preparations for Brexit.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle stated very clearly at the end of his remarks, we will not oppose the Bill at this stage, but we hope that it will be possible to make some substantial changes in Committee, because they are very much needed, as has been reflected by the tenor of this debate.

3.34 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):**

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to this important debate, which is narrow in scope, as the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury pointed out, but none the less important. There were a limited number of contributions, made up for, however, by their quality.

Let me bring us back to the essential element of what this Bill is all about, which is aligning the employer national insurance treatment in respect of termination awards and sporting testimonials with that of income tax. As a number of hon. Members pointed out, the rationale behind these measures is to bring in alignment and, with it, some elements of simplification. We should remind ourselves that, as we have heard, the genesis of this journey was back in 2013-14, with the report by the Office of Tax Simplification. Another rationale for these measures is to disincentivise any tendency towards the manipulation of payments as between earnings and termination payments on the tax side of things. There is, of course, additional revenue to the Exchequer of some £200 million per year as a consequence of these measures.

I turn now to some of the specific points that have been raised—first and foremost, by the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd). He told us some jokes about cricket that were not bad—well, by his standards, at least, they were passable. He managed to remember two of the three great football teams up in the Liverpool part of the country, proving conclusively, I have to say, that he knows far more about football than he does about economics and taxation. *[Interruption.]* Yes, cruel but fair. That was exemplified by his lamenting the fact that we did not abolish class 2 NICs. I was surprised to hear him say that, because he was at great pains, as he always is, to be the champion of the lower paid—as indeed are Conservative Members. The rationale for stepping back from that abolition, as he will know, is that it would have imposed a very significant burden on

the very people he seeks to protect—the lower paid—by putting up the cost of the contributions that they would have to make in order to qualify for their state pension.

Curiously, the hon. Gentleman accused us, contrary to the assertions of the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), of having rushed the timetable for this legislation, despite the fact that its genesis was about five years ago. That is probably indicative of the speed at which a future Labour Government would get things done—five years is rushing it, in those terms. He also accused us of not taking the legislation seriously, but as he spoke there were precisely none of his hon. or right hon. Friends sitting on the Benches behind him.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) gave a masterful performance in which he not only showed great in-depth knowledge of the issues at hand but understood the mentality and the challenges that we have as Ministers in the Treasury. It is indeed a restrictive environment where we do not want to put people's taxes up, we make commitments not to do so, and we fight day in, day out to ensure that we stick to those pledges. But at the same time, we do of course have to raise revenue, as he described. He also cantered around the tax terrain, touching on IR35, auto-enrolment and various other aspects of tax. It was a very thoughtful contribution to the debate.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) specifically referenced the amount of consultation—or the lack of it, as she saw it—around the Bill. I should remind her that we have consulted on it twice. It was issued in draft in December 2016, and it was prefigured when we handled the income tax aspects of these issues in the 2016 and 2017 Finance Acts. Of course, the measures themselves were first mooted back in 2015, so we have been round the block with them.

**Kirsty Blackman:** The point I was making was not that there was necessarily a lack of consultation, but that we did not know how much consultation there had been, because the details are not in the explanatory notes, where they would often be. Normally, the explanatory notes will say a bit about the amount of consultation there has been, but they do not say anything at all. If that had been written down for us, and we had known how many consultation responses there had been, I would not have asked the question.

**Mel Stride:** The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury has just reminded me that there has been a lot of information out there—we have, not least, written to Members to explain the background to these measures.

As to the hon. Lady's specific point, she has raised the quality of information memorandums with me before in a different context. I said on that occasion, and I will restate now, that I am happy to look at the point she has raised. While we may have disagreements over policy across the House, I think we all accept that it is important that the relevant information is clearly provided and in the right place, and I will certainly be happy to look at that issue.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of tax treatment where there is an expectation that a testimonial payment will be made. She understandably asked how we know whether such a payment should be seen as having an

[*Mel Stride*]

expectation attached to it. The answer is if that payment is customary. If someone is involved in a sports club of some sort, and there is a testimonial every year for a particular player or group of players, and that had been going on for some time, that would be a customary testimonial situation. In those circumstances, the tax treatment would follow accordingly.

The hon. Lady also raised a point about employer NICS at 13.8% being applied above the £30,000 threshold. She raised the prospect that some of that may be borne by the employee, because the employer would have a certain amount that they were looking at. She raised the question of what the balance was between who bears that cost and the £200 million per year received by the Exchequer. I very much doubt that that information is available, but if it is, I will certainly make sure that we provide it to her. That may be an issue she wishes to come back to in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) specifically majored on the threshold—the £30,000—and pointed out that it first came into effect in 1988. What I would say to him is that, in the case of Germany and the United States—certainly in the case of income tax—the threshold is effectively zero, so in terms of international comparisons, the figure of £30,000, while it is true that it has not increased by inflation since 1988, is none the less set at a reasonable and proportionate level. As a number of speakers have also pointed out, 80% of termination payments are below the £30,000 threshold in any event and would therefore not fall under this employers' national insurance.

The hon. Member for Oxford East, as well as helpfully pointing out that Labour's mission is to increase corporation tax, came on to the issue of avoidance and evasion, particularly in the area of football. She thought I would mention the Rangers case, and it is important to do that, because it does indicate that we will take cases right the way to the Supreme Court when we believe that issues such as disguised remuneration are in play. Whether it is in football or other areas of commerce and economic life, we will make sure that the right amount of tax is paid. I will not rehearse the arguments that the hon. Lady has heard from me on many occasions about the tax gap and how successful the Government have been in that respect compared with Governments of the past.

The second issue the hon. Lady raised was charitable giving. She set up the prospect of a testimonial being held and the money going through the committee and then on to a charity. She asked what the tax treatment would be in those circumstances. It is open to a committee in that situation to route some of the money via payroll giving to the charity—that is without limit—to make sure that that is done in the most tax-efficient manner possible. However, she may wish to return to that matter in Committee, where we can perhaps have a more detailed debate about it.

The hon. Lady asked about seeking evidence of the abuse of termination payments—in other words, disguising what are essentially earnings by transferring them into a termination payment, thereby reducing taxation. HMRC is clear that there has been evidence of that in the past. I am sure that she will wish to revisit the matter in more detail in Committee.

The hon. Lady mentioned the impact of these measures on wages, citing the correct figure of 0.1% for the reduction by 2020-21. However, I point out that we have now had 10 months of increased real wages, due to our success in keeping inflation down and generating nominal wage growth. Of course, with regard to employment, which is part of the issue we are addressing, we now have among the highest levels of employment in our history, and the lowest unemployment since the mid-1970s.

The hon. Lady asked what guarantees there are that we will not reduce the threshold in either case. Of course, it is up to this Government, or any future Government, to take a view on these matters, but I can assure her that we have no expectation or intention at the present time to lower the thresholds. If we did, that would of course be by way of an affirmative statutory instrument, which means the measure would have appropriate scrutiny.

In conclusion, I thank the Opposition and all Members for their contributions, and for not opposing Second Reading.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

### **NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS (TERMINATION AWARDS AND SPORTING TESTIMONIALS) BILL (PROGRAMME)**

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the National Insurance Contributions (Termination Awards and Sporting Testimonials) Bill:

#### *Committal*

- (1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

*Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

- (2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 16 May 2019.

- (3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

*Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including  
Third Reading*

- (4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on Consideration.

- (5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption that day.

- (6) Standing Order No. 83B (programming sub-committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

*Other proceedings*

- (7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—  
(*Mel Stride.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS  
(TERMINATION AWARDS AND SPORTING  
TESTIMONIALS) BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)**

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the National Insurance Contributions (Termination Awards and Sporting Testimonials) Bill, it is expedient to authorise provision adding termination awards chargeable to income tax to the amount by reference to which, in the case of Class 1A National Insurance Contributions, the appropriate national health service allocation (for England, Wales and Scotland) and the appropriate health service allocation (for Northern Ireland) are to be calculated.—(*Mel Stride.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**PETITION**

**Public confidence in the Prime Minister**

3.47 pm

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): The petition asks the House to hold a debate of no confidence in the Prime Minister at the earliest opportunity. It is from residents of the United Kingdom. The lead signatory is Leonard Harris from Accrington in Lancashire. Other signatories include many from Dorset constituencies, including Christchurch, and from representatives of Leavers of Dorset. The lead signatory wanted to submit a parliamentary e-petition on the subject, but it was ruled inadmissible because it is not possible to submit an e-petition calling for someone to lose their job. It was deemed that the consequence of the petition was that the Prime Minister could lose her job, so it was ruled out. Hence this old-fashioned public petition.

The petition states:

The petition of Residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Prime Minister repeatedly promised that the UK would leave the European Union on 29 March 2019 and that the only way to prevent that happening without a deal was for our Prime Minister's Withdrawal Agreement to be approved by Parliament; further notes that despite her Withdrawal Agreement having been rejected by the House of Commons on three separate occasions, the Prime Minister intervened personally to prevent the UK leaving the EU on 29 March 2019, further intervened to prevent the UK leaving the EU on 12 April 2019, and has now agreed with the EU, without the prior approval of her Cabinet or Parliament, that the UK cannot leave the EU before 31 October 2019 without a deal, notwithstanding having incurred expenditure in excess of £4 billion for that purpose, and the Prime Minister having repeatedly stated to UK citizens that in her view no deal is better than a bad deal; further expresses its dismay that the Prime Minister has also conceded that the UK is not allowed to renegotiate the Withdrawal Agreement or open negotiations on a future relationship with the EU prior to 31 October 2019, thereby going back on her guarantee that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed; and further as a result that they have no confidence in the Prime Minister.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons hold a debate and make a decision on a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister at the earliest opportunity.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002451]

**Welbeck Defence Sixth Form College**

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Paul Maynard.)*

3.50 pm

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): I am very grateful for this opportunity to raise the important matter of the future of Welbeck Defence Sixth Form College in Leicestershire. The college is in the constituency of my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), by a few hundred yards, but I have been delighted to visit the college on a number of occasions, both before and since my election in 2010 to represent Loughborough. This is clearly a matter of national importance. It is good to see my hon. Friend in his place on the Treasury Front Bench. I think I can confidently say that at least on this subject he and I are going to be firmly of the same mind. In particular, we would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the fantastic staff, pupils and governors, both past and present, for their unwavering commitment to our armed forces, as well as their contribution to the local area and the college over many years; and also to Councillor David Snartt, who has always been a strong voice for the college.

Welbeck is a full boarding co-educational college, funded by the Ministry of Defence. It offers an A-level education to young people who go on to study a degree at a partner university and receive an annual bursary before starting their careers as technical officers within the Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force or the MOD civil service. The college now has over 300 boarding pupils, and students come from all over the UK and from a wide variety of backgrounds. This positive impact on social mobility is something I will return to.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing the debate. I declare an interest as a former member of the Army for 14 and a half years as a part-time soldier. Does she not agree that the college is a way of sowing into the future those whose career choice is the armed forces and that to close it down sends a contradictory message to the official one, which is that we want young people to make a career out of the armed forces? Money spent on sowing it into the lives of young people can never be wasted. In other words, money spent now will increase our forces, making soldiers who are special. The British Army is the best in the world.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman very much indeed for that intervention. I agree with him. From testimonials sent to me by former students and their families, I know how strongly they agree, too. In many cases, Welbeck has transformed their life chances. As he also says, this is about building fantastic armed forces, particularly with a science, engineering and technology background, for the United Kingdom. I am sure the Minister will want to cover how he thinks the changes proposed will enhance that and not detract from it. There is some convincing to do on that score.

Welbeck aims to prepare students for life at university and beyond by giving them a well-rounded curriculum that will—as a champion of character education, I particularly endorse this—  
“challenge and develop them academically, physically and socially.”

[Nicky Morgan]

The college also aims to develop students on a personal level by challenging them through a diverse range of co-curricular activities, which include many different sports, combined cadet force activities, and working within the community through volunteering and charity work.

On 6 April 2018, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, wrote to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood:

“I am writing to inform you that the Ministry of Defence will be undertaking a review of the Defence Sixth Form College at Welbeck as part of an ongoing initiative to understand how to improve the supply of STEM graduates into Defence and the Armed Services... Welbeck is part of our wider scheme for recruiting STEM graduates. Its role is to educate pupils in relevant A-level subjects prior to moving to the next phase of the scheme where they are supported through STEM courses at university. If successful they then go into Initial Officer Training with one of the Armed Services or enter the Civil Service within the MOD. Like many other organisations, we”—

the MOD—

“have found it consistently difficult over recent years to attract sufficient, good quality, STEM candidates. Whilst the education and wider experience provided by Welbeck is of a high standard, and despite measures to mitigate shortfalls, intake targets are not being achieved. Equally, over the 5-6 years they are in the pipeline the numbers seeing it through to Initial Officer Training has consistently only been about 55%.

The review will look at the breadth of the operation of Welbeck, which is a private Finance Initiative establishment run by a contractor, Minerva. It will explore re-setting the current PFI, extracting better value from the current PFI, and also whether a different STEM graduate recruiting scheme would better meet Defence’s needs. We will be instructing PwC to work with Minerva to explore the viability of these options.

Whilst the review will be internal to MOD only, I understand that such a review can create uncertainty and potentially some concern among your constituents. I want to reassure you, however, that no decisions will be made until the review is complete, at which point I will write to you again. One of the assumptions of the review is that, whatever happens, students who are currently on the scheme will be able to see it through to graduation and joining the Services or Civil Service.”

I know that, as the local MP, my hon. Friend raised a question with the Prime Minister on this in the House last year and has had regular engagement on it with Ministers. But as far as I can establish, the review’s conclusions have not been released to the public, nor is it clear who was formally consulted, so it was deeply disappointing to read last month, in a written statement by the Minister here today, of the decision by the Ministry of Defence to

“put in place a new, targeted scheme to recruit undergraduates in related subjects; the STEM graduate inflow scheme... This scheme has been designed to significantly increase the number of STEM graduates brought into defence and the variety of STEM disciplines they are from... The new scheme will replace the current defence technical officer and engineer entry scheme... which has produced some excellent young graduates but is not meeting defence’s requirements or providing sufficient value for money. Ending the current scheme will also mean that the Defence Sixth Form College... at Welbeck will close, with a final intake in September 2019.”

We, and those watching this closely, note the Minister’s final comment in the statement:

“Full transition to the new scheme will take place incrementally over the next five years, during which the current intake of students will be fully supported. For the final two years Welbeck remains a going concern. That time will be used productively to

work with local authorities and stakeholders to seek the best possible future use of this impressive school, including within the education sector or an alternative use within defence.”

I will return to the issue about the future in a moment but, first, for the sake of those affected, we must be absolutely sure that the Ministry of Defence is making the right decision. As the local MP, my hon. Friend has written:

“A number of constituents have written to me, following the announcement, to express their concern about the forthcoming closure of the College, particularly in light of the excellent opportunity Welbeck offers young people across the UK, since 1953 and on its current site since 2005, to get a first-class STEM and technical education in preparation for a career in our Armed Forces, and for the values and discipline it instils in its students. While I can understand the Ministry of Defence’s approach to ensuring that it has access to talented engineering and technical graduates needs to be updated from time to time to reflect changing needs and approaches to training and education, I do share the view that Welbeck’s closure will be a real loss in that context.”

As local MPs, we note, and are grateful, that my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Committee—I am delighted to see him here—has written to the Ministry of Defence to ask if it is wise to

“shut down a means of creating graduates who have been working towards a service career from their mid-teens.”

He goes on to say

“we are very concerned that closure of Welbeck College risks sacrificing an existing—and productive—source of STEM graduates in the hope that a new and untried system will be more successful.”

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend, I, on behalf of the Defence Committee, received a number of representations from people involved with Welbeck who stressed the high quality of the service it provides. I cannot help wondering if part of the problem is that not all Welbeck graduates go into the armed services. Perhaps part of the solution is that part of the budget should be funded by some other Department to recognise the fact that there is an educational benefit that goes wider than just recruitment into the armed forces.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. He speaks with great expertise as Chair of the Defence Committee and makes an interesting point. If I were still Secretary of State for Education, I would be thinking about the impact on my budget, but he made two broader points. The first is about the positive impact of having more young people studying science, technology, engineering and maths in this country. Of course, if they are going to be part of our armed forces or the MOD civil service, that is a great thing for the country, but there are many other fantastic STEM-based jobs that will benefit this country too, and I suspect that many of those future employees have started life at Welbeck and been inspired there.

The second point is about how the decision was made, what alternatives were looked at and who was consulted. In his letter to the MOD, the Chair went on to say:

“Our understanding is that the staff and governors were not consulted on the College’s future and it does not seem obvious to us that the creation of SGIS requires the closure of the College”.

He asked why the decision must lead to the closure of Welbeck, whether the change between the two schemes offers value for money, how closing the college will help UK defence

“in an increasingly competitive market for STEM graduates in the UK and globally”,

and whether the staff and governors of the college were consulted before the written statement, or whether they were informed of the decision without being able to influence the review. We look forward to reading the Government’s response to that letter, which I suspect, like all other Select Committee correspondence, will be published and made available to the public in due course.

The decision is clearly very unsettling for staff, families, current students and those who had hoped to study there in future. We note the current 847 signatures on the petition on the Parliament website and the current 1,076 signatures on the 38 Degrees petition site. The latter petition calls for a consultation to be held to include parents, staff, students and other relevant stakeholders over the proposed closure of Welbeck. As I have said, it is clear from the comments received just how strongly parents and families feel. I have selected two of those I have received. The first reads:

“It is incredibly disappointing to read that Welbeck Defence Sixth Form College is to shut...Our 15 year old daughter...has visited Welbeck twice as she has her heart set on joining the Navy and training to be an air engineer. Welbeck provides a place where young women can be encouraged and supported into engineering careers. It offers a standard and type of education—and opportunities—that would otherwise be out of reach to families like us who are not affluent and cannot afford to pay for expensive boarding schools”.

The second reads:

“I strongly believe without Welbeck my son would not be achieving as well as he is doing now. Welbeck is there for intelligent children from poor backgrounds and not just for children from private schools or more affluent families. They are all given the same opportunity from an early age to reach their full all round potential academically and within many sports and other areas which my son would not have been able to achieve at sixth form college. Welbeck is a community; a family and a collection of likeminded intelligent young adults who are training with the mind set to do as well as possible not just for themselves but for their country and their chosen entry force. My son ended up getting offers from both and chose the RAF to follow on from his years at air cadets.”

I hope that in his reply the Minister will address the questions raised by the Chair of the Defence Committee and say how he thinks the new scheme will still benefit the students whose lives and futures are being shaped and transformed by Welbeck. I hope he can also take us through how the review was conducted and who was involved.

If this decision is not to be reversed, this fantastic site could well be empty in just a couple of years. Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood nor I want an empty site just sitting there, nor do we want it sold off to any old bidder. We know there is already local interest. The Minister’s written statement made it clear that an alternative use within either education or defence would be found. I hope that the PFI contract will not put future occupiers off or provide an excuse for officials not to pursue alternative uses sooner rather than later. If he can shed more light on plans for the site, we would be pleased to hear them.

I finish with another comment from a family. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is poised. He cannot wait. I am delighted—he is a coiled spring—but I hope he will bear with me while I read out one further comment:

“The training and preparation that the students receive is truly first class and I am fearful that we may lose something irreplaceable which, if lost, will be impossible to replicate.”

I echo that sentiment. I hope that, at a time when the UK needs all the talent that we can muster, the Minister will understand the concerns that I have set out and provide reassurance. I suspect that this will not be the last debate or set of questions on the issue that I have raised. As the local Members of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood and I look forward to working with the Minister and his officials on this important matter.

4.5 pm

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):**

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing the debate, and, indeed, on all her contributions and support for the college over many years. I also acknowledge the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), to whom my right hon. Friend referred. I should perhaps add, by way of explanation to the general public, that he is unable to speak today because of his role as a Minister. However, his very presence on the Front Bench alongside me today highlights the fact that he has been a champion for Welbeck during his tenure as the local Member of Parliament.

As I listened to my right hon. Friend, it was impossible not to recognise and appreciate the affection that is felt for the current Welbeck Defence Sixth Form College—as well as its predecessor establishment, Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire—and the disappointment that some will feel at the decision to close it as part of the MOD’s move to a new scheme for recruiting science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates to careers in defence. It is, perhaps, most important for me to acknowledge the high-quality education that Welbeck has been providing, and to pay tribute to its excellent staff and the talented young graduates who have gone on to forge successful careers in defence.

Let me say at the outset that the MOD remains firmly committed to attracting high-quality STEM graduates into the armed forces and the civil service, which, in turn, will contribute to support for the wider UK STEM agenda. In an increasingly complex and technologically driven world, we need talented individuals with a diverse range of STEM skills to ensure that we keep pace with our competitors and are fully prepared to meet the challenges and threats that we face today and, especially, in the future.

Welbeck has undoubtedly played its part in producing excellent STEM graduates. I should explain that attendance there forms the first stage of a two-part scheme, the defence technical officer and engineer entry scheme—or DTOEES, another fantastic abbreviation that only the MOD could come up with. I shall refer to it simply as “the old scheme”, if I may. Following two years at the college and successful completion of A-levels, students have gone to selected universities to study for STEM degrees and joined one of four defence technical

[Mark Lancaster]

undergraduate scheme squadrons. On graduation, they have entered initial officer training with one of the services or become defence civil servants. Under the old scheme, they could go to only 11 universities in the United Kingdom, including just one in Scotland; under the new scheme, that range will be widened. The courses available under the old scheme were traditional STEM courses, rather than—at this point I should declare my interest as the deputy commander of the 77th brigade—courses involving information advantage, cyber, and other 21st-century skill sets that are now required in the military.

Unfortunately, the fact is that the scheme as it stands has consistently failed to deliver the required number of engineers and technical officers to Defence since its establishment in 2005. Despite efforts to improve its output, on average only 53% of entrants have completed it successfully, and a proportion of those have not achieved STEM degrees. While this is not about money, it should be noted that the scheme has cost the MOD and the taxpayer some £200,000 per student who has become a STEM graduate.

My right hon. Friend touched on social mobility, which has been an important part of the scheme. She may be interested to know that just 15% of Welbeck graduates have had a general household income of up to £20,000—perhaps those at the lower end of that bracket—while 60% have had a household income of over £60,000. We are also interested in that area in trying to improve the social mobility aspect of the new scheme.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the review, and we did have a review. In effect, 11 different options were considered, which were broken down into three broad categories: do nothing—retain the current scheme as it is; do better—identify a number of sub-options that would all retain Welbeck; or do something differently—identify a number of sub-options that would involve the closure of Welbeck. There really was a genuine effort to look at a vast range of options.

My right hon. Friend also mentioned consultation with staff and governors before the decision was made. A cross-section of both Welbeck staff and governors were engaged during the course of the study by the review team. Equally, prior to the announcement, Defence Academy staff formally engaged with contractors, and the review was a standing agenda item for the board of governors. There were also two “town hall” meetings with staff in June and November last year.

The reasons why some individuals have not completed the old scheme, leaving it early at either Welbeck or university, are varied and complex, but they include medical, academic and voluntary withdrawals. Ultimately, asking young people to make life-determining decisions at age 14 or 15 has, in some cases, been one factor that may have impacted on both recruitment and retention. Another downside of the previous scheme was its relative inflexibility, which I have already touched on, principally because of the fixed costs of Welbeck. This really has meant that the Ministry of Defence could not respond effectively or quickly enough to changes in requirement, or target spending where it would be most effective.

Looking to the future, as I set out in my statement to the House on 11 March, a review of STEM officer recruiting concluded that an alternative method of recruiting

STEM graduates was needed to improve the numbers entering a career in defence. The STEM graduate inflow scheme has been designed significantly to increase the number of STEM graduates brought into Defence and the variety of STEM disciplines they are from. Unlike the old scheme, it will be open to undergraduates across all UK universities, studying a wider range of STEM subjects that will include cyber and other new technologies.

The scheme will be supported by an attractive financial package, whereby undergraduates may receive a mix of bursary, tuition fee payment and other targeted payments that are significantly higher than the current bursary of up to £4,000 per annum. This will attract and support a wider range of applicants who are already academically proven, having passed A-levels or being already in the undergraduate pipeline. Importantly, this will provide a greater opportunity to improve both social mobility and diversity. The new scheme, with its focus on supporting individuals through university, will enable more students from a wider range of backgrounds to receive financial support. Indeed, we hope and anticipate that we will double the number of students who receive support.

The financial package has been benchmarked against industry offerings for their own STEM graduate schemes, and it will be competitive. Even with this financial package, however, it will be better value for money—estimated at about a third of the cost per student of the old scheme. The new scheme will also be inherently flexible, allowing the Ministry of Defence more easily to adjust its requirements should the demand for STEM graduates change—for example, due to an increase in requirement or, indeed, a need for specific skills.

Full transition to the new scheme will take place incrementally over the next five years, during which, as my right hon. Friend has said, the current intake of students will be fully supported. The MOD and the single services will develop their specific schemes over this period according to their own requirements, and that is where the flexibility will come in. These are likely to be built around their existing officer recruitment schemes. It may still include some sponsorship of those at school, depending on individual service need, but personnel and funding from the old scheme will be transferred to these schemes to enable them to undertake this work.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** Can the Minister tell me how long it will take to determine whether the new scheme is a success? If it is found not to be a success, will it be too late to go back to a continuation of the college-based scheme?

**Mark Lancaster:** As I said in my earlier remarks, this is effectively a five-year transition. The intake to Welbeck this year will be going into a two-year programme, which will be the last. That will give us two years, as we move to a more undergraduate-focused scheme, to get the new scheme right according to single service requirements. The new scheme, which will run for a period of time, will also be under review. We have not leapt to this decision—anything but—and we hope that the transfer period will allow us to get it right.

As I have said, the new scheme, like any recruitment initiative, will of course be kept under review to ensure that it is achieving the output it is designed to achieve. If it is not, we will look at it again. The final intake to

Welbeck will enter in September this year, and for the final two years Welbeck remains a going concern. Over that period, we will work closely with the Welbeck contractor, Minerva, and the principal to help the contractor to support staff who are impacted and to ensure continuity of quality education to students, keeping staff, governors and pupils fully informed of any developments.

I recognise that there are concerns over the future of the Welbeck site, and I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough that it has become an important part of the local community. I can reassure her and the House that we will do all we can to secure an alternative, sustainable future use for the site. An assessment is being undertaken to determine whether Defence may itself have a use for it and, in addition, some early market testing has identified credible, prospective interest from the private education sector. It is too early to say what the outcome will be, but Defence will work with stakeholders, including the local authority and partners across Government, to seek to secure a viable future for Welbeck.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the Minister very much for his response. Some of these issues might well be commercially sensitive, so I wonder whether he would be willing to meet me and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), at an appropriate point, to discuss some of that interest in more detail with officials. It

would be helpful to have such discussions, perhaps on an ongoing basis, until the future of the site has been secured.

**Mark Lancaster:** That is a perfectly reasonable request, and I would of course be delighted to meet my right hon. Friend and the Minister. I want to take this opportunity to underline the Department's determination for the site to be utilised and not to become moribund. It is a great site, and it is in the wider interest that there is a smooth transition to its future use. We are determined that that will happen.

The scheme has made a valuable contribution to Defence's need for STEM-qualified officers, but we need to increase numbers well beyond the current ability to deliver, as I have tried to explain. We also need to have greater flexibility about the sorts of graduates that we are now attracting into our 21st century armed forces. We need to be more responsive and agile, both to succeed in an increasingly competitive market for STEM graduates in the UK and globally, and to meet the challenges that we are now likely to face. However, I do not underestimate the impact of this decision on my right hon. Friend's local communities, and, if I may, I shall end as I started, by paying tribute to her for raising this matter and, crucially, to the staff at Welbeck, who have done such a sterling job for so many years.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.18 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 30 April 2019

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

## Healthcare: East Midlands

9.30 am

**Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered provision of local healthcare in the East Midlands.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am glad to have secured this crucial debate, which gives me and my east midlands colleagues a great opportunity to highlight the healthcare crisis in our constituencies, our region and across the country. I must stress in everything I say that I do not blame the hard-working and dedicated staff for any of it; the fault lies fairly and squarely with Government cuts. Our constituents deserve better than the past decade of underfunding, which has created a postcode lottery in local healthcare. It has had particularly detrimental implications for my constituency of Lincoln: local healthcare centres have been forced to shut, more general practitioners' services are at risk of closure in the coming months, and local hospitals are in need of considerable funding and support.

Our healthcare infrastructure in the surrounding region of Lincolnshire has also been put under considerable pressure over the past nine years. In July last year, the chief inspector of hospitals recommended that United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust, which has a deficit estimated at £80 million, should remain in special measures. The latest figures show that the trust missed its A&E waiting time target by 32% and has not met the national standard since September 2014.

The east midlands reflects the national picture of a health service in crisis. The Government have spent nine years running down the NHS by imposing the biggest funding squeeze in its history, with massive cuts to public health services. Social care has been slashed by £7 billion since 2010. Our NHS is short of 100,000 staff, including 41,000 nurses and nearly 10,000 doctors. That has had a detrimental knock-on effect on performance: waiting lists are at 4.3 million, more than 500,000 patients are waiting more than 18 weeks for treatment, and 2.5 million people are waiting for more than four hours in A&E. That is a crisis.

It is clear that the underfunding, privatisation and inadequate staffing of our health service has had a devastating effect on healthcare provision in Lincoln and the east midlands. Government decisions have had terrible consequences for people who need care in the areas that I and many of my colleagues represent. That is typified by the recent announcement that the highly relied-on Skellingthorpe surgery may close.

For those who do not know it, Skellingthorpe is a beautiful village in my constituency. Its doctors surgery provides healthcare to more than 8,000 patients, many of whom are local residents. The national patient survey found that 81.9% of the surgery's patients felt that their overall experience was good or very good. The Glebe Practice, which runs the surgery, is in the process of proposing its closure to the clinical commissioning group, and the practice's patients are centralised in its

Saxilby surgery. I acknowledge that there are pressures on the service—there could not fail to be, given the Government's cuts—and that the practice is struggling to recruit clinicians, so centralising its service in Saxilby allows it to maintain quality in one surgery. However, centralising the service restricts my constituents' access to care. They have told me that it is already very difficult to book a timely GP appointment there.

As many other hon. Members will know from their own constituencies, rural areas are often inaccessible because of limited transport links. If the Glebe Practice's plan to transfer patients to its Saxilby practice is agreed to, it will mean patients having to travel on public transport—remember, not everybody can drive or has a car—or walk for 90 minutes from the Skellingthorpe surgery. Even the closest surgery is about a 40-minute walk away. Imagine elderly people having to walk for 40 minutes!

This is a shocking downgrade of my Skellingthorpe constituents' access to care. The proposed alternatives do not offer an acceptable journey length to patients who are in need of health services. Many patients may struggle with mobility issues because of age or illness, while others may not be able to afford to travel other than by public transport.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech that sets out the challenges to healthcare in rural areas such as Lincolnshire. Just this week, the wound service in one of our local clinics in High Peak has shut. Elderly patients with open wounds are having to travel for four hours each way, on three buses, to access the clinic that they are supposed to go to. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is absolutely unacceptable?

**Karen Lee:** Yes, I do. I hope that everybody in this Chamber would agree that that is really unacceptable.

Rather than reducing access to one-to-one healthcare, we should be outlining how we can help groups such as the Glebe Practice by implementing effective national programmes that incentivise recruitment in rural areas. There is a major workforce crisis: as a report co-authored by the Nuffield Trust, the King's Fund and the Health Foundation has found, the NHS could be short of 7,000 GPs within five years. Rural areas will be the first to be hit. As access to GP services in the east midlands is reduced, I urge the Minister to take action to address the staffing crisis.

Before the surgery closes, Lincolnshire West CCG intends to hold a public consultation—but the people of Lincoln have been there before, very recently. Lincoln's walk-in centre on Monks Road closed last year after an allegedly meaningful public consultation, 94% of respondents to which were opposed to the closure. Protests were held outside Lincoln County Hospital and along the high street. Both Conservative-led Lincolnshire County Council and Labour-controlled City of Lincoln Council formally objected to the closure, as did I, but not a bit of notice was taken—the centre was still closed. The justification was similar to the one being given now for the Skellingthorpe closure: we were told that there would be sufficient alternative provision to ensure the same level of care. After researching that claim, we found that no substitution would come anywhere near the accessibility of the walk-in centre, so I am afraid that my constituents' faith in any local consultation is pretty limited.

[Karen Lee]

Appointment-only slots will not meet the needs of my constituents who rely on short-notice, timely access to care. Inevitably, they will only add to the pressure on the overworked A&E department at Lincoln County Hospital and East Midlands ambulance service.

I am very concerned that a trend is emerging: the implementation of cuts to healthcare services, in direct opposition to local people's wishes and needs. It is deeply worrying that CCGs are not listening to residents' concerns before closing local health services. I completely acknowledge that there have been sustained budgetary pressures on the healthcare system over the past nine years, and that it is the CCGs that are expected to deliver large-scale cuts, but in a transparent health governance system we cannot allow cuts to be rubber-stamped against such clear local opposition.

I ask the Minister to consider these cases and contact me to provide substantial reasoning to explain why another closure in my constituency is considered acceptable. The information that I and my constituents have been afforded has led us to the opinion that neither the walk-in centre nor the Skellingthorpe surgery should have been considered for closure. I am sorry, Minister, but passing the buck to the CCG is not good enough for my constituents.

It is not just local GP practices and health centres that have been put under debilitating pressure over the past decade. In my constituency, Lincoln County Hospital serves the city of Lincoln and the north Lincolnshire area. Due to funding and staffing pressures, the latest Care Quality Commission inspection has found that Lincoln County Hospital is below the national standard and requires improvement. It is important to stress that, as is the case in hospitals throughout the UK, this substandard performance is in no way the fault of the dedicated and hard-working staff. I speak from experience: when I was a nurse there, we often used to stay up to an hour late. In theory we got our time back, but in practice we did not.

The staff give a lot—it is not their fault. I worked as a nurse at Lincoln County Hospital for 14 years and I know how much energy and care all the staff, from porters to doctors, put into their challenging work. That is supported by the CQC report, which concluded that the hospital requires improvement in four out of five areas: safety, effectiveness, responsiveness and management. The only area rated as good was the caring nature of the hospital. As the report states repeatedly:

“Patients were treated with compassion, dignity and respect.”

I pay credit to the hard-working staff for that, but they are being let down by a Government who have consistently neglected our health services. I have been through their cuts myself.

The inspection found that nurse staffing numbers were often insufficient to keep people protected from avoidable harm and that the hospital relied heavily on agency and locum staff. I know that at first hand: my friends who are still nurses there tell me that that is true even now. Most worrying was the fact that adequate levels of nurses were observed on only four of the 28 days that the CQC reviewed. It is hardly surprising that there are such drastic staffing shortages. Since

2010, there has been a 19% real-terms fall in weekly earnings for full-time nurses. Nursing degree applications have dropped by one third since the Government scrapped nursing bursaries, without which I would not have been able to train. I go on and on about the nursing bursary, and I will not stop. We need to bring it back; we will not have enough nurses until we do.

The Health Foundation has also found that the number of nurses quitting because of a poor work-life balance almost tripled between 2011 and 2018. Our NHS staff should be celebrated and supported. Their kindness and commitment should not be taken advantage of by a Government who strip away the security of their profession. Lincoln County Hospital demonstrates the devastating way in which avoidable staffing shortages affect vulnerable patients in our communities.

The CQC report also found that patients could not always access care and treatment in a timely way. Waiting times were worse than the England average and did not meet the national standard. Some 60% of ambulance handovers were delayed by 30 minutes or more, and 47% of patients in A&E waited longer than the recommended 15 minutes to be triaged. I went out with an ambulance crew about a year ago, and I saw that at first hand.

That shows how hard-working, committed NHS staff in Lincoln are being put under intolerable pressure by decisions made in Whitehall. That is not unique to Lincoln. In July last year, England's chief inspector of hospitals recommended that United Hospitals Lincolnshire NHS Trust should remain in special measures after visits to Lincoln County Hospital, Pilgrim Hospital, County Hospital Louth and Grantham and District Hospital. Pilgrim Hospital in Boston, which serves my constituents, is a particularly worrying case. It received an overall rating of “inadequate” in this year's CQC inspection. The report found that there was no allocated corridor nurse. Corridor nurse—really? Should people be in corridors on trolleys? One nurse was caring for up to 21 patients at one time. When I was a nurse, the average was about six or eight. On a bad day, if someone did not come in, it could be 10 or 12, but 21—really?

It is clear that at the local, regional and national level, healthcare provision is not working. Vulnerable people who need care in Lincoln, the east midlands and across the UK have a right to access the health provision that they need. That requires a properly funded and staffed NHS service, from local GPs to county hospitals. Although I welcome the Government's planned funding increase for the NHS, most health experts agree that it is barely enough to keep the NHS afloat, let alone reverse nine years of severe funding cuts. Areas such as Lincoln and the east midlands need and deserve much more than a plan that will barely keep afloat a system operating on a shoestring budget.

As someone whose job used to be to provide local healthcare, I am lifted by the fact that everyone can access healthcare as a human right in this country, but that universal right is threatened by policies that do not enable an effective health service in which everyone can access care based on their need, not on the austere policy decisions of the Government of the day.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. The debate can last until 11 o'clock. We have got almost an hour of Back-Bench time, so there is no pressure, but the Chair will be particularly generous to any Member who wants to dilate at length on the need for an urgent care hub at Kettering General Hospital.

9.43 am

**David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for allowing me to speak first. I think it is the first time I have heard a Chair say that there is no time constraint, but I will not detain the House for too long. At the risk of being called to order, I had planned to raise the work that you have done for Kettering General Hospital and your impassioned demands for improvements to it over the years, which no doubt the Minister has listened to many times. I was with some friends last week who said, "Ah, Northamptonshire. That's the Bones—Peter and Philip—isn't it?" Kettering General Hospital came up. At the risk of being called to order—I do not see you doing that—let me say what a good job you have done for that hospital. As was said in the Chamber this week, your whole identity in the House is linked to the work you have done there.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) on securing not just half an hour but an hour and a half in what used to be called the Grand Committee Room but is now Westminster Hall. She spoke passionately and with detailed knowledge, as a former nurse, about the problems in her area. I listened to her speech, and I have sympathy with what she said about some of the consolidation that has taken place, but inevitably there have to be some changes and rationalisations in the health service.

I will talk mainly about the changes in the great town of Hinckley, in my west Leicestershire constituency of Bosworth, which is some way from Lincoln. We were very fortunate that the Secretary of State himself—ipse—recently came to Hinckley to look at the changes that will be made thanks to the £8 million grant that has been secured for upgrading the facilities in Hinckley. Mayur Lakhani, the chair of the West Leicestershire clinical commissioning group, spoke warmly about the way the Secretary of State had responded to their bid, and the support of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, which happens to be Conservative-controlled, and which I will refer to later.

I was lucky to be elected to this House a long time ago—in fact, so long ago that I sometimes forget the date. I have been a Member for more than 30 years, and the one health issue that has bedevilled my constituency above all others in that period is what to do with the Mount Road hospital—the old hospital in the middle of Hinckley. Because of the £8 million grant that the Secretary of State awarded to the clinical commissioning group, we are now able to make some substantial changes to the health improvements in Hinckley. Given your interest in Kettering General Hospital, Mr Hollobone, you will understand my joy at seeing the improvements that are about to take place—consultations are going on at the moment.

I have a letter from the West Leicestershire clinical commissioning group setting out exactly where we are now. It says that the investment supports plans to provide modern, fit-for-purpose facilities, and more services in the local community and closer to home in

Hinckley. I say to the hon. Member for Lincoln that part of that will be about shutting down old facilities. One is a portakabin and another is the old hospital. In exchange, the investment will make better use of all available existing space in Hinckley Health Centre on Hill Street, not far from the old hospital, and Hinckley and Bosworth Community Hospital, which we call Sunnyside because it is on a hill and gets the sun all day long—it is a marvellous place for a hospital.

As part of the £8 million package, the Hinckley Health Centre will be refurbished to accommodate X-ray, ultrasound and physiotherapy, and to increase the number of consulting rooms, which is extremely important. Out-of-hours primary care services will be relocated from Hinckley and Bosworth Community Hospital—Sunnyside—to the newly developed urgent care hub in the Hinckley Health Centre, which will provide out-of-hours urgent care for local patients. A combined day case surgery and endoscopy unit with day case beds will be created. That will provide an increased range of day case procedures and cancer screening services for local patients. We will be removing services from the old Hinckley and District Hospital and the physiotherapy portakabin, which are unfortunately not fit for purpose, and physiotherapy services will be relocated to Hinckley Health Centre.

As I have the luxury of time, I say to people who have campaigned for years to save the old Hinckley and District Hospital that as it is such an old building, upgrading the hospital to the highest standards would require a phenomenal amount of work at a very high cost, with a low return on investment because all the special cables now have to be run with special conduits for oxygen and monitoring. It simply cannot be done efficiently in such an old structure. Although many of my constituents will have an emotional attachment to the old hospital, the decision that has been taken by the clinical commissioning group is right: it needed to close. In exchange, we are now getting an £8 million grant, which will provide much better facilities. As I mentioned earlier, some of the facilities are coming into the town from the outskirts—from Sunnyside to the health centre. It is quite an achievement.

We were lucky to get the grant of £8 million. My father always said to me that you generate your own luck in life, which is true. In this case, one of the drivers that made it possible for the Department and Secretary of State to agree to the clinical commissioning group's bid was the extraordinary co-operation in west Leicestershire between the different service providers, particularly in Hinckley in my constituency.

At the beginning of the 2005 Parliament, I was lucky enough to get elected to the Health Committee under the new procedures. Subsequently, I chaired it for a short time. When I was elected to the Committee, I asked the then leader of the council, "Would you like me to come and talk about health on a regular basis?" It was agreed that I would, and that developed into a health and wellbeing partnership, which meets quarterly with the clinical commissioning group; the director of public health for Leicestershire County Council, Mike Sands; and senior officers at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, including Bill Cullen, Simon Jones, Councillor Maureen Cook and many other excellent Conservative councillors over time. We also have doctors from the local surgeries attend.

[David Tredinnick]

Over a period of some years, we saw the meeting change from participants sitting with their arms folded and leaning back, to sitting up and listening attentively. We have learned to work together, and the partnership has been leakproof—there is nothing to gain from talking outside. We have had an extraordinary degree of co-operation, and I am absolutely convinced that it has improved the health services in my constituency and the county as a whole. It has reduced costs and brought up a whole range of new ideas, some of which I shall go through today. The work of the secondary provider, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, has been really remarkable and hugely encouraging, and it is something that all local people in my constituency can be proud of. Leicestershire County Council has done a good job, too, but I am particularly proud of what Hinckley and Bosworth has done through its health and wellbeing partnership—its contribution to health delivered through that partnership.

It might be instructive if I run through some of the areas that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has worked on. I am pleased to see the Minister of State in his place rather than a Parliamentary Under-Secretary; he is the deputy of the Secretary of State. It illustrates how seriously the Government take the issue of health funding in the east midlands. I want to share with him what is going on in Hinckley. First, I reiterate that we have a local delivery of preventive services through co-operation. I mentioned the councils, but we also talk to the voluntary and community sector. We have patient participation groups, school participation groups and elderly patient participation groups.

The information pyramid is broad-based, and the lines of communication are fluid. Information can come from the bottom to the top very easily. From those ideas, the Conservative-controlled Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has produced a comprehensive prevention strategy, which sets out the work that the authority will undertake with its partners. The first objective is to prevent issues from escalating by taking action as early as possible. The second is to reduce demand for high-cost services and dependency on statutory services, thereby making spending more efficient.

Another objective is to develop self-help approaches to enable communities to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, which is something that the Department of Health and Social Care worked on under the Secretary of State's predecessor, and the Health Committee in the 2005 Parliament looked at personal budgets and how they work. It was about getting people to think about their own health. With an ageing population, that is one of the areas that really must be brought to the fore in the future. However much money we ask for the NHS, we will never have enough supply of resources to meet demand unless we encourage people to take greater care of themselves. In this respect, the initiatives that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has taken are hugely important in encouraging people to do that.

I will come on to what the council has done in a moment, but the overall aim of the strategy is to ensure that, together with its key partners, the council enables communities—especially people who are most at risk—to keep safe, keep well, stay independent and enjoy life. To support those aims and achieve those objectives, the

council provides integrated locality teams, which identify and support people in a more co-ordinated way, focusing on two specific areas. The first is:

“Proactive identification via risk stratification of patients (18+, frail, multiple LTCs) at risk of a hospital admission and assessing the ‘whole person’ and their needs to keep them safe and well at home where it is appropriate to do so.”

I quote from this document—“whole person”—because a key thrust of health policy in the future should be holistic healthcare, which has become slightly muddled up and seen as definitely not mainstream. Actually, it should be at the core of the mainstream, treating the patient as a whole. I will come on to long-term care and conditions when I discuss the Health Committee's report, “Managing the care of people with long-term conditions”, which I signed off as Chairman.

In Hinckley and Bosworth, we have a council that is proactively segmenting the population to treat people who are most in need as priorities, which I absolutely applaud. It also does that through the use of health ambassadors, who are

“uniformed volunteers who support and encourage people to get more active more often. They undertake this by playing to their strengths. Some give presentations, some lead activities, some encourage and support new participants on current schemes. Some are happy to have a coffee after an activity and talk to new participants. The big thing is they are positive role models who are empathetic with people and can support them to change and be more active in a way that is natural and comfortable to them.”

The programme is particularly effective when dealing with older people. In my beautiful constituency, Desford sports centre provides classes for elderly people, to keep them active. They have a chance to talk to experts—not doctors particularly, but sports therapists. They can play table tennis, sit down and do quizzes, play tennis—there is even tennis for people who are disabled. The whole idea is to get people who are a bit tired of life, or a bit sad by themselves, to meet other people and to engage in activities, thereby making them happier and healthier, and reducing the burden on the health service.

We are trying to divert away from A&E—the Leicester Royal Infirmary has one of the highest patient inputs in the country relative to its geographical footprint. I will not talk about the royal infirmary and the wonderful work of its health workers, but when the chair of the clinical commissioning group came to see what we were doing in Desford—on another visit, without the Secretary of State—we saw the Steady Steps programme. It is a 24-week free postural and stability exercise programme for older adults, aimed at those aged 65 and over who are at risk of falling, unsteady on their feet, lacking in confidence or likely to lose their balance.

One therapy that the sports centre is not employing, but to which I should like to draw the House's attention, is the Alexander technique, which I have used in the past. Alexander was an opera singer, and he found that he could not sing. Part of the problem was that his chest was constricted all the time, so he could not project his voice—something that politicians are also quite keen to do at time when on the soapbox, if they can ever get there. Alexander discovered that breathing was connected to posture, and most people do not stand correctly with their hips as part of their back; they tend to have a break and swivel around the second and third lumbar vertebrae. He managed to get people to stand correctly to get their weight right. With their weight right, their lungs could perform properly. Those techniques, which have been

developed by experts over the years, should be looked at carefully by the Department of Health and Social Care, but I will come to ways that we can take pressure off the Department generally.

Through the Steady Steps programme, it is so exciting and empowering to see elderly people who have become immobile actually get back into the community. Some of them have mental health problems, and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has an active mental health support programme with five main objectives. They are to create networks to co-ordinate comprehensive and integrated mental health services in the community; to implement activities and events for promotion and early intervention and prevention in mental health; to improve awareness of mental health issues among children and young people, so that they do not think it strange that an older person is perhaps not as with it as they were in their 20s; to improve mental health and the impacts in the workplace; and to improve the quality of life of people living with dementia, and of their families and carers.

That is not rocket science; it explains to people simple facts of life about health. The programme brings the community together—it is a project that speaks to cohesion—makes it less likely that people will be upset by the behaviour of other people, and enables instructors to identify core problems. In the Hinckley and Bosworth area, we have over 6,500 dementia friends and 40 dementia champions. That is a lot of people in a constituency of 100,000 with 70,000 electors, and a very serious intervention.

Suicide is another issue that we as MPs deal with regularly. Most colleagues will have had cases in their surgeries about which they have had to approach care agencies. Leicestershire and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council have taken very decisive steps, with the Start a Conversation suicide prevention campaign for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The Start a Conversation website was launched on 10 September to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day, and aims to provide information and signposting to people who are experiencing distress, to those worried about someone else, or those bereaved by suicide. The website is still in development, but will offer support and training to professionals.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Whether we are discussing healthcare in the east midlands or in Northern Ireland, the issue of suicide is prominent in my constituency. When I became its MP in 2010, the level of suicide among young people was at its highest. That was dealt with through the involvement of community groups and of people in the community who had lost loved ones. There was also interaction with church groups and those of faith. By coming together, we reduced the incidence of suicide, and by working alongside healthcare in Northern Ireland, which is a devolved matter, we found that together, we could address the issue. It took both the community and healthcare to make that happen.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Before Mr Tredinnick responds, I remind the Chamber that there is half an hour of Back-Bench time left, with two other Members seeking to contribute.

**David Tredinnick:** I am sensitive enough to take the hint and will not delay the Chamber for much longer, Mr Hollobone. In response to the hon. Member for

Strangford (Jim Shannon), we have a street pastor campaign in Barwell in my constituency, which really gets people in. The point about suicide that is often missed is the tragedy that it leaves behind and the damage to family and friends.

In my wind-up—I know hearing that will excite you, Mr Hollobone—I will focus on the Secretary of State's announcement yesterday about putting cigarette-packaging style warnings on opioid painkillers, which I absolutely welcome. Of course it affects the east midlands. A report in the *Evening Standard* yesterday was entitled, "Experts hail our opioids investigation as addiction warnings are announced". To give credit where it is due, the *Evening Standard* promoted that campaign, which I think is incredibly important.

The weakness in saying that we must stop all that is that no one has actually come up with any alternatives. People take those painkillers because they are in pain. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has produced a holistic therapists directory, which may be the first of its kind in the country. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited, I took him to Burbage House Health Clinic, where he could see physiotherapists and chiropractors working together. He has declared his interest—I believe his wife is an osteopath—so I hope that under this Secretary of State, we will see some movement in this matter.

We cannot just stop people taking drugs without offering them an alternative. The three most effective ways to stop back pain are acupuncture, osteopathy and chiropractic. Acupuncturists, osteopaths and chiropractors are all properly regulated, so I implore the Minister of State to look carefully at using them. The other issue I wanted to mention is polypharmacy polymorbidity, which the Health Committee looked at. I gave the Minister as a Christmas present the report of the all-party group for integrated healthcare, which I chair. I do not know whether he put it in his stocking, but I look forward to hearing if he enjoyed it over Christmas. Perhaps he will look at the issue.

We are very myopic sometimes, thinking that our system is the only one around, but the best place to look at for solving some of the problems is India, which has a Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy. It is responsible for all the herbal medicine and the different services that are not mainstream or opiate drugs. We should look at what Prime Minister Modi has done there.

I have probably indulged myself a bit, Mr Hollobone, but it is so unusual to have any time in the House—thank you very much. I look forward to the Minister of State's response, and again I congratulate the hon. Member for Lincoln.

10.10 am

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate about the issues that specifically affect the east midlands. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) for bringing the debate to Westminster Hall and the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) for expounding on some of the local and national issues in his area.

High Peak in Derbyshire is on the very north-west tip of the east midlands, which brings its own pressures to a very rural area on the edge of two other regions that provide most of our acute healthcare: Greater Manchester

[Ruth George]

and Sheffield in the Yorkshire region. We are highly dependent on other regions for our acute healthcare. People can find it difficult to access our local healthcare services. It is important that they are able to access the best possible healthcare locally, to prevent their problems from becoming more serious and so that they do not have to travel much longer distances to access acute care.

When I was first elected, I had an indoctrination of fire on healthcare matters. A consultation by our North Derbyshire CCG had been ongoing for two years. It was called “Better Care Closer to Home”, so its aspirations sounded marvellous: people would receive the care they sought closer to home or in their own home, rather than having to travel anywhere. In practice, it meant an announcement in July 2017, just after I was elected, that our local gold-standard dementia ward, the Spencer ward at the historic Cavendish Hospital, was to close.

The ward had 10 beds and took the most seriously ill patients with dementia, whose families were no longer coping with them at home. Often, they had got to the stage of being violent and abusive, fighting against the illness and against the people trying to care for them. It is a tragic illness and I have seen members of my own family go down with it, and at that stage families need all the support they can get.

The Spencer ward would take those patients whom no one else could cope with and, within six weeks and with no drugs whatever, manage them and their families into getting them home again. The staff claimed it was the shepherd’s pie that did it, but it was down to years of skill, expertise and kindness. The patients could be cared for at home, which everyone had thought was impossible, instead of having to go into specialist dementia care housing with high-level nursing care, which often costs six-figure sums for each patient. The ward closed in February last year, and it was an absolute tragedy for the patients and their families—even more so for the patients now coming through with dementia.

We were told that the 25 skilled staff would be transferred to a dementia rapid response team, a group who would be able to visit patients in their own homes, giving support to the families and enabling continued care at home. In practice, however, I am afraid that has not happened. The response team is located 20 miles from some of the areas in my constituency that most need it, and only one of the 25 skilled Spencer ward staff members went to work in that team. Others were left with no jobs in the health service; they went into retail and their skills were lost. That was a tragedy not just for patients but for staff and our whole community, because once those skills are lost, once those jobs have gone and people have left the NHS, it is almost impossible—without years of training and dedication—to put that service back together again.

That is why I am so committed to fighting for services in High Peak that are being let go because of years of cuts to our CCGs, which have to make very short-term decisions based on balancing the books by the year end. NHS England does not let them look at any longer-term measures or decisions that could put the investment into the preventive health measures talked about by the hon. Member for Bosworth. That cannot be the case.

In 2016-17, the formula was changed for the CCGs. Our CCG went into deficit and then special measures under NHS England. The chief executive said that he

and his board were prepared to make £12 million of cuts in north Derbyshire, but NHS England said that that was not good enough. It insisted on £16 million of cuts within six months, so the chief executive left. In the year just gone, 2018-19, the cuts have come on. With a deficit of £95 million for all the Derbyshire CCGs, which are looking to band together to achieve some efficiencies of scale, they had to make £51 million of cuts. We are constantly being told about the NHS 10-year plan and the £20 billion of funding coming into the NHS. I do not know where that is going, but our CCG will not see it. The Minister may smile, but I do not find it funny that over the next four years Derbyshire, the area I represent, will experience £270 million in cuts to health services, which are already stretched almost to breaking point.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln, I went out with the East Midlands ambulance service. I saw how stretched it was, having to travel vast distances and out of area, sometimes leaving little or even no cover, with patients perhaps having to wait five hours after a stroke, or being lost because of the cuts. The ambulance service has experienced five years of cuts, year on year.

Last year we had a Westminster Hall debate about the East Midlands ambulance service, which was attended by many of the Members present. I was delighted that another £20 million was invested in the service, but there is an issue with recruitment—once the skilled paramedics have left the service, recruiting them back again is very difficult. Meeting the targets for that extra £20 million will be extremely difficult for the service, through no fault of its own.

The issues in our local area put pressure on acute service providers as well. The hospitals in Macclesfield and Stepping Hill, which serve the north Derbyshire end of my constituency, have staffing problems and can shut their doors to High Peak patients because they are out of area—we are not in their region. The Macclesfield cardiology, gastroenterology and general surgery departments were shut to my local patients. Just before Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, Stepping Hill shut breast services to patients from north Derbyshire, who therefore faced having to travel 30 miles for the follow-up to a mammogram. That is a huge distance for people in rural areas to travel; often, there is no transport available for them, so they are reliant on lifts. Yes, there is community transport, but that has been cut, too.

Our voluntary services have been cut because the clinical commissioning groups have to make their cuts by the end of the year, and one area they can cut is grants to external organisations. The voluntary sector has had cuts to social care, befriending services and community transport. As the hon. Member for Bosworth has said, a sustainable health service needs such services in order to provide preventive care and to enable communities to come together and support each other, particularly the most vulnerable. That needs a framework, but voluntary sector services are being cut time and again, as I said in a debate in September. Some £300 million of cuts have been made to voluntary sector services in Derbyshire.

Health service cuts are being made alongside those to social care. Derbyshire County Council has made huge cuts to services, resulting in care workers’ shifts changing from a two-shift to a three-shift system. It wanted more efficiencies and was struggling to fill some shifts, but working early, late and night shifts is almost impossible for

anyone with caring responsibilities, which most social care workers have. I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln, who worked in nursing, will sympathise with that and will know the destructive effect on people's lives. It is one thing to do that for a nurse's salary, which is a professional salary, but it is very different to ask people to do that for the minimum wage—it was a living wage under the Labour-led Derbyshire County Council, but now it is less than the national living wage. Asking people to work a three-shift system for that sort of money is simply not worth it, so they have left in droves.

Our care home fees have been frozen while at the same time the minimum wage, pension costs and business rates are all increasing. The care homes are not prepared to take any elderly residents with any sort of additional needs. There are no nursing homes whatsoever in the High Peak area, so we have to go out of area. It is an increasingly difficult situation for families, who struggle to visit patients and keep family ties going. It is heartbreaking that, at the end of a long life, residents are taken out of their area, away from the people they know and love and their communities.

That is the impact on rural areas of years of cuts to health and social care and to the young people's services provided by the county council. Both older and younger people are being squeezed. A couple of weeks ago I held a debate in the main Chamber on young people's mental health, because of the low-level support being given. Derbyshire CCGs have cut the contract for counselling services with the third sector and there is no longer a service in place. The number of school nurses, who support young people through difficult times in their lives, when they have anxiety and are distressed, has been halved. There is an 18-month wait for access to child and adolescent mental health services. I hear from young people and their families who are desperate. Often, parents feel they have to stay with their child 24 hours a day, seven days a week, because they are so scared of the harm that the child may do themselves and the risk of suicide that the hon. Member for Bosworth mentioned.

Why are we letting it get to this stage? Why are we letting our young people suffer in silence? Why are we sending our older people away from their families? It comes down to the failure to look holistically at our health and care services in the long term. NHS England still has Derbyshire CCGs in special measures. They have been told to meet a target of between £50 million and £70 million of cuts over each of the next four years. They have to identify those cuts behind closed doors. There is a lack of scrutiny, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln has said.

Often, so much of the impact is on patients and GPs, who have to pick up the pieces. The strain on GPs is almost intolerable. Buxton has only about half the GPs we need. There are shortages in other areas, too. At my surgery, patients have to phone two weeks in advance to even try to get an appointment with a GP. If they do not phone early enough, they cannot get an appointment in those two weeks and they have to try the next day. That leads to an increase in people going to A&E and an increase in admissions to acute care and costs to the NHS as a whole. That is not a cost-saving process.

Budgets that do not look at the whole picture, to try to help primary care and to support people's conditions, are leading to an increase in the need for acute care.

Because of the lack of social care, once people are in a hospital bed it is hard for them to get out of it. The number of beds at Fenton ward in Cavendish Hospital—the one rehabilitation ward left in my constituency—has just been reduced from 18 to 10. That was going to happen in October but I managed to persuade the hospital that it might need some rehab beds over winter. It kept them open but it is now down to 10 beds. There is a waiting list of six or seven patients, who are stuck in hospital, taking up hospital beds because the rehab beds have been cut. That is a false economy.

I hope the Minister will look at how the system has an impact on the health professionals who are trying to deliver a service, and most of all on the patients who are suffering under it. Yes, there is price for rationalisation in any service, but we also have to look at the long term. As the laudable aims of the NHS 10-year plan set out, we need to work with our communities, support our professionals and help our patients to care for themselves. Unless this financial system changes, that NHS plan will be simply hot air.

10.27 am

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. In case hon. Members are not aware, I am a consultant paediatrician and work in the east midlands as a doctor during times that fit around my parliamentary commitments. I have worked in a number of hospitals around the east midlands: in Lincoln County Hospital, Mansfield Community Hospital, King's Mill Hospital, and in both of the major Nottingham hospitals, Queen's Medical Centre and Nottingham City Hospital. I have also worked at Doncaster hospital and I am now at Peterborough. I have a fairly wide experience of the different hospitals serving the east midlands population.

I was proud to hear last week that Peterborough has received a "good" rating from the Care Quality Commission. Not just that; the CQC will shortly return because the trust is not happy with "good"—it wants to receive an "outstanding". It was somewhat displeased that the visitors focused on the areas they thought might be a problem, rather than on the areas we might have been able to showcase. The CQC will return to see the areas that it knew were very good already, to see whether we are entitled to see the "outstanding" mark. I hope that is achieved.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), my constituency neighbour, on achieving this hour-and-a-half debate. I was pleased to hear her welcome the extra money for the NHS, but disappointed to hear that she does not think it is enough, unlike the former Labour Health Secretary. We need to bear it in mind that a 3.4% average real-terms annual increase—£20 billion more—is a lot more money. I was also disappointed to hear about problems; it is easy to identify the problems and much more difficult to identify the solutions. Money is one of the solutions, but this is about much more than money.

I want to highlight some of the really good things going on in the east midlands. The hon. Lady correctly identified morale as one of the issues with the workforce. One of the things that affects workforce morale is people focusing on problems rather than on the areas in which excellent services are being delivered, which is the

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

focus of most of my constituents—me and my family included—who receive excellent service from the hospitals in our area. The problem with low morale in the workforce is that it causes people to leave. When people leave we have more locum staff, which increases costs. Since less money is available, there is less ability to trial new things, so staff leave—and so the cycle continues. We need to reverse that, so I welcome the new routes into nursing, such as nursing apprenticeships, and the hard work we have done to increase the number of nurses who can train.

As a doctor, I am aware of shortages in medical staff, particularly in paediatrics, which is the area I work in. The University of Lincoln is opening a medical school in the hon. Lady's constituency. That is a really good intervention. Students commonly stay to work in the area in which they trained, and that medical school will enable that to happen. The Government also need to look at remuneration. The remuneration of my junior medical colleagues is significantly lower in real terms than the remuneration I received as a junior doctor at the same grade.

I would be grateful if the Minister looked at issues with retirement. In my constituency, some GPs and other doctors retire earlier than they might wish to, because if they continued to work they would accrue very high pension contributions that they would not benefit from. If they continued to work but withdrew from the pension scheme, they would lose other benefits, such as death in service benefits. The Government should look at that.

In my rural constituency, once I have visited the GP it takes me 15 minutes to drive to a pharmacy in the nearby towns of Grantham or Sleaford with the prescription I have been given. Some patients at my surgery, including me, are entitled to have their prescriptions dispensed to them on site. How frustrating it is, though, for constituents who do not have that entitlement but would if they moved one house further down the street, not because they live in the wrong area but because they moved practice after they moved house. A constituent recently wrote to tell me that if someone moves into the area and then changes their GP, they are not entitled to dispensing services, but if they move GP and then move home, they are entitled to those services. That seems incongruous. GPs at dispensing practices receive a revenue increase, so they have both an incentive to provide an excellent one-stop service to their patients and a financial incentive to work in a rural area that offers such a dispensing service. I should be grateful if the Minister would look at that.

When I was first elected, I was terribly worried about East Midlands ambulance service. In the preceding few months, I had attended a number of incidents—just as an individual member of the public who had been driving past—where patients waited an inordinate amount of time for an ambulance. That was completely unacceptable, and one of those patients died, although I suspect that was not related to the time the ambulance took to arrive. That is why my first Prime Minister's question, my first meeting with the Prime Minister and my first meeting with the Health Secretary were all about East Midlands ambulance service.

I was therefore pleased to go back and visit the ambulance service recently and hear how much has been done. The extra money that has been put in has produced 67 new ambulances, of which 27 are brand-new and additional as opposed to new-for-old replacements. The service's response time for patients in the most acute need—the most unwell patients—has fallen by more than two minutes, which is a good success; we have to bear in mind the rural geography. I was also interested to hear about the research that is going on. Not all improvements in healthcare are delivered by money; some are delivered by research and improvements in knowledge and treatment. The East Midlands ambulance service has a research and audit department, which is looking at ways that the service can deliver better care to its patients; that is excellent.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the challenges of delivering healthcare in rural areas. Hon. Members may know about the joint work between Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln, United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Public Health England, Health Education England and others on launching a national centre in Lincoln to look at how we deliver better care to people in rural areas—that is its main focus. That is another attraction for people to come and work in the beautiful county of Lincolnshire. The centre will look at data, research and technology. I would love to have time to go into all the different things it can do to improve healthcare for my constituents and others, but time is short, so I will move on.

Let me touch on orthopaedic services at Grantham. People rightly are terribly concerned about the number of people who prepare for an operation—they build themselves up, take time off work and put plans in place for the care of those who are dependent on them—that is cancelled. We understand the reasons why that might happen, but ULHT has worked really hard on delivering better care. The fantastic Grantham Hospital—it has saved my husband's life on two occasions—has a designated ward for orthopaedic surgery, which is only for what it calls "cold" operations. That is part of the "Getting It Right First Time" approach, looking at how we ensure that we get the very best care in orthopaedic surgery.

Trauma services have been moved to Lincoln. People might say, "Oh, that's a dreadful cut," but it means there are more people on hand in Lincoln to deliver more operations more effectively and more efficiently; more people get their operations done—fewer are cancelled—and there is a dedicated team of people in Grantham who are knowledgeable in orthopaedics and focused on delivering joint replacements and other non-urgent care. Overall, the service has improved massively. I congratulate ULHT and Grantham Hospital on the improvements they have delivered, and I wish they were being shouted about more publicly.

I also want to mention the A&E at Grantham Hospital. My husband, whom I love very much, has had his life saved twice at Grantham Hospital, so maintaining A&E services there and ensuring that people can access them is extremely important to me and my family, not least because we live very close by. I welcome the fact that the A&E will be reopened on a 24-hour basis soon, but I want soon to be now.

I have run out of time, but I thank the hon. Member for Lincoln for securing the debate and I hope to hear some good answers from the Minister.

10.38 am

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) for securing this important debate. She is a passionate advocate for the NHS in her area and made a passionate speech. I also thank the other hon. Members who spoke—the hon. Members for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) and, of course, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who has just left the Chamber—for their excellent speeches and interventions.

Although I am pleased to respond on behalf of Labour, it is with sadness that Members come here time and again to explain the impact on their constituents of the crisis in the NHS. Sadly, as we have heard, standards are slipping across the board. It was a mild winter, but despite the thankfully lower levels of flu and vomiting virus, we saw the worst performance against the four-hour A&E target since records began. [*Interruption.*] If the Minister cares to—

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):** It was an improvement on last year, so it was not the worst.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Oh, right—it was the second-worst, then. Anyway, bed occupancy also rose to 95.2% this winter, well above the 85% deemed to be safe, and patients are waiting almost 4% longer in A&Es than they were two years ago. In Nottingham they are waiting 14% longer than in 2017, and in Leicester they are waiting almost 4% longer than two years ago. East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust has missed its targets for responding to patients in life-threatening situations. We have heard countless stories today that demonstrate how the crisis happening in our NHS both locally and nationally is real.

It is clear that the Tories' plans for NHS funding fall short of what is needed. The autumn Budget announcement of a cash injection for health services excluded public health budgets, training and capital, which means an increase of just 3% for health services when we have a childhood obesity crisis, cuts to sexual health and addiction services, workforce shortages and a backlog of nearly £6 billion in repairs. It is not even enough to wipe out hospital deficits.

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust alone predicted a deficit of more than £40 million by the end of the financial year, and it has declared 15 black alerts since December. How will the Government's settlement help trusts like that become more sustainable? Where is the funding to guarantee sustainable health services in the face of ever-increasing demand from a complex and changing demographic? For example, in the east midlands, the number of preventable deaths from liver disease has increased by 37%. Obesity is also a growing problem, 66% of the population being overweight. People in the east midlands are more likely to have had a depressive episode than those in the rest of the country—3.9% compared with 2.2%. In 2013-15, the average life expectancy at birth across the east midlands was 79.3 years for males and 82.9 years for females, both of which are significantly below the national average. There is also considerable variation in preventable mortality from the major causes of death across the east midlands local

authorities, with an urban-rural divide. The urban areas of Nottingham, Leicester and Derby have significantly lower life expectancy than the average for England.

Money is, of course, only one of the issues surrounding the crisis in the NHS. There is a staff recruitment and retention issue, too. NHS figures show that there are 100,000 vacancies across the health service, including 31,000 across the midlands and the east of England. Therefore, 9.3% of posts in the midlands and the east—about one in 11—are unfilled.

Constituents will also be worried about the integration of services in the east midlands. In recent years, councils have distanced themselves from sustainability and transformation plans and the integrated care systems in some areas, due to a lack of democratic accountability and scrutiny from stakeholders, including concerns over cuts and privatisation. Nottinghamshire's ICS is an interesting case: the city council suspended its membership for six months last year for those very reasons, rejoining only in April 2019 after assurances were given to improve accountability and shared decision-making processes. I am sure that Members will be keen to hear from the Minister how democratic accountability and transparency is being improved in such cases.

Residents will also be concerned about the number of community hospitals that have closed or are under threat of closure. Residents of Bakewell and Bolsover have to travel to Chesterfield or Derby for their appointments, after their hospitals closed. The loss of those community hospitals impacts on rural areas of the east midlands, isolating people further because not only will they have to travel further to appointments, but so will any visitors, so patients are suffering.

The Government have spent nine years running down the NHS, imposing the biggest funding squeeze in its history, with swingeing cuts to public health services, and social care has been slashed by £7 billion since 2010. As we have heard, the NHS is clearly buckling under the pressure as a result, and standards of care continue to plummet. I would appreciate assurances from the Minister about how the Government will get a grip on the situation in the east midlands and across the country as a whole, to reverse the extremely worrying statistics and tackle the issues we have heard about.

10.45 am

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. As you know, I have met the chief executive of the team from Kettering, I have visited Kettering and I have responded to you on the Floor of the House about Kettering. Kettering and its requirements for the A&E are therefore not far from the forefront of my mind.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) on securing the debate and I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I intend to spend some time going through a number of the areas raised this morning. I am bound to say that the long-term plan, which a number of Members welcomed, is a substantial step forward, and the funding commitment—the biggest ever in peacetime—is a key to ensuring that that can be delivered. The number 100,000 has been trotted out, but clearly that does not represent posts unfilled, nor does it take any account of the actions that the Government are undertaking. More than that, the simple fact is that, compared with eight years ago, there are 14,700—over

[Stephen Hammond]

15%—more doctors, 10,300 more nurses, midwives and health visitors and, in addition, over 15,900 more nurses on our wards.

I also point out that of those vacancies that several hon. Members mentioned, well over 80% are being filled by a combination of bank and agency nurses. Of course no one wants that situation to persist, but there has been a consistent decline in the number of agency staff, and since the transfer from the bursary to the loan system, much has been done working with nurses to ensure that courses are filled. We are seeing more applications than previously: this time around UCAS reported over 4,000 more applicants. Last year, my predecessor announced a fund to provide an increased package for postgraduate nursing students starting courses in 2018-19 in terms of employment in learning disability, mental health and district nursing roles, which are the key vacancies that need to be filled.

I will try to answer a couple of specific points raised by the hon. Member for Lincoln. She rightly voiced concerns about the closure of Skellingthorpe health centre in her constituency. As she pointed out, were there to be a closure, the CCG would be required to conduct a proper consultation. I spoke to the CCG yesterday and I understand that as yet—she may wish to correct me—there has been no formal request for closure. Equally, the CCG tells me—I hope this is right—that it will meet the hon. Lady later in May to discuss this matter, and that, were there to be a request, it would immediately inform her and offer her a meeting with it and the lead GP at Skellingthorpe to see what action could be undertaken. The CCG has also confirmed—she will understand this—that it appreciates that this is a rural community, and that there are additional challenges for local residents, so it is working not only with Skellingthorpe to understand the challenges and how they may be met, but to ensure that the rural network of GPs might work together.

The hon. Lady rightly expressed concern about CQC inspections, and I will go on to speak about those if I have time. She mentioned the recent inspection that took place on 25 February at Pilgrim Hospital, with a report published on 3 April. Although “requires improvement” remains the rating, there were marked improvements in certain areas, including in the standard of care, numbers of staff and nursing provision for children, and a real improvement in the triage time. She will appreciate that the trust is receiving substantial support from NHS England, including to help the hospital get out of special measures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), chair of the all-party parliamentary group for integrated healthcare, spoke passionately about the health and wellbeing partnership. He is absolutely right, and the Government support the integration of healthcare services and recognise the good work being done by that partnership in Hinckley and Bosworth. The Secretary of State enjoyed his visit to Hinckley, and was particularly pleased to get a real impression on the ground of the improvement in services that will come from the £8 million investment. My hon. Friend reminded me of his Christmas present to me, and I was pleased to read some—although not all—of his report over the Christmas period. You will not be surprised to hear,

Mr Hollobone, that I was also intrigued to hear his comments about India. I sometimes think that the “Ministry of Calm” in India could benefit many people in this place.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) spoke about “Better Care Closer to Home”. That reminded me of when I was a councillor 18 years ago and a different Government wanted to do to local services in my area the things that she described. The issue was only resolved some years later, in 2015, when a new medical centre was built. She rightly mentioned the East Midlands ambulance service and—most importantly—its paramedics. I visited that service earlier this year, and spoke not only to the management but to the medics who deliver those services. There are clearly challenges regarding location, and not all the standards have been met. It is also true, however, that there are 67 new ambulances—an increase of 27—and response times have improved, which is to be welcomed. I recognise the problems with CAMHS that the hon. Lady raised. That is clearly an issue nationally as well as in the east midlands, and it is right for the long-term plan to recognise that. The commitment to mental health diagnosis and treatment times is a significant change from the previous situation.

**Ruth George:** Mental health services were allocated £1.2 billion, but that money was not ring-fenced. That is the problem that CAMHS has had with the cuts. Will the Minister commit that any additional funding for mental health services will be ring-fenced, so that it goes where it is needed?

**Stephen Hammond:** There is a commitment to treatment and the funding that backs it in the long-term plan, and that money is dedicated to that commitment. That is pretty clear.

**Ruth George indicated dissent.**

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Lady is asking me to use the word “ring-fenced”, but if I say that the money is there and allocated for that matter, then it is specifically ring-fenced for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) gave us a valuable insight into the NHS, given her experience as a consultant. She is right to say that we must tackle a number of workforce issues, and morale is undoubtedly key to that. I was pleased to see that set out in the initial workforce plan; and Baroness Harding, chair of NHS Improvement, has been asked to consider a stream of work about making the NHS the best employer. That work will consider a number of issues about retention and the culture and morale of staff. I look forward to the publication of that report, and I hope my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming the new ideas it contains.

My hon. Friend was right to mention the pensions of a number of GPs and other NHS staff. She will not be surprised to hear that I am continuing to persuade Treasury colleagues to accept the Department’s proposed solution for that issue, and I hope we can make progress and make an announcement on that soon, which will be reassuring to many. I encourage my hon. Friend to write to me about the dispensing service she mentioned, and I will consider what issues we can take up. Finally, she was right to talk about the orthopaedic services at

Grantham. “Getting It Right First Time”—GIRFT—is led nationally by Professor Tim Briggs, who was lead clinician at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital. That is making a huge difference, not only to the concentration, specialisation and number of operations being undertaken, but—equally importantly—the great improvement in safety and reduction in infections is leading to hugely better care for patients.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) mentioned A&E performance, and she is right to say that it fails to meet the target. However, she is wrong to say that this year has seen the worst performance ever, as there has been an improvement on last year. Over the past months, United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust has seen a huge increase in attendances compared with the previous year. That reflects the wider NHS, where demand is up by 6%, yet more than 4,700 patients per day are treated within the four-hour waiting limit. The hon. Lady mentioned Public Health England and Health Education England, but funding for those bodies was designed to be dealt with in the comprehensive spending review that will take place in the autumn. It was never intended to be tackled inside the long-term plan and spending commitment.

The hon. Lady mentioned money, but this is a transitional year for funding. The funding provided is enough to work on the deficit, and given the analysis being done, the Government’s commitments, and the work on efficiency in the health service, it is surprising that Labour Members who recognise the benefits of much of the long-term plan are not prepared to welcome the financial settlement that backs it up and will deliver it.

Briefly, let me mention another east midlands MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup). She was not able to speak today as she is my Parliamentary Private Secretary, but she has done great work in pointing out the benefits of Ilkestone Community Hospital, which I intend to visit in the near future. May I just say that—

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. I do not think the Minister can just say it. He must allow time for Karen Lee to sum up the debate, so perhaps he will bring his remarks to a close.

**Stephen Hammond:** Thank you Mr Hollobone. I will not just say anything other than that I wanted to address a number of issues about east midlands care, so I will put them in a letter and write to Members who have participated in this debate. It is important to address the huge number of issues raised by colleagues and ensure that the context is clearly understood. This Government wish to thank all hard-working professionals in the NHS for their work. We will do everything we can to continue that support, with a plan and the money to back it up, so that, both nationally and locally, the NHS can deliver for patients.

10.58 am

**Karen Lee:** I thank all those who have contributed to this excellent debate. Some comments have reflected the fact that healthcare remains something of a postcode lottery. In some areas we hear that everything is positive and good, but that is not always the case where I live. Travelling long distances to access a GP is not positive for someone who is ill, and that is not what my Skellingthorpe constituents want. That is not about an emotional attachment; it is a practical consideration. The concern in Lincoln is that nothing is opening, it is all closing.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about suicide and mental health and I agree that we need ring-fenced funding for mental health care. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) spoke about problems delivering healthcare in rural settings, and people travelling long distances to access care. My Skellingthorpe constituents are not looking forward to that, should they lose their GP services.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## **Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Services: Redcar and Cleveland**

11 am

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered funding for rape and sexual abuse support services in Redcar and Cleveland.

As always, it is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I was pleased to secure this debate to once again bring to the Minister's attention the crisis facing rape and sexual abuse victims in my constituency. I have raised this crucial issue in writing and on the Floor of the House, but the response from the Government has been disappointing. I have been given the same response about the money the Government are investing in domestic and sexual violence and abuse services, which is welcome, but it simply does not reflect the realities on the ground in my area.

In response to my question in the Chamber last week about the cuts to rape and sexual abuse funding, I was told about the Government's work on domestic violence. While domestic violence is extremely important, and I wholeheartedly welcome the Government's Domestic Abuse Bill, I was talking about rape and sexual assault services, not about domestic violence. So I am glad to have the debate today to specifically focus on EVA Women's Aid, which is a fantastic charity in my constituency that does amazing work supporting vulnerable women and children who survive rape, sexual abuse and violence and childhood sexual abuse.

EVA provides services across a 94 square mile area, and last year it supported nearly 1,000 vulnerable women and many children. It goes without saying that the support provided is a lifeline to clients, with whom the charity has worked hard and carefully, often over a long period, to develop sensitive, caring and trusting relationships. That trust is vital to enable victims to get the support they need. Because of that record, EVA is a well-respected organisation in the local community, held in high esteem by local people and led brilliantly by Richinda and her fantastic team of staff. I pay tribute to them today. Women feel comfortable approaching EVA because they know its reputation, how many women the charity has cared for and the respect and esteem in which it is held in the local community. That is why the removal of EVA's grant from the Ministry of Justice's rape and sexual abuse support fund is a devastating decision, which I urge the Minister to reconsider.

Since 2014, EVA has received funding from the rape and sexual abuse support fund to carry out its important work. The funding accounts for 15% of EVA's revenue and is a significant source of income for a small local charity. In March, EVA was informed, without any prior warning or expectation, that its bid to renew the funding for the 2019-2022 period had been unsuccessful. That decision means that from the end of June the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland will not have the sexual violence support services and specialist counselling that EVA currently offers to children and young people of all genders, and to adult females. That includes support services for victims of child sexual abuse, which we know to be a crucial issue, and the number of people coming forward is increasing.

EVA is now trying desperately to make up the shortfall and save these crucial services. It has exhausted all other avenues, from the local police and crime commissioner

to the local authority and clinical commissioning group. In areas like mine, the reality is that the budgets and funds of those organisations are already stretched. They have already had to make cuts to services and they do not have reserves of unallocated funding with which to step in and rescue services, such as those provided by EVA. Those services will have to go by the wayside if the funding is not found.

The PCC and the NHS jointly fund independent sexual violence adviser services and a sexual assault referral centre, which are highly valued and important, but they are not responsible for funding longer-term therapeutic counselling of the type EVA provides, which is vital. We cannot continue just to respond to crisis after crisis; we have to support people in the long term, which is exactly what EVA does. That is why I am raising this issue with the Ministry of Justice once again.

Ministers simply cannot pass the issue down to police and crime commissioners. Until now, the funding has been directly provided to EVA from central Government and it is central Government who have taken the decision to withdraw it, with very little notice and with devastating consequences. The three-month extension to June to allow for "necessary adjustments", as stated in the ministerial response I received, is welcome but inadequate. At this point in the funding cycle, when organisations already have commissioning arrangements in place, this is just a stay of execution on the closure of services. Five of EVA's 23 staff could be affected by the decision. They are specially trained rape counsellors who provide specialist support, and they could now be lost, along with all their skills, experience and training, because of short-sighted funding decisions that have not taken into account the impact on many vulnerable women in my constituency.

EVA received notification of the cut on the same day that the Government announced a funding increase of £24 million over three years for victims of rape and sexual assault. The victims Minister celebrated, saying that the Government are "supporting more centres than ever".

That would be a welcome development, but it is not the truth in Redcar and Cleveland and it is not what we are seeing. In reality, we are seeing a cut to vital services. While I appreciate that Arch North East is being funded to provide support for sexual abuse victims in the Cleveland police area, I understand it is receiving a similar amount to its previous funding allocation. It will have little extra capacity to support the residents of Redcar and Cleveland, who EVA currently caters for.

I do not know how familiar the Minister is with Cleveland; it is a huge geographic area, with a lot of rural, former mining villages and accessibility issues, as our buses are very expensive. Making one grant allocation for the whole area covered by the Cleveland police and crime commissioner fails to appreciate the different communities and demographics covered, as well as the fact that many women will only come forward to organisations and charities that they know, trust and feel secure with. Asking them to travel and to face a new and unknown organisation is going to put many women off accessing services.

**Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate and the powerful speech she is giving. It can be incredibly

difficult for women to come forward. In south Yorkshire, where my constituency is, 3.5% of rapes result in a charge; nationally, it is only 4.1%. These figures are absolutely shocking and appallingly low. Does my hon. Friend agree that cuts to services, such as the one she is talking about and others across the country, will only make the situation worse and reduce the number of people, predominantly women, coming forward?

**Anna Turley:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The levels of conviction for rape are a national scandal; more has to be done. The idea that we are seeing cuts to services and safe spaces for women coming forward is shocking. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend because not only is she here today defending her constituents and standing up for vulnerable women, but she ran the London marathon last weekend in support of a local domestic violence and rape charity. She's talking the talk, as well as walking the walk or running the run; I congratulate her on that.

The geographic diversity of my area and the inaccessibility is a huge issue; it means many women will not access the services or be able to afford to access the services they need. The funding decision comes at a time when demand for independent specialist provision for survivors of sexual violence and abuse is at unprecedented levels. The message I hear from the workforce on the ground is that they are seeing services shrinking and provision is not meeting the level that is needed. The decision also demonstrates the risk of smaller organisations and charities, and the valuable, community-focused services they bring to the table, being squeezed out by larger organisations.

Indeed, the report by the all-party parliamentary group on sexual violence on the funding and commissioning of sexual violence and abuse services, published last year, found a huge contradiction in the way in which services are commissioned. There is supposed to be a move towards local commissioning to achieve tailored, locally appropriate solutions, which would be welcome, but that is countered by funding pressures on commissioners, who too often let large service contracts to single, generic providers in order to deliver savings through economies of scale. This approach is evidently happening with national commissioning too, and it will force small but vital, well-loved and respected providers, like EVA, out of the picture.

I will take a moment of the Minister's time to share feedback from service users at EVA's centre that highlights why the services matter. It is easy to talk about figures, cuts and national services in this place, but the reality is that we are talking about the lives of the most vulnerable women, who we must support and protect. These are the voices of women from my area who have reached out and sought EVA's help after suffering horrific sexual abuse. Karen says:

"Your service gave me a lifeline when I was at rock bottom and didn't know where else to turn, and I'll never forget that. I don't know what my fate would have been without you."

Nadia says:

"The counselling service gave me back my life. I'd be stuck in a nightmare if it had not been for EVA."

Angela says:

"I now have the strength to face my issues. You have helped me realise I haven't done anything wrong but was vulnerable and taken advantage of".

Finally, Jane says:

"Counselling has helped me feel sane through the weeks. I thought I was going crazy. It has helped me start figuring out what to do about my circumstances and historic abuse".

I am sure the Minister agrees that here are real people facing terrible situations, who would have nowhere to go if not for the services EVA provided. It is vital that we support them and enable them to get the support and provision they need. It is clear from those personal accounts how much EVA's service users value the local, individually tailored support that they trust. As I am sure the Minister recognises, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) said, it can take a huge amount of courage to come forward and seek help after the kinds of horrific ordeals these women have gone through. This funding decision risks closing the door on that option for many women and children in Redcar and Cleveland, so today I ask the Minister once again to please revisit this funding decision. I would love to invite him to visit Redcar and see EVA's fantastic services for himself. If the Government are truly committed to supporting more centres than ever and ensuring that every victim of sexual violence receives the full package of support they need, then I urge him to look at this one more time.

11.10 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar):** It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I thank the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) for securing this debate. We may not always agree on everything, but one thing we can agree on is that she is a doughty champion for her constituents and speaks up for them in this House at every opportunity. I know the subject we are discussing is, rightly, enormously important to many Members of the House more broadly. Sexual violence and abuse, as the hon. Lady has alluded to, are horrendous crimes that sadly affect too many in our society. As the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) said, they continue to be a huge problem for our society and our country.

I will start by saying how important it is to me, as a Minister with responsibility for supporting victims of crime, to ensure that support is available to them when and where it is needed. The right support is essential to help victims to try to cope with what has happened to them and to try to start rebuilding their lives. Ensuring that more victims and survivors of sexual violence have access to high-quality services remains a key priority. As the hon. Member for Redcar will know, I have visited a number of services providing vital support to women facing abuse and violence around the country, including in Cheshire and Brighton, and heard of the struggle many of these services face to secure long-term funding.

Those services tell me that there are three challenges: first, sustainability of funding; secondly, the need to move from a single-year, round-robin settlement to a multi-year settlement; and, thirdly, the need for the process to be made simple and clear. Often, particularly with the small local organisations mentioned by the hon. Lady, it is the same person who is the director running the organisation, delivering the service on the ground and sitting up until the early hours having to write multiple bids to try to build up the pot for a sustainable budget.

[Edward Argar]

I have listened to those organisations, and in last year's first ever cross-Government victims strategy we set out ways in which the Government planned to improve support to all victims of crime, particularly victims of sexual violence and abuse. My aims have been to ensure the provision of high-quality services, with sustainable funding and clear and simple processes that reduce the administrative burden while moving to a multi-year settlement, reflecting what those services say to me.

The national rape support fund, for which I am responsible, is one of a number of Government sources of funding for rape support services. A number of significant improvements have been made to that fund, the previous competition for which took place in 2014. The most recent competition commenced last November and, as the hon. Lady has said, the results were announced in March.

That funding will now be provided for three years, rather than annually. As the hon. Lady said, I also ensured a 10% funding boost overall for these essential services, with an extra uplift above that in London to recognise the differential demand levels there compared with other parts of the country. The rape and sexual abuse support fund now totals £24 million over three years. Far from cutting spending at the national level, we are increasing it, and I welcome the spirit in which she acknowledged that.

It is also important to note that this is not the only source of funding to which many of these organisations have access. As I mentioned, last November EVA and others were made aware that this would be a competition for the next three years. The hon. Lady would not expect me to do anything with public money other than to re-compete it, at appropriate intervals and with appropriate criteria, to ensure that services continue to evolve and we continue to get the innovation and the highest quality of services that we would wish for.

I have always been clear that in the context of the support that victims receive, their needs must come first. In addition to trying to ensure geographical access for as many victims as possible, our competition ensured that stringent quality criteria were applied to all bids. As a result, 79 support centres have been awarded grants, including various small local providers, and the Ministry of Justice now funds more support centres than ever before and in all areas. For the first time, there are directly Government-funded services in all 42 of the country's police and crime commissioner areas.

The number of PCC areas with Government-funded male support centres—we must recognise that men as well as women are victims of these horrendous crimes—has nearly quadrupled from 11 to 41 under this process. That is in addition to funding a national helpline and webchat service for male victims, following a significant rise in the number of men and boys coming forward to report crimes. Funding has also been extended to include those who suffered abuse while under the age of 13, recognising that many victims of child sexual abuse may struggle to access timely support.

We are also testing full local commissioning of sexual violence services with five PCC areas for three years, to explore the benefits for victims and service providers alike. Our aim is to better streamline services locally,

including with the national health service, to reduce administrative burdens and challenges for centres so that more money be spent on frontline services.

Our final piece of the strategy was to increase spending from £31 million in 2018 to £39 million in 2020-21, to improve services for victims of sexual violence and abuse who seek support from sexual assault referral centres. We are working to ensure better service integration between statutory services such as the NHS and the third sector and charities, to provide joined-up and lifelong care and support for those who have suffered sexual assault and abuse and therefore need them. The NHS strategic direction for sexual assault and abuse services is an example of those commitments put into practice. It seeks to improve support for victims and survivors of sexual violence by joining up key agencies and ensuring we have a whole-system response to tackling sexual abuse.

That work is complemented by the investment the Government have made in supporting PCCs to commission support services locally, with £68 million of funding nationally going to PCCs. The Ministry of Justice is also funding much of the spending that PCCs do in this area. The PCC for Cleveland has been allocated more than £600,000 to provide support to victims, of which £45,000 is ring-fenced specifically to support victims of child sexual abuse. PCCs also, rightly, choose to invest some of their own funds additionally into these services.

As the hon. Lady mentioned, as a result of the recent competition in her Cleveland PCC area we will be funding Arch North East to provide support to men, women and children across the county. As with all centres receiving MOJ grant funding, the funding will be expected to support victims resident across that entire area, including her borough, irrespective of postcode. Her constituency will continue to be covered by the service.

Arch North East is approximately nine miles from Redcar town centre. This is where my geography may become a little hazy, but I think it is about a 30-minute journey by car or a journey of an hour or so on the 63 bus. I know the hon. Lady mentioned cost, and she is right to highlight the need to remove as many barriers as possible to accessing services.

In addition to usual support services, Arch North East provides independent sexual violence advisers for victims, and they make home visits across the area, including the entirety of the hon. Lady's borough. Home visits are also offered for children. The service is primed and ready to take on any victims that require support in the area, and reassures us that it has one of the shortest waiting times for services in the country. Arch North East complements services provided by Helen Britton House, a sexual assault referral centre in North Ormesby. The SARC provides 24-hour crisis intervention and support 365 days a year with dedicated specialist staff.

Additionally, the Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre in Darlington is an hour away from Redcar on the train and is served by good local train connections with nearby towns in Durham and Cleveland. Residents in the north of the PCC area of Cleveland—for example, up towards Hartlepool—would also be able to access services in Northumbria such as SomeOne Cares, Grace Northumberland Rape Crisis and Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre. For residents in the south of the PCC area of Cleveland, Survive North Yorkshire can also be accessed.

I understand that the hon. Lady will be disappointed that one of the centres, which she has highlighted today, was not successful in its bid to secure national funding. I reiterate what I said earlier: she is nothing if not a doughty campaigner for and supporter of her constituents and constituency. However, it would be inappropriate for me to discuss in this Chamber the specific detail of our evaluation of that organisation's bid, although I will re-emphasise that all bids were measured against clear quality criteria, as well as geographical criteria, with awards made accordingly. The decision not to fund EVA Women's Aid was not taken lightly.

I recognise the value that providers bring to those whom they support and to the local community and the point that the hon. Lady rightly makes about the need, in this space, for familiarity and trust at the heart of conversations. However, my primary consideration must be to provide the best-quality support to victims, even if on occasion that means taking a difficult decision such as the one under discussion. I regret to say to the hon. Lady that we will not be revisiting the decision. I know that she will be disappointed by that, but I feel it is important that I am honest with her.

As the hon. Lady mentioned, EVA Women's Aid will receive a three-month extension of its current MOJ grant, to help it to adjust during this transition period. I understand that EVA was also not successful in a recent competition for PCC funding. The hon. Lady may wish to discuss with Cleveland's PCC his decision in that respect as well; I imagine she probably will do so.

The House should be in no doubt that the Government are determined that victims of rape and sexual violence will be supported by high-quality, accessible services

throughout their journey to try to cope and recover from these hideous crimes. I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues across Government, with the specialist support organisations that have helped to shape our victims strategy and with colleagues across the House on this agenda, to ensure that all victims of crime have access to the high-quality services that they need and deserve.

Victims of these most appalling crimes rely on all of us in the House, irrespective of whether we are in government or opposition and of whether we are a Front Bencher or Back Bencher, to represent their needs and to ensure that they receive the support to which they are entitled. It is a privilege to work with colleagues across Government and across the House. In this context, although she is not here given the nature of this debate, I also pay tribute to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), with whom I work closely on these issues. She, too, is a doughty champion of victims of crime. We will continue to work to ensure that victims in Cleveland and in all areas of England and Wales are heard and supported.

In conclusion, I appreciate that the hon. Member for Redcar will be disappointed by the outcome of the process, but I again reiterate my commitment to continue working with her to ensure that her constituents get the services that they need. I again pay tribute to her dedication to her constituents in bringing forward this debate and thank her for doing so.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.23 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Sikhs: Contribution to the UK

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the contribution of Sikhs to the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and to open this debate, which comes at the end of the first UK National Sikh Awareness and History Month. I am sure this debate will cover history, community, faith, economy and culture.

The Sikh community is an established community in the UK, whose members first arrived in significant numbers in the 1950s. We know that Sikhs are now well established with a significant and leading presence in almost all professions. In Hounslow, almost 10% of the population identifies as Sikh. There are almost 500,000 Sikhs across the UK—approaching 1% of the total population.

The “British Sikh Report 2019”, launched in Parliament last week as part UK National Sikh Awareness and History Month, describes the contribution of Sikhs across our economy. Sikhs have an 84% employment rate, with top sectors of employment including public service, charity work, healthcare, teaching, accountancy and finance, and IT and technology. Many businesses are run by those in the Sikh community, including many in my constituency. Dr Rami Ranger, who is Sikh, is perhaps one of the best-known Asian businessmen in the UK, having founded a company which has won the Queen’s award for enterprise more than six times.

The contribution of the Sikh community to our armed forces continues to this day. Sir Frank Messervy, quoted in “The Sikh Regiment in the Second World War” by F. T. Birdwood, said:

“In the last two world wars 83,005 turban wearing Sikh soldiers were killed and 109,045 were wounded, fighting for the British Empire. During shell fire, they had no other head protection but the turban, the symbol of their faith.”

By the beginning of the first world war, there were more than 100,000 Sikhs in the British Indian Army, making up 20% of the force. Before 1945, 14 Victoria Crosses were awarded to Sikhs, which was a per capita regimental record. In 2002, the names of all Sikh Victoria Cross and George Cross recipients were inscribed on the monument of the memorial gates on Constitution Hill, next to Buckingham Palace.

Despite that background, this shared history is far less known or understood by an increasing number of people.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Before my hon. Friend moves on from the incredible record of Sikh soldiers in service of this country and freedom, does she agree that it is appropriate that we should now have a war memorial recognising that effort? Fundamentally, the Government should get on with designating a site where that can be placed.

**Seema Malhotra**: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. I am sure that all hon. Members present would agree with him. My hon. Friend

the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) will talk further about that point and the campaign he has helped to lead in Parliament.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Following on from what our right hon. Friend has just said, the Sikh contribution in the first and second world wars was very significant, particularly in places such as Burma. Sikhs played a prominent part in the battles of El Alamein, which were some of the greatest victories of the second world war, and that should not be forgotten. I reinforce what our right hon. Friend said about a memorial to the Sikh soldiers.

**Seema Malhotra**: My hon. Friend has a long-standing record of working with his local Sikh community. I will also make that point, as will my hon. Friend the Member for Slough.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am pleased to be in this debate. My hon. Friend mentioned the lack of knowledge in this country of Sikh history. Will she join me in encouraging visitors to the Manchester Museum to see the Jallianwala Bagh exhibition, which has been prepared in conjunction with the Partition Museum in Amritsar? I think visitors from across the country and different cultures will find it very informative. I visited it during the Easter recess and I can warmly recommend it.

**Seema Malhotra**: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important contribution. I hope to visit the museum in the near future. I am sure that hon. Members across the House and those watching will be interested to attend that exhibition, which comes at a critical time, 100 years since the awful event that took place on Vaisakhi in 1919, in Amritsar. I will comment more on that centenary later.

Despite the background of Sikhs’ contribution to the UK, it is extraordinary that our shared history is little known or understood. Understanding different communities is vital for not just community cohesion, but getting policy right, including the rights of Sikhs to wear their articles of faith—an important right that led to exemptions for the kirpan in new knife crime legislation in the recent Offensive Weapons Bill debate.

Sikhs, like other communities, have faced an increase in hate crime attacks. Last year we saw an attack on a turban-wearing Sikh visitor outside the House of Commons. This appalling attack sent shockwaves across the whole community and the Houses of Parliament. That incident triggered our idea of a National Sikh Awareness and History Month, which is also referred to as Sikh Heritage Month and takes place this month, during April, the month of Vaisakhi.

Other right hon. and hon. Members will make speeches raising the issues that are important to them, so I want to focus on two main areas. First, I want to focus on the purpose and place in our national life of National Sikh Awareness and History Month, of which this debate forms the final parliamentary event. Secondly, I want to share a perspective on the Sikh community in my local area and the range of contributions made to the wider community.

Last April I tabled an early-day motion with cross-party support, calling for the UK to recognise April as National Sikh Awareness and History Month, noting that 14 April marks Vaisakhi and the founding of the Khalsa in 1699,

by the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. That early-day motion was supported by over 100 Members of Parliament from across the House, the all-party parliamentary group on UK Sikhs and many other groups. It recognised that the national Sikh awareness months that have been established in other western countries have successfully raised awareness of Sikhs, broken down barriers, and improved cohesion and dialogue.

To take that forward, we formed a cross-party parliamentary steering committee, and I thank all its members for their support in recent months. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), who is here today, and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), who is chair of the all-party parliamentary group on UK Sikhs and is also present.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough, who is leading the campaign for a permanent Sikh war memorial in London. Sikh war memorials have opened in Bristol and elsewhere, but it is absolutely time that we showed leadership and had a permanent war memorial in London. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend for working with me on the campaign for direct flights from London to Amritsar, which would serve communities in London and the surrounding areas. I also thank the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who is present, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell).

Many across the Sikh community were part of the early establishment of the idea last year with the Sikh Council UK. I thank Jagtar Singh Gill and Gurinder Singh Josan, along with Kirat Singh, for their support in the early days when the idea was growing, which led to the launch this month.

This month is just the start. With the foundations in place, we look forward to expanding the steering group and including community members and groups from across the country, so the project will be truly community led. The programme of events in Parliament in April has been supported by a range of Sikh community organisations and community channels, all of which I thank for making it happen. I also thank Satwinder Sehmi, an artist and calligrapher who contributed to the development of the logo for Sikh Heritage Month, which respectfully and symbolically brings together faith and heritage.

Our programme of events has been extremely well attended and hugely inspiring and engaging. The Vaisakhi event in Parliament, which is organised annually by the British Sikh Consultative Forum, brought together representatives from gurdwaras across the country for the launch of the project. There were also supportive messages from all parties, including from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. On the same night, a launch took place in the Scottish Parliament.

Last week, we had a packed event and discussion in Parliament for the launch of the “British Sikh Report 2019”. The Sikh Channel, Everything’s 13 and the Basics of Sikhi, which are also attending the debate, helped with the incredible Turban Awareness Day, which was educational in recognising and educating people about the significance

and relevance of the turban. That event in Parliament was attended by almost 50 Members of Parliament from all parties.

Two lectures were given, one by Dr Opinderjit Takhar, the director of the Centre for Sikh and Punjabi Studies, on Guru Nanak and feminism, and one by Anita Anand on her new book, “The Patient Assassin”, which is about the principal actors, the story before and the story after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, in which many Sikhs and people of all faiths were brutally murdered by the British. For her, the story is personal, as her grandfather escaped death by minutes while his close friends and colleagues were brutally murdered. She also told the story of Udham Singh, who made it his life’s mission to assassinate the lieutenant governor of the Punjab at the time, to whom she also had a strong personal link through her husband’s family, who had had contact with him in the past.

The massacre 100 years ago is a stain on our nation’s history to this day. It is time for an official apology. I am extremely disappointed that that was not forthcoming in our previous debate and during April. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that again today. It is no surprise that the “British Sikh Report 2019”, published last week, found that 79% of British Sikhs believe that the British Government should apologise for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and that 85% believe that it should be taught and in school syllabuses. It is a huge disappointment that we continue that battle. The massacre was condemned by Winston Churchill, then Minister for War, as

“an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation”.—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1920; Vol. 131, c. 1725.]

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East for his work and for the way he has brought together Members of Parliament from both sides of the House to call on the Government to make sure that the official apology happens.

Through April, a range of community-organised events have also taken place around the country, with MPs and councillors involved in Visit My Gurdwara and Langar with your MP events, which often coincided with important Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtans or community processions. This month takes on greater significance this year, as Sikhs around the world mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. I hope that National Sikh Awareness and History Month plays its part well in raising awareness and understanding of the Sikh faith, history and community, and continues to strengthen the bridges we build with Parliament and across nations with all our communities.

I will talk briefly about the gurdwaras in my constituency, Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha on Alice Way and my gurdwara on Martindale Road, which is run by the Nishkam trust, which play a huge role in many different ways, as I am sure gurdwaras across the country do. They extend charity and welcome and they support those in need. Every week, they welcome people who may be homeless or hungry. They welcome all, irrespective of background, through their doors. They run weekend classes and Punjabi classes, and host our surgeries as Members of Parliament so that we can reach all those in our communities. They have run immigration workshops—a huge issue in many ethnic minority communities—

[Seema Malhotra]

where immigration advisers are supported in providing confidential support and advice to those who desperately need it.

The Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha on Alice Way hosts the Hounslow Disability Network, which again provides vital support to those who need it. There are wellbeing events with the NHS, the police and many others across our community that make a huge difference. They also support the arts, culture and education. My constituent, Hardyal Luther, the former vice-chairman of Guru Nanak Worldwide's council of supporters, organises a Guru Nanak essay competition every year that brings together talent and encourages the younger generations to take part and explore their history, culture and faith.

We live in a peaceful and respectful society because we choose to make it so. The structures that we build between us as a society help to nurture those vital links that make us a safe place for all communities and a place in which we can be sure that future generations will also be safe and will understand and respect one another. The respect that we hold and the understanding that we nurture are part of a statement about how we as a nation recognise that we have more in common than that which divides us.

**John Spellar:** I realise that my hon. Friend is reaching the end of her excellent contribution, but she has come to a key point about the Sikh community in the United Kingdom. While enormously proud of its history, culture and tradition, it is also enormously proud to be British. Something like three quarters of the Sikh community in this country were born in the UK and are hugely proud of this country. Being proud to be Sikh and proud to be British identifies the Sikhs and is why the Sikh community makes such a great contribution to our country.

**Seema Malhotra:** My right hon. Friend makes an important point that goes to the heart of what this debate is about. Whatever our heritage, as we play our part in British public life, it is vital that we respect each other and show that, in a time of rising hate crime not just across our country but across the world, we take the time to value each other, respect each other, understand each other's history, and understand our nation's history through the context and lens of all those who make a vital contribution.

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, given that she is coming to the end of her speech. I thank her for an admirable and comprehensive contribution to the debate. The contribution of Sikhs to public life has gone unrecognised so far. I had the privilege of being the deputy to Lord King when he was leader of Sandwell Council. He was the first Sikh leader of a major metropolitan authority and subsequently became a Member of the House of Lords. I put on record his contribution to breaking down barriers and providing inspiration for subsequent generations of Sikhs to enter public life.

**Seema Malhotra:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. We all remember Lord King and the contribution that he made.

I will also make reference to our two Sikh Members of Parliament who are here today: our first turbaned Sikh Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough; and our first female Sikh Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston. They do us all proud and make a huge contribution, not only to debates in this House but to making sure that, as a minority community, we play our part and are seen to play our part in Britain's mainstream public life.

With those words, I will end my speech. I thank you, Sir Edward, for chairing this debate, and the House for allowing me to call this debate and make my contribution to it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** As you can see, we have a large number of Members who wish to speak. We may need to set a time limit, because I want to try to get everybody in. In the meantime, perhaps we can have nice short speeches of no more than five minutes.

2.51 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and to follow the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra). I thank her and other colleagues for all they have done for the National Sikh Awareness and History Month.

I will mention three things that I have really appreciated about the Sikh community in my own constituency of Stafford, having visited the gurdwara on Tithe Barn Road on more than one occasion. The first is the wonderful hospitality that visitors receive, which I have experienced during my time in Stafford and also at the Sikh temple in Moshi in Tanzania, where I lived for many years. The warm welcome I received was tremendous and a great credit to both those communities.

The second point, which has already been mentioned by the hon. Lady, is the contribution that Sikhs have made, are making and will continue to make to our country, whether that is in business, the professions, public life, which she rightly mentioned, including the very highest levels of public life, or the armed forces. She has rightly mentioned the huge contribution, and sacrifice, that Sikhs have made on behalf of the United Kingdom throughout both world wars, and indeed elsewhere.

It was my privilege on Sunday to attend the Anzac memorial service in Cannock Chase in my constituency, and to see the contribution that others from the Commonwealth have made, particularly those from New Zealand. However, it is equally right that we remember the huge contribution of Sikhs. Let us not forget that the number of people who served was absolutely tremendous, including 100,000 New Zealanders out of a population of 1 million. Well over 100,000 Sikhs served in the first world war alone. Those are tremendous figures, and those who served were all volunteers; they were not conscripts, as far as I am aware.

Thirdly, it is important to note the interest that our Sikh community in Stafford has shown in the community and public life. During elections they always invite the candidates to speak and answer questions, which I welcome because they extend the invitation not only from the Sikh community's point of view but from that of the whole community of Stafford.

I will make two further points. First, I very much hope that there will be an official apology for the events of 100 years ago. We need to look more closely at a number of events from right across the former British empire, which is now the Commonwealth. For instance, events during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya have not yet been sufficiently investigated, by which I mean events on both sides of the conflict, but particularly perhaps those relating the United Kingdom.

My Sikh constituents also have a real conviction—indeed, they make it really clear—about the importance of freedom of religion. The freedom to express one's religion, and having the ability to do so across the world, matters hugely to me as a Christian. We in this place must uphold freedom of religion at a time when the situation in many countries around the world is becoming increasingly darker for those practising their faith.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order. There is nothing more frustrating than not getting in, so I am afraid that I have to impose a time limit of four and a half minutes.

2.55 pm

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Thank you, Sir Edward, for that ruling and for your chairmanship today.

I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on securing this debate. As she said, it comes at the end of our first ever National Sikh Awareness and History Month. There have been lots of events, including the Vaisakhi celebration, Turban Awareness Day, the lecture on Guru Nanak and feminism—which I am glad to say was given by Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar, the director of the Centre for Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of Wolverhampton—and many others dedicated both to acknowledging the Sikh contribution and to teaching more about Sikhi and what it stands for.

I will mention a few things relating to that contribution. The first is the military contribution of Sikhs—the sacrifice in blood and life, with lives being laid down in two world wars, by Sikhs fighting for this country. It is estimated that some 83,000 Sikh soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice. Memorials have been erected to acknowledge that sacrifice, including, as we have just heard, in Bristol. A memorial was unveiled at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire in 2015, and another was unveiled in Smethwick last year. We await, however, a national memorial in central London dedicated to their sacrifice. I acknowledge the leadership and hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). We want a memorial to be erected and for the bureaucracy to be cut through. The issue has cross-party support, so I hope the Minister will provide a positive response.

The second contribution by Sikhs is, of course, economic. Many Sikhs came to my constituency and others in the west midlands in the 1950s and 1960s, often to do hard, even back-breaking, work in steel mills and foundries. They often faced barriers of prejudice as they laid down the foundations for their new life. Although we quite rightly associate the Sikh community with social mobility,

that mobility rests on the hard work of the first generation of Sikhs who came here. As is the case with so many immigrants, they worked hard to make sure that their children had better chances than them in life.

I also pay tribute to those who have worked to record the stories of those early Sikh migrants. For example, Anand Chhabra, founder of Black Country Visual Arts, has lovingly collated the Apna Heritage Archive's photography collection, which records early Punjabi life in the west midlands in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and which was exhibited at Wolverhampton Art Gallery last year.

Alongside that hard work, there was great bravery. For example, there is the story of Tarsem Singh Sandhu, who led the fight in Wolverhampton for Sikhs to be able to wear a turban while driving a bus. Unbelievably, that was banned in the past, even when half the bus drivers in the city were of Sikh heritage. Tarsem Singh Sandhu was told that he would lose his job unless he was clean shaven and abandoned his turban, but he took a stand, rightly saying that he was doing nothing wrong. He had to face down great hostility to win his battle, and his bravery and that of those who campaigned alongside him paved the way for change that today we take for granted. Even after that great progress, however, there are still struggles. Legislation still has to be amended to ensure that the simple act of observing the five Ks and wearing a turban can be done freely.

What can we draw as a broader conclusion? I see a community whose story is overwhelmingly positive. Sikhs have achieved success in business, education, public life and, increasingly, politics, with the historic election of the first turban-wearing Sikh, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), and the first woman Sikh MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill). This is a timely debate, and Sikhs should build on their success in the future.

2.59 pm

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my good and hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) for securing this important debate and for her excellent speech.

Despite being only about 1% of the UK population, British Sikhs have without doubt made an immense contribution to our nation. They have among the highest numbers of graduates of any community, and huge proportions of them are in employment and in the voluntary and charitable sector. According to official statistics, they also have the highest level of home ownership—the most likely of all the faith groups to own their own home. However, despite there being such incredible achievements, I want to concentrate my remarks, in the limited time I have, on some current and future initiatives.

In particular, there is the national Sikh war memorial. Due to the hard work of the trustees, of whom I am president, a central London site has been identified. I pay tribute to Members of both the Government and the Opposition who, on a cross-party basis, have helped, and also the Mayor of London's office. I fully hope that the Minister will today endorse all that good work and support us in the future in every possible way, so that the dream will become a reality on that site.

[*Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési*]

I also want to touch upon direct flights to Amritsar, which is the global, spiritual and tourist hub for the Sikhs, and home to the most revered Sikh shrine, known sometimes as the Golden Temple. Since being elected, I have been pushing on this matter, and I am thankful to those hon. Members who, on a cross-party basis, attended the parliamentary event. Despite the anti-Sikh and anti-Punjab elements who successfully scuppered such efforts by the diaspora and the Punjab community over the previous decade, in 2018 we successfully reinitiated the Birmingham to Amritsar route with Air India, and this month, thanks to several meetings and sincere efforts, we were looking forward to the announcement of direct flights from London to Amritsar. However, the recent difficulties faced by Indian airlines, including the collapse of the major private operator, have unfortunately put paid to that. Furthermore, even the advances made with the Birmingham to Amritsar route have been cancelled, allegedly due to the escalating Indo-Pak tensions and the inability to use certain airspace, along with capacity issues.

Given the context, is the Minister willing to meet me, and perhaps team members from the Departments for Transport, for International Trade and for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, as well as the Foreign Office, to see how we could encourage some of our British airlines to take on what would no doubt be a lucrative route? Post-Brexit, our ability to increase such communities' cultural, trade and tourism ties will no doubt determine our nation's success and enhance our global links. I sincerely hope that the Government will fully support National Sikh Awareness and History Month every April, after its having been initiated this year under the leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston, with excellent events being organised by other Members and hard-working Sikh organisations.

I fully endorse the calls for a formal apology from the Government for the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, massacre, and the need to incorporate such historic colonial events into our national curriculum, so that future generations may learn from the blunders of the past. There has been an increase in hate crime, and after the horrific attack last year on one of my turbaned guests, who was queueing outside Parliament, by a hate-filled individual who felt the need to try to remove his turban, we have turned a negative into a positive with a Turban Awareness Day for the second year in a row, attended by so many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler). I am sure that with continued political support, the British Sikh community will go from strength to strength.

3.4 pm

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on securing this important debate. In our first ever National Sikh Awareness and History Month, I pay tribute to her work, and that of hon. Friends and Members across the House, in establishing it. It is absolutely right that we have this debate today, to highlight the contribution of the Sikhs to the UK on so many different levels, whether military, economic or political.

I thank my hon. Friend for calling the debate, and for organising the fantastic Turban Awareness Day last week. I know that many hon. Members present were there. It is certainly the first time I have worn a turban, and the process of having someone dress me in a turban was interesting and educational. I very much enjoyed it, and I thank everyone who was involved in organising the event.

I am proud that one of the first Sikh temples in the country outside London was the Guru Nanak Satsang gurdwara on the Cannock Road in my constituency. It is one of two Sikh gurdwaras in my constituency, the other being the Guru Nanak Sikh gurdwara on Well Lane in Wednesfield. I am always delighted to visit the gurdwaras. As the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) said, people always get a very warm welcome reception, a delicious Indian tea, samosas and all sorts of other things, because of the Sikh tradition of offering food to anyone, regardless of their background. People are always well fed and warmly welcomed at gurdwaras, not only in Wolverhampton but elsewhere across the country and the world.

I am delighted to take part in the annual Vaisakhi procession in my constituency, which last took place a couple of weeks ago between the Well Lane and Willenhall gurdwaras. There will be a very late Vaisakhi celebration in Wolverhampton—we always have the Vaisakhi Mela on the first Sunday of the month in West Park. Thousands of people flock there, obviously from the Sikh community but also from all different communities, and from all religions and none. It is a joyous affair, and I look forward to attending again this year.

I am proud that Wolverhampton has the second-highest percentage of Sikh residents in England, second only to Slough. Our Sikh community in Wolverhampton is vibrant and well integrated and makes a huge contribution to the local community and to society. It is fantastic and fitting that the University of Wolverhampton last year launched its Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden). The centre is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, and I congratulate Dr Opinderjit Takhar not only on setting it up, but on giving the recent lecture in Speaker's House on Guru Nanak and feminism.

I would like to reflect on what the hon. Member for Stafford said about the strong advocacy of the freedom of religion that the Sikh community brings to the UK. At election time, we always know what the Sikh priorities in my area are. We get invited to the local gurdwara; we get fed and watered, but demands are also put on us for the election. That is good and right, and I congratulate the various Sikh organisations that actually draft a manifesto for the election.

I echo those who have asked the Government for an apology for the massacre 100 years ago at Jallianwala Bagh. Although the Prime Minister has expressed deep regret, it is a shame that the Government have not gone further. On a more positive note, I would like to say how proud I am of the contribution of the Sikh community in Wolverhampton to business, education, public life and politics.

3.8 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra)

for securing the debate, and I thank the Minister for being here today and for his clear commitment to his role. I look forward to hearing his remarks.

As we have heard, Sikhs have made an immense contribution to British society in a wide range of areas. Whether through business, charity work or the invaluable impact of the 83,000 Sikh soldiers who gave their lives in the service of the British Army, it is no exaggeration to say that Britain would simply not be Britain without the contribution of the Sikhs. Despite their magnificent contribution, Sikhs in Britain—and across the world—often face significant discrimination because of their beliefs.

Just before the Easter break, I, along with others, spoke in this very chamber about the many Sikhs who lost their lives during the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, roughly 100 years ago. Thankfully, things have drastically improved since then, but Sikhs still face discrimination and even violence across the world. I declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, and I am here to speak out for the Sikhs as well. I am also pleased to have the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) as an office bearer in that APPG and I look forward to her contribution shortly.

According to UK Home Office data, 117 incidents of hate crimes against Sikhs were recorded in 2017-18. That figure is likely to be underestimated, as many victims of hate crime do not report them. Incidents of discrimination towards Sikhs have been recorded for years. For example, the “British Sikh Report 2013” estimated that three quarters of the UK’s Sikhs had experienced racism. According to the UK Sikh Survey 2016, almost one in five Sikhs had encountered discrimination in a public place over the past year, with one in seven having directly experienced workplace discrimination. The report found that Sikhs who wear religious iconography or clothing are the most likely to experience abuse. Since 9/11, both individual Sikhs and gurdwaras have regularly been on the receiving end of attacks by people who have mistaken them for Muslims and mosques respectively. There have been numerous high-profile incidents in the media, notably the attempted beheading of Sikh dentist Dr Sarandeve Bhambra in a Welsh supermarket in 2015.

It is simply unacceptable that anyone should be subject to discrimination, abuse or violence because of their religious beliefs, or lack thereof. We should do everything in our power to tackle discrimination against Sikhs in Britain. It is also right that we work with our international partners to tackle discrimination towards Sikhs because, unfortunately, the problem also afflicts many other nations, as has been mentioned. For example, in the US, the Sikh Coalition estimates that Sikhs in the US have experienced an average of one hate crime per week since the start of 2018, with a 17% spike in anti-Sikh violence since the 2016 presidential election. Those figures, too, are expected to be underestimated.

In India, where there is the greatest population of Sikhs in the world, conditions for Sikhs and other religious minorities have deteriorated over the past decade owing to the rise of Hindu nationalism, and attempts to alienate non-Hindus have emerged in conjunction with that ideology. The 2017 report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom notes:

“Hindu nationalists often harass Sikhs and pressure them to reject religious practices and beliefs that are distinct to Sikhism, such as wearing Sikh dress and unshorn hair and carrying mandatory

religious items...Article 25 of the Indian constitution deems Sikhs to be Hindus. This creates an environment in which Hindu nationalists view Sikhs as having rejected Hinduism and as being enemies of India because some Sikhs support the Khalistan political movement, which seeks to create a new state in India for Sikhs”. The growth of such views serves only to make life harder for the Indian Sikh community.

Sikhs in Britain and around the world have contributed greatly to society. Despite that fact, their community continues to suffer significant discrimination. It is our responsibility in this House today to do what we can to tackle that discrimination at home in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and abroad, and to ensure that Sikhs and all other religious or belief communities are valued and allowed to live their lives in peace and to contribute yet more to society, having very clearly contributed much in the past.

3.13 pm

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) for succeeding in her application for this timely debate to mark the end of Sikh heritage, history and awareness month—a month she has worked incredibly hard to champion and organise. Like many Members across the House, I too have participated in the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan in Birmingham over the weekend. The gathering is one of the largest in Europe, with more than 100,000 in attendance.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on UK Sikhs and the first female Sikh Member of Parliament, it has been a pleasure listening to Members from across the House rightly laud some of the contributions that individual Sikhs and the Sikh community as a whole have made to the UK.

When I was elected just under two years ago, I came to Parliament with a belief that it was here that we could make fundamental changes, and that we, as Members of Parliament, could lead on issues of importance for individual constituents, our community or the whole of the United Kingdom. I want us to do more than offer warm words about the contribution of Sikhs, or indeed any community, to the UK.

Despite making up 0.8% of the population, according to the 2011 census, Sikhs accounted for 2% of religious hate crimes recorded by the police in 2017-18. I want us to tackle hate crime and prejudice by taking today as a starting point for educating the whole population about the influence that Sikhs have had and how their impact has shaped the Britain of today, as well as many other parts of the world. It is in this place that we can choose to do more than discuss the contribution of diverse communities and speak solemnly about hate crimes. In this place we can put in place actions and policies to look at the link between the two.

The hate crime action plan refresh in 2018 was extremely disappointing, given the promises made to Sikh organisations that they would not be ignored or invisible to Government; but what matters now is how the Government address Sikh hate crime. I look forward to working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address the under-reporting of Sikh hate. The new chair of the community safety group for the Sikh Council UK is Manchandan Kaur, and I hope the Government will reach out to her and the council to work with them.

[Preet Kaur Gill]

Our children need to learn about the contribution of the Sikh community, and to do that, we must teach people about the honest history of Britain. We must learn about the positive and progressive parts as well as the repression and exploitation that has occurred in Britain's name. We need to learn that, during the second world war, British soldiers were paid differently depending on their race. In their thousands Sikhs, along with others, gave up their lives for our freedom. My grandfather also fought in the second world war.

Our children must learn about the Amritsar massacre, where British troops massacred unarmed demonstrators. They must learn about the life of Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, daughter of the last Maharaja of the Sikh empire and goddaughter of Queen Victoria, who pioneered the cause of women's rights in Britain and abroad. They must learn about the grassroots activism of many Sikhs in the 1960s to challenge unfair pay, working conditions and cultural oppression.

My father, the late Daljit Singh Shergill, who was president of the Guru Nanak gurdwara Smethwick for 18 years, set up the first food bank during the 1980s recession in Smethwick. He worked with the miners during their strikes, raising funds to support them. He championed interfaith working and worked closely with the Harborne parish and the Bangladeshi and other minority groups. Gurdwara Smethwick has recently revealed the Lions of the Great War statue, commemorating the contribution of Sikhs to world wars one and two, led by the president, Jatinder Singh Bassi; the general secretary, Humraaj Singh Shergill; and leader of Sandwell Council, Steve Eling. And we must know the truth of the role of the then Government involvement in Operation Blue Star, otherwise known as the 1984 genocide of Sikhs.

If we genuinely want to recognise the contribution of Sikhs to the UK and the way it has shaped British society, the way it has moulded what it means to be British and the way it has shaped current and future generations, it is not enough simply to discuss it; we must end the discrimination that Sikhs face because of a lack of data. The race disparity audit used 100 datasets across Government to look at how people of all ethnic groups are treated across public services, but there was no data on Sikhs. As we celebrate their contributions, let us not ignore the fact that the Government's aim to tackle burning injustices has been a concern when it comes to Sikhs. That is why Members across the House support the Sikh ethnic tick box in the census.

We in this place are here to make fundamental change and lead on what is important. I hope that today the Minister, as a Member of the Government, will commit to genuinely following through on the issues raised. In doing so the Minister will have my full support, and the APPG will be happy to work with officials to develop a programme of work.

3.17 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) for securing this extremely important debate today. I want to start by putting on

the record my sincere gratitude for all the support and good will that I have received from the Sikh community in Coventry. Their help and encouragement has been and will always be very much appreciated.

There are many gurdwaras in my constituency and across Coventry. They are not only places of worship, but important community hubs that bring people together and, as anyone who has visited a temple will know, are places of great benevolence, where everyone is welcome and food is shared with the rest of the community. The annual Vaisakhi celebration is firmly woven into our city's cultural calendar. Thousands of people take part in the Nagar Kirtan—the parade—which starts at the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Parkash in my constituency, and is a joyous and inclusive celebration that is attended and enjoyed by Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. The event contributes successfully to broadening our city's cultural life.

Similarly, the Sikh community contributes tremendously to the success of the economy of both Coventry and this country. The Sikh community certainly punches above its weight in this area, with a deserved reputation for having a strong work ethic and being disproportionately successful in business. It is a similar story in our vital public services, where Sikhs make such an invaluable contribution to our armed forces, our NHS and our education sector.

As well as the cultural and economic contribution that the Sikh community makes to our city, there is a significant social contribution, not least to the health and wellbeing of our environment. Sikhs have a strong relationship with the environment, which is an integral part of their faith and identity. That connection with the natural world prompted Coventry's Sikhs to commit to planting more than 550 trees across the city to mark the 550th anniversary of the birth of Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. That fantastic initiative will help to restore nature to our cities, parks and green spaces, and secure a healthy, resilient and sustainable environment that will benefit people and wildlife for generations to come.

That sense of social responsibility does not end with the natural environment. Public service is hugely important to Sikh identity, and helping others is part of their way of life. Sikhs constantly strive to do more and find new ways of contributing to their local community, whether that is through the time they give up or the money they donate to important local charities and projects. I admire and am grateful for their work throughout my city, and I thank the 16,000 Sikhs in Coventry for their social, cultural and economic contributions.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I echo the points that my hon. Friend is making so well. In my constituency, the Sikh community has done a huge job and been at the heart of our community, both commercially and through its public leadership. I place on the record my thanks to Mota Singh, who is standing down as a councillor after 40 years of public service. What a terrific record that has been.

**Colleen Fletcher:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Sikhs contribute so much each and every day across all walks of life, and their culture, diversity, enterprise and values of faith, family, and community help to make our city a more unique, integrated, tolerant and vibrant place to live in, work and visit.

3.22 pm

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on securing the debate and on her powerful speech. I am delighted to speak in this debate, and I welcome the launch of National Sikh Awareness and History Month. I pay tribute to the work of my colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), for Feltham and Heston, and for Slough (Mr Dhesi) in pursuing that important initiative. It has also been wonderful to see recent events in Parliament—my personal favourite was definitely Turban Awareness Day.

My city of Manchester contains a significant Sikh population and provides a prime example of the beauty of our diverse society. It is particularly noticeable how well the Sikh community has integrated itself into the local community, not just through business, but through charity work and the hospitable nature of the local gurdwaras. My local gurdwara is a lively, colourful and welcoming place. I recently visited it for the Vaisakhi celebrations, and was touched by the warm and very Punjabi welcome.

I have seen over the years the positive impact that Sikhs have had not just in my constituency, but across Britain and in all walks of life. Minorities such as British Sikhs exemplify all that is great about Great Britain, which is home to many of the world's religious and ethnic minorities. It is a place where we strive to create the conditions for minorities to thrive, safe in the knowledge that there exists a robust framework of equality and non-discrimination legislation, and professional practice. Other examples of the contribution that Sikhs make to the UK are witnessed in the British Army where, as Members have said, many Sikhs have served with distinction. We still have some way to go before we fully realise our equality aspirations, but the Equality Act 2010, passed by a Labour Government, remains a significant landmark on our journey to a more equal society for all.

As for other minority communities, however, challenges remain for British Sikhs, and ignorance of the Sikh religion often lies behind prejudices. Sadly, the Sikh community continues to face discrimination. For example, a report by the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims described the very direct and tangible impact that Islamophobia has on our Sikh communities. Whether that is gurdwaras being defaced, or Sikh men such as Dr Sarandeve Bhambra being targeted by Islamophobes because of the mistaken perception that they are Muslims, we are acutely aware that more must be done by all in society to tackle the impact of rising Islamophobia that affects all our communities.

Given the escalation in bigotry after the Brexit vote and the rise in racial discrimination and hate crimes on grounds of race and religion, it is important that we reassert the Britishness of our minority groups, and integrate their history and stories in our national imagination. To challenge the racism of far right groups, we must repel the myths that are peddled about our communities, and we must celebrate the tremendous contributions made by those communities to the UK. I believe that the positive contributions made by Sikhs and other Commonwealth citizens to our British history should be included in national school curricula. The time is right to pay tribute to British Sikhs and all they have achieved, because

their contribution amounts to so much more than their numbers. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to participate in this much-needed debate, which recognises and celebrates the wonderful contributions made by the Sikh community. Finally, let me conclude with the wise words of Guru Nanak, who said:

“He who regards all men as equals is religious”.

3.26 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Edward. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) for her work in establishing National Sikh Awareness and History Month. It has been a wonderful month of celebration, education, learning, and sharing food, which is a great thing and definitely to be encouraged. This month the Scottish Parliament held its first Vaisakhi reception, which was so well attended that extra people had to be squeezed into the garden lobby. More and more people kept coming, which was great to see.

I thank Charandeep Singh and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar from Glasgow for their help in gathering information on the Sikh community in Scotland for my contribution to this debate, and for their tireless community work. In her interfaith role, and through the network of Scottish gurdwaras, Ravinder has been incredibly active over nearly 30 years in promoting dialogue and understanding between faiths, as well as promoting the Sikh community. After our debate on Jallianwala Bagh, she told me that her grandfather had survived that massacre because, as a young man, he lay underneath the bodies. That brings home to us all how that link is still there within human memory, including here in the UK, and it is because that link is so real for so many that the lack of an apology from the Prime Minister was so disappointing. Ravinder also told me that in 1920, Sikhs based at Glasgow University wrote to the then *Glasgow Herald* to voice their outrage at those events. This is not something that happened in another country far away and a long time ago; this is very real to communities today, and I urge the Minister to do all he can to secure that apology.

The established Sikh community settled in Glasgow in the early 1920s, and the first gurdwara was established in South Portland Street in the Gorbals in the 1940s. The community has grown in both numbers and institutions. Scotland's eight gurdwaras, based in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Irvine, serve communities across the nation and are used by 4,000 individuals each week, including Sikhs and those from other backgrounds. During the Vaisakhi celebrations we saw the Nagar Kirtan procession through the streets of Glasgow, and it was an absolute joy to behold and be part of. The tradition of langar—providing a free meal—was begun by the first guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, expanded by Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das, and it remains strong to this day. I very much enjoyed sharing a meal with my colleague Sandra White MSP and the congregation at the Glasgow Central Gurdwara Singh Sabha a fortnight ago. The food was delicious, and I encourage anyone who can to go there. As other Members have reflected, visitors are very much welcomed when they go through the doors.

**Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on her role in securing this important debate. Everybody recognises the contributions of the Sikh community in the social and semi-political

[Mr Virendra Sharma]

fields, but I am glad to say that in my constituency and my area, the Sikh community has played a major part in the mainstream politics of Britain. It was where the first Sikh—Indian-born—was elected as a local councillor, and where Piara Singh Khabra was elected as Member of Parliament. Parmjit Dhandra was elected as a Member of Parliament, as was Marsha Singh, who was the Member for Bradford West. The Sikh community is not only playing a part in social life, but playing a positive role in bringing communities together in the mainstream politics of Britain.

**Alison Thewliss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his excellent point. Sikhs have played a role in many different fields, as they should. Two Members who have spoken this afternoon, the hon. Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) and for Slough (Mr Dhesi), are Sikhs who have made their contributions to politics. There is a great contribution going on across the UK, and we need to see many more Sikhs taking up the role of elected Member.

Each week, the gurdwaras in Scotland serve over 3,000 meals, all prepared and distributed by volunteers. In addition, Seva Scotland prepares meals in the gurdwara and distributes them to the vulnerable in society through mobile food banks, which provide over 100 hot, fresh meals a week in Glasgow and Edinburgh to the most vulnerable, many of whom are homeless. In addition, the Sikh community regularly fundraises for Scottish charities, including the Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity, for which it recently raised over £8,000.

The Sikh community works hard to create stronger, integrated communities. As the hon. Member for Slough and others have mentioned, there has been anti-minority hostility and hate crime about, which the Scottish Sikh community has taken on through a vibrant proactive approach to promoting diversity in Scotland. Each year, the Network of Sikh Organisations educates over 4,000 Scottish school pupils, and interacts and engages with over 40,000 non-Sikh visitors to gurdwaras. The Gurdwara Guru Granth Sahib Sikh Sabha on Albert Drive is recognised as being so welcoming that it has a four-star rating from the tourist agency VisitScotland. It also does outreach; it recently did a turban-tying event in Queen's Park, with members of the community turning up on a beautiful sunny day to show how turbans are put together. As other elected Members have mentioned, learning how that feels was an experience, and it was good to get the opportunity to do that outside in the sunshine.

As the local elected Member for three of Glasgow's four gurdwaras, I know that the Sikh community regularly engages with local and national Governments on issues of importance to the Sikh community, most recently the Sikh census question, but also on security issues after the scandalous attack on the Guru Nanak gurdwara in Edinburgh last year. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) asked me to pass on how strongly the community in Edinburgh felt about that. There was great solidarity, with the community coming out in support of those from the gurdwaras. The Scottish Government's Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, Ben Macpherson, who is also the local MSP, was out there giving his support to the community as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) has been active in campaigning on the Jagtar Singh Johal case. I know that there was a meeting with the Foreign Secretary last week, and that the all-party parliamentary group led by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston has also been campaigning on that issue, backed by the solidarity of the gurdwaras.

**Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con):** I endorse those comments. I myself met with Jagtar's wife and brother last week after they had met the Foreign Secretary, so there is cross-party, consensual agreement that we support the "Free Jaggi Now" campaign.

**Alison Thewliss:** I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman's support; it is important that we stand together on these issues as much as we can.

I have received representations from the gurdwaras in my constituency about the difficulties caused by the UK Home Office in the recruitment of Sikh celebrants. When I visited the Vaisakhi celebrations, I was pleased to see that the Sikh celebrants had been able to get into Glasgow and participate in those celebrations, which I believe involved a 48-hour reading of the Sikh holy scriptures. If that is going to be done in a shift over 48 hours, there need to be plenty of celebrants to make it possible.

The Scottish Sikh community is engaged in international activity. The Sikh Council of Scotland was founded in 2002 by Gurdeep Samra, and under President Sulakhan Singh is providing scholarships worth £700,000 to 290 young children in the poorest parts of India, covering their tuition fees, transport, food and schooling costs and removing that burden from their parents. The community also supports work to empower young women by providing training in high-skilled tailoring centres, where those women are trained in the art of tailoring, sewing and design. Hundreds of young women have enrolled, and after their training, each qualified young woman is provided with a sewing machine free of charge to open their own tailoring shop locally, to act as a source of income for those women and their families. Some 90% of young women enrolled in that scheme reach the stage of opening their own local centre, which is quite incredible. The Sikh community also funds local water projects in India and provides six eye camps in that country, which have provided eye care and operations such as cataract surgery to over 6,000 individuals, completely free of charge.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the importance of education. All the Sikh gurdwaras in Scotland provide a range of educational facilities, including Punjabi heritage classes, tuition classes, computing classes and health and wellbeing classes. Those are all free, and seek to increase and improve the life chances of people from minority ethnic communities. Combined, the gurdwaras educate over 4,000 young Scottish Sikhs through their educational services. That is a great thing for the community, particularly as it links together the older and younger generations through language.

Leith-based Sikh Sanjog, founded by Trishna Singh OBE in 1989, is particularly notable as an organisation run by women, and I wish it all the best on its 30th birthday this year. Sikh Sanjog has run the Punjabi Junction cafe for the community, and offers a range of services to inspire and empower Sikh and other minority ethnic women and young people to advance their life opportunities through the building of skills, confidence and social inclusion. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh

North and Leith has told me how much that means to the local community. The Sikh community is also expanding its footprint on the national stage through the advocacy charity Sikhs in Scotland, under the leadership of Charandeep Singh, which will represent the needs of that community across civic Scotland. As other hon. Members have mentioned, Sikhs have made an economic contribution. The two stunning gurdwaras in Glasgow, which I invite everybody to visit, invested £15 million in Scottish communities, which is significant in fundraising terms.

I will finish with a wee story about how the Sikh community is regarded in Glasgow. The painting club at Toryglen community hall has produced for me the most gorgeous painting of the Glasgow skyline, with landmarks from my constituency. It has recognised the contribution of the Sikh community by including the gurdwara dome in that beautiful painting. What more fitting tribute by Glaswegians to their fellow citizens could there be? The Sikh community is very much part of Scotland's vibrant tartan, and I take this opportunity to thank it for its contribution.

3.36 pm

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to be part of today's debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on having secured it. I also congratulate all the members of the all-party parliamentary group on UK Sikhs who have contributed to this very special month. It is lovely to see Parliament as diverse as it has been this month; sometimes, I think this place is at its best when Members can debate and talk about the beauty and diversity of their constituents and how much they add and contribute. It makes this a very special place.

We have heard a lot about the contribution of Sikhs in both world wars, and a recognition of the role that Sikhs played in our history. Sikh British Indian soldiers were just 2% of the population, but 20% of the British Indian Army, and I join other Members in calling for a war memorial in central London to recognise and celebrate that fact. I hope that when the Minister rises to his feet, in the spirit of today's debate, he will agree and say that that will happen. As we have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), a place for that memorial has already been identified.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston said, it is sad that this history month was born out of an attack on a turban-wearing Sikh outside Parliament, a place where we hope we break down barriers. However, as we have heard, something positive has come out of that negative. It was a pleasure to be a part of Turban Awareness Day in Parliament. I too now understand how long the process takes. It was a real education, and I thank Members, especially our Sikh Members, for allowing us to ask silly questions—I thought some of them were silly questions—and for the dignity with which they responded. That is testament to how we all need to embrace, understand and appreciate each other's cultures.

A hundred years later seems like the right time for an apology for the Jallianwala Bagh murders. That incident should be taught in schools; it is time and it feels right. We have been talking about suffrage and the contributions that Sikh women made to suffrage movements, and we

have talked about those centenary celebrations, but it is time to acknowledge the good and the bad and ensure that that incident is taught in schools.

We have heard a lot today about the “British Sikh Report 2019”. It refers not only to the many Sikhs who work in the public sector, but to those in the care sector. I found that a fascinating piece of research, and we should all reflect on the positive role that Sikhs play in public life.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) spoke with pride about his Sikh community and about events in the British empire that need to be investigated. What he said is true. Often history likes to talk about what are considered to be the good bits, but for us to understand and mature as a society, we need to talk about the bad bits too, so that history does not repeat itself, as we have seen in the recent increase in hate crime.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) spoke about Sikh soldiers and the ultimate sacrifice. He talked about the cross-party support and all the firsts we have here in Parliament and, beyond that, in his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough is a completely and utterly enthusiastic advocate for the war memorial. I congratulate him on all his campaigning since he has been in Parliament. He has hit the ground running, to say the least, and has always been so calm in doing so. He often talks about turning a negative into a positive, but I congratulate him on being elected as the first ever black, Asian and minority ethnic representative in the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I am sure he will take that delegation by force and ensure that everything is considered in the right way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) talked about education about the turban and the gurdwaras in her constituency. She is no longer in her place, but she talked about West Park, and it sounded like the place to be. I might just have to pay a visit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) talked about her constituency with such joy and grace, but I must congratulate her on being the first female Sikh Member of Parliament. I remember when she was elected, everyone was saying, “Oh my gosh, I can't believe that you are the first and there wasn't one before.” There was almost a sense of it being a shame on the House. I congratulate her on being the first female Sikh Member and her words about being an advocate for action, not warm words. We must never forget how we can use this place to ensure that the Government make the changes they need to make. We need fewer warm words and more action.

My hon. Friend mentioned Princess Duleep Singh and the role she played in the suffrage movement. Often, women of colour are excluded from the history books and we have to dig deep to find the role they played, even when we know they played a full role and often made a bigger sacrifice to do so. She also mentioned the race disparity audit having no data on Sikhs. If the Government are going to do something, it is important that is done in its entirety, so that it is meaningful. If we are going to go through a process of auditing, it is important that we make it as meaningful as possible. The debate about having Sikh as a recognised box is not

[Dawn Butler]

a new debate, and it could easily have been included in the Government's race disparity audit. Will the Minister explain why that was not the case?

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) talked about how Sikhs punch above their weight and the planting of trees around Coventry. I should not forget to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan). He talked about the warm Punjabi welcome and everything that is great about Great Britain, and that is the thing: Great Britain is known for its diversity. People coming from other countries often say, "I love the diversity, the unity and the acceptance." It is not about tolerance. I do not want to be tolerated; I want to be accepted and appreciated for the contributions to society that my family and I make. My hon. Friend talked about the role we can all play in rooting out racial discrimination. Debates such as this highlight how we all have a significant role to play in ensuring that there is less hate in society, and more acceptance.

3.46 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Sir Edward. Being in the House of Commons, more often than not I am really proud of our role as advocates for our communities. It is brilliant that more than 20 Members of Parliament have come to this debate to make a contribution to celebrate Sikhs and Sikhs in British society. That is extraordinarily uplifting and a brilliant way of marking the almost conclusion of UK National Sikh Awareness and History Month. That event came out of a negative attack outside Parliament, and what a fantastic way it is of turning that negative, terrible thing that we all condemn into something positive.

In this debate, we have all come together to make a positive contribution about Sikhs in our society. I love the idea of having a month that is not only about history and what happened in the past, but about today and celebrating the hugely positive contribution that Sikhs make in Great Britain and around the world, as we have heard. We have had more than 20 contributions. I will do my best to respond to as many as possible of the points raised, while leaving the customary two minutes for the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra). I congratulate her on securing this debate and pay tribute to her for the campaign she has run and all the work she has done.

My Department is in charge of communities in this country, and we work closely with communities across Great Britain to try to find ways to create that cohesion that the Opposition spokesperson just spoke about. I reiterate what has been said about the positive contribution that Sikhs have made to British society. Their vibrancy and selfless service are renowned. I have never visited a gurdwara, so I will have to do that. I do not have one in my constituency, but the huge contribution that gurdwaras are making to communities across Great Britain is absolutely fantastic.

**Eddie Hughes:** I have an excellent gurdwara in Willenhall in my constituency. The Minister would be welcome to come and visit it with me at any time.

**Jake Berry:** Fantastic—I accept that invitation. I am sure my hon. Friend will also take that opportunity to lobby me on his high street competition bid, but I happily accept his invitation.

I am delighted that our Parliament has been made richer and more diverse. Having the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) speak today was one of the highlights, as he is the first turban-wearing Sikh in Parliament. We should celebrate his historic role in the story of our Parliament and our nation.

In addition, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) is the first female Sikh, which we should also celebrate. I was surprised when the election results came in and that news came over the wires. It says something about this place that we had not until that point had a female Sikh representative. The hon. Lady is doing a fantastic job representing not just her constituents but the Sikh community more widely.

I appreciate that it is a couple of weeks late, but I place on record my good wishes to all Sikhs who celebrated Vaisakhi recently with their family and friends. I think it is fantastic. The Prime Minister will host an event in Downing Street early next month to celebrate Vaisakhi with members of the Sikh community from across the UK.

**Mr McFadden:** I thank the Minister for his opening remarks, and I am sure that the Sikh community will be very grateful for his Vaisakhi greetings, but the Government missed an opportunity a couple of weeks ago, on the 100th Vaisakhi since the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, to respond to cross-party calls for an official Government apology. Was that the last word on the subject, or can we expect to hear more from the Government, perhaps at the Vaisakhi celebration that he mentioned?

**Jake Berry:** The right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to prejudge what the Prime Minister may or may not say at that Vaisakhi celebration; I do not have any information about what is planned. All I would say is that the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 13 April 1919 is, as Members have described it repeatedly in this debate, a stain on the history of this country. It seems to me quite right that, 100 years on, people are calling on the Government to mark it, and to change what the Government have done. The Prime Minister recently made it clear that she deeply regrets what happened and the suffering caused, saying:

"The tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 is a shameful scar on British Indian history."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2019; Vol. 658, c. 308.]

That is a direct quote from the Prime Minister, and of course the British high commissioner to India, Sir Dominic Asquith, laid a wreath on the Jallianwala Bagh centenary, expressing regret for what happened.

It is important to reflect on the past, and I do not know what will happen at the Vaisakhi celebration in Downing Street. I will pass on the comments from this debate to the Prime Minister, and more widely to those across Government. There may be an opportunity for others to raise the matter with the Prime Minister if they have the opportunity to do so in Parliament, at Prime Minister's Question Time, on or around the time of that celebration in Downing Street.

I will move on to talk about how the Government engage with the Sikh community. We have heard about the hugely important contribution that the Sikh community makes to Britain. It is important that I put on record how the Government, particularly through my right hon. Friend Lord Bourne, the Minister for Faith, engages with the Sikh community and particularly Sikh umbrella groups. He often hosts interfaith roundtables with representatives from different faiths. Part of that has been to engage heavily with the Sikh community and its representatives.

Lord Bourne is currently seeking to refresh the groups of Sikh communities and umbrella bodies with which he meets. He is seeking particularly to expand those groups to ensure that more women have an opportunity to contribute and that more members of grassroots and community representative groups can attend them. Knowing the interest that there will be in today's debate, I put out a call to the community more widely, particularly to women, to come forward and engage with the Government on how we can more actively support the Sikh community in the UK. We look forward to continuing our engagement with the Sikh community throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and I hope that that can be part of an active engagement, with Members from across the House playing their full part.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:** I really appreciate the commitment that the Minister is giving to carry on working closely with the Sikh community. Will he join all of us in campaigning to put pressure on the Prime Minister of this country to apologise on behalf of British communities? The Sikh community and the Indian community in general would appreciate that support.

**Jake Berry:** I read out the direct quote from the Prime Minister expressing regret in relation to that. Any further change in the Government's official position would be a matter for the Foreign Office and for the Prime Minister, although I have committed to pass on Members' comments, and I am sure that the Prime Minister and her team will read the *Hansard* of our debate.

A few very specific points have been raised, to which I will respond. First, the hon. Member for Slough asked whether I would meet him to discuss flights directly. I will of course, but I wonder whether it would be more appropriate for him to meet a Transport Minister. Perhaps he and I can have a quick conversation after the debate to work out who the appropriate Minister would be. In the absence of any other Minister better qualified to deal with the matter, I will of course meet him with the greatest of pleasure.

Comments have been made about the Sikh war memorial and the cross-party campaign for proper recognition of the extraordinary contribution that Sikhs made during both world wars—14 Victoria Crosses is a number that should humble us all. The Government are correctly supporting efforts to seek a permanent war memorial in London for that contribution. My Department has facilitated meetings with Westminster City Council and we have helped to persuade it, though I am sure it did not take too much persuasion, that there is a need for this war memorial. We support the planning application and have helped to identify potential sites. My Department is the ultimate arbiter of the planning application, so I

cannot be drawn more widely on its success or failure, but we would all think it a wonderful outcome were such a memorial to be seen in London.

**Mr Dhesi:** I thank Lord Bourne, his colleague Hilary Patel and the entire Department, because they have been very co-operative. I need reassurance from the Minister that we will get further gas under the pedal to get that memorial in Westminster sooner rather than later.

**Jake Berry:** I hope I can give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance. The Government are fully behind the proposals for the war memorial. If there is more we can do to assist, we will certainly offer that help. I congratulate him for all the work he has done and the extraordinary way in which he has reinvigorated the campaign since he arrived in Parliament relatively recently. We will continue to work with Westminster City Council. There are negotiations with the Crown Estate, and if we can assist in that work or those negotiations in any way, we will do so. If, following this fantastic month of celebration and history, we can make some real progress, we can all be really proud of that. If the hon. Gentleman runs into any issues—of course, my colleague Lord Bourne would usually deal with them—he can contact me and I will personally take them up with the relevant people in my Department.

Issues relating to hate crime have been raised. In the remaining moments, it may be helpful for me to highlight the additional funding that the Home Secretary has made available for places of worship. I have visited each of the mosques in my constituency to talk about the availability of that funding. It is right that the Government support places of worship, so that religious people can meet, come together, pray together and practise their faith. I hope that colleagues will do what I have done, which is to visit diverse places of worship in their own constituencies, to ensure that worshippers are aware of that funding and of the fact that they can apply for proactive security around places of worship. I congratulate once again everyone who has taken part in this extraordinary and uplifting debate.

3.58 pm

**Seema Malhotra:** I thank the Minister and all who have taken part. I am sure that the debate on the issue of a formal apology for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre will continue. I hope the Prime Minister will use her Vaisakhi event next month to move things forward.

I echo the words of my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr Dhesi) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill): raising awareness has a purpose, which is to build relations and to tackle hate, inequality and injustice. Where that requires Parliament to act, I hope we will have the courage to do so. In this debate, we have heard that people from the Sikh community have contributed to our society in so many ways—from Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, who campaigned for suffrage in my constituency, to Fauja Singh in sport. We have not mentioned him, but this is a marathon week.

I close by thanking the Sikh community in my constituency and the leaders of our main local gurdwaras for all they do in working in an interfaith way, recognising the words of Guru Nanak Dev Ji that there is no Hindu and there is no Muslim. That we are all one together is a strong message that comes from the Sikh faith. I would

[Seema Malhotra]

like to mention Zora Singh Khangora, Gurmej Kaur, Gurmit Singh Hanzara, Premi Singh from the Afghan Sikhs, Sarup Singh Mahon, Gurmail Singh Malhi and our deputy mayor, Councillor Sumra, and all the other Sikh councillors who do a huge amount to keep the bridge strong between our community and our politics.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** On a personal note, it has been a great privilege to chair this wonderful debate, in which we have all come together to celebrate the contribution of the Sikh community to our nation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the contribution of Sikhs to the UK.

## Migration Advisory Committee

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**George Eustice** (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the composition of the Migration Advisory Committee.

The Migration Advisory Committee has six members. The chairman, Professor Alan Manning, is from the London School of Economics; he is, of course, an economist. Professor Jackline Wahba is from the University of Southampton; she is an economist. Dr Jennifer Smith is from Warwick University; she is an economist. Madeleine Sumption is from the University of Oxford; she is an economist. Dr Brian Bell is from King's College London; he is an economist. Finally, Professor Jo Swaffield, who is newly appointed, is from the University of York; unsurprisingly, she too is an economist.

I do not doubt that all those individuals are proficient economists. Nor do I doubt that those of them who still lecture are perfectly capable of imparting in the lecture theatre the knowledge that students need to pass their exams. However, an important question must be asked: does it make sense to have an advisory committee on migration that is made up exclusively of economists, and that excludes all other fields of knowledge and experience? If the Minister told me that there was a case for one economist on the panel, I would accept that, because there is undoubtedly an element of economics in migration policy. However, it is not the only issue that we should address, nor are economists' skills the only skills needed.

The knowledge and experience of the individuals on the committee is inevitably quite limited and narrow, and their perspective is inevitably very theoretical rather than rooted in experience. They live in an academic bubble, which means that they do not always understand the challenges that individual businesses face. Not one of them, I think, has ever run a business; not one has created any wealth on their own through entrepreneurship; not one has created any jobs. They do not know what it is like to worry about putting together a rota to ensure that a restaurant is fully staffed. They do not know what it is like to be a strawberry farmer who has to close a gate on a field of strawberries because they do not have enough staff. Nor do they know what it is like to have to cancel a weekend away with their family because somebody has called in sick and they have to do the work themselves.

My view is that an expert committee on migration should be much broader. It should have entrepreneurs—people who have actually built wealth, created jobs and made and run their own businesses. It should have business leaders from a range of different sectors.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to have a range that covers not only different sorts of people, but the whole United Kingdom? We should understand the issues that affect all parts of our United Kingdom.

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. For instance, some of the Migration Advisory Committee's advice has been that it does not matter if

we shut down certain industries, but some of those industries are prevalent in certain regions and matter to those of us who represent them. I believe that the committee should also have a range of business leaders from a range of sectors of the economy, to represent different briefs and explain why particular sectors employ people in a particular way. Why not have a place for a trade union representative as well?

The Minister or her officials might regard all the people I have just mentioned as dreadful vested interests with an axe to grind, who could not possibly sit on an expert committee. I disagree. Does not the Minister value those people's opinions? She might find that real entrepreneurs and people in business and trade unions could ground-truth some of the current committee's economic theories.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Even to economists, for whom I have a high regard, some things should be self-evident. For instance, in Stafford we grow an awful lot of salad, which replaces salad that would otherwise be imported. It is really important for the United Kingdom's balance of payments; without the workforce to pick it, grow it and process it, we would be more reliant on imports and our balance of payments would be negative.

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is important that as a country we make, produce and grow things. Sadly, I am afraid that some economists overlook the importance of that, and some do not think that the balance of payments matters at all. They think that we can just carry on losing money, borrowing it from elsewhere and spending like no tomorrow, but we all know that that is not how the world works.

Even if the Minister felt that some of the people I have mentioned had a vested interest or an axe to grind, it would be quite possible to make allowances to take that into account. It is wrong to ignore those voices and shut them out. Even if the committee were to remain largely academic, where is the space for people who studied international relations? Do not their degrees matter? There will be many people at the Home Office who have chosen to work in immigration, and whose skillsets and qualifications are in international relations, but they are all excluded from this expert committee. What about people who studied human geography, a normal route to looking at issues such as immigration? Where is the space for them on the committee?

The Minister may say that she meets businesses and unions all the time and hears their voices. However, we cannot get away from the fact that this narrow advisory committee almost sees itself as writing policy. Ministers and officials who draft answers to parliamentary questions routinely hide behind the MAC, saying that it is not appropriate for Ministers to say anything about migration matters until the committee has reached a conclusion. They appear to have abdicated responsibility for policy making to the committee.

The level of reverence shown by the Home Office to the Migration Advisory Committee is rather akin to that shown to the Monetary Policy Committee. However, the MPC was established by statute and has statutory powers to set interest rates, whereas the MAC is simply an ad hoc advisory group and should be treated as such.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, highlighting deficiencies in the Migration Advisory Committee with

respect to the reflection of regions, income strands or industry needs. However, the committee only advises; Ministers decide. This afternoon, the Minister has an opportunity to show how she can hear and ignore, to make sure that we have a system that is bespoke and best suited for the future of our industry and our country.

**George Eustice:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I hope that the Minister will clarify that the Government have an absolute right to ignore at will any recommendations from the Migration Advisory Committee.

Until recently, I was a Minister in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—I was one of those Ministers who used to sign off parliamentary answers that said, “We can't say anything until we hear from the Migration Advisory Committee.” We saw this as a vital piece of work. As we leave the European Union and take back control—in some cases for the first time in half a century—of policy areas such as agriculture, fisheries and migration, we must assertively own that space. There is no space for sitting on our hands, dithering and delaying; we must wholeheartedly come up with a coherent policy.

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): My hon. Friend will know that people in fishing, farming, healthcare, social care and our tourism industry are acutely conscious of this challenge. They expect and want whoever is making the decisions, or at least guiding policy, to be well informed and responsive to things as they change.

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Sadly, many individuals across various sectors report that they do not feel that the Migration Advisory Committee actually listens to them. They feel that the committee has a rather supercilious stance and is basically not interested in the views of people running real businesses.

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this very important debate. Economists like to measure and count things. Does he agree that they need to come up with a way of counting shortages of different skills, rather than trying to put a measurement on the value of those skills? It is purely as simple as, “We have a shortage of these skills. We need those skills.”

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes a crucial point, which I was going to come on to. The Migration Advisory Committee is trying to be too clever by half, rather than just making a straightforward assessment of the industries that have labour shortages, trying to assess what those shortages are as best it can, and setting a figure for the appropriate tier 3 or tier 2 provision, so that we can get the right people into those industries. Instead, the committee has gone off on a frolic of its own in trying to outline a plan to socially engineer a solution to what economists call the productivity puzzle.

As a Minister, I was deeply disappointed when the Migration Advisory Committee's final report concluded in autumn 2018. I thought it was very poor and told us nothing new. Frankly, it read a bit like a student's dissertation. It was a trot round the course of rather standard economic theories of comparative advantage and so on. I suppose that reflected the fact that it was ultimately written by economists and academics, who do not have real-world experience. At the heart of that report was undoubtedly an economist's obsession with

[George Eustice]

abstract theories of productivity—the so-called productivity puzzle to which we have to keep being subjected, because it is the current obsession of economists.

Put simply, the MAC believes that it can use immigration policy to socially engineer a solution to productivity. It recommends no provision at all for tier 3 migration—no provision for so-called lower-skilled jobs. In essence, its argument is that if we get rid of people on lower incomes and simply destroy the industries they work in, productivity will rise. It is a completely ill-conceived idea and will lead to economic contraction, which will affect particular parts of the country worse than others. Industries will be forced to close, as the committee's report highlighted and acknowledged, but was indifferent to. Let us not forget that under Professor Manning's world-view, the Home Secretary's father would have been denied entry to our country. Mr Javid came here to work first in the cotton mills, and then on the buses. Had Professor Manning been in place at the time, the Home Secretary's father would have been sent back and would not have been admitted to this country. That is a terrible indictment of the conclusions of the current MAC report.

The Migration Advisory Committee claims that its recommendations are consistent with our industrial strategy. I think that is wrong, as they violate two important principles in our industrial strategy. First, a principle of the industrial strategy is to make the UK the best place in the world to set up a business. Secondly, the strategy seeks balanced growth around the country, not growth concentrated simply in the home counties. A skills-based immigration system along the lines proposed by the Migration Advisory Committee will be bad for business and will damage and close certain industries. It will be bad for many parts of the country that depend on those industries for their wealth generation, including whole supply chains.

As I said, Brexit changes things fundamentally. We have to own this space assertively. We have to learn to value people who work on lower incomes and might have fewer formal qualifications, but who do vital work—be it in hospitality, agriculture or caring environments, and so on. First, we need to reform the Migration Advisory Committee so that we can give the Home Office better advice.

I conclude with two requests of the Minister. First, since the Migration Advisory Committee is an ad hoc committee and not established in statute, I see no reason why its current membership could not be extended to, say, 10 or 12 individuals. They are paid a day rate for attendance; it is not a salaried position. The Minister has an opportunity right now to extend the Migration Advisory Committee and broaden its skills base.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Immigration is very important to Scotland, and I notice the absence of my colleagues from the Scottish National party. It is a very important area not just for Scotland, but for the whole of the UK. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a very narrow field to have a team of economists dealing with such an important issue? We surely must have the voice of others—particularly business, the National Farmers Union in Scotland and in England and Wales, and, as he mentioned, trade unions. We need to have some mechanism whereby these people are

heard and the real needs of these industries, including hospitality, the NHS, fishing and farming, are truly heard. I doubt whether any of those economists understands the need throughout the UK, particularly in Scotland.

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes a vital point, which is the thrust of my argument: we cannot have a coherent policy by relying just on the opinions of economists. They will give a particular perspective—cut and pasted out of a textbook—but it will not actually be ground truth; it will not be rooted in the real economy. Up and down the country, real businesses are taking decisions not to invest, not to expand and not to create new jobs, because they cannot get people to fill the vacancies that they have in their business as it stands. The stance against so-called low-skilled immigration is actually damaging our economy already, and we need to recognise that.

I have a second request of the Minister. As I said, I note that she recently took the opportunity simply to reappoint, I think, two members of the Migration Advisory Committee at the end of last year. She has not taken the opportunity to refresh the team. I also understand that Professor Alan Manning has a three-year term, which, if my research is correct, ends in November. Can the Minister confirm that she will not reappoint Professor Alan Manning, that his term will end in November, and that he can then be replaced by someone who understands business?

4.17 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) on securing this debate. He put his view forward with customary forthrightness, and I would expect nothing less from him. I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to shine a bit of light on the work of the Migration Advisory Committee. It plays a very important role in the development of immigration policy and its work is often in the spotlight, but there is far less discussion of the committee's membership and composition.

We are lucky to have the MAC. Although there are no members of Her Majesty's Opposition here to hear me say this, the then Labour Government's establishment of the MAC back in 2007 was possibly one of the best things they did in the field of immigration. Creating the MAC has enabled successive Governments to have a source of informed, authoritative and impartial advice on some of the most contentious and thorny questions of immigration policy. The readiness with which successive Governments have accepted the MAC's advice is a testament to the quality of that advice and to the value and wisdom of having such a body. It is noteworthy that a number of other countries have now sought to emulate our approach by appointing their own expert bodies to advise them on immigration policy.

As my hon. Friend said, the MAC is made up of a chair and five members, whom he described as proficient economists. I might go somewhat further and describe them as eminent labour market economists and migration experts working in universities and think-tanks, who bring considerable skills, expertise and experience to their role. Indeed, I venture to suggest that they are some of the finest minds in their discipline in the United

Kingdom. The chair and the members are appointed through a process of fair and open competition, in accordance with Cabinet Office rules on public appointments. The MAC is supported by a secretariat made up mainly of Government economists drawn from across the civil service, but it remains independent of the Government.

It has been suggested—indeed, this was the main thrust of my hon. Friend's comments—that the MAC or a successor body would benefit from having a wider range of members, and that it should include not just academics but, for example, people working in industry. I want to make three points in response.

First, advertisements for MAC members do not stipulate that they have to be academics. As I have said, fair and open competition is used, and there is nothing to prevent a person working in any field from being appointed, provided he or she is the best candidate. My hon. Friend might be interested to know that the advertisement listed experience of working in or with business as one of the desirable criteria that candidates were asked to display.

Secondly, the MAC always seeks to proceed by consensus, and all its reports are unanimously agreed. There is a danger that that approach could be damaged if it were made up people who felt the need to represent and argue for the concerns of particular sectors or vested interests.

Thirdly, I am not sure where we would draw the line in any such approach. My hon. Friend suggested that the MAC, or a body that replaces it, should have business representatives among its members, but there are millions of businesses in the UK and many representative bodies that speak for their interests, including the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, Make UK and chambers of commerce up and down the country, to name but a few. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend is suggesting that they should all have a seat. If businesses are to be represented, what about the trade union movement, charities, voluntary organisations, local government and, of course, the NHS, which is a major employer of migrant labour? Pretty soon we might have a body so large and unwieldy that it would struggle to advise the Government sensibly.

The MAC has been very busy indeed over the past few years. My hon. Friend mentioned one of the two important reports it produced last year. The first was on international students, and the second on the impact of European economic area migration. I recognise that not everybody agrees with its conclusions, particularly in the EEA migration report—my hon. Friend is among those who do not share its views—but producing a report that commands universal support would be beyond any committee or organisation, however constituted, given how contentious immigration policy is. Moreover, I do not think anyone can dispute the thoroughness and rigour of the MAC's approach.

My hon. Friend invited me to tell him that I have travelled the country meeting businesses, trade unions and others. I certainly do that, but so has the MAC, and it will continue to do so. For its report on EEA migration, it took evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals, and visited every nation of the United Kingdom and every part of England. As its interim report states, it met more than 130 organisations and stakeholders representing every sector of the UK economy, and it received 417 written submissions. It weighed all that evidence very carefully before it came to its conclusions.

It is important that people do not let their disappointment with the recommendations translate into an attack on the effectiveness of the independent body that produced them.

My hon. Friend went as far as to say that the MAC's report was cut and pasted from a textbook. Far from it. It was the result of a great deal of evidence taking, research and work, which took many months. It is incredibly important to recognise that the MAC's recommendations are exactly that—recommendations. The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) suggested that I have the ability to hear and ignore. I also have the ability to hear and listen. This year, as part of our White Paper engagement, we are taking the opportunity to listen to a wide range of views from across the country and from a variety of sectors. Immigration policy is a matter for the Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth knows, not least because he was involved in this when he was a Minister at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Government's intentions for the UK's future skills-based immigration system were set out in a White Paper that was published last December, which we have described repeatedly as the start, not the end, of the conversation.

Time does not permit me to cover the White Paper in detail, beyond making it very clear that our engagement has started. So far, more than 60 meetings have been held to discuss the proposals contained within it. To date, I have met representatives of several significant sectors, and I will continue to do so over the course of the next few months. We will not make a final decision on the proposals in the White Paper until that process has been completed. In parallel with that, the MAC is reviewing the composition of the shortage occupation list, and is undertaking an extensive evidence-gathering process to help its deliberations.

We have heard views this afternoon from across the country, including Northern Ireland, Scotland and the south-west. Hon. Members mentioned a variety of sectors, including social care, farming, fishing and hospitality, but there are many others that we often hear less of. I am particularly struck that the road haulage and distribution, veterinary science and retail sectors rely significantly on migrant labour. When we consider the views that are fed into the MAC, it is important that we do not cherry-pick which parts of industry and which sectors we listen to. We must listen to them all, and to every part of the country.

**George Eustice:** I am very grateful to the Minister for setting out her approach. Does she agree with a point that a number of hon. Members made, which is that a coherent approach to setting numbers for migrants coming here would be to look at a range of different sectors so we can make the best judgment about the number of migrants we want to come into the country for the time being—albeit perhaps on a short-term work permit? The MAC has done something very different. It has set out a plan to socially engineer a change to our economy. Its plan is to force the closure of certain industries by denying them access to the labour they need. That is what is wrong.

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend will be aware, from the White Paper and the Government's proposals, that although we have listened to the MAC, we have not

[Caroline Nokes]

relied exclusively on its opinions. The MAC did not include any suggestion of a temporary workers route for skills that do not fall within the categories that it has designated—I hate to use the term “lower skilled”, and if I have a few minutes at the end, I will try to expand on why. We are very conscious that there are industries and sectors that need people with different skills. The temporary workers route, which we included in the White Paper as a point for engagement and discussion, was not included in the MAC’s report. I am very conscious that, although we have to listen to the views of expert economists, we have to come up with a coherent policy that will work for every sector of industry, every part of the economy and the whole of the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend makes a big pitch for tier 3, and we can have a long conversation about “lower skilled”. He and I are conscious that there are many occupations that do not fall neatly into the categories of “high skilled” or “medium skilled”. When we talk about lower skill levels, I always try to find different language. There are many people working in health and social care or in farming and fishing who have skills that do not fall neatly within academic qualifications but are absolutely essential if those business are to be able to find staff, and to remain vibrant and profitable. That is part of the jigsaw puzzle that we are putting together over the course of the year.

The White Paper makes it clear—my hon. Friend may disagree with this—that we envisage an expanded role for the MAC in the future. As well as responding to specific commissions from the Government as it does now, it will have a wider role to produce an annual report on all aspects of Government immigration policy. It will have the ability to consider and make proactive recommendations on any aspect of that policy. The White Paper is clear that we want to consider the MAC’s composition, status and remit, potentially including expanding the chair’s post. I have certainly heard my hon. Friend’s pitch about appointments to posts in the MAC. I emphasise again that that is always done through fair and open competition. We want the best people—people with experience and expertise—and it is crucial that we build on our existing model, rather than create something new from scratch.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for enabling us to debate these important matters. He, like other hon. Members, has strong views about this. I remain convinced that the MAC model has served the UK and successive Governments well, and that we should enhance and strengthen it so that, in an area as important as immigration policy, the Governments can continue to make policy on the basis of the best possible independent and impartial evidence-based advice.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Defence Industry: Scotland

4.30 pm

**Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the diversification of the defence industry in Scotland.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Hollobone. I am glad that this debate was selected because it is an opportunity to raise the important and seldom discussed topic of the defence industry in Scotland.

We are rightly proud of our history of shipbuilding. I represent a constituency just south of the River Clyde, and I do not need to tell anyone in this chamber that the legacy of shipbuilding and the remaining cranes dotted along the Clyde are a great symbol of national identity and pride, not just for those who live near to or in Glasgow, but across Scotland. That pride is not limited to those of us north of the border, either. The industry holds significance for the entire UK. Shipbuilding rightly continues to be an important part of the defence industry in Scotland, but as the demand and requirements of national defence change and future threats emerge, we must look at areas of future growth for Scottish industry, to ensure that, alongside shipbuilding, Scotland has a diverse pool of defence industries that will be sustainable in future.

In 1981, 68% of the workers in defence-related industries worked in shipbuilding, while 26% worked in the aerospace industry and about 6% worked in the armaments industry. In 2017, the picture was similar: shipbuilding accounted for about the same proportion of 68%, while the aerospace industry in Scotland had gained a slightly greater share of 28% and the armaments industry had about 4% of the workforce. Of the £1.6 billion that the Ministry of Defence spent with industry in 2016-17, 57% was spent on shipbuilding and repair, with the nearest spending block making up just 11.8%, which was spent on computer services.

The defence sector in Scotland is significantly reliant on shipbuilding, and although shipbuilding is a major benefit to our economy, high reliance on a single sector exposes the wider industry to risk from changes in the market and the evolving nature of the threats that we face, and to the risk of mismanagement by the UK Government.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. We need a strong domestic defence industry, as well as the sovereign capability to build defence equipment in Scotland and across the UK, to ensure that we are not overly reliant on orders from overseas. Does he agree that, unfortunately, this Government have chosen to neglect our home-grown industries in favour of buying off-the-shelf from abroad?

**Ged Killen:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and later in my speech I will make the point that making short-term decisions without looking at the whole picture is inherently flawed.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that one of the UK Government’s strangest decisions is to tender internationally for fleet support ships? If it

were decided that they should be built in the UK, that could benefit shipbuilding not just in Scotland, but across the UK.

**Ged Killen:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I will touch on that point later in my remarks.

Although we must continue to support shipbuilding, the UK and Scottish Governments must focus on diversifying and deepening the defence industry in Scotland to ensure that there will always be a base for the high-skill and high-value roles associated with the industry—that is eminently achievable. Scotland is well placed to be a home for a variety of new industries. With strong universities and a history of manufacturing and design excellence, we are ideally placed to take advantage of the large demands of the UK's defence. This debate gives Members the opportunity to discuss future high-growth areas and draw attention to the advantages of increasing diversity in the defence industry. For my part, I will touch on two high-growth areas: space and land vehicles.

Glasgow in particular has become a pioneering centre for the deployment of microsatellites, producing more satellites than any other city outside the United States. As future defence concerns rely increasingly on the gathering and analysis of information, significant space assets will be vital to the day-to-day operations of the armed forces in both military and non-military operations.

The space sector has huge potential for future growth. Year-on-year growth in the sector has been five times greater than in the wider economy since 1999, and the sector has tripled in value since 2000. Each new job in the space sector adds £140,000 of added value per employee, and the overall sector receives 36% of turnover from exports.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The high-quality satellites that are built in Glasgow are superb, and will be launched from my part of the world. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Britain has a great business opportunity to build a lot of satellites for allied countries for their own defence, and that if we get going now, we can steal on a march on the world?

**Ged Killen:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. As a satellite hub, companies in Glasgow have produced huge volumes of satellites. Two companies, Alba Orbital and Spire Global, have between them put around 100 satellites in orbit, and Spire Global makes one new satellite per week. The recent go-ahead for the spaceport in Sutherland, as well as Glasgow's growing microsatellite industry, perfectly places Scotland to take advantage of new investment and infrastructure.

Investment from the MOD will be a major factor in the successful development of space and satellite technologies. Any investment will naturally lead to a build-up of skills and will spill over into the civilian sector. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister indicated the role that the upcoming strategic defence and security review will have in supporting the development and expansion of the space industry in Scotland, and what representations he will make to ensure that that vital high-growth sector is not overlooked. The industry is highly competitive and, as the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) said, it is vital that the UK takes a lead.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for the speech that he is making, which is very helpful. The British space industry has not only been successful here, but has played a huge part in the European project Galileo. Does he share my regret that the European Commission, in a fit of pique, has decided to kick us out of the project, to which we have made not only a financial contribution, but an enormous industrial contribution? Europe should really be holding that up as an example of competing in the world.

**Ged Killen:** My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that we have different views on Britain's membership of the European Union. I largely consider that we are kicking ourselves out of the EU and should accept the consequences of that, although I regret the impact that it will have on projects such as Galileo.

Further to the space sector, the construction of advanced land vehicles offers an excellent opportunity for the expansion of the defence industry in Scotland. Glasgow now hosts an armoured vehicle centre of excellence, which was set up by defence company Thales. The centre aims to provide the MOD with an excellent new resource for the development of armoured vehicles.

Thales is currently bidding for the MOD's multi role vehicle-protected programme which, if successful, would see 50 highly skilled engineering design and manufacturing jobs brought to the Glasgow site, and the possibility of 30 additional jobs created over the programme's lifetime. Thales has said that if it is selected for the MRV-P and as the UK design authority and integrator for the Boxer and its variants, 100 new jobs could be created directly, while 180 jobs could be created through supply chains and around 200 further jobs could be supported indirectly.

Such programmes are vital for expanding the diversity of the defence industry in Scotland and introducing new skills, as well as deepening the existing skills base. A great example is my constituent Stewart Macpherson, an employee at Thales Glasgow who has been chosen as one of the top 30 electronics engineers under 30 in the UK.

Encouraging and supporting new skills and professionals is a great benefit of defence investment, so I should be grateful for an update from the Minister on the progress towards reaching a decision on the MRV-P programme. I appreciate, however, that he may only be able to reveal certain information as some might be commercially sensitive.

**Chris Stephens:** I again thank the hon. Gentleman for mentioning Thales, which is based in my constituency. Does he agree that if Thales is successful in obtaining the contract, the economic benefits for the whole Glasgow area—including for my constituents and his—would be considerable?

**Ged Killen:** I absolutely agree. Recently, when I visited the site, I was pleased to see how many of my constituents are employed there.

I am disappointed about the previous actions of both the UK Government and, to a certain extent, the Scottish Government. The recent failure by the UK Government to support the construction of the fleet solid support vessels, as mentioned in this debate and many other times in this place, shows completely misplaced priorities. Ill thought-out changes to Government tendering rules

[Ged Killen]

redefined the vessels, meaning that the ships will not fall under article 346 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. That opens UK shipyards to subsidised international competition and puts jobs and the potential investment in shipyards such as Rosyth at risk.

What is more, that situation was wholly avoidable, with the decision being made completely unilaterally, yet possibly writing off highly skilled, highly paid jobs that could return £2.3 billion in revenue to the Treasury while providing sustainable employment and an increasing skills base. I therefore urge the Government to think again about that, and to follow the Labour party's lead by advocating that such ships are built in the UK. The case of the fleet solid support ships signals a Government who are far more interested in achieving in-year cost reductions than in looking at the whole picture.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech about the British defence industry. Does he agree that we built two world-class aircraft carriers in Rosyth, employing a lot of my constituents and I am sure some of his, and that the Government should offer some of our expertise and the build facility to our allies around the world who have expressed interest in aircraft carrier technology, so that we can continue to build our expertise and keep the engineering specialities developed in Rosyth and in Scotland?

**Ged Killen:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point, which was well made. I am sure that the Minister will respond in his remarks.

**John Spellar:** Is it not the case that the solid support ships would be ideal for the Rosyth site to maintain its workforce until aircraft carrier refits are necessary? Does that not show that the Government have not learned the lesson of the gap in work at Barrow, which then required a reconstruction of the workforce at huge cost? Surely the Government are saving pennies now but costing pounds later.

**Ged Killen:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. To be frank, I find it amazing that the red, white and blue Conservative party of Great Britain does not see the merit of building such ships in Britain, creating so much benefit for years to come.

In the context of this debate, we must also look at the Scottish Government's role. Recently, the First Minister set out her plans for a new independence referendum. We must therefore consider the impact of that policy on long-term investment. Scotland's shipyards rely on the pipeline of complex warships to be constructed for the Ministry of Defence—at least one remaining aircraft carrier, five offshore patrol vehicles and eight frigates—but if Scotland were to become independent before the next Holyrood election, as the SNP plans, the MOD has indicated that Scotland could be excluded from producing UK warships under article 346, or a similar rule if the UK has left the EU. Without those contracts, the shipyards would need to find alternative sources of demand in order to remain open, and I hope that the SNP will elaborate on that in any contribution today.

The MOD spends about £1.6 billion a year directly on Scottish industry, with £900 million spent directly on shipbuilding. The Growth Commission report stated that the entire defence budget for an independent Scotland would be £3 billion, plus £450 million to be used over five years to set up the apparatus of an entire independent state, of which a defence force is just one part. From that combined pool, therefore, the SNP proposes to find at least £900 million a year just to keep the shipyards open, while also setting up a new defence force, equipping it, and ensuring that its IT and support systems work properly. That is before we get on to the implications of importing the necessary components required for advanced manufacturing under a new currency.

That is £450 million to set up a new state in five years, including a defence force, but in less than five years it has cost the Scottish Government £200 million to set up a Scottish social security system and £178 million to set up an IT system to allocate payments to farmers. When we consider the complexity required to set up a new modern military force with all the support and complex IT architecture necessary, we realise that the figures do not add up. Scotland is being let down by both its Governments.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): On top of that are the billions that it would cost to convert our currency from pounds to something else. It is just a fairy tale, is it not?

**Ged Killen:** There are so many different layers to this. Going into the day-to-day costs in pounds sterling is bad enough, but adding the uncertainty of trying to set up a whole new currency from scratch takes us into the realm of fantasy.

We have a good opportunity, through smart industrial policy, to build a healthy, thriving and contributory defence industry in Scotland. The Labour party has put smart industrial policy at the heart of our policy proposals for the next election, whenever it comes. However, it is disappointing that both the UK and Scottish Governments cannot do the same.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** The debate can last until 5.30 pm. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokesmen no later than 5.7 pm. The guideline limits are five minutes for the SNP, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister. If the Minister closes no later than 5.27 pm, that would allow the mover of the motion three minutes to sum up the debate. Until 5.7 pm, however, we have time for Back-Bench contributions, the first of which will be from Stephen Kerr. One other Member was standing, so I hope that we can split the time equally.

4.47 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen). He spoke very well, with passion and conviction, and thoughtfully. I was delighted with the tone that he set for the debate.

I wish to take us in a slightly different direction with public policy in the defence industry and on diversification, because I wish to refer specifically to the Scottish

Trades Union Congress campaign to set up—or to encourage the SNP Scottish Government to set up—a defence diversification agency. That approach to defence diversification, rather than the one in the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful speech, is simplistic and frankly regrettable. Not only is the point of view that the Government are best placed to tell business how to operate mistaken and misguided, but the ideologically blinkered way in which the left approaches this vital area of public policy is lacking.

I would not often choose to quote from the *Morning Star*—frankly, I have not often even perused a copy of it—[*Interruption.*] I know that Opposition Members are disappointed to hear that I am not a regular subscriber. On 15 May, it ran a story on the vote at the STUC annual congress calling on the SNP Government

“to establish a Defence Diversification Agency to promote a ‘fair and sustainable shift’ away from nuclear weapons.”

Continuing to quote the *Morning Star*—the first and perhaps only occasion on which I will do so—the report went on:

“But professionals’ union Prospect and general union GMB opposed the motion, saying it sent the wrong message to defence workers.

GMB Scotland delegate John Dolan, a Scotstoun shipyard convener, said: “This motion is not in the real world of work.

“These people have worked in these industries for years, keeping you, your children and your grandchildren safe.

“How many jobs have been created by defence diversification?

“This is a con. Where is the Saudi Arabia of renewables we were promised 10 years ago by Alex Salmond and the SNP government?””

I do not know John Dolan—perhaps other Members present do—but I want to repeat a line of his, because it is important:

“These people have worked in these industries for years, keeping you, your children and your grandchildren safe.”

I agree with the statement made by the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West in his opening speech that we should be proud of the defence sector in Scotland. As he mentioned, UK defence spends £1.6 billion with Scottish industry each year, supporting at least 10,000 high-value jobs in the Scottish economy.

**Chris Stephens:** The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that if he buys the *Morning Star* today, he will find a column in the name of my good self on blacklisting, which I recommend to him. I suggest that if he is, as he claims, so concerned for the views of shipyard workers on the Clyde and what they are saying at the Scottish Trades Union Congress, he listen to them and support their argument that the fleet's solid support ships should be built in the UK and not be put out to international competition.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am not at all surprised that the hon. Gentleman writes a column in the *Morning Star*. I would have been disappointed if he had said anything other than that. Of course I wish that all the defence contract work available should remain in the UK, support high-value UK jobs and advance our technical expertise in shipbuilding. I have no doubt that the Minister will address that issue when he responds.

I pay tribute to the people who work for businesses that have invested in Scotland such as Babcock, BAE Systems, Leonardo, Thales, Raytheon, Rolls-Royce and others. All those major contractors and others are

operating in Scotland. I have heard Members of this House speak of those businesses in disparaging terms. I want to make it clear that if any Member of this House does not want those businesses and their workers in their constituency, I will be absolutely delighted to have them come to Stirling. Stirling has a long association with our armed forces, and a proud connection with our servicemen and women and those who support them in the supply chain that those industries represent. That connection is symbolised by Stirling castle.

I do not know John Dolan but he captured some of the pride of the people who work in those industries. I am proud of that workforce, such as those at Her Majesty's Naval Base Clyde at Faslane, many of whom are my constituents. If I could, I would say to each of them, in the words of Mr Dolan, “Thank you for keeping me, my children and my grandchildren safe. Thank you for defending our country and our freedoms. Scotland is proud of you.” In my constituency, defence contracts support many jobs, especially at FES, which is a principal electrical contractor and works on the new Navy ships that are being built on the Clyde. Emerson also has significant defence contracts. FES has made a huge investment in its apprenticeship programmes and runs its own academy. Hundreds of skilled electricians have benefited from FES's commitment to them and the Ministry of Defence's commitment to Scotland.

Some on the left approach this issue from a pacifist viewpoint built on deeply held beliefs. I respect that. Others on the left, such as the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, are more pragmatic and see the high-value jobs that are done as a vital strategic part of the Scottish economy. The position of the SNP is far more craven. It knows that the defence sector would be destroyed in the event of independence, as the hon. Gentleman outlined. SNP Members use defence diversification as a way of distracting people, because the truth is that they do not care much about jobs or about defence; they just care about independence, as was seen in their conference in Edinburgh at the weekend. According to that separatist vision, Scotland's workers, savers and pensioners would give up the pound for a valueless currency yet to be named, and no frigates would be built on the Clyde if they ever got their way.

**Chris Stephens:** I find it extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman accuses me and others in the SNP of not caring about defence jobs, given that I meet the shop stewards in the Clyde shipyards on a regular basis and they know my views. Would he care to withdraw or clarify what he suggests? He was pointing at me when he made those outrageous remarks.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am not sure I was specifically pointing at the hon. Gentleman. Let me be absolutely clear: those who espouse separatism in Scotland know that the consequences would be the loss of those jobs and the technology, know-how and added value that goes with them. They know only too well that Scotland would not have a Royal Navy.

**Luke Graham:** My hon. Friend is making a valid point. It would not just be the hard power of the military's physical ships and tanks that would be taken away; it would also be MI5, MI6 and the myriad security services that are embedded and supported by the United Kingdom. I wish the SNP could see that valid point, too.

**Stephen Kerr:** The SNP cynically swallows the idea of being in NATO—a nuclear defensive alliance—because it knows that Scotland will never wear pacifism. It wants Faslane and the nuclear deterrent gone.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just a question of defending the United Kingdom's territorial waters and our contribution to NATO, but goes much further afield? We forget that the maintenance of a blue-water Navy is vital to trade. One only has to look at the Red sea. I used to ship coffee from the Port of Tanga through the Suez canal to Europe and around the world. Piracy around the Red sea was rife; ships were hijacked until the European Union force and others, led until recently by the United Kingdom, were there with ships built in Scotland.

**Stephen Kerr:** I would sign up to beating swords in ploughshares every day of the week, but the lesson of history is that we defend the peace by being strong. I am proud of the United Kingdom's 2% defence spending commitment. We have obligations in the alliance, which we meet.

I recently had the privilege of attending the naming ceremony of HMS Taymar, the latest second-generation River-class ship, on the Clyde. It is a magnificent ship built in the best traditions of Scottish shipbuilding for the Royal Navy, by Scottish engineers, fitters, designers, programmers—a host of highly skilled professionals. The workforce spoke with such pride about their work, and they are fully justified in that pride, because they are making a massive contribution to the security of our country and our servicemen and women who sail in those ships. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) outlined some of the other things that they do.

Scotland's contribution to the defence sector and our Scottish servicemen and women are a matter of national pride for all of us. The men and women who serve alongside our service personnel are to be saluted. I will long remember the visit I made in my constituency to people who work for Babcock—mechanics and engineers who had gone to Afghanistan and Iraq to be there with our service people to service their armoured vehicles and to keep them on the road. They must not have their sacrifice traduced by an ideologically driven attack on a proud and vital industry.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** I will call the Front-Bench speakers at seven minutes past five, and Martin Docherty-Hughes may speak until then.

4.57 pm

**Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** It is good to serve with you in the chair, Mr Hollobone. It is always good to speak in this place about the valuable contribution made to Scotland and across the UK by the people who work in the defence industry. Their skills and diligence make their contribution to our economy invaluable—let us not forget that Scotland has record-low unemployment—and that is felt well beyond the sector in which they work. I am glad there is agreement across the Chamber on that point. I am thankful to the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) for giving us the opportunity to demonstrate that point of agreement.

From the perspective of the Scottish National party, as we consider the starting point for the Scottish defence industry to move towards an economically and otherwise sustainable future after Scotland's independence, there is much cause for optimism. I am no pacifist; my brother served in Iraq and in Afghanistan twice, and my nephew is a Royal Engineer. Our Benches are not filled with pacifists, although I cast no aspersions on the voting intentions of those who are.

In my role on the Select Committee on Defence, I have been lucky to visit many defence manufacturing sites in Scotland. I am glad to say that they are all historically rooted in their local communities, but nonetheless are well integrated into the wider European and global economies, with export profiles to match. For me, an independent Scotland operating in the strong framework of the European family of nations, with the broad shoulders of a global, capable trading bloc that already has trade agreements and over half a billion people, should be well placed to build on that position.

The most important aspect of ensuring that we have a sustainable and diverse Scottish defence industry—this is where we might find some agreement—will be the establishment of multi-year defence agreements, or MYDAs. I have yet to hear a single other member of the Defence Committee mention those at that Committee. Used commonly by our allies, MYDAs create a framework agreement among political parties for a common approach to defence procurement that gives security to industry and removes complex and long-term decisions from capricious politicians wedded to short-termism.

With MYDAs of five years or longer, an independent Scotland, which of course is my preference, or indeed the UK, would no longer have to face Governments halving the size of the Type 45 destroyer programme—I will leave it to others to find out which Government did that—or chopping up maritime patrol capability. That capability was discussed at the Defence Committee this morning; we are having to try to get an even older programme from the United States to replace it. Defence Secretaries who seek to sign blank cheques for programmes in the hope of being catapulted into No. 10 would no longer be able to saddle the procurement budget with £15 billion black holes.

The consensus about the excellence and skills of our defence industry employees should be reflected in an ability to work together to ensure their long-term future. Quite simply, the MOD has been used for far too long as a political football. We already know that a steady and reliable pipeline of orders can form the basis of a diversified and sustainable industry.

Earlier this year, I was lucky enough to join my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) on a visit to Thales electronics in his constituency. I was fascinated to see the outstanding tradition of periscope manufacturing being transformed to produce a new generation of optical sensors for the Royal Navy and other customers, including the navy of Japan. Technology designed and developed in Glasgow, with a broad economic reach across the whole of central and western Scotland and with the expertise of a lot of people from West Dunbartonshire, whose shipbuilding heritage is profound—of course, we do not have any shipyards left, but we will leave that for another debate—is

used on a whole range of optical sensors for use across the military and civilian fields, not only in the UK but by our allies.

Similarly, SNP Members were delighted by the welcome news that Raytheon, recognising the strength of the skill base in central Scotland, has decided to invest in a new facility in Livingston, primarily to design and manufacture power systems for military and defence radars. Building on a history of excellence in manufacturing in the military domain to provide civilian applications is precisely what this debate is about, as I am sure the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West intended.

Those are examples of multinational companies that have chosen to locate in Scotland because of the skills, quality and work ethic of those who come through our schools and universities. Very few other small states have such a plethora of world-class higher education departments, and we can only hope that the end point of the Brexit process does not dislocate them from common European funding mechanisms. That points to the fact that the common assumption that the strength of Scotland's defence industry is mainly in the maritime sector may change in the future. These are encouraging developments, and I only hope that the potential development of cyber and electromagnetic capabilities in Scotland leads to much growth and diversification. Again, that was discussed at the Defence Committee this morning.

Let me draw my remarks to a close by reiterating my agreement with most of what was said by other Members, who spoke about the abilities of those who work in the defence sector in Scotland. We are grateful for the contribution they have made and will continue to make to the health of our economy and to our neighbours and allies. Let me reassure them that, as least from my perspective, independence continues to be the best way forward for a sustainable future away from the historical underinvestment by successive UK Governments in defence in Scotland. Finally, we hear much about the 2% of GDP that the UK spends on defence, but Scotland does not get its fair share of that. Perhaps the Minister can tell us why not.

5.4 pm

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) for bringing this important and timely debate to Westminster Hall. We on the Scottish National party Benches really appreciate his timing; only last weekend, our party decided to develop a policy of setting in stone a road map for taking nuclear weapons out of Scotland forever.

Critical to developing that road map is establishing how we can have conventional forces in places such as Faslane, Glen Douglas and Coulport. Importantly, we need to use the skills and talents of engineers, scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs to diversify into conventional deterrents, and to put those people's undoubted abilities to more peaceable uses that help our economy.

Despite promises, troop numbers in Scotland are down and naval shipbuilding contracts have gone unannounced, with consequent job losses in the likes of Rosyth in my constituency and on the Clyde. We have long made the case that the fleet auxiliary ships should be built in Scotland, and that the north Atlantic and the

High North should be the bread-and-butter areas of activity for our Navy and Air Force, yet not a single ship of any significant size is based north of the English channel, and the people of Scotland feel exposed to potential threats from the north and the east. In the air, following the demise of Nimrod, we beg and borrow any maritime aircraft we can find from the USA, Canada and Norway until the new P-8s come into service in 2021.

We would like more support for our defence industries, not just to meet the defence needs of today but to help them create the new technologies that will be at the cutting edge of our future defence posture. If we put more money and time into the technology, jobs and skills we have, perhaps we will find better solutions that we can apply as a society.

I was really taken by some of the ideas I picked up on a NATO visit to Nova Scotia earlier this year. The Canadian Space Agency is a leader in technology, and its use of satellites and different information-gathering devices would sit exceptionally well with the scientific reputation of Scotland's space industry. Canada organised a huge competition to identify the country's first astronaut, which involved kids in schools, with the aim of boosting their science, technology, engineering and maths activity, and allowing more children to become involved in science and technology. All the provinces involved got behind their local candidate to be the first Canadian astronaut, and that really upped the ante with respect to people's interest in science and technology. Canada even put a picture of its first astronaut on its \$20 bill; every time someone spends one, they are reminded that their country is associated with science and innovation. It is quite amazing what you can do when you have your own currency.

I thought I was going to get an intervention there. Here in the UK, we are going to lose out on £1.2 billion of investment through the Galileo programme as we drop out of the EU. That cannot be good news for anyone. That is the kind of investment we need to take us forward, to enable us to use the skillsets of our graduates and to support our defence industries to diversify into more peaceable activity.

The other area I would like to talk about is cyber-security. There was recently a meeting of cyber-experts at Edinburgh Napier University. Small nations, such as Estonia, have shown the way forward, as they have picked up prizes and accolades for the expertise and innovation they have shown in finding solutions to security problems. Again, leaving the EU puts us in quite a difficult—and weaker—position. Money must be found to retain that research and development to encourage new cyber-products and services to come to market.

I have come hot foot from a meeting in Committee Room 6 at which we were talking about the costs associated with nuclear submarines. I have no doubt that we could use the range of skills and talents involved in building submarines, maintaining the warheads, and so on, to provide us with a better chance of developing economic activity rather than spending it on a weapons system that will never be used.

**Stephen Kerr:** The reality is that the nuclear deterrent is used every single moment of every single day. It is a deterrent—that is how it works, and it is working really well because we have had peace for a very long time.

**Douglas Chapman:** That is the line pointed out every time we have this discussion, but it really is time for an adult conversation. The figures in the “Trouble Ahead” report show that £3.5 billion is spent every year on the nuclear deterrent. There are conventional deterrents that we can use, and we must also look at how else we could utilise that money if we were not spending it on nuclear weapons.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, as was said at the Defence Committee this morning, if we had that £3.5 billion to spend on hybrid warfare—a war that exists—that would be a better deterrent than nuclear weapons, which have no long-term impact?

**Douglas Chapman:** My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. There are huge pressures on the defence budget overall, but the Minister knows that if he had another £3.5 billion to spend every year on conventional weapons and the approach and posture suggested by my hon. Friend, that would put a big smile on his face. Perhaps then we could get some RAF contracts back into Scotland.

5.12 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this debate on such an important topic to Scotland. He made a number of important points and spoke with great passion about the opportunity for companies such as Thales with its multi-role vehicle programme. I recently visited Thales, which, as the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) mentioned, is located in his constituency. There is the potential to create 180 new jobs in Glasgow. Of course, opportunity is centred not just on that site, because of the importance of the supply chain. For example, Allied Vehicles, which is one of the largest automotive companies in Scotland and is located in my constituency, stands to benefit from participation in that programme if we drive forward the opportunity for automotive development in the defence sector in Scotland. That is just one of the many examples of how we can grow the supply chain in Scotland.

In preparing for the debate, I could not help looking back at the previous few years both in my life and career and in politics. Having worked at BAE Systems on the Clyde and at Scottish Enterprise, where I was part of the team that developed the aerospace, defence, marine and shipbuilding strategy with the industry leadership group, I know the role that a thriving defence sector can play when it is given not only resources but political backing. The importance of that was spelled out by the work of the ADMS strategy, which identified that 38,408 people are employed across 825 companies in the sector, and that there are £5.5 billion of sales a year, generating £1.7 billion in gross value added, from which there is an annual tax revenue of £540 million to the Scottish economy. That is a huge benefit to the Scottish economy. Sadly, the resources and political backing are not fully met by the Government. Political ideology seems to have blighted the clear economic opportunities provided by the defence sector.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I apologise for being late. Does my hon. Friend agree that the process for giving out defence contracts is fundamentally flawed?

**Mr Sweeney:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. As we are discussing the defence industry in Scotland, we must express the Opposition’s frustration that no one from the Scotland Office is present to answer for the Government. That crystallises the Opposition’s belief that the Secretary of State for Scotland is not providing the political backing that Scotland needs. I cast no aspersions on the resilient efforts of the Minister, with whom I often enjoy batting back and forth across the Dispatch Box, but it is a pity that the Secretary of State for Scotland could not be here. I will discuss that later in my contribution.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West outlined, the defence sector in Scotland takes many shapes and forms, from shipbuilding to the aerospace industry, with exceptional talents. Unfortunately, they are not being enabled to flourish as they should. There is a clear absence of an industrial strategy, and given the engineering expertise that can be found across the whole defence sector, it should be at the heart of any industrial strategy. The Government do not seem to appreciate that, and they will undermine the integrity of the defence sector in the near future if they do not rapidly get to grips with it.

If we take the obvious example of shipbuilding, which is easy for me as I worked in the industry, we see that the Government’s approach to the fleet solid support ships contract is nothing short of absurd. The decision not to factor the socioeconomic value of defence contracts into the procurement process is economically illiterate and flies in the face of common sense. The Minister and I have batted this back and forth, as I mentioned, and I am sure that in a few minutes he will tell me that it is all about value for money for the taxpayer. However, that argument falls apart because the contract’s socioeconomic value is not factored in at the procurement stage. The reported cost of the contract is £1 billion, but as studies such as those by the GMB union estimate, keeping the contract in the UK would secure up to 6,500 high-paid, high-skilled jobs, including almost 2,000 shipbuilding jobs that pay about 45% more than the average UK salary. Just think of the difference those jobs could make to the UK economy and to communities across Scotland.

The GMB has estimated that the contract would return about £285 million to the Exchequer in the form of taxes, national insurance contributions, lower social security payments and so on. If we built FSS ships in the UK, it would contribute to the nation’s prosperity. In fact, there would be a direct tax and national insurance return to the Treasury of up to £415 million—20% of the contract cost, which represents a bargain.

Data from other countries indicates that naval shipbuilding has a multiplier effect of 1.35, with £1.35 generated in long-term economic benefits for every £1 spent. Therefore, the UK benefit from a programme cost of £1 billion would be £1.35 billion. Having those ships built overseas would simply hand the benefit to someone else—that is probably why they are so eager to bid. Perhaps we should take a leaf out of their book and, at the Government’s discretion, ensure that those ships are built in the United Kingdom without competition—or, at the very least, ensure that the UK consortium wins the contract. That would secure jobs for the future.

At Rosyth, there is a gap between the completion of HMS Prince of Wales later this year and the expected refit of HMS Queen Elizabeth in 2030. The contract for

the fleet solid support ships could ensure that the shipyard runs at smoother capacity during that timeframe. However, as I have said, the Government's economic illiteracy could well prevent that from happening, leading to much greater inefficiency and costs down the line. I am sure the people of Fife will not let them get away with that. The Government are keen to celebrate the continuous at-sea deterrent, but I would much rather see continuous in-shipyard building across the country. We would far rather celebrate that.

That brings me to the fact that there is clearly no wider industrial strategy not only for the defence sector but for manufacturing as a whole. To use Fife as an example, the Government are refusing to keep the FSS contract in the UK. At the same time, not even 10 miles away, the BiFab yards in Burntisland are sitting there idle because of a lack of contracts. That is another example of the Government's complete and utter short-sightedness.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman is over his time and the Minister must respond to the debate, so he needs to bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Sweeney:** I shall steer it into port forthwith, Mr Hollobone.

The Government have spent the past few months saying how wonderful it is that this offshore wind deal has been signed, but we are not seeing the benefits spin off. Other countries are clearly benefiting from that, through state aid deals. Many references have been made to opportunities in the space sector, but yet again the Government have not convinced us about what they are doing.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West again for securing the debate. I have shown what a Labour Government would do with a coherent strategy. I look forward to hearing the Minister address the key points raised, including the need for a more robust defence industrial strategy to maximise the economic opportunities.

5.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing the debate and for the tone of it. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) is right that it has been a considered debate about how we might diversify the defence industry in Scotland.

Before I address some of the specific points that have been raised, I want to emphasise the importance of the UK's defence industry, both in delivering world-class military capabilities to our armed forces and in contributing to the UK economy. Last year's report into the contribution of defence to UK prosperity by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) showed that defence benefits every single part of the United Kingdom. It is a sector with an annual turnover of £22 billion supporting some 115,000 jobs. Scotland shares in that national success by benefiting directly from every pound spent on our defence, which is in itself the biggest defence budget in Europe. The report highlighted the range and diversity of the defence industry across the whole of the UK, including in Scotland, and the UK Government's support for the defence industry in Scotland.

Last year, defence spend with industry in Scotland amounted to £1.65 billion, supporting some 10,000 jobs and equivalent to £300 per capita, which is above the UK average. The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said that Scotland wants its fair share, but as a Yorkshire MP I would say that £300 per head in Scotland compares very favourably with the £60 per head that we get in Yorkshire and the Humber. I think it is we who want our fair share.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** There is a difference between a nation and a region, clearly.

**Stuart Andrew:** There are many Yorkshire people who would argue very differently.

We invest in shipbuilding in Scotland to maintain world-class capabilities for our Royal Navy, recognising the incredible expertise of the Scottish shipbuilding sector. With a history that dates back more than 150 years, it has long been the envy of the world and today remains a global leader. As we have heard, in the past few years Scotland has played a major part in the building, assembly and successful delivery of HMS Queen Elizabeth, the most powerful surface vessel in British history. The MOD has also placed a £3.7 billion contract to build the first three state-of-the-art Type 26 global combat ships on the Clyde, where all eight will eventually be built. The first of these City-class frigates has been named HMS Glasgow and the last will be HMS Edinburgh. Coupled with our order for five offshore patrol vessels, this work will sustain some 4,000 jobs in Scottish shipyards and throughout the supply chain until the 2030s. No other industry in the UK can boast such a pipeline of future work.

Many other businesses are investing in Scotland, and I have heard many people congratulate and praise them. They include Babcock, BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Leonardo, Thales, Raytheon and QinetiQ. Denchi Power is an innovative smaller company, based in the far northern coastal town of Thurso in Caithness, which from its factory overlooking the beautiful islands of Orkney provides much of the essential advanced battery and charging technology and subsystems for the UK's combat radio systems. These companies demonstrate the diversity of size and geography of the Scottish defence supply chain.

In the air, Leonardo manufactures state-of-the-art radar systems in Edinburgh. I had the great privilege of seeing some of the fantastic work it is doing there, and it is world beating. We want to see more of that as part of the combat air strategy. At RAF Lossiemouth, work has commenced on a new £132 million strategic facility co-funded by the MOD and Boeing. Up to 200 local jobs will be created at the peak of construction and we expect over 400 new jobs in the operation, once the P-8A fleet is based there permanently.

On land, companies across Scotland have provided and continue to logistically support high-technology subsystems on the Army's critical warfighting platforms. These include Challenger 2 main battle tanks, Warrior infantry fighting vehicles, Foxhound patrol vehicles and the new AJAX reconnaissance fleet. The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) asked for an update, and I can tell him that there is an ongoing competition on package 2 between the two contenders, and we are waiting for their revised bids, which we

[Stuart Andrew]

expect to have soon. The winner will be announced later this year. As it is a live competition, there is not much more I can say at this stage, but it is ongoing.

It is right that there is more that we can do, and I am absolutely determined that we do it. Scotland also benefits from the defence innovation initiative. The Defence and Security Accelerator finds and funds exploitable innovation to support UK defence and security quickly and effectively. It brings together the private sector, academia and Government organisations to find innovative solutions to some of the challenging problems facing defence. In the last year, DASA has launched 14 new themed competitions and run five cycles to open call. It has received nearly 800 proposals from over 480 organisations; some 228 proposals have been funded, of which over half are from small and medium-sized enterprises, with over £36 million of funding allocated. DASA's competition events and outreach work are supported by a team of regionally focused innovation partners. This year DASA has been building relationships in Scotland and liaising with Scottish Enterprise, Textiles Scotland and the Universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde and St Andrews, to name but a few.

We also heard about space; Scotland has a great opportunity in that sector. Scotland is developing innovative defence technologies in that area, which is one reason that the Government's flagship cyber-security event was hosted by the National Cyber Security Centre in Glasgow last week. Raytheon, which I met this morning and which specialises in the development of cyber-technologies, has recently announced new investment in a hi-tech manufacturing facility in Livingston, as we heard in the debate, as part of the diversification of its portfolio and its investment in British jobs. That is exciting news that will build on the support that it already gives.

More broadly, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West is right that space funding is an area that we need to develop carefully and take every possible opportunity from. That is why our space strategy, setting the direction for the defence space sector, will be published shortly. I regularly meet companies across the country, including many in Scotland, to talk about the space sector. I can assure hon. Members that it is something we are taking very seriously, because we know it will provide a great deal of opportunity in the future.

On 14 March this year the Defence Secretary reaffirmed his commitment to increasing defence's contribution to UK economic growth, setting out a new package of measures to drive productivity and innovation in the sector. We held prosperity conferences and SME workshops, and we want to engage with as many people as possible. Many Members who have an interest in defence have arranged for me to meet businesses. I am happy to do that because we want to engage with as many of them as possible, so that we can take advantage of what they offer for the security of our nation, and so that every part, including Scotland, benefits from the wider prosperity that defence spending can bring.

5.28 pm

**Ged Killen:** It is a pity that the Minister's response was cut short, not least because I was on the edge of my seat waiting to hear what he had to say about the FSS issue that has been raised several times by Members in the debate.

As the Minister says, this has been a considered debate. I am not sure what progress we have made, but we have at least been able to give some of the issues an airing. I am pleased that the Minister acknowledges the need for more to be done and recognises the opportunities, particularly in the space sector. I thank hon. Members for their attendance and participation, and you, Mr Hollobone, for chairing the proceedings.

I passionately want shipbuilding to remain a mainstay of the defence industry in Scotland, but I want it to be one of many mainstays as we move towards a defence environment that is increasingly dominated by information gathering technologies and intangible assets. There is much for us to be proud of when it comes to Scotland's defence industry, but if we are to future-proof it and realise its untapped potential, we need smart investment decisions, long-term thinking and a focused mission-oriented approach to diversifying it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved.*

That this House has considered diversification of the defence industry in Scotland.

5.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Tuesday 30 April 2019

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Pubs Code

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will today begin the statutory review of the pubs code (the code) and the pubs code adjudicator (PCA) through the launch of an invitation to all those with an interest to feed in their views and experiences of the operation of code and the effectiveness of the PCA.

Pubs are a vital part of communities across the country. The Government have been supporting them through freezing beer duty, cutting business rates for many pubs and supporting community pubs through changes to planning law and by funding Pub is the Hub's pub diversification work.

The establishment of the pubs code was provided for by the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 ("the Act") and is set out in the Pubs Code etc. Regulations 2016. The code governs the relationship between large pub owning businesses and their tied tenants, giving tenants certain rights, including the right at certain times to exercise a "market rent only" option, under which their rent is set at the market level and they are no longer required to buy products from their pub owning business.

The pubs code adjudicator ("PCA") was established by the Act and is appointed by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The role of the PCA includes giving advice and guidance; the investigation of non-compliance with the code; where non-compliance is found, requiring publication of information, imposing financial penalties or making enforceable recommendations; and arbitrating disputes under the code.

Section 46 of the Act requires the Secretary of State to review periodically the operation of the pubs code and section 65 of the Act requires the Secretary of State to review periodically the adjudicator's performance. The review will look at the period from the establishment of the code and the PCA to 31 March 2019.

The invitation to submit comments and evidence will run for 12 weeks and can be accessed through gov.uk (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pubs-code-and-pubs-code-adjudicator-statutory-review>). Stakeholders have until 22 July 2019 to respond. Following this, BEIS will analyse the responses and other evidence as set out in the terms of reference. A report on the findings of the review will then be published as soon as practicable and laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State.

The terms of reference for the pubs code and PCA reviews will today be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### British Indian Ocean Territory

#### **The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):**

Further to my written statement of 26 June 2017 (HCWS10), on 25 February the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos archipelago from Mauritius in 1965. We were disappointed that this matter was referred to the International Court of Justice, contrary to the principle that the Court should not consider bilateral disputes without the consent of both states concerned. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom respects the ICJ and participated fully in the ICJ process at every stage and in good faith. An advisory opinion is advice provided to the United Nations General Assembly at its request; it is not a legally binding judgment. The Government have considered the content of the opinion carefully, however we do not share the Court's approach.

As outlined in the previous written ministerial statement, we have no doubt about our sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, which has been under continuous British sovereignty since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty over the archipelago and we do not recognise its claim. We have, however, made a long-standing commitment since 1965 to cede sovereignty of the territory to Mauritius when it is no longer required for defence purposes. We stand by that commitment.

The joint United Kingdom-United States defence facility on Diego Garcia helps to keep people in Britain and around the world safe. For nearly 40 years the facility has helped the United Kingdom, United States, other allies and our regional partners, including Mauritius, combat some of the most challenging threats to international peace and security, including those from terrorism, organised crime and piracy. The facility also remains ready for a rapid and impactful response in times of humanitarian crisis in the region. These functions are only possible under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom.

As the Foreign Secretary confirmed to PM Jugnauth on 27 April 2019, Mauritius is a valued friend, trading partner and member of the Commonwealth. We are fully committed to our bilateral relationship and also want to deepen and intensify engagement with Mauritius. With regard to the very important matter of the Chagossians we are continuing our work to design a support package worth approximately £40 million, to improve Chagossian livelihoods in the communities in Mauritius, the Seychelles and the UK where they now live.

I have placed a copy of the advisory opinion in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can also be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statement/written-statement/Commons/2019-04-30/HCWS1528>.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Infected Blood Support Scheme

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** Today the Government have announced their intention to increase the financial support for beneficiaries of the infected blood support scheme in England, administered by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA).

This follows a meeting on 21 January 2019 between myself, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the infected blood inquiry secretariat and affected beneficiaries where I committed to looking at where further improvements might be made to the support provided by the existing infected blood scheme.

In this announcement, we have set out our plans for a major uplift in the financial support available to infected and affected beneficiaries of the infected blood support scheme in England. The current annual cost of the scheme is estimated at £46.3 million per annum and we expect this will increase to over £75 million to provide for these uplifted payments.

The level of support provided to infected beneficiaries will increase. In addition, the upper threshold level of household income currently used to means-test support

provided for the bereaved will also be substantially raised allowing more bereaved beneficiaries to be eligible for additional support from the scheme.

All beneficiaries will be sent a letter by NHSBSA this week setting out the details of the changes and the impact they will have on them. This detailed payment information will also be made available on NHSBSA's website. All new payments will be backdated to 1 April 2019.

I have also announced my intention to reach out to the devolved administrations to look at how we might provide greater parity of support across the United Kingdom. I will update hon. Members on these conversations in due course.

Today's announcement reconfirms the Government's commitment to providing those affected by the infected blood tragedy of the 1970s and 1980s with a fair and transparent support scheme, one which focuses on their welfare and long-term independence.

It also reaffirms the Prime Minister's support for the infected blood inquiry, which she ordered in 2017, and which specifically asked for the support given to those affected by infected blood be looked at again. The Government will continue to listen to and co-operate fully with the inquiry.

[HCWS1527]

# Ministerial Correction

*Tuesday 30 April 2019*

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### EU Customs Union

*The following is an extract from oral questions to the Secretary of State for International Trade on Thursday 25 April 2019.*

**Nick Smith:** Some 9,000 people work in the Welsh steel industry, so can I ask the Secretary of State to think again, and support a permanent customs union and commit to a common external tariff on steel imports to support steel jobs in south Wales?

**Dr Fox:** No, I will not commit to that. I have set out the reasons why I believe the application of a common external tariff will be limiting on the UK's ability to carry out an independent trade policy. What I would say is that we already have the Trade Remedies Authority up and running, and that is the best way to deal with any disputes over steel through WTO rules.

*[Official Report, 25 April 2019, Vol. 658, c. 860.]*

*Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for International Trade:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith).

The correct response should have been:

**Dr Fox:** No, I will not commit to that. I have set out the reasons why I believe the application of a common external tariff will be limiting on the UK's ability to carry out an independent trade policy. What I would say is that **we have already established our trade remedies functionality**, and that is the best way to deal with any disputes over steel through WTO rules.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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**not later than  
Tuesday 7 May 2019**

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**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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