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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 18 March 2025

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

NEW WRIT

Mr Speaker: I have to announce to the House that Mike Amesbury, the former Member for Runcorn and Helsby, has been granted the Chiltern hundreds. The recall process would have begun once the time limit for all routes of appeal had been reached. It is now no longer relevant, but for the convenience of the House, I will, as is customary, arrange for the notifications from the courts to be placed in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

Ordered,

That on the 26th day of March 2025, the Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new Writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the County constituency of Runcorn and Helsby, in the room of Michael Lee Amesbury, who since his election for the said County constituency has been appointed to the Office of Steward and Bailiff of His Majesty's three Chiltern hundreds of Stoke, Desborough and Burnham in the County of Buckinghamshire.—(*Sir Alan Campbell.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

The Secretary of State was asked—

Warm Homes Plan

1. **Euan Stainbank** (Falkirk) (Lab): What steps he is taking to introduce the warm homes plan. [903229]

21. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What steps he is taking to introduce the warm homes plan. [903250]

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Our warm homes plan will upgrade up to 5 million homes with technologies such as heat pumps, solar panels and insulation, helping families to lower bills and improve their homes. Last week we allocated £1.8 billion to local authorities and social housing providers to help low-income households and social housing tenants. We will publish further plans following the spending review.

Euan Stainbank: The warm homes plan delivers a welcome uplift in resources for domestic energy efficiency. Failures by Governments, energy companies and local authorities over a number of years have left my constituents paying huge energy costs, with poor connectivity, failure to install smart meters or smart meters not working when they are installed, and not-fit-for-purpose electric heating systems in the Braes villages. Does the Minister

agree that the Government must do all they can to end fuel poverty, and will he meet me to discuss how to hold accountable those who are responsible for the ongoing issues in my constituency?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend raises a number of important issues. It is about having a tough regulator in Ofgem, it is about smart meters that work, and it is about every decision the Government take seeking to tackle fuel poverty. That is why I was incredibly pleased that we announced the extension of the warm homes discount to an extra 2.7 million families, with an extra £150 next winter to help families. That is what this Labour Government are all about.

Debbie Abrahams: I welcome the energy efficiency measures that my right hon. Friend mentions, which will really make a difference to many families in the future, but what can the Government and energy providers do to help families struggling to pay their energy bills today?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend speaks with great expertise about these issues. She will know that the Minister for Energy Consumers, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Miatta Fahnbulleh), put in place with the energy companies £500 million this winter to help families struggling with their bills. We also want to see Ofgem proceed with the plan to relieve the debts that many families face, because the debt overhang from the cost of living crisis that we saw after Russia's invasion of Ukraine still blights many families in our country. If we move forward on all those fronts, we can tackle these issues.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I strongly support all efforts to increase energy efficiency and bring down bills. Is the Secretary of State concerned about the potential unforeseen consequences of raising the minimum level of energy performance certificates to C for long-term rented accommodation but not doing so for short-term lets and owned properties? Will that not create an incentive in communities such as ours for people to go to Airbnb or second home ownership, rather than providing affordable homes for local people?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. I believe I am right in saying—I was checking with the Minister for Energy Consumers—that as part of the consultation on energy efficiency, we are looking at the issue of short-term lets, which has been raised in the past. He is right to draw attention to what we are doing here, because this measure, which the last Government proposed and then backed away from—a pattern we are seeing quite a lot at the moment—will take up to 1 million families out of poverty. It is a basic principle: if someone is renting a home and they pay their rent on time, they have a right to live in decent, warm accommodation.

Electricity Grid Decarbonisation

2. **Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): What recent estimate his Department has made of the cost of decarbonising the electricity grid by 2030. [903230]

7. **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What recent estimate his Department has made of the cost of decarbonising the electricity grid by 2030. [903235]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): Our clean power mission will end our dependence on volatile fossil fuel markets, giving the British people the energy security they deserve and driving jobs and investment into our communities. We are already seeing the impact of the clean energy transition, with thousands of jobs being created across the country in CCUS—carbon capture, usage and storage—hydrogen and offshore wind, and more nationally significant solar power being approved in eight months than the previous Government managed in 14 years.

Mr French: The London power tunnels project has been a positive story locally in Bexley, as National Grid has worked with the community to minimise disruption with a plan to restore the site. However, the Labour Government's planning reforms have led developers to propose two extensive industrial battery storage facilities on a nature conservation area and farmland locally in Bexley that do not meet fire safety guidance. While we need infrastructure, does the Minister agree that weakening green belt protections against residents' wishes and damaging nature in the process to meet Labour's unrealistic grid targets will result in bad developments in inappropriate places?

Michael Shanks: I am glad the hon. Gentleman draws attention to the London power tunnels. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have visited them recently and they are a fantastic example of engineering and of what we can achieve if we set ambitious targets in this area. I gently disagree with the hon. Gentleman on the wider point, however, as we are going to have to build infrastructure across the country to get the benefits of the renewable energy that we are generating, and battery storage is important for that. Of course communities have a voice through the planning system and it would be wrong for me to comment on individual applications, but the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues must remember that we cannot simply block every infrastructure project that needs to be built. We need to build for the economic growth of the country and for our energy security.

James Wild: Once again the Minister has failed to answer the question about the cost estimate, but we do know that the Government's dogma-driven 2030 target will drive up costs and that we will see pylons and substations imposed in Walpole in my constituency and across the country against the wishes of local people. That will damage our countryside and it relies on Chinese supply chains, which the Energy Secretary visited only over the weekend. When will the Government realise that their approach of ruling out underground options and attempting to buy off local communities on the cheap, rather than listening to them, will only drive opposition to their plans?

Michael Shanks: Once again, we hear from Conservative Members about all these grand plans that they wish they had done in the 14 years that they were in government. They could have moved forward on undergrounding if they were so keen on it, but of course they did not. The

reality is that it is for individual companies, not us, to set forward the design of individual projects, and cost estimates for undergrounding are five or 10 times more expensive.

The bottom line on all of this is that the leader of the hon. Member's party earlier today moved away from the commitments that she had made on net zero. Just a few years ago, she said that

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made it clear that relying on authoritarian regimes"

can make it

"harder...to heat our homes".

They recognised then the importance of this net zero transition; now they are running away from how we deliver on it.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee, Bill Esterson.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): UK electricity bills are the highest in Europe compared to gas. Evidence given to the Select Committee suggests that the Government are absolutely right to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, and it is a shame that some Opposition Members have abandoned an evidence-informed approach to policymaking. Can the Minister confirm whether the Government are considering rebalancing the infrastructure levies on our energy bills, as a way of reducing electricity bills in the immediate future and as a down payment towards 2030 and beyond?

Michael Shanks: The Select Committee Chair makes an important point. Along with the Minister for Energy Consumers, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Miatta Fahnbulleh), I am looking at all options, because it is important that we bring down bills and that we are building an energy system that protects us from the volatile fossil fuel markets in the future. There are trade-offs to be made when rebalancing that we need to be aware of, in particular whether a diminishing number of gas customers can pay bills if we were to transfer levies, but we are looking at all options and are, of course, looking at how we review with Ofgem the wider question of standing charges to make sure we bring down bills. My hon. Friend is right to say of the journey that we are on—and that the Conservative party used to be on, and on which there used to be consensus—that our transition to net zero is important for energy security and for the climate, but also for protecting bills in the long term.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): The Minister is clearly aware of the foolhardy decision by the Opposition to abandon the political consensus on net zero, but has he made an assessment of the cost to the consumer of pursuing that disastrous path, which would lock us into our dependence on polluting fossil fuels, volatile oil and gas prices, and the whims of foreign dictators?

Michael Shanks: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important to recognise that where once there was consensus in this country on how we tackle the climate crisis and, crucially, how we deliver the economic and industrial advantage, that consensus seems to have been splintered by the Conservative party. It was only two years ago that the leader of that party made an important point, which I agree with strongly, when she said

“if we get our strategy wrong, we risk being left on the backfoot as other countries seize the advantage.”

The Conservative party now wishes us to be on the backfoot, but we are determined that we will drive forward because that is the best policy for consumers, economic growth and energy security.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): The Government’s rush to decarbonise the grid means more hidden costs, more curtailment payments, more balancing payments, more subsidies and a higher carbon price. Will the Minister guarantee that our carbon price will remain lower than the European price for the remainder of this Parliament?

Michael Shanks: I think the hon. Gentleman knows more than anyone about the work that the previous Prime Minister Theresa May did in this area—work that his party is now moving away from rapidly. The Conservatives were right then: the only way for us to bring down bills, deliver economic growth and tackle the economic opportunities is for us to be on this journey together. Conservative Members used to strongly believe in that. We will continue on that path because it is the right thing for the country to do.

Nick Timothy: That was a long-winded answer, but the Minister did not actually address the question, and I think he just gave away that it is Labour’s secret plan to increase the price of carbon—a massive rise in the carbon price—adding hundreds of pounds to families’ bills and decimating British industry. Given Labour’s election promise to cut bills, will he take this moment—he can look up into the camera if he likes—to promise the country that by the next election bills will be lower, as Labour promised? Yes or no?

Michael Shanks: Never mind long-winded answers—that was a very long-winded question. I have not revealed any secret plans, but the Conservatives have revealed their not so secret plan, and I can tell the county that it is just as disappointing as the one the country rejected seven months ago. We have been very clear that it is our commitment to bring down bills, and we are determined to deliver on that. Unlike the Conservative party, which left consumers across the country exposed to volatile fossil fuel markets—the hon. Gentleman is right to point out that bills went up and up and up when his party was in government—we will bring them down. His party wants to take us back to the fossil fuel casino but we will not do that.

Mineworkers’ Pension Scheme

3. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to the mineworkers’ pension scheme on the living standards of the recipients of that pension. [903231]

5. **Jake Richards** (Rother Valley) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to the mineworkers’ pension scheme on the living standards of the recipients of that pension. [903233]

11. **Elaine Stewart** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to the mineworkers’ pension scheme on the living standards of the recipients of that pension. [903239]

The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones): This Labour Government have ended the historic injustice of the mineworkers’ pension scheme. At the end of November last year, the first uprated payments for the pension scheme landed for over 100,000 miners and their families. That is an average increase of 32% on their monthly payments, or an average additional £28 a week.

Nick Smith: I thank the Minister for her answer and for her hard work to increase payments to mineworkers and their families across the country. After digging for coal for many years, 1,600 miners and their families have received an uplift of nearly £30 a week in my constituency of Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney. However, progress is still needed on the staff superannuation scheme. The trustees of that scheme confirmed to me that the average age of pension members is 76, so with time marching on, will the Minister outline the next steps to help members of the staff scheme?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks; he is right to talk about the British Coal staff superannuation scheme. The initial focus of our work was on the mineworkers’ pension scheme, which was in our manifesto. We had to work at pace on that commitment, and we are working with the Government Actuary’s Department on how the surplus-sharing arrangement will work going forward. That big piece of work is under way, but my hon. Friend is right to point to the tens of thousands of people who are in the BCSSS. I too have met the trustees, and we are working as fast as we can through the issues associated with that scheme. The two schemes are different—they operate in different ways—but the Government are the guarantor for both of them, and I will reconvene trustees to continue discussions with them and take this matter forward.

Jake Richards: At the last general election, I made a promise to ex-miners in my constituency that a Labour Government would deliver justice on the MPS investment reserve fund and return it to its members. I am delighted that at the end of last year, this Government delivered, providing a boost of more than 32% to their pensions. However, in my constituency there are more than 600 BCSSS members, who are still really concerned about this issue, so I would welcome the Minister’s answer on that. Can she reassure them and me that the trustees will continue to update the members of that scheme? At the moment, there is a degree of uncertainty on what progress can be made over the coming months.

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his concern for his constituents who are in the BCSSS. I am very receptive to the calls from BCSSS trustees. I wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury at the end of last year to begin discussions. We have received a positive response from him, and we are now taking the next steps to move this process forward.

Elaine Stewart: We are only partway there on the pension injustice for miners. The British Coal staff superannuation scheme has around 40,000 members

who formerly worked in mining industries, including a number of my constituents. They include many women who were among the lowest paid in the coal industry—my own mum worked in the pit canteen. Can I assure my constituents enrolled in the BCSSS that transferring the £2.3 billion investment reserves to its members is a priority for this Government?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right to point out that there are about 40,000 people in this scheme. About 5,000 of them are women, unlike the mineworkers' pension scheme, of which the vast majority of members are men. The two schemes are different and operate in a different way, because in 2015 the BCSSS had run two deficits and was at risk, so there had to be an intervention from Government. The two schemes operate differently and have to be looked at differently. The Government Actuary's Department team is working its way through the mineworkers' pension process, and we are now working with officials on this issue. I am meeting officials later today to talk about it more to see what we need to do. I stress that this is very complex—we are talking about billions of pounds-worth of assets—but we are absolutely receptive to calls from the trustees, and I will meet with them again soon.

Clean Power by 2030

4. **Dan Tomlinson** (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): What progress he has made on achieving clean power by 2030. [903232]

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): We are driving forward at speed to deliver clean power by 2030. Last week, the Government introduced the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which will enable the biggest expansion of the grid for generations, sweeping away the connection delays and the queue that held us back for too long under the last Government and reforming the planning system to speed up delivery. We have also laid out for the first time legislation to provide households near new or upgraded pylons £250 a year off their energy bills for 10 years, as part of our commitment to delivering meaningful benefits for communities hosting clean energy infrastructure.

Dan Tomlinson: Does the Secretary of State agree that community energy has a vital role to play in the transition to cleaner and greener power? Will he accept an invitation to come to my constituency in north London to visit Community Energy Barnet, which is working on one of the largest community energy projects in the country?

Ed Miliband: I always like visiting north London, and I would very much like to accept an invitation from my hon. Friend. He makes a really serious and important point about community energy. If we look at Germany and Denmark, we see that they have done much better on community energy than us. Great British Energy has an important role to play in this, and we will say more about that in the coming weeks.

Sir Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Does the Secretary of State share my concern about reports of persistent misconduct by Drax, regarding cutting down old-growth forest and burning it at its power station? To be clear,

this is a company that chops down pristine forest, ships it halfway across the world to burn it in the United Kingdom and claims that it is sustainable. Will he look again at the large amounts of subsidies that have been approved by this Government for that company?

Ed Miliband: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect, was present when the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), made a statement on precisely that issue. On the impact on bills, he will be delighted to know that under the new arrangements that this Government agreed, there has been an absolute transformation in the scale of subsidy to Drax; it will be halved. There is also a windfall tax when its profits go above a certain level, which I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is in favour of, and there are much higher standards of sustainability. He is right that we should take these issues seriously.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): The Conservative party abandoned the economy, the NHS, the justice system and immigration, and now it is joining its Reform collaborators and other climate change deniers in the dunce's corner. Does the Secretary of State agree that, unlike this Government, who recognise the triple benefit of the 2030 goal—energy security, a transition to renewables, and job creation—the Conservative party has no solutions for 21st century Britain?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend should not be so shy and retiring. He makes a really important point. I listened to the interim shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), on the radio this morning. He made net zero 2050 sound like a target dreamed up by me, but it is not. It was Theresa May, the former Conservative Prime Minister, who legislated for net zero by 2050. The hon. Member was her Parliamentary Private Secretary at the time—he was supposed to be the man implementing it. She set the target because it was the right thing to do, so that we can have cleaner home-grown energy, get the jobs, and protect future generations.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): The plans for a green generator at the Peterhead power station in my constituency are shovel-ready, but they depend on approval for the Acorn project at St Fergus. On 12 November last year, the Minister for Industry stated in response to a question from me that more information would be available on the track 2 projects "in the coming months." Given that four months have passed, can the Secretary of State provide an updated timescale and outline what the next steps will be?

Ed Miliband: I support the Acorn project; it is really important. For reasons that the hon. Member will understand, the right time to make decisions will be at the spending review in June.

Energy Consumer Support

6. **Sarah Edwards** (Tamworth) (Lab): What discussions he has had with energy suppliers on support for consumers. [903234]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh): We know that people are worried about their energy bills, and that too many are struggling to afford them. We agreed £500 million of industry support, alongside our warm home discount, to ensure that £1 billion of support was available for households struggling with their energy bills this winter. We will continue to take action to support consumers in the short term, as we sprint towards clean power in order to bear down on energy bills for good.

Sarah Edwards: In my constituency, a local hospitality business's energy provider, E.ON, has behaved appallingly by back-billing and incorrectly billing, leaving that business nearly bankrupt. While I welcome the new expanded remit of the Energy Ombudsman, we need to ensure that it has the capacity and powers that it needs to protect businesses. Would the Minister meet me to discuss this case, and what are the Government doing to ensure that our local businesses are not driven to bankruptcy by the outrageous behaviour of energy suppliers?

Miatta Fahnbulleh: I am happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this case. However, there are clear rules in place to protect consumers from unfair back-billing, and energy companies must comply with those rules. I have met Energy UK, the industry body, and Ofgem to reinforce our expectation that if rules are not complied with, Ofgem will take enforcement action. The broader point is that we have to ensure that the energy market is working for consumers and is fair. We are reviewing Ofgem to ensure that it has the mandate, the duties and the powers—including the Energy Ombudsman—that it needs to be an effective and strong consumer champion.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): For the record, I and my constituents are proud of the southern North sea development—the largest wind farm in the world, begun under the last Government. However, we are not happy about this Government's rush to force our consumers to pay higher bills; to see, as a result of vast subsidies, farmers in a very important agricultural area of Norfolk farming solar panels, rather than the food that we need to ensure affordability and our security; and to abandon agricultural leadership on net zero. Can the Minister reassure my consumers that £250 is adequate compensation for higher bills and the defoliation of a large part of Norfolk? That is what has happened in the rush towards ill-thought-out net zero targets, set in London, without any consideration of local people.

Miatta Fahnbulleh: The past few years have shown us why we must break our reliance on global fossil fuel markets. Under the hon. Gentleman's Government's watch, energy prices spiralled, and consumers across the country paid the price. That is a reality that Opposition Members were happy with, but it is not a reality that we think is tenable, so we will sprint to clean power, because that is the route by which we achieve energy security for the country, and financial security for families. We are on the right side of history, and on the side of consumers. Opposition Members are deluded.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): In Blackpool, we have more than 250 charities that are doing incredible work supporting people with their mental health, in

getting back to work, and also with the cost of living, but too many people tell me, week in, week out, that they cannot afford to pay the bills. What conversations has the Minister had with energy companies about supporting these charities? Will she agree to meet me to discuss this important issue?

Miatta Fahnbulleh: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: charities and third-sector organisations play a vital role in getting support to households, which we know are struggling with bills. Part of the reason we thought it was so important to agree £500 million of industry support was to make sure that we got additional support to households. We are also consulting on extending our warm home discount to 2.7 million more households, so that more than 6 million people get help. We will work with the energy sector to make sure that we use the vital network of charities to get that support to the households that need it.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): The price of gas is some 20% lower than it was at the beginning of this year, and the Secretary of State promised that bills would come down. Can the Government say when bills will come down for consumers, given that they are going up by 6% on 1 April?

Miatta Fahnbulleh: I encourage the hon. Gentleman to check his facts. The price cap went up, which was disappointing for families, because of the spike in wholesale prices. That is because of our reliance on global fossil fuel markets. *[Interruption.]* I will say it incredibly slowly for him, so he can understand: it is because of our reliance on global fossil fuel markets. We must break that reliance. We have to wean ourselves off this rollercoaster of price spikes and price falls, which is harming consumers across the country. The sprint to clean power will achieve that. It is a shame that he cannot see that.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Consumers are concerned about the rising energy price cap. What will the Secretary of State do to strengthen existing energy schemes and initiate new schemes? Will it include delivering the £300 reduction in energy bills that Labour promised during the general election?

Miatta Fahnbulleh: We know that households are struggling with bills and are worried about them. That is why we are doing everything we can to bear down on bills. We are doing that not just because it is a manifesto commitment, but because it matters to households across the country. While we sprint to clean power—we are clear that that is the route to bearing down on bills—we will support households. Whether it is the £500 million agreement we made with energy suppliers, the extension of the warm home discount to more than 6 million households, or the debt support we are providing to consumers with energy debt, we are taking short-term action. Let me be clear that the way we get ourselves out of this bind is by delivering clean power for consumers across the country.

COP29

8. **Harpreet Uppal (Huddersfield) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the COP29 agreement.

[903236]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy): I thank my hon. Friend for her continued interest in this issue. Despite significant challenges, COP29 agreed a new climate finance goal and finalised guidance on international carbon markets. We would have liked more progress in certain areas, such as on mitigation outcomes. We look forward to playing an important role in the run-up to COP30 in Belém, to ensure that more progress is made.

Harpreet Uppal: Tackling climate change should matter to all of us because it affects all of us. At COP29, the UK led the way on setting strong climate targets. How is the Minister ensuring that measures are in place to track progress against our COP commitments? How is she working with businesses, local authorities and industry to deliver on those targets and drive investment?

Kerry McCarthy: My hon. Friend is right: we earn the credibility that enables us to show international leadership by delivering at home. In due course we will publish a cross-economy plan for meeting our climate targets, which will outline the policies that are needed to meet our 2035 nationally determined contribution, and we are engaging with a range of stakeholders on delivery through, for instance, the Net Zero Council, which has a very busy work programme, and the local net zero delivery group.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What assessment has the Minister made of the COP29 commitment to tripling finance for developing countries from the previous goal of \$100 billion to \$300 billion a year by 2035, and what is the United Kingdom's contribution to that sum?

Kerry McCarthy: It is always a pleasure to answer questions from the hon. Member. We remain committed to international climate finance, and to the new climate finance goal agreed at COP29. The level of the UK's contribution will be considered in the spending review, when we will also consider how we can maximise investment from the private sector.

Carbon Capture and Storage

9. **Matthew Patrick (Wirral West) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to support the development of carbon capture and storage technology. [903237]

19. **Richard Baker (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to support the development of carbon capture and storage technology. [903248]

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): The £21.7 billion of funding to which we committed in October will kick-start the carbon capture, usage and storage industry, supporting thousands of jobs in our industrial heartlands through the east coast and HyNet clusters. We continue to engage with important future projects, such as Acorn in Scotland and Viking in the Humber, and we will make further announcements following the spending review.

Matthew Patrick: As my right hon. Friend will recognise, Merseyside is a clean energy pioneer, a hub of carbon capture and hydrogen technology. The climate emergency is the challenge of our generation, and that challenge

will be met only through the collective endeavour of communities across our country, including mine in Wirral West. How are the Government helping our communities to deliver good, local energy projects?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is entirely right about this. We have learned over the last decade and more that this is the biggest jobs opportunity of the 21st century. Nowhere is that more true than in the investments we are making in carbon capture, usage and storage, and I am confident that my hon. Friend's constituents will benefit. A couple of weeks ago, the Confederation of British Industry produced an important report that showed that last year, the net zero economy grew three times faster than the economy as a whole. The House should let that sink in, because it tells us that if we turn our back on the net zero economy, we turn our back on business, jobs and investment.

Richard Baker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is huge potential for carbon capture and storage to play a key role in our green energy ambitions for Scotland? As we look towards the spending review, does he agree that the Acorn project presents an excellent and efficient opportunity to invest in CCUS, and to reduce the carbon impact of industries across Scotland, because it will repurpose existing pipelines?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate my hon. Friend. He is a fantastic advocate for the Acorn project, of which we are hugely supportive. Track 1 projects were agreed in last year's Budget—a fiscal event, a fiscal moment—and the Government are considering those projects ahead of the next phase of the spending review, which will come in June; but I do not think that anyone doubts the potential value of the Acorn project, not just to Scotland but to the whole United Kingdom.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): No one who cares about the future of our children and our grandchildren will gainsay the importance of carbon capture, but does the Secretary of State not understand that he is undermining that good work—notwithstanding his answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Sir Oliver Dowden)—by continuing to subsidise the Drax power station, which is cutting down forests in Canada, turning the wood into pellets, and shipping it thousands of miles across the Atlantic to burn here? That makes nonsense of what he is trying to achieve.

Ed Miliband: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect. The situation that we inherited from the last Government meant that we had to consider matters such as security of supply and how we could secure the best deal for bill payers. That is what we did, and that is why we made the statement that we made on Drax. On longer term, however, the right hon. Gentleman is entirely right. We need to move away from unabated biomass and consider all the possibilities to enable us to move towards net zero, and that is what this Government are doing.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the six students from Bourne community college who came to Westminster yesterday to present their report on the future of hydrogen storage as a net zero approach to aviation? Does he

agree that students engaging with science, technology, engineering and mathematics are excited about the potential of clean power and carbon capture, and that proper funding for STEM in our schools will provide us with the next generation of scientists and engineers who can help us to achieve these goals?

Ed Miliband: I join the hon. Lady in warmly congratulating the six students from her constituency whom she mentioned. I am sure that I speak for all Members of the House when I say that when we meet young people who are engaged in the potential of clean energy technology to transform our country and our world, it is an incredibly important reminder, both about its potential for jobs, and about our duties to future generations.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change has made it clear that by 2050, we need to be removing 10 billion tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere every year if we are to stand a chance of keeping below the 1.5° target. It is clear that carbon removal, and not just carbon capture and storage, will play a critical role in our avoiding a climate disaster. In the face of the Conservative party once again embracing climate denialism, what steps will the Government take to support the research, development and deployment of carbon removal technologies to ensure that British companies become leaders in this emerging sector?

Ed Miliband: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I can tell him that the Minister for Industry held a roundtable with a whole range of industry voices on this precise topic last week. He is right about this issue. There is scepticism about CCS in some parts of academia and elsewhere. All the evidence that I have seen from the Climate Change Committee, the IPCC and others, including the International Energy Agency, is that CCS technology has a crucial role to play on something like 20% of emissions. He is also right to say that carbon removal is the next stage of that journey, and it is something that my Department is heavily engaged in.

Nuclear Power

10. **Mr Andrew Snowden (Fylde) (Con):** Whether he is taking steps to maintain the role of nuclear energy within his energy security strategy. [903238]

13. **Cat Smith (Lancaster and Wyre) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to support the nuclear power sector. [903241]

17. **Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to support the nuclear power sector. [903246]

The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones): Nuclear power is at the heart of our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. It is not just providing energy security, but driving billions of pounds in investment and creating thousands of highly skilled jobs. Great British Nuclear is on track to make final decisions on its

small modular reactor competition this spring, while a final investment decision on Sizewell C will be made in the spending review.

Mr Snowden: Whether one agrees with the Government's net zero targets or not, they will not be able to achieve them without nuclear energy playing a significant role, which is why I was delighted that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State chose to launch their nuclear strategy in my constituency—I can only assume that my invite was lost in the post. A key part of the nuclear fuel strategy is the nuclear fuel industry in this country. From the aggressive actions of Russia and other countries that have pushed western commercial providers out and dominated elements of the nuclear fuel enrichment and manufacturing market, we see that it is ever more important for our national security that we develop whole-of-lifecycle nuclear fuel production. When will the Government announce the concrete steps that they will take, as part of the strategy, to improve the whole-of-lifecycle manufacturing of nuclear power?

Mr Speaker: He needs an Adjournment debate.

Sarah Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and, indeed, the Minister for nuclear in the other place have visited the hon. Gentleman's constituency and seen the good work that is happening there, and just shy of £20 million from Government grants has gone into that work to help develop nuclear fuels, which will be part of the future. The big nuclear developments at Sizewell and Hinkley, SMRs and advanced modular reactors all need to be in the mix, and he is absolutely right to make that point.

Cat Smith: Many of my constituents were pleased to see the extension of Heysham 1 and 2 late last year, and they would like long-term jobs for the future in the nuclear industry created in the north-west. Does the Minister agree that it is thanks to this Labour Government that we are ending the last Government's legacy of no new nuclear being built?

Sarah Jones: I completely agree. The Conservative party built no new nuclear in 14 years. Small modular reactors will bring energy efficiency and economic growth to many parts of this country. We are working at pace and will make sure that we have the answer on SMRs shortly. We will have the answer on Sizewell in the spending review, and of course nuclear will play a big role in the future.

Peter Prinsley: Small modular reactors, as the Minister says, will play an important part in delivering clean, cheap and secure energy across this country. However, current rules require that any reactor must apply for regulatory justification, as if nuclear power was an entirely new practice instead of an existing one. That delays reactors getting online and lowering energy bills for people across the country, including in Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket, by up to two years. Will the Secretary of State consider working with his Cabinet colleagues to simplify the system and recognise that nuclear energy technology is an existing practice, thereby accelerating the deployment of small modular reactors?

Mr Speaker: Another Adjournment debate.

Sarah Jones: I will happily investigate further the issue that my hon. Friend has raised. There are two pieces of work going on in this space: the draft nuclear planning policy statement and the nuclear regulatory taskforce. We want to make things as easy as we can, and I am very happy to talk to him further.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Small modular nuclear reactors are clearly the way forward for decarbonising the grid but are held up by constant delays. When does the Minister expect to be able to announce the first one to be brought into operation, and when does she expect it to actually start work?

Sarah Jones: I am hoping that it will take less than the 14 years in which the previous Government failed to deliver anything. We will see the announcements on the first SMR in the spring. Our door is open to anyone who wants to suggest building new nuclear in this country.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On 6 February, the Prime Minister announced that he would “take on the blockers” and build new small modular reactors, but do those blockers include his own Government? With essential work being delayed and paused at Sellafield, possible job losses at the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and still no certainty for Sizewell C due to a general fear in the industry that the spending review will stymie the ambitions of Great British Nuclear, are the biggest blockers to new nuclear in the UK not in Labour’s Treasury?

Sarah Jones: I am not sure how many times the hon. Member promised he would get to the final investment decision on Sizewell under the last Government—I think he and his colleagues promised that at least five times in the House—and of course it did not happen. I gently repeat that the previous Government managed no new nuclear in 14 years, and he himself admitted that the Government had moved too slowly in getting nuclear projects off the ground. We are working at pace, and we will deliver the result of the competition in the spring. Sizewell C is also moving at pace, and we will have final answers in the spending review.

Mr Speaker: We are going to run on a bit because we are behind. We have hardly got through any questions.

Renewable Energy: Workers’ Rights

12. **Anneliese Midgley** (Knowsley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support workers’ rights in the renewable energy sector. [903240]

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): For this Government, good pay and conditions for workers and the role of trade unions must be at the heart of the renewable energy sector, because that is the only route to a fair transition. Since we came to office, EDF Renewables has announced recognition agreements with four major trade unions. We applaud it for its decision, and we want others to follow suit. Through the Office for Clean Energy Jobs, we are also working with industry and trade unions to support fair pay, terms and conditions in the sector.

Anneliese Midgley: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. The Employment Rights Bill is an historic step forward for workers, but these rights must go hand in hand with good jobs. What action is he taking to strengthen the UK’s manufacturing capacity and supply chains to ensure that communities such as mine in Knowsley benefit from the transition to net zero?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is a brilliant advocate for her constituency, and on this issue of manufacturing jobs. If we look at what this Government are doing—from GB Energy to the national wealth fund and the clean industry bonus—we see that this Government are determined to ensure that we manufacture in Britain. We care about where things are made, and we will make those good manufacturing jobs happen.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Large-scale Solar Farms

14. **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the development of large-scale solar farms. [903242]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): Meeting our clean power mission will require a significant increase in the deployment of both ground-mounted and rooftop solar projects. As well as consenting record amounts of ground-mounted solar, we want to see a much greater deployment of rooftop solar power. We will soon publish the solar road map—work that started under the previous Government—to bring together our next steps in this area.

Sir Edward Leigh: The Government say that only 1% of agricultural land will be taken up by solar farms, but in the pipeline around Gainsborough 10,000 acres have already been put aside for solar farms, with another 4,000 announced a couple of weeks ago—up to 15% of my constituency, which is the most arable and most fertile in the country. I make one quite reasonable request of the Secretary of State: will he consider applications in the round rather than individually, and look at their cumulative effect on food production and the local environment?

Michael Shanks: Under even the most ambitious scenarios, less than 1% of agricultural land would be occupied by solar farms. On the right hon. Gentleman’s point about their being holistically planned, the strategic spatial energy planning that we have taken forward is important in having a coherent view of the entire energy system. That is work that we should have done many, many years ago. We are now moving at pace to do it, but individual planning applications are—

Mr Speaker: I call Luke Murphy.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Now that the Conservative party opposes large-scale solar, net zero and onshore wind, I am tempted to ask the Minister what he makes of that party’s new energy policy, which is to take us back to the past, rub two sticks together and hope for the best. Instead, will he update the House on the progress of Great British Energy in delivering our clean energy mission?

Michael Shanks: I think we have rehearsed the arguments about the absolute failure of the previous Government over the past 14 years. The Conservatives have just gone further back today. On GB Energy, I was delighted to be in Aberdeen yesterday to join the board of GB Energy for its first board meeting. The Bill will soon, we hope, complete its passage through Parliament. It can then get on with delivering for the British people.

Topical Questions

T1. [903253] **Steff Aquarone** (North Norfolk) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Britain produces 1% of global climate emissions. China is the world's largest emitter, yet no UK Energy Secretary has visited it in eight years to make the case for it to do more. That is why I have been in Beijing making the case for climate action. Engagement, not negligence, is what fighting for Britain looks like. On climate, as on so much else, this Government believe that Britain can only protect our national interests by engaging on the international stage.

Steff Aquarone: The Bacton energy hub in my constituency is undergoing a green transition, which I support because I believe in protecting our natural environment and boosting our economy through net zero—two things the Conservatives seem to have abandoned. Green hydrogen at Bacton needs wind power to be brought in from the coast. Will the Secretary of State help to make that happen, and will he visit Bacton with me to see the potential for himself?

Ed Miliband: This, among many others, is a very, very important potential project and the hon. Gentleman is right to make the case for it. Green hydrogen is absolutely part of our energy mix in the future.

T3. [903255] **Gurinder Singh Josan** (Smethwick) (Lab): I welcome the Government's commitment to nuclear energy. I recently met representatives of Newcleo, a company developing small modular reactors using lead-cooled fast reactor technology that uses depleted uranium and plutonium: waste materials of which we have an abundance from our existing nuclear programme. Will the Secretary of State detail what he is doing to ensure that the industrial strategy takes account of all aspects of the nuclear jigsaw, including the wide variety of technologies on offer?

The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Sarah Jones): Clean energy is one of the eight growth sectors in the industrial strategy and will provide a core part of that strategy. If anybody wants to build new nuclear in this country, our door is always open.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Last month, with surprisingly little fanfare from the Department or the Secretary of State, the Climate Change Committee published carbon budget 7. Among the more eye-watering recommendations was the figure put on the cost of meeting the obligations: £319 billion over the next 15 years. Frontloading that will be a net cost to industry every year until 2050. Is that exorbitant

cost the reason that he cancelled his Department's review, commissioned by his predecessor, into the whole-systems cost of net zero?

Ed Miliband: I deeply regret the direction in which the hon. Gentleman is going. The Climate Change Committee does incredibly important work. We will look at CB7, but the biggest cost we face as a country is if we do not act on the climate crisis. That is what would leave hundreds of billions of pounds of costs to future generations.

Andrew Bowie: The right hon. Gentleman might be content with signing our energy sovereignty over to the People's Republic of China, and he might be happy with his Government's arbitrary targets and bans, pushing bills up and leaving us more reliant on importing and costing jobs, but we think it is time for a new approach, as the Leader of the Opposition said this morning, focused on security and cost to the consumer, not pie-in-the-sky targets with no plan to reach them. Will he recommission the review into the whole-systems cost? If not, what is he trying to hide?

Ed Miliband: It is the Tory party that has an energy surrender policy: surrendering us to fossil fuel markets controlled by petrostates and dictators. The Tories would keep us locked in to fossil fuels, threaten billions of pounds of investment in net zero and leave our children and grandchildren a terrible legacy. That is the Conservative party in 2025: anti-jobs, anti-growth, anti-business and anti-future generations.

T4. [903256] **Andrew Cooper** (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): I welcome the plans brought forward last week to provide money off for people living near new energy infrastructure. Does the Minister agree that this is yet another thing that the Conservatives promised, but never had the ability to deliver?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we have moved forward on delivering our plan that people hosting important infrastructure in their constituencies should benefit from it. The Conservatives consulted on it, like so many policies that they talked and talked and talked about, but failed to deliver over 14 years—we are moving on with delivering it.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): In the recent advice for its seventh carbon budget, the Climate Change Committee highlighted the urgency of ensuring cheaper electricity so that households can transition away from gas heating. When will the Government act to improve energy security and reduce costs for the households seeking to adopt low-carbon heating by reforming policy costs on energy bills?

Ed Miliband: As we discussed earlier, the CCC raised an important issue that we need to look at. The key question on this so-called rebalancing is that it must be looked at in the context of understanding the principled case, while also ensuring that if we go down that or another route, we do so in a way that is fair. That is the work that my Department is engaged on.

T5. [903257] **Alan Strickland** (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): I have recently met a number of families who are members of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme. While I know they will welcome the Minister's earlier comments, as has been said, many are in their 70s and 80s, and they are keen for answers. Could the Minister expand on her earlier comments to say more about the next steps and when my constituents might get a sense of the timeline and progress going forward?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his concern for his constituents. As I said, I am very receptive to calls from BCSSS trustees. I wrote to the Chancellor, who sent back a positive response, and we are now taking the next steps in this process. I will be reconvening trustees to meet and talk about it again.

T2. [903254] **Mr Joshua Reynolds** (Maidenhead) (LD): Martin, a disabled resident, lives in his park home in Maidenhead. After his boiler broke down two months ago, he has faced significant challenges. He is unable to apply for the boiler upgrade scheme, as park homes do not get energy performance certificates, and the National Energy Foundation, which visited him three weeks ago, has still not provided him with a response. Will the Secretary of State outline what support he can give Martin and other elderly residents without heat or hot water?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We are very aware of the issues with park homes, and industry support is provided to residents. As we think about expanding the warm home discount and the support we provide for households that cannot afford their energy, we will, of course, have park homes in our mind.

T6. [903258] **Chris Murray** (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that community ownership projects will be crucial to achieving our world-leading net zero goals, and will he come to Edinburgh to see some of our fantastic community power projects?

Ed Miliband: Yes, that sounds really good. Community energy is a crucial part of our energy future.

T7. [903259] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The Secretary of State and I are near neighbours. Will he take a short car journey to Gainsborough to visit the new fusion site at West Burton? It is probably the most exciting development in green energy that we have ever had in this country, creating unlimited jobs and unlimited green energy. Will he join me in Gainsborough?

Ed Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman and I do not necessarily agree on everything, but on this we do agree. The transformation of the West Burton site from a fossil fuel-fired power station to a fusion power plant is an incredibly exciting project, and we should all be battling for it.

T8. [903261] **Chris Kane** (Stirling and Strathallan) (Lab): The Minister may be aware that SSE is supporting more than 1,000 new homes in rural Scotland to aid energy

infrastructure development. Does he agree that the SNP Scottish Government's failure to get a grip on our rural housing crisis is a major barrier to infrastructure development, and will he urge SSE to expand the scheme into my constituency, where we have key projects around the communities of Killin, Lochearnhead, Tyndrum and Crianlarich?

Michael Shanks: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He underlines the importance not just of delivering on energy projects but the wider economic benefits from building infrastructure—the kind of infrastructure that the Conservatives now oppose. He is right that in order to deliver these projects, we need to see investment in rural communities by the Scottish Government. We will continue to press them on those issues.

T9. [903262] **Mike Martin** (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): Kent county council plans to introduce 10,000 on-street car chargers over the next decade. To put that in context, Kent has a population of 1.6 million people. At this rate, Kent will have burned down by the time we all have electric on-street car charging. What can the Secretary of State do to speed this up?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman raises a really important issue. Rolling out electric car infrastructure is incredibly important. If he writes to my Department, we will ensure that he gets the best possible reply.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Will Ministers consider exercising the community electricity right within the Infrastructure Act 2015 to require commercial renewable energy developers to offer communities the opportunity to part-own schemes developed in their area?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. As an energy nerd, I am really interested in this 2015 power, which, despite my nerdery, I did not actually know about. We are actively looking at this really important power, which was put in place by the previous Government.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): In response to a written question to me last week, the Minister confirmed that no nationally significant infrastructure projects have been consented to that will use greater than 50% best and most versatile agricultural land. In my constituency, the East Park Energy solar farm is close to 75%, but the overarching national policy statement for energy states at paragraph 5.11.34:

“The Secretary of State should ensure that applicants do not site their scheme on the best and most versatile agricultural land without justification.”

Can the Minister confirm whether nearly 1,500 acres of best and most versatile land is too much good-quality agricultural land to sacrifice?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman will know that any nationally significant project goes through a proper planning process, and it would not be right for me to comment on that. None the less, I am sure that the decision makers will be looking closely at the issues that he has raised.

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): There is to be a much reduced testing process for oil at the import terminal at Grangemouth. Is the Secretary of State concerned that, if imported oil does not pass these reduced tests, it cannot be used, leading to Scotland suffering a fuel shortage?

Michael Shanks: Throughout the seven months that we have been in government, we have been doing everything we can to work with the operators of the Grangemouth refinery. Of course we were disappointed by its closure. We have carried out a number of pieces of work on fuel security. We are not concerned about that at this point, but, across the whole country, we keep constantly it under review.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Although the Leader of the Opposition thinks that achieving net zero is impossible without “bankrupting us”, investment in low carbon energy for communities such as Severn Beach in my constituency could create valuable skilled jobs. What steps will the Government take to ensure that the area around the River Severn will get the investment that it needs to realise its potential?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Lady is absolutely right on that. The Opposition are off to the “Wacky Races” when it comes to net zero. We in the Labour party know the truth: net zero is the economic opportunity of the 21st century and, under this Government, we will seize it.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): Carbon capture, utilisation and storage is the central plank of the Humber 2030 vision. Does the Secretary of State have any plans to meet the Humber Energy Board, and if he does not will he join me in doing so?

Sarah Jones: I talk every day to my hon. Friend about her constituency and I am very happy to meet whoever she wants me to, because we think this is an incredibly important matter. The opportunities for her area and the Humber are great if we can harness the talents of the people in her constituency.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): Requiring developers to include solar panels in all new homes and buildings would be extremely popular with the public and help deliver net zero targets. Can the Secretary of State give an update on his discussions with the Secretary

of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, including those on mandatory solar as part of the future homes and buildings standard?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We are actively working on that in government. Whatever one’s view on ground-mounted solar—we in the Labour party think that it has a role—we do need solar panels on rooftops. It is an important opportunity. While we are about it, perhaps the hon. Gentleman can start supporting our plans on planning and infrastructure so that we can build the clean energy infrastructure that we need.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware of the ongoing work to deliver new nuclear investment in Hartlepool. Billions of pounds are on the table, which will mean jobs and skills for generations to come. Will he meet me to discuss how we can get this deal over the line?

Ed Miliband: New nuclear is an essential part of our future energy plans. My Ministers and I would be absolutely delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss those plans.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I welcome the warm words from the Secretary of State earlier about the Acorn project. How confident is he that the Chancellor is listening?

Ed Miliband: I speak as an old lag in these things: we have never had a Prime Minister and a Chancellor so enthusiastic and committed to the net zero agenda and what it can do economically for our country. The right hon. Gentleman should take heart from that.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Teesside is seeing thousands of jobs coming on stream in carbon capture and storage, but the Conservatives’ new energy policy would put those jobs at risk. Will the Secretary of State restate his commitment to this industry, and will he work to establish a Europe-wide CO₂ market to bring investment and jobs to our region?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it so well. This is the economic opportunity of our time. Our investment in carbon capture and storage shows what is possible. Today’s desperate request for attention from the Opposition is anti-business, anti-jobs, anti-growth, anti-investment and the wrong choice for Britain.

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we continue proceedings, I pay tribute to John “Paddy” Hemingway, the last surviving Battle of Britain pilot, who died yesterday at the age of 105. Mr Hemingway was a teenager when he joined the RAF during the second world war. At the age of 21 he was a fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain, a three-month air campaign in 1940 to protect the southern parts of England and British shipping from large-scale assault by the Luftwaffe. There is no doubt that the courage and overwhelming sense of duty of RAF pilots such as Mr Hemingway helped to end the second world war and allowed us the freedoms that we enjoy today.

Welfare Reform

12.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall): This Government are ambitious for our people and our country. We believe that unleashing the talents of the British people is the key to our future success. But the social security system that we inherited from the Conservatives is failing the very people that it is supposed to help and is holding our country back.

The facts speak for themselves. One in 10 people of working age are now claiming a sickness or disability benefit. Almost 1 million young people are not in education, employment or training—one in eight of all our young people. Some 2.8 million are out of work due to long-term sickness, and the number of people claiming personal independence payments is set to double this decade from 2 million to 4.3 million, with the growth in claims rising faster among young people and those with mental health conditions. Claims are up to four times higher in parts of the midlands, Wales and the north where economic demand is weakest. These places were decimated in the '80s and '90s, written off for years by successive Tory Governments and never given the chances that they deserved.

The consequences of that failure are there for all to see. Millions of people who could work are trapped on benefits, denied the income, hope, dignity and self-respect that we know that good work brings. Taxpayers are paying millions more for the cost of failure, with spending on working-age sickness and disability benefits up £20 billion since the pandemic, and set to rise by a further £18 billion by the end of this Parliament to £70 billion a year. It is not like this in most other comparable countries, where spending on these benefits since the pandemic is either stable or falling, while ours continues to inexorably rise. That is the legacy of 14 years of Tory failure.

Today, we say, “No more”. Since we were elected we have hit the ground running to get more people into good work through our plan for change. We are investing an extra £26 billion into the NHS to drive down waiting lists and get people back to health and back to work.

We are improving the quality of work and making work pay with our landmark employment rights legislation and increases in the national living wage; we are creating more good jobs in every part of the country in clean energy and through our modern industrial strategy; and we are introducing the biggest reforms to employment support in a generation, with our £240 million Get Britain Working plan. Today, our pathways to work Green Paper sets out decisive action to fix the broken benefits system, creating a more proactive, pro-work system for those who can work and so protecting those who cannot work, now and for the long term.

As a constituency MP for 14 years, I know that there will always be people who can never work because of the severity of their disability or illness. Under this Government, the social security system will always be there for people in genuine need. That is a principle we will never compromise on. Disabled people and people with health conditions who can work, however, should have the same rights, choices and chances to work as everybody else. That principle of equality is vital too, because, far from what Conservative Members would

have us believe, many sick and disabled people want to work, with the right help and support. Unlike the Conservatives, that is what we will deliver.

Our first aim is to secure a decisive shift towards prevention and early intervention. Almost 4 million people are in work with a work-limiting health condition and around 300,000 fall out of work every year. We have to do far more to help people stay in work and get back to work quickly, because their chances of returning are five times higher in the first year. Our plans to give statutory sick pay to 1 million of the lowest-paid workers and provide more rights to flexible working will help keep more people in work. The WorkWell programme is trialling new approaches, such as GPs referring people to employment advisers instead of signing them off sick. Our Keep Britain Working review, led by former John Lewis boss Sir Charlie Mayfield, will set out what Government and employers can do together to create healthier, more inclusive workplaces. We will therefore help more employers to offer opportunities for disabled people, including through measures such as reasonable readjustments, alongside our Green Paper consultation on reforming Access to Work so it is fit for the future.

Today, I can announce another step. Our Green Paper will consult on a major reform of contributory benefits, merging contributions-based jobseeker's allowance and employment support allowance into a new time-limited unemployment insurance paid at a higher rate, without someone having to prove that they cannot work in order to get it. Therefore, if someone has paid into the system, they will get stronger income protection while we help them get back on track.

Our second objective is to restore trust and fairness in the benefits system by fixing the broken assessment process and tackling the perverse incentives that drive people into welfare dependency. Labour Members have long argued that the work capability assessment is not fit for purpose. Going through the WCA is complex, time-consuming and often stressful for claimants, especially if they also have to go through the PIP assessment. More fundamentally, it is based on a binary can-or-cannot-work divide, when we know that the truth is that many people's physical and mental health conditions fluctuate. The consultation on the Conservatives' discredited WCA proposals was ruled unlawful by the courts. I can therefore announce today that we will not go ahead with their proposals. Instead, we will scrap the WCA in 2028.

In future, extra financial support for health conditions in universal credit will be available solely through the PIP assessment. Extra income is therefore based on the impact of someone's health condition or disability and not on their capacity to work, reducing the number of assessments that people have to go through and providing a vital step towards derisking work. And we will do more, by legislating for a right to try, guaranteeing that work in and of itself will never lead to a benefit reassessment and giving people the confidence to take the plunge and try work without the fear that that will put their benefits at risk.

We will also tackle the perverse financial incentives that the Tories created, which actively encourage people into welfare dependency. They ran down the value of the universal credit standard allowance. As a result, the health top-up is now worth double the standard allowance, at more than £400 a month. In 2017, they took away extra financial help for the group of people who could

prepare for work, so we are left with a binary assessment of whether people can or cannot work, and there is a clear financial incentive for someone to define themselves as incapable of work—a factor the Office for Budget Responsibility, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others say is likely to be driving people on to incapacity benefits. Today, we tackle this problem head-on.

We will legislate to rebalance the payments in universal credit from April next year, fixing the value of the health top-up in cash terms for existing claimants and reducing it for new claimants, with an additional premium for people with severe, lifelong conditions that mean they will never work, to give them the financial security they deserve. Alongside that, we will bring in a permanent, above-inflation rise to the standard allowance in universal credit for the first time ever. This means a £775 annual increase in cash terms by 2029-30, and it is a decisive step to tackle the perverse incentives in the system.

We will also fix the failing system of reassessments. The Conservatives failed to switch reassessments back on after the pandemic, so they are now down by more than two thirds, and face-to-face assessments have gone from seven in 10 to only one in 10. We will turn these reassessments back on at scale, shift the focus back to doing more face-to-face, and ensure that they are recorded as standard, to give confidence to claimants and taxpayers that they are being done properly.

I can also announce that, for people on universal credit with the most severe disabilities and health conditions that will never improve, we want to ensure that they are never reassessed, in order to give them the confidence and dignity they deserve. We will also fundamentally overhaul the Department for Work and Pensions' safeguarding approach to make sure that all our processes and training are of the highest quality, so that we protect and support the most vulnerable people.

Alongside these changes we will also reform disability benefits so that they focus support on those in greatest need and ensure that the social security system lasts for the long term into the future. Social and demographic change means that more people are now living with a disability, but the increase in disability benefits is double the rate of increasing prevalence of working-age disability in the country: claims among young people are up 150%; claims for mental health conditions are up 190%; and claims for learning difficulties are up by over 400%, according to the IFS. Every day there are more than 1,000 new PIP awards. That is the equivalent of adding a population the size of Leicester every single year.

That is not sustainable in the long term, above all for the people who depend on that support, but the Tories had no proper plan to deal with it—just yet more ill-thought-through consultations. So today I can announce that this Government will not bring in the Tory proposals for vouchers, because disabled people should have choice and control over their lives. We will not means-test PIP, because disabled people deserve extra support, whatever their incomes, and I can confirm that we will not freeze PIP either. Instead, our reforms will focus support on those with the greatest needs. We will legislate for a change in PIP so that people will need to score a minimum of four points in at least one activity to qualify for the daily living element of PIP from November 2026. That will not affect the mobility component of PIP and relates only to the daily living element.

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Alongside that, we will launch a review of the PIP assessment, led by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability, in close consultation with disabled people, the organisations that represent them and other experts, so that we can ensure that PIP and the assessment process are fit for purpose now and into the future. This significant reform package is expected to save over £5 billion in 2029-30; the OBR will set out its final assessment of the costings next week.

Our third and final objective is to deliver personalised support to sick and disabled people who can work so that they can get the jobs they need and deserve. We know from the last Labour Government's new deal for disabled people, young people and the long-term unemployed the difference that proper employment support can make. More recent evidence from the Work Choice programme and additional work coach time shows that support can make a significant difference in the number of people getting and keeping work and improving their mental health and wellbeing.

This Labour Government believe that an active state can transform people's lives. We know that because we have done it before. Today I can announce that we will invest an additional £1 billion a year in employment support, with the aim of guaranteeing high-quality, tailored and personalised support to help people on a pathway to work—the largest ever investment in opportunities to work for sick and disabled people. Alongside that, for those on the UC health top-up, we will bring in an expectation to engage and a new support conversation to talk about people's goals and aspirations, combined with an offer of personalised health, skills and employment support.

We will go further, because being out of work or training is so damaging for young people's future prospects. In addition to funding our youth guarantee through the £240 million Get Britain Working plan, we will consult on delaying access to the health top-up in universal credit until someone is aged 22, reinvesting the savings into work support and training opportunities, so that every young person is earning or learning and on a pathway to success.

The Conservatives left a broken benefits system that is failing the people who depend on it and our country as a whole. The status quo is unacceptable, but it is not inevitable. We were elected on a mandate for change to end the sticking-plaster approach and tackle the root causes of problems in this country, which have been ignored for too long. We believe in the value and potential of every single person: we all have something positive to contribute and can make a difference, whether that is in paid work, in our families or in our communities alongside our neighbours and friends. We will unleash potential in every corner of the land, because we are as ambitious for the British people as they are for themselves. Today we take decisive action, and I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

12.53 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. She and I agree on one thing: the welfare bill

is too high. Left unchecked, it will rise to £100 billion by the end of the decade. Spending more on sickness benefits than we do on defence is not the sign of a strong country.

This is not just a question of money. We have 3 million people of working-age who are not in work due to ill health, not filling the roles businesses need, not contributing to our economy and not fulfilling their own potential. The best way to get the welfare bill down is to get people off benefits and into work. That is what we did year after year after taking office in 2010. Despite the once-in-a-century pandemic, 4 million more people were in employment when we left office than when we inherited Labour's mess. Before the pandemic, economic inactivity was at an historic low, but it is true that we then started to see a new phenomenon: growing numbers of people, and—particularly worryingly—young people, claiming sickness benefits. A system set up with good intentions to protect the most vulnerable in society has over time morphed into something broader, driven in part by a well-intentioned but not always helpful medicalisation of life's ups and downs.

In government, we identified the problem and worked up plans to tackle it, but at every point Labour Members opposed them. In fact, the now Chancellor said that not one single penny could be saved from benefits. When they came into office, not only did they cancel or delay pretty much everything we handed over, but they had no plans of their own. They walked into the Department with empty notebooks. All they had done in opposition was oppose, instead of the hard work of coming up with their own answers. That is why the country has had to wait another eight months for this announcement. In that time, taxpayers have shelled out £7 billion in extra sickness benefits, and nearly half a million people have been signed off sick. In fact, 60 people were signed on to sickness benefits while the Secretary of State was talking.

None the less, I have been looking forward to hearing what the right hon. Lady would announce today and which of the many things briefed to the media her spinning policy wheel would eventually land on. Governing is hard—we know that. In the last few weeks, the Government have made it look really hard, but that is nothing compared with how hard life can be for a severely disabled person, somebody for whom getting up, getting dressed and getting breakfast—things most of us found easy this morning—are hard if not impossible. For some people, the last few weeks have been deeply frightening. They will be glad of the uncertainty finally ending.

I genuinely want the right hon. Lady to succeed, and I welcome her commitment today to increasing the number of reassessments and to having more of them face to face and recorded. I welcome the investment in employment support for disabled people. I welcome, of course, her reannouncing a host of things that we were doing in government. Scrapping the work capability assessment and creating a single assessment is already Government policy that is due to come in in 2026-27. Her big idea seems to be to delay that until 2028. Merging new-style jobseeker's allowance and employment and support allowance into a new time-limited higher rate is a proposal that we worked up in government. We launched a consultation on tightening up eligibility for PIP and, by the way, we would have gone much further

with that. We consulted on ending reassessments for people whose health conditions will not improve, and the right to try guarantee sounds remarkably similar to our chance to work guarantee. Of course, on the Secretary of State's continued support for WorkWell, I launched that programme with the now shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride). In fact, the only original idea I can see in the entire announcement is increasing the rate of unemployment benefits—a Labour policy if ever I have heard one.

This is a now-or-never chance to seize the moment—a now or never for millions of people who will otherwise be signed off for what could end up being a lifetime on benefits—but today's announcement leaves me with more questions than answers. How many people will be helped back into work and by when? Surely we have not been waiting eight months for just another Green Paper. Where is the fit note reform crucial to stem the flow of people on to benefits? Where is the action on people being signed off sick for the everyday ups and downs of life? Why is the right hon. Lady planning to save only £5 billion when the bill is forecast to rise to over £100 billion? Do the savings she is announcing today include the £5 billion we had already agreed with the OBR for reforming the work capability assessment? If so, she has made virtually no savings of her own. What is the net saving given the additional expenditure planned?

Fundamentally, this is too little, too late. The fact is that £5 billion just does not cut it with a bill so big going up so fast. She needed to be tougher. She should be saying, "No more hard-working taxpayers funding the family next-door not to work, no free top-of-the-range cars for people who do not need them, no more sickfluencers helping people to claim money they do not need."

Before the right hon. Lady puts on her angry voice and leans across the Dispatch Box to shout at me about "14 years", I gently say to her that everybody in this Chamber and around the country knows that we lost and Labour won. Her job now is to govern and mine is to hold her to account. Our country needs everybody who can work to do so. That principle should be at the heart of our welfare system. It is good for the taxpayer, good for the economy and good for the individual and their family, who benefit from security, dignity and purpose that work brings, and it means that those who genuinely cannot work get the support that they deserve.

The fact is that fewer people work under Labour. That has happened every time Labour has been in office, and it is already happening now. The Government should have taken their time in opposition to come up with meaningful reforms, but they did not, and the country is already paying the price.

Liz Kendall: I personally like the hon. Lady a great deal, but her entire response seemed to be railing against her own party's failings and lamenting action that her party failed to take. "Too little, too late," will indeed be the epitaph of the Conservative party. One thing on which I agree with her that this is a now-or-never moment, and I am proud that this Government are taking it. We are taking decisive action, ducking the challenges that have been ignored for too long.

I am not interested in being tough. This is about real people with real lives, and we must be careful in how we talk about it. I am interested in taking the right steps

to change the system in order to transform people's lives and, crucially, ensure that we have a social security system that lasts. One in three of us will have a health condition in our lifetime, and one in four is disabled. Unless the country, the welfare state, the world of work and all our public services wake up to that fact, the welfare state that the Labour party created will not be there for future generations. That is what we are determined to secure. This is a substantial package of measures that will save around £5 billion by 2029-30. We will have to wait until the OBR comes up with its final costings on all this at the spring statement.

I leave hon. Members with this: a decade ago, former Chancellor George Osborne said:

"Governments...let...unemployed people get parked on disability benefits, and told they'd never work again. Why? Because people on disability benefits don't get counted in unemployment figures that could embarrass politicians."

The Labour party is not embarrassed about this situation; we are ashamed of the state the Tories left the country in. We will face up to our responsibilities; it is time that Conservative Members did the same.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement. I absolutely agree: our social security system is not fit for purpose. The measures, particularly those to increase employment support by £1 billion a year and to increase the standard allowance of universal credit, which the Opposition failed to do in government, will be positively felt.

I appreciate the difficult financial circumstances that we face. Despite the Opposition's assertion that £5 billion is not a huge figure, this is the largest cut in social security support since 2015. There are alternative and more compassionate ways to balance the books, rather than on the backs of disabled people. I absolutely and fundamentally believe that my right hon. Friend is on the right course, but I implore my party to try to bed in our reforms before we make the cuts, as others have asked.

There is so much evidence of the adverse effects that the Conservative party had through cuts to support and restrictions to eligibility criteria when it was in government, including the deaths of vulnerable people. That cannot be repeated. I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend published as a matter of urgency the Government's analysis of the impacts, particularly mental health impacts, and outlined when we are expected to respond.

Liz Kendall: I thank my hon. Friend for her response. We will publish the equality and poverty impact analyses alongside the spring statement. I know that she is a lifelong champion of sick and disabled people, and she has rightly raised concerns, including through the Select Committee, of vital issues such as safeguarding. I look forward to receiving the Select Committee's report on that in order to learn from the evidence that it received. Although this is a substantial package with those estimated savings, spending on working-age sickness and disability benefits will continue to rise over this Parliament. The last forecast was that they would continue to rise by £18 billion. As she says, these are important issues, and

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we need to work to get this right to ensure that proper support is in place for people. I genuinely look forward to working with the Select Committee to get all these proposals right.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for sharing her statement in advance—that was extremely welcome.

The Liberal Democrats want to see more people in work, including those with disabilities. Sadly, the significant blocker to those people getting into work is the appalling state of the health and social care system left behind by the Tories—to my mind, in more ways than one. We desperately need the new Labour Government to drive forward with reforms to invest in and improve our health service.

The devil is in the detail of these proposals. I fear what we will find as we turn over rocks over the next few days, particularly for the most vulnerable. The Secretary of State has described the system as broken, so how will she drive significant change through the measures? I fear that this is just tinkering around the edges when we need real culture change within the DWP and investment in our NHS. That is absolutely essential.

Liz Kendall: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need extra investment in the NHS and to overhaul the culture of the DWP, and that is precisely what we are doing. We are investing an additional £26 billion into the NHS, an extra £172 million into the disabled facilities grant to help disabled people to live independently, and £3.7 billion into social care, which is such an important issue.

We need a decisive cultural shift in the DWP. That is why our Get Britain Working plans include proposals to overhaul jobcentres. We have also said today that we need to look fundamentally at our safeguarding approach. Our Pathways to Work programme is genuinely just that. For some people, getting out of the house is an achievement; for others, it is maybe going along to a community group, doing voluntary action or getting skills. That is what we mean, and we will work closely not only with the NHS and social care—and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care—but with voluntary organisations, which have such a vital role in helping people on to a pathway to success.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to ensuring that no one is on the scrapheap when it comes to work and that everyone gets the support that they need. I note that she is consulting on delaying access to the health top-up in universal credit until the age of 22. Will she explain the rationale for that age, and what savings does she expect to make if that consultation goes forward?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend raises a really important issue. Patience is not my greatest virtue, but Members will need to wait until the spring statement for the OBR's full assessment of individual measures and the savings they make. On delaying access to the health top-up for people under 22, there will be a specific

exemption for those who are never able to work because their disability is so severe. This is all about matching it with our youth guarantee, announced in the Get Britain Working plan, to make sure every young person is earning or learning. If someone is not in education, employment or training when they are young, the impact can be lifelong and scarring on their health, job prospects and earnings, so we have to put that right.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): How precisely will these benefit cuts be realised, given this Government's anti-business Budget, which has seen businesses close at the fastest rate since Labour was last in office? Of those still standing, 30% are planning to cut staff to cope with the increase in employers' national insurance contributions. Where are the jobs? We know Labour is the party of the magic money tree; is Labour now the party of the magic jobs tree, too?

Liz Kendall: The only party that believes in magic money is the Conservative party, who wrote a cheque that they could not pay. Unlike Conservative Members, we believe that good work and rights at work are of benefit to businesses, because the best businesses know that they help retain people and reduce the costs of recruitment. We are overhauling our approach in the DWP to employers, because only one in six ever uses a jobcentre to recruit. We want to have a single account manager for all businesses. We are going to make sure our jobcentres are much more embedded in their local communities, so that they have detailed knowledge of individual employers. That is the way that we get Britain working and growing again.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): When the Government made the decision to go down this route, did they understand the pain and difficulty that it will cause millions of our constituents who are using food banks and social supermarkets? These people are on the brink. This £5 billion cut is going to impact them more than her Department gives credence to. I would like to be able to look my constituents in the eye and tell them that this is going to work for them. As things stand, my constituents, my friends and my family are very angry about this, and they do not think this is the kind of action that a Labour Government take.

Liz Kendall: I have great respect for my hon. Friend, but let me say this to him. I have spent years chairing Feeding Leicester, the programme to end hunger in my city, and I know that I can look my constituents in the eye and say to them: I know that getting more people into better paid jobs is the key to their future success, and I know that dealing with their mental health problems, which are so prevalent, is essential. If someone can work, we will give them the help to get back on their feet, because that is the long-term route to tackling poverty and tackling inequality, which is what this Labour party is all about.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): Like the Secretary of State, I was elected in 2010, and I need to tell her that our recollections differ. When I came into this role, after 13 years of Labour government, 7.5% of young people in the Gosport constituency were not in education, employment or training. That number was down to 3% last year. Since Labour has taken office,

83,000 more people across this country of working age are now unemployed. Businesses in the sectors that take on so many young people across our constituencies, from adult social care to childcare to hair and beauty, are telling me that they are not taking on more staff as a result of her Chancellor's changes to national insurance contributions. Surely the two are mutually incompatible.

Liz Kendall: Unless we cut waiting times and waiting lists in the NHS, people cannot get back to health and back to work—many employers have said to me that they are deeply concerned about that—and that is the reason we are investing an extra £26 billion into the NHS. We are dealing with precisely those key sectors—health and social care, construction and so on—where employers want people with the skills to do those jobs. We are overhauling our approach in DWP and setting up sector-based work academy programmes specifically tailored to employers' needs. I know there is more we need to do to work with employers and help them get people back into work, and that is what this Government will deliver.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): After 14 years of Conservative failure, there is a 29% employment gap and a 17% pay gap for disabled people in this country. We must therefore ensure that the social model of disability is central to Government decision making, to achieve inclusive growth that enables disabled people to fulfil their potential. I welcome the Secretary of State's proactive approach to reasonable adjustments and the £1 billion support package to get disabled people back into work where they can work, as well as her recognition that PIP is designed as an in-work benefit to enable people to live independently. Research shows that supportive, incentive-based approaches massively outperform cuts or sanctions in getting disabled people into sustainable employment. What work has she done to develop inclusive growth strategies across all employment sectors, to close the disability employment gap and the disability pay gap?

Liz Kendall: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. At the heart of our mission is providing equal rights and choices for disabled people to work. We will be working with disabled people and the organisations that represent them to develop our pathways to work employment support so that we get it right, because we will not do that unless we work closely with disabled people. We are also working right across Government—we have disability Ministers in every single Department who are driving this agenda forward—and I know that my hon. Friend will give much valued advice and help to make sure we get it right in every part of Government.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): Encouraging and enabling people to get back to work is a laudable aim, but how can the Secretary of State assume £5 billion of success in advance of actually rolling out the programme? Surely the right approach is to let the reforms generate savings naturally by a concrete reduction in need, rather than to set an arbitrary target beforehand.

Liz Kendall: We are not setting an arbitrary target. We are fixing a broken system, and we are taking action immediately, because we believe we have to put in place employment support, health support and social care support at the same time as fixing a broken benefits

system. I always start with people—what do we need to do to give people the opportunities they deserve if they can work? What do we need to do to make sure the social security system lasts? We cannot put that off any longer, because it is not good enough for the people we were elected to serve.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): PIP is a devolved benefit, known as the adult disability payment in Scotland. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that she will work with partners, including the Scottish Government, to ensure that disabled people across the whole UK get the support they need?

Liz Kendall: Absolutely—that is very important for me personally and for the Government as a whole. We want people in Scotland to have the same chances and choices to work if they can as everybody else and to make sure people have proper protections. That is essential for us, and I will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government, as I know other Departments will.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Youth unemployment stood at 642,000 as of the last quarter of 2024—a rise of 136,000 on 2023—with a youth unemployment rate of 14.8%. The Secretary of State talked about earning and learning. Does she agree that one way of attracting some people back into work would be to get more young people into His Majesty's armed forces—the Air Force, the Navy and the Army—and will she discuss that with the Defence Secretary?

Liz Kendall: I absolutely agree. Indeed, before I was appointed to this position, as a constituency MP in opposition I discussed with my local jobcentre and the armed forces recruitment team precisely these issues, because the exciting careers and opportunities that are available are really important for young people in my constituency and the right hon. Gentleman's. I will certainly have more conversations with colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to make sure we put this plan into action.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I have heard many people make a moral case for the changes that my right hon. Friend has announced today, but does she agree that over the last 20 years those with large amounts of wealth have done extremely well while average household incomes have stagnated and the standard of living for the overwhelming majority has gone down? So while we make a moral case for changes to the benefits system, should we not also be making the case for how we can tax wealth as opposed to income?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend is right that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the biggest burden, which is why I am very proud that we have closed loopholes in the non-dom tax status, looked at the profits of the energy companies and tackled issues in many other areas. Fairness in the tax system is an absolute principle of the Labour party.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The Government say they will not change our fiscal rules because of their manifesto. They say they will not change their tax policies because of their manifesto. They say they will not change their position on the single market because of their manifesto. Perhaps the Secretary of State could

[Stephen Flynn]

outline to me and to people right across the UK where in her manifesto it stated that they were going to take £5 billion away from disabled people?

Liz Kendall: I am very happy to send a highlighted version of our manifesto to the right hon. Gentleman, where we said we would reform or replace the WCA, we said we would make sure we dealt with the backlogs in Access to Work, we said we would make work pay, we said we would invest more in the NHS, we said we would improve employment rights, and we said we would create jobs in every part of the country. I am very proud that we are delivering on it and I just ask the right hon. Gentleman to take a look at what is happening in Scotland and at the Scottish Government's record, because there is probably more they could do.

Gill German (Clwyd North) (Lab): I am delighted to hear my right hon. Friend announce additional investment in high quality, tailored and personalised support to help people on a pathway to work and the recognition that for so many it is indeed a pathway, not just a series of referrals that merely lead back to square one. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that joint working with local support services like those in Clwyd North, which are already doing great work, will form part of this reform so that a truly local, person-centred approach can be achieved?

Liz Kendall: Yes. We will not get this right unless we draw on the huge strengths of our voluntary and community organisations. I have never believed that there are hard-to-reach groups; it is just that we need to change what we do. There is a lot we can learn from groups like those my hon. Friend mentions, because it really is a pathway to work. We have got to end this false divide between those who can and cannot work, and instead understand that there are steps towards a better life. That is what this Government want to deliver.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I have two practical questions. First, the Secretary of State said she is joining jobseeker's allowance and employment and support allowance into a new time-limited unemployment insurance; what is that time limit? Secondly, she said there would be an expectation on people to look for work; what happens when they do not meet that expectation and what discipline is faced if they do not take that up?

Liz Kendall: The time limit is one of the things we are consulting on in the Green Paper and I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman's views on that. On the expectation to engage, it is interesting that when we have started to free up our work coach time and offer support on the phone and in person, many people have come forward, because we are trying to change the culture. The Conservatives always leap straight to a position where people refuse to get involved. We have got to change that culture; that is the way that we will get more people on to that pathway to success.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I agree with the Secretary of State that many disabled and sick people want to work, but the

reality is that cutting PIP will not address the reasons why they do not. She outlined that the reasonable adjustments framework for disabled people is very hard to navigate. It took me six months to navigate it for a member of my staff here in the place where we legislate, so how hard is it going to be for disabled people in the workplace to try to get employers to make those adjustments? Will the Secretary of State outline how she is going to make sure that the workplace is ready for the people who will be accessing it? Can she reassure me about the disability employment gap, which in a sense has nothing to do with benefits, but is to do with the reasonable adjustments that are not being made at the moment?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend is a passionate advocate of these issues and she is right: we have to do far more to work with employers to ensure that those basic reasonable adjustments are made. That is one of the issues that Sir Charlie Mayfield is looking at in our "Keep Britain Working" review, precisely because we know that good employers understand the need to make these changes. I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend to go through this in more detail because she is right: we have to get this absolutely nailed.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): First it was the pensioners and their winter fuel allowance, then it was the WASPI women and broken promises, and now it is the sick and the vulnerable. We believe in protecting the taxpayer but also in protecting those who need our support the most, yet there was not a word about abuse or about those who are taking money out of the system when they are not entitled to it. How can the Secretary of State rationalise in her own mind saying in the statement that, on the one hand, she accepts that people's health and wellbeing can fluctuate but that, on the other hand, she is going to do away with the accumulation of points? To require an applicant to get four points in any one box does away with the ability to recognise that mental ill health in particular manifests itself in many different ways. That accumulation of points has been incredibly important in getting support for those who need it most. If it fluctuates, how come she is doing away with that accumulation?

Liz Kendall: There is very clear evidence that good work is good for mental health. That is the case for people with anxiety and depression, but also for those with more severe conditions such as psychosis and schizophrenia. There is really clear evidence from the NHS individual placement and support programme that if we can help people get into work, that is not only better for them and their incomes, but it reduces their relapses and spending on the NHS. The right hon. Gentleman asks how I rationalise this; I do so because I am not prepared to accept a system that is miserable for people, that traps them in poverty, and that denies them the chances and support they deserve. I am also not prepared to accept an inexorable rise in costs and spending, much of which is on the costs of failure, precisely because I want to ensure that the social security system lasts for the long term.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I think all Government Members understand the scale of the financial bin fire left by the previous Government, but there are those who are worried and are seeking assurances at home.

For the 1 million people potentially losing disability support, what guarantees can my right hon. Friend give that those who are unable to feed or toilet themselves will not lose out on personal care? For the 1 million who can and do want to work, of course we welcome that £1 billion of extra support, but how are the Government going to hold unco-operative employers' feet to the fire in giving disabled people an equal chance of employment and career success?

Liz Kendall: I agree with my hon. Friend: I know people are worried and concerned and that is a really important issue. It is why I disagreed with the Opposition spokesman saying that we need to be tough; I am not interested in that because this is about real people and real lives. The changes to PIP are not coming in immediately; they will be coming in from November 2026 for new claimants. Those with severe conditions who will never work will be protected. If people do have a reassessment, it will be done by a fully trained assessor or a healthcare professional and will be based on their individual needs. In order to ensure there is greater confidence in those assessors and the decisions that are being taken, we will overhaul our safeguarding and training and we will record those assessments as standard, because that is essential.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Because working is so beneficial to mental health, will the Secretary of State require claimants to undertake socially useful work in order to retain their benefits?

Liz Kendall: No.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for listening to disabled people and their organisations about ending needless, wasteful and extremely expensive repeat reassessments for those with progressive conditions. I hope that has been welcomed by those who have campaigned for it for many years. Will the Green Paper include plans to tackle the disincentives to work for disabled people and others in supported housing? If they work for more than 15 hours a week, it can result in financial penalties. That system was not only ignored by the Conservatives, but actually put in place by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in coalition, when they fumbled the introduction of universal credit. Will this Government fix tax allowances to ensure that work always pays, including for disabled people in supported housing?

Liz Kendall: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability is looking at that. I am sure that he will discuss those issues with my hon. Friend, if he would like that.

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I have heard nothing today that shows that the Government have listened to disabled people. Any changes to PIP should have been co-produced, but this week, 25 disabled people's groups and charities wrote to Ministers begging for their opinions to be included, and not as an afterthought. Will the Secretary for State explain why disabled people are feeling so disregarded and scapegoated, and why impoverishing them to the tune of £5 billion is a higher priority than a simple wealth tax?

Liz Kendall: I think that many disabled people felt disregarded and ignored under the Conservative Government. We will be working with disabled people and the organisations that represent them on many—not all—aspects of what I have announced today. If the hon. Lady has particular issues and concerns that she would like to raise, she can write to me, or I would be very happy for her to meet me or the Minister for Social Security and Disability.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): Mr Speaker, you know that there are decisions made in this House that stay with you for the rest of your life. This is one of them. We all agree with the Secretary of State's objectives of trying to ensure that disabled people have the resources they need for a decent quality of life, and that those capable of work have support to get into work. However, trying to find up to £5 billion of cuts by manipulating the PIP rules and criteria will result in immense suffering and, as we have seen in the past, loss of life. What independent monitoring will take place and be reported to the House, and what threshold of suffering is needed before an alternative route is taken to supporting disabled people?

Liz Kendall: I take the issues relating to the measures I have announced today very seriously. We want to ensure that all the assessment processes and training are properly scrutinised, and we are overhauling our safeguarding processes. My objective is to improve the lives and life chances of sick and disabled people by supporting into work those who can work, and by protecting those who will never work, through switching off reassessments to give them dignity and respect. I believe that the mission to ensure that those who can work do, and to secure the sustainability of the social security system for the long term, is the responsibility of the Labour party that founded the welfare state.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): One of the first acts of this Government was to take away the winter fuel allowance from millions of pensioners on incomes as low as £13,000 a year, including 44,000 who are—or were—terminally ill. Will the Secretary of State reassure all our constituents that in making these changes, she will not be going after those who have a terminal illness?

Liz Kendall: That is absolutely essential for me personally, and for the Government as a whole, and I give that assurance to the hon. Lady. However, I gently say to her that pensioner poverty increased under the Conservatives, and they left 880,000 pensioners not getting the pension credit they deserve. The Conservatives are suddenly converted to caring about pensioners on low incomes. In contrast, we have decided to act.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): As a physio, I know that optimising somebody's function and independence, whether they are in work or not, saves the system so much money, because it prevents dependency. However, I find that incongruous with the cuts of £5 billion and the changes to the eligibility criteria. Will the Secretary of State ensure that before the measures are brought to the House, disabled people are consulted and involved in the decision making? We must ensure that people maintain their independence, psychological safety and dignity, and that they are not pushed further into poverty.

Liz Kendall: I agree with my hon. Friend that keeping older people physically independent for as long as possible is vital. That is one of the reasons why we are investing an extra £26 billion in the NHS. Not only are we rolling out employment advisers in talking therapies and mental health services, but we are starting to do so when it comes to physical health, too, including for people with musculoskeletal conditions, because getting people back to health and back to work is so important. We will legislate for the PIP changes, and the House will have the full ability to debate them. Crucially, we will consult disabled people on the employment support programme and how we get that right, so that it is much more joined up with the health support that many sick and disabled people need.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): Many of my Hazel Grove constituents are keen as mustard to get back to work, but they are waiting for either a diagnosis or treatment on the NHS. That is made more difficult because of the capital spending needed at Stepping Hill hospital, and because mental health services across Greater Manchester are stretched too thin. What assurance can the Secretary of State give my constituents that her announcements today will not make an already difficult time in their lives even more difficult?

Liz Kendall: The hon. Lady is right to champion her constituents' needs. We recently undertook a survey of people on sickness and disability benefits, and two in five of them said that they were on a waiting list. That really concerned us, and it is why we are putting extra investment in place. We need to go further, faster, on driving waiting lists down. We have already achieved the 2 million extra appointments that we said we would deliver in our manifesto—we did that seven months early—and we will do even more to ensure that her constituents get back to health and back to work.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Nearly 1 million young people leaving school are not in employment, training or education. My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (David Baines) and I both represent St Helens. A couple of weeks ago, we received a letter from college tutors who were having difficulty getting young people to take up employment, training or education, asking if we could we do anything about that. Will the Secretary of State say a little more about the guarantee of employment for young people, and how we will get them to accept training? Those young people were afraid of a cut in universal credit. I have to admit that I did not know that young people were on universal credit.

Liz Kendall: I promised I would keep my answers shorter, because so many colleagues want to get in. Our youth guarantee will be rolled out from next month. Mayors and local leaders will bring together work, health and skills support locally. I am very happy to talk to my hon. Friend personally about what more we can do in her constituency, because she is right that we have to get those young people on a pathway to success.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): When I fought the last election, I was honest with my electorate, telling them that we would save £12 billion from the welfare budget. Was the Minister honest with

her electorate when she talked about Labour's plans to cut disability welfare, or is she making this policy on the hoof because the Chancellor has destroyed economic growth?

Liz Kendall: The Conservatives did not have a plan. The former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), admitted during the general election campaign that the money had already been scored. I will listen more to the hon. Member when the Conservatives put forward a plan that works, instead of having it discredited in the courts.

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): Too many carers of disabled people end up with physical and mental health disabilities themselves, and end up trapped in the same system as their loved ones. What more can the Secretary of State do with her colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education to end that trap?

Liz Kendall: I have been a lifelong champion of family carers, who give their all to looking after the people they love. My hon. Friend will know that we have already boosted the carer's allowance earning threshold by £45 a week to £196, benefiting more than 60,000 carers by '29-30—the biggest ever cash increase in the earnings threshold for carers. We need to do much more to support family carers, including enabling them to balance their work and caring responsibilities. I look forward to talking to my hon. Friend about that.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The Secretary of State says that she will legislate for a change in PIP, so that in future, people must score a minimum of four points in at least one activity to qualify. That means that an individual who needs supervision or assistance with therapy for three and a half hours a week, prompting and assistance with washing, assistance to get into the bath or shower, supervision to manage their toilet needs, and assistance to dress and undress their lower body would no longer qualify for PIP. How many such individuals are there?

Liz Kendall: It does not mean that. Every single case is assessed on individual need. It is really important that the hon. Lady and her constituents understand that we will protect those with severe disabilities who can never work. Anyone who goes through a reassessment will have it done based on their personal needs.

Dr Zubir Ahmed (Glasgow South West) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will agree that under the managed decline of the SNP, people in Scotland are more likely to be economically inactive than those in the rest of the UK. She will further agree that we have greater ambitions for the people of Scotland, particularly young people, than the Conservative party. Does she agree that these reforms are absolutely necessary to put more Scots back to work, and back on the road to prosperity?

Liz Kendall: Yes, I would. People in Scotland deserve the same chances and choices to work. They deserve to get skills and training, to not have young people leaving school without the qualifications they need, to have an NHS that is reducing waiting times, and to have overhauled jobcentres—absolutely. We will continue to work with

the Scottish Government to put all those problems right, because we want people in every part of this country to benefit.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State's shift towards prevention. Last May, my constituent Alexander McRandal was riding his motorbike on the lanes of east Devon when he struck a pothole and was thrown from his bike. His collision resulted in permanent nerve damage. He has had to leave a 40-year career, and his wife Louise has given up work to look after him. While they will be reassured to hear that the Government will not freeze PIP, does the Secretary of State recognise that more investment in local government is needed to prevent situations like theirs?

Liz Kendall: I am really sorry to hear about what has happened to the hon. Gentleman's constituent and his family, and the impact it had on them. There is absolutely more that we need to do to provide local support, which is why the Get Britain Working plan is not all being determined by Whitehall. Local leaders know best what local areas need, which is why we are devolving more resources, powers and responsibilities to local areas to ensure that we shift the focus towards prevention and early intervention and help people get back on their feet.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): When cuts to incapacity support were introduced by the last Government through the work-related activity component, we saw severe rises in poverty, no significant increase in employment, and cases of mental ill health skyrocketing. In the north-east, we already have some of the highest rates of poverty and ill health in the country, so what assurances can the Secretary of State give me that these changes will not push people in areas like mine further into poverty and ill health?

Liz Kendall: This is absolutely about areas like those represented by my hon. Friend—areas that have been written off and denied opportunities for so long. It is really important that we look at this in the round. We are taking action to create more good jobs in every part of the country through the modern industrial strategy, clean energy and building 1.5 million homes. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is sending specific teams into the 20 areas with the highest levels of economic inactivity to drive down waiting lists. There is much more that we need to do to focus this on the areas that need help the most, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to make that happen.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Today, across the United Kingdom and in my constituency of Upper Bann, so many genuine benefit recipients are fearful of what lies ahead—people who are vulnerable and need a compassionate welfare system to assist them in their day-to-day living. Regrettably, no reassurance has been given to those people today, particularly on the four-point minimum requirement. There has been little mention of fraud and the genuine need to tackle it head-on. Does the Secretary of State not believe that equipping our benefit fraud officers with resources and powers to catch and deal with those committing fraud would be a better starting point than sweeping changes that will be unlikely to outsmart the fraudster, but will hit the most vulnerable?

Liz Kendall: The hon. Lady may not know, but we have a fraud Bill going through Parliament right now, because we believe that £8 billion being wasted on fraud every single year is unacceptable. I am more than happy to write to her to set out the contents of that Bill; we can then have another discussion.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The reality remains that over the last few weeks, thousands of the most severely disabled people in my constituency and millions across the UK have watched in disbelief as politicians debate cuts to the support that enables their very survival, leaving many at breaking point. Does the Secretary of State understand the real fear and distress that that has caused? Will she today commit at the Dispatch Box to ensuring that not a single person who currently receives PIP will be unfairly punished or left struggling by these plans?

Liz Kendall: I do understand the worry and anxiety. I hope I have made it clear to the House today that I do not start from a position of being tough: I start precisely from a position of compassion for people who can work and are being denied opportunities and for severely disabled people who will never work. That is one reason why we are overhauling our safeguarding processes to ensure that those who can never work are never reassessed, to give them the confidence and dignity that they deserve.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): I welcome any initiative that will see more people getting back into work. Although I have some concerns about the wrong people being targeted—and the fact that there will not be the jobs for them to go to, because of the national insurance contributions increase—I will press the Secretary of State on the detail. I find it strange that she can tell us that this will save £5 billion, but she cannot give us even a ballpark figure—I do not expect it to the penny—for how much she will spend beyond and above the £1 billion she has already announced. I know that it will come out through the OBR, but can she not give us a rough idea of how much her changes will cost?

Liz Kendall: The hon. Gentleman may know that Government Members strongly believe in and support the independence of the OBR and the processes behind it. We can give overall figures today, but he will have to wait until the OBR assessment is published at the spring statement for the individual costings, how many people will be affected and by how much.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): Many constituents have contacted me because they are afraid of losing their benefits. After 14 years of Tory neglect and chaos and several months of scaremongering, there is real vulnerability and fear in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State confirm that we on the Government Benches believe that those who cannot work are nevertheless entitled to a decent standard of living? Like her, I believe that good work is good for us; it is good for mental wellbeing, a sense of worth and economic security, and disabled people are entitled to those. Will she write to me and set out in detail the incremental support, including tech support, that disabled people in Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West can expect as a result of these measures, and when they can expect them?

Liz Kendall: I absolutely commit to doing that.

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): In her statement, the Secretary of State referred to right-to-try legislation being brought forward and to de-risking work, but the Treasury's NIC rises make employing more expensive and the Employment Rights Bill makes it more risky. What assessment has her Department made with other relevant Departments of the impact of recent Government policies on job creation and opportunities for sick and disabled people to try work?

Liz Kendall: Labour Members believe that good work and employment rights make it more likely that people will take work, and that they will keep people in work—that is why we are bringing those changes forward. We have a lot of employers who want to work with us to get the people they need because they are struggling to fill vacancies. We are overhauling our approach to that, because we want to serve employers to better meet their needs.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Of course, everyone in our country who can work should work, and should receive appropriate support to do so. It is of the utmost importance to many Labour Members that Labour ensures that disabled people who can never work are supported and protected to live the best possible life in dignity. Can the Secretary of State tell me how an adult who cannot work—however much they would have liked to—because, for example, they have cerebral palsy, a visual impairment and learning difficulties, and who is on enhanced PIP and has limited capability for work and work-related activity, will be affected by these changes? What will be the impact on their finances?

Liz Kendall: I know that my hon. Friend cares passionately about these issues, and I have spoken to her about them many times. I absolutely agree, and we commit that people who will never be able to work because of the severity of their disability or health condition will be protected. In fact, by never going back and reassessing those people, I hope that we will make a positive improvement, giving them the dignity and respect they need and deserve.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): Culture matters. Those who have been victims of the carers' overpayment scandal describe the culture at the DWP as spirit-crushing, but the culture of the Government matters too. Last week, I spoke to my constituent Geoff, who lives in Haywards Heath and is partially sighted. He told me that he and the partially sighted community have been sick with worry about what is being brought forward today. Does the Secretary of State think that the pitch rolling that has gone on over the past 10 days is the right way to make these kinds of announcements?

Liz Kendall: I hope that from now on, hon. Members will focus on the proposals that we are actually putting forward. Culture really matters—that is why we launched an independent investigation into the carer's allowance overpayments; we want not just to be told that we are putting things right but for independent voices to say that. Many of our work coaches in jobcentres are absolutely wonderful, but I have heard from other hon. Members about work coaches ringing deaf people. We

must start changing that, looking at our training processes and putting all these things right so that everyone is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): In Erewash, there are many disabled and sick people who can never work, but who are forced to jump endlessly through hoops for the benefits they need to survive. I welcome the Secretary of State's plan to switch off reassessments and end the needless stresses that these people must endure. Will she elaborate on those plans?

Liz Kendall: This is something that is personally important to me and the Minister for Social Security and Disability. We have seen cases in which, unbelievably, people whose disability will never change, or whose health condition will only get progressively worse, are being reassessed. While we switch reassessments back on and make them more face-to-face for people on the health top-up, we really want to ensure that there is dignity and respect for those who can and will never work. I would be more than happy to write to my hon. Friend with more details about that proposal in the Green Paper.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Has the Secretary of State ever been diagnosed with depression? I have—I have been in a situation where just getting up in the morning, having a shower and brushing your teeth feels like the biggest fight. Does she think that putting people who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition through more reassessments will make their mental health condition better or worse?

Liz Kendall: The hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not talk about any health issues I may or may not have had in the past, although she is brave enough to talk about them in this House. People's mental health conditions affect them in many different ways; there are people with anxiety and depression who say to me that work has actually given them structure and purpose and helped them deal with the problems, while others have said that sometimes they just cannot get out of bed, let alone out of the house. We need a system that recognises the different and fluctuating nature of these conditions and does whatever is right for that person, to get them back to health and—if they can—back to work.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): I was a manager in the employment service. It has always needed reform, whether that is telling people that they have to come back in six weeks to get help or—under the Tory Government—being told to move people from employment benefits on to incapacity benefits in order to say that there are more people in employment. How we go about reforming it is fundamentally important, and I do not think it should be linked to saving money—that is rather crass, and it has caused lots of anxiety for my constituents and for people elsewhere. Patriotic Millionaires has said that a tax of just 2% on assets over £10 million will bring in £22 billion a year. That is a better way to bring money in to help fill the black hole that we have found ourselves in because of the disaster of 14 years of Tory Government. Does the Minister agree that aspiration, compassion, care and fairness will be the hallmarks of this Labour Government?

Liz Kendall: Aspiration, compassion, care and fairness are absolutely the hallmarks of this Government—that is why we are bringing forward these reforms. As I said earlier to the House, I do not start from a spreadsheet; I start from my belief that everybody has a value and a contribution to make, in whatever way, and that we want people to fulfil their potential. That is what these reforms are about.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Given the announced changes to the personal independence payment, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the potential impact on injured service personnel claiming the personal independence payment as an interim measure while their compensation claims are processed prior to the awarding of the armed forces independence payment, and will the armed forces independence payment also be within the scope of these changes?

Liz Kendall: I will look into that issue in detail, and will respond to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I can.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): My right hon. Friend co-chairs the child poverty taskforce. Can she tell the House what analysis she has undertaken of the impact on child poverty of the reforms she is announcing today? Will she publish that analysis, and can she assure the House that these reforms will not make child poverty worse for any child living in a family where their parents or carers are in receipt of benefits?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. As I said earlier, we will publish the equality impact analysis and the poverty impact analysis around the time of the spring statement. It is really important that we look at how more people will benefit from being in work and improving their incomes—that is essential. We will also come forward with our child poverty strategy, because we have a clear manifesto commitment to drive child poverty down. Children growing up in poverty could have their life chances damaged for years to come, and we are determined to put that right.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): This whole statement is predicated on saving £5 billion at the expense of people with disabilities in our society. Anyone who has been through the trauma of trying to apply for a personal independence payment knows about the intrusive nature of the questioning, and about the great difficulty of obtaining that payment and then continuing to receive it in future. The Secretary of State's statement has caused consternation and dismay to many people around the country—particularly those with disabilities—who are understandably alarmed that their benefits will go down and that they will live in greater poverty as a result. Can she say with hand on heart that no disabled person will be worse off after her statement, or will that £5 billion be taken at the expense of those in our society who already live the most difficult lives?

Liz Kendall: This statement is predicated on stopping people being written off—denied opportunities, denied hope and denied a future. It is about making the social security system sustainable for the long term, which is so important to me. When we have 1,000 new PIP awards every single day, many of those driven by mental

health and young people, we have got to look at that. We cannot duck this challenge, because I want a social security system that will be there for centuries to come.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I am hoping to try to get everybody in, but I will be finishing the statement at around 2.30 pm. Please help each other by keeping questions and answers short.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): My constituents will welcome the Secretary of State's commitment today to protecting with dignity those who cannot work because they are so severely disabled or because of illness. There are many sick and disabled people who can work with the right support, so can my right hon. Friend confirm that those people will get the support they need to get into work to build a better life for them and their families?

Liz Kendall: Yes. Members have rightly said that PIP is not a benefit related to work, but a contribution to the extra costs of living with a disability. Actually, 17% of people on PIP are in work. I want to expand opportunities for disabled people who can work to get into work, because the disability employment gap, which actually fell under the last Government, has flatlined. We want to sort that out, because we believe that disabled people should have the same rights and chances to work, if they can, as everybody else.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Can the Secretary of State offer some reassurance to Sue from Wareham about her 45-year-old son, who is permanently disabled through childhood illness? She told me that he has great abilities and works part-time with support, but every time there is a change of circumstance, he has to prove his permanent disability again. The Secretary of State has confirmed that there will be changes to reassessments by DWP, but will that also apply across other Departments, including the Department for Transport, for matters including bus passes and blue badges? Those reassessments cause huge mental health issues.

Liz Kendall: The hon. Lady raises an important point. I will look at that and write to her to make sure we address it properly.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): While I accept that it is perfectly possible for people with severe mental health conditions to work with the right support—in Warrington, we already have an employment rate above the Government's national target—is there not a risk that these proposals are premature and that we are legislating for the mental health services we might hope to have in the future, rather than where these services are today? Does the Secretary of State accept that the issue is not over-diagnosis, but the broken mental health services we inherited?

Liz Kendall: I have always believed we should follow the evidence on this. We have a clear commitment to recruit 8,500 new mental health workers and to have mental health support in every primary and secondary school to prevent problems from happening. We also need to roll out individual placement and support within the NHS. I have seen in my own constituency that it can

[Liz Kendall]

be life-transforming, but we need to go further and faster to ensure that all people with mental health problems who can work do so.

Ann Davies (Caerfyrddin) (PC): Wales will be hit hard by these cuts, with the second-highest proportion of disabled people of working age in the UK. Stripping £5 billion from the system will only increase pressure on other services. Has the Secretary of State secured the approval of her Labour Welsh Government colleagues, as they will be the ones who will have to shoulder the cost of these damaging cuts?

Liz Kendall: Welsh Labour wants to see more people having the chances and choices to get good jobs. That is why we have a modern industrial strategy to create good jobs in every part of the country, why we are building 1.5 million new homes and why we want to see clean energy support. All those things will make a huge difference. We do not believe that the status quo is acceptable or inevitable. That is why our plan for change will create more good jobs in every part of the country. I hope that the hon. Lady and her party will welcome that.

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): I support the measures set out in this statement to get people who can work into work. I have been contacted by constituents who are worried, such as my constituent Lisa, who has a son with a severe disability. He will never be able to work and relies on support. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that people like my constituent, who cannot work and will never be able to work, will not be worse off under these proposals?

Liz Kendall: We absolutely will protect those who can never work. One thing I have not said to the House so far is that we are consulting in the Green Paper on whether we should increase the age until which children get DLA from 16 to 18. That is an important point to give people the reassurance they need and deserve.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): Parity in our welfare benefits is a key feature of our Union. When the last Government introduced their welfare reforms, the Northern Ireland Executive saw fit to introduce mitigations for which they had to pay by taking money off health and education out of the block grant. If the Northern Ireland Executive decide to mitigate these cuts on this occasion, can the Secretary of State confirm that that money would again have to come out of needed services, such as health and education?

Liz Kendall: Full details on the impact of these changes on the block grant will be available at the spring statement. The last Budget provided the biggest ever block grant settlement since devolution. I will be working closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive to make sure we do everything possible to help people in Northern Ireland into work and off benefits, to ensure that they have the same chances and choices as people right across the United Kingdom.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): Peterborough is a youth unemployment hotspot. I know not many Members are left on the Opposition Benches, but one of the most

shameful parts of their record has been writing off a generation, with one in eight young people not in education, earning or training. There is nothing progressive or good about a Government who write off young people and put them on benefits. I welcome the work that the Secretary of State has announced about employment support services for young people. Will she speak more about my passion, which is the Government's youth guarantee and how we put into reality youth jobs for the future?

Liz Kendall: Young people in my hon. Friend's constituency are much more likely to be unemployed than young people in the rest of the country, and I know his passion for the youth guarantee. We are investing extra support into the youth guarantee in his area, and I look forward to launching that youth guarantee very soon.

Shokat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): I of course applaud the intention of getting people back to work, but my inbox—like those of everybody else here, I am certain—is full of emails from petrified disabled constituents. The recurring theme is the absolute disbelief that once again, welfare cuts are being imposed by none other than a Labour Government. What will the Secretary of State say to my constituent, Jason, who lives in our city? He has been told by Leicester city council that it will now consider his PIP payment as income and so has increased the council tax he has to pay. How does the Minister expect Jason to find that additional £900?

Liz Kendall: I am happy for the hon. Gentleman to write to me about that constituent so I can look at the issue.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): Three quarters of the people who claim universal credit and disability have gone without essential items in the past six months. The £5 billion cut is likely to make that worse for them. I have had lots of emails from my Liverpool Riverside constituents. As others have asked already this afternoon, will the Minister speak with the Chancellor about looking at a wealth tax? We need a wealth tax and not to be attacking the most vulnerable.

Liz Kendall: I know that my hon. Friend cares passionately about these issues. Her constituents will not only benefit from the £1 billion investment into employment support, but the first ever above-inflation permanent increase in universal credit, if people are on universal credit and PIP. We have already taken action to ensure that those with the broadest shoulders take a bigger burden, including our action on the non-dom tax status and a tax on the profits of utility companies. That principle of fairness is vital to us all.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I go on the tube twice a week, and the disability seat in the carriage says "Not every disability is visible". Bearing that in mind, those with severe mental health issues, such as paranoid psychosis, anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, already fear phone calls from withheld phone numbers. Will the Secretary of State commit to ensuring that they will not be impacted or hounded in the attempt to root out fraudsters? Does she accept that those with severe mental health issues may not understand their illness, or be able to explain it or grasp it? How will these people—my people; our people—be protected?

Liz Kendall: I think that everyone's situation and condition is individual and personal to them, and that is why it is important that any reassessments are done on an individual case-by-case basis. There will be people with psychosis and schizophrenia who can never work, but I have met people in Leicester with precisely those conditions who have got work through the employment advice provided by the NHS's individual placement and support service. That is why, as I have said, the pathways to work employment support is personalised and tailored to individual need.

Given the size and complexity of the social security system, it is not easy for me to provide an answer now for the people whom the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. That is why we must have those personal assessments, and I want much more to be done to ensure that they are carried out properly.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Last night I received a response from the Minister for Social Security and Disability, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), to a written question that I had asked about the average payment for the daily living component of PIP. It revealed that the average payment was just £12 a day. The purpose of the daily living component is to cover the cost of extra help needed with everyday tasks such as washing, eating, using the toilet and getting dressed, but the Secretary of State's proposal to tighten the eligibility criteria could mean that even those who are assessed as needing help on every criterion may not be entitled to PIP. Is it not wrong to balance the books on the backs of sick and disabled people in such a way?

Liz Kendall: I can confirm that we will focus PIP on those with the greatest needs by changing the assessment so that people will need to score a minimum of four points to qualify for the daily living component. That will apply to new claimants from November 2026. Reassessments will be conducted on a personal, case-by-case basis, and therefore, while I entirely understand why Members raise issues about individuals, we cannot determine those cases from the Dispatch Box.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): I represent the second most deprived constituency in the United Kingdom, where nearly one in two children are living in poverty, and I worry about the impact that these measures could have on child poverty numbers. Moreover, the number of young people in my constituency who are not in work, education or training is double the national average, but they cannot gain access to the mental health support that would enable them to get into work. That is happening throughout Blackpool, but it is also happening across the country. What can the Secretary of State do to turbocharge the health service while also putting representatives of the voluntary sector, the third sector and the charity sector into jobcentres, so that people can find mental health support immediately rather than waiting for us to rebuild the NHS that the Conservatives left in such a terrible mess?

Liz Kendall: We are considering putting jobcentres into GP surgeries and community centres. I believe in a jobs and careers service going to where people are, rather than always expecting them to come to us. I think I am right in saying that authorities in some parts of the

country, such as the combined authority in Manchester, have commissioned specific talking therapies for people who are looking for work. That is the direction in which we want to move, and I should be more than happy to discuss it with my hon. Friend in more detail.

Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab): Hundreds of disabled people in my constituency want to work, but they often face absolute poverty pay and feel that they would be better off on benefits. On average, disabled workers are paid £2.35 an hour, or £4,300 a year, less than other workers. How will Labour's commitment in the King's Speech to a new equality Bill ensure that disabled workers will finally receive equal pay at work, and can choose a good job over being—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I call the Secretary of State.

Liz Kendall: I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that today we launched a consultation on equality pay gap reporting, and I hope that that will make a huge difference.

Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): If we do indeed believe in the social model of disability described earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Dr Tidball), may I encourage the Secretary of State, and indeed everyone, to find a different language in which to talk about this? When we describe disabled people as being unable to work, we ignore the fact that most disabled adults are in work, while many of those who are not are desperate to get into work but are held back by low pay and lack of opportunities. Can we look again at Access to Work to ensure that the largest and most profitable employers are bearing more of the costs of adequate—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind Members that there are a great many more for me to get in? I ask them please to help each other, and keep the questions and answers short.

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend is right: there are more disabled people in work than ever before, and we need to recognise that and go further. We are launching a consultation on Access to Work to ensure that more people are able to secure that vital support, and that it goes to the right place at the right time.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): I agree with the Government that welfare reform is necessary, but many of my constituents are very worried about the removal of support on which they rely. Fourteen years of austerity under the Conservatives took its toll on our nation, with public service cuts and the cost of living crisis pushing people to the brink. What are the Government doing to address the root causes of people's inability to work, rather than just focusing on the symptoms?

Liz Kendall: We are focusing precisely on the root causes. We are focusing on what more we can do to change the world of work, get people back to health and back to work and give them the skills that they need, and on tackling the disincentives in the benefits system. I am not interested in tinkering around; it is

[Liz Kendall]

too important for people, and life is short. I want to get it right, tackle the root causes, and put the country on a pathway to success.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): Many organisations, including our own NHS, use punitive capability processes when scoring the illnesses of people who become sick while in work, which causes additional stress to those who need support the most. How will the Government help employers to ensure that their employees are supported properly when they experience ill health?

Liz Kendall: Our Keep Britain Working review, led by the former John Lewis boss Sir Charlie Mayfield, is dealing with precisely that issue: what more we can do to help employers to give sick and disabled people more opportunities to obtain work and stay in work.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Ind): The Resolution Foundation has warned that as a result of cuts in PIP, 620,000 people could lose about £675 a month, with the poorest families hit the hardest. Given that 870,000 children live in PIP-receiving households and 290,000 of them are already living below the poverty line, how can the Government justify pushing more disabled people and children into poverty rather than pursuing fairer alternatives, such as a 2% wealth tax on assets worth more than £10 million, which would raise £24 billion—five times as much as the suggested savings from the proposed cuts? Is “austerity 2.0” really the change that people voted for?

Liz Kendall: Spending on working-age sickness and disability benefits will still rise substantially over the current Parliament. The full assessment of the numbers affected, and by how much, will be published alongside the spring statement.

Harpreet Uppal (Huddersfield) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. Cuts in social security for disabled people under the last Government led to their living in poverty with little or no increase in employment rates. What assessments have been made of the impact of these changes on their income, and will the Secretary of State ensure that any reforms are compassionate and disabled people have a voice?

Liz Kendall: Many other Members have asked that question. We will publish the equality impact and poverty impact analyses alongside the spring statement. I believe that we need to treat people with dignity, respect and compassion, but must also face up to the challenges of a failing system that is currently not sustainable, not for the public finances—although that is relevant—but for the very people who will depend on this in future. That is what we are trying to change.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for reassuring my constituents with profound disabilities that they will be protected under these reforms. My niece, who herself has autism and has faced significant barriers to work, is a health coach in a local jobcentre, where she is helping other people with disabilities, neurodiversity issues and mental illnesses to find work. However, she is frustrated by her lack of

access to fit notes. Will the Secretary of State ensure that jobcentre staff have the time, information and resources that they need to help people with disabilities and health problems to find suitable and rewarding jobs?

Liz Kendall: As always, my hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. We want to free up our work coaches' time from tick-box benefit administration so that they can spend more time with sick and disabled people who need support, and can refer them to, for instance, mental health or debt advice services. When we do that, more people get into work, and both their finances and their mental health improve. We have already announced that we will free up 1,000 work coaches' time to help more than 60,000 sick and disabled people, and that is just the start: we want it to be rolled out throughout the land.

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): I am one of the 6% to 8% of people living with a serious mental illness in employment, despite 80% of us wanting to work. I am here despite a mental health system that I have always found unsupportive, and because I went out of my way to forge my own pathway of support and care. Although I welcome the Secretary of State's offer of a package of support, my plea to her is that she work with her colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to make sure that those of us who suffer with a severe mental illness have the true support that we need to access employment.

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend is right. One of the things we learned during the pandemic is that a healthy nation and a healthy economy are two sides of the same coin. I believe we need to do much, much more to join up what the DWP does with what the NHS and, crucially, local skills and voluntary organisations do. That is not the way we have worked in the past, but that is what we want to change.

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): Having worked for all his adult life, my dad had a life-altering stroke in 2013. He was just 55, and PIP kept him alive for 10 further years. As the person who helped to fill in his PIP forms, take him to assessments and make the telephone calls, I can tell the House that, without a doubt, the system is already incredibly difficult to access. Will the reforms help speed up the process for PIP assessments and decisions, which take far too long under the current process?

Liz Kendall: Yes. We have announced in the Green Paper that, alongside the changes for which we will legislate, we will have a review of the PIP assessment process, led by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability. We will work with disabled people, the organisations that represent them, and others to sort this out. One of the great tragedies is that it is a miserable system for everybody. I do not want it to be like that—we need to change it—and I really look forward to talking to my hon. Friend to get more of his ideas.

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): Labour believes in the value and dignity that having a job gives people, but too many disabled people who want a job

are being let down and trapped by the current system. Organisations such as SWEDA—the Skills Work and Enterprise Development Agency—in West Bromwich help people with disabilities and long-term conditions into employment with tailored, local support. Can the Secretary of State confirm that this package of reforms will support people into good, fulfilling work via local organisations, and that we will protect people with long-term conditions who will never be able to work?

Liz Kendall: Yes.

Natasha Irons (Croydon East) (Lab): The system is clearly broken, and I welcome the urgent work to get it fixed. What reassurance can the Secretary of State provide to children living in households that receive PIP but are in poverty? What reassurance can she provide to the one in five people in receipt of universal credit and disability benefit, who are reliant on food banks already? What reassurance can she give to my constituents, 6,000 of whom claim PIP, which they need for dignified lives?

Liz Kendall: Having chaired Feeding Leicester for years—unfortunately, I had to give it up when I got this job—I know only too well the issues that people face right across my city and my hon. Friend's constituency. Our objective is to get those who can work into good work, because that is the sustainable way to tackle poverty and inequality in this country. We are also committed to developing a bold, cross-Government child poverty strategy, which we hope to publish shortly.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): Being healthy is shaped by the world around us, from the homes we live in to the air we breathe and the money in our pockets. Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a moral case for tackling the social determinants of ill health and the causes of poverty, rather than cutting the benefits of the most vulnerable people in our society?

Liz Kendall: I have worked in health, and one of my first jobs involved tackling health inequalities when I worked at the King's Fund charity. We are looking at building not only more homes, but more decent homes. We want people not just to get jobs, but to get good jobs. We are looking at raising the income of the poorest people with our new fair repayment rate, which gives an average of £420 a year extra to the 1.2 million poorest families. There is much more that we can do but, right across Government, our purpose is to tackle poverty and inequality by getting more people into good jobs. That is the Labour way.

Yuan Yang (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): I strongly congratulate the Secretary of State on the £1 billion package of employment support. Many active labour market policies have been shown to have considerable economic impact. Historically, it has been difficult for the Office for National Statistics to score the positive impacts of active policies, as opposed to the more straightforward impacts of budget reductions. Will the Secretary of State commit to working cross-departmentally to ensure that we have long-term investment in the health of our nation, which is so fundamental to the wealth of our economy?

Liz Kendall: Yes.

Lola McEvoy (Darlington) (Lab): I welcome the reforms outlined today and the commitment to make sure that our most vulnerable disabled people are protected from these changes. In Darlington, we know the value of work, but I have come across constituents with learning difficulties who have been out of work for a long time. They have been in work placements and could work, but they were badly bullied and have been scarred by 14 years of rhetoric about how they are workshy. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give that they will be offered safe and secure work placements?

Liz Kendall: I am not interested in blaming people to grab easy headlines; we have had that for too long. I know that many people with autism and neuro-divergent people have been treated badly, which needs to change. If my hon. Friend would like to send more case studies and examples from her constituency, I will look at them to see what we can do. We will try to put things right.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool West Derby) (Lab): Many will see the removal of £5 billion from the social security system not as reforms, but as the continuation of the failed ideology of Tory austerity, which has already cost thousands of lives. I have had hundreds of disabled constituents tell me that they are absolutely terrified by what the Government are planning to do. Does the Secretary of State really believe that it is fair to balance the books on the backs of disabled people and the poor, rather than introducing a wealth tax on the super-rich?

Liz Kendall: Let us be honest: that is not what we are doing. I do not accept the status quo—it is miserable for people who can work, and miserable for those who cannot. That is what I want to change.

Connor Naismith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the tone that she has struck today. We are talking about people's lives, not figures on a spreadsheet, and I hope to see that reflected in the delivery of these plans.

Disabled people's trust in the system is low following 14 years of a failed punitive approach by the Conservative party, and speculation in recent days has left my constituents feeling fearful. What assurances can the Secretary of State give that those with the most severe disabilities—those who are genuinely unable to work—will be no worse off under these plans?

Liz Kendall: I can absolutely give that commitment. Many hon. Members have raised the issue of culture, which is about how people feel they have been treated and the headlines that they see in the papers. It is really important that we change that. I know that we cannot do so overnight, but the entire team in the DWP—our Ministers and officials—want to change things so that we can get people on a pathway to success.

Dr Beccy Cooper (Worthing West) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. Welfare reform must ensure that incentivising people into work does not produce unintended health consequences, not least

[Dr Beccy Cooper]

by generating fear and uncertainty, as she rightly points out. Does she agree that we need to address the health inequity issues that are delaying treatment of mental illness, and our underlying public health and inequality issues? Welfare reform and NHS transformation must complement each other, to make sure that no one is left behind.

Liz Kendall: I absolutely agree that we need to tackle these issues, but there is more and more evidence that good work is good for the mental health of people with anxiety and depression, and for those with serious conditions, if support is provided in the right way. I have seen it for myself in my constituency, including through the work that the NHS is doing. We have to spread that far more widely.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): We know that helping people to stay well and manage long-term conditions or disabilities is almost always cheaper in the long term. Can the Secretary of State tell me how she will account for the potential wider system costs of changing the amount of money that is available to people with disabilities or long-term conditions?

Liz Kendall: For many years before I was appointed as a shadow DWP Minister, I worked in health and social care, and I know that helping people to manage their long-term conditions is absolutely essential. We must give people power, control and agency over their lives, rather than telling them that a doctor or somebody else always knows best. I deeply believe in that principle, and I will work closely with my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary, because I know he believes that, too. There is much more we can do, but we will definitely make a start.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I think I will get everybody in at this rate, thank you.

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I recently held a child poverty roundtable in my constituency, and one of the issues raised repeatedly was that many people who want to work find themselves worse off when they lose benefits and find themselves pushed into hardship. What assurances can my right hon. Friend provide for my constituents that under these changes they will be better off in work and will no longer be penalised for wanting to improve their life's circumstances and those of their families?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend raises a really important point, and it would be really good if she talked to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability, who is reviewing universal credit, as we promised in our manifesto, to tackle poverty and make work pay. We have to make that a reality for everybody in this country, and I am sure that, if she talks to him, he will speak more about what we are doing in this regard.

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): Last week, my constituent Ellie, who is visually impaired, visited the local jobcentre, but as a full-time student seeking part-time work, she was belittled, spoken over and told that she could not get help because she was on PIP, not on UC. She left feeling devastated by that experience. Can the

Secretary of State reassure me and Ellie that such an experience will become a thing of the past for people like her who are desperately seeking work?

Liz Kendall: That is absolutely my intention. I ask my hon. Friend to send me the details, because I will look into that personally.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the clue is in the name of our party? Because we believe in dignity in work and enhanced workers' rights; dignity and far more support for disabled people and people with health conditions seeking work, particularly with the right to try; and dignity and compassion for those unable to work, especially in ending reassessments. Does she also agree that this Labour Government will get Britain working and get welfare working better, with compassion and support at its heart?

Liz Kendall: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments. I do not pretend that this will change overnight, and I know it is a huge agenda, but we are in politics to make a difference—and a big difference—because, as I have said, life is short, and there is much we need to do.

Antonia Bance (Tipton and Wednesbury) (Lab): Many of us in this place have fought alongside parents of severely disabled people, not least against our broken SEND system. Can the Secretary of State reassure those parents, who may be looking at the proposed changes to UC health eligibility for under-22s and feeling deeply dismayed right now?

Liz Kendall: We are consulting on this proposal, and we want to make sure that those severely disabled people who will never work will be protected. However, I also know that there are many young people with special educational needs and learning difficulties who, with the right support, can make a contribution, live independently and get work. I am working closely with my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary to get this right, because it is really important that we ensure all young people get the support and opportunities they deserve.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that the Tory legacy in coastal communities such as mine in East Thanet is a broken welfare system and a broken economy. The number of people claiming PIP has more than doubled in my constituency since 2018, and the statistics on young people claiming for mental health conditions are particularly heartbreaking. However, two things can be true at once: too many people are being written off without a path to wellness and work; and there must be reliable support for those who cannot work. Can my right hon. Friend explain how reducing support for those who struggle to wash and dress themselves will help tackle either of these challenges?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend, as always, speaks passionately about her constituency and the need to make sure that the support for people who can work is

there, but also that we protect those who cannot. I would say that every case needs to be judged on an individual basis, and we will make sure that that happens.

I say to the House, and to you, Madame Deputy Speaker, that I know many people would have wanted to ask more questions and to say more, but my door is always open. We want and need to get this right, and we will have more debates about this, but if any hon. Member on either side of the House wants to contact me with more questions, I and the team will do everything we can to address those openly, honestly and quickly.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): The final question from the Back Benches will come from Chris Vince.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. I think we all know that the current system is not only broken, but unsustainable. I welcome her focus on supporting the long-term unemployed, and I would point to some good examples of the work we are doing in my constituency. However, would she agree that we need to support those constituents in Harlow, many with severe disabilities, who cannot work, and end this merry-go-round of constant reassessment?

Liz Kendall: Madam Deputy Speaker, you were saving the best till last, as always, with my hon. Friend.

We absolutely will protect those with severe disabilities who can never work. I do not want to see them having to go through deeply worrying reassessments, and we want to put that right. For people in Harlow who can

work but have been denied such opportunities, we will fix the broken system, tackle the perverse incentives left us by the Conservatives, and give people the hope and opportunity that there are better days ahead.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just to let Members know that about 100 Members have asked questions on the statement.

Dr Caroline Johnson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. When I asked a question during the statement, the Secretary of State said, “It does not mean that.” I had raised the list on the Government’s website of the descriptors used to qualify somebody for a certain number of points in relation to the daily living component of PIP. Each of the descriptors I mentioned has two or three points associated with it:

“Needs supervision...or assistance to be able to manage therapy that takes...3.5 hours a week. 2 points... Needs assistance to be able to wash either their hair or body below the waist. 2 points... Needs assistance to be able to get in or out of a bath...3 points ... Needs supervision...to be able to manage toilet needs. 2 points... Needs assistance to be able to dress or undress their lower body”—

needing the physical help of another person—also “2 points.”

At the moment, someone with all of those needs would qualify for this component of PIP, but under her new rules they will not. How can I give the Secretary of State the opportunity to correct the record?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, but the hon. Lady has got her point on the record.

Freight Crime

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

2.37 pm

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the recording and investigation of freight crime; and for connected purposes.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Keir Mather) for being present on the Front Bench today.

Shortly after being elected in July, I became the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on freight and logistics, because almost a fifth of my constituents work in this vital sector and I wanted to make sure they had a voice in Parliament. The freight and logistics sector has become the backbone of the local economy in North Warwickshire and Bedworth, with businesses located across the constituency. Since becoming an MP, I have had the pleasure of visiting many of these businesses to see how they are providing varied opportunities for people in North Warwickshire and Bedworth. I want the logistics sector to be something young people in my constituency are excited to be part of, and that means we must tackle freight crime so they can feel safe in their jobs.

I am proud that North Warwickshire and Bedworth contributes so much to our national economy by getting goods and medical supplies to the people up and down the country who need them. However, from speaking to drivers and businesses across the country, it is clear that one of the biggest issues facing this industry is organised freight crime. With the Road Haulage Association, the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service and freight businesses, we recently launched our APPG report on freight crime to provide a framework for how the Government can secure our supply chains. Our report highlighted a key misconception. Too many people think theft from a van or lorry is low-level opportunistic crime; this is not true. Freight crime is committed by organised criminal gangs. It is dangerous, and it has cost the UK economy £1 billion since 2020. More action is urgently needed.

I thank the Home Office and the Department for Transport for their engagement with our campaign. I know they understand the need to tackle this critical issue, and statistics show that the investment they have made in safe parking has paid off, with a reduction in the number of crimes at truck stops. I hope that demonstrates to the Government that targeted action to combat freight crime is producing results. I recently met the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention, and I welcome her recognition that the challenge of freight crime must be tackled if we are to achieve our mission of economic growth.

We need to see more action on freight crime. The situation is urgent. Between 2023 and 2024, the total value of goods stolen by freight criminals increased by 63% to more than £120 million. I visited Corley services in my constituency to see how it is tackling freight crime. Even though it has introduced measures to make drivers and parked vehicles safer, it is clear that more must be done. I spoke to Dave Hands, the managing director of LTS Global Solutions, based in my constituency,

about how freight crime has impacted his business. The company experienced six fuel theft incidents last year, each of which significantly impacted the business—LTS loses a day of deliveries and must replace the stolen fuel, pay a call-out fee to repair the vehicle and supply fuel to get it to the nearest garage.

This has to stop. This type of crime can often be violent, with organised gangs targeting drivers sleeping in lay-bys, as they know that is when they are most vulnerable to theft. In February 2024, five men threatened a driver in an Essex lay-by with a handgun before stealing his cargo, leaving the driver terrified. Despite an extensive area search, the police did not identify any suspects. Similarly, in West Yorkshire, last summer, thieves threatened a driver with a hammer and stole £250,000-worth of products from the vehicle. Once again, no one was caught.

Freight criminals are also becoming ever more sophisticated. They target warehouses where they know high-value goods will be stored and have stolen trailers laden with laptops, household appliances and medical supplies from transport hubs right across the midlands. Organised freight criminals seize opportunities of goods shortages to target cargo that is increasing in value, such as baby formula and personal protective equipment during the pandemic. In a particularly cruel case, freight criminals stole more than £1 million-worth of Government-funded laptops meant for deprived children. Luckily, three men were caught and sent to prison.

As a House, we must understand that organised freight crime feeds into other organised crime, where gangs have a large underground network of handlers who reintroduce large amounts of stolen cargo for the public to buy. Stolen cargo has even ended up on our supermarket shelves.

Staggeringly, in the most extreme and dangerous examples, freight criminals can even steal from moving vehicles. Last year, a heavy goods vehicle was driving to Hinckley, when the driver realised that the lock had been cut while he was driving and that more than £3 million-worth of smartphones, watches and laptops had been stolen. This type of operation, where criminal gangs drive erratically to target and tailgate a moving vehicle, is dangerous to everyone on the road.

Police in Warwickshire know that freight crime is becoming increasingly organised, targeted and dangerous, yet they are struggling to track and tackle it effectively because an organised gang stealing thousands of pounds-worth of goods from a lorry and someone stealing a mobile phone from the passenger seat of a car are coded in the same way. I am sure that that does not make sense to anyone in this House. That is why this Bill is needed.

The Bill would create a separate crime code for freight theft from a vehicle. With this specific code and classification, large-scale thefts of freight goods would be categorised differently, allowing police to respond to them as organised and targeted freight theft, rather than them being lumped together with domestic car break-ins and other car crime. This change would help police to deal with incidents more effectively in real time. Call handlers would be able to ask specific questions and follow responses and procedures specific to freight crime, allowing police to respond to incidents faster and more appropriately, stopping incidents and patterns slipping through the cracks.

It would also mean we could collect meaningful data. At the moment, the majority of data on freight crime is put together by the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Police Service, an organisation that receives no Government funding. Police forces currently do not have to report their freight crime incidents, so there are counties for which we have no data at all on how much freight crime is taking place. A separate crime code would mean all police forces could track freight crime instances, target freight crime hotspots in their county and create a national strategy with other police forces to chase down perpetrators across counties.

The Bill will improve police effectiveness when dealing with organised freight criminals and help us to tackle the problem and come up with a national freight crime strategy. Almost 20% of workers in North Warwickshire and Bedworth work in the freight and logistics sector, and they should not have to feel scared and threatened while doing their jobs. Freight and logistics businesses, which quite literally keep our country running, should not have to shoulder regular losses because of cargo theft; the police should not be hamstrung in tackling serious organised crime because they cannot retrieve the data they need to co-ordinate a national freight strategy; and ordinary consumers should not be left to pick up the bill. Organised freight crime gangs have been left to grow for too long, but this simple change should help to stop them in their tracks. It is time we took tougher action on freight crime, introduced a new freight crime code and put these thieves behind bars, where they belong.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Rachel Taylor, Shaun Davies, Sarah Coombes, David Burton-Sampson, Kirith Entwistle, Catherine Fookes, Christine Jardine, Antonia Bance, Mrs Sureena Brackenridge, Alex Ballinger, Sarah Edwards and Josh Newbury present the Bill.

Rachel Taylor accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 June, and to be printed (Bill 202).

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]

Further consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Education Committee, Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, HC732]

New Clause 17

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SCHOOLS: DATA PROTECTION

“After section 30 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 insert—

“30A *Data protection*

- (1) None of the provisions in or made by virtue of this Part (including Schedule 2) are to be read as requiring or authorising the processing of information which would contravene the data protection legislation (but in determining whether the processing would do so, take into account the duty imposed or the power conferred by the provision in question).
- (2) In this section, “the data protection legislation” and “processing” have the same meaning as in the Data Protection Act 2018 (see section 3 of that Act).”—
(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment ensures that the provisions in or made under Part 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (including provisions inserted into that Part by clauses 52 to 55 and Schedule 3) do not override the provisions in the data protection legislation.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.47 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 1—Free school meals: automatic enrolment of eligible children—

“In section 512ZB of the Education Act 1996 (provision of free school lunches and milk), omit subsection (2)(b).”

This new clause would remove the requirement in the Education Act 1996 for eligible children to request free school meals of their local authority.

New clause 6—Establishment of national school food monitoring scheme—

“(1) Within 12 months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must institute a scheme for monitoring school food standards in England (‘the national school food monitoring scheme’).

(2) The purpose of the national school food monitoring scheme will be to determine whether applicable food standards duties are being met in the provision of all food in schools in England.

(3) The national school food monitoring scheme may from time to time publish reports containing such information as it sees fit relating to school food standards in England.”

This new clause would establish a national school food monitoring scheme, to ensure that the breakfast club provision included within this bill, along with all other school food, follows school food standards.

New clause 7—Registration of children for free school meals—

“After section 512ZA of the Education Act 1996 (power to charge for meals etc.), insert—

“512ZAA Registration of children for free school meals

The Secretary of State must ensure that free school meals are provided to—

- (a) all children in England who are eligible to receive free school meals; and
- (b) all children whose household income is less than £20,000 per year.”

New clause 9—Duty of school governing bodies regarding mental health provision—

“(1) Subject to subsection (3), the governing body of a maintained or academy school in England has a duty to make arrangements for provision in the school of a dedicated mental health practitioner.

(2) In subsection (1), “education mental health practitioner” means a person with a graduate-level or postgraduate-level qualification of that name earned through a course commissioned by NHS England.

(3) Where a school has 100 or fewer pupils, the duty under subsection (1) may be satisfied through collaborative provision between several schools.

(4) The Secretary of State must provide, or make arrangements for the provision of, appropriate financial and other support to school governing bodies for their purposes of facilitating the fulfilling of the duty in subsection (1).”

New clause 10—Establishment of a National Body for SEND—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, establish a National Body for SEND.

(2) The functions of the National Body for SEND will include, but not be limited to—

- (a) national coordination of SEND provision;
- (b) supporting the delivery of SEND support for children with very high needs; and
- (c) advising on funding needed by local authorities for SEND provision.

(3) Any mechanism used by the National Body for SEND in advising on funding under subsection (2)(c) should be based on current need and may disregard historic spend.”

New clause 11—National Tutoring Guarantee—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, publish a report outlining the steps necessary to introduce a National Tutoring Guarantee.

(2) A “National Tutoring Guarantee” means a statutory requirement on the Secretary of State to ensure access to small group academic tutoring for all disadvantaged children who require academic support.

(3) A report published under this section must include an assessment of how best to deliver targeted academic support from qualified tutors to children—

- (a) from low-income backgrounds,
- (b) with low prior attainment,
- (c) with additional needs, or
- (d) who are young carers.

(4) In preparing a report under this section, the Secretary of State must consult with—

- (a) headteachers,
- (b) teachers,
- (c) school leaders,
- (d) parents of children from low-income backgrounds,
- (e) children from low-income backgrounds, and
- (f) other individuals or organisations as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(5) A report under this section must be laid before Parliament.

(6) Within three months of a report under this section being laid before Parliament, the Secretary of State must take steps to implement the recommendations contained in the report.”

New clause 12—VAT zero-rating for certain items of school uniform—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 6 months of the passing of this Act, make provision for certain items of school uniform to be zero-rated for the purposes of VAT.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “certain items of school uniform” means items of school uniform for pupils up to the age of 16.”

New clause 16—Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education in assemblies—

“(1) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 70 (requirements relating to collective worship)—

(a) for subsection (1) substitute—

“(1) Subject to section 71, each pupil in attendance at—

- (a) a community, foundation or voluntary school in Wales,
- (b) a foundation or voluntary school in England which is designated with a religious character, or
- (c) an Academy in England which is designated with a religious character,

must on each school day take part in an act of collective worship.”

(b) in subsection (2), for “community, foundation or voluntary school”, substitute “school to which subsection (1) applies”.

(3) After section 70, insert—

“70A Requirements relating to assemblies

(1) This section applies to schools in England that are—

- (a) maintained schools without a religious character;
- (b) non-maintained special schools;
- (c) City Technology Colleges; and
- (d) Academies without a religious character.

(2) Each pupil in attendance at a school to which this section applies must, at least once during the school week, take part in an assembly which is principally directed towards furthering the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the pupils, regardless of religion or belief.

(3) In relation to any school to which this section applies—

- (a) the local authority responsible for education (in the case of maintained schools) and the governing body must exercise their functions with a view to securing, and

(b) the head teacher must secure,

that subsection (2) is complied with.”

This new clause would remove the requirement for daily collective worship in England for maintained schools and academies without a religious character, non-maintained special schools, and city technology colleges, and introduce a requirement for a weekly assembly furthering spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

New clause 23—Provision of relationships and sex education and PSHE to persons who have not attained the age of 18 at further education providers—

“(1) The Children and Social Work Act 2017 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 34 (Education relating to relationships and sex)—

(a) at the end of subsection (1)(b) insert “and

- (c) relationships and sex education to be provided to persons who have not attained the age of eighteen and who are receiving education at post-16 education institutions in England”;
- (b) in subsection (2)(a), after “schools” insert “and further education providers”;
- (c) in subsection (2)(b), after “schools” insert “and further education providers”;
- (d) in subsection (2)(b), after “schools” insert “and further education providers”.

(3) In section 35 (Other personal, social, health and economic education)—

- (a) at the end of subsection (1)(b) insert “and
 - (c) to persons who have not attained the age of eighteen and who are receiving education at post-16 education institutions in England”;
- (b) in subsection (2)(a), after “schools” insert “and further education providers”;
- (c) in subsection (2)(b), after “schools” insert “and further education providers”;
- (d) in subsection (2)(b), after “schools” insert “and further education providers”.

This new clause would extend the existing provision of relationships and sex education and PSHE under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to people under the age of 18 who are receiving education at post-16 education institutions in England.

New clause 24—Cap on new faith schools’ admissions—

“(1) Any school or academy established more than two months after the passing of this Act which—

- (a) is of a religious character, and
- (b) is selective on the basis of faith,

must adopt admissions criteria which provide that, where the school is oversubscribed, at least 50% of the places available each year are allocated without reference to faith-based criteria.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to an academy established as a result of a maintained school being converted into an academy under section 4 of the Academies Act 2010, except where the converted maintained school was—

- (a) of a religious character, and
- (b) selective on the basis of faith prior to conversion.”

This new clause would require new schools with faith-based admissions (other than those which were maintained schools that have converted to being academies) to apply a 50% cap on faith-based admissions places when oversubscribed, in line with the cap for new academies and free schools.

New clause 31—Guidance on the admission of summer-born children with EHC plans—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, publish guidance for local authorities and school admissions authorities on the admission of summer-born children with education, health and care plans.

(2) Guidance published under this section must—

- (a) detail the factors which must be taken into account when considering a request for a summer born child with an EHC plan to be placed outside of their normal age group;
- (b) include a presumption that requests relating to the placement or admission of summer-born children with EHC plans should be considered on no less favourable terms than requests relating to summer-born children without EHC plans; and
- (c) outline circumstances when it may, or may not, be appropriate for a child who has been placed outside of their normal age group to be moved to join their normal age group, with a presumption that such a placement should be no less favourable terms than placements relating to summer-born children without EHC plans;

- (d) detail how parents may object to the placing of their child with their normal age group, and the process by which such objections will be considered.

(3) In developing guidance under this section, the Secretary of State must consult with—

- (a) groups representing the interests of parents;
- (b) individuals and organisations with expertise in supporting children with special educational needs and the parents of such children;
- (c) other such parties as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “summer-born children” means children born between 1 April and 31 August.”

New clause 32—Collection and publication of data relating to summer-born children—

“(1) A local authority must collect and publish data on—

- (a) the number and proportion of summer-born children who started school in the local authority’s area outside of their normal age group—
 - (i) with EHC plans, and
 - (ii) without EHC plans
- (b) the number and proportion of summer-born children—
 - (i) with EHC plans, and
 - (ii) without EHC plans

who started school in the local authority’s area outside of their normal age group and who have been required to join their normal age group;

- (c) the number and proportion of summer-born children with EHC plans who started school in the local authority’s area outside of their normal age group and who have been required to join their normal age group in a—
 - (i) special school;
 - (ii) mainstream school.

(2) The Secretary of State must annually—

- (a) conduct a statistical analysis of, and
- (b) publish a report on the data collected by local authorities under subsection (1).”

New clause 34—Provision of free school lunches to all primary school children—

“(1) Section 512ZB of the Education Act 1996 (provision of free school lunches and milk) is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (4A)(b), after “year 2,” insert “year 3, year 4, year 5, year 6”.

(3) In subsection (4C), after “age of 7;” insert—

“Year 3” means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 8;

“Year 4” means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 9;

“Year 5” means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 10;

“Year 6” means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 11;”

This new clause would extend free school lunches to all primary school age children in state funded schools.

New clause 38—Power to prescribe pay and conditions for teachers—

“The Secretary of State must, within three months of the passing of this Act—

- (a) make provision for the power of the governing bodies of maintained schools to set the pay and working conditions of school teachers to be made equivalent with the relevant powers of academies;
- (b) provide guidance to all applicable schools that—
 - (i) pay levels given in the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document are to be treated as the minimum pay of relevant teachers;

- (ii) teachers may be paid above the pay levels given in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document;
- (iii) they must have regard to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document but may vary from it."

This new clause would make the pay set out in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document a floor, and extend freedoms over pay and conditions to local authority maintained schools.

New clause 39—Approved free schools and university training colleges in pre-opening—

"The Secretary of State must make provision for the opening of all free schools and university training colleges whose applications were approved prior to October 2024."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to proceed with the opening of free schools whose opening was paused in October 2024.

New clause 40—Duty for schools to report acts of violence against staff to the police—

"(1) Where an act listed in subsection (2) takes place which involves the use or threat of force against a member of a school's staff, the school must report the incident to the police.

(2) An act must be reported to the police where—

- (a) it is directed towards a member of school staff or their property; and
- (b) it takes place—
 - (i) on school property; or
 - (ii) because of the victim's status as a member of a school's staff.

(3) The provisions of this section do not require or imply a duty on the police to take specific actions in response to such reports."

This new clause would create a duty for all schools to report acts or threats of violence against their staff to the police. It would not create a requirement for the police to charge the perpetrator.

New clause 41—Right to review school curriculum material—

"Where requested by the parent or carer of a child on the school's pupil roll, a school must allow such persons to view all materials used in the teaching of the school curriculum, including those provided by external, third-party, charitable or commercial providers."

This new clause would ensure that parents can view materials used in the teaching of the school curriculum.

New clause 48—Review of Impact on Home Educators and Reduction of Unnecessary Reporting—

"(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the day on which this Act is passed, conduct a review and report of the impact of clause 26 on home educators in England.

(2) The review must include an assessment of

- (a) the administrative and reporting requirements placed on home educators as a result of clause 26;
- (b) the administrative and reporting requirements placed on local authorities as a result of clause 26;
- (c) the extent to which such requirements are necessary for safeguarding purposes; and
- (d) any data or reporting obligations that can be reduced or removed for home educators where they are not essential for safeguarding.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay a report before Parliament setting out the findings of the review, including—

- (a) an analysis of the impact of clause 26 on home educators;
- (b) a clear outline of any data or reporting obligations that will no longer be required from home educators; and
- (c) a timeline for the removal of unnecessary reporting obligations, which must not exceed 12 months from the publication of the report.

(4) In conducting the review, the Secretary of State must consult with representatives of home educators and relevant stakeholders.

(5) The report must be made publicly available.

(6) The Secretary of State must ensure that any reporting obligations identified as unnecessary under subsection (3)(b) are removed within the timeframe specified in subsection (3)(c)."

New clause 49—Provision of free meals and activities during school holidays—

"(1) A local authority must—

- (a) provide; or
- (b) coordinate the provision of programmes which provide, free meals and activities to relevant children during school holidays.

(2) For the purposes of this section, "relevant children" means children in receipt of free school meals.

(3) The Secretary of State may, by regulations made by statutory instrument—

- (a) specify minimum standards for meals and activities during school holidays;
- (b) specify criteria that organisations involved in the delivery of meals and activities during school holidays must meet."

This new clause would place a duty on local authorities to provide or coordinate free meals and activities for children eligible for free school meals during school holidays.

New clause 51—Flexibility to take into account local circumstances when following the National Curriculum—

"In section 87 of the Education Act 2002 (establishment of the National Curriculum for England by order), after subsection (1) insert—

"(1A) In any revision to the National Curriculum for England, the Secretary of State must ensure that the National Curriculum shall consist of—

- (a) a core framework; and
- (b) subjects or areas of learning outside the core framework that allow flexibility for each school to take account of their specific circumstances."

This new clause would clarify that, when revised, the National Curriculum for England will provide a core framework as well as flexibility for schools to take account of their own specific circumstances.

New clause 52—Parliamentary approval of revisions of the National Curriculum—

"In section 87 of the Education Act 2002 (establishment of the National Curriculum for England by order), after subsection (3) insert—

"(3A) An order made under this section revising the National Curriculum for England shall be subject to the affirmative procedure."

This new clause would make revisions to the National Curriculum subject to parliamentary approval by the affirmative procedure.

New clause 53—Arrangements for national examinations for children not in school—

"After section 436G of the Education Act 1996, as inserted by section 25 of this Act, insert—

"436GA Arrangements for national examinations for children not in school

Where a child is eligible to be registered by the authority under section 436B, the authority must—

- (a) provide for the child to be able to sit any relevant national examination; and
- (b) provide financial assistance to enable the child to sit any relevant national examination; where requested by the parent or carer of the child."

New clause 54—Review of Free School Meal eligibility and Pupil Premium registration—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the day on which this Act is passed, conduct a review of—

- (a) the number of children in England who are eligible for free school meals but are not claiming them,
- (b) the number of children who are eligible for free school meals but are not registered for the purposes of pupil premium funding,
- (c) the number of additional children who would be eligible for free school meals if the income thresholds had been uprated in line with inflation since 2018, and
- (d) the number of additional children who would be eligible for free school meals if the income thresholds were set at £20,000 per annum after tax.

(2) A review under subsection (1) must include an assessment of—

- (a) barriers preventing eligible children from claiming free school meals;
- (b) disparities in take-up rates across different regions and demographics; and
- (c) the financial and educational impact of under-registration on schools and local authorities.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay a report before Parliament setting out the findings of the review, including any recommendations for improving registration for and take-up of free school meals and pupil premium funding.

(4) The review and report required under this section must be repeated annually.”

Amendment 219, in clause 22, page 41, line 23, at end insert—

“and for all pupils attending special schools”.

This amendment would require the delivery of school breakfast provision to all pupils in special schools, regardless of their age.

Amendment 2, page 41, line 23, at end insert—

“(1A) The appropriate authority must, in securing breakfast club provision, make provision for the needs of qualifying children listed on the school's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Register.”

This amendment would require the providers of breakfast clubs to make particular provision for the needs of children on schools' Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Registers.

Amendment 220, page 42, line 23, at end insert—

““special schools” has the meaning set out in section 337 of the Education Act 1996.”

This amendment defines special schools and is consequential on amendment 219.

Amendment 214, page 43, line 11, at end insert—

“(2A) Before making an application under subsection (1), the appropriate authority of a relevant school must consider whether the duty might be met by other forms of breakfast provision including—

- (a) classroom-based provision, or
- (b) takeaway provision, either at school or at a proximate site.”

This amendment would require schools to consider other models of breakfast provision before seeking an exemption from the duty to provide breakfast clubs.

Amendment 215, page 43, line 21, at end insert—

“and if the condition in subsection (4A) is met.

- (4A) The condition in this subsection is that the Secretary of State is satisfied that the appropriate authority of a relevant school has fully considered other forms of breakfast provision in accordance with subsection (2A).”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to be satisfied that a school had considered other models of breakfast provision before granting an exemption from the duty to provide breakfast clubs.

Amendment 217, page 43, line 29, at end insert—

“551CA Promotion of supplementary models of provision

The Secretary of State must seek to promote and support the development of supplementary models of provision where appropriate, including

- (a) classroom based provision.
- (b) takeaway provision, and
- (c) nurture group services.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to promote supplementary models of provision.

Amendment 218, page 43, line 37, at end insert—

“(d) matters arising from the Secretary of State's duty under section 551CA.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to develop guidance in connection with the duty to promote supplementary models of provision.

Amendment 216, page 43, line 38, leave out “have regard to” and insert “comply with”.

This amendment would require schools to comply with guidance under section 551D.

Amendment 212, page 44, line 5, at end insert—

“551E Publication of data

The Secretary of State must acquire and regularly publish data on breakfast club provision in schools, including data on—

- (a) the characteristics of those receiving breakfast in schools, including their eligibility for free school meals;
- (b) uptake levels;
- (c) satisfaction levels amongst pupils and parents; and
- (d) any assessment of the impact of provision on attendance, behaviour, health and wellbeing.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to acquire and regularly publish data on breakfast club provision in schools.

Amendment 213, page 44, line 5, at end insert—

“551E Advice and support

(1) The Secretary of State must provide to any school to which the duty under section 551B applies advice and support services when requested by the appropriate authority of the school.

(2) Services provided by the Secretary of State in accordance with subsection (1) should include advice and support from individuals with specialist knowledge of the delivery of school breakfast provision.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to make available to schools advice and support services delivered by people with specialist knowledge of the delivery of school breakfast provision.

Government amendments 132 and 133.

Amendment 1, in clause 24, page 44, leave out lines 22 to 29 and insert—

“(1) The appropriate authority of a relevant school may not require a pupil at the school to have to buy branded items of school uniform for use during a school year which cost more in total to purchase than a specified monetary amount, to be reviewed annually.

(1A) The Secretary of State may by regulations specify the monetary amount that may apply to—

- (a) a primary pupil; and
- (b) a secondary pupil.”

Amendment 191, page 45, line 6, at end insert—

“(2A) Where the appropriate authority of a relevant school provides second hand items which—

- (a) comply with the school's uniform requirements,
- (b) are in an acceptable condition, and

(c) can be purchased for significantly less than the cost of buying the item,

the appropriate authority may require a pupil to have more than three branded items of uniform.

(2B) Where the appropriate authority provides new items which—

(a) comply with the school's uniform requirements,

(b) are new, and

(c) can be purchased for significantly less than the cost of buying the item non-branded,

the appropriate authority may require a pupil to have more than three branded items of uniform.”

This amendment would allow schools to require more than three branded items of uniform if they are making them available, whether new or second hand, at a lower cost than buying non-branded items.

Amendment 190, page 45, line 15, after “school” insert

“except items of kit required when representing the school in sporting activities”.

This amendment would exclude items of PE kit required when representing the school in sporting activities from the limit on branded items of school uniform.

Government amendments 134 and 135.

Amendment 200, page 47, line 29, at end insert—

“(8A) Where a local authority refuses consent in respect of a child who meets the criteria for Condition A, the local authority must provide the parents or carers of the relevant child with a statement of reasons for the decision.

(8B) A statement of reasons provided under subsection (8A) must include an assessment of the costs and benefits to the child.”

This amendment would require a local authority to submit a statement of reasons when they do not agree for a child who meets Condition A to be home educated.

Government amendment 20.

Amendment 202, in clause 25, page 46, line 22, leave out “condition A”.

Amendment 201, page 46, leave out lines 23 to 28.

Amendment 224, page 46, line 23, leave out subsection (3).

Government amendments 21 to 24.

Amendment 22, in clause 25, page 46, line 25, leave out “337(1)” and insert “337”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 173, page 46, line 32, after “action” insert—

“, or has previously taken action”.

This amendment would widen the definition of “relevant child” to include children in relation to whom a local authority has previously taken action under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Amendment 192, page 46, line 37, at end insert—

“(c) providing services to the child or their family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, or

(d) a local authority which has ever provided services to the child or their family under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.”

This amendment would ensure local authorities had to consent to withdrawing children from school if there is a child protection plan in place or if a child is a ‘child in need’, or if there has ever been a child protection plan in place, in relation to the relevant child or their family.

Amendment 4, page 47, line 19, at end insert—

“(6A) For the purposes of subsection (6), “suitable arrangements” in relation to the education of the child otherwise than at school mean arrangements appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and the existence of any special educational needs.”

This amendment would clarify the meaning of suitable arrangements for the education of a child outside of school, which the local authority must consider when deciding whether to grant consent for withdrawal from school.

Government amendments 25 to 31, 136 to 138, 32, 139, 33 and 140.

Amendment 5, in clause 26, page 49, line 40, leave out “each” and insert “the”.

This amendment would remove the obligation on parents to provide information on the second parent.

Amendment 6, page 49, line 41, leave out “each” and insert “any”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 5.

Amendment 193, page 50, leave out lines 1 and 2.

This amendment would remove a requirement for the register of children not in school to include details of how much time a child spends being educated by parents.

Amendment 7, page 50, line 2, leave out “each parent of the child”

and insert “a parent”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 5.

Amendment 194, page 50, line 4, after “parent” insert—

“, in respect of each individual or organisation which provides such education for more than six hours a week”.

This amendment would ensure that information relating to short activities such as those operated by museums, libraries, companies and charities, as well as individual private tutoring activities, would only need to be recorded on the register of children not in school if they are provided for more than six hours a week.

Amendment 175, page 50, line 17, at end insert—

“(1A) The requirement to provide information under subsection (1)(b) does not apply where a safeguarding concern in respect of either parent has been identified.”

Amendment 195, page 50, line 17, at end insert—

“(1A) The requirements of subsection (1)(e) do not apply to provision provided on weekends or during school holidays.”

Government amendments 34 to 39.

Amendment 196, in clause 26, page 51, line 18, at end insert—

“(2A) The Secretary of State may only require further information about children to be included on the register by introducing regulations subject to the affirmative procedure.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to introduce regulations, subject to agreement in Parliament, when seeking to require additional information to be included in the register of children not in school.

Government amendments 40 to 45.

Amendment 197, in clause 26, page 53, line 14, after “436B)” insert—

“but does not include any person or provider that is providing out-of-school education to home-educated children on weekends or during school holidays.”

This amendment would mean that providers of out-of-school education would not be required to provide information to local authorities in respect of education they provide on weekends or during school holidays to home-schooled children.

Amendment 198, page 53, line 21, after “way” insert—
 “, but may not refer to an amount of time that is less than or equal to six hours a week.”

This amendment would mean that providers of out-of-school education would not be required to provide information to local authorities where they provide education for fewer than six hours a week.

Amendment 221, page 53, line 21, at end insert—

“, but may not refer to an amount of time that is less than or equal to six hours a week.”

Government amendments 46 to 59.

Amendment 199, in clause 26, page 55, line 22, at end insert—

“(9) The Secretary of State shall publish annually the GCSE results of children listed on the register.

(10) The Secretary of State shall ensure that the GCSE results of children on the register are included for each set of outcome data published by the Government.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to record outcome data for children on the register as a subsection of each set of performance data published by the Department for Education.

Government amendments 60 to 67.

Amendment 8, in clause 27, page 58, leave out lines 22 to 24.

This amendment, along with Amendments 9, 10, 11 and 12, would mean that preliminary notices would not be served on a child's parent for not providing certain information.

Government amendment 68.

Amendment 9, in clause 27, page 58, line 27, leave out “, C or D”.

This amendment is related to Amendment 8.

Amendment 13, page 58, line 32, at end insert—

“(4A) For the purposes of subsection (4), “suitable education”, in relation to a child, means education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and the existence of any special educational needs.”

This amendment would clarify the meaning of suitable education which the local authority must consider when serving a preliminary notice for a school attendance order.

Amendment 10, page 59, leave out lines 9 to 22.

This amendment is related to Amendment 8.

Amendment 11, page 59, line 24, leave out “to D” and insert “or B”.

This amendment is related to Amendment 8.

Government amendment 69.

Amendment 12, page 59, line 41, leave out “, C or D”.

This amendment is related to Amendment 8.

Government amendment 141.

Amendment 14, in clause 27, page 60, line 5, at end insert—

“(1A) For the purposes of subsection (1)(b)(i), “suitable education”, in relation to a child, means education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and the existence of any special educational needs.”

This amendment would clarify the meaning of suitable education which the local authority must consider when serving a school attendance order.

Amendment 15, page 60, line 8, leave out from beginning to end of line 9 and insert—

“may consider—

(i) any of the settings outside the home where the child is being educated, and

(ii) where the child lives”.

This amendment would give local authorities the discretion to consider settings where a child is educated when determining whether a school attendance order should be served.

Amendment 16, page 60, line 10, leave out from “consider” to “so” and insert—

“whether the child is being educated in a way which is appropriate to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have”.

This amendment would require the authority to have regard to section 7 of the Education Act 1996 in respect of parents' duty towards their child's education.

Amendment 17, page 60, line 15, leave out from “visit” to end of line 16 and insert “meet the child”.

This amendment would remove the requirement for the child to be seen in the home.

Amendment 18, page 60, line 17, after “refused” insert “without reasonable grounds”.

This amendment, along with Amendment 19, would, where a request to meet a child has been refused by a parent without reasonable grounds, enable an authority to consider that to be a relevant factor when considering whether to make a school attendance order.

Amendment 19, page 60, line 18, leave out “must” and insert “may”.

Government amendments 70 to 78, 142 to 144, 79 to 81, 145 to 148, 82, 149, 83 to 89, 150, 90, 151 to 153, 91 and 92, and 154 and 155.

Amendment 203, in clause 32, page 72, line 16, at end insert—

“(1B) Powers under subsection (1) may not be exercised in relation to an academy.”

This amendment specifies that the Secretary of State should rely on the provisions in Funding Agreements as regards to academies.

Government amendments 156 to 158.

Amendment 204, in clause 34, page 87, line 5, at end insert—

“(2D) The Secretary of State must issue guidance for relevant institutions on how subsection (2)(g) is to be understood.”

This amendment to allow independent schools not to have to notify the Secretary of State about change of use for buildings.

Government amendments 159 to 167.

Amendment 205, page 99, line 33, leave out clause 41.

Amendment 222, in clause 41, page 99, line 34, at end insert—

“(1A) In section 133 (requirement to be qualified), after subsection (5) insert—

“(5A) Regulations made by the Secretary of State under this section must have regard to—

(a) the availability of qualified teachers in each school subject, and

(b) the necessity or desirability of specific sectoral expertise for teachers in each school subject”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to take account of the availability of qualified teachers in each subject, and the desirability of specific sectoral expertise when making regulations under clause 40.

Amendment 206, page 100, line 6, leave out clause 42.

Amendment 207, page 103, line 1, leave out clause 44.

Amendment 208, in clause 44, page 103, line 9, leave out from “directions” to the end of line 11 and insert—
“as are necessary to secure compliance with statutory duties, the requirements of the Funding Agreement, or charity law.”

This amendment would limit the Secretary of State's power of direction should an Academy breach, or act unreasonably in respect of, the performance of a relevant duty.

Government amendment 168.

Amendment 209, page 103, line 36, leave out clause 45.

Amendment 225, in clause 45, page 104, line 2, at end insert—

“(c) after subsection (1A) insert—

“(1B) Before deciding whether to issue an Academy order in respect of a maintained school, the Secretary of State must issue an invitation for expressions of interest for suitable sponsors.

(1C) The Secretary of State must make an assessment of whether or not to issue an Academy order based on the established track record of parties who responded to the invitation issued under subsection (1B) with an expression of interest in raising school standards.”

Amendment 223, page 104, line 21, at end insert—

“(10) Before the amendments made by this section come into force, the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report detailing—

(a) the mechanisms, including Academy Orders, by which improvement of school standards can be achieved, and

(b) guidance on the appropriate usage of these mechanisms.”

Amendment 210, page 107, line 32, leave out clause 51.

Amendment 211, page 109, line 5, leave out clause 52.

Government amendments 169, 170 and 93.

Amendment 3, in clause 60, page 113, line 25, at end insert—

“(2A) Section [Abolition of common law defence of reasonable punishment] comes into force at the end of the period of twelve months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.”

This amendment is consequential on Abolition of common law defence of reasonable punishment.

Government amendments 94 to 110.

New clause 2—*Review of the Act*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must from time to time—

(a) carry out a review of the impact of the provisions of this Act; and

(b) publish a report setting out the conclusions of the review.

(2) A first report under subsection (1) must be published within 12 months of the passing of this Act, with subsequent reports published at intervals not exceeding 5 years.

(3) A report published under this section must, in particular—

(a) set out the objectives intended to be achieved by the provisions of this Act;

(b) assess the extent to which those objectives are achieved; and

(c) assess whether those objectives remain appropriate.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to conduct regular reviews of the impact of this Act and publish reports.

Catherine McKinnell: I start by thanking hon. Members in all parts of the House for their valuable contribution to the debate so far.

The Bill is for children—the clue is in the name. It is for their safety, their education and their future that we bring it forward. This Government are on a mission to

break down barriers to opportunity for each and every child, and the Bill is a significant step on that path. I welcome the debate that the Bill has sparked. After a decade in which education was left on the sidelines, Labour is once again bringing it to the fore, and to the centre of national life—the place it always occupies under a Labour Government. Education is at the heart of how we ensure opportunities for the next generation.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): On the Minister's point about the last 10, 12 or even 14 years, would she join me in acknowledging that the schools in Walsall borough—a very diverse borough, with areas of real deprivation—outperformed national figures for the first time at the end of last year, with 91% of Walsall schools being graded good or better? That figure has steadily increased under not just a Conservative Government, but a fantastic Conservative-led council.

Catherine McKinnell: I will always share in the celebration of schools that are doing well, and the right hon. Lady is absolutely right to celebrate the schools in her area. I do question, however, the shameless pride we sometimes see in the record of her Government; when they left office, England's schools were getting worse, standards in reading, maths and science were down, roofs were crumbling, children were struggling, and a generation of children were absent from school. We are determined to tackle those challenges head-on. The education that we provide for our children is not just for their future, but for all of our futures. It shapes society today and the society that we want for tomorrow.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is good of the Minister, for whom I have a great deal of respect, to give way. As I know her to be an honest person, will she at least share with the House the fact that schools in England are better today than they were in 2010? Picking some tiny subset of time to make out that schools are deprived is not a fair assessment. Schools are demonstrably better in England today than they were in 2010. Please, Minister, at least acknowledge that.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words and his assumption of my honesty. The fact is that one in three children starting school is not school ready. More than a third of children leave primary school without a firm foundation in reading, writing and maths. The disadvantage gap is widening. I will come on to what we want to achieve as a Government, but we are not satisfied, as Conservative Members appear to be, with leaving some of our children without the start in life that they deserve. We want the best for all our children, and that is what our changes will achieve.

Graham Stuart: Will the Minister give way?

Catherine McKinnell: I have given way to the right hon. Member. I will do so again later.

It is essential that every child and family has certainty that they can access a good local school—a school that will set high expectations and standards for all our children, enabling them to achieve and thrive. We are bringing forward legislation to achieve our reforms, but there are reforms that we can make for which no legislation

is required. We are designing a school system that supports and challenges all schools to deliver for our children. We want a rich and broad curriculum, delivered by expertly trained teachers, who have a good pay and conditions offer that attracts and retains the staff that our children need.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In that spirit, will the Minister look at my new clause 30, which calls on the Government to review the effectiveness and value of outdoor education and learning for young people in both primary and secondary schools? We have a mental ill health pandemic in this country and are trying to put that right. Will she acknowledge that building young people's resilience through outdoor education is good not just for dealing with that, but for building young people's ability to rely on others and themselves? That helps them in situations in which they are not comfortable, and when they go back to the classroom, they are more willing to learn. Does she see this as a moment in which to invest in outdoor education, in every part of the country?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is incredibly committed to that cause—understandably so, as he comes from a part of the country that boasts incredible outdoor scenery, and activities that many of us, I am sure, have taken part in. He is right to want that for all our children. That forms part of the changes that we are introducing today, which will unlock opportunity for all children up and down the country. We want to create a floor, but no ceiling, for what schools can offer, and to enable healthy competition and innovation beyond a core set of frameworks and standards, so that we can improve all schools, and give them the freedom and ability to deliver the enrichment programme for which he so rightly advocates. We want high and rising standards for all children.

Wendy Morton: Does the Minister not understand that freedom and flexibility can come from allowing a school flexibility over its curriculum?

Catherine McKinnell: Try as the Opposition might to make their straw man argument, this Labour Government will demand high and rising standards for all our children. Recent polls of the profession show that, despite all the scaremongering, trust chief executive officers agree that there is nothing to fear from our sensible, pragmatic and common-sense measures, which will drive standards up in every school. Academies have grown from a Government-backed insurgency in our schools, and now make up well over 50% of our school system. That is not about to change. The shadow Minister will be pleased to hear that conversions to academy status are progressing faster under Labour Ministers than at any time since she joined this House, but it is right to look forward and consider how we will build a system fit for the next 20 years. The Bill is a step on that path. It recognises, in the words of one multi-academy trust leader, that parents deserve clarity and confidence in the standards that their children's school upholds, and that is what this Government will secure.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), led yesterday's debate on part 1 of the Bill. I will use my opening remarks to speak to the Government's

amendments to parts 2 and 3. Members commented yesterday on the number of amendments, but the number of substantive amendments is small, and I shall focus on them today.

Many Members have a great interest in city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts, and they have raised with me the excellent practice supported by those institutions. The Government amendments ensure that these schools can be named on school admission orders, and make it clear that families with children attending those schools will benefit from other measures in the Bill, such as those tackling the cost of school uniform.

Just as we are committed to working with all our schools, so too are this Government determined to work with the devolved Governments to deliver higher standards of education and care in all parts of the UK. The majority of today's amendments concern the extension of the "children not in school" provisions to Wales. The Minister spoke yesterday of our pride in working with the Welsh Government. Labour Governments in both Cardiff and London will deliver our shared ambition for a society where all children receive high-quality education, wherever they grow up. We will build a Britain where children come first. These 91 amendments will extend all the "children not in school" measures to Wales. There is a legislative consent motion on this change, on which we are working very closely with the Welsh Government.

Amendment 140 will include the Scottish definition of schools in the definition of "relevant schools" for the "children not in school" register clause. This amendment ensures that only those children who are intended to be captured by "children not in school" registers are eligible for registration. Without the amendment, a child who lives in England, but who attends school full time in Scotland, would be required to be registered on their English local authority's "children not in school" register, despite being in school full time.

The previous Government said that there was no space in their King's Speech to ensure our children's safety and education, but for this Labour Government, our children are a priority across the whole of the United Kingdom. Amendments 189 and 170 will ensure that the amendments made on corporate parenting extend to the whole of the United Kingdom. Education is an essential protective factor, which can shield our most vulnerable children from harm. The "children not in school" measures include the new requirement for parents of children subject to child protection plans or inquiries to seek local authority consent. However, not every child subject to these inquiries will be at risk indefinitely, so it would not be appropriate or proportionate for those home-educated children who are not at risk and who are receiving suitable education to be placed in a school if it is not their parents' preference. This Government will respect parents' rights to opt for home education, while keeping children safe from harm and securing their right to education. Amendments 141 to 148 will ensure that this intention is reflected through the school attendance order measures in the Bill.

Graham Stuart: Will the Minister reassure home-educating parents that the requirements in the Bill will not be overly onerous? For instance, there is a requirement to record the time that each parent spends educating

[Graham Stuart]

their child. Is that 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year? How exactly would that work? Can she give us some reassurance that this measure can be made manageable and sensible, and will not be disproportionate?

Catherine McKinnell: Parents who are doing the right thing—home-educating their children and providing a suitable education in a safe environment—have nothing to be concerned about in relation to these measures. They are intended to ensure that no child falls through the cracks, and that is what we are delivering.

Graham Stuart: I am sure that the Minister intends to ensure that this does not happen, but would someone have to record all the hours and places in a week? I do not know how much the Minister knows about home education, but children are educated in all sorts of places. She has an opportunity at the Dispatch Box to say that she will come forward with regulations to ensure that they do not have to write down every time that they stop at an ice cream shop for some education about the vanilla flavour.

3 pm

Catherine McKinnell: The amendments that I am addressing relate particularly to information sharing, which clearly the right hon. Gentleman has concerns about. Members on both sides of the House will be all too aware of the succession of tragedies that we have seen when children have fallen between the cracks in services that should be there to support them. The changes in the Bill are a reflection of this Government's determination to bring that era of state failure to a close.

New clause 17 relates to the measures on opening new schools. Part 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which the Bill is amending, includes a number of relevant duties and powers where personal data might be processed—for example, where a proposal for a new school includes details of the relevant experience of the individual proposers. It makes clear that these powers and duties to give or publish information do not give anyone the right to give or publish personal data in a way that would breach data protection legislation. It applies a data protection override to the whole of part 2 and schedule 2 to the 2006 Act to cover all the information-related powers and duties in relation to opening, closing and altering schools.

Amendments 166 and 167 will ensure that restrictions on the sharing of data, obligations of confidence and other restrictions do not prevent the sharing of information where it is done to protect the welfare of children at registered independent educational institutions or in accommodation provided by schools or colleges. They empower Ofsted to disclose information to other inspectorates of independent educational institutions or of accommodation in schools or colleges, to enable their inspections and ensure high-quality services for our children. We anticipate that information to be shared for those purposes may include that which is given in confidence—for instance, concerns shared with Ofsted by whistleblowers. However, it is essential that information sharing that would help to protect a child's wellbeing is not hampered. This imperative should override concerns about breaking confidence.

Amendments 90 and 151 are essential because of the Bill's new powers for local authorities to share data from their "children not in school" registers with the agencies listed in section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and with Ofsted, in line with well-established practices, and to share information to protect and promote the wellbeing of children. The amendments will ensure that local authorities can have confidence that they are acting in the children's best interest when doing so. There are well-established processes and existing expectations on these agencies to share information to protect and promote the wellbeing of children. Without these amendments, local authorities and these agencies may be concerned that they will be restricted in the information that they can share or receive from the "not in school" register. This information is relevant to help local authorities undertaking safeguarding, welfare and education relating to children, so it is crucial that it can be shared when appropriate.

These amendments serve to strengthen the Bill and ensure that it works as intended to keep children safe, to secure their education and to ensure that each and every family can access a brilliant local school, which is the cornerstone of opportunity for every child. I thank right hon. and hon. Members again for their scrutiny and challenge to the Bill so far. I look forward to listening to the debate, because there is no subject on which the House feels so passionately as the future of our children, and the steps that we must take to ensure that each and every one of them can achieve and thrive.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): The Bill does not set out any kind of clear plan or vision for our schools. It does not address the big challenges that need addressing. It is silent on discipline and behaviour—one of the biggest issues. It comes after the Government scrapped simple Ofsted judgments and will be followed by moves to dumb down the curriculum and lower standards further.

The Secretary of State has no positive vision. She has axed programmes for advanced maths, physics, Latin and computing because she thinks that they are elitist. She has axed behaviour hubs with no replacement, even though schools that went through the scheme were twice as likely to be good or outstanding. Yet, somehow, she is able to find £90 million for advertising. The Bill is the worst of all. We have tabled numerous amendments to it. It takes a wrecking ball to 40 years of cross-party reform of England's schools. Those reforms worked. There is much more to do, but England has risen up the international league tables even as Labour-run Wales has slumped down.

Under successive Governments of all colours, England's schools have been improved by the magic formula of freedom plus accountability. The Bill attacks both parts of that formula. On the one hand, it strips academy schools of freedoms over recruitment and curriculum and reimposes incredible levels of micromanagement, taking away academy freedoms now enjoyed by 82% of secondary schools. On the other hand, it strikes at accountability and parental choice, ending the automatic transfer of failing schools to new management, reversing

the reforms of the late 1980s, which allowed good schools to expand without permission from their local authority—a reform that ushered in parental choice.

Let me unpack this. First, the Bill takes away academy schools' freedoms over the curriculum. We have tabled amendments to that. As Sir Dan Moynihan, who leads the incredibly successful Harris schools, explained:

“We have taken over failing schools in very disadvantaged places in London, and we have found youngsters in the lower years of secondary schools unable to read and write. We varied the curriculum in the short term and narrowed the number of subjects in key stage 3 in order to maximise the amount of time given for literacy and numeracy, because the children were not able to access the other subjects... why take away the flexibility to do what is needed locally?”—[*Official Report, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Public Bill Committee*, 21 January 2025; c. 71, Q154.]

Likewise, Luke Sparkes from Dixons argued:

“we...need the ability to enact the curriculum in a responsive and flexible way at a local level...there needs to be a consistency without stifling innovation.”—[*Official Report, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Public Bill Committee*, 21 January 2025; c. 79, Q167.]

Katharine Birbalsingh, the head of Michaela school, which has been top in the country three years in a row, wrote to the Secretary of State:

“Do you have any idea of the work required from teachers and school leaders to change their curriculum? You will force heads to divert precious resources from helping struggling families to fulfil a bureaucratic whim coming from Whitehall. Why are you changing things? What is the problem you are trying to solve?”

Graham Stuart: Like me, my hon. Friend finds these proposals tragic because of the removal of the curriculum freedoms that have allowed schools such as Michaela and Petchey and others all over the country to tailor their curriculum specifically to reach disadvantaged pupils so that they can engage better with their learning and have an achievement that previously they did not have. That door is being closed. I hope that Government Members reflect on this and seek a change of policy, if not in this House, then at least in the House of Lords.

Neil O'Brien: My right hon. Friend is completely correct. Some Government Members have reflected on this: the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) said that the proposal to make it compulsory for academies to teach the national curriculum was of particular concern to her, and she is right. Ministers have never explained what they are trying to solve with this change, but the unions like it, so into the Bill it goes.

We have tabled further amendments on qualified teacher status. The Government are getting rid of academy freedoms over recruitment and the freedom to employ non-QTS teachers. Sir Martyn Oliver from Ofsted gave us a good example of how these freedoms are used. He said:

“In the past, I have brought in professional sportspeople to teach alongside PE teachers, and they have run sessions. Because I was in Wakefield, it was rugby league: I had rugby league professionals working with about a quarter of the schools in Wakefield at one point.”—[*Official Report, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Public Bill Committee*, 21 January 2025; c. 49, Q108.]

Brilliant. The Government's own impact assessment to the Bill says of this change:

“some schools may struggle to find the teachers that they need.”

Rebecca Leek from the Suffolk Association of Headteachers gave a good example of how this freedom is currently used. She said that she urgently needed an early years lead, and was able to take on someone who had run an outstanding nursery, even though they did not have QTS and nor did they plan to get it. But in future, she would not be able to do that. Former headteacher David Thomas told us in Committee that this freedom allows them to recruit people who may be at the end of their career, who have a huge amount of experience that they want to give back to the community. They do not want to go through the bureaucracy, and if we put up barriers, they will not end up in the state sector.

Ministers have not produced a single shred of evidence that teachers without QTS are of lower quality, or for why they cannot be a good supplement to QTS teachers. Ministers have never explained why they, sitting in Whitehall, think that they are in a better position to judge who to employ than headteachers on the frontline. Ministers claim that is vital, but a footnote at the bottom of page 24 of the impact assessment reveals it would, in fact, not be applied to lots of different types of schools, including 14 to 19 academies, 16 to 19 academies, university technical colleges, studio schools, further education colleges and non-maintained school early years settings. It is supposedly vital but is not being applied to loads of different types of school. Yet Ministers are imposing it on loads of other schools. As the former head of Ofsted pointed out this week, taking that flexibility out of the system feels like a retrograde step, and she is right.

Under the Bill, Whitehall micromanagement is back, too. Clause 44 allows the Secretary of State to direct academy schools to do pretty much anything. The Confederation of School Trusts is really worried about that and has suggested a way to bring such unlimited power under some limits. They say:

“We do have concerns about the power to direct...It is too broad and it is too wide. We would like to work with Government to restrict it to create some greater limits. Those limits should be around statutory duties...statutory guidance, the provisions in the funding agreement.”—[*Official Report, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Public Bill Committee*, 21 January 2025; c. 81, Q169.]

Yet Ministers voted down our amendment to put that suggestion from schools into effect.

Likewise, as we discovered in Committee, clause 34(5)(2) will require academy schools to get permission from the Secretary of State to make any change to the buildings they occupy. That includes any change to

“(ii) either part of the building, or

(iii) permanent outdoor structure”.

Literally, if an academy school wants to build a bike shed, it will have to go to the Secretary of State. It was clear in Committee that Ministers had not even realised that that would apply to academy schools. Those are just two of the many, many centralising measures in the Bill.

While freedom is being taken away on the one hand, accountability on the other side of the ledger is being watered down too. The Government already got rid of single-word Ofsted judgments and replaced them with something much more complicated that does not seem to have left anybody very happy. Then, clause 45 ends the automatic conversion of failing schools into academies. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has said,

[Neil O'Brien]

"The current system, in which failing schools automatically become academies, provides clarity and de-politicisation, and ensures a rapid transition. I fear that making that process discretionary would result in a large increase in judicial reviews, pressure on councils and prolonged uncertainty, which is in nobody's interests."— [Official Report, 8 January 2025; Vol. 759, c. 902.]

She also said,

"the DfE will find itself mired in the high court in judicial review. When we tried to transfer our first failing school to a Harris academy we spent two years in court, and children...don't have that time to waste."

She is so right.

Rob Tarn, the chief executive of the Northern Education Trust, has made the same point:

"If there's no longer a known, blanket reality...There is a risk that, where it's been determined a school needs to join a strong trust, it will take much longer and we will go back to the early days of academisation when people went to court."

The Children's Commissioner makes that point too. She says that she is

"deeply concerned that we are legislating against the things we know work in schools, and that we risk children spending longer in failing schools by slowing down the pace of school improvement."

She is right.

The Confederation of School Trusts has said that the current system offers struggling schools "clarity" as they

"will join a trust, and that process can begin immediately".

In contrast, they warn,

"We are not clear on how commissioning part-time support through the RISE arrangements makes that any easier."

The former national schools commissioner, Sir David Carter, has warned that the

"arguments and legal actions that will arise if a school in Cumbria is told to join a trust while a school in Cornwall just gets arm's length support will only add delay to delivering a fairer and better offer to children."

Worse still is clause 51, which attacks school choice and the freedom to go to good schools. It was in 1987 that Mrs Thatcher announced that

"we will allow popular schools to take in as many children as space will permit. And this will stop local authorities from putting artificially low limits on entry to good schools."

That agenda became known as local management of schools and of it the former Labour Minister Lord Adonis wrote,

"Local Management of Schools was an unalloyed and almost immediate success...school budgets under LMS were based largely on pupil numbers, so parental choice came to matter as never before."

In contrast, the Government's impact assessment of the Bill says:

"We want the local authority to have more influence over the PANs for schools in their area".

It goes on to say:

"It could also limit the ability of popular schools to grow...If a school is required to lower their PAN, some pupils who would have otherwise been admitted will be unable to attend the school. This will negatively impact on parental preference".

Michael Johnson, the leader of the very successful Chulmleigh trust, warns that that "could be disastrous

for successful schools...The Government are not better placed than parents to decide which school a child attends."

Graham Stuart: Does my hon. Friend, like me, reflect on the irony that the success from 2010 to 2024, which we on the Conservative Benches would naturally celebrate, was only possible because of the Labour visionaries who drove the academies programme forward, made changes, developed the argument, rolled the pitch and allowed us to lift our schools to much higher levels of performance and our children from deprived backgrounds to much better results. Labour Members were the creators of that, and now this Government are disowning it.

Neil O'Brien: It is tragic. It is not us criticising the Bill; it is the professionals—the people who have given their lives to education. I will give another example. Gareth Stevens, leader of Inspiration Trust, another high-performing trust, gives the example of his local council wanting to halve places at an outstanding school to prop up other schools. He says that

"the idea that we could have the rug pulled out from under us and the number of places in our high performing school cut is the most worrying thing...It will mean fewer places at high performing good or outstanding schools".

3.15 pm

The Bill allows a local authority to object to the current admission numbers of any school anywhere in the country; that became apparent in Committee. There will therefore be border disputes with local authorities trying to push down numbers in neighbouring authorities. I suspect that faith and selective schools will be particularly in the crosshairs of some of the more ideological left-wing authorities. There is nothing in the Bill to prevent the schools adjudicator from setting a published admission number to zero, to shut a school or to stop one from opening. We tried to amend the Bill to require school performance to be taken into account when decisions are made on pupil numbers, but amazingly, the Government voted even that down.

When there are dramatic falls in pupil numbers, it is true that schools will shut or shrink, whatever the rules are. Under parental choice, however, the places that shrink will be determined by parents voting with their feet. In contrast, under this schools Bill, it will depend on the ideological and political views of local councillors. The Bill is moving power from parents to politicians.

Even this week, we have seen further criticisms of the Bill from people who have devoted their whole lives to improving education. The former head of Ofsted has said that this Bill is levelling down, and called on the Secretary of State to

"think again before the damage is done."

The chief executive of Advantage Schools says:

"I think it would be a show of strength to pass the wellbeing parts of the schools bill and consider the rest for a *much* longer period."

That is a good idea. Lord Harris, who backed Labour at the last election, says:

"We want better schools for everybody and the Schools Bill will do the opposite of this, harming the most disadvantaged families. I hope that Labour will think again."

We also hope that they will think again. We will fight on to stop this misguided, destructive and, ultimately, just very, very depressing Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Chair of the Education Committee.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 1, new clause 2 and amendment 2, all in my name. The amount of time afforded to the Education Select Committee to undertake detailed scrutiny of the Bill was very limited. We were able to undertake just one evidence session on part 2, and we deliberately sought not to duplicate the evidence taken by the Public Bill Committee. We therefore took limited evidence on the changes to the role of local authorities in school place planning and admissions.

I speak, however, as an MP whose constituents have suffered the consequences of the fragmentation of admissions policies and place planning over the past 14 years. That has resulted in school places sometimes being delivered in areas where they were not needed, undermining other local schools; our councils struggling to ensure the delivery of school places that were needed, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities; and local places at a very popular local school being allocated not to local families but to children across a wide area of south-east London. I therefore wholeheartedly support the attempts in the Bill to restore coherence to admissions and place planning through the role of local authorities.

I also support the measures to reduce the cost of school uniform for families by limiting the number of branded items, which are a really significant cost of living pressure for families. However, I encourage the Government to keep a careful watch on how this requirement is being complied with, particularly in relation to the cost of blazers, having heard of one appalling example in my constituency of a very vulnerable child who had been allocated a place at a good school but was told she could not attend until she was wearing a blazer, the cost of which was over £100—way beyond the means of her family. I know the Minister will agree that no child should be shut out of the classroom because their family cannot afford the right clothes for them to wear, and that that is the intention of the Bill, but the monitoring of the detail will be important.

I also welcome the measures in the Bill to introduce a register of home-educated children. While home education is the right option for some children who are well supported to receive education at home, the number of children going missing from the education radar, out of sight and without any regulation of the quality of the education they are receiving, and sometimes coming to harm, as in the horrific recent case of Sara Sharif, is deeply concerning. The measures in the Bill will help to address this.

The Education Committee welcomes the introduction of breakfast clubs in the Bill, which will help to ensure that no child has to start the school day hungry, but we also heard compelling evidence of the importance of school lunches for the poorest children. Around one in 10 children who are eligible for free school meals do not claim them because their parents or carers do not complete the administrative process. This can be because of difficulties with the administrative process itself, lack of awareness about the entitlement, or language barriers. Children from non-white backgrounds are more likely to be unregistered.

This under-registration has impacts on schools too, since the ability of schools to draw down pupil premium funding is linked directly to the registration of eligible children for free school meals. I am talking about the existing entitlement, not a new spending commitment. The benefits of free school meals for children's health and wellbeing and their ability to learn are clear, and are being seen in local authorities that are already auto-enrolling eligible children, including Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and some London boroughs. In London, the benefits are pupil premium receipts for schools because the Mayor of London is already funding universal free school meals.

Research from the Food Foundation found that, while local authorities were successful in their mission to reduce the number of eligible children missing out on free school meals, it was a difficult and resource-intensive task, and the data sharing between relevant authorities necessary to register children automatically was not straightforward. The local authorities piloting auto-enrolment have called for central Government to step in and help. The Committee has recommended that the Government introduce auto-enrolment for children already eligible for free school meals. This recommendation would ensure that between 200,000 and 250,000 additional families with the poorest children in our country, who are already eligible, will receive the meals to which they are entitled. That recommendation is reflected in new clause 1, and I hope the Government will choose to support it today.

I turn to amendment 2. The Committee took evidence on breakfast clubs. We heard about the benefits of them both in ensuring that children do not start the school day hungry, and in relation to the opportunity afforded a child to settle gently into the school day and play with their friends. We also heard about the need for breakfast to be provided on a flexible basis, so that children whose families are unable to get them to school early, who may be among the most vulnerable children, do not miss out on this vital meal.

The Committee has heard extensive evidence in our inquiry on special educational needs and disability about the difficulties that families of disabled children have in finding childcare and accessing extracurricular activities. To that end, it is vital that children with SEND can access breakfast clubs on an equal footing with their peers. This may involve additional costs, particularly in relation to home-to-school transport and the need to have specialist staff on site at the time of the breakfast club. I welcome the fact that the early adopters programme includes about 50 specialist schools, but the inclusion of children with SEND in breakfast clubs in mainstream schools is also essential, and I hope the Government are looking closely at the early adopters and at any additional support that may be needed to ensure that. Amendment 2 would ensure that children with SEND were able to access breakfast clubs, and I hope the Government will support it.

Finally, I turn to new clause 2. This is a very large Bill covering many areas of policy, and it is being taken through this House very quickly and was not subject to any pre-legislative scrutiny. There have been a large number of Government amendments at a late stage, and a number of measures in the Bill will be contingent on Government policies that are not in the Bill for their

[Helen Hayes]

success, including the curriculum and assessment review, the reforms to the Ofsted assessment framework and the work of the child poverty taskforce.

New clause 2 would require the Secretary of State to conduct regular reviews of the impact of this Act and to publish reports. I would anticipate that such reviews would show a positive impact of this legislation. Having a clear monitoring and reporting mechanism is good practice, particularly for a Bill of this size that has been delivered so quickly. I welcome the intention behind this Bill and the measures it contains. I look forward to supporting it this evening, and my Committee looks forward to playing a constructive role in scrutinising its impact in the months and years to come.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): A number of measures in part 2 of this Bill are to be welcomed. However, after a decade of neglect by the Conservatives, I want to ask Ministers this: when our schools are crumbling, when we cannot find specialist teachers, when special needs provision is in crisis and when we have a huge persistent absence problem, why have the Government chosen to tinker with academies and governance arrangements as their priority education policy? The one strong message coming through from education leaders, including those who have no ideological axe to grind, is that the way that the Government have gone about part 2 of the Bill shows a lack of coherent vision for the school system, with no White Paper and no consultation with those on the frontline or in leadership positions across the sector.

I turn to some of the new clauses tabled in my name. With all the pressures on family finances, new clause 7 would ensure that free school meals were available to children from households earning less than £20,000 per year and automatically enrol eligible children into this provision. Liberal Democrats have long believed that this is an effective, targeted intervention that would help children in poverty at both primary and secondary school to concentrate, to learn and to thrive.

New clause 54 would require the Secretary of State to find out exactly how many children were eligible for, but not claiming, free school meals or were not registered for pupil premium funding. It beggars belief that, as spelled out in recent answers to parliamentary questions that I have submitted, the Government are flying blind on this issue, with the last proper study of uptake dating back to 2013. New clause 54 would require regular reviews of free school meal uptake.

As we discussed at length this morning in Westminster Hall, and as the Chair of the Education Committee pointed out, an estimated 230,000 eligible children are missing out on a free school meal. Where local authorities auto-enrol children into free school meals, it makes a real difference. In Liberal Democrat-led Durham, 2,500 additional children now benefit from a hot lunch, and their schools benefit from an additional £3 million in pupil premium funding.

In Committee, the Minister confirmed the Government's intention to improve uptake by looking at auto-enrolment and data sharing between Departments. However, his

suggestion that locally led efforts were more likely to meet the needs of local communities risks patchy action across the country. We believe that this requires a national response, and we therefore strongly urge the Government to look at auto-enrolment as well as increasing the eligibility threshold, to ensure that we are feeding some of our poorest pupils, whether they are at primary or secondary school.

Staying on the theme of the cost of living pressures on families, we on the Liberal Democrat Benches strongly support the objective of bringing down the cost of school uniforms for hard-pressed families up and down the country. However, we remain concerned that the Bill as drafted, in setting a maximum number of branded uniform items, is highly prescriptive for schools and will not actually rein in the costs of those items. As the Chair of the Select Committee has just pointed out, there is nothing to prevent items costing £100 or more each. Furthermore, an answer to a parliamentary question that I tabled stated that, on average, girls' uniforms cost £25 to £30 more than boys' uniforms. If we want to tackle these inequalities, the best thing to do is to support our amendment 1.

I want to put on record my thanks to the Clerks, because we picked up a drafting error in our amendment 1. The online version is correct, but the printed version is incorrect. Our amendment 1 actually amends clause 24 and proposes a monetary cap, rather than a cap on the number of items. That would be reviewed and updated in line with inflation through secondary legislation every year. It would also drive down costs as suppliers would have to compete for school contracts.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): The hon. Member mentions answers to written parliamentary questions. Would she have been as surprised as I was to see the answer to a written PQ of mine saying that if a school specified that a badge be sewed on to an otherwise generic blazer, that badge would count as an item of branded uniform?

3.30 pm

Munira Wilson: I am shocked, because I was about to come to that as a possible solution to staying within the price cap. Apparently that will not be allowed either—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. If the statement that the hon. Lady has made about a potential drafting error is indeed the case, has she made arrangements to ensure that the correct version of the amendment has been published?

Munira Wilson: Yes, we have been in touch with the Clerks, who have corrected the amendment online. The printed version is incorrect, but in the online version amendment 1 amends clause 24 instead of clause 23.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We will ensure that that process has indeed taken place.

Munira Wilson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In Committee, the Minister said that a cost cap, rather than an item cap, would be too complex and risked reducing choice for parents by increasing schools' reliance on specific suppliers. She also suggested that there would be regional variation in uniform pricing. Again,

having tabled a PQ, it is clear that there has been no analysis by the Government to show regional variation in uniform prices.

I was going to suggest that schools that wanted more branding on items under a cost cap could sew or stick logos on plain jumpers and other items bought cheaply in supermarkets. I believe the Government want parents to have choice. My suggestion would give parents the choice of going to a well-known supermarket brand and then applying the school logo. I am shocked to hear about the answer to the PQ tabled by the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), and I will have a look at it afterwards. Our amendment 1 would put pounds and pennies back into parents' pockets and avoid top-down meddling from Whitehall on school uniform policy.

Also on school uniforms, new clause 12 concerns a simple matter of fairness. The zero rate of VAT applies only on clothing for children up to the age of 14, and parents have to pay VAT on school uniforms for children who are larger or over the age of 14. In Committee, the Minister cited the cost to the Exchequer of making the change, but if the Government's stated aim is to bring down uniform prices, I humbly suggest that she presses the Chancellor to look at this amendment, because it is a simple change to make.

Turning to special needs, as I said at the outset, this is probably the biggest burning priority for the school leaders I speak to up and down the country. It certainly is across this House, given the number of Members involved in SEND debates. New clause 10 in my name would establish a new dedicated national body for SEND, which would fund high-needs provision and ensure that children with particularly complex needs receive tailored support. With high-needs spending having tripled since 2015 and, as the Minister herself pointed out, educational outcomes for SEND pupils remaining stagnant, we need to reform the system. I know she is busy working on this, but a national body would help reduce the postcode lottery for those with the highest needs. Indeed, a growing body of experts in the sector are starting to suggest that a national body could gather evidence on the efficacy of various SEND interventions.

Yesterday I said it was surprising that a Bill so entitled had little content on wellbeing. Given the huge and growing mental health crisis among our children and young people, new clause 9 in my name would place a duty on school governing bodies to ensure that every school in England, whether primary or secondary, has a dedicated mental health practitioner on site. The Government have repeatedly said they are committed to providing mental health support in every school, but it was clear when I pressed the Minister in the Chamber during a debate last Thursday that the support the Government are committed to providing will certainly not be the equivalent of a full-time person in every school. Mental health support teams, which the Government are looking to expand, do great work but are spread far too thinly. Our children and our schools are crying out for more dedicated mental health professional time.

Let me turn to the issue of academy schools. I fear that the Government are mostly trying to fix a problem that does not really exist, rather than focusing on the real challenges in education. My biggest concern here is that Ministers are putting the cart before the horse by writing into legislation that all schools must follow a

curriculum of which we do not yet know the content because it is under review. New clause 51 in my name would ensure that we have a core common curriculum with local flexibility built in. New clause 52 would ensure parliamentary oversight, given that we do not know the results of the ongoing review. Although we Liberal Democrats have always maintained that the automatic academy order is not a silver bullet for turning around failing schools, until such a time as Ofsted and Government have settled on a swift and robust new accountability and inspection regime to ensure high standards in all our schools, removing the automatic academy order for schools that are causing concern is certainly very risky. Amendments 223 and 225 in my name would ensure parliamentary oversight and attempt to mitigate some of those risks.

Let me turn to home education. On Second Reading, I stated that we Liberal Democrats strongly support a register of children not in school to ensure that vulnerable children do not disappear from the system. We also strongly support the right of parents to choose to home educate where that is the best option for their child. However, in evidence to the Bill Committee, even the Association of Directors of Children's Services was circumspect about the amount of information that parents will be expected to supply, as set out in clause 26. That level of detail risks becoming intrusive and unnecessary. Ministers must think again.

New clause 48 calls for, at the very least, a review of the register's impact on home educators to be carried out within six months, to ensure that only reporting requirements that are strictly necessary for safeguarding purposes are retained. Amendment 224 would remove the requirement for carers of children in special schools to secure local authority consent to be home educated. New clause 53 would ensure that home-educated children are not excluded from national examinations because of financial or capacity constraints.

Bradley Thomas (Bromsgrove) (Con): On home education, does the hon. Lady agree that not only is it a case of getting the balance right between privacy and the right to educate at home, but it is important that home educators do not feel stigmatised by the ability of the state to enter private property under less-than-forthcoming means that enable it subsequently to make an assessment of home education that is completely contrary to the reality experienced by the child in their own home?

Munira Wilson: The hon. Gentleman expresses concerns that those of us on the Bill Committee found in the written evidence we received from families who home educate. My inbox certainly has such correspondence from home educators in my constituency.

There is a real fear that this legislation, which is seeking to safeguard children who go missing from education, will over-police home educators, most of whom are doing a great job. In fact, a lot of them home educate their children not because they want to but because they feel forced to. That comes back to what I was saying about the crisis in our special needs system, and the fact that so much special needs provision just does not meet the needs of children, so parents give up work to be able to home educate their child. By virtue of their children's needs, parents tend to be much more flexible in how

[Munira Wilson]

they home educate. The very onerous reporting mechanisms will interfere with the flexibility that parents need to provide to their children.

In conclusion, I say respectfully to Ministers that part 2 of the Bill is a bit of a muddle, because the second half of it was bolted on to some well-trailed measures that largely have cross-party support. I hope Ministers have heard the strength of concern from school leaders about the unintended consequences of some of their measures. If they are serious about helping families with the cost pressures they face, I trust they will listen to cross-party calls on free school meals, whether that is introducing auto-enrolment or raising the eligibility threshold, as well as to the more effective approach to managing the cost of school uniforms that I have set out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I refer back to the point made by Munira Wilson about the corrected online version of her amendment 1, for the benefit of Members who are in the Chamber. In case there is any confusion, the correct version should begin:

“Clause 24, page 44, leave out lines 34 to line 4 on page 45 and insert”.

Steve Witherden (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate and express my support for the Bill. For far too long, school children have borne the brunt of academisation. Fortunately, the Labour Government in Wales rejected this model, but, having been a teacher on the border for most of my working life and a national executive member of the NASUWT, I have seen at first hand the negative impact of academies becoming the default model, while local authorities have been sidelined.

Since the introduction of the Academies Act 2010, the freedom for academies and free schools to set their own pay, terms and conditions has led to the exploitation of teachers. For example, teachers at Ark schools are expected to work 1,657 hours—more annually than a maintained school teacher, while earning £7 less per hour. The lack of national consistency not only allows these schools to undervalue and overwork staff but undermines basic rights such as pension schemes, maternity and sick pay. Our Bill will tackle those disparities by extending the statutory pay and conditions framework to all teachers in academies, ensuring greater consistency and fairness between academies and maintained schools.

There is also the issue of admission policies. Too many schools misuse their control over admissions to break with inclusive local authority policies, selecting what they consider to be a more favourable intake of students. The Bill's extension of the power to direct admissions to academies will ensure that local authorities can secure places for hard-to-place and vulnerable students, rather than allowing academies to exercise shameful selective admissions. Furthermore, by ending academy presumption, the Bill takes a significant step towards increasing academy accountability, empowering local authorities to better serve the needs of their communities, particularly helping SEND students and reducing reliance on unaffordable independent providers.

I hope to see the severe disparity between teachers' pay and the high salaries of academy CEOs reviewed and addressed in future education legislation. We must ensure that funding is directed where it is most needed: to teaching and learning. This Bill marks an historic first step towards creating an accountable and fair education system that will benefit all our children.

Graham Stuart: It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr (Steve Witherden), who has done us and the nation a great service with the clarity of his speech. The Labour party is often accused of working to serve the producer interest rather than the consumer interest, looking after the needs of the trade unions and not those of the ordinary citizen or, in this case, the child. But rarely does any Labour Member make it quite so explicit as the hon. Gentleman just did, with a total betrayal of the child and a total focus on the needs of the professional, their interests, their pay, their disparities and their conditions. There was nothing about the child, nothing about the standards of education. Never have I seen a Labour Member speak up so honestly about what this Bill is really about. We should be enormously grateful to him for doing that, and for doing it so clearly—and in not many words.

This Bill contains 38 policy proposals all linked by a troubling theme: the misguided notion that the bureaucrat knows best. In advocating for new schools to be opened and controlled by local authorities, the Government choose to ignore the evidence that competition and innovation are what drive up standards, and instead they consolidate power in the hands of bureaucrats.

3.45 pm

This Bill also undermines the rights of parents to determine what is best for their children's education, whether it be attending school or being home educated. Far from empowering schools, which until the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr came along Ministers have tried to pretend this Bill does, the Bill imposes a centralised, outdated version of education that stifles choice and which will reverse 14 years of progress.

Actually, it is more than that. It is 25 years of progress because, as I referred to earlier in an intervention, it was 2000 when the then Labour Prime Minister announced the academies programme, and I think it was in 2002 that the first city academy opened. That is a quarter of a century of progress in which time demonstrably, by every known measure of performance, schools in Wales have fallen behind schools in England practising these supposedly appalling academy policies which have led to such an improvement for the child. The hon. Gentleman's speech was quite remarkable, but I would hope there are Members opposite who are not so tied up in their trade union engagement—their producer-interest capture—that they can instead focus on the interests of young people.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and I and Members opposite served on the Education Committee which I chaired, we were horribly aware that the policies that we were helping to scrutinise and influence would have an impact on lives for decades to come. Education policies are in many ways more fundamental than the economic policies pursued by a Government at any time, which are at least more easily altered. But if we close down the opportunities

for disadvantaged children, that will be having a negative impact on them, on their families, on their community and indeed on this country for decades to come. That is why this is such a bad idea.

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): Under the current system, a third of our children leave school without the basic qualifications to succeed in life, so does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that that shows that the current system is failing and needs change? Furthermore, in the communities with the most disadvantaged—I mean those outside of London—the academisation approach has not made an impact and has not turned around the life chances of children growing up in the most deprived wards. I have worked in those communities and with those schools and seen the impact of trust after trust failing those children. I will not accept that. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is unacceptable and that we have to move forward from this day to make greater improvements to make sure that the most disadvantaged students genuinely get the opportunities they deserve?

Graham Stuart: I thank the hon. Lady for her speech, if not intervention, and I certainly applaud her passion for the interests of children, disadvantaged children in particular, and her rage at failings in the system and her desire to see improvements, which might need to be radical, but we have not heard how the mechanics of the changes proposed in this Bill will raise standards. They will in fact dismantle them. The hon. Lady's intervention comes in the context of my following the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr talking about Wales, and it is clear that the system being created by this Bill is much more akin to that in Wales, exactly as the hon. Gentleman so honestly said. Does the hon. Lady suggest that deprived children in Wales have better outcomes than they do in England? [*Interruption.*] She moved to stand up but then thought better of it, which was wise because she knows that the situation in Wales—which, as the hon. Gentleman said, is exactly what this Bill is trying to create—is infinitely worse than it is in England. Whatever the failings of the system in England, it is demonstrably better than it was 15 or indeed 25 years ago, and it is demonstrably better than it is in Wales.

Sarah Smith *rose*—

Graham Stuart: I happily give way to the hon. Lady again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I remind hon. Members that interventions should be short.

Sarah Smith: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way once again. In my most recent conversation with a group of my headteachers, not one of them raised concerns about this section of the Bill and the reforms. For them, the question of academisation and how the amendments have been made will not limit them in their capabilities to do the best for their children. They are concerned about issues that will come forward as a result of the Bill around SEND, which have been mentioned by hon. Members from across the House, and other things that are restricting them from making progress.

Graham Stuart: I thank the hon. Lady, but she again could not explain anything about the Bill. Her passion for improvement is great—we would all applaud that—but her linkage to anything in the Bill that will improve matters was distinctly missing.

Many people, including Sir Jon Coles of United Learning, have criticised the proposals in the Bill; he said they will effectively destroy the academy system. I could not tell where the hon. Lady is on that, but the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr spoke with great clarity. Where once Labour promised us “education, education, education,” it now promises us bureaucracy, bureaucracy, bureaucracy. Tragically, it is our children who will bear the consequences.

The outcomes of the last Labour Government serve as a stark warning of where the Bill will lead. In 2010, notwithstanding the nascent academy movement, we inherited a country where our children ranked 27th globally in reading. We spent more on education than Germany, yet achieved results that lagged behind nations like Poland. By the time we left office, England's students were ranked as the best readers in the western world. In 2010, just 68% of schools were rated good or outstanding, but today that figure is 90%. These dramatic improvements did not happen by accident; they are the result of a system that puts freedom, competition and accountability at the centre of education, and equally importantly leaves mediocrity with nowhere to hide.

If the Conservative education reforms were great, it was only because we were standing on the shoulders of giants.

“Academies were introduced in the areas of greatest challenge, harnessing the drive of external sponsors and strong school leadership to bring new hope to our most disadvantaged areas.”

Not my words, but those of the longest serving Labour Prime Minister, Sir Tony Blair, in 2005. To his credit, he recognised the failings of our country's overly centralised education system and started the reforms that paved the way to make our schools great again.

From tiny acorns do mighty oaks grow, and that is what the Conservatives delivered. In 14 years, the number of children attending academies skyrocketed from 192,000 to 4.9 million. That was transformative for pupils across England, particularly those living in deprived communities. One example is Harris Academy Battersea. Formerly known as Battersea Park school, it was considered inadequate before joining the Harris Federation in 2014. At that time, 68% of students achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. By 2017, that figure had risen to 83%, and in 2018 Ofsted rated the academy as outstanding, noting that teachers were proud to work there, morale was high, and pupils of all abilities made very strong progress. By putting a strong emphasis on cultural enrichment and academic excellence, the life chances of the working-class pupils that academies predominantly teach and who Labour claims to represent were transformed.

I am pleased that the Government have seen sense on one issue—I congratulate the Minister on that—and have amended the Bill to stop the extension of national pay rules to academies, and only require academies to have due regard to the school teachers' pay and conditions document, rather than impose a ceiling on pay. That would have undermined the remarkable progress made by these institutions in raising standards, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

[*Graham Stuart*]

New clause 38 goes one step further, making the pay set out in the school teachers' pay and conditions document a floor and extending freedoms over pay and conditions to maintained schools. One of the strengths of academies is their ability to respond flexibly to local needs, including offering competitive salaries to attract and retain the best teachers in challenging areas. Limiting that flexibility would ignore the realities of teacher recruitment and retention, especially in communities where the need for high-quality education is greatest, because people respond to incentives. If academies cannot pay the best maths or physics teacher more, the children who would benefit from their skills the most will be left behind.

Building on the need for greater freedom and flexibility to raise standards, we introduced free schools, an initiative that helped to spark a renaissance in English education. Walking hand in hand with its union paymasters, who decry those schools as unaccountable and underfunded, as we heard set out in the previous speech, Labour wants these engines of social mobility to be destroyed. Its proposal to allow local authorities to open new schools, along with its planned review of the free school programme, would shift control of our children's education away from communities and teachers and back into the hands of bureaucrats.

Unfortunately, the process has already started. In October, Ministers paused plans to open 44 new state schools in England, putting parents who planned to send their children there in limbo, so I am pleased to support new clause 39, which would reverse that pause and allow those schools to open as planned. Let us be clear: in 2024, 21% of GCSE entries from free schools achieved a grade 7 or above compared with 19% in comprehensive schools. Labour may not want to face the facts, but the reality is that sometimes the bureaucrat and the trade union shop steward do not know best. The Secretary of State is Labour's Miss Trunchbull, putting our teachers in the chokey to satisfy her union paymasters.

This Government are so certain in their belief that they know best that they will not even allow parents the freedom to educate their own children without state interference. Buried within this Bill is a new legal requirement for local authorities to maintain a register of children not in school—a policy that I recognise was in the Conservative party's manifesto, but which has the potential to be not just unhelpful, but actively harmful to children.

Our country has long upheld the primacy of parents, not the state, in determining the best education for their children, and this proposal seeks to undermine that fundamental covenant. That is why I support amendment 200, which would require a local authority to submit a statement of reasons when it does not agree for a child to be taken out of school to be home educated. It should at least have to account for itself. Compulsory enrolment could have serious consequences, as families may simply refuse to comply and potentially disengage from state involvement altogether because of this overreach, leading to negative unintended consequences that could impact on the child's wellbeing.

The state thinks that it has a divine right to infringe on every aspect of the child's life—or, at least, this Government do. They want to know what home-educated

children do at the weekends and during the holidays. If that information is not required for children who attend mainstream schools, what is the justification for demanding it for children who are home-schooled? Why, in response to my repeated interventions, could the Minister not provide any reassurance that some sensible and proportionate rules would be put in place? I therefore support amendment 197, which would remove that requirement.

It was John Maynard Keynes who said:

“When the facts change, I change my mind”.

In the same spirit, I ask colleagues across the Chamber what they do. The evidence is clear: freedom and flexibility in education drive up standards and deliver better outcomes for children. In government, we followed the evidence and built on the previous Labour Government's body of work, and the results speak for themselves. England now has the best readers in the western world, a record number of schools rated “good” or “outstanding” and greater opportunities for working-class children, albeit never at the level we would like, which is why that needs to be built on, not knocked to the ground.

As proud as I am of our record, this debate is not about party politics. At its heart, it is about ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has access to the highest-quality education that we can provide. I urge the Secretary of State to follow the evidence, not ideology. I will vote against this Bill, but given the Government's majority, we accept that however misguided these policies are, they will probably pass. All I can do is finish by appealing to colleagues across the Chamber to show courage, stand up for the poorest in society, stop the wreckers and support our amendments this evening when we come to vote.

Abtisam Mohamed (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I commend the Minister on all the excellent work that has taken place so far on the Bill. My representations will be on home education. I recognise the importance of safeguarding and making sure that vulnerable children do not fall through the net; however, the home-educating community is growing, diverse and caring, and those involved are fiercely passionate about their children's education and learning.

Amendments 4, 13 and 14, which stand in my name, would add to the Bill the definition of “suitable education” that already appears in section 7 of the Education Act 1996. Without these amendments, it would be left to individual local authority officers to decide what they think is suitable education.

4 pm

Amendments 5 and 7, also in my name, are about registration and the contents of the register. They would make it no longer compulsory to provide the second parent's name if it is not relevant to the child's education. If the second parent's name is not mandatory, the lone parent cannot be sanctioned for failing to supply it. The requirement to provide two parents' names disproportionately impacts single parents, who may have to make an impossible choice between provoking their ex-partner and seeing their child forced back into school. Failure to comply may result in the lone parent having to choose between sending their child to school, which may not be the best place for them, and fines and imprisonment.

Amendments 8 to 12, which I tabled, deal with the school attendance order process. They would remove conditions C and D, which, if met, allow a notice to be served for a school attendance order. Conditions C and D are conditions in which a parent is unable or unwilling to provide information for the register.

Amendments 15 to 19, in my name, relate to home visits. Home visits are part of the school attendance order process, and my amendments would put it in the Bill that there must be reasonable grounds for refusal. A child may be extremely anxious about having strangers in their safe space—their home—who are there to scrutinise how much the child is learning, and who have the power to send the child back to school if they deem what they are learning to be insufficient. A parent may therefore feel compelled to refuse a home visit. That should not be a reason to fail their home education, so it should be put in the Bill that there may be reasonable grounds for a refusal. That cannot be left to guidance at a later date. Furthermore, it would be using a sledgehammer to crack a nut if the local authority had a statutory duty to consider all the settings in which a child is being educated, since those venues and activities will constantly be evolving. Instead, the Bill should say that the local authority may consider some of those settings.

Amendments 15 to 19 allow home visits to be refused on reasonable grounds. That would also mitigate the use of school attendance orders to deal with discrepancies in registrations. Conditions C and D in subsections (6) and (7) of proposed new section 436H of the Education Act 1996 would otherwise have a disproportionate impact on lone-parent households, which are mostly headed by mothers. Under proposed new section 436C, details of both parents would be required for the register, while proposed new section 436D imposes a legal duty on parents to supply that information. Without my amendments, proposed new section 436I could create a situation in which a lone parent who is scared to supply information about an absent parent or former partner is put at risk of reprisals from the non-resident parent, whose address will also be visited, as one of the homes in which the child lives.

Finally, I would like to give the House a message from many of my constituents who are home educators. There are some who say, “Home educators do a good job, but”. A whole community is dismissed in seven words. Just for once, can we acknowledge the thousands of families who are taking responsibility for their children's education, often as a result of shortcomings in the school system, as was rightly said by the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart)? Their work, and that of their children, should be appreciated and valued. We should not stigmatise home education; if child protection laws and systems fail, it is they that should require scrutiny.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): The debate on this Bill has been comprehensive. I rise to support a number of amendments to this Bill that hon. Friends have tabled, but I open on a point that has already been much debated, not only yesterday but during the Bill's earlier stages. The Minister has said from the Dispatch Box that she regards the safety of children as being the Government's highest priority, but the Government's absolute refusal to countenance the amendments and proposals on equal protection

demonstrates a lack of will to follow most other countries in implementing laws that provide that level of protection to children. That remains enormously disappointing, and will be an outstanding issue, in terms of child protection, for the foreseeable future.

The measures before the House are primarily concerned with schools. I would like to back up a number of colleagues who have set out the long-standing cross-party nature of the measures that underpin the success of the education system in England. I was a governor at one of the first schools to ever become an academy. It was sponsored by a significant Labour party donor, who came forward to support a Conservative local authority that engaged with that programme.

I also pay tribute to the work done by the Liberal Democrat Minister David Laws. He attended Cabinet as the Minister for school standards when the Academies Act 2010, which underpins everything structural that has driven forward academy standards, was implemented under the coalition Government. I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) disowning the contribution that the Liberal Democrats made, on a cross-party basis, to driving up school standards in England over the years.

Munira Wilson: I chose my words carefully. I talked about the past decade, during which the Liberal Democrats were not in government. The Conservatives had seven or eight Education Secretaries in that period. That carousel of constant change demonstrates how little those Education Secretaries valued education. The state of our school buildings, and of our special educational needs and disabilities system, tells us all we need to know about how much the Tories value education.

David Simmonds: It is important that we pay tribute to the work that David Laws did. As a key part of that coalition, he shaped the legislation that underpinned all the actions that followed, by the coalition and by Conservative Education Secretaries in majority Conservative Governments. We all need to recognise not only that education is a shared priority, but that all parties contributed to driving things forward and creating these structures over the years.

I have a degree of sympathy with the Government on an issue that they are trying to address. It has always been a legal conundrum that successive education Acts have placed detailed, specific legal obligations on local authorities regarding the provision of school places in general, and the provision of education to individual children to whom they owe a duty, but there are times when that is in conflict with the fact that academy schools are their own admissions authorities. That is not new; it has been true of faith schools for many years.

Most of us in this House will have had casework arising from parents being frustrated about the difficulties in their relationship with their child's school. However, a number of my hon. Friends have made the point that most of the measures in this Bill are not about relieving those issues that can be burdensome for families and children, but are about imposing much more centralised control over what goes on in the education system in England, where school standards have powered ahead of those that we see in other parts of the United Kingdom, particularly in Labour-run Wales.

[David Simmonds]

The outset of my journey on this issue was in the dying days of the last Labour Government, when I was a member of, and then chair of, the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers. That body, as an employer, provides evidence to determine pay and conditions for school teachers. We might generally conjecture, as members of the public or as members of the political establishment, that that would be a fairly light-touch responsibility—that we would take a strategic interest in the workforce, and occasionally give advice and guidance. I was surprised to discover that we were to attend, with 17 unions, a weekly meeting with the then Secretary of State, Ed Balls, and his deputy Jim Knight, at the then Department for Children, Schools and Families, in which those unions would provide Ministers with a detailed list of their expectations for how every aspect of education policy would be micromanaged. Those regular weekly meetings came to an end with the election of the coalition Government, but I am aware that they have resumed since the election last year.

We have heard admissions from Ministers about how rarely they have engaged with school leaders, and have noted a great reluctance to say how often they engage with those who represent the union interests.

Damian Hinds: Intervene and tell us!

David Simmonds: I invite the Minister to say how often she has been meeting those school leaders.

We have also seen a move to re-establish the school support staff negotiating body. I had the privilege of chairing the employers' side of that body. Its purpose was not only to give the teaching unions a voice on every aspect of education, but to support staff. One of the big challenges for the last Labour Government was the fact that the teaching unions hated the idea that school support staff would have that voice when it came to what went on in the classroom. It is, again, a cause for concern that the priority for the new Government is not to ask themselves, "How can we build on the progress that we have made with policies that we established and principles that we introduced?", but to ask themselves, "How can we revert to giving control to those with a vested interest in how much money is spent, rather than those with a vested interest in the attainment of the children in all our schools?"

That is why it is so important for us to support new clause 38. In government, we should have taken the opportunity to

"extend freedoms over pay and conditions to...maintained schools",

but the present Government, who say that they regard education as a priority, now have that opportunity. They have the opportunity to create a genuinely level playing field, so that, appropriately, the maintained schools that have been some of the main drivers of the progress in reading and mathematics among the youngest children, which is one of the proudest achievements of the past decade, can also secure teachers of the highest quality.

I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed that the unions' demand that no one should teach in a classroom without qualified teacher status will not apply to university technical colleges. We know that UTCs have sometimes struggled in the current educational landscape. UTC Heathrow in my constituency, for instance, introduced

an educational offer for a group of young people who might otherwise find it difficult to gain access to the type of education that would give them the start in life that they need. That is an example of success and an opportunity on which we could build, but instead it is being overlooked and potentially undermined by measures on the national curriculum.

It is hard to understand how an aviation-focused UTC closely connected with Heathrow airport, providing employment opportunities and a chance to access apprenticeships, gain technical skills and learn about catering and retail, would be well served by our prohibiting the people who know about those matters from doing their work unless they have qualified teacher status. We must ensure that we retain that element of diversity and opportunity in our education system—that diversity of provision and style that was always intended to underpin academisation, but which is now at serious risk of being lost.

There is clearly a need to reconcile the legal impositions on local authorities—for example, the need to balance the local education budget, which is legally part of the council tax, though we are yet to see a solution that would not have an unacceptable impact on local residents, and the legal obligation on local authorities to provide places—with the lack of any legal obligation on the Government to ensure that those elements are properly funded. However, on the substance of the Bill, even with the very sound amendments that we are seeking to pass, it is, essentially, a shopping list of union demands. What the Minister describes as a mission is a mission without a purpose. There is no sense in the Bill of how we are to take forward the progress we have made, what we want to achieve for our disadvantaged children, what targets we might set and how we might go about meeting them, and how we might unleash the sense of aspiration that exists in so many of our communities.

People ask what developments we could be proud of when we left office. When we left office, youth unemployment was half what it had been under the last Labour Government, and there were 4 million more people in work than there were when they left office. Much of that is down to the brilliant progress that was made by so many of our schools in transforming education standards. This Government should hang their heads in shame, because all they can do is come forward with a shopping list of union demands and not for a moment put forward the needs of the children of this country.

David Baines (St Helens North) (Lab): I rise to support this Bill in its entirety, and I will speak about part 2 in particular. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), who spoke about people hanging their heads in shame. It is not in scope of the Bill, but I could talk about the fact that more children are coming to school not ready to learn. I could talk about the SEND crisis, the rise in child poverty or the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. We could talk about the Conservatives' legacy and hanging our heads in shame, but I do not think he would want to hear that.

4.15 pm

I was a member of the Public Bill Committee. There was a large amount of agreement about much of the Bill, but there were also some significant divisions;

they are rightly being debated in a lively fashion today, and I am sure that will continue. The child protection measures debated yesterday, which were broadly supported, are clearly significant, but I believe that the measures in part 2 will also make a real difference to the lives of many children and their families.

As many colleagues in the House know, I was a primary school teacher and a council leader before entering Parliament. In both those roles, I took the wellbeing of children extremely seriously. I can assure Opposition Members, who might be concerned about my motives for speaking, that my interest lies in what is best for children and their families. Given my experience, and as a dad of two young children, I cannot welcome this Bill enough, and the conversations that I have had with families, governors and school staff in St Helens North suggest that I am not alone.

The Bill introduces a floor, not a ceiling, in standards. Ensuring that every classroom has a qualified teacher at the front of it, and making sure that all schools teach the same core curriculum, are common sense to most parents and carers. Despite a bit of scaremongering, it was reported last month that a *Schools Week* survey found that the majority of academy leaders envisaged little to no negative impact from the Bill. From speaking to school leaders in maintained and academy schools in St Helens North, I know that is the general consensus.

One of the measures in the Bill that has gained the most attention is the introduction of free breakfast clubs at every primary school. I sympathise with amendment 2, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), which would require schools to make particular provision for children on the SEND register, and I hope that this will be monitored throughout the pilot process and going forward. We have recently had the announcement of the first 750 schools to pilot the scheme, and I have previously welcomed the news that PACE, Garswood primary and Ashurst primary in St Helens North are among the first cohort. I visited Ashurst last week and spoke to the headteacher, Lisa Houghton, and the chair of governors, Chris Forrest. Their ambition for their school, and their excitement about this opportunity, was clear. It is a fantastic school, and I have no doubt that they and many others are ready to make a success of the free breakfast club programme. We just have to give them the funding and the tools to make it work.

When I was a teacher and a council leader, I often watched previous Governments talk about education, state schools in general and children from communities like mine as if they were foreign—that is, if they talked about us at all—so I was thrilled to hear the Secretary of State refer to Carr Mill primary school in my constituency when she announced the first 750 breakfast clubs. Carr Mill provides a model for others to follow, and having spoken to headteacher Andrew Maley at an event in my constituency on Friday, I know that he is determined to take it further and will do so with our support.

Every single parent or carer is ambitious for their children. The vast majority are currently working every hour that God sends, just to make ends meet, and they will welcome the breakfast clubs and help with the cost of uniforms, not to mention the Employment Rights Bill and other things that Opposition parties continue to vote against. This Bill does a lot, and I will vote for it

with enthusiasm, but there is still a lot more to do. I have a huge amount of sympathy with some of the tabled amendments, particularly those that would increase the take-up and availability of free school meals. For example, the use of auto-enrolment is a no-brainer, and I hope the Government will look at that. More generally, if we are to improve children's wellbeing, we will have to end child poverty. That will need a whole-of-Government and national effort that is much bigger than this single Bill or any other, so I look forward to the report of the child poverty taskforce in due course—hopefully, sooner rather than later.

I am determined to use my time in this place to do all I can to help give every child the best possible start in life. No child should be left behind, and if we are going to achieve that, voting for this Bill is a good place to start.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): There are good elements in this Bill. In line with Professor Jay's recommendation, I agree that the House must urgently make it a duty to report abuse. As new clause 50 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) sets out, we also want a new authority established to deliver national and local inquiries into rape gang culture and the like. I fully support breakfast clubs, especially following the invention of free school meals—a few years ago—by a Liberal Government.

These are good measures because they put the interests of the child at the centre of everything, and the Bill goes wrong where it puts ideology ahead of the interests of the child and loses sight of those interests. I do not support adding taxes to education, which is outside the scope of the Bill, and I am concerned about the effects on academies as well.

Any conflation of children being educated other than at a traditional school with safeguarding concerns is not borne out by the evidence. It is also an ideological position that is an insult to the parents and families of the 110,000 children—our constituents up and down the country—who are doing a great job in ensuring that their children are educated, whether they are home tutored or educated otherwise. In fact, according to local authority data published in academic research that has been submitted to the Education Committee, only 11% of section 47 child protection inquiries into home-educated children result in a child protection plan. That rises to 26%—more than double—for the average of all predominantly school-educated children. Child for child, those educated at home are the safest and least in need of protection, so the overwhelming weight of new bureaucracy and legislation tackling home education as a sector is not justified. My hon. Friend's new clause 48 is therefore quite right, because we should remove the burdensome and highly intrusive sanctions on such families.

Unless amendment 221 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Vikki Slade) is agreed to, the Bill will enable grandparents reading to their grandchildren at weekends or in the evenings on a regular basis to be served with a notice, demanding a response on pain of a monetary penalty, by a council officer who chooses to issue one. These powers are really extreme and extraordinary. Instead, we should be supporting the interests of the child.

[Gideon Amos]

We should be supporting home-educated children and allowing them to sit exams without charging them hundreds and hundreds of pounds for the privilege. New clause 53, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham, would do exactly that. Without such a provision, can Ministers conceive of anything in the Bill that supports home-educated children? There is plenty to regulate them, control them and expose them to rigorous inspection, but there is not a single clause in the whole Bill that supports children being educated at home. Why the parsimonious Treasury cannot be persuaded to simply allow them to sit exams without paying hundreds of pounds is beyond me. Forgive me, but I cannot fathom why a Government would not want to provide for children to sit examinations.

In Somerset, our council has much a much better and proportionate approach, and it has developed a protocol in partnership with home-educated families. I am worried that that constructive approach will be swept away by the more confrontational approach that this Bill ushers in. At worst, there is the prospect of a disabled child being forced back to school by a local authority officer when they have good reason to be frightened of going back to that school, which really cannot be right.

Turning to my Taunton and Wellington constituency, I pay tribute to state schools such as those my children attended, and the independent ones in Somerset, where, as I have said, the local authority has a more constructive and positive approach to working with schools and families. I particularly pay tribute to the pupils at West Monkton primary school, who have written to me about their amazing plastics pollution campaign. I completely support their bid to ban single-use plastics, which they have written to me about. For those schools and the 5,254 children with an education, health and care plan who cannot get a school place, such as the family who came to my surgery on Friday, may I urge the Government to do more to help families with children with special educational needs? It is crazy that the system is preventing them from attending school when they want to. We need more projects like the great special educational needs centre being developed at Hatch Beauchamp school, which I visited recently. We need to be driven by the interests of the child, not ideology.

Finally, until the Government address the fact that £2 out of every £3 of council tax in places like Somerset is going on care—a national responsibility, in my opinion—then local services, schools and communities will see less and less investment. Social care funding must be tackled. It affects the whole of local government finance, including schools. That is not good for our environment, not good for jobs and not good for the growth of our economy.

Sarah Smith: It is a privilege to stand again in support of the Bill. If we are to improve our school system for the benefit of all children, regardless of their background or educational needs, their welfare and interests need to be at the heart of any reform. Opposition Members' suggestions that that cannot be done without sacrificing standards in education could not be further from the truth. It is because the Government are ambitious for all children that the commitment to excellence in education is the driving force behind the measures in the Bill.

Labour knows that when standards in schools drop, it is working-class children and those whose attainment levels may already be lower on paper but who are no less impressive due to overcoming additional learning challenges, who will suffer.

The Bill represents a cultural shift in how Government approach educational reform through delivering change in the sector through partnership and child-centred policy. The prioritisation of a child's wellbeing and a focus on inclusion are not woolly concepts, but the bedrock of stability that will enable all children to thrive educationally.

It is not contentious to say that we currently have a fragmented school system that is letting down far too many children. That needs to change. Children need to feel like they belong in their school. Every setting, regardless of type, must be given the freedom to drive up standards in a way that meets the needs of its pupils and communities. The Bill goes back to the original purpose of academies, which was to share best practice and encourage collaboration in the best interests of our children. Allowing councils to open new schools will ensure not just that more school places are available, but that the places are the best ones for local families and where they are needed. This is a very positive step forward. A focus on school structures alone will not help families, children or teachers.

I support the roll-out of breakfast clubs, which will lead to every child having access to a healthy meal to start the day. As the impact assessment states, clubs will help to boost children's attendance, attainment, behaviour, wellbeing and their readiness to learn. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for highlighting, through amendment 2, the need for any provision to take into consideration the needs of all children, particularly those with special educational and disability needs. Inclusion is at the heart of this policy, so adjustments will need to be made to provide the food, transport and staffing for pupils in both mainstream and specialist provision. I also support new clause 1 and the auto-enrolment of children for free school meals. The two amendments support the Government's mission to tackle child poverty.

Unfortunately, special schools fall behind mainstream ones in the offer to parents and pupils outside the conventional school day. Recently, a school close to Hyndburn and Haslingden that serves many of my parents and families has shortened the school day by a whole hour against the wishes of parents. In all honesty, I found the reasoning quite unconvincing. It will cause chaos for families and it would not have been tolerated in a mainstream school. We must do better with SEND schools to ensure that their children get the same school standards and excellent provision that the Government are working to achieve.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): One point that headteachers in my constituency report is that, sadly, too many children with SEND are being offered access rather than inclusion in mainstream settings. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to get to grips with the SEND crisis that, sadly, we inherited from those on the Opposition Benches?

Sarah Smith: I absolutely agree. We look forward to what is going to happen on that, and particularly to what we will do to tackle those challenges and ensure that we

offer truly inclusive settings and that the needs of every child are at the centre of all the decisions that we take. I look forward to working with colleagues and discussing with Ministers how we can continue to drive high and rising standards in all our schools.

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State recently spoke about a subject I am really passionate about: the sense of belonging in the classroom, so that a child knows they have the potential to achieve great things because they are valued, and that their learning—however it is facilitated to accommodate their needs—is seen as important. As Ministers deeply understand, nowhere is the need for that approach greater than for children living with special educational needs and disabilities.

I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), who is currently on the Front Bench, for his encouraging words in Committee on the value of understanding wellbeing. How we chart national wellbeing in the future could help to embed this key data into policy making and commissioning going forward, both locally and nationally, to ensure that schools can drive further improvements for young people and help to reverse the low levels of life satisfaction that, sadly, far too many of our children report experiencing. Brilliant work is being undertaken on this subject by the BeeWell project with Manchester University, and I urge the Minister to engage with the project, if he is not already, on what is being learned and how that data can inform and improve provision for children and young people.

As the Labour champion for the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity, I have had the privilege of visiting many schools across Hyndburn and Haslingden to reflect on this priority area and see the amazing work of our teachers. I am proud on their behalf to support a Bill that puts education back at the heart of national life. If we are to break the link between a young person's background and their future success, we must deliver a core guarantee of high standards with space for innovation in every child's education, so that they can thrive and achieve beyond any expectation that may have been placed on them.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): Today, I will concentrate on the important arguments for new clause 34 and amendment 173. New clause 34 would extend the provision of free school lunches to all primary school children. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Opher), who tabled this important new clause for consideration in Committee, with the backing of 42 hon. Members, and to my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns), who moved it.

To set the context for new clause 34, the children's charity Barnardo's is clear that we are seeing epidemic levels of poverty among children in the UK. Across the country, families are facing a desperate struggle to put food on the table, keep the lights on and heat their homes. Nationally, 4.3 million children are in poverty; in my constituency, 3,920 children are growing up in poverty—that is 21% of children. This shocking state of affairs was a political choice made by the previous Government and those who backed austerity, and we should not repeat it. The No Child Left Behind campaign, which underpins new clause 34, is backed by more than 250 civil society leaders, from unions to charities, medical

bodies to faith leaders and mayors to councils. This widespread backing is unsurprising because the case for universal free school meals is overwhelming.

The need for free school meals is acute. We all remember Marcus Rashford igniting the campaign during the pandemic, pointing out that we could fill 27 Wembley stadiums with the 2.5 million children who did not know where their next meal might come from. The shameful legacy of child poverty continues. Poverty is embedded, with research from the University of Bristol showing that one in five schools run a food bank—a figure that is, I am told, even higher than the number of community food banks operated outside schools by the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network combined.

The National Education Union has explained that its members see the struggles of children in poverty every day, with 80% of teachers asked saying that they have provided food for hungry children out of their own pockets. One NEU member said:

“So many of our children arrive tired and hungry. I find the issue with food so awful. I stock my school kitchen every week with fruit, cereal, milk, biscuits...the number of children who pop in to see me and then ask for food has grown over the last 2 years. It is heart breaking.”

A universal approach is the best policy for three key reasons. First, it is good for children. Universal provision helps children learn, grow and thrive in school. For example, research published in November 2024 evaluating London's roll-out of free school meal provision to all children attending primary state schools found that the policy helped children's readiness to learn and ability to concentrate. The Department for Education's evaluation of the pilot undertaken by the last Labour Government found that pupils in schools where all children received free school meals were found to have made four to eight weeks' more progress in maths and English over two years. In that pilot, the poorest children made the most progress, reducing the attainment gap. In areas with means-tested provision, the effect on the attainment gap was negligible.

On the health benefits, research published by the *British Medical Journal* found that less than 2% of packed lunches met school food standards, so this policy is a major opportunity to increase healthy eating. It would also reduce stigma and shame, giving pupils a better sense of belonging in schools. Means-tested provision leads to children feeling singled out and labelled as poor, impacting on their enjoyment of and engagement with school.

Secondly, providing free school meals for all is an effective investment. The evidence shows that universal systems reduce inequality and deliver economic prosperity beyond the classroom. A cost-benefit analysis of expanding free school meals by PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that for every £1 invested in universal free school meals, £1.71 is generated in core benefits, such as increased savings for the NHS and schools and increased lifetime earnings and contributions for young people.

Other expert research shows that the provision of universal free school meals increases pupils' lifetime earnings, with the biggest increase being for the most disadvantaged children, thereby reducing inequalities for a generation beyond school. Work by the Food for Life partnership demonstrates that when food is sourced sustainably, more than £3 in social, economic and environmental value can be created for every £1 spent, mostly in the form of new jobs in the local economy.

[*Adrian Ramsay*]

Thirdly, universal provision is more efficient. We know that providing free school meals helps end a situation where children fall through the gaps. Means-testing will always miss some children and families. In England, the draconian eligibility criteria mean that one in three children living in poverty are considered too well off to access free school meals. Restrictive eligibility, complicated registration processes and stigma also block countless families from accessing support.

Universal systems are also more efficient, because they massively reduce administration. By putting an end to means-testing children for food, schools get back administration time, as all children's meals will be funded together via one mechanism. Free school meals for all also eradicate problems of school lunch debts. Universal policies are also easier to defend and protect from erosion by future Governments who may seek to freeze thresholds or restrict eligibility.

In the UK, Wales and London are leading the way in providing free, universal, healthy meals at lunchtime for every child in primary school as a means of reducing inequality—not just in school but for entire lifetimes. England needs to catch up. I sincerely hope that the Minister will consider building on the excellent progress on breakfast clubs contained in the Bill.

New clause 34 makes the case for free school meals for all primary school children, but I want to be clear that I and my party support the extension of this policy to all children in school, because hunger does not stop at the age of 11. I hope to divide the House on this vital new clause, which builds on the excellent breakfast club provision. I urge all hon. Members to vote for the new clause, because we know that children cannot learn when they are hungry and that free school dinners for all is a winning policy for the economy, for families and for children.

I turn briefly to amendment 173, on local authority consent for the withdrawal of certain children from school. Home education is an option that works extremely well for some families, and indeed many children thrive in this environment. Nevertheless, for vulnerable children, there can be real dangers in dropping out of sight of public agencies. The Bill already rightly mandates that if a local authority has live child protection concerns about a child, because they are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm, then their parent must obtain the consent of the local authority to withdraw the child from school. Our amendment would extend that mandate to children for whom the local authority has previously had concerns and taken action under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 in order to safeguard and promote their welfare. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, supported by the Children's Charities Coalition, has called for this strengthening of the Bill's protections to safeguard the most vulnerable children, for whom withdrawing from school poses a risk to their safety and welfare.

Last year, the child safeguarding practice review panel published its analysis of serious case reviews involving children who have died or suffered serious harm because of abuse and neglect. Those children were not in school at the time, under the proviso of receiving an education at home. Of the 41 serious case reviews, 23 of the children—over half—were previously known to children's social

care, including being subject to a child protection plan prior to the incident. Under clause 25 as it stands, such children would not be safeguarded, which I am sure is not the Government's intention. I therefore urge the Minister to seriously consider amendment 173 as a proportionate and necessary safeguarding measure.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): As a member of the Bill Committee, I have had detailed oversight of the measures in the Bill. They are vital for safeguarding children across the country, as well as supporting children and families with measures such as free breakfast clubs, reduced school uniform costs and extra support for kinship carers. I am thrilled that three schools in my constituency have been chosen to pilot free school breakfast clubs. They will put more money back in parents' pockets and ensure that all children start the day right with a healthy meal.

The Bill has been subject to healthy debate, both in this place and in Committee. It is a strong piece of legislation and one that has been strengthened through the parliamentary process. Looking through the amendment paper, I was interested to read new clause 1, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), on auto-enrolment for free school meals. Parents have contacted me who are eligible for free school meals but are finding the application process difficult and are being passed between the school and the council. Auto-enrolment would help those children and families get the support that they are entitled to from day one.

It is important that children from all backgrounds have the same opportunities in life. I welcome measures aimed at tackling inequalities. I have spoken about the inequalities that arise from faith-based admissions to schools, where children are allocated school places based on the professed faith of their parents. I am pleased that the Government have confirmed the 50% cap on faith-based selection criteria for new academies and free schools. Faith-based schools are shown to be less diverse than their peers on a range of measures, including deprivation levels—measured by free school meals—the number of children with special educational needs and disabilities, and diversity of race and ethnicity compared with their local areas.

The evidence shows clearly that faith selection is social selection by proxy. In my opinion, selection by faith has no place in taxpayer-funded schools at all. The 50% cap on faith selection was brought in the previous Labour Government to address inequality, and at least ensures some regulation of that. However, I am still concerned that new schools opened by local authorities are not subject to the same cap. In cases of oversubscription, they could allow 100% faith-based admission. I have raised concerns about this directly with the Minister, and I thank her for taking the time to discuss it with me.

I am pleased that the Bill takes long-overdue action to tackle illegal schools. At least 7,000 children attend illegal settings—for obvious reasons, that is an estimate. Ofsted has been raising this problem for many years, because it does not have sufficient powers of entry and investigation into illegal schools. The Bill fixes that, granting Ofsted increased powers of entry and providing more powers to bring criminal cases against those schools and the people who run them.

Members may not be aware of illegal schools. They tend to be concentrated in specific local authority areas. Usually, they are run by religious groups, which tend to be fundamentalist, extreme, highly controlling or isolationist in their outlook. We know from former pupils of these schools that in many cases they only study religious texts and receive no other form of education. Instead of having a broad and balanced education, children are subjected to indoctrination. Children attending illegal schools have also been subjected to abuse, both physical and sexual. That is unacceptable and such settings must be regulated. If they are unwilling to be regulated and offer a proper education, they must be shut down.

I refer members to the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Sam Carling) in last week's Crime and Policing Bill debate for a flavour of the attitude of high-control religious groups towards reporting abuse within their own communities. I also lay on record my thanks to Humanists UK for its work exposing the dreadful practices in illegal schools over the past decade. I welcome this Labour Government's recognition of the severity of those problems and the swift action taken to safeguard those vulnerable children. I also welcome future discussions on how to manage the problem of part-time settings.

4.45 pm

Another key safeguarding measure in the Bill is the advancement of the regulation of home education. I have been contacted by some constituents who are concerned about the new regulations regarding home education. The vast majority are parents who have chosen to home-educate their children due to failings within the school system, particularly for children with special educational needs. I sympathise with those parents, and I have spoken before about how delays in getting education, health and care plans, alongside failures to implement those EHCPs, mean that our children with SEND are suffering. I completely understand why some parents have taken the decision to withdraw their child from a school where their needs are not being met. Unfortunately, though, not all parents who remove their child from school are motivated in the same way or are providing a decent education.

Sadly, there are too many cases where children who are classed as home-educated are actually attending the illegal settings that I set out earlier, or are simply not receiving any education at all. In the worst cases, like that of Sara Sharif, we have seen children removed from school in order to prevent detection of abuse. It is only with this Bill that that can be tackled. The introduction of registers for children not in school is crucial in ensuring that children do not fall through the net.

Gideon Amos: Does the hon. Lady accept that, in the tragic case of Sara Sharif, which my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr Forster) has been pursuing, the murder happened in the school holidays and Sara was already known to social services? There is not much evidence that the parents said they were going to home-educate in the first place. Given all those facts, does the hon. Lady accept that there is actually no correlation in the data between home-educated children and children who are ultimately judged to need a care plan?

Lizzi Collinge: I acknowledge the complexity of that case and that the absolutely unacceptable failings before Sara's death were abject across many organisations.

However, she was removed from school partly so that her parents could prevent the detection of the abuse. I have recognised, and will continue to recognise, that that obviously does not speak to the vast majority of people who home-educate their children. However, as parliamentarians, we have a duty to protect the most vulnerable, and sometimes that includes regulating the majority, who are decent, honest people.

I want to reassure parents that the new regulations, such as registers for children not in school and the capacity to compel school attendance in certain cases, are not aimed at limiting home education as a whole or about policing how people choose to educate.

Graham Stuart: The intention is not the thing; it is the actual impact that counts. Let us take the example of someone who has taken their child out of school for the reasons that the hon. Lady has mentioned. Perhaps they have an autistic child who is miserable every day, and after letters to the headteacher and the local authority and failure after failure, they are forced to go into home education. Can she understand why parents are fearful of a representative of—as far as the parents are concerned—that failing local authority having the right to enter their home and sit in judgment over the child that they have been forced to home-educate? Can she understand why they would be fearful of the imposition a hard, top-down register, especially after so many years of successive Governments failing to provide any proper support for home educators?

Lizzi Collinge: I accept wholeheartedly the amount of parents of children, particularly with SEND, who have been absolutely failed by our system and by 14 years of Conservative Government. What I do not accept is that the proposal is somehow a major imposition. I do not believe that checking that children are receiving a decent education and are safe and well cared for is a major imposition on parents, and I think all good parents would welcome that.

These measures are being put in place to protect and safeguard vulnerable children. Having no oversight of children not in school is an unacceptable risk to children's welfare. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill is crucial, and cannot come too soon to protect our most vulnerable children and to support families up and down the country with rising costs. It has the welfare of children at its heart, and I am proud to have served on the Bill Committee and to have played a role in shaping this vital legislation.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): Like VAT on independent schools and putting up costs through national insurance contributions, this Bill is yet another example of Labour turning children's education into an ideological battleground. I have said it before, but I will say it again: Labour clearly hates any form of education that is not state-controlled, local authority-run schooling, and this Bill is another example of that. Under the Conservatives, pupils soared up international league tables, ensuring that every child, regardless of postcode—except if they lived in Wales—received the best start in life. Labour is intent on reversing that progress, attacking academic freedoms and dismantling a system that has delivered demonstrable results for young people. Indeed, it was a system that Labour used to champion, but now it has come back to power and is looking to dismantle it.

[Gregory Stafford]

Most of this Bill is trying to solve a problem that does not exist. Like the Employment Rights Bill last week, it is bodged and being rushed through without proper scrutiny, and behind it all is the cold, dead hand of the union paymasters that fund Labour. I commented on it during debate on the Employment Rights Bill, and we have heard again today—I am afraid the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr (Steve Witherden) has just left his place—that the “Jurassic Park” of the unions is back. Like last week, it is not Jeff Goldblum—

Lizzi Collinge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gregory Stafford: I will finish my analogy. It is not Jeff Goldblum who is going to be savaged by the dinosaurs; it is our children.

Lizzi Collinge: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr, to whom he referred and who has actually worked in schools as a teacher, might have a really good grasp of what happens in schools?

Gregory Stafford: It would be totally wrong of me to cast any aspersions on the hon. Gentleman's teaching ability. I have not sat through one of his classes, but if it was anything like his speech an hour ago, I would perhaps be looking to find some other educational outlet for myself or my child.

While I acknowledge that some of the child protection aspects of this Bill are important, much of it represents a dangerous and unnecessary centralisation of power that will harm schools, teachers and, most importantly, pupils. In recent meetings I have had with the Last Wednesday SEND group, as well as with home education groups across Surrey and Hampshire, there has been overwhelming concern about the proposed legislation. Many of those I have spoken to feel vilified for choosing to remove their children from mainstream education in favour of alternative specialised provision tailored to the individual needs of their children.

I will take this opportunity to highlight five key amendments that I think are particularly important; I urge Members to give them their full consideration. The first is amendment 206, which would remove the requirement for all academies to follow the national curriculum. Clearly, a national curriculum can provide a broad and balanced education, but education is not a one-size-fits-all issue. The Bill seeks to stifle innovation, which is a dangerous and regressive move. It is particularly concerning for faith schools and alternative provision settings such as Pathways school, a SEND provision school in my constituency. Pathways school plays an invaluable role in educating vulnerable children and providing trauma-informed strategies alongside a high-quality, project-based curriculum. Excellent spaces such as those would struggle to continue under state-imposed education strictures.

As a parent, I draw attention to new clause 41, which would give parents the right to review school curriculum materials to ensure their children are fairly exposed to material appropriate for their age group. It is not controversial to say that parents have a unique and intimate understanding of their children's needs, and it is only right that they have an active role in ensuring the quality and suitability of their children's education.

Moving on to amendments 200 and 202 regarding home education, a key group in my constituency that have ardently opposed state-controlled education are the home educators. Home education is a provision used by many parents across Farnham, Bordon, Haslemere and Liphook, because it provides a more personalised approach to learning, which in some cases benefits certain children. Amendment 200 would mandate local authorities to submit a statement of reasons when they do not agree that a child can be home-educated. Families are deeply concerned that the Government's proposals impose excessive state control over home education, failing to recognise the dedication and care that home-educating parents provide. The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Lizzi Collinge) said—I think I am quoting her correctly—that “all good parents would welcome” this imposition on education. That is deeply unfair to all the good home-educating parents who have contacted me. They do not feel that this is a proportionate measure; they think it is a deep imposition, and they are good home-educators.

Amendment 200 is a more proportionate way to address concerns while ensuring the accountability that the hon. Lady wanted. That is especially important for families with SEND children awaiting education, health and care plans—a process that can take up to two years. In my local area, 17% of independent school pupils receive SEND support, yet only 6% have a formal EHCP. Therefore, home education, especially in that interim gap between realising a child needs SEND support and receiving an EHCP, is often the best option for them. Amendment 202 would remove the requirement for local authorities to approve and consent to the home education of children with special educational needs. Removing those bureaucratic hurdles would empower parents to make the best decisions for their children and would ensure inclusivity and equity in education.

I want to touch on amendment 192 on neglect and abuse of children that is related to home education. Although I strongly support home education as a valid choice, safeguarding must remain a priority. However, home-educating parents feel vilified by this Government, who treat them as if they were inherently suspect, as the hon. Lady did, rather than recognising their commitment to their children's education. Amendment 192 would ensure that local authorities may withhold consent for withdrawal from school where there are concerns about neglect or abuse. The entire House was horrified by the tragic case of Sara Sharif, and the amendment is a necessary, balanced and proportionate response—far more so than the Government's broader proposals, which unfairly target responsible home-educating parents. Instead of a sweeping punitive approach, the amendment focuses directly on children who are genuinely at risk, ensuring that they remain in a monitored environment where safeguarding concerns can be identified and addressed.

The Bill is an ideological attack on academic freedoms which will hurt the very children who Labour claims to support. It imposes unnecessary constraints on schools, weakens parental choice and undermines educational innovation. The poorest pupils will suffer the most. Academic freedoms have driven up standards, allowing schools to tailor their curricula to meet the needs of pupils. Labour's insistence on enforcing a rigid national curriculum will stifle progress and limit opportunities.

Its move to weaken the academy system will leave struggling schools in limbo, harming the very children who need urgent intervention.

The Bill tears down 25 years of progress—progress that has had a demonstrable impact on children, improving their educational outcomes, life chances and business and employment opportunities, and benefiting the country as a whole. I urge the House to reject this damaging Bill and to stand up for the best interests of our children. Let us protect parental rights, uphold educational freedoms and ensure that every child has access to safe, high-quality and inspirational education.

5 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Ind): I rise in support of new clause 23, tabled in my name, which seeks to extend mandatory relationships, sex and health education to all young people aged 16 to 18 in further education, sixth form and apprenticeship settings. RSHE is currently compulsory only to the end of key stage 4, when students are 16 years old, but young people remain in education or training until the age of 18. That creates a dangerous gap, in which thousands of young people are left without the vital education they need to stay safe and informed during a crucial and vulnerable period of their lives.

Government data paints a stark picture. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 16 to 19-year-olds experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group, with 8% reporting incidents in the past year. That is precisely the age when young people are beginning to explore intimate relationships—a time when they need guidance on recognising coercive control, domestic abuse and harmful behaviours.

We all know the tragic consequences of ignoring that gap. The recent case of Kyle Clifford, who murdered Carol, Louise and Hannah Hunt after reportedly being influenced by the misogynistic views of Andrew Tate, reminds us that toxic narratives can take root when young people are unable to access to reliable and positive education about healthy relationships and respect. That topic has also been powerfully explored in the new Netflix series “Adolescence” by Stephen Graham, which addresses the impact of misogynistic and harmful ideologies, particularly among vulnerable young people. The series, which I recommend to everyone, highlights how a lack of proper education in relationships and self-worth can leave young people susceptible to dangerous and controlling behaviour.

Put simply, we cannot allow harmful voices to fill the vacuum that education should occupy. Education is not just important; it is lifesaving. Providing young people with clear lessons on consent, coercive control and domestic abuse would give them the tools to identify harmful behaviour and seek help when they need it. Without that, we leave young people across the country vulnerable to manipulation, abuse and harm.

Survivors have bravely shared their stories, illustrating the tragic cost of inaction. Faustine Petron, a survivor who founded the “Make It Mandatory” campaign, has spoken powerfully about how education could have changed her life. Having experienced domestic abuse at just 16, she said:

“If I had received mandatory education on healthy relationships and coercive control in sixth form, I truly believe I would have recognised the signs of abuse earlier and sought support—before it escalated into four years of serious violence. Those are years I can never get back. Years when I should have just been a child.”

Another parent who supported the 100,000-strong online petition shared their heartbreak:

“My daughter ended her life in January 2022, aged 21, because she was in a coercive and controlling relationship and was abused on every level. The perpetrator was the boy she met at school and had known since she was 12 years old.”

And another signatory said:

“I wish I’d known about coercive control at 16 when I entered an abusive relationship and stayed in it for 9 years. I thought that because there was no physical violence, it couldn’t be abuse. Teenagers need educating about this.”

Those stories are not isolated. Reports from the “Everyone’s Invited” platform highlighted that 142 further education and sixth-form colleges in England were named in testimonies of sexual violence. Those shocking accounts demand urgent action.

New clause 23 has broad support. The Women and Equalities Committee recommended such a change in 2023. The chief medical officer, the Children’s Commissioner and organisations such as Brook, the End Violence Against Women Coalition and the Sex Education Forum have all called for RSHE to be extended to 16-to-18 education providers. Ultimately, the new clause is a matter of prevention and protection. It is about giving young people the tools to identify unhealthy relationships, to know where to turn for help, and to foster respect and understanding in their personal lives. By extending RSHE to all young people in education until the age of 18, we can save lives, prevent harm and build a safer society for everyone. That is not just the right thing to do; it is the necessary thing to do.

I urge Members from across the House to support my new clause, as well as new clause 34 in the name of the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay), which would extend free school meals to all primary school pupils—a campaign that I, alongside other Labour Members, have proudly supported for a long time. It is up to us to ensure that no young person is left behind without the necessary education and food that they need to stay safe, healthy and empowered.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I must confess I am worried about the Education Secretary and her future employment prospects. She may share the confusion of the public and wonder whether the Prime Minister is a socialist or a pragmatist, a tax-and-spend lefty or a quango cutter, a human rights lawyer or a war leader, but Education Ministers seem to have missed the latest McSweeney memo.

While the reformer in the Department for Work and Pensions says she wants to get people off welfare and into work, and the reformer in the Department of Health and Social Care holds up school reform and academies as the model for his changes to the NHS, the luddites in the Education Department are taking a hammer to the machinery that has made English schools the best in the west. This Bill—along with the curriculum review, a weakened Ofsted, the threat to SATs in primary schools, the end of free schools and weaker discipline policies—undoes decades of hard-won reform and higher standards.

It should be obvious that the objective for our school system is higher standards. Of course, Ministers pay lip service to that idea, but their actions belie their words, not just with this Bill but with the appointment of an academic to run the curriculum review who has criticised

[Nick Timothy]

past Governments' "obsession with academic achievement." Standards improved through the years of school reform because Governments put their trust in heads and teachers, parents, and the philanthropists and public servants who sponsored free schools and academies. We followed what we understood from neurological science and research about how children learn, from work on cultural literacy to the knowledge that higher-level skills are dependent on the automatic mastery of lower-level activity. We turned to synthetic phonics, maths mastery, a knowledge-rich curriculum, teacher-led instruction and traditional academic subjects, and watched pupils fly.

When I compare my own education with what my children are taught today, the difference is truly staggering, and yet this Government want to go back to the failed policies of the past and the failed policies that continue to this day in Scotland and Wales, where standards are sadly far lower than in England. We know why: this disastrous journey back is what the unions demand, and it is what those on the left, in their hearts, really want. We heard Labour MPs on Second Reading explicitly rejecting the very concept of academies and demand state-run schools.

Some 80% of secondary schools are now academies. Ofsted says that 87% of them are good or outstanding, even though many were previously failing schools that were made academies to turn them around under new leadership. This intervention has been proved to work. Academy freedoms have given heads the space to make bad schools good. According to the fairer schools index, which takes both academic achievement and socioeconomic background into account, the top five state schools in England are all academies: Steiner academy Hereford, Michaela community school, Mercia school, Eden boys' school, and Eden girls' leadership academy. Multi-academy trusts have achieved Progress 8 scores far above the national average, with trusts such as the Harris Federation, United Learning, Star Academies, Delta Academies Trust and Ark all performing strongly.

The Government's disregard for evidence with the Bill has provoked massive anger among school leaders. The Children's Commissioner has said that the Government are

"legislating against the things we know work in schools".

Katharine Birbalsingh, the headteacher at Michaela, has called the Bill "catastrophic". Sir Dan Moynihan, CEO of the Harris Federation, simply asked:

"Why are we doing this?"—[Official Report, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Public Bill Committee, 21 January 2025; c. 75, Q160.]

[*Interruption*] If the hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince) would like to intervene, he may.

I want to say something about the Bill's most damaging measures, starting with clause 42, which makes the national curriculum compulsory for all academies. Today, the interim report of the curriculum and assessment review has been published. Just as predicted, the review endorses the Education Secretary's demand for a curriculum that prioritises non-academic subjects over traditional subjects such as the sciences and geography. Indeed the review throws into doubt the future of the EBacc, which ensures a proper focus on core academic subjects. While there is value to non-academic disciplines, of course,

there is only so much time in the school day. Teachers will lose the ability to prioritise what they teach, as well as how, and children risk getting less time in which to learn reading, writing and numeracy skills to an advanced level.

Evidence shows that academies, such as the Laurus Trust, have already found a good balance between academic rigour and extracurricular activities. The Education Policy Institute found that the Laurus Trust's extracurricular programme led to an attainment 8 score being 6.2 points higher among current pupils than for pupils who attended before the programme began. The point is the trust has the freedom to decide the focus of its extracurricular work.

Centralised control over the curriculum will also undermine school ethos and character. For example, Marine Academy Plymouth has tailored its curriculum around the city's maritime history and relationship with the sea, and we should be encouraging innovation, not conformity—or "consistency" as I hear Ministers euphemistically call it.

Clauses 41, 46 and 47 remove flexibility over teacher qualifications, pay, and conditions, but giving academies freedom over how they recruit, train, and develop staff has led to impressive results. Michaela hires teachers with little or no experience but then gives them training based on its own ethos. Dixons Trinity Academy and King's Leadership Academy have done similar. And the Government are not extending the requirement in clause 41 to recruit QTS—qualified teacher status—teachers to further education, university technical colleges, studio schools, non-maintained schools, and early years provision, so why impose it on academies?

I share the concerns expressed earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston (Neil O'Brien) regarding clause 50. This new amendment will give local authorities the power to overrule headteachers and block school expansion and even mandate the number of pupils attending an academy. This would give local politicians the power to starve academies of pupils and promote their preferred locally controlled schools. This would cut some school budgets and could even lead to closures. Instead of letting parents decide which schools thrive, this is a return to failed command-and-control statism. As roll numbers fall, clause 50 will put huge power into the hands of often very ideological politicians, and for those who doubt this danger, those of us who worked with free school founders know the games councils have played with land hurriedly sold and planning applications refused to stop new schools opening.

A couple of months ago in this House the Prime Minister called academies a Labour achievement. He said:

"Academies are here to stay, and will continue to drive up standards. That is what the Bill is about."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2025; Vol. 760, c. 998.]

But if he really meant that, I honestly wonder whether he has read, or understood, the Bill at all.

I am afraid the Education Secretary and her team, however, know exactly what they are doing. Their ideology blinds them to evidence and leaves them deaf to advice from those who know what they are talking about. This is why Ministers cannot admit the success of English schools in the PISA and TIMSS international rankings.

Catherine McKinnell *indicated dissent.*

Nick Timothy: The Minister gave me a frown but she can intervene and admit the success of English schools in those rankings if she wishes.

It is why, when Michaela was once again selected—*[Interruption.]* Would the Minister like to intervene? No, apparently not. It is why, when Michaela was once again the best-ranked school in the country for progress, the Secretary of State could not bring herself even to congratulate Katherine Birbalsingh when I invited her to do so from these Benches. It is why the Education Secretary's special adviser briefed the newspapers that Ms Birbalsingh is a liar, and why he briefed the newspapers against Amanda Spielman, former head of Ofsted, attacking her very personally as a "failure" and a Conservative.

As Margaret Thatcher, not just a former Prime Minister but a former Education Secretary, once said:

"If they attack you personally, it means they have not a single political argument left."

And this is the truth: the Education Secretary does not have a single political argument for this disgraceful act of policy vandalism, but she is determined to ignore those who know better than her and push on. And the people who lose out, I am afraid, will be the children, from ordinary working families the length and breadth of the country, denied the best we can give them, unaware that a better and brighter future has been stolen from them thanks to nothing more than vindictive left-wing dogma.

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to speak in support of the Bill, which delivers on the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity. The Bill will drive high and rising standards in school, cut the cost of sending children to school for my constituents and make life easier for families in my area. Its landmark reforms to safeguarding and children's social care will stop children from falling through the cracks.

5.15 pm

I spoke in favour of the Bill on Second Reading in January, and I am pleased that the elements of the Bill that I spoke about then have not been substantially amended. First, the Bill, as amended, still provides for a profit cap, enabling the Secretary of State to cap the profits of non-local-authority, Ofsted-registered providers of children's homes, foster agencies and supported accommodation. Secondly, I particularly welcomed the introduction of free breakfast clubs in every primary school. I note that in Committee, the Government proposed amendment 6, but that amendment is technical in nature, and the Bill will effectively make the same provision as the original draft did.

The clause relating to breakfast clubs in the Bill, as amended, has been and will be warmly welcomed by my constituents in Mansfield for many reasons—not just because it will save families up to £450 a year, but because evidence shows that providing a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day can contribute to improved readiness to learn, increased concentration and improved wellbeing and behaviour.

I am pleased that we are wasting no time in rolling out free breakfast clubs in primary schools. Two schools in Mansfield have been chosen to be among the first

schools to trial the free breakfast club programme: St Peter's Church of England primary academy in Mansfield and Holly primary school in Forest Town. I welcome that announcement, and I am pleased that Mansfield schools are part of the trial that will allow the Government to monitor what works and what needs correcting, before wider roll-out across England.

The Government have made it clear that one of our top priorities is investing in the next generation to break down the cycle of poverty that holds our nation's progress back. The Bill clearly drives home Labour's mission to break down barriers to opportunity, and I will vote for it proudly, on behalf of all those children and families in Mansfield and across the country who will benefit from its measures.

Damian Hinds: I am grateful to be called to speak in the debate. It has been an honour to be a member of the Bill Committee. Over many days, we considered the Bill in detail, providing line-by-line scrutiny. Today, there are many amendments before us, many of which I support, and there are important issues to discuss, including elective home education. My right hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) made some excellent points, and the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Abtissam Mohamed) also made important points.

It is important that we discuss the breakfast club provision. In principle, schools providing breakfast to children is a good thing—why not?—but as we get closer to implementation, colleagues on the Labour Benches may find themselves getting more mail from headteachers in their constituencies, noting that the Government say that the pilot scheme will save parents £450 per child, but the amount of money that the Government are giving to schools goes down as low as £114 per child. That is clearly quite a gap for schools to make up, and we will see how they intend to do that.

We had some good debates on uniform in Committee. I gently say to Labour colleagues that if they think the changes in uniform will automatically result in the cost of sending children to school going down—because everybody will go to Asda and get unbranded clothing, so there will be no pester power or fashion competitions when it comes to sportswear, for example—next time they do a school visit, they should go to a PE lesson and look down at the children's feet. If they cannot make it to a PE lesson, just wait for the end of the school day, stay at the school gate and look at the children's bags. It is not automatically the case that not having uniform items for sport, for example, makes things cheaper. I also hope that at some point during the passage of this legislation, the Government will get rid of the bizarre anomaly by which they say it is all right to have a school tie as an additional logoed or branded item in a secondary school, but not in a primary school, for some reason.

There are also important new clauses for us to consider—on free school meal auto-enrolment, for example. We had that discussion this morning in Westminster Hall with the Minister for early education, the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan). Historically, there have been barriers to auto-enrolment for free school meals to do with IT systems and the legal basis for such a measure. The IT system issues are melting away as technology improves, and I hope that the Government will look at that seriously.

[*Damian Hinds*]

If I were to comment on every clause with which I have an issue, or every amendment on which I have an opinion, I would stretch even your famed patience, Madam Deputy Speaker. Instead, I propose taking a step back. What we are debating is more than just the 84 pages of parts 2 and 3 of the Bill, or the 62 pages of amendments. This is really about the soul and direction of education in England. As other colleagues have mentioned, this new Government have a very solid base on which to build when it comes to attainment in England; we have the best primary school readers in the western world—yes, that bears repeating. Under the last Government, at secondary school, we went from 27th to 11th in mathematics, and from 25th to 13th in reading. Children on free school meals became 50% more likely to go to university. That is the record of the last 14 years. It is not the record of the 13 years before that, when we went down the international comparison tables.

There were stand-out reformers in new Labour, and I pay tribute to them, starting with Sir Tony Blair and his famous epizeuxis, “Education, education, education.” There was also the noble Lord Blunkett, Lord Adonis and others, but they were always swimming against the tide from the left of politics and the Labour party to push through reforms. We should not exaggerate how much was achieved by the end of the last Labour Government. There were a couple of hundred academies, as opposed to many thousands today.

What happened between 2010 and 2024 was not all about academies—far from it. It was really about brilliant teachers—that is always where it starts and finishes in education—in an ecosystem that valued high standards and high quality. Crucially, it was about the combination of autonomy and accountability for schools, a knowledge-rich curriculum, and proven methods, such as synthetic phonics and maths mastery. It was about schools learning from each other, both in the hub-and-spoke network across the country and in academy trusts, which became the primary vehicle for school improvement.

That improvement also needed diversity and parental choice, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness, who is on my left—spatially—pointed out. That starts with clear information and knowing how children are doing at school. There was a time, for many decades in this country—going back way before the new Labour reforms, by the way—when nobody knew how many children were just being let down by schools. We took that provision of clear information further, of course—as did the Blair reforms—with clear Ofsted judgments that anybody could access readily, but also much longer judgments that could be read by anybody who could read.

We do not talk nearly enough about Progress 8—it is so much better than the measures that we used to have—either on raw GCSE attainment or the contextual value-added measures of the Labour years. We also knew that if we were to have choice, there needed to be spare capacity in the system. Remarkably, in spite of the fact that there was a known demographic need, in the years up to 2010, the previous Labour Government cut school places by a six-figure number; we added 1.2 million more. We also made the diversity of academies and free schools happen, and welcomed it.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): My right hon. Friend has referred not only to the previous Government, but to the new Labour Government before that. Does he share my concern, and perhaps my confusion? I thought there was consensus on the huge benefits of academies, which were brought in by new Labour and advanced by the previous Conservative Government, but this Government seem to be ripping up that consensus through this Bill.

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is certainly right that over the years, there have been many brilliant, far-sighted people in the Labour party who have overlooked their political tradition and said, “We must just do what is best for the children.” I do not think there has ever been a universally accepted consensus on academies; until very recently, there have been groups actively organising against schools becoming academies, with leading members of the Labour party involved in those movements. There has always been a strand, which turns out to be wider than we realised, of the Labour party that believes that unless there is control from the top, through councils, and unless schools are told what to do, the system is inconsistent. Some consistency in education is very important, but that is not the same as uniformity, and certainly not the same as top-down control.

It turns out that Government Ministers do not want transparency and choice. They do not want diversity. In particular, they seem to want to curtail the improvement in school performance that has been made possible through academy trusts. The Government have already stopped new free schools. This Bill can not only stop academies growing in size, but can stop them staying the same size, even if they are popular with parents.

We all know that the Bill erodes freedoms, starting with the qualified teacher status requirement. It is not as if schools are going around willy-nilly, recruiting people without qualifications off the streets. They are not putting cards up in Tesco saying, “Apply now to teach, no prior experience or qualifications required”—of course they are not. Equally, though, a headteacher who is trying to do the best for his or her school and its children might have a reason to bring in somebody from a profession. They might want to bring in somebody with a sports background, somebody from the private sector, or somebody from another country to help with their school’s language programme, but no, we do not trust headteachers to make those decisions. We have to write something into legislation to stop them doing that.

Turning to the national curriculum, again, it is not as if schools are going around willy-nilly saying, “We’re not going to teach children English, maths, geography and history. We’re just going to make it all up.” In fact, Ofsted-inspected schools—which all state schools are—cannot do that, because they are judged on having a broad and balanced curriculum. The quickest way to achieve that is to follow the national curriculum, but there are schools that want to innovate and to deviate somewhat from the national curriculum. We see no harm in that, so long as those schools maintain that breadth and balance.

It has been said by a few colleagues that it seems to put the cart before the horse to say that all schools must follow the national curriculum rigidly before we have the outcome of the review. Just a few hours ago, we had a publication connected to the review, but not the

final report. It is beside the point, however, because whatever the review comes up with—on which we must wait and see—the Government are not obliged to adopt it and could adopt something else. Even if they do adopt it, this Government or any subsequent Government could decide to do something different. Having the ability for schools to deviate somewhat gives us a safety valve against the over-politicisation of schools and what is taught in the curriculum. It also gives some reassurance to faith schools and parents.

5.30 pm

Graham Stuart: Has my right hon. Friend seen Tim Leunig's article in *Schools Week* talking about Ofsted's new report card system following the Labour manifesto commitment? One danger is that, if my right hon. Friend is right and we see a reduction in standards, the Bill could switch off the light that allows us to see that, because

“reliability and validity are in tension”,

as Tim Leunig puts it. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that Ofsted must ensure that it continues to put a bright and reliable light on the education system, so that we can see whether the policies in this Bill work?

Damian Hinds: I do, and my right hon. Friend gives me two valuable opportunities. The first is to pay tribute to the great Tim Leunig. We do not often talk about him in this House. He has friends here, and he is a perceptive thinker. I will look up his article.

The other opportunity that my right hon. Friend gives me is to highlight the discrepancy we can get when things appear to be getting better, when in fact they are not. That is what happened under the last Labour Government when, in spite of us falling down the international comparisons, they managed to find 11 different ways in the system to make it look like our GCSE results were improving year after year. We do not want that to happen again. There were those champions in the new Labour years who made these great reforms happen and would want to continue them now, so I say to those on the Government Benches: where are the champions today? Where are those in the modern Labour party who will say, “No, we will not be bound by ideology. We are going to do what is in the best interests of the children”? I hope there will be some of those champions in the other place.

To be fair, I was mildly encouraged this morning to hear the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, when questioned on the radio about the fate of this Bill, appearing to be somewhat open-minded, shall we say, about what might happen. To be fair, I have even been slightly encouraged listening to the Secretary of State for Education in recent days and weeks. She has sounded like she might be a little bit open to rowing back from some of the worst excesses of this legislation. There is still time. There will be weeks of this legislation being considered in the other place, so I just ask the Government to please take that time to think carefully about the legacy they will be leaving and to turn those words into deeds.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Ministers for their contributions. It is an honour to have an opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents and my former colleagues in the teaching profession on the

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Quality of teaching is the single biggest driver of standards in schools. The Bill will ensure that all teachers have or are working towards qualified teacher status. As a former teacher, I welcome that.

It is fair to say from the chuntering I have been doing from this Bench that I feel passionately about education. I find it difficult, listening to Opposition Members—I recognise that they generally care passionately about education, but sadly my experience of teaching under their Government was different from how they describe it. I once again ask the Minister to recognise that she is inheriting a workforce in the education system that is absolutely at rock bottom.

Let me stress, however—I want to make this clear to Conservative Members—that I put the wellbeing and education of children above any politics. When I talk about the education of young people, I talk not just about examinations but what is described in the teaching profession as the hidden curriculum: important life skills. Indeed, I became quite animated when a month ago, on this very spot, I spoke in a debate about the importance of financial education.

As I have said, for me a well-qualified teacher is one who still takes a joy in education that has not been sucked out of him by the endless barrage of comments in the press, and, I must add, a revolving door of Conservative Education Secretaries, although I should offer an olive branch to the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds)—[*Interruption.*] I was about to say something nice about the right hon. Gentleman.

Damian Hinds: Carry on, then!

Chris Vince: I was going to say that he was probably one of the better ones.

I should also recognise, as should we all, that the young people who are going through the education system now have been impacted negatively by something even worse than a Conservative Government, namely the terrible pandemic. We know that they are less resilient. We also know that more and more young people are having to be carers for their parents and other family members and loved ones. Members will be aware that I am very passionate about this subject, and I thank the Minister and other Members for attending and contributing to my Westminster Hall debate on it last Thursday. On average, young carers are likely to miss more school than their peers, and I welcome the proposal in the Bill to record absences to ensure that no young people fall through the gaps, including those who are home educated.

I said earlier that I did not want to be too political about this. I went through the education process and became a teacher because of Sir Tony Blair's remark about “education, education, education”. When he said that teaching was a valuable and noble profession, I thought, “He's right: it is.” The former Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath did not put it in quite the same way when he said that most teachers were letting young people down.

I want to say something about reform, and to move away from the ideological politics of reform. Sometimes reform is good, sometimes it is bad, and sometimes good reform is bad because of the way in which it is implemented. As a former teacher, I can assure the

[Chris Vince]

House that telling a student that they are not doing a very good job does not make them do a better job. When we are considering reform in education, it is hugely important that we take educationists, teachers and support staff along with us, and that, I am afraid, is something that I do not think the last Government did. I believe that the Bill returns us to the original purpose of academies: to share best practice and encourage collaboration in the best interests of children.

I was told that I must talk about the amendments and new clauses, so let me briefly speak in support of Government amendment 156, which focuses on the importance of ensuring that every school is run by a “fit and proper person”, which I think we would all agree is a no-brainer. I also want to refer to—I cannot find the right page in my speech—

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend accept an intervention?

Chris Vince: I will!

Tim Roca: At several points today, we have been transported by Conservative Members to the educational nirvana that supposedly existed under the Tory Government. That is not the memory I have, or the memory that many parents and children have. They, I think, remember the real-terms funding cuts that happened for much of the last 14 years, increasing class sizes, the millions of days lost to industrial action by unions who were fed up with the hectoring nature of previous Conservative Governments, and the 11% of children who were going hungry compared with the 8% OECD average. PISA rankings are all very well and good, but PISA scores were going down; they were just not going down as fast as those in other countries.

Chris Vince: I thank my hon. Friend for painting a better picture than the one painted by Conservative Members.

Shortly after the election, in August, I met a couple of former teacher colleagues who were still in the profession, and they just looked broken. It was really difficult to see, because they have been maths teachers for a long period of time. When I first became a teacher, they inspired me to persevere, to reflect on the bad days and to have better lessons. To see them so fed up and so disenchanted with being a teacher was really difficult, and we have to change that. I emphasise again to the Minister that it is really important that we ensure that we support teachers' mental health. I was going to intervene on the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) to ask him whether he recognises that happy and supported teachers lead to happy and supported young people, which is really important.

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Vince: I will not.

I will briefly mention Government amendments 166 and 167, which talk about data protection never getting in the way of safeguarding. One of my most difficult days as a teacher—the House will be pleased to know that it

has nothing to do with the Conservative Government—was when a young person in my class came to me at the end of a lesson and said those terrible words that every teacher dreads: “I need to tell you something.” Despite my explaining to her that it could not be confidential, she made a disclosure—I will not go into it, obviously—and then begged me not to tell anyone, which is not an option for teachers or anyone in a similar position. It was heartbreaking to see how upset she was, but I reported it in the correct and proper way. Clearly, safeguarding is really important, and all professionals—not just those in education—who work with young people take it very seriously. General data protection regulation, or myths about GDPR and data sharing, should not get in the way of ensuring that our young people are safe in education and outside it.

I will finish on a lighter note, because I appreciate that I have got a little bit deep. The right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) discussed the educational merits of having an ice cream. I say to him that $\frac{1}{3}\pi r^2 h$ is the volume of a cone.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince) for schooling me in maths—I am not very good at that.

I begin by expressing my strong support for the Bill, particularly its efforts to enhance child protection and ensure better collaboration between professionals involved in children's care. I welcome the measures in part 2 that seek to harmonise admissions and provide cost of living support for families, especially those from deprived backgrounds.

Parents whose children are in state-funded education deserve transparency. They should have access to clear information about their child's education and be assured that schools and trusts are operating fairly, and I look forward to measures coming forward that are not in the Bill but which will really make a difference for children, such as the child poverty strategy, the SEND review and the curriculum review. However, there is one part of this Bill that I believe needs to be amended: the level of unnecessary scrutiny that is being imposed on parents who choose to home-educate their children. Rather than protecting them, elements of the proposed register risk putting such families in danger.

Let me be clear: I support the principle of the register. As corporate parents, local authorities need to know where children are if they are not attending school. Collecting some information and the reasons for elective home education is important, not only for child protection but so that authorities can plan for the future. We know that some children who are home-educated later return to school, and many parents make this choice because local education provision does not meet their child's needs, either temporarily or permanently. That presents an opportunity for local authorities and multi-academy trusts to work collaboratively with families to ensure that curricula and school offerings are inclusive of their needs.

However, proposed new section 436C of the Education Act 1996, which governs the content and maintenance of the home education register, contains provisions that could have serious unintended safeguarding consequences, as suggested by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed). Under proposed new section 434A, in clause 25, the local authority must serve notice to

both parents “unless exceptional circumstances apply”—for instance, in cases of domestic abuse or family estrangement. Yet proposed new section 436C, in clause 26, requires the register to include the name and home address of the child, both parents’ names and addresses, and the addresses of all places where education takes place. Crucially, there is no provision for exceptions in cases where sharing this information could put children at risk.

5.45 pm

One of my constituents, whose name I will protect for obvious reasons, told me:

“Since 2018, I have managed to keep my home address private from my ex partner. Throughout the case”—

a court case—

“I was supported in keeping my address private and it was not included in any documents he was given access to...This register would hand him our home address. It would hand him details of my new relationship. The names and address of my new partner’s parents who will be supporting me...It would hand him the address of every activity she”—

her child—

“attends. This proposed register essentially hands him motivation, evidence, licence and opportunity to continue his coercive controlling behaviours”.

She goes on:

“Currently we are safe. She’s known in our home ed community. She is not hidden or missing education. This Bill will put her in danger. It will put me in danger. It will put my baby with my new partner in danger. The current provisions of this bill will not increase our safety and I have no doubt that there are hundreds of other mothers in the same position across the country.”

That is chilling, indeed. To address it, amendment 175 in my name would provide the same safeguarding expectations as are already present in proposed new section 434A, removing the requirement to provide sensitive information where there is a known risk to a child.

I am also concerned about the excessive reporting requirements for the register—other than the reference to ice creams. While basic information is useful for future planning, proposed new section 463C(1)(e) goes much further, requiring the details of all individuals involved and a full list of all activities. That not only places an unrealistic burden on families, but is impractical for local authorities to manage. If we break down what is being asked for, it would mean that parents must report a neighbour who teaches their child to cook or sew and a local farmer who introduces their children to the environment through hands-on experiences, as well as swimming lessons, museum visits and even regular nature outings with other home-educating families.

Gideon Amos: In that vein, does my hon. Friend accept that, as I mentioned, grandparents reading to their grandchildren could be considered as providing home education and should be inspected and reported on, and vital home education groups providing services free of charge could be driven out of business by the scale and weight of reporting they will have to provide?

Vikki Slade: I think a lot of people who do not know anything about home education miss the fact that there is a whole community of home educators, and home-educated children spend plenty of time with their peers, but they are just different peers—others who prefer to have their education outside a school environment—and there is a risk of such organisations being driven underground or lost altogether.

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents already have a duty to ensure that their child receives a suitable education, whether through school or otherwise, and local authorities can already conduct informal inquiries and issue school attendance orders if they believe a child is not receiving an appropriate education, so this is simply overkill. A formal register would help to ensure accountability, but this is overreach. My amendment 221 proposes a more practical solution of requiring only those who provide more than six hours per week of education or activity to be included in the register. That strikes a reasonable balance by ensuring that key educators are identified without overwhelming families or local authorities.

While there are genuine safeguarding concerns, local authorities already have the power to intervene under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. The Victoria Climbié Foundation stated that the provision proposed in the Bill would have done nothing to help Sara Sharif because the local authority had already decided that the child was not at risk.

Graham Stuart: I hope colleagues in the other place will follow up on the hon. Lady’s excellent speech. To focus in on that point, if a register does go ahead—the hon. Lady supports that; I do not—it should start with the minimum requirements, and then it could be expanded if that is needed, rather than be spread out in this way. To reinforce the point she makes, local authorities already have the power to intervene if it appears to them that someone is not having a suitable education, and they have all the powers required if there are concerns about welfare. Conflating welfare and education in the way this Bill does particularly irritates and upsets home educators.

Vikki Slade: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. In fact, Kathryn from my constituency wrote me a very long email talking about welfare versus education—two totally separate issues. People are really upset and would have been devastated and distraught to hear the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Lizzi Collinge) effectively make them feel like they were some sort of pariah. I was really upset to hear that, especially as I asked home educators in my constituency to listen to the debate and give me their feedback.

I support amendments 195 and 197, tabled by the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), which seek clarity that educational activities outside regular school terms should not be subject to this overreach. My children are not subject to them, and children in home education should not be subjected to anything more than the rest of us. Children receiving education out of school should have the same rights to take their public examinations as their peers. It should not be based on a parent’s ability to fund that. After all, the Treasury already saves many thousands of pounds for every home-educated child. New clause 53, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), would provide support for parents by providing for home-educated children to sit any relevant examination and to be fully funded where requested.

I thank the Minister for confirmation on one point: as I sat here this afternoon, I received a letter to say that the challenges faced by summer-born children will now be considered. I would like to pass on the thanks—*[Interruption.]* Well, I’ll save the rest of it for you.

[Vikki Slade]

I was not going to speak about academies, but as I sat here over several hours I received two more emails relating, in particular, to concerns about their governance. I heard the challenge from those on the Conservative Benches about the comments by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr (Steve Witherden) on teachers, but I cannot tell the House how many times I hear complaints about the way staff and whistleblowers are being treated in multi-academy trusts. While I have sat here today, I have heard of another who has been suspended by a multi-academy trust. This is not about them getting better treatment; it is about them getting worse treatment. If teachers are treated badly and leave the sector, that has an impact on our children. It is about the children, not just the teachers.

In summary, I support the principles of the Bill, but I urge the Government to consider the amendments on excessive and potentially harmful requirements imposed on home-educated children. They are common sense amendments that would allow children to be protected without placing undue burdens on families.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I rise in support of the Bill and in support of the amendments that seek to increase access to free school meals, a policy that would make a world of difference to the one in two children living in poverty in my constituency, the most deprived in the country. I also want to pay tribute to the amazing teachers in all the schools in Liverpool Riverside who go above and beyond every single day, not only for the children but for their parents.

Research last summer showed that nearly one in five households with children were suffering from food insecurity. That is made worse by cruel and punitive policies, such as the two-child cap on benefits. Universal free school meals would go a huge way towards immediately alleviating the pressures that these families are facing. In the sixth richest country in the world, no child should go to school hungry and all children should be supported to achieve their full potential.

Some 47% of children in my constituency now live in poverty. If those children lived in London, Scotland or Wales, they would have access to universal free schools meals at primary school. However, because they live in Liverpool, many are forced to learn on an empty stomach. That is indefensible and unfair. The Government should take the opportunity presented by the Bill to put an end to that postcode lottery and extend free school meals for all so that no child goes hungry and no child is left behind.

The evidence is clear: the impact of universal free school meals is life changing. Research has found that they ease the financial burden on families, help children to focus in class, reduce stigma and foster stronger school communities. They far outstrip other policies in all those areas, including breakfast clubs and means-tested free school meal schemes.

Teachers in my constituency have told me about the devastating reality that they see every single day, with children coming to school unable to buy lunch and unable to concentrate or learn properly. No matter how bright a child is or how amazing a teacher is, hungry children cannot learn.

The problem is not just who qualifies for free school meals, but how many eligible children are missing out. Up to 250,000 children who should be receiving free school meals are not, due to a system that is inefficient, overly complex and burdensome for parents and schools alike. Families struggle with complicated registration forms, language barriers and a lack of awareness, with some parents avoiding applying due to stigma or embarrassment. The income threshold of £7,500 is incredibly low and has not risen for many years, and too many families living below the breadline are ineligible to access the support they need.

This desperately needs to change. Providing free school meals would not only guarantee at least one hot meal per day, but ease the financial burden on struggling families by saving them approximately £500 per child per year. Studies show that fewer than 2% of packed lunches meet school food standards, whereas a hot school meal ensures that children receive the nutrition they need to grow, concentrate and succeed. Research has shown that well-fed children perform better academically. Early findings suggest that children from non-white communities or single-parent households are disproportionately unregistered for free school meals, despite being entitled to them.

We should also see this policy as an investment in our future. Universal free school meals are proven to tackle health and educational inequalities, providing a long-term boost for our economic productivity and alleviating pressures on our healthcare systems. If we choose today to spend the money and roll out universal free school meals to all children at primary school, for every £1 we spend, we will generate £1.71 in core benefit returns—it is a no-brainer. We must put an end to the economically illiterate models of arbitrary fiscal rules and recognise what the evidence shows: investing in our children's future is a sensible financial choice, as well as a just one.

After 14 years of Tory austerity, skyrocketing inequality and the lasting effects of the pandemic, now is the time for bold action. If this Government are truly committed to raising the healthiest generation of children ever, we must start by funding universal and nutritious free school meals for all. We have an opportunity to end the scandal of child hunger in our schools and give every child the foundation they need to learn and thrive. I call on the Government to get behind these new clauses and amendments today so that no child in this country is left hungry, and no child is left behind.

Jodie Gosling (Nuneaton) (Lab): I rise today in support of amendments 27 and 43 and new clause 1, as proposed by the Chair of the Education Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). I agree with her, because the truth of my experience in education over the past 20 years is far different from the experiences and views that we hear from those on the Opposition Benches. At this point, I must refer to my entry on the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and to my partner's interests.

In a previous life, I raised a motion at North Warwickshire borough council to convene a multi-agency meeting to tackle knife crime in our schools. In one school, 17 sharps had been found in a school bag in a search that I am told saw school "bouncers"—large men in black suits and ties—stripping through students' bags and removing sanitary products from girls' bags in

public corridors. I appreciate that we need strong measures on knives in schools, but what really baffled me, and the reason why we moved a motion at the council, was that there was no police involvement, no oversight and no accountability from school authorities. At that time, the school also had one of the highest rates for exclusion and persistent absenteeism in the country. It is not hard to understand the link.

A friend of mine—I will call her Rosie—went to the school and was thriving. She attended regularly and was getting on well. She was then threatened by a classmate with one of these sharps. The culprit was excluded for three days and then put back in the same class as Rosie. Unsurprisingly, she was quite uncomfortable with the school's decision. There was no accountability and no changes were made by the school. How on earth can a child be expected to focus on their learning when they are scared for their own safety?

6 pm

We teach children from two years of age to listen to their instincts, and that if things feel wrong or unsafe, they probably are. When Rosie became too anxious to attend school, things escalated. Following an attempt to take her own life, a supportive plan was put in place by the school, but the mother was threatened with fines and penalties if Rosie did not engage with the school's plan. Rosie's mum was forced into making an impossible choice between potentially putting her daughter in harm or paying a fine that she could ill afford. One day, we managed to get Rosie into school. We had reassured, coaxed, supported, bribed and perhaps even coerced her to go to school that day. An hour later, she was sent home in a taxi for a minor uniform violation. She did not go back to that setting.

As a teacher with 20 years at the chalkface, I welcome many of the moves to improve attendance at our schools, but there are better ways than fines and penalties. In a case where a 14-year-old girl would rather die than attend her school, there are clearly other issues that need to be addressed. The positive impacts of good attendance in our schools have drastic lifelong implications, but our schools must be made safe. They need to be the solution, not part of the problem. They should provide support for children facing challenges. I welcome the phrase, "When it is in their best interest", but I hope that, in deciding what that is, the voices of the families will be heard. There are a number of families whose children are not in education and remain at home—like Rosie. A considerable number are home-educated and they tell me that that is because the schools cannot meet their needs.

I wish to speak to new clause 1 on auto-enrolment for school meals. This is not just about food, although healthy food is incredibly important, especially in areas such as Camphill in Nuneaton where 40% of children live in poverty. Access to free school meals is a gateway to other support such as uniform grants and holiday hunger programmes, but crucially, it gives additional funding to schools to provide pupil premium activities for children from low-income families. A disadvantaged child in Nuneaton is twice as likely not to achieve national averages in English and maths by the age of 11. Pupil premium funding is designed to be used not only to provide specific interventions, but to give children access to cultural capital that they cannot afford at home.

I have schools in my constituency that have not been rated by Ofsted as "good" or better in more than a decade. I do not judge schools by Ofsted judgments alone, but a 50% or lower pass rate in English and maths at GCSE is a damning indictment. That means that another 50% do not achieve the basic requirements that they need to enter into further education. That is a generation of children delivered to the world of work under-skilled and underprepared.

This Bill is the start of our journey to protect and uplift education for the children in my constituency. The Bill will strengthen the role of families and educators in child protection teams, improve information sharing between partners, provide cheaper, more accessible school uniforms and require academies to make provisions for improving behavioural standards, so that situations such as the one I have explained will never happen again. It should provide safer learning spaces with the ability to step in early when situations are failing to meet our high expectations. The Bill has the potential to transform the educational offer in Nuneaton and truly to give our children their futures back.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I rise to speak to new clause 6 tabled by children's food champion, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson), and to amendments 212 to 220 in my name. I also put on record my support for new clause 1 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), new clause 7 tabled by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) and new clause 49 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne). It will come as no surprise that I am also a fan of new clause 34 because, thanks to the last Government, over 4 million children are in poverty, and I will always support anything that makes their little lives and that of their families more bearable.

New clause 6 would introduce a much-needed national monitoring system for school food. Of course, school food standards already exist, but not all schools are meeting them. There is far too much variance. There are some brilliant examples of heart-healthy, nutritious meals that fuel children for the rest of the school day. Then, there are examples where unhealthy fizzy drinks and fried food are the norm. Some 60% of secondary schools have been found not to follow the school standards at all. A study from Impact on Urban Health shows significant differences between what is mandated by the school standards and what is on menus and what ends up on plates. There is far too much free rein. There is no mechanism for school food standards to be checked against what pupils are being served. The new clause would end the postcode lottery of school food so that standards no longer just exist on paper but are on our children's plates.

The amendments in my name all relate to strengthening school breakfast club provision. After years of pushing my School Breakfast Bill, no one was happier than me when the Labour Government legislated for school breakfasts. It is great to see that three of the pilots are in schools in my constituency. Some 2.7 million children live in food-insecure households. The previous Government's national school breakfast programme is missing 86% of those children. Most of them will have arrived at school ready to learn, but with a gnawing hunger in their stomachs.

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

Their day is marked with that persistent worry that comes with hunger—a worry that will permeate their entire school day.

Hunger has a significant impact on children's learning, because hungry children do not learn, no matter how bright and determined they are and no matter how amazing or dedicated their teachers are. Numerous studies have shown the links between nutrition and cognitive development. Hungry children suffer developmental impairments, language delays and delayed motor skills, not to mention the psychological and emotional impact, which can range from withdrawn and depressive behaviours to irritable and aggressive ones.

I have always believed in the transformational power of education. It is certainly not standard for children from my background to end up in this place, so the power of a good education can never be overestimated. The food that fuels that ability to learn and develop should never be underestimated. These clubs will ensure that socioeconomic status is less of a deciding factor in good educational outcomes. My amendments would help realise the full potential of our breakfast clubs.

There is no provision in the Bill to monitor or measure the success of school breakfast provision. It is difficult to scrutinise the efficacy of any policy if there is never any analysis of it. The pupil premium, free school meals eligibility and the income deprivation affecting children index are good indicators of the very children who will need these clubs the most. Any policy should be measured by its impact on these groups, so that we know that those who are most in need are benefiting.

More worryingly, without proper data to prove the success of the policy, a future Government may decide to scrap it altogether. That is why amendment 212 is so important. Not all staff are nutritional experts, and some will have never delivered school breakfast provision before, so it is right that they have the right advice on hand and why a more mixed model and flexible approach is needed from the Government. Amendments 213 and 216 to 218 would achieve that.

The flexibility shown in the models adopted by Magic Breakfast has resulted in a take-up that is 375% higher than in non-Magic Breakfast schools. Yet the Bill requires only one model be delivered: the traditional breakfast club, held in a canteen for 30 minutes before the start of the school day. Many schools already use different models of breakfast clubs, including ones that suit particular schools, such as classroom breakfasts, grab-and-go takeaway models, nurture groups and late provision. A rigid model of delivery will have less success and schools that cannot fit that model will feel that they have to be exempt from delivery. Amendments 214 and 215 would ensure that if a school were to seek exemption from the Government's school clubs, other models had been considered.

I know that the Minister knows that SEND schools often cater for primary and secondary pupils on the same site. That means that in those schools some children will be excluded from school breakfast clubs. I know from discussions with dedicated teachers and school staff in my constituency that they will not allow their pupils to be disadvantaged in that way, so it is likely

they will use their already tight budgets to make sure older pupils also get that nutritious, healthy start to their school day.

Amendment 219 would apply only to approximately 100,000 pupils in England. That would be a modest 2.22% increase in the policy if all those children took up the offer—and we know that that is unlikely, because the children with complex needs do not always require the same food provision accessed by other pupils. For those who do require it, however, it is right that they should have the same nutritious start to their day as other children with whom they share a school site.

I am, of course, pleased that at long last there is legislation for school breakfasts. However, it is essential that we get that right. My amendments will do just that, and I know that the Minister will have carefully considered them. I look forward to her comments at the close of the debate.

Neil O'Brien: With the leave of the House, we have had an excellent debate this afternoon, as we did in Committee. I will pick out only a few of the contributions. We had important words from the Chair of the Education Committee, the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who pointed out how quickly the Bill had been prepared and pushed through. That is why we have so many amendments on Report and, to be honest, one reason that the Bill has run into such trouble.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) gave a great speech, drawing on his experience as the Chair of the Select Committee, and the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed) gave an excellent speech, laying out why the provisions on home schooling are an excessive burden and go too far. We all agree that it is about making sure that children are not just “not in school”; however, the provisions really are overly burdensome. The hon. Members for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) and for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Vikki Slade) and lots of Conservative colleagues pointed out the same thing.

I have to say that my jaw hit the floor when I first read the Bill and saw the provisions that treat the parents of children in special schools the same as people who are being investigated by social services. Those people are not criminals, they are not doing the wrong thing and sometimes they need to move to look after their vulnerable children. I hope the Government will think again in the other place.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I agree with the shadow Minister on the point about special schools. Additionally, in Committee in January, he raised the point about local authority consent for some children to be withdrawn from school, and how that should be extended from children who are subject to a child protection plan to children who are regarded as a child in need. Why are the Opposition not pushing that to a vote today?

Neil O'Brien: We have a limited number of things that we can press to a vote, but I hope, as we go to the debate in the other place, that we are in complete agreement on the excessive nature of some of the requirements being made of home schoolers, who we must not treat as illegitimate just because they choose to educate their children in a certain way. My hon. Friend the Member

for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) used his huge experience to take us on a rather bleak journey from the reforming agenda of the early Blair years to the regress that we are seeing now. My hon. Friend the Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) explained why this was such a mistake and took us through the Bill in bleak detail.

I do not always agree with the hon. Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana), but I do agree with her on Andrew Tate, whom I regard as totally abhorrent. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), the shadow Justice Secretary, is leading the charge to get the Tates deported to this country so that they can face justice here. I find their work utterly, utterly abhorrent.

My brilliant hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) contrasted the reforming rhetoric that we at least see in other Departments with the rather retro agenda in the Department for Education. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), who did so much work in Committee, gave us another brilliant and witty speech. He talked about how Labour reformers had always been swimming against the tide, and I think that is right. He also talked about the free school breakfast numbers that the Government have used and the claim that they are going to save parents £450. This is a mysterious figure, because if we want to give £450 to every primary school child, that will cost north of £2 billion, but the Government are spending £33 million, so they are two orders of magnitude apart. Why will the Government not publish the workings behind this figure? I think the truth is that the source is the back of a spad's fag packet, to be completely honest.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince) gave a good speech, and the thing I absolutely agree with him about is the importance of teaching. It is one of the best and most noble things anyone can do with their life. All of us as MPs do school visits, and we might do an hour of highly energetic chat with people in year 6. We then realise the energy required to be a teacher and to keep that up all day, so I absolutely pay tribute to those who are doing this noble work.

One of the most interesting speeches this afternoon was the one from the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr (Steve Witherden). Various Labour Members said that things under the last Government were not nirvana, and that is right. Various people said that there were more things to fix, and that is right too. We absolutely agree with that. But the hon. Member said that things were so much better in Wales because they had avoided the Blair-era reforming agenda, they had avoided academies, they had got rid of league tables for a time, they were still using other methods such as cueing rather than phonics, and so on and so forth. But let us just have a look at the numbers to see what that has done.

The PISA tables show that, under the last Government, England went from 11th to ninth on science, 19th to ninth on reading and 21st to seventh on maths. That is a huge increase. In Wales, the best bit was on maths, where they went from 29th to 27th. They were flat at 28th on reading and collapsed from 21st to 29th on science. A pretty dismal record, really. I would encourage those who say that things are brilliant in Wales to read

the searing report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which is known for its mild-mannered work and cautious judgments. The report states:

“PISA scores declined by more in Wales than in most other countries in 2022, with scores declining by about 20 points (equivalent to about 20% of a standard deviation, which is a big decline). This brought scores in Wales to their lowest ever level, significantly below the average across OECD countries and significantly below those seen across the rest of the UK... Lower scores in Wales cannot be explained by higher levels of poverty. In PISA, disadvantaged children in England score about 30 points higher, on average, than disadvantaged children in Wales. This is a large gap... Even more remarkably, the performance of disadvantaged children in England is either above or similar to the average for all children in Wales.”

Disadvantaged children in England are doing better than all children in Wales, and the IFS also points out that the disadvantage gap is bigger in Wales. It concludes that the explanation for lower educational performance is not ethnicity or deprivation, and that it

“is much more likely to reflect longstanding differences in policy and approach, such as lower levels of external accountability and less use of data.”

That is the damning indictment of the IFS.

As Adams said, “Facts are stubborn things”. We have seen what this agenda does in Wales. It is a disaster, and those who are the most deprived are the ones who lose out the most. That is why this afternoon we are going to be pushing our amendments to protect academy freedoms, to protect the ability of good schools to grow and to protect parental choice. This Bill shifts power from parents to politicians, and we will always resist that. We will be moving to a vote now to stop this destructive agenda, which has failed in Wales and will fail in England too.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Minister.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions, some of which have been well considered and delivered powerfully—others less so. This Government's mission is to break down barriers to opportunity by driving high and rising standards. That has to be the right of every child, delivered through excellent teaching and leadership, a high-quality curriculum, and a system that removes the barriers to learning that hold too many children back, all underpinned by strong and clear accountability. This Bill delivers the legislative elements of the broader vision that we are determined to deliver. As part of that, from next term free breakfast clubs will start being rolled out in early adopter schools across the country, including special schools and alternative provision settings. Members who tabled amendments 2, 219 and 220 are right that it is critical that the new breakfast clubs are accessible for children with special educational needs and disabilities. All pupils, including those with SEND and those in special schools, are already in the existing drafting of the clause. The need to get this right is why we are testing, and learning through, the early adopter programme.

On amendments 214, 215, 217 and 218, it is important to be clear on the distinction between food-only options being “alongside” or “instead of” the breakfast clubs. The club is as important as the breakfast. It gives children a settled start to the day and will secure improvements in attendance and behaviour, so the right approach is to

[Catherine McKinnell]

legislate to give schools certainty of the minimum they need to provide and to work with early adopters to see how schools can maximise attendance at these clubs. To promote food-only offers may risk undermining the club element.

Let us be clear: we inherited a shameful legacy from the previous Government. Compared with when Labour last left office, 700,000 more children are growing up with their lives and life chances scarred by poverty. Children cannot achieve or thrive if the stressors and strains of growing up in poverty—of seeing their parents worried about putting food on the table, of being concerned about their younger siblings or whether their friends will judge them for not having the basics—are put on their shoulders. I know my hon. Friends share the Government's concern for those children and their futures. We have set up the child poverty taskforce chaired by my right hon. Friends the Education Secretary and the Work and Pensions Secretary to look at how we can work across Government to tackle the causes and impacts of poverty on children's lives.

The support the Government provide through their school food programmes to enable families to access healthy, nutritious food is being considered as part of that work. It is right that these considerable reforms, such as extending universal infant free school meals to all primary pupils, are considered through this route in a holistic way. Alongside the work of the taskforce, we are making progress to make it easier for families to access their entitlements, and I recognise the concern that right hon. and hon. Members have for children missing out.

The Government are pressing ahead with making it quicker and easier for families and local authorities to get children signed up for free school meals with our new eligibility checking system, which allows parents to check their eligibility and supports the local efforts we have seen to ensure that children receive that support. Further, I can confirm that our officials are working with the Government Digital Service in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to explore options on further data sharing to get more families signed up for their entitlements. We expect to have those provisions in place from next year, well ahead of the academic year beginning in September 2026.

Our officials are working with the Department for Work and Pensions to explore options on supporting enrolment through universal credit. My Department will monitor the impact of those policies and engage with local authorities to assess the impact of the changes on the uptake of free school meals. I would be happy to update the House on that work and write to the Chair of the Education Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), by way of doing so.

Helen Hayes: The Minister has set out the Government's commitment to increasing the take-up of free school meals for children who are already eligible, as well as a number of practical measures the Government are taking to make registration easier. On the basis of what she has said today, I am content not to push my new clause 1 to a vote. However, the Select Committee will continue to closely monitor the take-up of free schools meals. Should

the progress that the Minister expects to see be lacking, we will come back and press the issue of auto-enrolment again with her and expect that she looks at it again.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank my hon. Friend for her diligence both in her role as Chair of the Select Committee and on this issue in particular. We want children to receive the entitlements that will transform their life chances. Indeed, we will work closely with her Committee to ensure that we communicate well with the House on those important issues.

Our determination to deliver better life chances for our children does not stop there. As well as free breakfast clubs, we are delivering the holiday activities and food programme, enabling disadvantaged children and children identified by their local authorities to access healthy food and enriching activities in the school holidays. We will go further by supporting every child to achieve and thrive, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and by putting money back in their parents' pockets.

Another part of that picture is the sad increase in childhood obesity, which, unfortunately, the Conservative party did very little to address. We must ensure that, alongside clubs and activities, the food that children have at school is healthy and balanced, and embeds healthy eating habits. We must ensure compliance with school food standards. With reference to new clause 6, we are working with the Food Standards Agency to take forward the findings of the 2022-23 compliance pilot on how best to tackle the barriers identified. On new clause 54, I can confirm that the Government will continue to publish comprehensive data on free school meals, and on the holiday activities and food programme, to ensure that our approach is informed by the best available evidence.

Tackling child poverty is imperative for the Government and for our society. It goes beyond the provision of food to putting money back in families' pockets, giving them choice and agency in ensuring that their children are set up for the future. Our action to cut the cost of school uniform is just another part of that picture. We are taking steps to cut the cost for families and put money back in their pockets. I know that hon. Members share the desire to reduce the cost of sending children to school, but a monetary cap, as proposed in amendment 1, would increase burdens and could create new financial penalties for schools.

For schools, that would mean having to review uniform policies annually to ensure that branded items are still within the cost cap, and, as a result, it could mean that they change their uniforms more frequently to remain within the cap. They would also have to review and possibly renegotiate contracts with suppliers more frequently. For parents, more frequent changes in uniform could increase the overall number of branded items that they have to buy while their child is at school. It could affect their ability to pass uniforms down as second-hand, and could increase their reliance on specific suppliers.

Our proposals provide clarity and certainty for schools and will enable parents to have greater choice in where they buy uniforms. Amendment 191 risks undermining that parental choice. Nothing prevents schools from providing branded items at a lower cost than generic alternatives and offering them as optional items. Under current VAT rules, all children's clothing and footwear

designed for children under 14, including school uniforms, already attracts a zero rate of VAT, which covers the intention of new clause 12.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), we encourage schools to use sew-on badges, with a school name or logo, as a cost-effective way to brand uniform items. We want to give parents absolute clarity on what the limit means for them. That is why we have included those items, plus a tie, in the three-item limit for secondary education.

Let me turn to amendments 4, 13 and 14, and 16. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed) for her intention to provide clarity on the interpretations of “suitable education” and “suitable arrangements”. It is important that there be consistency across local authorities in how they approach that. However, the amendments are not needed. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 is already clear that education must be suitable to a child’s age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they have. I want to reassure Members that we will make clear in statutory guidance for local authorities everything that they have to consider under section 7 when they are making decisions about the suitability of education.

6.30 pm

I turn to amendments 8 and 12. Local authorities will be able to require parents of eligible children to provide information for registers. This will give them sight of this cohort of children, including those who are home educated, so that they can ensure that they receive a suitable education and are safe. Removing this sanction from local authorities would make the provision less effective. Members will understand that it is considered poor practice for this Government or our predecessors to impose a legal duty on individuals without ensuring any sanction or consequence for failing to comply.

Amendment 203 concerns the application of independent school standards to academies. Academies are independent schools in law and are regulated by the independent school standards, unless expressly exempted. If we took the standards away, we could not hold academies properly to account in critical areas such as safeguarding. Opposition Members should be familiar with this dual regime, as they operated it for 14 years. Successive Governments have operated the regulatory regime on that basis, and this Government will do the same.

It is more than 20 years since the last Labour Government began converting into academies schools that were failing children and showing no signs of turning around. Our party is the proud parent of academies, and of turning around the life chances of children in communities up and down our country. That Labour Government were driven by a simple principle that drives this Labour Government, too: our children—all of them, in every school—deserve the very best education we can provide, and anything that stands in the way of that must be tackled. Parents deserve to know that, wherever they live, their child will be able to attend a good local school, where there is a qualified teacher in front of the class, attracted and retained through strong terms and conditions, teaching a cutting-edge curriculum. Every child deserves a school that gives them the best education our country can offer.

Academies were, are and will continue to be at the heart of that endeavour. In the nearly nine months since the election, more than 420 schools have been turned into academies. We are working with them to drive outcomes for our children. We want to harness and spread throughout our school system the best academies’ innovations in teaching and practice, underpinned by a core of standards that no one can slip below.

We are committed to ensuring that new teachers are set up for a successful teaching career through high-quality teacher training and induction. Amendment 222 is unnecessary because existing exemptions allow schools the flexibility to recruit an unqualified subject expert and then support them in gaining QTS through an employment-based route, or ensure that they are under qualified supervision.

Amendments 209, 223 and 225—[*Interruption.*] Did the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) honestly just say, “It costs a load of money to train teachers?” That is what I understood her to say. As set out in Committee, we propose repealing the duty to issue academy orders, in order to broaden the Secretary of State’s flexibility to take the best course of action for any school in a category of concern. We have set out our plans for exercising this flexibility, and the Government will update the House on the progress of the consultation.

Academisation should remain the default position for schools in special measures, and we propose continuing to academise schools as we build the capacity of the new RISE—regional improvement for standards and excellence—service. We are not content to leave schools struggling, as the previous Government did. From September 2026, schools requiring significant improvement will be supported by RISE teams, which will work with responsible bodies to drive forward school improvement. Academisation will remain as a backstop if improvement is not secured.

I turn to amendment 210. Together with changes to regulations, clause 51 provides a route for independent consideration where agreement on the published admission number, or PAN, of a school cannot be reached locally. That will ensure that decisions on a school’s PAN meet the needs of the local community, so that parents have the opportunity to send their child to a school where they can achieve and thrive.

There has been a long-standing expectation that schools and local authorities will work together on place planning. However, where authorities have unilaterally set a PAN that does not work in the interests of children in the area, does not meet local needs, and damages the quality of education that children receive, the Bill will change that. [*Interruption.*] I can reassure the hon. Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston (Neil O’Brien) that it will not prevent good schools from being able to grow, where that is right for local children. Indeed, we expect that it will encourage good schools to offer more places, where there is demand, and where they have the capacity to do so. Our proposals give local authorities powers to set schools’ PANs, and schools will only be able to object to the independent and impartial adjudicator when the adjudicator concludes that a PAN is unlawful, having regard to admissions law. School performance and parental choice will continue to be a key consideration throughout the regulations, and we need to ensure that all published admission numbers are right for schools and local children.

Finally, on the monitoring and evaluation of the Bill, we have already set out our intention to conduct and publish a post-implementation review/impact assessment, and we will consider other post-implementation reviews as necessary, as we do for all measures that regulate business activities.

This Bill represents just the first legislative steps towards what this Government want to achieve in driving up outcomes for all children—and we mean every child. The security of a safe and loving home, the security that comes from families knowing that sending their children to school will not cost the earth, and the security of a good local school with qualified teachers supporting every child to achieve and thrive—after 14 long years, that is not too much to ask, and it is what this Bill will deliver.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 17 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 7

REGISTRATION OF CHILDREN FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS

“After section 512ZA of the Education Act 1996 (power to charge for meals etc.), insert—

“512ZAA *Registration of children for free school meals*

The Secretary of State must ensure that free school meals are provided to—

- (a) all children in England who are eligible to receive free school meals; and
- (b) all children whose household income is less than £20,000 per year.”—(*Munira Wilson.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 77, Noes 313.

Division No. 127]

[6.37 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat	Farron, Tim
Allister, Jim	Foord, Richard
Amos, Gideon	Forster, Mr Will
Anderson, Lee	George, Andrew
Aquarone, Steff	Gibson, Sarah (<i>Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine</i>)
Babarinde, Josh	Glover, Olly
Begum, Apsana (<i>Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana</i>)	Goldman, Marie
Bennett, Alison	Gordon, Tom
Berry, Siân	Green, Sarah
Brewer, Alex	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Jarvis, Liz
Cane, Charlotte	Kohler, Mr Paul
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Lockhart, Carla
Chadwick, David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i>)	MacDonald, Mr Angus
Chamberlain, Wendy	Maguire, Helen
Chambers, Dr Danny	Martin, Mike
Coghlan, Chris	Maynard, Charlie
Collins, Victoria	McMurdock, James (<i>Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson</i>)
Cooper, Daisy	Miller, Calum
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Milne, John
Dance, Adam	Moran, Layla
Darling, Steve	Morello, Edward
Davey, rh Ed	Morgan, Helen
Dean, Bobby	Morrison, Mr Tom (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i>)
Denyer, Carla	Olney, Sarah
Dillon, Mr Lee	Perteghella, Manuela
Dyke, Sarah	Pinkerton, Dr Al
Easton, Alex	Ramsay, Adrian
Farage, Nigel	

Reynolds, Mr Joshua
Robinson, rh Gavin
Roome, Ian
Sabine, Anna
Savage, Dr Roz
Shannon, Jim
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Sollom, Ian
Stone, Jamie
Sultana, Zarah

Swann, Robin
Taylor, Luke
Tice, Richard
Voaden, Caroline
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wrigley, Martin
Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:

Tessa Munt and
Susan Murray

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (<i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy</i>)	Carling, Sam
Abbott, Jack	Charalambous, Bambos
Abrahams, Debbie	Charters, Mr Luke
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Collinge, Lizzi
Akehurst, Luke	Collins, Tom
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Conlon, Liam
Aldridge, Dan	Coombes, Sarah
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Cooper, Andrew
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Cooper, Dr Beccy
Ali, Rushanara	Costigan, Deirdre
Ali, Tahir	Cox, Pam
Anderson, Callum	Coyle, Neil
Anderson, Fleur	Craft, Jen
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Curtis, Chris
Asato, Jess	Daby, Janet
Asser, James	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Athwal, Jas	Darlington, Emily
Atkinson, Catherine	Davies, Jonathan
Atkinson, Lewis	Davies, Paul
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Dean, Josh
Bailey, Olivia	Dearden, Kate
Baines, David	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Baker, Alex	Dickson, Jim
Baker, Richard	Dixon, Anna
Ballinger, Alex	Dodds, rh Anneliese
Bance, Antonia	Dowd, Peter
Barker, Paula	Duffield, Rosie
Barron, Lee	Eagle, Dame Angela
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Eagle, rh Maria
Baxter, Johanna	Eccles, Cat
Beales, Danny	Edwards, Lauren
Beavers, Lorraine	Edwards, Sarah
Benn, rh Hilary	Efford, Clive
Billington, Ms Polly	Egan, Damien
Blake, Olivia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Ellis, Maya
Blake, Rachel	Elmore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Entwistle, Kirith
Bonavia, Kevin	Eshalomi, Florence
Botterill, Jade	Esterson, Bill
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Brickell, Phil	Farnsworth, Linsey
Bryant, Chris	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Burgon, Richard	Ferguson, Mark
Burke, Maureen	Ferguson, Patricia
Burton-Sampson, David	Foody, Emma
Butler, Dawn	Foster, Mr Paul
Byrne, Ian	Foxcroft, Vicky
Byrne, rh Liam	Foy, Mary Kelly
Cadbury, Ruth	Francis, Daniel
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Frith, Mr James
Campbell, Irene	Furniss, Gill
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Gemmell, Alan
Carden, Dan	German, Gill
	Gilbert, Tracy
	Gill, Preet Kaur
	Glindon, Mary

Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola

McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reid, Joani
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Mrs Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael

Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Morden, Jessica
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan

Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Christian Wakeford and
Anna Turley

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 34

PROVISION OF FREE SCHOOL LUNCHES TO ALL PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

“(1) Section 512ZB of the Education Act 1996 (provision of free school lunches and milk) is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (4A)(b), after ‘year 2,’ insert ‘year 3, year 4, year 5, year 6’.

(3) In subsection (4C), after ‘age of 7;’ insert—

“‘Year 3’ means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 8;

“‘Year 4’ means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 9;

“‘Year 5’ means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 10;

“‘Year 6’ means a year group in which the majority of children will, in the school year, attain the age of 11;”.—(*Adrian Ramsay.*)

This new clause would extend free school lunches to all primary school age children in state funded schools.

Brought up and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 77, Noes 315.

Division No. 128]

[6.50 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Adam, Shockat
 Allister, Jim
 Amos, Gideon
 Aquarone, Steff
 Babarinde, Josh

Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Bennett, Alison
 Brewer, Alex
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Chadwick, David (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Will Forster*)
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Coghlan, Chris
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Dean, Bobby
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Easton, Alex
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Liz
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Leishman, Brian
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Helen
 Martin, Mike
 Maynard, Charlie

McDonnell, rh John
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Moran, Layla
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morrison, Mr Tom (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Will Forster*)
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Olney, Sarah
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Roome, Ian
 Sabine, Anna
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Sollom, Ian
 Stone, Jamie
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swann, Robin
 Taylor, Luke
 Voaden, Caroline
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Siân Berry and
 Carla Denyer**

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Anderson, Lee
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Billington, Ms Polly

Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Becca
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil

Craft, Jen
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhese, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farage, Nigel
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Giindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh

Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogege, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMurdoch, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha

Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Mrs Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Shannon, Jim
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick

Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tice, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Christian Wakeford and
Anna Turley

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 23

FOOD AND DRINK PROVIDED AT ACADEMIES

Amendments made: 132, page 44, line 6, at end insert—

“(1) In section 512B of the Education Act 1996 (provision of school lunches: Academies), after subsection (3) insert—

“(4) Subsections (1) and (3) apply to an agreement under section 482 in relation to a city technology college or a city college for the technology of the arts as they apply to Academy arrangements in relation to an Academy school or an alternative provision Academy.””

This amendment ensures that section 512B of the Education Act 1996 (which imposes requirements relating to the provision of school lunches at Academy schools and alternative provision Academies) also applies to city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts.

Amendment 133, page 44, line 28, at end insert—

“(4) Subsections (1) and (3) apply to an agreement under section 482 in relation to a city technology college or a city college for the technology of the arts as they apply to Academy arrangements in relation to an Academy school or an alternative provision Academy.” —(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment ensures that the provision made by inserted section 512C of the Education Act 1996 (which applies the school food standards to Academy schools and alternative provision Academies) also applies to city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts.

Clause 24

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Amendments made: 134, page 45, line 24, leave out—

“or a non-maintained special school”

and insert—

“, a non-maintained special school, a city technology college or a city college for the technology of the arts,”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 135.

Amendment 135, page 45, line 33, at end insert—

“, or (f) a city technology college or a city college for the technology of the arts.”. —(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment ensures that the definition of “relevant school” in section 551ZA (inserted into the Education Act 1996 by clause 24) includes a city technology college and a city college for the technology of the arts.

Clause 25

LOCAL AUTHORITY CONSENT FOR WITHDRAWAL OF CERTAIN CHILDREN FROM SCHOOL

Amendments made: 20, page 46, line 21, leave out “in England”.

This amendment and the amendments in the name of Secretary Bridget Phillipson to clauses 25 to 29 and Schedule 1 ensure that the provisions in the Bill that relate to children not in school, that previously applied only in England, will also apply in Wales.

Amendment 21, page 46, line 24, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 22, page 46, line 25, leave out “337(1)” and insert “337”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 23, page 46, leave out lines 26 to 28 and insert—

“(b) an independent school within the meaning of section 463 which—

- (i) in the case of a school in England, is specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with special educational needs;
- (ii) in the case of a school in Wales, is wholly or mainly concerned with providing full-time education to persons for whom an individual development plan is maintained.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 24 page 46, line 29, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 25, page 47, line 44, leave out “the Secretary of State, and” and insert “—

- (i) the Secretary of State, in relation to a local authority in England, and
- (ii) the Welsh Ministers, in relation to a local authority in Wales, and”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 26, page 48, line 1, after “State” insert “or the Welsh Ministers (as the case may be)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 27, page 48, line 7, leave out “the Secretary of State, and” and insert—

- “(i) the Secretary of State, in relation to a local authority in England, and
- (ii) the Welsh Ministers, in relation to a local authority in Wales, and”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 28, page 48, line 8, after “State” insert— “or the Welsh Ministers (as the case may be)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 29, page 48, line 10, after “considers” insert—

“, or the Welsh Ministers consider.”.—(Catherine McKinnell.)

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Clause 26

REGISTRATION

Amendments made: 30, page 48, line 35, leave out “: England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 31, page 48, line 37, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 136, page 49, line 6, after “pupil” insert “or a student registered”.

This amendment is a minor drafting change to ensure that the correct label is used in relation to institutions where the children are referred to as students rather than pupils.

Amendment 137, page 49, line 15, after “pupil” insert “or a student registered”.

This amendment is a minor drafting change to ensure that the correct label is used in relation to institutions where the children are referred to as students rather than pupils.

Amendment 138, page 49, leave out lines 28 to 30.

This amendment and amendment 139 ensure that unregistered independent educational institutions do not fall within the definition of “relevant school” for the purposes of determining whether there is a duty to register a child under section 436B of the Education Act 1996, as inserted by clause 26.

Amendment 32, page 49, line 31, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 139, page 49, line 35, after “2008” insert—

“, that is registered under section 95 of that Act (register of independent educational institutions)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 138.

Amendment 33, page 49, line 35, at end insert—

- “(f) a school that is included in the register of independent schools in Wales (kept under section 158 of the Education Act 2002), or”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 140, page 49, line 35, at end insert—

- “(g) a school within the meaning of section 135(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.”

This ensures that section 436B, inserted into the Education Act 1996 by clause 26, does not require a local authority to register a child who attends a school in Scotland.

Amendment 34, page 50, line 24, at beginning insert—

“in the case of a child who is in the area of a local authority in England,”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 35, page 50, line 26, at end insert—

- “(ba) in the case of a child who is in the area of a local authority in Wales, whether the child has any additional learning needs, including whether an individual development plan is maintained for the child;”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 36, page 50, line 39, at end insert—

- “(da) whether the child has ever been assessed as having needs for care and support for the purposes of Part 4 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (anaw 4) (see section 32(1) of that Act) and, if so, any actions that a local authority is taking or has taken in relation to the child under that Part (or Part 4 or 5 of the Children Act 1989) and any services that a local authority is providing or has provided to the child in the exercise of functions conferred on the authority by or under that Part (or Part 4 or 5 of the Children Act 1989);”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 37, page 50, line 41, after “authority” insert “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 38, page 50, line 42, after “1989” insert—

“or in Wales (within the meaning of section 74 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 39, page 51, line 16, after “considers” insert—

“, or the Welsh Ministers consider (as the case may be),”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 40, page 52, line 3, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 41, page 52, line 8, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 42, page 52, line 35, after “19” insert—

“(in England) or section 19A (in Wales)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 43, page 52, line 38, at beginning insert—

“where the local authority is a local authority in England,”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 44, page 52, line 40, at end insert—

- “(ca) where the local authority is a local authority in Wales, arrangements made by the local authority under section 53 of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (anaw 2) (additional learning provision otherwise than in schools);”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 45, page 53, line 2, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 46, in clause 26, page 54, line 5, leave out “in England”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 47, page 54, line 17, leave out “in England”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 48, page 54, line 17, after “directs” insert—

“in relation to a local authority in England, or the Welsh Ministers so direct in relation to a local authority in Wales.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 49, page 54, line 18, after “State” insert—
“or the Welsh Ministers (as the case may be)”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 50, page 54, line 21, after “State” insert
“or the Welsh Ministers”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 51, page 54, line 22, after “considers” insert—

“or the Welsh Ministers consider (as the case may be)”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 52, page 54, line 27, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 53, page 54, line 35, after “11(1)” insert
“or 28(1)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 54, page 54, line 41, at end insert—

“(c) His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales;

(d) the Welsh Ministers.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 55, page 55, line 1, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 56, page 55, line 3, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 57, page 55, line 10, leave out “Wales.”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 58, page 55, line 12, after first “England” insert “or Wales”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 59, page 55, line 12, leave out second “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 60, page 55, line 24, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 61, page 55, line 38, after “19” insert “or 19A”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 62, page 55, line 41, at end insert “, or

(d) the local authority is required to secure additional learning provision or other provision for the child under section 14(10) or 19(7) of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 63, page 56, line 3, after “regulations” insert

“to be made by the Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 64, page 56, line 16, at end insert—

“(3A) In section 569(2B), (2BA) and (2BB) for “the National Assembly for Wales” (in each place that it occurs) substitute “Senedd Cymru”.

(3B) After section 569(2BB) insert—

“(2BC) A statutory instrument which contains any of the following regulations to be made by the Welsh Ministers is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of Senedd Cymru—

(a) regulations under any of the following provisions, other than the first set of such regulations—

(i) section 436B(6),

(ii) section 436C(4),

(iii) section 436E(9),

(iv) section 436F(1),

(v) paragraph 5 of Schedule 31A, or

(b) regulations under section 436I(5).

(2BD) A statutory instrument which contains (whether alone or with other provision) any of the following regulations to be made by the Welsh Ministers may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, Senedd Cymru—

(a) the first regulations under section 436B(6),

(b) regulations under section 436C(2),

(c) the first regulations under section 436C(4),

(d) regulations under section 436E(1)(a),

(e) regulations under section 436E(7),

(f) the first regulations under section 436E(9),

(g) the first regulations under section 436F(1),

(h) regulations under section 436F(2), or

(i) the first regulations under paragraph 5 of Schedule 31A.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 65, page 56, line 21, leave out “in England”.—(Catherine McKinnell.)

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Clause 27

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ORDERS

Amendments made: 66, page 58, line 15, leave out “: England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 67, page 58, line 17, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 68, page 58, line 22, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 69, page 59, line 34, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 141, page 60, line 5, at end insert—

“(1A) But a local authority must not serve an order under this section on a child’s parent if—

(a) either—

(i) condition B was the only condition cited in the preliminary notice served under section 436H in relation to the child, or

(ii) condition B and another condition were cited in that preliminary notice, but the child’s parent has satisfied the local authority that the child is receiving suitable education,

(b) the local authority is no longer conducting enquiries or taking action in respect of the child as mentioned in section 436H(5)(a), and

(c) the local authority is not aware of any other enquiries being made under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 or of any other action being taken under section 47(8) of that Act in respect of the child.”

This amendment ensures that a school attendance order is not to be given where enquiries or action under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 are no longer ongoing (and in a case where there were also other grounds for the preliminary notice, the local authority is satisfied that the child is receiving suitable education).

Amendment 70, page 61, line 7, at end insert “(England)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 71, page 61, line 8, after “authority” insert “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 72, page 61, line 25, at end insert—

“(6) Where a school attendance order is in force in respect of a child who subsequently becomes a child for whom the local authority maintain an EHC plan which specifies the name of a school, the local authority must ensure that school is named in the order.”

This amendment ensures that the provisions on school attendance orders for a child with an EHC plan will also cater for children who already have a school attendance order and then get an EHC plan at a later date.

Amendment 73, page 61, line 25, at end insert—

“436JA School attendance order for child with individual development plan (Wales)

(1) Where a local authority in Wales is required to serve a school attendance order under section 436I in respect of a child for whom an individual development plan is maintained in which a particular school is named, that school must be named in the order.

(2) Where—

(a) a school attendance order is in force in respect of a child for whom an individual development plan is maintained in which a particular school is named, and

(b) the name of the school specified in the plan is changed, the local authority must amend the order accordingly.

(3) Where a school attendance order is in force in respect of a child who subsequently becomes a child for whom an individual development plan is maintained in which a particular school is named, the local authority must ensure that school is named in the order.”

See the explanatory statements to amendments 20 and 72.

Amendment 74, page 61, line 29, after “plan,” insert—

“or a child for whom an individual development plan is maintained in which a particular school is named.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 75, page 64, line 24, after “State” insert—

“in relation to a school in England, or to the Welsh Ministers in relation to a school in Wales.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 76, page 64, line 40, after “section” insert—

“in relation to a school in England or the Welsh Ministers give a direction under this section in relation to a school in Wales”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 77, page 65, line 4, at end insert—

“(8) If a local authority in England serves a notice under subsection (2) specifying a school in Wales and an application for a direction is made to the Welsh Ministers under subsection (4) in relation to that notice, the direction under this section may only—

(a) confirm that a school specified in the notice under subsection (2) should be specified in the school nomination notice, or

(b) refer the question of which school or schools should be specified in the school nomination notice back to the local authority to determine.

(9) If a local authority in Wales serves a notice under subsection (2) specifying a school in England, and an application for a direction is made to the Secretary of State under subsection (4) in relation to that notice, the direction under this section may only—

(a) confirm that a school specified in the notice under subsection (2) should be specified in the school nomination notice, or

(b) refer the question of which school or schools should be specified in the school nomination notice back to the local authority to determine.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 78, page 65, line 8, after “plan” insert—

“or a child for whom an individual development plan is maintained in which a particular school is named”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 142, page 66, line 8, leave out “on request”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 143.

Amendment 143, page 66, line 10, at end insert—

“(1A) The local authority must revoke the order if—

(a) the order was served following a preliminary notice under section 436H in which the only condition cited was condition B,

(b) the local authority is no longer conducting enquiries or taking action in respect of the child as mentioned in section

436H(5)(a)

, and

(c) the local authority is not aware of any other enquiries being made under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 or of any other action being taken under section 47(8) of that Act in respect of the child.”

This amendment ensures that a local authority must revoke a school attendance order served following a preliminary notice based on enquiries being made or action being taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 which are no longer ongoing.

Amendment 144, page 66, line 15, leave out from “served” to the end of line 17 and insert—

“(i) as a result of the person failing to satisfy the local authority that the child is receiving suitable education, or

(ii) as a result of the person failing to satisfy the local authority both that the child is receiving suitable education and that it is in the best interests of the child to receive education otherwise than by regular attendance at school, where subsection (1A)(b) and (c) applies;

(1A)(b)”.

This amendment ensures that a request for a school attendance order to be revoked can be made where arrangements have been made for the child to receive suitable education in a case where enquiries or action under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 are no longer ongoing and the preliminary notice cited condition B and another condition.

Amendment 79, page 66, line 27, leave out “the local authority” and insert—

“a local authority in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 80, page 66, line 31, at end insert—

“(4A) If a person is aggrieved by a refusal of a local authority in Wales to comply with a request under subsection (2)—

(a) the person may refer the question to the Welsh Ministers, and

(b) the Welsh Ministers must give such direction determining the question as the Welsh Ministers consider appropriate.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 81, page 66, line 40, at end insert—

“(6) Where the child is one for whom the local authority maintains an individual development plan—

- (a) if the name of a school or other institution is specified in the plan, subsection (2) does not apply;
- (b) if the name of a school or other institution is not specified in the plan, a direction under subsection (4A)(b) may require the authority to make such amendments in the plan as the Welsh Ministers consider necessary or expedient in consequence of the determination.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 145, page 67, line 5, leave out “the person proves that arrangements have been made”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 148.

Amendment 146, page 67, line 7, at beginning insert—
“the person proves that arrangements have been made”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 148.

Amendment 147, page 67, line 11, at beginning insert—
“the person proves that arrangements have been made”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 148.

Amendment 148, page 67, line 15, at end insert—

“(c) section 436H(5)(a) is no longer met in respect of the child, where the order was served following a preliminary notice under section 436H which cited only condition B, or 436H(5)(a)

(d) both—

- (i) the person proves that arrangements have been made for the child to receive suitable education otherwise than at a school, and
- (ii) section 436H(5)(a) is no longer met in respect of the child, where the order was served following a preliminary notice under section 436H which cited condition B and another condition”.

This amendment ensures that a criminal offence is not committed where a person fails to comply with a school attendance order served, or served in part, because of enquiries or action under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 which are no longer ongoing, and the person proves that the child is receiving suitable education.

Amendment 82, page 67, line 21, after “436J” insert “, 436JA”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 149, page 68, line 4, at end insert—

“436R References to “Academy school” and “Academy arrangements”

(1) In sections 436I and 436K to 436N, a reference to an Academy school includes a reference to a city technology college and a city college for the technology of the arts.

(2) The reference in section 436L to Academy arrangements includes a reference to an agreement under section 482.”

This amendment ensures that a reference to an Academy school in the provisions on school attendance orders (inserted into the Education Act 1996 by clause 27) includes a reference to a city technology college or a city college for the technology of the arts.

Amendment 83, page 68, line 4, at end insert—

“436S References to “regulations” and “prescribed”

(1) In sections 436B(6), 436C(4) and 436E(7) “regulations” means—

- (a) regulations made by the Secretary of State in relation to England, and
- (b) regulations made by the Welsh Ministers in relation to Wales.

(2) In sections 436C, 436E, section 436F, 436I and paragraph 5 of Schedule 31A “prescribed” means—

- (a) prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State in relation to England, and
- (b) prescribed by regulations made by the Welsh Ministers in relation to Wales.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 84, page 68, line 7, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 85, page 68, line 9, leave out from “units),” to “—” in line 10 and insert “for paragraph 14 substitute”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 86, page 68, line 11, leave out “13A” and insert “14”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 87, page 68, line 12, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 88, page 68, line 22, leave out “in England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 89, page 68, line 36, leave out “in England”.—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Clause 28

DATA PROTECTION

Amendments made: 150, page 69, line 2, leave out “436P” and insert “436S”.

This amendment is consequential on amendments, 73, 149 and 83 which insert new provisions into clause 27.

Amendment 90, page 69, line 3, leave out “attendance orders in England: data protection” and insert—
“school attendance orders: processing of information”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20. This amendment is also consequential on amendment 151.

Amendment 151, page 69, leave out lines 4 to 14 and insert—

“436T Processing of information

(1) This section applies to section 434A, sections 436B to 436P and Schedule 31A, and provisions of regulations made under any of those provisions.

(2) Except as provided by subsection (3), a disclosure of information authorised or required under any provision to which this section applies does not breach—

- (a) any obligation of confidence owed by the person making the disclosure, or
- (b) any other restriction on the disclosure of information (however imposed).

(3) None of the provisions to which this section applies are to be read as requiring or authorising the processing of information which would contravene the data protection legislation (but in determining whether the processing would do so, take into account the duty imposed or the power conferred by the provision in question).

(4) In this section, “the data protection legislation” and “processing” have the same meaning as in the Data Protection Act 2018 (see section 3 of that Act).”

This amendment ensures that powers to disclose information under the provisions mentioned override any obligations of confidence or restrictions on disclosure other than those imposed by the data protection legislation.

Amendment 152, page 69, line 16, leave out “436Q” and insert “436T”.

This amendment is consequential on amendments 73, 149 and 83 which insert new provisions into clause 27.

Amendment 153, page 69, line 19, leave out “436R” and insert “436U”.—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment is consequential on amendments 73, 149 and 83 which insert new provisions into clause 27.

Clause 29

GUIDANCE ON CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ORDER

Amendments made: 91, page 69, line 18, leave out “: England”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 92, page 69, line 21, leave out “any guidance given by the Secretary of State” and insert—

“(a) in the case of a local authority in England, any guidance given by the Secretary of State;

(b) in the case of a local authority in Wales, any guidance given by the Welsh Ministers.”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Clause 31

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF REGULATION

Amendments made: 154, page 69, line 29, leave out from beginning to end of line 20 on page 70 and insert—

“(1) The following are independent educational institutions for the purposes of this Chapter—

(a) independent schools in England;

(b) institutions in England, other than independent schools and excepted institutions, that provide full-time education for—

(i) at least five children of compulsory school age, or

(ii) at least one child of compulsory school age who is looked after by a local authority or has special educational needs.

(2) The following subsections apply for the purposes of subsection (1)(b) (and see section 138(1A) for provision about the meaning of an institution providing education).

(3) Regulations may—

(a) specify that an amount of time is or is not to be treated as “full-time” by reference to a number of hours in, or a proportion of, a week or other period, or in any other way;

(b) provide that time spent on a specified activity or on an activity of a specified description is or is not to be treated as time during which education is being provided;

(c) amend subsection (4) so as to add, remove or amend factors;

(d) amend this section so as to add, remove or amend provision about the interpretation of the factors in subsection (4).

(4) If, or to the extent that, the question of whether an institution provides full-time education for a child is not determined by regulations under subsection (3)(a) or (b), the factors relevant to determining that question include—

(a) the number of hours per week that—

(i) education is provided to children by the institution;

(ii) activities incidental to that education (such as breaks and independent study time) are provided;

(b) the number of weeks in an academic year that education is provided;

(c) the time of day that education is provided.”

This amendment highlights that all independent schools in England still fall within the definition of “independent educational institution”, revises the power to make regulations to reflect how it is intended to be used and revises the factors to be taken into account to determine whether an institution is providing full-time education.

Amendment 155, page 71, leave out lines 31 and 32 and insert—

“(fa) regulations under section 92,”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 154.

Clause 32

INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION STANDARDS

Amendment made: 156, page 83, line 10, at end insert—

“(6A) After section 127 insert—

“127A Determination by Tribunal of whether persons are fit and proper

(1) This section applies where the question of whether an institution meets, has met or is likely to meet an independent educational institution standard prescribed under section 94(1A)(a)(i) or (b) (fit and proper persons) is relevant to an application or appeal to the Tribunal under this Chapter.

(2) The Tribunal may determine that question for the purposes of the application or appeal, including by finding that a relevant person is, was or would be a fit and proper person to be involved in the running of an independent educational institution even if the Secretary of State is not of that opinion.

(3) “Relevant person” means—

(a) where the proprietor or proposed proprietor of the institution mentioned in subsection (1) is a body of persons, a person having, or proposed to have, general control and management of, or legal responsibility and accountability for, the proprietor or proposed proprietor;

(b) where the proprietor or proposed proprietor of the institution mentioned in subsection (1) is an individual, the individual.”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

Clause 32(2)(a) amends the Education and Skills Act 2008 to allow for independent educational institution standards to be set that relate to whether, in the Secretary of State’s opinion, persons are fit and proper to be involved in the running of institutions. This amendment allows the First-tier Tribunal to make that finding itself where relevant to an application or appeal.

Clause 34

MATERIAL CHANGES

Amendments made: 157, page 85, line 32, after “(3)(g)” insert “or section 101(2)(i)”.

This amendment provides for regulations to be made about what constitutes a type of special educational need for the purposes of new provision inserted by clause 34.

Amendment 158, page 86, line 26, leave out

“(as prescribed under section 98(3A))”.

This amendment removes words to reflect that regulations may not necessarily be made under section 98(3A).

Amendment 159, page 88, line 29, at end insert—

“(11) In section 166 (orders and regulations), in subsection (6)(a), after “circumstances” insert “, purposes”.”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment allows for regulations to be made for different purposes.

Clause 37

POWERS OF ENTRY AND INVESTIGATION ETC

Amendments made: 160, page 92, line 1, leave out from “this section” to end of line 3 and insert—

“(a) authorises the Chief Inspector to exercise the powers of investigation conferred by section 127D(1)(a), and

(b) may authorise the Chief Inspector to exercise the powers of investigation conferred by section 127D(1)(b) to (k) or particular powers.”

This amendment and amendment 163 provide for powers of investigation that are always exercisable by the Chief Inspector following an entry without warrant also to be exercisable following an entry under warrant.

Amendment 161, page 92, line 17, leave out “the Chief Inspector’s entry to the premises or”.

Clause 37 allows for the Chief Inspector’s entry to premises and investigation on premises to be assisted by any person accompanying, or thing brought with, the Chief Inspector. This amendment limits this to assistance with investigations on premises.

Amendment 162, page 92, line 21, leave out “the Chief Inspector’s entry or”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 161.

Amendment 163, page 93, line 22, leave out “subsection (1)” and insert “subsection (1)(b) to (k)”.

See the explanatory statement for amendment 160.

Amendment 164, page 93, line 25, leave out “subsection (1)(i)” and insert “subsection (1)(e), (h) or (i)”.

This amendment provides for copies of any document or other information taken by the Chief Inspector, in addition to things seized, to be retained for so long as is necessary in the circumstances.

Amendment 165, page 95, line 32, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

“(5) The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 is amended as follows.

(6) In section 57(1) (retention of seized items), after paragraph (v) insert—

“(w) section 127D(3) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.”

(7) In section 65 (meaning of “legal privilege”)—

(a) after subsection (8C) insert—

(8D) An item which is, or is comprised in, property which has been seized in exercise or purported exercise of the power of seizure conferred by section 127D(1)(e), (h) or (i) of the Education and Skills Act 2008 is to be taken for the purposes of this Part to be an item subject to legal privilege if, and only if, the seizure of that item was in contravention of section 127D(7) of that Act.;

(b) in subsection (9)—

(i) at the end of paragraph (e) omit “or”;

(ii) at the end of paragraph (g) insert “, or”;

(iii) after paragraph (g) insert—

“(h) section 127D(1)(e), (h) or (i) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.”

(8) In Part 1 of Schedule 1 (powers of seizure to which section 50 of the Act applies), after paragraph 73W insert—

“*Education and Skills Act 2008*”

73X Each of the powers of seizure conferred by section 127D(1)(e), (h) and (i) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment makes further provision consequential on the powers of seizure inserted into the Education and Skills Act 2008 by clause 37.

Clause 39

INSPECTORS AND INSPECTORATES: REPORTS AND INFORMATION SHARING

Amendments made: 166, page 96, line 34, at end insert—

“(1A) Except as provided by subsection (2), a disclosure of information under this section made for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the welfare of children provided with accommodation by a school or college does not breach—

(a) any obligation of confidence owed by the Chief Inspector for England, or

(b) any other restriction on the disclosure of information (however imposed).”

This amendment provides that, subject to the data protection legislation, disclosures by the Chief Inspector for England to inspectors of schools and colleges do not breach any confidence or restriction if made to protect the welfare of children accommodated by a school or college.

Amendment 167, page 97, line 15, at end insert—

“(1A) Except as provided by subsection (2), a disclosure of information under this section made for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the welfare of students at a registered independent educational institution does not breach—

(a) any obligation of confidence owed by the Chief Inspector, or

(b) any other restriction on the disclosure of information (however imposed).”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment provides that, subject to the data protection legislation, disclosures by the Chief Inspector to inspectors of independent educational institutions do not breach any confidence or restriction if made to protect the welfare of students at such an institution.

Clause 44

ACADEMIES: POWER TO SECURE PERFORMANCE OF PROPRIETOR’S DUTIES ETC

Amendment made: 168, page 103, line 35, at end insert—

“(7) In this section, a reference to an Academy includes a reference to a city technology college and a city college for the technology of the arts.”—(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

This amendment expands the meaning of “Academy” in clause 44 to include the remaining institutions established under pre-Academy arrangements that have not become Academies.

Clause 45

REPEAL OF DUTY TO MAKE ACADEMY ORDER IN RELATION TO SCHOOL CAUSING CONCERN

Amendment proposed: 209, page 103, line 36, leave out clause 45.—(*Laura Trott.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 324.

Division No. 129]

[7.14 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
Allister, Jim
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brandreth, Aphra
Burghart, Alex
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cleverly, rh Mr James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John

Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh David
Dewhurst, Charlie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Easton, Alex
Evans, Dr Luke
Fortune, Peter
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Glen, rh John
Grant, Helen
Griffiths, Alison
Harris, Rebecca

Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Lopez, Julia
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McMurdock, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca

Philp, rh Chris
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Nick Timothy and
 Mr Andrew Snowden**

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Ady*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine

Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Sarah Sultana*)
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy

Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dowd, Peter
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan

Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris

Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Mrs Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scroggham, Michelle
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy

Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Christian Wakeford and
Anna Turley

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 51

FUNCTIONS OF ADJUDICATOR IN RELATION TO
 ADMISSION NUMBERS

Amendment proposed: 210, page 107, line 32, leave out clause 51.—(*Laura Trott.*)

Question put: That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 324.

Division No. 130]

[7.16 pm

AYES

Allister, Jim
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bennett, Alison
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Brewer, Alex
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chadwick, David (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster*)
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Cleverly, rh Mr James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Coghlan, Chris
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dinéage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Dyke, Sarah
 Easton, Alex
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Glen, rh John
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Grant, Helen
 Green, Sarah
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Lopez, Julia
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Helen
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McMurdock, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Moran, Layla
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster*)
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pritchard, rh Mark

Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Roome, Ian
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sabine, Anna
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stone, Jamie
 Stuart, rh Graham

Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Andrew Snowden and
Nick Timothy

Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermey, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne

Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisman
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillipson, rh Bridget

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Ady*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Bonavia, Kevin

Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dowd, Peter
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah

Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Mrs Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair

Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Christian Wakeford and
Anna Turley

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 59

EXTENT

Amendments made: 169, page 113, line 5, at end insert—

“(1A) Subject to subsection (1), sections (Corporate parenting responsibilities), (Cases in which duty under section (Corporate parenting responsibilities)(1) does not apply), (Corporate parenting duty: collaborative working), (Duty to have regard to guidance) and (Reports by Secretary of State) and Schedule (Relevant authorities) extend to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.”

This amendment provides that NC18, NC19, NC20, NC21 and NC22 and NS1 extend to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Amendment 170, page 113, line 6, leave out “subsection (1)” and insert “subsections (1) and (1A)”.—(Catherine McKinnell.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 169

Clause 60

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: 93, page 113, line 25, at end insert—

“(2A) Subject to subsection (1), sections 25 to 30 and Schedule 1 come into force, in relation to Wales, on such day as the Welsh Ministers may by regulations made by statutory instrument appoint.”

This amendment and the amendments in the name of Secretary Bridget Phillipson to clause 60 ensure that the Welsh Ministers have the powers to commence the provisions relating to children not in school, in relation to Wales. See also the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 94, page 113, line 26, leave out “and (2)” and insert “to (2A)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 93.

Amendment 95, page 113, line 29, after “appointed” insert “under subsection (2A) or (3)”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 93.

Amendment 96, page 113, line 32, at end insert—

“, except sections 25 to 30 and Schedule 1 in relation to Wales.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 93.

Amendment 97, page 113, line 32, at end insert—

“(5A) The Welsh Ministers may by regulations made by statutory instrument make transitional or saving provision in connection with the coming into force of sections 25 to 30 (including Schedule 1) in relation to Wales.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 93.

Amendment 98, page 113, line 33, after “(5)” insert “or (5A)”.—(Catherine McKinnell.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 97.

Schedule 1

CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: 99, page 114, line 6, leave out “after “section” insert “436I or”” and insert “for “437” substitute “436I””.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 100, page 114, line 8, leave out “after “section” insert “436I or”” and insert “for “437” substitute “436I””.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 101, page 114, line 10, leave out “after “section” insert “436I or”” and insert “for “437” substitute “436I””.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 102, page 114, line 13, at end insert—

“(1A) Omit sections 437 to 443 (school attendance orders) and the italic headings before sections 437 and 443.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 103, page 114, line 14, leave out subparagraphs (2) to (9).

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 104, page 115, line 25, leave out “, after “under section” insert “436P,”” and insert “and (2)(a), for “443” substitute “436P””.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 105, page 115, line 26, leave out subparagraph (13).

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 106, page 115, line 36, leave out from “substitute” to the end of line 37 and insert “section 436I.”

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 107, page 116, line 1, leave out subparagraph (16).

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 108, page 116, line 13, leave out “after “section” insert “436K(4), 436N(2),”” and insert “for “438(4) or 440(2)” substitute “436K(4) or 436N(2)””.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 109, page 116, line 17, leave out “or 443”.

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Amendment 110, page 116, line 18, leave out “, 443”.—
(*Catherine McKinnell.*)

See the explanatory statement to amendment 20.

Third Reading

7.28 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson):

I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is legislation that belongs to children. The clue is in the name—the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. It is for them. It is because this Government are for them. We are on a mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for each and every child, to sever the link between background and success, and this Bill sits at the centre of that mission.

Let me start by thanking Members from across the House for their contributions, especially members of the Bill Committee for their scrutiny. I say a particular thank you to the ministerial team—my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards and the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan)—for guiding the Bill through its Commons stages.

This debate is valuable. Education is back at the forefront of national life and children are back at the centre of our national conversation. Every child in this country deserves a safe childhood and an excellent education.

The action in the Bill cements in legislation the biggest reform of children’s social care in a generation, keeping children with their families wherever it is safe to do so, supporting them to stay together and strengthening kinship care so that vulnerable children can live with the people they know and trust if they cannot continue to live with their parents. It fixes the broken care market so that when children cannot stay with their family, and kinship or foster care sadly is not an option, children have somewhere to live that is safe, secure and supportive.

After 14 years of inaction and our most vulnerable children being pushed to the sidelines, their voices not heard, the Bill puts their life chances front and centre. We have started that reform already, piloting new financial support for kinship carers and investing over £500 million into family help and child protection in the next financial year alone.

This a Bill that protects children based on data, evidence and expertise, laying the groundwork for a single unique identifier for children, enabling sharing of the right information at the right time, creating multi-agency child protection teams and requiring permission before children subject to child protection inquiries or plans can be home educated. It spots early warning signs and stops vulnerable children falling through the cracks. It starts with safety and it builds from there. The Bill

legislates for free breakfast clubs in primary schools, so that our children are ready to learn at the start of the school day. It puts money back in parents’ pockets, with breakfast clubs saving them up to £450 a year. Our new limit on expensive branded uniforms will save some parents over £50 per child in the back-to-school shop. This is a Government who support families, parents and children alike.

It is the right of every child to have every opportunity to succeed, and it is the right of every parent to send their child to a great local school. That is what the Bill will do. It will provide the certainty of an excellent local school for every child. Our best schools and trusts are partners and leaders. They have shown the value of collaboration, and how excellence and innovation can flow from one classroom to another. It is time to bring that to the whole country: excellence in every classroom, science lab, art studio and music room in every type of school. The curriculum and assessment review published its interim report just this afternoon. From that review will come the rich and broad curriculum that our children need and deserve, delivered by expert teachers, raising a floor of high standards below which schools must not slip, and above which they can build and innovate with no ceiling on what they can achieve.

When it comes to our children’s safety and life chances, I am always impatient. I ask Opposition Members to put aside their rhetoric and gimmickry, just for one moment, and consider what their constituents actually want—not their friends in high places, in the commentariat and in the Westminster bubble, but parents up and down this country. Parents want qualified teachers at the front of their children’s classrooms. Parents want to know for sure what their child is being taught. Parents want more teachers in our schools, better trained and supported. Parents want free breakfast clubs in their child’s primary school. Parents want cheaper uniforms that do not set them back at the start of every term. Parents want stronger safeguards for children after the horrific incidents that we have sadly seen in recent years.

If Opposition Members oppose the Bill, that is what they are opposing. They may talk in the vaguest of terms about the supposed horror that the Bill will unleash. We have seen it all before. Just months ago, they told us that Labour’s plans to end tax breaks on private schools would send a flood of children into state schools, who would overrun them—scaremongering. I have lost count of all the doom-laden stories. Do they come to pass? Absolutely not. Once again, the Conservatives are on the wrong side of parents, resisting change and protecting privilege. It speaks to a wider point. The Conservatives are just lost. They are so out of ideas, clinging on to the misguided hope that the public will just forget the past 14 years as if they never happened and that it was not all for nothing. But it was.

Labour is cleaning up the mess that the Conservative party left behind, to ensure that every child has a safe, loving home, to put money back into parents’ pockets, to drive high and rising standards in all our schools and to deliver the brighter future that every child in our country deserves. I commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

7.34 pm

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): I had hoped that, during the Commons stages of the Bill, the Government would listen to the vast number of respected voices from the education sector who have warned repeatedly that this ill thought through Bill is nothing short of a disaster for education standards in this country. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State failed to listen to the Children's Commissioner, who warned that children will spend longer in failing schools because of this Bill; or Katharine Birbalsingh, who argued that if passed—*[Interruption.]* That is how they treat one of the best headteachers in this country. She warned that if passed, “the impact on our children, especially our most vulnerable, will be seismic.”

The Secretary of State will not listen to the former chief inspector of Ofsted, who described the Bill as a “many-pronged assault on school standards”,

or to Lord Harris, who supported the party at the last election and said that the Bill will only harm “the most disadvantaged families.” Even some of her own Back Benchers have asked the Secretary of State to think again. Why does she think she knows better?

Instead of engaging constructively with that criticism, the approach from the Secretary of State has been to resort to personal attacks. In response to Amanda Spielman's suggestion that there should be an analysis of the impacts of autonomy in schools before a legislation abolishing it is forced through the House of Commons, a Government source went on the record to denigrate a former senior public servant in the most personal of terms. Did the Secretary of State sign off that briefing?

In her own opinion piece in the *Telegraph* today, the Secretary of State told me and the shadow team to get out of London. She appears not to have noticed the work of Star Academies, Delta Academies Trust, United Learning, Trinity and Inspiration Trust, among many others. Those are brilliant trusts that are changing the lives of young people and she so casually dismisses them.

I have a suggestion for the Secretary of State in return: she should visit Wales. Wales, where the Labour Party have been in charge for 26 years; Wales, the blueprint for her reforms; and Wales, which currently finds itself at the bottom of the rankings for the whole of the UK in maths, English and science. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said today that his party would never do anything to harm social mobility, yet the Bill will be devastating for social mobility.

Labour Members need to understand the consequences of the Bill. The evidence, should they care to read it, is overwhelming. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said very clearly that the differences in policy and approach have led to the terrible outcomes in Wales for disadvantaged young people. Indeed, disadvantaged young people in England do as well as the average child in Wales. Yet these are the policies that the Government want to implement in England. How on earth can they justify imposing the same policies and approach that have been such a disaster in Wales?

The Bill undermines, at a single stroke, all the work that has been done by successive Governments of all parties, headteachers and trusts over so many years. Academy trust heads have been abused during this debate and attacked by unions in this process because they dared to want better for young people under their

care. Former Labour and Conservative Education Secretaries, who have driven through reforms in the face of fierce opposition, are being undermined by the Bill.

I cannot believe that the Government will undo all of that for no reason. There is no evidence whatsoever that their proposals will improve a single school. In fact, the evidence is clear that they will make things worse. The Secretary of State is putting ideology and the interests of union bosses over what is best for children and parents. This is a Bill of two halves. The first is on safeguarding, and we absolutely agree with the principle of that, but the second is the policy equivalent of a wrecking ball. It will destroy the consensus built up over two decades on what improves schools. It is discredited, it is disastrous for school standards, and we will never stop fighting it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 382, Noes 104.

Division No. 131]

[7.40 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (<i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy</i>)	Botterill, Jade
Abbott, Jack	Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Abrahams, Debbie	Brash, Mr Jonathan
Adam, Shockat	Brewer, Alex
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Brickell, Phil
Akehurst, Luke	Bryant, Chris
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Burgon, Richard
Aldridge, Dan	Burke, Maureen
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Burton-Sampson, David
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Butler, Dawn
Ali, Rushanara	Byrne, Ian
Ali, Tahir	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Anderson, Callum	Campbell, Irene
Anderson, Fleur	Campbell-Savours, Markus
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cane, Charlotte
Asato, Jess	Carden, Dan
Asser, James	Carling, Sam
Athwal, Jas	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Atkinson, Catherine	Chadwick, David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i>)
Atkinson, Lewis	Chamberlain, Wendy
Babarinde, Josh	Chambers, Dr Danny
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Charalambous, Bambos
Bailey, Olivia	Charters, Mr Luke
Baines, David	Coghlan, Chris
Baker, Alex	Collinge, Lizzi
Baker, Richard	Collins, Tom
Ballinger, Alex	Collins, Victoria
Bance, Antonia	Conlon, Liam
Barker, Paula	Coombes, Sarah
Barron, Lee	Cooper, Andrew
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Cooper, Dr Becca
Baxter, Johanna	Cooper, Daisy
Beales, Danny	Cooper, rh Yvette
Beavers, Lorraine	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Begum, Apsana (<i>Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana</i>)	Costigan, Deirdre
Benn, rh Hilary	Cox, Pam
Bennett, Alison	Coyle, Neil
Berry, Siân	Craft, Jen
Billington, Ms Polly	Crichton, Torcuil
Blake, Olivia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Curtis, Chris
Blake, Rachel	Daby, Janet
Bloore, Chris	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Dance, Adam
Bonavia, Kevin	Darling, Steve
	Darlington, Emily
	Davey, rh Ed
	Davies, Jonathan
	Davies, Paul

Dean, Bobby	Hinder, Jonathan	Moran, Layla	Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Dean, Josh	Hopkins, Rachel	Morden, Jessica	Savage, Dr Roz
Dearden, Kate	Hughes, Claire	Morello, Edward	Scrogham, Michelle
Denyer, Carla	Hume, Alison	Morgan, Helen	Shah, Naz
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Huq, Dr Rupa	Morgan, Stephen	Shanker, Baggy
Dillon, Mr Lee	Hurley, Patrick	Morris, Grahame	Shanks, Michael
Dixon, Anna	Hussain, Mr Adnan	Morris, Joe	Siddiq, Tulip
Dodds, rh Anneliese	Hussain, Imran	Morrison, Mr Tom (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i>)	Simons, Josh
Dowd, Peter	Ingham, Leigh	Mullane, Margaret	Slade, Vikki
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Irons, Natasha	Murphy, Luke	Slaughter, Andy
Dyke, Sarah	Jameson, Sally	Murray, Chris	Slinger, John
Eagle, Dame Angela	Jardine, Christine	Murray, rh Ian (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Smart, Lisa
Eagle, rh Maria	Jarvis, Dan	Murray, Katrina	Smith, Cat
Eccles, Cat	Jarvis, Liz	Murray, Susan	Smith, David
Edwards, Lauren	Jermy, Terry	Myer, Luke	Smith, Jeff
Efford, Clive	Jogee, Adam	Naismith, Connor	Smith, Nick
Egan, Damien	Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Narayan, Kanishka	Smith, Sarah
Ellis, Maya	Jones, rh Darren	Nash, Pamela (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Smyth, Karin
Elmore, Chris	Jones, Louise	Newbury, Josh	Snell, Gareth
Entwistle, Kirith	Jones, Ruth	Niblett, Samantha	Sollom, Ian
Eshalomi, Florence	Jones, Sarah	Nichols, Charlotte	Stainbank, Euan
Esterson, Bill	Josan, Gurinder Singh	Norris, Alex	Stevens, rh Jo
Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Joseph, Sojan	Olney, Sarah	Stevenson, Kenneth
Falconer, Mr Hamish	Juss, Warinder	Onn, Melanie	Stewart, Elaine
Farnsworth, Linsey	Kane, Chris	Onwurah, Chi	Stone, Jamie
Farron, Tim	Kaur, Satvir (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Opher, Dr Simon	Stone, Will
Fenton-Glynn, Josh	Khan, Naushabah	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena	Strathern, Alistair
Ferguson, Mark	Kinnock, Stephen	Osamor, Kate	Strickland, Alan
Ferguson, Patricia	Kirkham, Jayne	Osborne, Tristan	Sullivan, Kirsteen
Foody, Emma	Kitchen, Gen	Owatemi, Taiwo	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Foord, Richard	Kohler, Mr Paul	Owen, Sarah	Sultana, Zarah
Forster, Mr Will	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Paffey, Darren	Swallow, Peter
Foster, Mr Paul	Lamb, Peter	Pakes, Andrew	Tami, rh Mark
Foxcroft, Vicky	Lavery, Ian	Patrick, Matthew	Tapp, Mike
Foy, Mary Kelly	Leadbeater, Kim	Payne, Michael	Taylor, Alison
Francis, Daniel	Leishman, Brian	Pearce, Jon	Taylor, David
Frith, Mr James	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Pennycook, Matthew	Taylor, Luke
Furniss, Gill	Lewin, Andrew	Perteghella, Manuela	Taylor, Rachel
Gemmell, Alan	Lewis, Clive	Phillipson, rh Bridget	Thomas, Fred
George, Andrew	Lightwood, Simon	Pinkerton, Dr Al	Thompson, Adam
German, Gill	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Pitcher, Lee	Thornberry, rh Emily
Gibson, Sarah (<i>Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine</i>)	MacAlister, Josh	Platt, Jo	Tidball, Dr Marie
Gilbert, Tracy	MacDonald, Mr Angus	Pollard, Luke	Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Gill, Preet Kaur	MacNae, Andy	Powell, Joe	Toale, Jessica
Gilmour, Rachel	Madders, Justin	Powell, rh Lucy	Tomlinson, Dan
Glindon, Mary	Maguire, Helen	Poynton, Gregor	Trickett, Jon
Glover, Olly	Malhotra, Seema	Prinsley, Peter	Tufnell, Henry
Goldman, Marie	Martin, Amanda	Quigley, Mr Richard	Turmaine, Matt
Goldsborough, Ben (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Martin, Mike	Ramsay, Adrian	Turner, Karl
Gordon, Tom	Maskell, Rachael	Rand, Mr Connor	Turner, Laurence
Gosling, Jodie	Mayer, Alex	Ranger, Andrew	Twist, Liz
Gould, Georgia	Maynard, Charlie	Reader, Mike	Uppal, Harpreet
Grady, John	McAllister, Douglas	Reed, rh Steve	Vaughan, Tony
Green, Sarah	McCarthy, Kerry	Reeves, Ellie	Vaz, rh Valerie
Greenwood, Lilian	McCluskey, Martin	Reid, Joani	Vince, Chris
Griffith, Dame Nia	McDonald, Andy	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Voaden, Caroline
Gwynne, Andrew (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	McDonald, Chris	Richards, Jake	Walker, Imogen
Hack, Amanda	McDougall, Blair	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny	Ward, Chris
Hall, Sarah	McEvoy, Lola	Rigby, Lucy	Ward, Melanie
Hamilton, Fabian	McGovern, Alison	Rimmer, Ms Marie	Waugh, Paul
Hamilton, Paulette	McIntyre, Alex	Robertson, Dave	Webb, Chris
Hardy, Emma	McKee, Gordon	Roca, Tim	Welsh, Michelle
Harris, Carolyn	McKenna, Kevin	Rodda, Matt	West, Catherine
Hatton, Lloyd	McKinnell, Catherine	Roome, Ian	Wheeler, Michael
Hayes, Helen	McMahon, Jim	Russell, Mrs Sarah	White, Jo
Hayes, Tom	Miller, Calum	Rutland, Tom	White, Katie
Hazelgrove, Claire	Milne, John	Ryan, Oliver	Wilkinson, Max
Hillier, Dame Meg	Minns, Ms Julie	Sabine, Anna	Williams, David
Hinchliff, Chris	Mishra, Navendu	Sackman, Sarah	Wilson, Munira
	Mohamed, Abtisan		Witherden, Steve
	Moon, Perran		Woodcock, Sean
			Wrigley, Martin

Yang, Yuan
Yasin, Mohammad
Yemm, Steve
Young, Claire

Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Ayes:
Christian Wakeford and
Anna Turley

NOES

Allister, Jim
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brandreth, Aphra
Burghart, Alex
Cleverly, rh Mr James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh David
Dewhurst, Charlie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Easton, Alex
Evans, Dr Luke
Fortune, Peter
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard

Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Glen, rh John
Grant, Helen
Griffiths, Alison
Harris, Rebecca
Hayes, rh Sir John
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Lopez, Julia
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mayhew, Jerome
McMurdoch, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Norman, rh Jesse
Obese-Jecty, Ben
O'Brien, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris

Pritchard, rh Mark
Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Reed, David
Robertson, Joe
Robinson, rh Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Simmonds, David
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Sir Julian
Smith, Rebecca
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Gregory
Stuart, rh Graham

Swann, Robin
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Trott, rh Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wild, James
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Andrew Snowden and
Nick Timothy

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate**DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

That the draft Online Procedure Rules (Specified Proceedings) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.—(*Jeff Smith.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (19 MARCH)

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 19 March, business in the name of the Leader of the Opposition shall be treated as being taken on an allotted half day provided under paragraph (2)(b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business) and, notwithstanding paragraph (2)(c) of that Standing Order, may be entered upon at any hour and may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours; proceedings shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Lucy Powell.*)

St Patrick's Day: UK Bank Holiday

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

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It gives me huge pleasure to call Jim Shannon.

7.53 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to actually lead the Adjournment debate for a change, rather than just intervene in it. I thank Mr Speaker in particular for granting the debate. I hoped to have it last night, but that was not possible, so tonight was the night.

I have kept my shamrock from last Wednesday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) and I were at the Champ event. We were given shamrocks in a sealed package. Mine is still moist and very fresh, and I have kept it especially for tonight so I could wear it for the occasion.

It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak about the potential merits of making St Patrick's day a UK bank holiday. I stand as a very proud Unionist who is happy to say that I hope everyone enjoyed St Patrick's day—they should have. I enjoyed it; I always do. When I started off my life, I was not sure about St Patrick's day, because it seemed to have been taken over by one section of the community, but when I looked into the issue, I found out that St Patrick clearly was everybody's. For the last 40 or maybe 50 years of my life, I have been promoting St Patrick for the purpose of why he is here.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I did not think I would have to wait so long to be the first to intervene on my hon. Friend. I congratulate him on securing this debate. He is right to highlight the unifying elements of St Patrick, our patron saint. He mentions that he is a Unionist. Of course, it is the St Patrick's cross that represents us in our national flag. Does he believe that the St Patrick's cross needs to be given greater official recognition?

Jim Shannon: I do, and I will probably mention that in my speech. The reason I am here has absolutely nothing to do with politics. This is all to do with the message of St Patrick and the gospel message. I want to be very clear about that.

I love to see the joy on people's faces and the fun that comes from parades and events throughout the year. It is my desire that we ensure that, rather than turning rivers green for St Patrick, as they do in Chicago and other parts of the world, which is all great fun, we focus on the message of St Patrick and why it is important.

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): A few weeks ago, Beckenham was hit by the tragic loss of Graham Murray. A proud Irishman of Cork, Graham was a stalwart of Beckenham rugby club. He was a larger-than-life character and a leader on and off the pitch. He leaves behind a four-year-old son, Tadgh, and wife, Aisling, who I met recently and who is pregnant with their second child. Will the hon. Member join me in sending condolences to Graham's family and friends in both Beckenham and Ireland, and also pay tribute to

John and everyone at Beckenham rugby club, who have rallied round the family and shown the best of our community in recent weeks?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Member, who spoke to me beforehand and told me what he was going to say. As a Christian, like others in the Chamber, my thoughts and prayers are with the family. He has outlined clearly what we should be focusing upon. Maybe this St Patrick's day debate gives us a chance to reassure the family of the promise that St Patrick's message brings for us all in this Chamber and further afield. I thank him for that. He is a very assiduous MP, and I understand that he has some family in my constituency, in Portaferry to be precise. I thank them for their votes every election, as he tells me—I hope he does not mind me saying that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We may be deviating from the topic of the Adjournment debate.

Jim Shannon: I believe that when we look past the myths to the message of the man, few in this House would disagree that the holiday should be UK-wide, as indeed should all the national saints' days for each nation. St Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was born to a Christian family in Wales, in Roman Britain, in the late fourth century AD.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady needs to be sitting in the appropriate part of the Chamber to make an intervention. Mr Shannon, you should continue.

Jim Shannon: Shortly before he was 16, Patrick was captured from the villa of his father, Calpurnius, by a group of Irish raiders who took him to Ireland and forced him into slavery. Six years later, he escaped home to Britain, his religious faith strengthened during his time in slavery. The story of St Patrick is a wonderful one. It is a great story of love, of a missionary and of Christianity.

Patricia Ferguson: I thank the hon. Member for giving way, and I thank you for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker—my apologies.

The legend of St Patrick is a very famous one. We Scots like to think he was born in Kilpatrick in Scotland, but wherever he was born, the things he represents, as the hon. Member says, are things that we can all gather around. I think the fact that the celebrations around St Patrick's day are so lively probably does have something to do with the fact that, actually, he was Scottish.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Controversial.

Jim Shannon: Controversial already, Madam Deputy Speaker; my goodness. I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention and I will put forward the case that we should all be looking to be as one under St Patrick—Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Believing he had been called by God to Christianise Ireland, St Patrick later returned to Ireland as a missionary. How wonderful it is to see the beauty of the Union at work in St Patrick's life: a British man who fell in love

with the people but, more importantly, whose love for God made him return to the bosom of those who had mistreated him, having been kept in slavery for six years. We all love the story of the little man coming good; we all fight in this House for the wee man and wee woman all the time, and that is the story of St Patrick, a former slave who absolutely changed the nation for God and for good.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Sadly, many now see St Patrick's day as a time for drinking and excess and that is against everything Patrick stood for. Does my hon. Friend agree that Patrick was in fact ahead of his time, with his exposure of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the fact he told people about their need of salvation, of the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross and their need of repentance? So when we wear our shamrock we need not think of the myths and legends but of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jim Shannon: I am going to come on to that now—my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have long marvelled at the way St Patrick made theology understandable for those who had no education, no access to holy books, and no ability to read them. He came with a message of love and action. This is the St Patrick I believe we should celebrate and honour: a man who loved Jesus and wanted the world to know Him, not hampered by denomination or doctrine. St Patrick's message is as applicable today as it was 1,600 years ago. Christ has a plan and a purpose for those who place their trust in Him, and those of us who serve Him have a purpose to glorify God and to help our fellow man.

The cultural history of St Patrick is clear throughout my constituency, with the touches of his message spanning throughout it. Indeed, as we walk through the hallowed halls of Parliament St Patrick's prominent position is clear in Central Lobby. I glance up daily with pride at his place within this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as symbolised along with St David, St Andrew and St George. It is wonderful to have us all together as one within this great United Kingdom.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I respect the hon. Gentleman, my Celtic brother, in his pride as a Unionist; of course, I am a proud nationalist, and proof perhaps that the Irish will always rise because I represent a Scottish constituency. But does the hon. Gentleman agree that if we were to agree to a UK bank holiday for St Patrick, we might also have to agree for one for St Andrew, St George and St David, and that these matters are more appropriate for the devolved Assemblies to consider?

Jim Shannon: We might have different aspirations—one for unity, one for independence—but none the less the hon. Gentleman and I are good friends and have been for a long time, and will continue to be. May I suggest that the next Adjournment debate should be on that very issue?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): That is up to the Speaker, Mr Shannon.

Jim Shannon: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Robin Swann (South Antrim) (UUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. We have already heard the Scottish claim St Patrick—I say that in response to the last intervention—we have heard, I believe, the Welsh try to claim him as well, and we know he is our patron saint. Perhaps that is why the hon. Gentleman is proposing that St Patrick should be the symbolic head for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Jim Shannon: I could not have put it better. That was brilliant; well done.

It is my firm belief that much good for the self-esteem of our young people comes from instilling in them national pride and identity, but for the benefit of our local economy I would also highlight the good that can come from establishing saints' days as national bank holidays. St Patrick's day is celebrated in England, Scotland and Wales, as the beauty of this collection of nations is the strong bond of our shared history. If we travel to Liverpool or Edinburgh we clearly see that there is an appetite to celebrate St Patrick, as there is all over the world and in other parts of Scotland, Wales and England.

Some of my Democratic Unionist party colleagues took the opportunity to head to Washington to meet with the President of the United States recently and enjoyed building that bond that can only be beneficial to our wee nation based on the shared heritage of the US with the UK, and Northern Ireland in particular—we in Northern Ireland use the word "wee" all the time; it is one of those words that we always use. With the US President having Scots roots and Vice-President J.D. Vance having Ulster Scots heritage, what better time for those who care for Northern Ireland and want to see a prosperous relationship built with the Americans, which will be mutually beneficial?

I am aware of US companies that enjoy our skilled workforce, along with our low business rates, good connectivity and high quality of life for staff. The fact that the famous Chick-fil-A's first UK restaurants are in Northern Ireland speaks volumes about what could be accomplished between our nations. I love chicken, I have to say; I think it is okay to eat that as a diabetic—at least, I think it is.

I thank our Deputy First Minister and the Economy Minister for their visit to the US to solidify that beneficial relationship. They, more than others, understand the value of relationships, rather than pointless grandstanding or point scoring. While the Americans will have no idea or care for those who believe that they are above the US-Northern Ireland trade links, they will have a clear picture of who came and what they have to offer. To me, that is again reminiscent of the message of St Patrick: the hand of friendship to all. That is the hand of friendship that I hand out to everyone in this Chamber, and who in turn hand it back to me.

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the extension of his hand of friendship. He touched on the Economy Minister and the Deputy First Minister being in Washington, but will he extend that acknowledgment to the Health Minister, who I believe was also in Washington last week?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I hope that hand of friendship extends to the Speaker.

Jim Shannon: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Health Minister was there as well. I am very respectful of others who were there who I have not named, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I can think of two or three names, but I will not mention them.

I do not believe that we have fully grasped the potential merits in making St Patrick's day a totally global phenomenon, not just for cities across the world to enjoy, but for people to come and enjoy in each of our four nations. The saint—the man from Britain—who bonds us all could and should be promoted by us all.

Alex Easton (North Down) (Ind): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the significance of the origins of St Patrick, a British saint born in Roman Britain, possibly near the end of the 4th century, combined with his lasting contributions to religion, culture and history across the United Kingdom, underscore the value of recognising a UK national holiday in his name?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman and I have been friends for many years, long before he was elected to this House and before he was a Member of the Legislative Assembly, back when we were representatives on the council many moons ago. His words have added emphasis to what we are trying to achieve.

I truly believe the first step in recognising the ties that bind are to make St Patrick's day a UK holiday. With that in mind, I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (Justin Madders), in his place. He spoke to me last night and said, "I am looking forward to your debate", and he has smiled the whole way through. I am quite sure his response will be one that will help us.

I attended the Irish Fest in Milwaukee for some six years as an Ulster Scot.

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): May I give the hon. Member the opportunity to correct the record? St Patrick was born in Kilpatrick, in Clydebank, in my constituency of West Dunbartonshire, in the year 387. More importantly, my wife, Alison Patricia McAllister, was born on St Patrick's day and she celebrated her birthday on Monday. Does the hon. Member agree that she deserves a holiday every year on her birthday? *[Interruption.]*

Jim Shannon: No, I cannot say that in the Chamber—it would be unfair. But I can say that I wish the hon. Gentleman's wife many happy returns. I am sure that when the hon. Gentleman is here she is probably more happy than ever—*[Laughter.]* I say that in jest.

Adam Jogee: The hon. Gentleman is extending birthday wishes to those who celebrate on 17 March. My father has his birthday on 17 March, so may I invite my honourable colleague to send him happy birthday wishes too?

Jim Shannon: Of course I will. I knew the hon. Gentleman long before he became a Member. He and I have been friends for four or five years. We corresponded on an app regularly, I followed his progress as a councillor and I very much welcomed him to the Chamber. I look forward to his friendship throughout our time here. I wish his dad every happiness on his birthday.

Adam Jogee: For the record and as a matter of accuracy, when the hon. Gentleman talks about apps, he means WhatsApp. *[Laughter.]*

Jim Shannon: I am not technically minded, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. I will be clear that St Patrick was not born in Stoke-on-Trent—of that, I think we can all be certain. In genuine sincerity, the fact that we are all here this evening in joyful spirits discussing the potential for St Patrick's day to be a UK bank holiday demonstrates the importance of the nation's saints in bringing people together.

The hon. Gentleman talked about teaching our children to help them to understand their identity. Too often, the St George's cross is misappropriated by people for nefarious means. It is our flag and we own it, just as the St Patrick's cross is the flag of the hon. Gentleman, and it is important that we use and celebrate them. I think he will agree that by doing so, we can teach our children about their history and their future.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman always brings wise words to any debate. I talked to him on Monday in Westminster Hall, when he got up and said that he had a few comments. I was greatly impressed by his contribution—I went over to him afterwards and said that his words were very wise—and his words now were also wise.

The point I will make about the Milwaukee Irish Fest that I attended for some six years, as an Ulster Scot, is that I did not have any difficulty going there, and they had no difficulty with me going there. What I see in St Patrick is the gospel that he brought for everybody, wherever they are within these Celtic nations, be it Wales, Scotland or England. Those are the things that we very much enjoy.

I will end with these words; I am very conscious that the Minister wants to give me a fulsome response and to reinforce our request. The words of St Patrick are what I leave with everyone now. I want to make the most of the advantages of our heritage of St Patrick, but, more than that, I want the truth of his words to make changes in us all today, and that comes from the love of Christ, which is his message the whole way through. I believe we as Christians should impress and deliver that message to those who we meet in this House. I have a very simple philosophy: be nice to everybody. It is not hard to be kind and to do that in the best way that we can.

St Patrick's words are these:

"Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie down, Christ where I sit down, Christ where I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me."

If we had those thoughts in our minds every day, I believe that we would be better as a nation, better to ourselves as individuals and show the love that St Patrick showed through the gospel that he brought from Wales, to Ireland, back to England and back to us again. He is our patron saint; he always will be. Others may claim him, but they are not getting him—I say that in all kindness and love to the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire

(Douglas McAllister). Tonight we are asking for something, and I hope that the Minister can give us a good, positive response. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for making the time to come to the Adjournment debate that I did not intervene in—my goodness.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We are waiting for a positive response from the Minister.

8.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders): I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this Adjournment debate. I know that he is not familiar with the operation of Adjournment debates, so I am glad that he has found his way here this evening. If he wants to intervene, he will have about 10 minutes to do so—we would not want that streak to be broken, would we?

I wish the hon. Gentleman and everyone a belated but very happy St Patrick's day. I enjoyed hearing his contribution on what St Patrick's day means to him and to his community in Northern Ireland. I know that he has spoken very passionately about this subject on a number of occasions, as we would expect. In preparation for this debate, I contacted my family historian—my mum—to understand my Irish roots. Going back several generations, I have a fair bit over there, so I am pleased to report that I had one pint of Guinness yesterday to mark the occasion.

The Government appreciate the deep cultural and religious significance of St Patrick's day to many nationalists and Unionists across Northern Ireland, some of whom revere St Patrick for his role in the arrival and growth of Christianity on the island. As the hon. Member for Strangford said, he is for everybody. It is also a cherished day for those who serve and have served in the Irish regiments of the British Army, with the annual presentation of the shamrock to the Irish Guards by members of the royal family. The familial relationship with Ireland and Northern Ireland is so important to people across the UK, as it is to this Government. By way of just one example, our NHS is stronger for the contributions of the many Irish nationals who serve in it today and have done since its founding. The most recent statistics, from June 2023, showed that nearly 14,000 members of NHS staff were Irish, including doctors, nurses, and of course support staff.

Following the recent general election in Ireland, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Tánaiste have discussed the strength of the bilateral relationship, our shared commitment to the Good Friday agreement, and the importance of upholding political stability in Northern Ireland. We have also increased engagement between the two Governments, especially through the new Prime Minister-Taoiseach summits. The first of those summits took place on 5 March, about a mile from where I live in my constituency, although for some reason my invite did not quite reach me—I do not know why that was. It was clear from that summit that the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach have agreed a joint vision for co-operation through to 2030, which will bring our two countries together like never before. Through the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council, we engage regularly with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive on matters of shared concern.

Of course, many people across the world look forward to the annual St Patrick's day celebrations, which showcase the significant contributions of Irish people. This year, we saw parades through the cities of Belfast, Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds, and here in London in Trafalgar Square.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister give way?

Justin Madders: If the hon. Member wants to intervene, he knows how to.

Jim Shannon: I thought it was important that I should do so, although I wanted to do so anyway. The diaspora in England, Scotland and Wales is massive. It is not just in the NHS, as the Minister has referred to; it is also in the construction business. Whenever I come over on the plane from Belfast or return, I see workers going over to build in London and then going back on the weekend. The diaspora includes farmers and businessmen. The connections between England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are enormous, and may I say, Minister, that the diaspora wants to have St Patrick's day as a UK bank holiday as well.

Justin Madders: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I am sure that if I did some polling, there would be support, but I will come on to some of the reasons why we may not be able to grant him his wish on this occasion.

During the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's recent visit to Washington, he participated in the annual St Patrick's day events and engaged with the US Administration, congressional members, business leaders and key stakeholders. He promoted Northern Ireland as a fantastic place to invest, work and live, highlighting its unique access to both the UK's internal market and the EU's single market. I am very pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), is in the Chamber tonight. She has been very active during St Patrick's season, attending receptions for community and business leaders in Stormont and Westminster.

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): Lá fhéile Pádraig sona daoibh go léir—happy St Patrick's day. St Patrick's day is a time to bring people together, often in our local pubs. Will the Minister join me in thanking Irish pub landlords up and down the country, including Michael Duffy and Joe Duffy, who run the Chancery and the Jolly Woodman in Beckenham?

Justin Madders: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Duffys on operating those pubs. I wonder whether he will be visiting them shortly to remind them of the good publicity he has given to a local business in his constituency.

Turning to the nub of the hon. Member for Strangford's speech, St Patrick's day is of course already a bank holiday in Northern Ireland, providing its people with the opportunity to mark that important cultural and religious occasion. The Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 specifies which days in each year are bank holidays, and contains provisions for appointing additional or substitute days. That Act designates 17 March as a bank holiday in Northern Ireland. The decision to create an

[Justin Madders]

additional bank holiday in Northern Ireland for St Patrick's day was taken against the backdrop of Northern Ireland's economic, social, cultural and legal systems. The current pattern of bank holidays is well established, and I am afraid that the Government do not have any plans to extend the St Patrick's day bank holiday to other parts of the UK.

Bank holidays are devolved to the Scottish Government, so Scottish Ministers are responsible for decisions about bank holidays in Scotland. I will therefore speak about the merits of a St Patrick's day bank holiday in Wales and England only.

An additional bank holiday in England and Wales for St Patrick's day would benefit those who celebrate it, including members of the Irish diaspora in the UK. Certain sectors of the economy, such as pubs and restaurants, might also benefit from increased expenditure on a bank holiday. It is a significant tourism draw to Northern Ireland, too, so I would expect that extending the bank holiday would draw more visitors from England and Wales over there. However, the overall cost to the economy of an additional bank holiday is considerable.

The latest analysis estimates that the costs to the UK economy of a one-off bank holiday is around £2 billion. That estimate is derived from the impact assessment for the platinum jubilee bank holiday weekend held in 2022. An additional bank holiday would also impact on public services. Bank holidays require the closure of schools, courts and tribunals. It may disrupt certain NHS services, such as routine operations. I also point out that there is no statutory right to time off for bank or public holidays specifically. Any right to time off or extra pay for working on a bank holiday depends on the terms of an employee's contract of employment, and like other terms and conditions of employment, it is a matter for negotiation between employers and workers. Even if the

St Patrick's day bank holiday were extended to England and Wales, not all workers would be able to take it off. For example, many NHS and emergency service workers, many of whom we have already heard are from Ireland, might still be required to work. We regularly receive requests for bank holidays to mark various historical, cultural, religious and sporting events.

Adam Jogee: Many people born on the island of Ireland, whether north or south, like my wife, made Newcastle-under-Lyme their home. Like many of them, I was celebrating St Patrick's day at the weekend at the Sneyd Arms on Higherland, an excellent local pub. As the Minister has just touched on other bank holidays, will he find time at some other stage to meet me to discuss the benefits of making St George's day a bank holiday?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend tempts me to talk about another bank holiday, but I am afraid that there would be the same arguments about the economic cost, although I think we should celebrate St George's day more in this country.

Although we have no plans for a St Patrick's day bank holiday in England and Wales, the Government strongly encourage employers to respond flexibly to any requests for leave, be that to celebrate St Patrick's day or any other significant religious or cultural events, whether that is Diwali, Vaisakhi, Magna Carta day, Remembrance Day or St George's day. It is important that we can take time out to celebrate these events. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford for securing this important debate. The message of unity that he came to us with from St Patrick is one that I share with him.

Question put and agreed to.

8.22 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 18 March 2025

[PETER DOWD *in the Chair*]

Free School Meals

9.30 am

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): I beg to move,
That this House has considered free school meals.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. It is a great honour to introduce this debate on free school meals—the first opportunity to discuss this important issue since the general election. Today’s debate was prompted by my conversations with primary school teachers in my constituency, who told me of their concerns at the lack of funding for free school meals and breakfast clubs. The number of children in our country going to school hungry is unacceptable, and that impacts families in my constituency of Eastleigh and across the UK. The chance to have the best start in life should be available to all children, regardless of background.

The cost of living crisis has driven countless families into hardship. The Government’s own figures estimate that 4.3 million children, or 30% of all children in the UK, are living in poverty, with the figure at 21% in my constituency. As of January 2024, 18.5% of pupils in Eastleigh—that is 2,426 children—were entitled to benefit-based free school meals, yet we know many more who would benefit from a free school meal do not meet the strict eligibility criteria and miss out. The Government must look at this issue with the urgency it requires, because those children are being failed.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): While I was the leader of Wokingham borough council, I ensured that we funded free school meals during the school holidays for children who received them during term time. That was absolutely the right thing to do to ensure that children were not left hungry and at a disadvantage because of their background. *The Times* reports that 1 million children face losing their free school meals. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is troubling, and that the Government must ensure that children entitled to free school meals continue to receive them during school holidays?

Liz Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I absolutely agree. I also congratulate him on the work that he did at the council to ensure that children did not go hungry in the school holidays. I wish more and more councils were able to do that.

How are children supposed to get good grades at school, engage in sports and achieve their dreams for a better future if they are hungry? Four in five teachers told the National Education Union that they see children unable to concentrate due to the impact of deprivation. Polling of 10,000 teachers across England conducted by School Food Matters showed that a quarter of teachers have used their own money to feed children. For families who are struggling, a free school meal would make a huge difference. When children are well fed, they perform better at school, are healthier, and have improved long-term outcomes.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for securing this important debate, particularly as we might be about to receive the outcome of the child poverty strategy review. Does the hon. Member agree that we have a postcode lottery at the moment? Three schools in Liverpool posted postcards to the Prime Minister saying that we needed to do away with the postcode lottery, because if you live in London, Scotland or Wales, you receive free school meals. Do you agree that children going to school hungry in the sixth richest economy in the world is a scourge on this country?

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. Will Members address the Chair, not one another directly, please?

Liz Jarvis: The hon. Lady made an excellent point, and I trust the Minister will address it later in the debate.

One headteacher in my constituency who leads a school of over 600 pupils told me the only way he would be able to resource breakfast clubs is to extend the teachers’ directed time and remove some of the vital continuing professional development interventions and clubs that support disadvantaged pupils. He worries that he will have to cut back on those initiatives to free up time to run breakfast clubs.

Mrs Strong, headteacher at Chander’s Ford infant school, told me that, although the cost of school meals has increased, the funding schools receive has not kept pace.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): My hon. Friend makes a point that I want to draw out. Gattons infant school in Burgess Hill in my constituency is paid £2.53 per meal, but the caterers charge it £3.15 per meal, so there is a shortfall of 62p per meal per child per day, which amounts to £7,839 over a year. Added to that, the caterers now charge the school an additional £2,000 per year to take away all the waste from the meals. That is a colossal amount of money for a small infant school to sustain. Does my hon. Friend agree that schools should be compensated for the true cost of free school meals?

Liz Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Schools are now being forced to subsidise meals from their already overstretched budgets, which takes away from vital resources such as staff salaries and school supplies.

For Chander’s Ford infant school, the cost of providing meals now exceeds Government funding by £1.11 per meal, forcing it to find another £31,468 out of its budget for the financial year. Schools should not be forced to cut services or make tough decisions to cover the cost of meals that should be fully funded.

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): My hon. Friend said that it is important that children are well fed, and I want to focus on the word “well”. Does she agree that this is about not just the amount of food that we provide for children, but the quality? It is really important that children receive highly nutritious content that releases energy slowly throughout the day and enables them to concentrate. Does she agree that, given that school face such difficulties with their budgets, there is an understandable temptation to look at less costly solutions for food, which is potentially very dangerous for children’s long-term health outcomes and ability to learn?

Liz Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I agree that it is essential that children have the best possible quality food, as well as a sufficient quantity.

I absolutely support the roll-out of breakfast clubs, but we must ensure that schools have the resources to provide them. The Government have talked about their plan for change, but addressing the core issues of funding for free school meals, the low threshold for eligibility and the way children are locked into appalling poverty is paramount. In England, only families earning £7,400 or less a year after tax and benefits qualify for free school meals. That threshold is far too low and excludes hundreds of thousands of children in need. The limit must be increased, so I was pleased to support a Liberal Democrat amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to increase the threshold to £20,000 a year after tax, which would expand eligibility to children who are currently missing out.

According to analysis conducted by the Child Poverty Action Group, 900,000 children living in poverty do not qualify for free school meals because the eligibility criteria are so restrictive. Those children are being denied a meal that they desperately need. That is a shameful legacy of years of underfunding.

It is also unacceptable that thousands of children entitled to free school meals are not receiving them due to administrative barriers. The Liberal Democrats believe that auto-enrolment is the solution, which is why my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) tabled an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to implement that change. A report by Policy in Practice in 2024 estimated that 471,000 children missed out on free school meals due to a complex application process. Auto-enrolment has been proven to work. When it was introduced in Durham, nearly 2,500 additional children gained access to free school meals, leading to a £3 million boost in pupil premium funding for the local council.

A system designed to support the most vulnerable should not be so complex that it prevents children from accessing the help they need. It is not just parents who are struggling with the administrative burdens, but teachers. My constituent Mrs Beckett, the headteacher of Nightingale primary school in Eastleigh, told me that the need to continuously justify how pupil premium funding is spent is one of the ongoing frustrations for schools. In reality, that funding allows them to provide additional support that benefits every child. Given that free school meals eligibility is a key driver for pupil premium funding, she questioned whether there had been any discussion about reducing the bureaucratic burdens on schools in this area. It would be more beneficial for the Government to acknowledge the broader support impact of the funding than to expect schools to repeatedly demonstrate its effectiveness, which is not a good use of staff time.

Beyond the bureaucratic hurdles that families and schools face, many families simply cannot afford to provide their children with nutritious meals, leaving schools on the frontline of a food insecurity crisis. A survey conducted in January 2025 by the Food Foundation found that 18% of households with children reported experiencing food insecurity, compared with 12% of households without children. That is deeply concerning, not least because of the growing child obesity crisis. According to NHS England, almost one in 10 children are already obese by their first year of school, and by

year 6 it rises to 22.1%. Schools should be part of the solution, ensuring that every child has access to healthy, balanced meals that support their growth, learning and wellbeing. If the Government are serious about raising the healthiest generation ever, they must go beyond rhetoric and ensure that free school meal funding is high enough to provide the right meal for every child who needs one.

Providing universal free school meals for primary school children is a good social and economic policy. Research from Sweden found that children who receive free school meals earn 3% more in lifetime earnings, rising to 6% for the poorest children. Expanding free school meals would be an investment in our future. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's analysis has shown that without additional action from the Government, poverty and deep poverty will remain largely flat until January 2029, with child poverty in the same terrible state. The Liberal Democrats would extend free school meals to all children living in poverty across both primary and secondary schools, with the goal of providing them to all primary school children when public finances permit. The Government must use targeted support, starting with more free school meals and establishing a fairer social security system that lifts families out of poverty, removes cruel policies such as the two-child benefit cap, and provides a proper safety net. I have consistently called for the two-child benefit cap to be scrapped, which is the quickest and most cost-effective way to lift children out of poverty.

No family should have to choose between paying bills and putting food on the table. No teacher should have to worry about making sure that pupils have had enough to eat so that they can learn, and no child should have to struggle through the school day. I hope the Government will act with urgency and step up for the children who desperately need their support.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called to speak in the debate.

9.42 am

Ian Byrne (Liverpool West Derby) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I hope that smile is because you are pleased to see me, and not because of Liverpool's defeat on Sunday—[*Laughter.*] I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) for securing this important debate.

In January, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published its first report on UK poverty since the new Labour Government took office. The report laid bare the horrific inheritance of the Conservatives. They departed office with three in 10 children in Britain living in poverty. The number of children growing up in the deepest form of poverty, defined as a household that cannot afford basics such as heating and eating, has more than doubled in the previous five years. In *The Big Issue* today, a survey of findings from frontline workers reports that 85,000 children are living in destitution—an increase of 21% since 2021—with 53% of families being supported unable to afford enough food for basic nutrition.

I see that in my own constituency each week. Teachers and social workers on the frontline tell me that things are getting worse for the families they know are struggling, and this has played out in the reports from both the

JRF and *The Big Issue*. Shockingly, the JRF report states that at the end of this Parliament, child poverty is set to be higher than it was at the beginning. For a Government with a mandate for change from an electorate tired after 14 years of austerity, and with a huge majority to put transformative policies into legislation if they wish, that would mark a catastrophic failure and a huge missed opportunity. We cannot afford for that to happen, and I know the Minister would not want it to happen.

I am here to talk about one policy that would tackle that injustice. First, I again want to put on record my opposition to the central driver of rising levels of child poverty: the two-child benefit cap. As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said, if we want to combat poverty, we must abolish the two-child benefit cap. But that is not the only tool at our disposal to tackle child poverty. I am here to talk about another: universal free school meals.

The case for universal free school meals is overwhelming and undeniable. Free school meals for all will ensure that every child has a hot, healthy meal each day, allowing children to eat, learn and grow together. That would tackle child poverty and disproportionately help working-class families, alleviating hunger and freeing up money for other essentials. That is why universal free school meals are a central demand of the Right to Food campaign, which I am proud to lead in Parliament.

As colleagues will know, eligibility for free school meals is incredibly restrictive. Household incomes must be less than £7,400 to qualify, which means that almost 1 million children in Britain are living in poverty but are not eligible for free school meals. When the Right to Food campaign ran a consultation across the country during covid, so many parents said they were just above the threshold, living in struggling, difficult times.

Those were my reflections when we drew up the Right to Food submission for Henry Dimbleby, but the picture varies across the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson) touched on, universal provision ends after year 2 throughout the rest of England, but in London and Wales, and up to year 5 in Scotland, all primary pupils are entitled to free school meals. The evidence showing the benefits of that is growing by the day.

After universal free school meals were rolled out across London's primary schools thanks to Sadiq Khan, 84% of parents stated that the policy significantly helped to manage family finances. Studies show that free school meals improve children's concentration, behaviour and academic attainment, benefiting children from deprived backgrounds most of all. Research from Sweden shows that free school meals improve children's lifetime earnings. It is a no-brainer.

There are also benefits outside the classroom. There are wards in my constituency with the highest child obesity rates in the country, and they are also some of the most economically deprived. That link between poverty and obesity is most clearly seen in children. Children in the most deprived fifth of the population are more than twice as likely to be living with obesity than those in the richest fifth.

Children with free school meals consume more fruit and vegetables. Studies have shown that universal provision leads to reduced rates of obesity and health inequalities. I will put that fact to the Minister when I meet him later

this month, with other MPs and the leader of Knowsley council. Councillor Morgan and the chief executive of Knowsley council have committed their borough to any pilot scheme with the Government to tackle this public health issue.

If we fix this in Knowsley, we can roll it out nationwide. I hope the Minister listens to our arguments for a universal free school meal pilot in Knowsley when we meet him in a couple of weeks. If we add up the benefits, the economic case for universal free school meals is straightforward. According to research by PricewaterhouseCoopers, for every pound invested, there is a £1.71 return. Unlike tweaking eligibility rules, universal provision combats the stigma attached to those receiving free school meals.

Later today, MPs will vote on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. I warmly welcome the Bill's introduction of school breakfast clubs, but I am supporting amendments to go further in tackling child poverty. I have tabled an amendment to put the holiday activities and food programme on a statutory footing, ensuring that children from the poorest households continue to have access to meals in school holidays into the future. I am also supporting an amendment to make free school meals for all primary pupils a reality throughout England.

I finish by saying this to the Minister. When the country finally voted to get rid of the Tories last summer, it was not voting for child poverty to continue to rise; it was voting for change. The change this country desperately needs includes transformative policies such as universal free school meals. I urge the Government to get behind those amendments and this policy. That would positively change the future chances of millions of working-class kids, giving them a chance to live a long, healthy and productive life. Surely, Minister, that was what the Labour party was created to do, and it is certainly why I am in this job.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I assure the hon. Gentleman that the smile was for both reasons.

9.49 am

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) on securing this debate.

I absolutely support the call for universal free school meals, but it needs to be accompanied by a call for proper funding because at the moment schools are simply not getting the support they need. In my constituency, the local council is unable to provide a catering service any more; it is simply not financially viable. Over the years, more and more schools have opted for private firms, so councils have lost the economies of scale and are no longer able to provide that service. Now, of course, those private firms are charging schools more than they would have been paying previously. Not only that, but on a practical level teachers are being expected to do more work as part of providing catering. The practicalities of delivering free school meals, even in the current situation, are fairly grim for schools.

The Government have announced they will introduce breakfast clubs. One school I spoke to in my constituency said it was expecting 67p per child for non-pupil premium children and 88p for pupil premium children. It currently runs a breakfast club, and that non-pupil premium

[Claire Young]

figure represents less than 15% of the break-even cost. The only way the school could fund a reasonable quality of breakfast and provide the support staff need would be to take money from many other important things it does. The school is also worried about the quality of food it will be able to provide. It currently provides a wide range of food, such as fruit, yoghurt, toast and cereals, and the children have plenty of choice. They also have the opportunity to have protein, which keeps them feeling full for longer. All of this gives them a balanced diet, but the school cannot see how it can provide more than a slice of toast on the funding that is proposed.

There is also a question of the physical constraints. The school I visited currently has to have two sittings for lunch and it has one of the larger school halls in the area. It is trying to work out the practicalities of delivering this service, given the constraints on space. Schools simply do not have the funding to extend their buildings.

In speaking to the motion, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh raised the restrictive eligibility for free school meals. More children risk missing out in future when parents on legacy benefits are forced to move to universal credit. Existing transitional protections run out at the end of this month.

To conclude, it is important to children's learning that they are well fed—by which I mean fed with good-quality food. I am concerned about the deliverability of the Government's breakfast club proposals and the shortfalls that schools are already facing with free school meals.

9.53 am

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) for raising this important issue.

Prior to being elected to this place, I was a youth worker in Norfolk and served as a local councillor for many years. In both roles, I spent much time supporting local families, and issuing food bank vouchers was sadly a routine part of my role. The referrals for families nearly always included many children. It is estimated that a third of all children in South West Norfolk live in poverty, with rurality being a significant additional burden, alongside a real challenge with low wages. More people using our local food bank were in work as opposed to out of work, so they were earning a wage but still struggling.

Nationwide in 2023-24, the Trussell Trust supplied more than 3 million emergency food parcels—the highest number it has ever distributed in a single year. I am grateful for the support of Trussell and the food banks at Thetford and Downham Market in my constituency. It is worth noting that when Labour left office in 2010, Trussell had 35 food banks nationwide. In 2013, that had increased to 650, and in 2019 it was 1,300.

I draw on those experiences from my time as a councillor because I came across so many families who were accessing the food bank but who were not registered for free school meals. That was often for a number of reasons, but primarily because they believed that they were not eligible or that they had missed the boat for the

whole year. Often, people had a change of circumstances part way through the year and suddenly found themselves in a completely different situation.

It is believed that 14% of all pupils in the UK who are entitled to free school meals are not claiming them. However, in the east, it is nearly a quarter of all pupils. In Norfolk, it is 17%, but the figure in neighbouring Suffolk—which is one of the worst in the country—is 32%. These are people who are eligible for free school meals but not claiming them.

There are still so many people who could and should be being supported by free school meals. We must do more to encourage enrolment and consider all options to get more people supported. I am really pleased with the progress the Government are making, particularly on breakfast clubs. There is one in a very rural village in my constituency, and I am looking forward to seeing what difference it makes as part of the trial. However, the challenge is great, and we must do more.

I was particularly pleased that the hon. Member for Eastleigh mentioned pupil premium. Sadly, in my constituency, as elsewhere, we have more than our fair share of conspiracy theorists and right-wing rhetoric. Schools and councils tell me that it is increasingly a struggle to encourage parents to access support and share information. One school told me recently that parents do not want to reveal income and employment information, such is the growing distrust of the state. That is having a real impact on schools' ability to access a fair share of pupil premium and other support intended to help not only those children who may directly benefit, but the school as a whole. Will the Minister speak to those specific concerns?

9.57 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) for setting the scene and for delivering a debate that is so important to us all.

Obviously, I will give a Northern Ireland perspective. Although Northern Ireland is not the Minister's responsibility, I know—or at least I think—he appreciates my comments and the perspective I give, which in this case replicates what is happening in the rest of the United Kingdom. I always think it is important to bring that interpretation to these debates, because that hopefully adds to how we do things together in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and ensures that we do them in a better way. Listening to hon. Members so far, it is evident that there are similarities, despite education being devolved. It is important that there is provision for all children to have a decent, balanced meal while in school. For that reason, I am pleased to be here.

I know that the team of the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) lost on Sunday, but the premier league is still ahead of him and that is the important one, so he should not worry about the Carabao cup; the premier league means a whole lot more, although the Carabao cup means a lot to Newcastle, because they have not had much success in the past few years.

It is a pleasure to see the Minister in his place, and I look forward to his contribution. He comes to these debates, and indeed to Question Time in the Chamber, to genuinely try to answer our requests, and he always

does that in a way that helps me have confidence in what he does and in the relationships he has with the Northern Ireland Assembly and particularly with the Minister there.

I am also pleased to see the shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), in his place. He always brings his knowledge to these debates, and he brings it in a fair way. That adds to our debates, because they are about how to make things better. That is what I always say about the shadow Minister and what he does.

To give some background, free school meals are managed and allocated by the education authority back home, and parents can check their eligibility and apply accordingly. The most recent figures I could get are from 2021, when 98,000 pupils in Northern Ireland were entitled to free school meals. I thank the hon. Members for Liverpool West Derby and for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson) for referring to those in poverty, because a great many are in poverty. There is no doubt that there are children who are eligible but who are not claiming, so more must be done to make parents aware of the criteria. I am keen to see how we can cast the net wider and gather those who should be eligible but who are not applying, whatever their reasons may be.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): The hon. Gentleman makes a point about those who are eligible. Schoolchildren in my constituency are complaining about bus services in Epsom and Ewell. They cannot get on to some of the buses, which means they are incredibly late for school. That is one of the reasons why they miss the breakfast option. While I welcome the introduction of free breakfast clubs, does the hon. Gentleman agree that free hot lunches are key to helping those who need them most? Those who are not there for breakfast also cannot get lunch. However, if they had a free hot lunch, even if they are late to school, they would still be able to have a hot meal.

Jim Shannon: As the hon. Lady says, there will always be children who miss out. How do we bring them into the system? The Minister has, no doubt, listened to her question, and hopefully his answer may be of some help.

In March 2024, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health revealed that 109,000 children in Northern Ireland were in relative poverty. Given that 97,000 to 98,000 children are receiving free school meals, there could potentially be around 11,400 children eligible for assistance and not claiming, some perhaps for the very reasons that the hon. Member for Eastleigh highlighted. More must be done to recognise that.

Some 89,000 children in Northern Ireland are said to be in absolute poverty, which is awful to think about. What a fine line there is between relative and absolute poverty. However, the fine line means that they either get a meal or do not get a meal, and it is important that they get one. I am being constructive in my questions, and I ask the Minister what we can do to address those issues.

Free school meals are a fantastic way to support parents, and they take a bit of pressure off them. Parents do not want to send their children to school without a meal; they want to make sure their children

have a meal and a full stomach. Children's inquisitive minds work better when they are not worrying about getting fed.

We must remember that our schools promote healthy eating and encourage parents to pack healthy and balanced lunches. While that is a wonderful initiative in principle, the cost of food has risen, as other hon. Members have outlined. The figures are very clear: it is impossible to produce a meal for 69p or 78p, and we need to remember that when it comes to producing helpful and nutritious meals.

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. However, as a new Member who strongly welcomes the new breakfast club initiative, I point out that in my constituency, like many others, only one in 10 schools currently offers a free breakfast club to children. Many of the schools that do offer one rely on companies such as Greggs, and the generosity of parents and teachers to put on the clubs. While I understand that there may be some kinks in the system as we roll out the early adoption scheme, is it not better that the Government are stepping forward, providing funding and working with teachers and schools, rather than relying on the generosity of private businesses and the teachers themselves?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is right. I am not here to deliver a bad message to the Minister. I welcome the scheme, because it is a good scheme. Any scheme is a good scheme if it helps.

I was about to mention Greggs, Kellogg's and other companies that do deals with schools. Just in the past week, Asda and Tesco have come up with pilot schemes across the United Kingdom through which food that is about to expire will be given to certain groups. And schoolchildren are a group that it could be given to.

There is nothing wrong with the food. I am of a certain generation, and in my house, when I was growing up, nothing was ever thrown out—nothing. I mean that. If the potatoes were old, they were roasted. If the cheese had a bit of blue growth around the edge, it was cut off or wiped off and we ate it. It has not done me any harm. I am shortly coming to a significant age, and perhaps those foods helped me live longer.

My point is that we need to take advantage of opportunities, and the pilot schemes set up by Asda and Tesco are opportunities. The hon. Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) is absolutely right that there are other ways of doing things, but we welcome the Government's positive initiative—if something is good, it is good; it is never bad just because it was proposed by another party. Let us include it in our agenda.

It is no secret that fresh, healthy food is more expensive than the easier alternative, so providing something at school will benefit so many families—parents want that as well. There have previously been calls to provide free school meals for all children. Many MPs, celebrities and organisations backed the No Child Left Behind campaign to provide universal free school meals. Such initiatives and partnerships could be developed to help us deliver for our children.

There is proof that nourishing and healthy meals support children in performing academically. They have better concentration, better memory and better energy, which boosts their educational performance and increases

[Jim Shannon]

the likelihood of a successful future. That is what we all want, and it is what the Government and the Minister are aiming for.

The initiative is similar to the free milk scheme, which I am old enough to remember from when I was a boy back in the 1960s. It was launched after world war two and was still going when I was at school, and indeed after that. It was designed to combat malnutrition and ensure that all schoolchildren under the age of 18 had free access to a good source of protein and calcium to aid their diets and growth.

I have spoken on this topic many times in this Chamber, but I want to emphasise its importance. Some pupils with special educational needs thrive on routine and perhaps live by a very strict diet. We have heard about children with special diets, and we should think about how they are catered for. If there were a SEND debate in this Chamber, it would be full because everybody would come along with their stories, and I would add my stories and examples too. Schools need to provide meals that cater to those children's needs. No child should suffer or be left behind. Will the Minister offer some clarity on the current guidelines on this issue?

The free school meals system is fantastic. The Government's initiative is fantastic, and nobody here will ever be churlish about it. I have made some constructive suggestions for how we can move forward in partnership with businesses such as Greggs, Kellogg's, Tesco, Asda and others. As I said, there is more to do to recognise all the children and parents who could benefit from this scheme. Furthermore, perhaps the Minister and his Department could consider universal free school meals for the betterment of all children's futures.

Again, constructively and positively, I look to the Minister to ensure that he has those conversations with the devolved nations—he makes it his business to do that, which is constructive and very welcome—and to ensure that adequate funding is always there to support suffering children and parents who are on the breadline, which makes it difficult for them to cater for and look after their children.

10.8 am

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I pay tribute to my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis), for securing this hugely important debate.

This is not a niche issue. As has been said, with three out of 10 children living in poverty, many of them going to school hungry, this is a matter of national shame. It has made me reflect on how privileged I was. I went to the local state school, which was a perfectly fine school. I never went to school hungry, and I always had a roof over my head. If I had gone to school hungry, there is no way I would have concentrated to get the grades I needed to go on to study veterinary science at the University of Liverpool for seven fantastic years. I could not have achieved that. We know that in this country we are short of vets, doctors and engineers. A huge amount of talent is being wasted because children cannot reach their full educational potential.

The hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) touched on the economic benefits of universal free school meals, and rightly mentioned the PwC study showing that for every £1 we put into free school meals, we get £1.71 in economic growth. There are a variety of reasons for that, including the fact that children end up getting better jobs and paying more tax—more than £18 billion over a 20-year period. There is less childhood obesity, costing the NHS less; people are less likely to end up on long-term benefits because they are getting better jobs and are healthier.

We also know that the prison illiteracy rate is several times the national average. It costs £51,000 a year to keep someone in prison, yet apparently we cannot afford to give children free school meals that might prevent them from going down that path in the first place. Not only do we have the heartbreaking moral argument for ensuring that children go to school well fed, but we also have the economic argument that doing so will grow our economy if we are brave enough to provide those meals.

I visited the tiny Itchen Abbas primary school—a little like the one I attended. The school has only 60 or 70 children, and I heard how by the time the school pays staff to come in an hour early and covers heating costs, while receiving only 60p, 70p or 80p per meal, it costs a lot to provide those breakfast clubs. The school wants to do it, but it is not feasible at the moment. I totally support breakfast clubs, and I think they are a fantastic idea. However, we have to make sure that not only are they affordable for schools, and not costing extra, but they are providing good, nutritious food for children. Clearly, when we factor in all the added costs, 60p or 70p per meal will not provide a nutritious meal and will cost the school a lot of money.

Despite the best efforts of Liz Truss and the last Government, we are still one of the wealthiest nations on the planet. There is no reason for any child to go to school hungry. If we make the right choices over the next few years, we can ensure that every child reaches their full educational potential, we can regrow our economy and we can ensure that every child enjoys being at school.

10.12 am

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I hope you will forgive my heckling earlier—I could not resist when Sunday's football match was mentioned. I am married to a proud Geordie and Newcastle United fan, and it was a day of high emotion in the Wilson household—although I am a Londoner and therefore a Spurs fan., but the less said about that, the better. I hope the Chair will indulge my teasing the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne).

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) on securing this important debate, especially as we head into the second day on Report on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. We will be talking about free school meals and breakfast clubs later.

I am incredibly proud that the Liberal Democrats have a very strong record of championing and delivering free school meals. Let us not forget that universal infant free school meals were delivered as a result of Liberal Democrat efforts in the coalition Government. If not

for our presence, it is clear that they would not have happened—Labour Members have previously put that on the record. I am proud to continue my party's campaign to ensure that more children benefit from free school meals.

Frankly, as many hon. Members have said, in this day and age, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we should not have to campaign on this issue. It is shocking that the Food Foundation has reported that one in five schools runs a food bank, and that as of January 2025, 18% of households with children live in food insecurity, meaning that family members are skipping meals or having smaller meals because they simply cannot afford to put enough food on the table.

I want to make the case for why more children should receive free school meals, both through the eligibility threshold and auto-enrolment, and for ensuring that is properly funded, given the challenges our schools face.

Why are free school meals so great? Well, as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers) powerfully outlined, we know that well-fed children have better educational outcomes; children who took part in universal primary free school meal pilots in east London and Durham achieved on average two months more progress in their SATs. We also know that children's concentration and behaviour improve. Behaviour is a real challenge at the moment for teachers up and down the country. We know that children end up eating healthier, because packed lunches tend to have more calories from fat, as opposed to carbs and other sources of calories, and they are higher in sodium and sugar. We know that free school meals help parents to save time and money—on average £10 per week—and, as we have heard from the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby and my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, analysis by that well-known left-wing think-tank PricewaterhouseCoopers shows there is a huge economic benefit: for every £1 invested, there is £1.38 return.

Why do we need more children to be eligible for free school meals? We know from the Child Poverty Action Group that some 900,000 children living in poverty are currently missing out on free school meals. The threshold that is used at the moment—£7,400 of family income—is shockingly low. It was last uprated in 2018; we are now in 2025, and we all know about the inflationary pressures and the cost of living crisis that we have faced. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones), who is no longer in his place, mentioned in his intervention, about a million children are set to lose out on free school meals as a result of the migration of legacy benefits to universal credit. The temporary extension to the arrangements is due to expire at the end of this month. I really hope that Ministers will take urgent action on that, because we cannot afford to see yet more children losing out on free school meals.

I recognise that I happen to represent a relatively affluent constituency, but that does not mean that there is no poverty there; in fact, it is often in more affluent constituencies that pockets of poverty tend to be hidden and overlooked. I was moved to tears a while back when a mother came to see me at my surgery. She had fled an abusive relationship and, as a result of the domestic abuse she had suffered, she was on mental health medication. She told me, "I have had to forgo my medication so that I can use the money I would have spent on a prescription to enable my daughter to have

lunch when she goes to college." Those are the sorts of decisions, dilemmas and choices that families up and down the country are having to face so that children and young people are well fed and can focus on their studies. That cannot be right.

I support the ambition, which a number of hon. Friends and other hon. Members have set out, of offering free school meals for all primary school children, but the Liberal Democrats recognise that money is tight at the moment. Therefore, extending free school meals to all primary school children is probably unachievable at the moment, and we should take a more targeted approach. That is why we are strongly committed to delivering the recommendation that Henry Dimbleby made to the last Conservative Government in his food strategy that the eligibility threshold for free school meals should be increased to £20,000, for children in both primary and secondary school. Let us remember that hunger does not end at the age of 11 and, where we have scarce resources, target them at the most needy children and young people at both primary and secondary. Welcome though the breakfast clubs are, we have heard time and again, not least from the children's charities that gave evidence to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee, that there are concerns that the most needy children will miss out and not take up the breakfast club offer.

Even with the current low eligibility threshold for free school meals, far too many children are missing out, but, shockingly, we do not know how many are missing out, because the last time the Government assessed how many children who were entitled to free school meals were actually taking them up was 2013—12 years ago. We know that at that point 11% of children eligible for free schools meals were missing out. Based on current numbers, the Liberal Democrats estimate that around 230,000 eligible children are missing out today. In a report published last week, the Education Policy Institute notes that those least likely to register are younger primary children, typically from the most deprived local authority areas. Although there are universal infant free school meals, it is still really important that parents register if their child might be eligible, because, as we have heard, that brings with it pupil premium funding for our schools.

I beg the Minister to look seriously at auto-enrolment. Last week, the House considered a private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb)—a Labour Member—that would introduce auto-enrolment. The Education Committee has strongly recommended auto-enrolment, and at least two amendments on it, including a Liberal Democrat one, have been tabled to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and will be debated this afternoon. In Liberal Democrat-led Durham county council this academic year, as a result of auto-enrolment, 2,500 more children are getting a free school meal and £3 million of pupil premium funding—money to help support our most deprived children to learn and thrive in their schools—has been delivered to schools in Durham.

In responding to Friday's debate on the private Member's Bill, the Minister said that he was talking to colleagues in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology about data sharing to enable more auto-enrolment at local authority level, but children cannot afford to wait. There are all sorts of challenges with data sharing, but

[Munira Wilson]

this can be done nationally. If the Government are going to persist with the changeover from legacy benefits to universal credit, with more children missing out on free school meals as a result, this is one mitigation they can take right now.

Before I finish, I want to touch on funding. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Alison Bennett), who is no longer in her place, touched on the fact that we have to fund free school meals properly where children are eligible for them. I welcome the Government's recent uplift in funding for universal infant free school meals, but it has increased by only 28p, or 12%, since the Liberal Democrats introduced the universal infant free school meal policy in 2014—at that point it was funded at £2.30 per pupil per meal; it is now £2.58—since when food prices have increased by 29%.

For most of that time, the funding stayed static. In the last Parliament, I and many other hon. Members campaigned hard for an uplift in per-meal funding. I was very pleased when Nadhim Zahawi finally moved a little bit on that, but the funding is still lagging behind inflation. Schools are having to find cost savings in other budgets to fund universal infant free school meals, which they have to deliver by law. As a London MP, before the Mayor of London introduced free school meals for all primary pupils, I heard from many of my primary schools that they were charging juniors more per meal in order to subsidise infant meals, because the Government were not giving them the requisite funding. If we want high-quality, nutritional meals for our children, they need to be funded properly. That is a very important lesson to learn as breakfast clubs are rolled out.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Eastleigh and for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young) have pointed out, there are alarming stories of schools picking up costs of between 60p and 80p per breakfast. That is just not sustainable. Schools do not have the extra money to subsidise breakfast clubs. We need breakfasts that have nutritional value. I asked in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee whether breakfast club breakfasts will consist of just a piece of toast and a glass of water, or whether they will actually be nutritionally valuable for children.

We know that there are big logistical challenges for small schools of delivering breakfast clubs. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire) mentioned children who cannot get to school in time, particularly those in temporary accommodation. Families in temporary accommodation travel from Croydon, Slough and further afield to Twickenham, and some spend two hours each way travelling. Those are the children who most need a breakfast, and they are the most likely to miss breakfast club.

In conclusion, providing a hot, healthy meal in the middle of the day for every child in poverty is the right thing to do both morally and economically. The Government have the opportunity to do the right thing today by supporting new clause 7 tabled to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh. If they are serious about spreading opportunity—they tell us most weeks that they are—they have the chance to step up today to improve educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged,

to boost their health and nutrition, and to help every child, no matter their background. If the Minister wants to deliver on that mission, I hope to see Labour Members marching through the right Division Lobby tonight when we call a vote on new clause 7 to raise the eligibility threshold for free school meals and auto-enrol every child that meets it.

10.25 am

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): It is wonderful to see you in the Chair, Mr Dowd. I congratulate warmly the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis), and I commend everyone who has taken part in the debate, including the hon. Members for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy), for Redditch (Chris Bloore), for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), for Winchester (Dr Chambers), for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young) and for Twickenham (Munira Wilson). Of course, I also commend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). Today is a big day for him, because it is the day that Parliament will finally debate whether St Patrick's day should become a UK-wide public holiday. We are doubly grateful to him for joining us this morning ahead of that moment.

This is a very important debate on a very important subject. Nutrition for children is clearly fundamental, for all the reasons that the hon. Member for Strangford talked us through. Later today, colleagues will have a chance to discuss the welfare system overall—what it is designed to do and what it does well. We should note that free school meals, in economist speak, are a particularly efficient benefit, because they are a benefit in kind. They go directly to people with a demonstrable need and provide a direct benefit, which helps them in their schooling.

I was proud that the last Government extended free school meal eligibility more than any previous Government. We took spending to over £1 billion a year to deliver, by the end of our time in government, free lunches to the greatest ever proportion of children—over a third, compared with one in six in 2010—despite unemployment coming down by 1 million, 600,000 fewer children growing up in workless households and the proportion of people in work but on low pay halving as a result of the national living wage. By the end of our time in government, more than 2 million pupils were eligible for benefits-related free school meals, a further 1.3 million infants in years R, 1 and 2 were eligible for universal infant free school meals, which were introduced in 2014, and 90,000 disadvantaged students in further education were eligible for free meals.

With any benefit or programme as important as this, of course there will always be things that we need to keep under review and update, and there are always issues. I think there are eight principal issues, which I hope the Minister will speak to; most of them have been covered by colleagues in the debate. The first is the per-meal funding rate of £2.58, which clearly needs reviewing over time, particularly in the light of the Budget changes, including measures such as the increase in national insurance contributions, which have raised costs.

Colleagues have talked about the quality of school meals, and it is right that standards are kept under review. Indeed, the Minister's colleague, the Minister for School Standards, committed in this place on 7 May last year that Labour in government would look again

at the guidance on school food standards. There have been calls—we heard them again today from the hon. Member for Twickenham—to change the £7,400 threshold. I should be clear that that is earned income, not total household income. Again, in this place on 7 May last year, the right hon. Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), a distinguished Labour MP who is now a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions, asked about that.

There have also been calls to make school meals year-round—the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby mentioned that—and to copy the example of London by making all primary school pupils eligible for free school meals. Indeed, I believe that the Minister said at the Labour party conference in September that the Government and his party were looking carefully at the London example to see what could be learned and derived from it.

There is also the question of children who are educated otherwise than at school, which we have debated in Westminster Hall, including with the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby—it may have been the last time, or almost the last time, that I was sitting on the Government Benches. On that occasion, we made it clear that we would put into the guidance the eligibility and the reasonable adjustments requirements. It would be good to hear how that is working operationally.

There is a good case for auto-enrolment. Some local authorities are running pilots; the Government should learn from that and seek to implement auto-enrolment. Historically, it has been hard to do, because of legal reasons and systems issues. The systems issues have ended, because technology has moved on, and a legal basis can be found, so I hope the Minister will be able to move forward with that.

Finally, on the question of eligibility, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate mentioned the transitional protections under universal credit. There was a campaign in 2018—let us euphemistically call it a creative deployment of the truth—that suggested that the then Government were about to remove free school meals eligibility from hundreds of thousands of children. I remember it well, because I was a Minister at the time. It was not true; in fact, what has happened with universal credit transitional protections is that many more children have become eligible for free school meals. In fact, that is a major reason why one in three children is now eligible for free school meals. The big question for the Government is this: will they take steps to keep the number of children eligible for free school meals at roughly a third of children? Perhaps the Minister can say a little more about how they will do that.

Beyond lunch, there are other aspects of meals at schools. In addition to the school fruit and vegetable scheme, there is also the holiday activities and food programme, which often takes place in schools and which the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby mentioned. We are proud to introduce that programme, which will be backed by over £200 million of funding and eventually extended to all 153 local authorities in England.

Then, of course, there is breakfast. We introduced the national school breakfast programme in 2018. Although Ministers often talk about school breakfast provision as if it was a new idea, by the end of our time in government, 2,694 schools were involved in the national school breakfast

programme, serving about 350,000 pupils. It was targeted, including by area deprivation, and eligibility was on a whole-school basis. The formula gave a 75% subsidy for the food and delivery costs. Crucially, programme remains available to this day to eligible secondary schools, as well as primary schools.

We worry a lot these days, rightly, about school attendance. Breakfast provision has a bigger effect on school attendance in secondary schools than it does in primary schools. I think the Government have confirmed that they are retaining indefinitely the national school breakfast programme for secondary schools. It would be helpful to hear the Minister confirm whether that means that at least the current level of support will be retained.

There are many more breakfast clubs than those in the national school breakfast programme. Some have a modest charge; some have a universal element—for example, every child can have a bowl of porridge, but other things are available. Some schemes use the pupil premium to subsidise it. Of course, just as with any wraparound provision, if a pupil being at breakfast helps to support a parent to go to work, typically the parent would be eligible for reimbursement of up to 85% of any costs through their universal credit payment.

On 24 February, the Secretary of State for Education said in the main Chamber that one in seven children in the pilot schemes has no current before-school provision. By my basic maths, that means that six in seven of those children do, so breakfast clubs in schools are quite widespread.

The Government say that the current programme is a pilot. Given that there are thousands and thousands of breakfast clubs in schools across the country, some of us were wondering what they were piloting—perhaps it was the angle of pour of the cornflakes, or some other difficult, technical detail. It seems that they might be trying to pilot how little they can get away with. The Government like to say to parents that they will save them £450 a year through breakfast clubs. Now, £450 per year divided by 190 school days—can anyone do that live?—is £2.37 a day.

There are one-off costs being provided for schools—£500 plus £1,099—but the per pupil rate is as little as 60p per day, although it is a little higher for pupil premium pupils. I would say that there is a big old gap between the 60p a day that the Government will give to schools and the £2.37 that they say they will save for parents, and I would like to know how they expect schools to make up that gap. I have no doubt that the Minister will say, “Ah, but it’s only a pilot,” but will he commit to increase the rate if it turns out to be too little to cover schools’ real costs?

10.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Stephen Morgan): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) for securing a debate on this important subject, and all Members for the spirit in which they have contributed.

Free school meals provide pupils with essential nutrition, support school attendance, improve behaviour and set children up for success by ensuring they can concentrate, learn in the classroom and get the most out of their education. They are essential to breaking down the

[Stephen Morgan]

barriers to opportunity and tackling child poverty—a task that is more important than ever because of the legacy of rising child poverty left behind by the previous Government. There are 700,000 more children in poverty now than in 2010, and more than 4 million children now grow up in low-income families.

As part of our plan for change, we are determined to tackle the scourge of child poverty and break the unfair link between background and opportunity. We have already taken wide-ranging action, despite this Government's incredibly challenging fiscal inheritance, including by setting up the child poverty taskforce. The taskforce is considering a range of levers to tackle child poverty, including key cost drivers for households such as food, to develop a comprehensive strategy that will be published this year. That is in addition to action that we are already taking to deliver on our mission to break down barriers to opportunity. The first 750 schools will begin offering free breakfast clubs from April, backed by more than £30 million of investment, to boost attainment, attendance, behaviour and wellbeing.

It is important that children eat nutritious food at school. The Department encourages schools to take a whole-school approach to healthy eating. The school food standards restrict foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, and ensure that schools provide children with healthy food and drink options so that they get the energy and nutrition they need across the school day. Free school meals must comply with those food standards.

Under current free meal programmes, about 2.1 million disadvantaged school-age pupils—24.6% of all pupils in state-funded schools—are already eligible to receive benefits-based free meals. A further 90,000 16 to 18-year-old students in further education are entitled to receive free meals on the basis of low income. In addition, all pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England's state-funded schools are entitled to universal infant free school meals. That benefits about 1.3 million children, ensuring that they receive a nutritious lunchtime meal. In total, we already spend more than £1.5 billion on delivering those programmes, and eligibility for benefits-based free meals drives the allocation of billions of additional pounds of disadvantage funding.

As a number of Members said, we want to ensure that as many eligible pupils as possible claim their free school meals, and we will make it as simple as possible for schools and local authorities to determine eligibility. To support that, we currently facilitate the process of claiming free meals through the provision of the eligibility checking service. This digital portal, available to local authorities, makes verifying eligibility for free lunches quick and simple. The checking system is being redesigned to allow parents and schools to check eligibility independently from their local authorities. This system will make it quicker and easier to check eligibility for school meals and has the potential to further boost take-up for families meeting the eligibility criteria.

In addition, we are aware of a range of measures that are being implemented by local authorities to boost the take-up of free lunches. We welcome locally led approaches. By working directly with their communities, local authorities can overcome the barriers to registering and take action to ensure that families access the support for which they

are eligible, subject to these activities meeting legal requirements, including those on data protection. As with all Government programmes, we will keep our approach to free school meals under continued review.

In addition to free schools, the Government are also investing in breakfast clubs, as I have mentioned, as well as the holiday activities and food programme this year. As my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) alluded to, we have tripled the investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million in the 2025-26 financial year, to help to ensure that children are ready to learn at the beginning of the school day. Local authorities will also receive over £200 million of funding for the holiday activities and food programme for 2025-26, which will provide healthy meals, enriching activities and free childcare places to children from low-income families, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning.

A number of points have been made about funding arrangements for free school meals. Schools are funded for benefits-related free meals at £490 per eligible pupil per year, and receive that as part of their wider core funding. That figure is increasing to £495 per eligible pupil for the next academic year. Universal infant free school meals and further education free meals are funded through direct grants, valued at £2.58 per child per meal. That is an increase of 2% on last year's rate of £2.53 and reflects the latest GDP deflator inflation forecast. Funding is not ringfenced, which means that schools have autonomy over how meals are delivered, which can include entering into contracts with suppliers and allocating funding within their budgets. I can assure Members that we will continue to work closely with the school food industry to monitor sector challenges.

I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) to discuss his views and ideas later this month, as we continue to work with local authorities to break down barriers to opportunity and deliver this Government's plan for change. I know that he will welcome the Government's roll-out of breakfast clubs, which on average will put £450 back into the pockets of parents, as well as ensuring that children are socialised and ready to learn at the start of the school day.

I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his contributions; a Westminster Hall debate is never as rich or courteous without his attendance. He kindly acknowledged my willingness to engage with the Minister of Education in Northern Ireland on our shared challenges. I can assure the hon. Member that I will continue to engage with the Minister.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh and a number of other Members, including the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), spoke about a range of issues to do with auto-enrolment and data-sharing initiatives by local authorities. We are aware of a range of measures that councils are implementing to boost the take-up of free lunches. To support those local efforts, and as the hon. Member for Eastleigh stated, my Department is working with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to explore legal gateways that could enable better data sharing. In the meantime, we will continue to engage with stakeholders to understand the barriers for households who meet the criteria for free lunches but are not claiming them, including by working closely

with local authorities, including those mentioned in today's debate, to understand the approaches that are being taken.

Members have raised points about the lack of data on take-up. As mentioned, data from 2013 indicates that 89% of children eligible for free school meals receive it. We have been unable to update that figure due to data limitations, which we are actively working to resolve.

The hon. Members for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young) and for Winchester (Dr Chambers) spoke about breakfast club funding. I encourage them to look at the detail of the guidance issued to schools, which will set out that an average-sized primary school with 50% take-up in the breakfast club scheme will receive around £23,000 per year as part of the early adopter scheme. For context, the previous Government's programme would have given a similar school £1,600. This shows that the Government are delivering real investment to deliver our plan for change.

I welcome the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) back to his rightful place on the shadow Front Bench, even if it is just for this morning. As he and the hon. Member for Twickenham said, transitional protections were put in place to ensure that children whose families were moving from legacy benefits to universal credit did not lose out. We will move to the next phase of transitional protections from 31 March, and I can assure hon. Members that no pupil will feel any change until after the summer. As with all Government policy, we will keep our approach to free school meals under review.

As a number of Members have stated, the Government inherited an extremely challenging fiscal environment, including a £22 billion black hole in the public finances. The child poverty taskforce is considering in the round

how we tackle the drivers of child poverty and its impact on children. Access to healthy, nutritional food will continue to be part of those conversations.

The provision of free school meals to the most disadvantaged pupils is vital. Access to healthy and nutritious meals free of charge supports the health, learning and wellbeing of some of the most disadvantaged pupils. I again thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh for securing the debate on this important subject. I also acknowledge the engagement of other Members in this place, along with the work of key stakeholders, whom I engage with regularly. We will continue to ensure that the most disadvantaged children receive the support that they need. I thank all Members for their contributions on this important matter, alongside the football banter—"Play up Pompey!" I hope it is clear from my comments that the Government are committed to breaking down the barriers to opportunity and to putting the subject of child poverty and health very much at the forefront of our agenda as a mission-led Government.

10.46 am

Liz Jarvis: I thank all the Members who have spoken in this debate. The biggest takeaways for me are that the way to ensure that all children have enough to eat at school is to raise the threshold for families who qualify for free school meals, to scrap the two-child benefit cap and to have auto-enrolment for free school meals. I urge the Government to listen to the lived experiences of teachers who are trying to deliver free school meals or breakfast clubs, because they are all struggling, in my constituency and across the UK. It is really important that the Government take that on board.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered free school meals.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

Stations: Step-free Access

10.59 am

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I will call the Member in charge to move the motion, and I will then call the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention for 30-minute debates. I exhort Members to think of what I just said a few moments ago. I call Mr Paul Kohler to move the motion.

Mr Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) (LD): I beg to move,
That this House has considered step-free access at stations.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. We are here today to discuss an issue of great importance to many across the country. No one could accuse this Government of dragging their feet on reform of our public transport system. With the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill en route to the Commons from the Lords, the rail reform consultation and the call for ideas on an integrated transport strategy, big steps are under way. All that activity presents us with a real opportunity to put accessibility at the heart of our public transport system to deliver a network that will serve everyone—but the devil will be in the detail and it is incumbent on the Government to move on from lofty rhetoric to the hard reality of making our transport system accessible.

More than 60 million people in the UK have a disability, or around a quarter of the total population. Those living with a disability take 28% fewer journeys than those who do not—a telling indictment of our current provision. There are issues on all forms of public transport, but arguably the greatest obstacles exist in rail services. According to a study by Transport for All, only 30% of disabled respondents said they used trains with confidence, and 10% said they do not use them at all. There are many reasons for this, including overcrowded trains and inadequate toilet provision. However, the biggest issue remains the absence of step-free access. Currently, only about a quarter of train stations are fully step-free from street to platform, making much of the rail network unusable for wheelchair users, and incredibly difficult for those with other mobility issues.

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): Constituents of mine with disabilities have had accidents at railway stations in Yeovil because of the lack of support staff and inaccessible systems for booking assistance. Does my hon. Friend agree that Great Western Railway and other operators must be made to ensure that there is proper support staff at stations such as Yeovil Pen Mill and Yeovil Junction?

Mr Kohler: Yes, I agree. It is not just about the physical provision, but having staff available, which I will come on to later in my speech.

As I was saying, accessibility is a problem not only for wheelchair users but for those with other mobility issues, including those with pushchairs or luggage, so we need to address the problem of step-free access. The Government have made some progress on this in recent years—though by no means enough—via the Access for All scheme. Since its inception in 2006, it has provided step-free access to around 300 stations, something that should be acknowledged.

I was very proud to recently cut the ribbon at the new Motspur Park station, which is now fully step-free for the first time in its 100-year history. After a decade-long campaign by local Lib Dems and efforts by my predecessor, we finally achieved what local Tories in Wimbledon said was impossible: delivering a station of which all users could take advantage.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member on his work on the station in his constituency. In my constituency, Northwich station has been without a step-free crossing since 2013, when the barrow crossing was closed. He will be aware that the Government have set out, as part of Great British Railways' six objectives, that accessibility should be part of that. I am sure he welcomes that. Does he agree with me that we need to see another round of Access for All applications while Great British Railways is being established, so that there can be a pipeline of work while that is going on?

Mr Kohler: Yes, indeed. Access for All stalled under the previous Government and we must give it new impetus. The hon. Member is absolutely correct.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and setting out the challenges. One of the challenges for me as a Scottish MP is the fact that the Scottish Government are responsible for nominating stations for Access for All, but it is a UK Government fund. My own station of Leuchars for St Andrews is a huge challenge because of the vast numbers of people who come to visit St Andrews. I understand the Leader of the House said that the Minister was considering the future of the Access for All fund. Does my hon. Friend agree that what we are hoping to hear this morning is a commitment to that fund?

Mr Kohler: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We absolutely need a commitment from the Government. That is what we are looking for today. Now where was I up to?

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Kohler: Yes—that might be useful, while I look for my place.

Helen Morgan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing my intervention and for making such a great speech. Many stations, such as Whitchurch station in north Shropshire, are well advanced through the Access for All scheme, but funding has been pulled at the last minute. Does he agree that there is a really good pipeline of work ready to go and ready to be built, and it would be great if the Government could reopen the scheme and get on with those that are ready to go?

Mr Kohler: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct—I had got to exactly that point in my speech. Despite the successes, the Access for All scheme has failed to deliver on its potential, but hon. Members need not take my word for it. In May 2024, the current Rail Minister, Lord Hendy, then chair of Network Rail, said Access for All had “significantly underperformed” over the previous five years, having stalled under the previous Government. Of the 149 schemes due to be completed

in that period, only 77 were—and, in what seems to be a first for a Government infrastructure project, there was an underspend of £99 million.

Natasha Irons (Croydon East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for securing the debate. East Croydon station in my constituency is the 21st most used station in Great Britain. It has a bridge that has been closed for 10 years, despite the use of local taxpayers' money, national funding and developer funding. We also have Norwood Junction station, which is the 79th busiest in the country and has no lift access at all. Does he agree that this is not just about reinvigorating the Access for All scheme, but about ensuring that it is delivered consistently, that we create local partnerships and that what is delivered makes sense to the people who are impacted?

Mr Kohler: I agree entirely with the hon. Member. All those components have to come together.

I must remember where I get to in my speech when I take an intervention. In an answer to a written question, I have been informed that an internal review into the shortcomings in the scheme has been conducted but has not been released. I therefore ask the Government to commit to doing so today. Many more stations have not even secured funding to begin the journey to step-free access. Stations in my constituency, including Malden Manor, South Merton and Morden South, are still waiting, with no prospect of anything happening any time soon.

There are also problems with the requirements that govern station modernisation. Believe it or not, it is not a given that step-free access will be incorporated in any new scheme. The current regulations state that if development is taking place at a station that serves under 1,000 passengers a day and there is another step-free station within 50 km—yes, 50 km—no step-free access needs to be included in the scheme; rather, there needs just to be some form of provision to include it at a later date. We all appreciate the need to spread developments across the network, but do the Government really think that 50 km is a practical distance to travel to use an accessible station?

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for giving way—he might like to mark where he is in his speech. I pay tribute to him for his speech. Swanscombe station, in my constituency, is not part of the Access for All programme at the moment, but it sits in a deep chalk cutting with no step-free access and with steep stairs, and is therefore completely inaccessible to local people. The transport misery for residents is increased because the main road out of town, the A226 Galley Hill road, has collapsed and has been unusable for two years. Does he agree that Access for All has not achieved its aim of ensuring that very many stations are accessible, and that far too many have lain outside the scheme for too long?

Mr Kohler: Like other hon. Members, the hon. Gentleman makes the point that this is an issue across the country. It absolutely needs to be addressed if we want to make our transport system fit for all residents.

If a development is already taking place, surely that is the ideal time to ensure that the station is step-free, instead of causing disturbance at a future date. Wimbledon Chase, in my constituency, is about to undergo a major redevelopment, but step-free access is not being provided.

That makes no sense. I understand that the previous Government conducted a consultation on potential changes to the regulations, so do the Government plan to move forward on this issue?

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Bristol Parkway is well used by people from my constituency, but those with mobility issues have faced lifts being out of action for weeks on end. Does my hon. Friend agree that not only do we need step-free access at stations, but it is vital that that access is reliable and properly maintained? That should be a subject for regulation, too.

Mr Kohler: My hon. Friend makes a good point; I got to the point in my speech entitled “Lifts out of action”, so I will start that now—how prescient of her.

The issue is not only the lack of step-free access. Even where there is provision, it is often unreliable. It is clearly unacceptable that those who rely on step-free access to plan their journeys—based on the limited number of stations available—discover only on arrival that the lift is out of action. The Office of Road and Rail found that there were more than 5,000 lift faults on the network from April to October last year—an increase of 9% on the same period the previous year. Furthermore, there has been a deeply concerning increase in the number of entrapments. The number of entrapments went up by more than a fifth in the last six months, with almost 400 entrapment events from April to October 2024 and an increase of 42% on the number of entrapments of more than 75 minutes.

The situation on the London underground last year was even more appalling. Only 92 out of 272 London underground stations are step-free, but those are often out of action, not just from faults, but due to a lack of staffing. A recent Lib Dem freedom of information request showed that there were 1,254 incidents last year, totalling 6,197 hours when the lifts were working perfectly well but train staff members were not there, meaning that those who rely on them cannot use the station.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): Will the hon. Member give way?

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. Paul Kohler.

Mr Kohler: Wimbledon Park tube station in my constituency had the highest number of incidents, with the lifts not working on a shocking 132 occasions. That was not always the case; in 2015 there were only 65 occasions across the whole year. Things deteriorated from that point, and in 2019 the Mayor of London told the London Assembly that he had been

“clear with Transport for London...that these instances must be further reduced.”

Sadly, that did not happen, and the situation has continued to deteriorate year on year. I appreciate that it is primarily a matter for the Mayor, but will the Government please raise that issue with him?

Time is short, so I will finish up, but we must note that lifts are by no means the only issue. Even if individuals can reach the platform, boarding the train is often incredibly difficult, and 67% of station platforms are too narrow for wheelchair users to turn at the base of a ramp. It is estimated that just 2% of stations actually have level boarding between the train and the platform. That is simply not good enough.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): My hon. Friend is laying out the case very clearly for more certainty about the future of Access for All funding, and the real, crying need for many of our communities to have level access to public transport. Does he agree that stations such as Bredbury in my constituency, where a passenger can travel in one direction with level access but not in the other, are affecting people's decisions about whether to take employment—making this a growth issue for our country, not just a fairness issue?

Mr Kohler: My hon. Friend has also shown how prescient she is, because I am about to reach that point in my conclusion. It is clear that the Government need to take urgent action on all this. There is a desperate need to get our economy growing, and ensuring that our infrastructure is accessible should play a key part in that. We hear today that the Government are reviewing the benefits system to get more people back to work. Surely they see that making public transport accessible is a crucial part of that endeavour. Accessibility is not just a good-to-have; it is vital to creating a more inclusive and productive country. I hope the Government are listening.

11.13 am

Kate Dearden (Halifax) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Mr Kohler) on securing this important debate on step-free access at stations. We all recognise how vital our transportation system is to the daily lives of millions across the country. It is the backbone of our economy, connecting people to jobs, opportunities and essential services, while also enabling people to spend time with friends and family. Crucially, it is also about ensuring that everybody, regardless of their mobility, can access those same opportunities.

At a recent meeting hosted by a fantastic organisation based in my Halifax constituency called Lead the Way, which provides invaluable guidance and support to people with learning disabilities and to their families and carers, I had the opportunity to hear directly from constituents about the significant impacts that inaccessible travel can have on their lives. As I said to those constituents, and I say to Members today, I absolutely share the passion for delivering transport infrastructure that is not only efficient, but inclusive. The principle of step-free access at stations is a vital element in ensuring that we have a transport system that works for everyone.

The Government's ambition is to see everybody using our transport network with ease and confidence. That means giving disabled people, older people and those with additional needs access to the services that many of us take for granted. Since 2006, the Access for All programme has been pivotal in advancing that goal. Since launching, the programme has developed step-free, accessible routes at more than 260 stations, as well as smaller-scale improvements at more than 1,500 stations, including accessible toilets and improved customer information systems. The Department has been clear that the need for step-free access at our stations is not just a matter of convenience, but a matter of fairness. That is why, since April 2024, 22 stations have been completed under the Access for All programme, with a further five due to be completed by April 2025.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): A constituent with mobility issues recently wrote to me about his concerns about Wivelsfield station in Burgess Hill. It was part of the Access for All scheme, but the money for improvements has yet to be forthcoming. It is another example of a station like that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Mr Kohler), where one side of the platform is accessible but not the other. Will the Minister ask officials to look into what is happening at Wivelsfield station and write to my office with an update on progress?

Kate Dearden: I thank the hon. Member for her contribution, which has been noted and heard. I am just coming to an update on the Access for All programme. As I mentioned, 22 stations have been completed under the programme, with a further five due to be completed by April 2025. That will be the highest number of stations completed in any single year since the programme began, but we know our work is far from done.

Much of our rail network was designed in the Victorian era. It was an impressive engineering achievement for its time, but it falls short of meeting the accessibility standards that 21st century passengers rightly expect. Today, only a fifth of stations across Great Britain offer step-free access to and between all platforms. However, it is important to recognise the progress made, with 75% of journeys now passing through step-free stations, which is a significant improvement on 50% in 2005.

I share hon. Members' frustrations that changes have not happened at the pace people would like to see. The Network Rail performance at the end of control period 6 was not good enough, with a number of projects late and over budget. We have taken steps to rectify that, including restoring a strong national oversight team at National Rail, so that best practice between routes and regions can be shared.

Under the previous Government, 310 nominations were received from Network Rail, train operating companies and other strategic transport organisations for the next round of Access for All. Last year, a list of 50 stations selected for initial feasibility work was announced. I am pleased to report that significant progress has been made with those studies. To date, 29 feasibility studies have been completed, with remaining studies on track for completion by the summer.

Helen Morgan: Will the Minister commit to those stations that have had their design and feasibility studies done? Some had commitments from the Minister in the previous Government, before the election was called. Can she commit to getting on with those stations? It is extremely frustrating for residents in places such as Whitchurch, who thought they were getting Access for All but have had the rug pulled from under their feet.

Kate Dearden: We will continue to take the Access for All programme forward as fast as funds allow. We will write to her with any updates we can provide. We are strongly committed to making the oldest railway in the world accessible to everybody and we will announce the stations progressing to design in the summer. We remain committed to building on progress and Ministers are carefully considering the best approach for the Access for All programme in control period 7. The Department for Transport will provide updates to all stakeholders in due course.

Wendy Chamberlain: Can we get a timescale on that? It sounded like lots of warm words and commitment and passion, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) said, there are now communities waiting with expectation. What timescale is the Department working to?

Kate Dearden: We will be able to make an announcement over the summer. I will not stand here today and make unfunded spending commitments—as Members will probably appreciate, that would be far above my pay grade. We will announce the stations that are progressing to design in the summer and the outcome, most likely, after the spending review.

The programme is, of course, vital to ensure that people with disabilities, parents with prams, who Members have mentioned, and older people, as well as anyone with reduced mobility, are not excluded from our public transport system. It is about giving everyone the same opportunity to travel freely, with dignity and without encountering unnecessary barriers.

Access for All is just one element in improving access to railway stations, and I will highlight some recent successes. The Elizabeth line has made significant strides in improving station accessibility across all 41 stations on the line, setting a benchmark for future projects, including level boarding from platform to train in its central section. That means that passengers with wheelchairs or other mobility aids can board trains without the need for assistance, thanks to the alignment of platforms and trains at the same level, which is a significant achievement for inclusive design.

Another notable example is the Northumberland line project, with all six of its new stations having step-free access. That ensures that everybody, regardless of their physical ability, can access a service, eliminating barriers and promoting equality. The stations are designed to accommodate passengers with mobility challenges by

providing ramps, lifts and other accessible features. We are also pleased that the trans-Pennine route upgrade is set to deliver step-free access at all but one of its stations once the upgrade work is complete.

In addition to those specific projects, the broader rail industry is taking steps to improve step-free access in both existing and new stations. The Office of Rail and Road plays a crucial role in that effort by setting guidelines and taking enforcement action against companies that fail to meet accessibility requirements. The industry is held accountable to standards that require a commitment to step-free access as part of its service offering. When those requirements are not met, the Office of Rail and Road can take the necessary actions to ensure compliance, which may include fines or forcing the implementation of corrective measures.

I have highlighted the importance of delivering step-free access across Great Britain, which reflects the Government's unwavering commitment to improving accessibility. Programmes such as Access for All, alongside major advancements such as the trans-Pennine route upgrade and the Elizabeth line, demonstrate the progress that we are making.

In conclusion, I urge all Members to continue to advocate for step-free access at stations, not just as an aspiration but as an essential part of our transport infrastructure. Together, we can ensure that no one is left behind. The journey towards an accessible and inclusive transport system is one that we can and must complete.

I again thank the hon. Member for Wimbledon for securing this important debate and I thank everyone else here for their contributions to it. I wish you all a great day.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 am

Sitting suspended.

Shipyards: Economic Growth

[CHRISTINE JARDINE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Richard Baker (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of shipyards in economic growth.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank all hon. Members for attending the debate, because shipyards and shipbuilding are iconic symbols of the industrial heritage of the United Kingdom. From the Belfast poetry of Carnduff and the folk songs of England, from the north-east to the south-west, to the words of Donald Dewar at the opening session of the re-established Scottish Parliament, evoking:

“The shout of the welder in the din of the great Clyde shipyards”, they are part of the economic and social history of these islands.

Our shipyards and the industry and creativity of their skilled workers have been sources of pride for local communities that have too often felt a keen sense of loss whenever a shipyard closed, as many did in the course of the previous century. When I was elected in July, the threat of closure for the Methil yard in my constituency was very real. After three centuries of the yard being the beating heart of the local economy, it was clear within days of this Government taking office that Harland and Wolff, seen as the saviour of the yard after the collapse of previous owners BiFab in 2021, was itself in dire financial difficulties.

That was a hugely anxious time, not only for Methil but for other Harland and Wolff yards in Belfast, Appledore and Arnish, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton), with whom I shared many challenging meetings on the prospects for the yards. Those were times of stress and worry for the future for all workers at each of the four yards. It was essential that, where the previous Government had not acted, this Minister and her colleagues took decisive action to save the yards. Many of us were relentless in making the case for the four yards, because not only their facilities but the skills and commitment of their workforces are essential for our mission for economic growth.

I want to pay tribute to the workers at the yards and their unions, Unite and GMB, who fought for their future. In particular, I thank the union representatives at Methil yard, Dougie Somerville of Unite and George McClelland of GMB, who worked alongside the yard’s manager Matt Smith to make the case for the yard to be saved. George started working at Methil in 1973, which is even before I was born. His commitment to the yard has been amazing, and it has paid off.

I recognise it was no easy process to secure a deal for Navantia UK to take on all four yards. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister for Industry had to go to great lengths to secure a deal. For the Scottish yards, an important advocacy role was played by the Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar. I was also pleased that there was positive dialogue between UK and Scottish Ministers on the future of the Scottish yards. I hope that spirit of collaboration continues, working together to promote the facilities at the yards.

It was deeply dispiriting to see yesterday’s announcement that the £175 million contract for seven loch-class vessels to serve our island communities had not been awarded to a Scottish yard but has gone abroad. That is highly disappointing for the shipbuilding industry in Scotland. It is a great concern for Ferguson Marine in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey). SNP Ministers simply have to show more ambition for Scotland’s shipyards.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for raising this subject and particularly for referring to the workforce at Ferguson Marine, who have lost out on that small vessel replacement programme, sending 170 jobs down the Swanee. Those workers were political pawns in a nationalist game, which I guess came to its peak when the First Minister launched a ship with painted-on portholes.

All is not lost because it was only phase one of the small vessel replacement programme that went to Poland this week. There is a phase two, which would provide vessels for my constituency: two ferries for the Western Isles and one for Iona. Surely the answer that the Scottish Government should seek to find is that phase two be rolled into phase one and that a direct award be made to Ferguson’s shipyard on the Clyde, which has experience of building those small vessels. We can save jobs, we can deliver the ferries and we can serve the people of the Western Isles by making a direct award.

Richard Baker: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend who, as always, is a doughty campaigner for his constituents. He has also put forward very practical proposals that offer a real way forward to ensure that those vessels are built by Scottish shipyards. We should all be working together to fight for the future of Scotland’s shipyards, so it is a matter of regret, particularly after the announcement yesterday, that we have no Members from the Scottish National party in Westminster Hall for this debate.

The sad news yesterday was in stark contrast to the day of excitement and celebration when the Minister for Industry, who is here today, visited Methil to mark the formal handover of the yard to Navantia UK. Let us hope that in the future we will have joint working and effective collaboration between UK Ministers and Scottish Ministers, and that Scottish Ministers show some ambition for future investment in and contracts for shipyards in Scotland.

Let us be clear that saving the yards is not an act of charity to their workers or the communities they support. The reason it is so important to save these yards is that they have an essential strategic role in promoting economic growth in this country. In 2024, the economic output of our shipyards was £2.7 billion. Between 2019 and 2024, the economic output of the sector increased by 72%, at a time when the overall value of the manufacturing sector declined by 2.4%.

Today, there is so much potential for our shipyards to play an even greater role in growing our economy. The national shipbuilding strategy had already set out plans to deliver a pipeline of more than 150 new naval and civil vessels for the UK Government and the devolved Administrations over the next 30 years. Ports are now one of the five key sectors earmarked for £5.8 billion of investment through the National Wealth Fund.

Those plans for investment are all the more important today, as the budget for defence spending increases to enable the UK to fulfil our responsibilities to Ukraine and in other arenas.

Laurence Turner (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine, and I draw attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and my membership of the GMB and Unite trade unions.

I thank my hon. Friend for his words about the workers at Arnish and I know that he has played a very important role in advocating for that yard. He talked about the national shipbuilding strategy and defence orders. Historically, all Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary orders were fulfilled by UK shipyards. That changed in 2012 when the MARS tanker order was awarded to Daewoo in South Korea. Subsequently, the 2017 national shipbuilding strategy made it an assumption that all such defence orders would be put out to international tender, bar some exclusions. Does he agree that that has been a source of real uncertainty in a sector that needs long-term planning, and that in future any industrial strategy should provide maximum assurance about the pipeline of orders for our domestic shipbuilding yards?

Richard Baker: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important and very eloquently argued point. We need to have such security for our shipbuilders and our shipyards, and our procurement strategy must support that agenda. Later, I will say more about how the ambitions about the security of future work at our shipyards that he has just set out can be realised.

It is our shipyards and our shipyard workers who will be crucial in developing our new defence capabilities, including the more than 350 skilled workers from my constituency who work at Babcock in Rosyth, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and Dollar (Graeme Downie). It is not only in defence that our shipyards have a key role to play in economic growth, but in renewables as well. It is right that Labour's green prosperity plan highlighted the role of ports in growing our renewable sector.

Navantia's plan for Methil is that it will become the business's centre of excellence for offshore wind manufacturing in the UK through Navantia Seanageries, its specialist renewable energy division. Navantia has announced plans to modernise both Methil and Arnish, with advanced fabrication and assembly capabilities, aligning with national commitments to secure domestic energy security while meeting our ambitious energy transition targets. I believe it would make great sense to extend the Forth green freeport area to include Methil and, in doing so, provide important incentives for that vital work.

In addition to yards being centres for renewables infrastructure, the transition towards low-emission ships and sustainable materials presents opportunities for innovation and leadership in environmentally friendly maritime technology. Green shipbuilding can be incentivised through Government procurement, and with the current scale of procurement in shipbuilding, there is also a role for the Government to encourage collaboration between naval shipbuilders, rather than running competitive tenders for each project. Most of all, the huge potential for growth in shipbuilding and fabrication in this country can only be achieved by investing in skills.

We have an ageing workforce in our shipyards, but the prospects today for young people joining the industry are bright. That makes it all the more important that we recruit and train young people in the skills our shipyards need. In Methil, there are plans for comprehensive training programmes, including on-site training at Navantia's Spanish facilities—when I talked to apprentices on a cold day in Methil, they were right behind those plans—which demonstrate Navantia's commitment to developing a highly skilled local workforce. It is important that the UK Government, devolved Governments and local skill agencies support that vital work.

One of the moments after the Methil yard was saved I found most rewarding was when Neil Cafferky, an apprentice draughtsman at Methil, had the opportunity to tell the Prime Minister what it meant for him that he would be able to continue his apprenticeship at Methil. Neil studied at Fife College and New College Lanarkshire before beginning his apprenticeship at the yard in 2021. That journey of skills and training has been amazing for Neil, because in 2022, Neil was a finalist in the Scottish Renewables young professionals green energy awards.

Neil is not alone in having a bright future at Methil. Of the 200 workers whose jobs at the yard were saved, 51 are apprentices. They are among thousands in the shipyards across our country. Investing in our shipyards means thousands of young people having the prospect of skilled, well-paid jobs throughout their career, with all the benefits that will bring to them, their communities and their country.

The actions taken by Ministers early in this Government show that they understand the importance of our shipyards in growing our economy. If we seize all the fantastic opportunities we have to grow our shipyards and boost the brilliant, highly skilled workforces that they employ, the story of shipyards in this country is not only one of a proud history, but of a vibrant future as well.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate and, if possible, keep to an informal five-minute time limit to allow everyone to get in. I call Edward Morello.

2.44 pm

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) on securing this debate.

Dorset does not enjoy the kind of large shipyards that the hon. Member outlined, but the marine industry is vital to Dorset's economy. It generates £483 million in gross value added and supports more than 8,000 jobs. Importantly, 71% of those jobs are in boatbuilding, reinforcing the sector's importance to the region. Local shipyards and boatbuilders provide high-quality, skilled employment in coastal communities; they offer well-paid jobs in areas where such opportunities are often limited.

However, the industry is at a crossroads. The shortage of skilled workers in the area is now the single greatest barrier to growth. We must do more to attract and retain talent in the sector. One key opportunity lies in supporting women in boatbuilding. Historically, women have been under-represented in this industry. It estimates that only 2% to 5% of hands-on yard workers are women.

[Edward Morello]

However, initiatives such as Women in Boatbuilding are changing this. Women in Boatbuilding has played a transformative role, particularly in Lyme Regis, where it has helped the Boat Building Academy, which I recently had the pleasure of visiting, to achieve a 50:50 gender split on its flagship boatbuilding course. Women in Boatbuilding not only promotes diversity, but drives economic growth. By making shipyards and boatyards more inclusive, we widen the talent pipeline, ensuring the industry's long-term sustainability. With the right support, more women will enter the profession, leading to greater innovation, a stronger workforce and a more resilient industry.

Supporting new talent is vital, but we must also protect the heritage of traditional boatbuilding. The National Shipbuilding Office recognises that the leisure sector accounts for 14% of the UK's shipbuilding industry, yet traditional boatbuilding is being neglected. In 2023, traditional wooden boat building was added to the Heritage Crafts Association's red list of endangered crafts, highlighting the urgent need for action. Without intervention, we risk losing centuries-old skills that have built and maintained iconic vessels—from Dunkirk's little ships to HMS Victory. These crafts not only preserve our maritime history, but contribute to our economy.

The solution is clear: we need central support and funding dedicated to preserving traditional boatbuilding skills. Without that, apprenticeships remain inaccessible outside the south-west, skilled labour shortages will worsen and our internationally admired shipyards will struggle to compete. Dorset has a proud maritime heritage and a thriving marine industry, but it needs investment, skills development and a commitment to inclusivity to ensure its future success. We have the talent, expertise and global reputation. Now we must ensure that this industry has the resources to grow, to innovate and to inspire the next generation of boatbuilders. Let us invest in our shipyards, our workforce and our maritime heritage before it is too late.

2.47 pm

John Grady (Glasgow East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) on securing this important debate. He spoke very knowledgeably about the topic, and his incredibly successful work to secure the future of the Harland and Wolff yard in Methil demonstrates what a conscientious, hard-working fighter for his community he is. I am proud to call him my friend.

Shipbuilding is a growth industry. Between 2019 and 2024, the economic output of the shipyard sector in the UK increased by 72%—I wish we could say that about much more of the British economy. There are almost 39,000 employee jobs in that industry in the UK, with 19% in Scotland, so it is an industry that we must get behind. It is central to Glasgow and the Clyde region. As everyone knows, Glasgow has a proud history of shipbuilding. At one point, more than 100,000 people were working in 38 yards along the Clyde; at the turn of the last century, almost one in four boats sailing in the world was built on the Clyde, so shipbuilding is in Glasgow's blood. The number is much lower now, but like any Glasgow MP, I have constituents who depend on the shipyards on the Clyde for work, and they make a significant contribution to Glasgow's economy.

We have world-class defence shipyards. We have two shipyards on the upper Clyde and they are operated by BAE Systems. They have a long history of developing first-class ships for defending the United Kingdom, and the new Type 26 frigates at the dockyards will do the same. This creates wealth across Glasgow, including in my seat. We also have a brilliant maritime education sector in Glasgow, and much of this is in my seat, on the Clyde. City of Glasgow college, trains craft apprentices for the BAE Govan and Scotstoun shipyards, and BAE has a brilliant on-site skills academy. City of Glasgow college also trains very many merchant navy officers in the UK, and many of those involved live in my seat, including in the Gorbals, as I find regularly when I knock on doors.

We need to keep warship building work in the UK. Make no mistake: this is essential for national security. We may wish for the world to be different, but we have to take it as it is. Skills in military and domestic shipyards are very important as we face this unpredictable world.

Civilian shipyards could also provide great opportunities in Glasgow, such as in renewable energy. Of course I would like to see Government support for shipbuilding, but it has to be deployed wisely. Taxpayers and the wider economy expect that money to be deployed wisely. Regretfully, that has not been the case with the SNP Government, who own the Ferguson Marine shipyard in Port Glasgow, just along from my constituency. They have spent more than £500 million on two ferries, which are hundreds of millions of pounds over budget. They nationalised the yard in 2019, but despite it being state-owned, Audit Scotland in December 2024 raised very serious concerns about governance at the yard. It said:

“Internal audit has not been able to provide assurance on FMPG's risk management, control and governance arrangements” and other matters.

Yesterday, we learned that Ferguson Marine had lost out to a shipyard in Gdańsk on a £175 million contract to build vessels for the Scottish Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey) is entirely correct that the Scottish Government have prioritised opportunities in Poland over those in Port Glasgow. The outcome of six years of SNP control of that shipyard is hundreds of millions of pounds wasted; it is an absolute scandal.

The SNP Government have failed the people of Port Glasgow—some of the most deprived communities in our family of nations—while wasting hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. Port Glasgow desperately needs good jobs, as does the whole of the Clyde region and Glasgow, and we should be incredibly angry at that SNP scandal. That is another SNP Government failure: they have failed Glasgow and the Clyde region on shipbuilding, education, health, transport and economic growth. After 18 years of the SNP, Scottish shipbuilding and Scotland need a new direction.

2.51 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. It seems to be a regular occurrence in Westminster Hall now. I wish you well and thank you for all you do.

I thank the hon. Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) for leading the debate. I am very pleased to be here. He mentioned Harland and Wolff,

which I will talk about as it obviously plays a critical role in Northern Ireland. For the record, the Minister has played a significant role, along with others, in ensuring that its future is a lot rosier than we thought it would be. We were worried about its future, but the Minister and others have ensured that it looks much brighter.

Shipbuilding has been crucial for the UK for decades. It generates hundreds of thousands of jobs and improves infrastructure between mainland Britain and the devolved institutions. I am honoured and pleased to be here to showcase the success of our fantastic shipbuilding sector. Gone are the days when Harland and Wolff employed almost 30,000 people in Belfast. It is down to about 1,000 or 1,500, but it hopes to grow to 2,000, 2,500 or maybe even more.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Northern Ireland paved the way in shipbuilding. Some of the world's most iconic ships were built at the heart of Harland and Wolff in Belfast. Everyone knows of the famous Titanic, probably for the wrong reasons—the tragedy in which all those people lost their lives—but there were also the RMS Britannic and the RMS Olympic. At the time Harland and Wolff, in the neighbouring constituency of Belfast East, represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), was one of the largest, most famous shipbuilding companies in the world. We are proud of that rich history.

I am proud to be able to speak about what Harland and Wolff has done in Northern Ireland and the jobs it has created. The tradition of shipbuilding, although not as big as it was, is still significant within Harland and Wolff across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is and was a global hub for shipbuilding. The sector employs hundreds even today, so it is important that we protect and preserve it, and retain people and give them opportunities. We want to protect and retain shipbuilding skills, including metalworking and engineering.

We are rich in shipbuilding culture for many reasons, including defence, global trade, imports, exports, design and engineering—the hon. Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife mentioned that in his introduction. In September 2024, Harland and Wolff entered administration for the second time in five years. In January 2025, with the help of Ministers and others, it was announced that the Spanish-owned firm Navantia was to take over ownership, maintaining the core roots of the historic shipyard in Belfast and elsewhere in this United Kingdom.

Maintaining jobs is at the core of any administrative takeover. Many employees who worked in Harland and Wolff before the takeover lived in my constituency and still do. I remember the tradition of shipbuilding even in the small village of Greyabbey, which I lived just outside of. The number of people who worked in the shipyards in the 1960s and '70s and even in the '80s was significant, as it was in Newtownards. Like some of those people, employees today are fearful of job losses and redundancy. The Minister has also been involved—for which I thank him—in the Spirit/Airbus takeover. Employees are not in control of which sectors are bought, which poses a massive question mark to their livelihoods, and indeed their futures.

Shipbuilding contributes billions of pounds to the United Kingdom economy, both centrally and through devolution. We continue to export and repair ships and

we have a part of the defence contract as well, which we are very proud to have. It massively contributes to the value of our trade and goods. Furthermore, some 36,000 people are employed in our wonderful Royal Navy. Shipbuilding is imperative for our defence capabilities, from defending our overseas territories to protecting our sea trade routes. Without the shipbuilding sector and the staff and people that have made it what it is, success would not be possible. Warships and submarines are built in other areas across the nation, including areas in England and Scotland and in the constituency of the hon. Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife, who introduced the debate. I am surprised that his colleague, whose constituency I cannot remember, is not here. He has always been very much to the fore in naval debates. I expected him to be here to wax lyrical about what he would do. I can remember his name but not his constituency.

Richard Baker: I think the hon. Member might be recalling my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and Dollar (Graeme Downie), who is at this moment at the Rosyth port meeting Babcock. His passion for his community and for that yard is, as the hon. Member knows, very strong.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for filling in that gap. *Hansard* will pick up on the constituency and keep it right. The only reason the hon. Member for Dunfermline and Dollar (Graeme Downie) is not here is because he is away doing something very practical in his own constituency, so well done to him.

We must continue to prioritise shipbuilding for the future, so I look to the Minister for the commitment that I know is already there. Just for the record, it is always good to have the reassurance that we all seek. There are steps that the Government can take to provide direct financial support to the shipbuilding sector, both centrally on the mainland and regionally to the devolved nations. Infrastructure development is massively important for the United Kingdom, from our safety right through to the food in our supermarkets. I am old enough to remember things that we used to say in my history class: we are an island built on coal, surrounded by waters full of fish. I am not sure whether that is true any more, but it tells us that the role of ships in connecting our islands is very important.

The history goes back centuries and is something to be proud of. In Northern Ireland it is always great to look back and recollect the successes of our past and still be grateful to this day that shipbuilding is as important as ever, despite being under the control of different companies. It still creates jobs, wage packets and opportunities and helps us grow as a nation.

I will conclude with this. I look to the Minister for her commitment to the industry and to the staff that will ensure it continues for the future. I am pleased to see the Minister, who has shown commitment, in her place. In all the things that I have brought to her attention, I have never once found her wanting, and I am sure we will not find her wanting this time, either.

2.59 pm

Irene Campbell (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) for securing this debate on

[Irene Campbell]

this very important topic. In Scotland the ferry fleet is years old and replacements have not been ordered in a timely way, which has caused chaos and difficulties for many of those in island and mainland communities. Now more than ever, we need a robust ferry replacement programme to ensure that our island communities are fully connected to the mainland. This debate provides an opportunity to highlight the importance of a UK shipbuilding industry.

Take my constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran and the impact that the lack of an effective ferry replacement strategy has had on our local communities, especially the island communities. Two state-of-the-art ferries were commissioned by the Scottish SNP Government for routes to the Isle of Arran. However, that was not what the community really needed or wanted. What we actually needed were smaller ferries that fit in the existing port at Ardrossan harbour, not new and expensive ships. We needed ferries that were built locally and which could provide a reliable and much-needed service, rather than the stop-start one we have at the moment. That is due to myriad issues, too many to mention in this debate. One of the new ferries is the one that had the painted windows seven years ago, which I will speak about in a moment.

The ferries were originally commissioned in 2015 and were scheduled to be ready for service in 2018. Glen Sannox has only entered service this year, 2025, and has already been recalled due to faults. Glen Rosa is due to be ready for September 2025—seven years too late for the people of Ardrossan and Arran. Had there been a planned, sustainable order procurement process we would not be in the position we are in Scotland. When planning for future projects, the Scottish Government need to prevent the Ardrossan harbour situation from ever happening again. That should be done through robust and thorough planning.

Ardrossan's economy has for many years relied on the harbour. The Isle of Arran is becoming isolated, suffering economically from a lack of tourism as sailings have been greatly reduced. Residents suffer as they cannot access essential services on the mainline, such as hospital appointments—so this is serious. We are now in the position where we might lose the port of Ardrossan because a ship has been built that cannot fit in the harbour. That will severely affect the local economy of Ardrossan and Arran and that of the surrounding area.

As we heard earlier, the recent procurement process to build seven new small electric ferries has awarded the contract to a non-UK bidder. It is a real pity to see the local nationalised shipyard Ferguson Marine, which has a track record of building smaller vessels on time and in budget, miss out on new contracts such as this.

I would like to finish by highlighting the importance of shipbuilding to national strategy. UK shipyards play a key role in our defence, as the Royal Navy depends on them for the construction and maintenance of their vessels. Given that we are increasing the defence budget to 2.5%, I think we can all agree that it is time to revisit and reinvigorate this overlooked industry.

3.2 pm

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): I look forward to serving under your leadership this afternoon, Ms Jardine. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and

Mid Fife (Richard Baker) for securing this debate and for an interesting, passionate opening speech. I also congratulate him and everyone involved in securing the Methil yard to make sure that there are jobs, opportunities and of course ships in future.

It is often said the Clyde built Glasgow and Glasgow built the Clyde. To anyone familiar with our city, that is more than just an expression: it is a way of describing the relationship that Glaswegians have with the Clyde. For centuries, it was a major shipbuilding river with some 30,000 ships built in yards in Glasgow and along the 116 miles of the Clyde. The expression "Clyde built" was synonymous with quality and was one that Glaswegians were particularly proud of. With the decline in shipbuilding, a major source of work, industry and pride was taken from the city.

As we have heard, the latest blow was delivered just this week when Ferguson Marine, established in 1903 and the last yard on the lower Clyde, lost out to a Polish company on a contract to build seven electric ferries for CalMac. Ferguson is a Scottish Government-owned company. It has been at the centre of controversy following delays and overruns in the construction of two new, much larger, ferries for CalMac. The contract for the Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa was originally awarded in 2015. It was not until January 2025 that the Glen Sannox was put into service.

I will skip the bit about a First Minister of Scotland launching a ferry in 2017, when it was incomplete and had portholes painted on.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Tell us more!

Patricia Ferguson: I was going to skip it because I thought I would save the blushes of the SNP Members present but, as none is present, I will carry on. It was the indignity of indignities perhaps to see a First Minister of Scotland launching a ferry with portholes painted on—something that was drawn attention to at the time, but did not seem to faze her. Perhaps we should have learned that the person in question was unembarrassable.

However, just last week, the ferry in question, brought into service in January 2025, was found to have a crack in the hull. Fortunately, that seems to have been overcome and the ferry is back in service. However, the award of the contract to a Polish company is very disappointing, as the contract for the seven new, smaller ferries was seen as a way of allowing Ferguson Marine to move forward, to put its troubles behind it and to build the kind of ships that it has expertise in doing. It was also a way to ensure the continuation of shipbuilding on the Clyde and the preservation of the jobs of the workers there.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey) said yesterday, CalMac's decision is incredibly disappointing and is a result of the Scottish Government failing to provide a direct award to the yard. That should never have been allowed to happen. Now no workers in Scotland, let alone Inverclyde, will benefit from those contracts. My hon. Friend was absolutely right to say that. By way of contrast, I will just mention that, in Stavanger last week, on a visit with the Scottish Affairs Committee, I saw a new electric ferry built in Norway, for Norway.

We have heard about the difficulties that many of our island communities have in reaching the mainland. We have heard about the issues that islanders have in accessing appointments and going about their business in the way most of the rest of us who do not live in island communities expect to, but an additional problem is caused by the age of our ferry fleet. People on the islands find it very difficult to go about their business island to island. The interconnectedness of our islands is suffering, too.

In my constituency of Glasgow West and stretching across the Clyde into Glasgow South West, we have BAE Systems, which makes the Type 26 frigate, which is highly rated around the world and highly adaptable, too. As well as contracts with the Ministry of Defence for eight frigates, Australia and Canada have chosen that particular frigate for their fleets and work is ongoing to try to secure a major contract with Norway, which would be hugely significant for both countries in terms of not just the export of the frigate itself, but what it would mean to our relationship and the defence of the two nations.

Last year, I visited BAE Systems' new training academy, built at a cost of some £15 million. BAE recognised that skills in areas such as welding were in short supply in the UK and has set about training the workers of the future, as well as upskilling existing workers, and training the leaders of the future. The state of the art academy is teaching 200 young people every year about project management, the management of cranes and welding, to name but a few of the jobs that people are being prepared for. The way in which innovative technology is used in the academy is remarkable. The young people I met that day are clearly relishing the opportunities they have.

Obviously, BAE Systems is training the workers it needs for the future—men and women, to take the point made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello)—but I would be surprised if some of the skills acquired in the academy were not also utilised in our green energy transition, and in the transition towards low-emission ships and sustainable and environmentally friendly maritime technology. It is clear to me that those young people will ensure that the term “Clyde-built” will continue to be a designation denoting high quality for decades to come.

3.9 pm

Mr Richard Quigley (Isle of Wight West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) for securing this debate on the role of shipyards in economic growth, which is particularly important to coastal communities such as those in my constituency. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Irene Campbell) that I can match her issues with ferries and raise her some.

For an island community like ours, shipbuilding is not just an industry, but part of our identity, our economy and our connection to the mainland. The Isle of Wight has a proud history of maritime innovation—from the pioneering days of Saunders-Roe, which led the way in hydrofoil and hovercraft development, to Wight Shipyard today, which is a leader in high-speed, low-carbon vessel construction. Across the island, boatbuilders such as Lallows boatyard and Diverse Marine, and marine engineering firms such as White Marine, continue to provide skilled employment and contribute to the wider

maritime sector. We are especially proud to be Europe's leader in aluminium welding, where world-class craftsmanship, cutting-edge technology and an unwavering commitment to innovation combine to shape the future of the industry.

But the significance of shipbuilding on the Isle of Wight extends far beyond jobs and exports. It is about connectivity and resilience. As an island, we are uniquely dependent on our ferries. Companies such as Wight Shipyard play a crucial role in designing and constructing the vessels that keep our communities connected, including the Thames Clipper boats here in London. Investing in shipbuilding on the Isle of Wight is about not just economic growth, but securing our transport lifeline, ensuring that our ferries remain reliable, affordable and fit for the future. Our ferries are not a luxury; they are essential. They support commuting, tourism, healthcare access and supply chains. By backing local shipbuilders, we can develop and maintain the vessels we rely on, reduce costs and drive innovation in greener, more efficient transport. In doing so, we strengthen not just our economy but the very infrastructure that keeps the Isle of Wight moving.

Shipbuilding on the Isle of Wight should not just be a story of the past; it must be a driving force for our future. At a time when coastal economies need regeneration, the industry has the potential to unlock long-term sustainable growth. The skills, expertise and infrastructure are already here. Investing in our shipyards means creating high-quality jobs, boosting local businesses and ensuring that the island remains at the forefront of maritime innovation.

There are real opportunities. The clean maritime demonstration competition has already funded innovative projects. We have the chance to position the Isle of Wight as a centre of excellence for low-carbon vessel design, but we need long-term commitment. We need capital investment, research and development support, and fair procurement policies that recognise the value of British shipbuilding. For instance, Wight Shipyard refurbished our Border Force boats and has the capability to build the new fleet at considerable savings to the current estimates. It just needs a route into the procurement process.

I urge the Minister to recognise the strategic importance of shipyards, particularly for island communities such as the Isle of Wight. By investing in our shipbuilders, we are not just creating jobs; we are securing the future of our island economy, strengthening our transport resilience and ensuring that Britain remains a global leader in maritime innovation.

3.12 pm

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) on securing this debate.

For centuries, shipbuilding has been a pillar of British industry, contributing not only to our maritime heritage but to the economic prosperity of our coastal communities. In the 1790s, Whitby was the second largest shipbuilding port in England. Indeed, a certain Captain James Cook learned his seafaring skills in the town, and his marvellous ship, the Endeavour, was also built there. Hon. Members can find out more about our proud shipbuilding history by visiting the Captain Cook memorial museum or Whitby museum.

[Alison Hume]

Today, Parkol Marine Engineering at Eskside wharf in Whitby has a workforce of more than 70. In 2017, it opened a second yard in Middlesbrough. Parkol has customers from across the UK and Europe, for whom it builds fishing trawlers as well as fully custom designs. Recently, it won two public tenders, which it wants to capitalise on to obtain more work in the workboat industry. This is important, because in a town where low-paid and seasonal jobs in tourism and retail predominate, Parkol offers young people in Whitby much-needed skills and opportunities, as well as apprenticeships in manufacturing, engineering, fabrication and business. That all significantly contributes to our local economy. Parkol told me that a lot of the necessary skills have been lost or are carried out by workers towards the end of their careers, so it strives to promote reintroduction of those skills via in-house apprenticeships.

Beyond direct employment, shipyards provide contracts for steelmakers, electrical engineers, software developers and countless other businesses. It is crucial that we recognise that broader economic impact and ensure that shipyards receive the backing they need to thrive. As Members have referenced, shipyards are more than just workplaces; they are engines of economic growth and cornerstones of national security. We must give them the best possible chance to grow.

Parkol's location on the east coast positions it well for carrying out maintenance work on crew transfer vessels and workboats employed on wind farms or offshore projects in the North sea. It has a floating dry dock, but it was built in the 1990s and now it has outgrown it, which means that larger vessels have to use slipways in Scotland and Holland. It is looking at how to increase its capacity, but has struggled to identify suitable funding or grant streams.

I am pleased that the Government have made clear their commitment to supporting job creation and long-term growth in the shipbuilding sector. I ask the Minister to commit to a bold vision for our shipyards, big or small, ensuring that they continue to serve as a source of national pride and economic prosperity for communities such as mine for generations to come.

3.16 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a pleasure to speak in any debate chaired by your good self, Ms Jardine.

I, too, note that a certain political party from Scotland is not present today, which is a disgrace. Let us think about what it would be like to be working in Ferguson's right now. Through no fault of the workforce—there is nothing wrong with their skills—they have been left out, which is pretty bad, and not one of those Members bothers to show up. I would not let them run a birthday party in a brewery, if I can put it that way.

Nevertheless, we have had good news about the frigates that are going to be built in Scotland. I suggest that there will probably be a greater necessity to build more of them, and I imagine that that work could come to Scotland. We have the skills and we should be proud of that.

When I was growing up in the highlands, there was a dismal litany of depopulation. When I was at Tain Royal academy, the brightest and best—and many others—

went south. Indeed, my father said to me, "Go south, young lad, to work and to prosper." But then the oil came. I give credit to the then Labour Government for seeing the potential of North sea oil and for lifting the ball and running with it, because those crucial decisions in the early 1970s created the industry that we have today.

Because of where the potential yards were situated, and the need to get them to the North sea, it made sense to build them in the Outer Hebrides, Kishorn, Ardersier and Nigg. In the early 1970s, we saw the transfer of the skills that have already been mentioned from the Clyde and other parts of the UK. Those skills moved north to build the mighty structures that we have today in the North sea.

I worked in the Kishorn yard on the Ninian Central Platform, which in its day was the biggest concrete structure ever built, and in the Nigg yard for a number of years. At the height of North sea construction and fabrication, no less than 5,000 people worked in the Nigg yard. Hon. Members can imagine what a difference that made to the local economy of that remote part of the highlands—depopulation disappeared just like that.

People moved in. We made jokes about them—no offence to hon. Members from the west of Scotland—and called them Hey Jimmys, because they all came in saying, "Hey Jim!" They got my name right, because I am James, which was rather charming. It was a shot in the arm to see, in my home town of Tain, people coming in from south-west Scotland and other parts. What that meant in terms of amateur operatic societies, and just doing things in the community, was a great change—very much for the good. I remember those days with great happiness: I married and I brought up my children because of the employment in those yards. That was why I did not move away and why I disobeyed my father's instructions.

More recently, as has been mentioned, we have seen the potential of floating offshore structures. As I have said, the Nigg yard where I worked was placed where it was because it was in one of the finest deep-water ports in the United Kingdom, where big structures could be built and moved relatively easily out to the North sea. For that reason, I am grateful to the Government for the announcement in the last few days that £55 million will be given to the port of Cromarty firth to develop an alongside fabrication facility to create and put together those modular structures that can then be taken out. I thank the Government for that very welcome decision.

From that investment, we can do great things in future, but I also suggest that time is of the essence. The skills mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow West (Patricia Ferguson) are ageing. If they are lost, they could be gone forever, because they are clever skills such as butt welding and all the different sorts of fabrication in steel, aluminium or concrete. In getting ahead with what we are doing now, we will be in the nick of time to train up new generations based on past generations' knowledge and ability. I welcome that.

This has been a well-tempered debate—apart from the conspicuous absence of some hon. Members—which sends a good message to everybody who cares about our shipbuilding industry. Everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet, which is to be welcomed because, as others hon. Members said, it was shipbuilding that made

this country great. We have the skills and the people, and we can do it again, but this time with offshore and other similar structures.

If a Government Member would like to visit my constituency to see what we are going to do, they would be more than welcome—to say the least. I may be in a different party, but I extend the hand of friendship. I know that a visit would mean a great deal to the local people.

3.22 pm

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) on securing this debate on the often overlooked but critical contribution of great shipyards to our nation's economic strength, employment prospects and national security. Many hon. Members have spoken with great passion and knowledge about the sector and about yards in their constituencies. My own constituency is a stone's throw from Leighton Buzzard, which is the furthest point in England from the sea, so I cannot speak with any local knowledge but I absolutely acknowledge the shipbuilding sector's critical role.

For centuries, shipbuilding has been a cornerstone of British industry, sustaining local economies, providing skilled jobs and securing our place as a maritime power. As we have rightly heard during this debate, the UK's shipyards have played a dual role—driving economic growth at national and local levels while ensuring our security at sea. Under the previous Conservative Government, decisive steps were taken to secure the future of British shipbuilding and maintenance, including supporting jobs, upskilling our workforce and reinforcing our defence infrastructure. Under the new Government so far, we have seen a more lacklustre set of steps taken towards supporting this sector.

Shipyards are more than just industrial sites; they are economic lifelines for the communities that surround them. For example, in Portsmouth and Govan, BAE Systems surface shipyards have been instrumental in building the Royal Navy's cutting-edge fleet. The last Conservative Government's commitment to the Type 26 and Type 31 frigate programmes guaranteed long-term employment and training opportunities for engineers and apprentices. Those contracts not only secured local jobs, but strengthened the wider economy.

In Cumbria, the BAE Systems submarine yard in Barrow-in-Furness has been at the heart of our nation's defence. Thanks to strategic spending by the previous Conservative Government, Astute-class and Dreadnought-class submarines continue to provide thousands of highly skilled jobs while reinforcing Britain's nuclear deterrent. That is a prime example of how economic security is directly linked to national security. Spending on our defence industry ensures that we remain prepared for the threats of the future.

In Birkenhead, Cammell Laird has been a stronghold for commercial and defence-related shipbuilding. Contracts secured under the previous Government provided much-needed stability, supporting jobs in the north-west and reinforcing the UK's ability to maintain its naval and commercial fleets.

One of the most important aspects of shipbuilding is its role in training the next generation of workers. The previous Conservative Government recognised that,

and supported and backed apprenticeship schemes that ensured that young people could gain the skills needed to drive innovation in the sector. The workforce at shipyards such as Govan and Barrow-in-Furness includes thousands of highly trained welders, engineers and naval architects. We ensured that their skills were passed down through new training programmes and partnerships with local colleges.

Without continued spending, there is a real risk of losing that expertise to foreign competitors, yet the current Labour Government have failed to provide the necessary assurances to sustain those initiatives. The lack of new contracts, clear strategic direction and industry support has left many shipyards facing an uncertain future.

Richard Baker: I share the hon. Member's ambitions for our shipyard sector. I was recently at the Rosyth dockyard in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and Dollar (Graeme Downie), where the workforce were excited about the future. They were already looking forward to a long order list and now feel in a position for that to grow, given the prospect of increased defence spending. Does the hon. Member agree that the strategic aim set out by the Government provides great opportunities for our shipyards and shipbuilding sector?

Greg Smith: That is indeed good news. The Conservative party, as His Majesty's loyal Opposition, has supported the Government's increases in defence spending. We moderately disagree on the pace of that increase, because we want to go considerably faster, but I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point about the good news for that particular shipyard.

I ask the Minister whether, following the defence uplift, the Government will commit to construct all our military vessels in the United Kingdom. The link between economic security and national security cannot be overstated. A strong shipbuilding industry means a strong Royal Navy, ensuring that the UK remains a global maritime power. It also means domestic manufacturing capabilities, reducing reliance on foreign suppliers and keeping critical national infrastructure under British control.

The Conservatives understand that reality. When we were in government, our national shipbuilding strategy was designed to create a steady pipeline of work to provide stability for our shipyards and to ensure that Britain could defend herself in an increasingly unpredictable world. That approach guaranteed not just warships but support vessels, reinforcing our ability to project power on the world stage.

However, the Government's delay in awarding many new contracts and the absence of a clear vision for the future of UK shipbuilding weakens our defences and threatens those skilled jobs. That threat extends to virgin steel production—a critical component in the shipbuilding supply chain. The Government have failed to negotiate a deal with the United States, whereas we secured the 500,000-tonne tariff-free agreement when in government. The lack of a deal is a real threat to the industry.

Shipbuilding depends on steel production, which is already suffering from Labour's failure to negotiate. Will the Minister provide the crucial update on talks with the United States that people whose jobs are on the

[Greg Smith]

line are desperate to hear? We need urgent action to safeguard our economic and national security interests. Does the Minister have any ongoing concerns, or is she confident in the future of those sites? The Government's handling of Harland and Wolff when the company needed financial support—it was threatened with administration, and the Government did little or nothing to stop that—was hardly a boost of confidence for the thousands of jobs that depend on the supply chain.

Patricia Ferguson: I thank the hon. Member for taking an intervention. I am not sure whether he misheard or did not hear the earlier part of the discussions in Westminster Hall this afternoon when Members on this side of the House and Liberal Democrat Members talked about the fact that Harland and Wolff was saved in both Methil and Northern Ireland. That is surely something to be celebrated across the Chamber.

Greg Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention, and it is absolutely good news that Harland and Wolff has survived, but throughout the entire summer, not long after the new Government were elected to office, there were constant asks for financial support that were not forthcoming. It took a very long time. This is fundamentally a debate, but I would gently suggest that the saving of Harland and Wolff—which I reiterate is good news—happened in many respects despite the early actions of the new Government and not because of them.

Patricia Ferguson: Would the hon. Member take another intervention on that point?

Greg Smith: It is a debate, so by all means.

Patricia Ferguson: I am grateful for that good-humoured response. Does he accept that the problems with Harland and Wolff did not just arise after a Labour Government were elected? Given that the Labour Government were able to announce that Harland and Wolff would continue and survive in December—fewer than six months after they came into office—it seems to me that the Government really care about the industry and worked really hard to make that happen.

Greg Smith: I am grateful for the points that the hon. Lady makes. The point from my earlier comment still stands—I was the shadow Minister over the summer; I survived my party's reshuffle—that many asks were being made by Harland and Wolff much earlier, and that was something that was not initially forthcoming. I fully accept the timeline that the hon. Lady sets out. This was not something that suddenly happened on 4 July, but when a new Government come in they should be judged on the speed of their response and exactly what is done to save that sector. We must continue to back our shipyards, provide long-term certainty for workers and reinforce Britain's position as a global leader in shipbuilding. By doing so, we will not only create a prosperous economy, but ensure that our nation remains safe and secure for generations to come.

3.32 pm

The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes

and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) on securing such an important debate. I thank him for quoting Donald Dewar in the first speech of the Scottish Parliament in 1998. I worked in an office next to Donald Dewar for a couple of years and he was an incredible man. He also said in that speech:

“We are fallible. We will make mistakes. But we will never lose sight of what brought us here: the striving to do right by the people of Scotland; to respect their priorities; to better their lot; and to contribute to the commonweal.”

The debate this afternoon has shown that many Members are carrying on in that spirit and acting in that way on behalf of their constituents.

One of the first issues that crossed our desks when we came to power last July was the challenge with Harland and Wolff. We were faced with a dilemma: if we had, as the shadow Minister suggested, thrown money immediately at the problem, we would have been throwing good money after bad. That was clear to anybody who had any sight of what was happening, but it was also clear that we were in a perilous position and we wanted to make sure that the Government could do whatever they could to save all four yards. There was a big push, for a number of reasons including the contracts that existed, to think about Belfast, and not to think about the four yards together.

A collective piece of work was done in which I played a small part and my hon. Friends the Members for Glenrothes and Mid Fife and for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton), who has the Arnish port in his constituency, as well as the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Defence and my boss the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, played a large part. They all wanted to make sure we could do some kind of deal. When I was sat in the Ministry of Defence with Navantia, we were scratching our heads and thinking, “What on earth needs to be done here?” It was a big piece of work, with a lot of hard work around the clock from officials. The Prime Minister intervened because he saw the importance of this good piece of work. My hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife made the important point that we did not want to do this work out of a sense of charity. It was because the people at Methil, in his case, are enormously skilled, offering the possibility of future contracts and operations.

We did not see it as charity; we saw it as protecting the talent we have in this country, and wanting to see it grow. When I had the privilege of going to Methil to meet and talk to some of the 200 workers, 50 of whom are apprentices, it was apparent that this was a place—though cold—where we built the things that defined the 20th century, and can also be where we build the things that will define the decades to come. It is important to keep that in mind.

I want to touch on an issue many hon. Members raised about the Scottish Government, procurement and the award going to a Polish shipyard. I was talking to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey) about that earlier today. He questioned why Poland had been chosen over Port Glasgow, which was a good question to ask. I know Anas Sarwar has also been asking questions. I heard the intervention about phase 2, and perhaps there is something to be pulled and gained from this, though what has transpired is a shame.

There is a question about procurement, which both we and the Minister for Defence Procurement are looking at. We will keep doing that, including considering the Procurement Act 2023. I will soon be talking to that Minister, not only in this area but on steel, to see what more we can do.

Jamie Stone: I thank the Minister for giving way. On that point, I do not know how well I can put this. In building offshore structures, different bits can be built in different places, but they would come to Invergordon to be amalgamated, hence the £55 million Government investment. Could the same principle apply of looking at the rules, to ensure that the different bits are built in Methil or Ardersier, rather than being built abroad? Because that is our fear, that they may be made far away in somewhere such as Poland or Korea.

Sarah Jones: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. He mentioned the importance of the £55 million that has gone to Cromarty Firth. Of course, we need to ensure, when looking at supply chains in whatever the industry, we do what we can to rebuild British jobs. In quite a few of our manufacturing industries over recent years, we have seen a slow decline, which we are keen to turn around.

I am working on the steel strategy, where we have a £2.5 billion fund that we committed to in the general election, on top of the £500 million that will be going, if delivered, to the Port Talbot work with Tata. That is a lot of taxpayers' money; we want to ensure we are spending it wisely and that we are using the levers of Government, whether in procurement or other matters, to ensure that we are building as much as we can in the UK. We obviously have to be cognisant of laws around procurement and need to look at it carefully. It is an ambition of the Government that we make things in the UK and use supply chains here as much as possible.

I am sorry about the decision that was made in Scotland. I am also sorry that there is no one here from the SNP to make their case. We will do what we can with procurement to ensure we make the right decisions. We talked about shipbuilding and shipyards and the importance—

John Grady: On the topic of SNP Members being away—perhaps they are all listening to “Desert Island Discs”, although one would not reach the desert island if the SNP were in charge—many of my constituents have family, friends and loved ones on the Scottish islands, but at many times of the year they have terrible difficulty going to see them because of the appalling ferry service. That is because the age of the fleet has increased significantly during the 18 years that the SNP has been in power and the reliability of the vessels is down, which damages businesses, people trying to go to hospitals or travelling, and industry on those islands. Does my hon. Friend agree that the way the SNP has managed the ferry service in Scotland over the last 18 years is utterly contemptible?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and I will bow to his wisdom as to why and how that situation has transpired, but for sure the ferry service is crucial for people's lives, wellbeing and health. As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Mr Quigley) said, a ferry service is not just about identity; it is also about basic necessities and lifelines.

So, I agree with my hon. Friend that there does not appear to have been good management of the ferries by the SNP, but sadly we are not overly surprised by that.

There were lots of good contributions to the debate about the role that shipbuilding can play and about some of the issues that we need to look at. We have talked a lot about defence. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife, who secured this debate, has about 350 workers in his constituency who work for Babcock and we are really pleased that the Government have committed to the 2.5% spending on defence going up to 3%. I have talked to the Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry, and of course we all think that the increase in defence spending presents an opportunity to do more here in the UK. I am working with colleagues to make sure that we get that right.

The whole point of the industrial strategy, which the Conservative party was ideologically opposed to, is to bring together the things that we do really well and ensure that all the levers of Government are tilted in the direction of turbocharging those sectors. Defence is one of those sectors, but historically defence has sort of worked to one side and everybody else has worked to another side. We are trying to bring those two together a bit, so that civil and defence can work together, learn with each other and prioritise all that activity from Government, to make sure that, as I say, we are turbocharging those eight sectors, one of which is defence.

There was a lot of talk about apprenticeships. The spokesperson for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire, talked about the apprenticeships that were set up under the last Government. Sadly, the apprenticeship levy does not work for a lot of people and we have shortages in professions such as welding. Indeed, welders have been on the Migration Advisory Committee list of people who we can procure from other countries because we are not training enough of our own. So, to see those welders in Methil learning their trade was a great thing. It was also great to hear the senior managers at Navantia talk to me about welding, because they actually know about shipbuilding and welding; they have real expertise. That was really encouraging.

We are reforming the apprenticeship levy, we are talking about how we can ensure that companies invest more in apprenticeships, and we are again looking at how we can tilt the whole skills regime towards the professions that we know we will need in the future. Engineers, welders and electricians are all on the list of the professions we need to boost in the future.

Members also talked about the opportunity provided by offshore wind and the green economy, as it were, more widely. As has been said already, Navantia plans to make Methil the centre of excellence for offshore wind manufacturing. There is also green shipbuilding, which is a burgeoning industry, and there is the whole infrastructure of monopiles and floating jackets—all of those possibilities—as well. I have also talked to the industry about the opportunities to lead the way in autonomous systems and robotics.

When we pull together the industrial strategy, the defence spending, our reforms to apprenticeships and our prioritisation of funding, including the Cromarty Firth example, the National Wealth Fund—with £5.3 billion for clean, green energy in five groupings, one of which is ports—and the clean industry bonus, which is another

[Sarah Jones]

opportunity to support growth in this sector, it is clear that the Government have a plan. That has been lacking in previous years, but we are not afraid to roll up our sleeves and get things done. We are all invested in the shipbuilding industry for reasons relating to the past and, more importantly, the future.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) talked about women in boatbuilding. I spend quite a lot of time with a lot of men in the industries I work with. That was a good point, well made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (John Grady) made a good point about the importance of spending taxpayers' money wisely in this space and not throwing good money after bad. I have talked about that already. We need to back winners and use that money as wisely as we can.

I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his kind words. He made the point that shipbuilding used to employ tens of thousands of people, but now it employs hundreds to a couple of thousand. We are realistic about that. We are talking about a smaller industry because of the changing nature of how ships are built, but it is still very important.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Irene Campbell) talked about procurement, which I have touched on already—it is very important. It is nice that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow West (Patricia Ferguson) saw the electric ferry bought in Norway, for Norway, but that speaks to a point that we are all looking at: we want to do more in the UK.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West said that shipbuilding is a lifeline, a kind of identity and an opportunity for economic growth. I agree with that, of course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Alison Hume) mentioned Captain Cook and the Endeavour. I did not know about that, but I now do. She talked about skills and apprenticeships, which I have touched on. She is absolutely right that they are very important.

This is an incredibly important area for the Government. We have put our money where our mouth is and are ready to do what needs to be done. The industrial strategy, the apprenticeship work and the defence spending present huge opportunities for the future, and I look forward to working with everyone here to deliver them.

3.57 pm

Richard Baker: Thank you for chairing this excellent debate so skilfully, Ms Jardine. I thank Members from across the House for their informed and important contributions. There has been great consensus about the exciting prospects for shipbuilding and shipyards in this country. There is the potential to invest in skills to ensure that they and the workforce are retained in our local communities, so we must build training and apprenticeship opportunities for our young people.

That commitment has been reflected by the actions the Government have taken, including the intervention to save Harland and Wolff and our investment plans to ensure shipyards have a great role in the future. I could not agree more with the points that hon. Members made about the need to invest in shipbuilding in Scotland. I would say that as an MP for a Scottish constituency. Saving the Methil yard was absolutely essential for me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow West (Patricia Ferguson) said that Clyde-built ships are synonymous with quality and reputation. We have that aspiration for shipbuilding right across the UK. Those qualities are represented by so many shipyards across our constituencies. That is why we should be passionate and confident about the future of our shipyards, and invest in them. It is hugely regrettable that the Scottish Government in the past few months and years have not shown that commitment, or evidence of support, but this Labour Government, in their first months in office, have done so.

We have been through the experience of Harland and Wolff, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) knows well. He spoke passionately about how it affects his constituents; it is so important to have a Northern Irish voice in this debate. I recall all too well what the Government inherited. Regrettably, the previous Government had done nothing for over a year to save those yards. The prospect of investing in the company as it was then was not realistic, and would only have threatened the yards further in the future. What came forward was a clear strategy that succeeded in saving the yards.

I take onboard fully the fact that there has been consensus across the Chamber that we want to invest in shipbuilding and shipyards; the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) shared in that. The Government's ambitions for shipbuilding and our shipyards are clearly shared across the Chamber. The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, and my erstwhile University Challenge teammate, the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), spoke very well about that, drawing on his professional as well as his political background. The ambition set out across the Chamber for our shipyards in renewables and defence is very clear. It is an opportunity for us to grasp.

The Government have made an excellent start, and indicated a clear plan for a bright future for our shipyards. I am pleased that the debate has reflected the commitment across the Chamber, from all the parties who were represented, to that ambition for our shipyards and our country. Apprentices, both female and male, will be looking forward to a long and bright future in our shipyards. I think we will all support that over the course of this Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the role of shipyards in economic growth.

3.52 pm

Sitting suspended.

Military Co-operation with Israel

4.30 pm

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of military collaboration with Israel.

It is a real honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. My speech for today's important debate was written and completed yesterday. My arguments were factually and systematically constructed, and at the core of my speech was essentially the pursuit of truth, with very little emotional rhetoric. I woke up this morning just before dawn, like millions of other Muslims around the world, to begin fasting for another day with some food and water, when news broke of yet another violation of yet another peace deal, as Israelis rained down bombs on makeshift shelters, slaughtering men, women and children. Perhaps like me, those men, women and children were preparing for their day of fasting, but now they will never see another sunset.

The question is this: have we provided those lethal bombs, or the parts for the aircraft that are dropping them, and has our intelligence sharing led to the slaughter of a further 400 people last night? I beg the Minister, "Please do not sit here and say we are doing everything we can," because that will add insult to injury. I accept that no one in the Labour Government has openly called for the Israel Defence Forces to be given a Nobel peace prize, but we have not even summoned the Israeli ambassador to express our concerns or contemplated economic sanctions because, in the words of our Foreign Secretary:

"Israel remains an important ally. We have an important trading relationship, worth £6.1 billion last year and involving 38,000 British jobs. I am sorry; any discussion of sanctions is just not correct." —[*Official Report*, 14 January 2025; Vol. 760, c. 152.]

I say to the family of the children who were burned alive last night that I am sorry; the Government say that we cannot afford to lose the money.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for securing this important and timely debate. He is right to refer to the Israeli airstrikes that killed over 400 people last night, shattering the fragile ceasefire and violating international law. He will also know that this has happened against the backdrop of the last two weeks, when we have seen a siege and blockade of Gaza, denying the people there food, water and electricity, which is collective punishment and in itself a war crime under international law. Does he agree that the silence of the international community is unacceptable? It is not a choice to act. The international community, including the UK, has obligations under international law and the UK Government must meet those obligations by imposing immediate sanctions on Israel.

Shockat Adam: I concur with the hon. Member completely. In the words of Martin Luther King:

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Against that backdrop, let us continue. As I mentioned, today's debate has been secured on no other premise than to find the truth. At this moment, the global order that we helped to build stands on the precipice of collapse. If we, as one of its architects, fail to uphold the

principles that we established, we will also be complicit in its destruction. No one voted me in to resolve the conflict in the middle east overnight singlehandedly, or expects me to do so, but what the British people in their millions are demanding—rightfully and unequivocally—is moral clarity, a strategic commitment to ending hostilities and the absolute assurance that our nation is not complicit in facilitating war crimes.

Today's debate will not delve into the historical archives of the conflict, which date from Balfour onwards—the Nakba, the occupation and the consistent humiliation, or the Hamas atrocities of 7 October. Instead, this is a legal and moral inquiry into our nation's military co-operation with Israel in the face of credible allegations, including of genocide, now before the International Court of Justice. The ICJ has ruled that the occupation is illegal and warned that Israel's actions in Gaza may constitute genocide. Under international law, the UK has an obligation not only to refrain from facilitating those crimes but to prevent them actively. Yet despite that duty, our country continues to engage in military co-operation with Israel. The question before us is very clear: are we upholding the rule of law?

Luke Akehurst (North Durham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the Government have introduced arms export licence suspensions, which target any weapons that might be of British origin that would be used in Gaza, but are attempting to balance that with the needs of the IDF to defend itself against acts of aggression—for instance, the Iranian missile attacks in other theatres in which the IDF is operating?

Shockat Adam: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention; that is something I will come on to. The question is very clear: are we upholding the rule of law or are we complicit in its erosion? Too often we speak in numbers. Tens of thousands are dead and millions displaced, but as the saying goes:

"A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic."

Before we proceed, I want us all to pause not to cite figures, but to honour lives lost—two specifically. Shaban al-Dalou was a 19-year-old software engineering student who had already been displaced five times. The eldest of five siblings, he had memorised the entire Quran and was just days away from his 20th birthday when an Israeli airstrike hit the Al-Aqsa hospital compound. The world witnessed the horrific image of Shaban attached to an IV bag, his body burning alive. His mother, the woman who had nurtured his every single dream, was killed alongside him. For a crumb of solace they were buried together in an embrace.

Who can forget the face of Hind Rajab, a six-year-old girl who was trapped in a car with five of her dead relatives, their bodies riddled with bullets? The whole world heard her call for help—a voice scared but full of hope. Rescuers from the Palestine Red Crescent Society responded. Unfortunately, they too were killed. These are not statistics; these are human lives. Let us take time to look at their faces. The question before us again is: did we as a nation facilitate those crimes?

Following this, in September 2024, our Government acknowledged that Israel was at clear risk of not complying with international humanitarian law and admitted that there was a risk that UK arms exports might be used to commit serious violations. Yet according to Campaign

[*Shockat Adam*]

Against Arms Trade, potentially £100 million-worth of military equipment has been approved for export to Israel, including spare parts for F-35 fighter jets that require continuous maintenance to remain operational, therefore constantly requiring spare parts. Furthermore, exports of F-35 parts are covered under what we call an open general licence, which allows unlimited exports to all approved partners worldwide., so we will never know the real numbers. Given that more than 15% of every F-35 is made in the UK, Israeli airstrikes would simply not be possible without British components.

Tahir Ali (Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for securing such an important debate. It was horrifying and heart-wrenching to wake up this morning to see more than 400 innocent Palestinians being killed, including children, bringing the death toll to over 48,000. Does he agree that Israel is not using weapons to defend itself, but rather using them against innocent Palestinians? It is time the Government took action to stop selling arms so that international law is not broken any further.

Shockat Adam: In addition to the 400 the hon. Member mentions, we have seen close to 50,000 Palestinians killed, the majority of whom have been women and children. In addition to the manufacture and supply of F-35 parts, it appears that RAF Marham in Norfolk has been used at least seven times to send spare parts directly to Israel. Since declaring a so-called suspension of arms exports, the UK has issued 34 new licences, including those for essential aircraft components. I ask the Minister directly: which licences were suspended in September 2024, which licences remain suspended, and why have the Government refused to publish details of arms exports between July and September 2024?

Our military co-operation extends beyond arms sales; it is operational, especially when it comes to using our airbase in Akrotiri, Cyprus. In one year alone, from December 2023 to November 2024, the UK conducted 645 surveillance and recon missions, which amounts to almost two flights a day. Interestingly, during the same period, the US moved heavy transport aircraft carrying military equipment to Akrotiri, and the RAF subsequently conducted daily cargo flights from Akrotiri to Tel Aviv. We have been told that those flights were for surveillance and hostage rescue, but if that is the case, we must ask why we used RAF Atlas C1 aircraft, which are large enough to transport military vehicles and helicopters.

Luke Akehurst: Does the hon. Member not accept that in the unlikely event that RAF transport aircraft had been carrying something as large as a helicopter or a military vehicle from Cyprus to Israel—it is the first time I have heard that allegation—we might have seen evidence of such helicopters or military vehicles of British provenance? The Israel Defence Forces have no need of such equipment. They have far more equipment than the British armed forces do.

Shockat Adam: That is the question that I wish to be answered. Were we involved, directly or indirectly, in the Israeli operation in Nuseirat in June 2024, when 276 Palestinians were killed at the rescue of four Israeli hostages? Critically, has our intelligence been used to conduct air strikes? If so, under article 25 of the Rome statute, is the UK now legally complicit in war crimes?

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): Does my hon. Friend agree that allying with Israel while it carries out a genocide will bring about the end of the international world order as we know it?

Shockat Adam: I completely concur with the hon. Member's timely intervention. The Government claim that they provide intelligence only when they are satisfied that it will be used in compliance with international law, but what independent due diligence has been conducted to verify that? If hundreds of UK flights have taken place over Gaza, what have we witnessed? What crimes, if any, have we seen? In the light of what happened this morning, why has the RAF continued to deploy Shadow R1 surveillance flights towards Gaza, when a stipulation of the ceasefire explicitly forbids surveillance operations? Is that not a violation of the spirit of the ceasefire agreement? Can the Minister confirm that the Israeli armed forces will not use surveillance supplied by the RAF flights during a hostage exchange in future attacks on Gaza?

The war has taken the lives of an unprecedented number of aid workers, including three British nationals who were killed while working with the World Central Kitchen humanitarian convoy. Their families have repeatedly requested video footage from our own Shadow R1 surveillance aircraft, which was operating above Gaza at the time. The Government have refused to release it. Similarly, on 27 May, when at least 45 Palestinians were killed in Rafah, another UK surveillance aircraft was in operation. Again, the footage has not been released. Why? What is being hidden, if anything? If we are confident in our innocence, why the secrecy?

Finally, there is now mounting suspicion and evidence that UK facilities in Gibraltar are being used for the facilitation of armed shipments, harbour services, and jet fuel supplies for vessels transporting weapons from the US to Israel. Can the Minister please clarify the usage of Gibraltar in the war effort?

We must confront the bigger picture. The UK helped to build the modern international legal order, but we risk dismantling it today. International law is not a game of pick and mix, where we enforce it in one case—namely African despots—and ignore it in another. By allowing Israeli exceptionalism, we threaten to undermine the very concept of international law itself.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate, and I ask them to keep to an informal limit of about three and a half minutes, please.

4.45 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (*Shockat Adam*) on securing this timely debate. We need to consider the potential vicarious liability of the UK state in military activities in Palestine and the middle east.

The murder of more than 400 Palestinians in Gaza last night must outrage us all. In the past fortnight, the passage of aid through Israeli checkpoints has been denied, leaving the Palestinian population in Gaza with less food, less water and fewer vital medical supplies. Israel's rejection of the ceasefire and its extreme military action overnight has escalated the killing of civilians

in Gaza, including women and children. It is a reasonable assumption that those airstrikes were conducted at least in part with F-35s, for which the UK continues to manufacture parts and supply maintenance parts. Will the Minister clarify whether they were used on this and previous occasions?

Despite the partial suspension of arms export licences to Israel, the Government left a deliberate loophole in place, allowing the export of F-35 parts to Israel via the global spare parts pool. In addition, the Government have issued at least a further 34 arms export licences to Israel since the original suspension—more than they originally blocked. According to new arms export licensing data published by the Campaign Against Arms Trade, the Government approved an open licence for components for combat aircraft. That licence appears incompatible with the Government's supposed commitment not to supply military equipment that could be used in Gaza.

From reports of the High Court case between Al-Haq and the Business and Trade Secretary, we have been made aware that the Government continued sending F-35 fighter jet components to Israel despite knowing that there was a clear risk that they could be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Luke Akehurst: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is more likely that F-35s were in use to shoot down Iranian drones, cruise missiles and other projectiles that were fired at Israel? Israel needs to use that platform to defend itself, given that it has faced two of the largest barrages of weapons fired at civilian targets since world war two.

Andy McDonald: As my hon. Friend has mentioned on several occasions, Israel is perfectly entitled to defend itself against Iranian attacks. It can have all the arms it wishes for, and it has the protection of other people from around the region, but the prerequisite is that it observes international humanitarian law in respect of the Palestinian people and that it vacates the illegally occupied west bank. Those are the conditions on which it should receive support.

Since the Government announced their partial suspension of arms export licences but maintained exports to the F-35 global supply pool, I have asked in the main Chamber, in Westminster Hall and in written questions whether they are engaging in discussions with F-35 partner nations about whether the supply of F-35s and spare parts to Israel could be suspended. They have made no effort to address that matter in the House, other than to claim that they cannot take action on the global spares pool without bringing the F-35 programme into peril, which would have implications for international peace and security. Preventing UK arms exports—specifically F-35 jets, which are dropping 2,000 lb bombs on Gaza with UK-made components—from being used in war crimes by Israel against Palestinians is in no way a threat to international security in Ukraine or elsewhere.

The US and the UK have actively constructed a false dichotomy in which the lives of Palestinians are pitted against the lives of other civilians. Continuing to transfer F-35 components to Israel is a violation of the UK's domestic and international legal obligations, which include the strategic export licensing criteria, the arms trade treaty, the Geneva conventions and the genocide convention. Will the Minister say whether the F-35 joint programme

office could control material movement based on part or number configuration? Will the UK consider raising with partner nations the need to temporarily suspend sales of parts to a nation that, last night, murdered several hundred civilians in Gaza? Will he state the legal implications for the Government if it is concluded that the F-35s have been used to pursue war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide against the Palestinians?

4.51 pm

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) for securing this debate.

As hon. Members have mentioned, we are discussing the UK's military collaboration with Israel when, in the past 24 hours, more than 400 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli airstrikes. We can see in real time the consequences of that collaboration and who is paying the price. Families in Gaza are searching for their loved ones among rubble. The dead lie wrapped in stained white sheets. They are the ones who have paid the price. Meanwhile, this Government have relentlessly pushed for the continued export of UK-made parts for F-35s. The Minister must confirm whether any of those warplanes were involved in the attack on Gaza last night. Will he confirm whether UK-made parts enabled any of the bombings in recent days? If they did, will he acknowledge the UK's direct role in the official collapse of an already fragile ceasefire?

In September 2024, the Government admitted that "Israel is not committed to complying with international humanitarian law",

that there was a "clear risk" the UK's arms exports might be used to commit serious legal violations, and introduced a partial suspension of 29 arms export licences to Israel. But that move exempted the UK's most financially significant and deadly export: components for the F-35 jets, including bomb release mechanisms, which are still being made in my constituency despite the city council's rejection of the company's presence in our city. Moreover, since the original suspension, the Government have issued at least a further 34 arms export licences to Israel. Will the Minister confirm that we have now issued more new licences than we suspended when that minimal measure was taken?

Alongside issuing deadly arms licences, the UK has outsourced more of its complicity to its overseas territories and military bases. The UK's base in Cyprus has been used by the UK, US and Germany to supply Israel with weapons, personnel and intelligence since October 2023. Gibraltar has continuously provided harbour services to vessels involved in providing energy and supplies to Israel—the Minister should confirm that, in response to hon. Members' questions. In written questions, Ministers have flatly refused to answer questions about whether RAF Shadow R1 flights from Akrotiri, in Cyprus, into Israeli airspace have been instructed to collect surveillance footage for hostage rescue or any other purpose. That refusal means that further written questions are now deemed out of order and the Government are escaping any scrutiny.

The UK can either reaffirm its commitment to human rights, as a nation that upholds democratic values, or it can continue to aid and abet a state whose human rights abuses now extend to genocidal actions—it cannot do both.

4.54 pm

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): It is both an honour and a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) for securing this debate.

From the outset, let me be absolutely clear about what is happening. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been slaughtered in Gaza. Women and children account for the vast majority of the dead. Entire families have been wiped from existence. What is left for those who survive? Starvation and disease, with homes and hospitals turned to rubble and dust. They now also face renewed airstrikes.

Just last night, more than 400 Palestinians were killed in Israeli bombings. That is not defence; it is the annihilation and the attempted eradication of a people. We, the United Kingdom, have obligations under the genocide convention, international law and the most basic principles of being human. We say we are committed to upholding international law, but what does our country actually do? The Government have approved more arms export licenses to Israel than they have suspended, they continue to use RAF Akrotiri to assist the transfer of US military cargo to Israel and carry out surveillance flights over Gaza gathering intelligence that could aid in the targeting of Palestinian civilians.

When the International Court of Justice ruled that genocide is “plausible”, the Government should have cut all military ties with Israel. Instead, it has chosen to continue arming and enabling a regime that conducts annexation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): Prior to last night’s devastating attack, Israel routinely broke the ceasefire agreement declared on 19 January, blocking aid and cutting off electricity and water supplies. Does my hon. Friend agree that these acts of genocide need to be recognised as such by the international courts and the UK Government?

Brian Leishman: I am in complete agreement; it is undeniable that these are war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. Every weapon part that the UK supplies and every piece of intelligence that we share makes us complicit. We must immediately suspend all arms sales, cease all military co-operation and impose economic and diplomatic sanctions. Anything less is just another stain on our history and an unforgivable betrayal of the Palestinian people to whom, let us be completely honest, we already owe a historical debt.

I co-signed a letter to *The Guardian* newspaper from the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). It called for an independent public inquiry into the UK’s role on what has happened and continues to happen in Gaza. Many people are of the opinion that the Government have taken decisions that breach international law. These opinions will not be changed unless there is transparency and accountability.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I am afraid I have to impose a formal time limit of three minutes so that we get through everybody.

4.57 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) for securing the debate, as well as the authoritative way in which he introduced it. Last night, 400 more people died in Gaza as a result of direct bombardment in breach of the ceasefire. At the same time, Israel is denying access to food, water and supply of electricity to the people of Gaza, who are now going through the most ghastly time ever, on top of all the horrors they have been through over more than a year. So many people—69,000—are now known to be dead there, and more bodies are found every day that rubble is cleared away. Those who survive will forever live with survivor’s guilt for the fact that they survived while all their friends and family died around them. This is devastation beyond belief on live television all around the world. We watch people being starved to death in front of our very eyes, while there is food aplenty just a few kilometres away, deliberately denied to them by a decision of Israel. That is a war crime. We have to be quite clear about that.

In a statement in the Chamber yesterday, in response to the G7 summit that the Foreign Secretary had attended, I asked a specific question about international law and the war crimes that I believe Israel has committed. He, it seemed to me, conceded that Israel was in breach of international law. That is quite significant. Presumably, there are many Foreign Office briefings going around saying that Israel is in breach of those laws.

That leads to the second question: if we, as a country, knowingly accept that Israel is in breach of international law and continue to provide it with the weapons with which people can be killed in Gaza then we ourselves, as a country, also become complicit in breaches of international law. Those laws are there for a purpose, to try to prevent genocide and the crimes against humanity that are happening before our very eyes.

Imran Hussain: The right hon. Member makes a powerful case. Does he agree that the international dimensions of the situation are so clear, with the ICJ investigating genocide and the International Criminal Court investigating war crimes, even though it continues to be attacked for that, that there is no room for any nation to deny this serious international situation? Secondly, would he agree that silence, frankly, goes with hypocrisy and double standards?

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): Order. We are very short of time, so I ask Members to refrain from interventions, in order to get through every speaker.

Jeremy Corbyn: I will be brief, Ms Jardine, because we need to get through the debate and have the Front Benchers speak. I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said. I attended the International Court of Justice hearing, where South Africa presented an historic and brilliant case that led to that historic opinion being offered by the court.

I was also at The Hague for the launch of the Hague declaration by a number of nations that have dedicated themselves to pursue support for the ICJ and ICC decisions diplomatically, and recognise that Israel is in breach of the fourth Geneva convention on the obligations on occupying powers in countries, which applies to Israel in Gaza and the west bank. I believe the Hague declaration is an important step forward.

I would be grateful if the Minister would answer some specific points. What exactly is going on at RAF Akrotiri? What was it that the Prime Minister on his visit there said he could not talk about, but there was lots of it going on? That was a very strange statement and comment to make on television at that time. Why are so many flights going from Akrotiri to Israel? What is happening, as the hon. Member for Leicester South mentioned, to the information collected by those flights over Gaza? Is all the information collected going to be provided to the ICC and the ICJ to pursue their investigations, if they request it?

The 300 licences that still exist have been increased by another recently approved 34—

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): Order. Sorry—time's up. I call Jim Shannon.

5.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shokat Adam) for raising this issue. He and I have very different opinions, as he knows, but we are both committed to seeing a just peace for the people of Gaza and Israel, securing the hope of a different future for every child in that area, regardless of race or religion. That is the desire that I work towards, knowing it to be the aim of this House. I will always be a proud friend of Israel and will speak from that perspective.

I must indicate that there is a time for peace through strength, which is what is needed. Israel was mercilessly attacked; the hostage releases, along with the parading of infant bodies in coffins, highlight the mentality of those who carried out the 7 October atrocities. Some 1,200 were killed—men, women and children—and women were raped with indescribable violence by Hamas terrorists. With Hamas there is clearly no remorse, but there is a clear hatred.

When people know where they stand and that the scorpion can sting, they protect themselves, which is what Israel does. Hamas can do nothing other than hate Israel and seek her eradication, and I would never support calls for Israel not to have the means to defend herself, as she rightly does.

I have lived through terrorism and the troubles and beyond. I am thankful that my children have never checked below their cars, as their dad did, or been stopped at an army checkpoint. They do not remember the days of the bombs exploding and the pain of innocent victims who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. I do not advocate war; I have felt the pain of it. However, I know that nations must retain an ability to show that they can and will defend their people when peace is no longer an option.

Israel did not use its military prowess until atrocities were carried out on it. It is my hope that the time has come for a solution for Israel and the decent people of Gaza. I will support that, but I will never attempt to bring Israel to the negotiating peace table with a hand tied behind their back, while acknowledging that the hatred of Hamas has not abated, and therefore neither has the threat to Israel. I want peace, but I want a lasting peace, and that will not happen while Hamas retain any control or ability to carry out their desire. These are the same Hamas terrorists who hid behind women's skirts in schools and hospitals—that is the sort of terrorists they are.

The rules cannot change and those who hate Israel are the main players in the game. Israel must have access to weapons and the support that they deserve. They must also have access to wise counsel to help to provide a plan and a way forward. I hope that this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will continue to be a friend to Israel in word, wisdom and deed, as I am every day of my life and indeed will be for the foreseeable future, and for every breath that I have in this world.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I call Luke Akehurst—please keep it brief, as you have had several interventions.

5.6 pm

Luke Akehurst (North Durham) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shokat Adam) for securing this debate today and for the sincerity of the remarks that he made. I know this is an issue that he cares deeply about. I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Recent months have seen dramatic shifts in global geopolitics, and I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for the leadership he has shown in defending our country's alliances in uncertain times. These developments are a reminder of how important our country's defence and security relationships are. In the middle east, we have deep and historical links with both Israel and much of the Arab world. The military co-operation between the UK and Israel helps to keep our country safe. Over decades, Britain and Israel have conducted joint military exercises in areas such as counter-terrorism, cyber-security and defence technology. British troops have been kept safe thanks to co-operation with Israel's cutting-edge defence sector, particularly in unmanned aerial vehicles, missile defence and radar systems.

The UK and Israel share intelligence on counter-terrorism and security threats posed by Iran, ISIS and other malign actors, both in the middle east and at home. Indeed, it is my understanding that the surveillance flights are actually collecting intelligence relating to the hostages in Gaza, including Avinatan Or, whose mother is British and who has now been held captive for 528 days. I hope the Minister will be able to update us today on whether the UK will continue those surveillance flights and do everything we can to bring Avinatan home.

The UK and Israel's defence co-operation strengthens our international alliances, most obviously through the F-35 programme, which some other hon. Members have rather maligned today, but which has created more than 20,000 jobs in the UK. I ask for reassurance from the Minister that there will be no change to the UK's participation in the F-35 programme, and that British-made parts will not be withheld from any of the other participants? Disrupting collaborative programmes that have been painstakingly negotiated over decades with multiple international partners—in this case a programme where we have a unique position as the only tier 1 partner—would mean that we would not be trusted to be a reliable partner in future international collaborative programmes that are critical for our national security, our technological base and the future of our aerospace industry.

I will finish by saying that military co-operation with Israel brings benefits to civilian populations in the middle east—Israeli and Palestinian. Last year, when Iran launched

[*Luke Akehurst*]

unprecedented ballistic missile attacks against Israel, which could have killed Palestinians as well as Israelis, British jets and intelligence played their role in shooting them down, saving Israeli and Palestinian lives and avoiding a huge escalation that could have brought all-out war across the region. I look forward to hearing more from the Minister about how the Government intend to strengthen our military co-operation with the middle east's only democracy.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP) *rose*—

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I am afraid we are out of time for Back Benchers now, but perhaps Brendan O'Hara would like to intervene on the Minister. I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

5.9 pm

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship for the first time, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) on securing this important debate.

I want to start by saying that the return of Israeli strikes on Gaza is horrific for all Palestinians, for the remaining hostages and their families, and indeed for the world. We need a return to the ceasefire now. I thank the hon. Member for raising so many points that I was not aware of; it would be good to hear the Minister's response on those particular issues.

As early as April 2024, the Liberal Democrat leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), called for the UK Government to suspend arms exports to Israel. Today I reaffirm that position: the UK must immediately halt all arms exports to Israel. During Foreign Office questions in October, the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Bicester and Woodstock (Calum Miller), pushed the then Minister for Development to

“agree that the UK should...cease all arms exports to Israel”.— [*Official Report*, 22 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 168.]

In response, the Minister talked around the issue and gave no clear response. That is unacceptable: we need decisive action, not evasion.

Liberal Democrats have long championed tougher controls on UK arms exports, to ensure that British-made weapons do not contribute to human rights violations. We support a presumption of denial for arms exports to all Governments listed in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's human rights and democracy report as human rights priorities, which include Israel.

Ultimately, the Liberal Democrats believe that only a political resolution, based on a two-state solution, can bring lasting peace, security and dignity to Palestinians and Israelis. However, developments in recent weeks have undermined efforts by moderates on both sides to maintain a ceasefire and move towards a durable peace in the region. The Israeli Government's decision to block the supply of aid into Gaza and their cutting of the electricity supply are unlawful and must be unequivocally condemned. It is crucial that we see a return to the ceasefire, with its conditions respected by all sides, and negotiations advanced to agree on phase 2. Electricity and essential

supplies must flow into Gaza to alleviate the immense human suffering. Blocking aid threatens the lives of the millions of Gazans dependent on humanitarian assistance after the destruction of the past 17 months. The UK Government must apply pressure to ensure a return to a ceasefire, and supplies must resume without delay.

Hamas must move immediately to release the remaining hostages, including the bodies of those killed in captivity. The treatment of hostages at the hands of Hamas, both in captivity and during their release, has been despicable. It is also clear that the expansion of Israeli settlements in the west bank is illegal and is fuelling further tension, undermining the efforts of Israeli and Palestinian moderates to move towards peace. The UK Government must outline concrete steps to put pressure on Prime Minister Netanyahu to address rising settler violence and the illegal expansions. Inaction on this issue must end. The Liberal Democrats have called for a ban on the import of goods from illegal settlements.

An increasing number of our allies, including Spain, Norway and Ireland, have formally recognised a Palestinian state. It is now time that the UK joins them. Recognition of Palestine on 1967 lines would send a strong signal that we are committed to a two-state solution and to supporting the work of Israeli and Palestinian moderates to that end. Given the calls by far-right Israeli Ministers such as Smotrich for the annexation of the west bank, the urgency of that recognition cannot be overstated.

President Trump's return to the White House adds further layers of complexity and urgency. His reckless comments on the future of Gaza, including suggestions that Palestinians should be removed from the strip, have further inflamed tensions. It is crucial that the UK steps up and pushes for a diplomatic resolution that recognises both an Israeli and a Palestinian state. Recognising Palestine would also inject hope into Palestinian society that having its own state is possible, which in turn would help to wrest control back from the extreme actors at the edges of Palestinian society.

In conclusion, the UK must have a principled and strategic approach: halt arms exports to Israel, hold all parties accountable under international law, and champion a two-state solution. This Government must stop ducking those critical issues and take a stronger stance, one that can contribute to a just and lasting peace.

5.13 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine. In accordance with parliamentary tradition, may I congratulate the new hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) on securing this important debate? As I understand it, he is a graduate of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, so I hope he will appreciate it if I make a few points in my speech about the defence-related events that have taken place recently at some British universities.

Perhaps I can begin by making some general comments about the situation in Gaza, as raised by several hon. Members this afternoon. I was on the Front Bench in the House of Commons on Thursday 16 January 2025 when the Foreign Secretary delivered the statement to Parliament concerning the ceasefire deal. Clearly, the events last night, including the bombing of targets in Gaza, are very concerning, as several hon. Members have already highlighted.

The release of the remaining 59 hostages held by Hamas since the atrocities of 7 October 2023 is key to a sustainable end to the conflict in Gaza and to building a better future. The British Government should be directly involved in efforts to find a way through this very difficult moment. The international community must also reiterate that there can be no role for Hamas in Gaza's future.

The Foreign Secretary argued back in January that the only viable long-term settlement of this issue is via a two-state solution, which would permit the creation of a credible Palestinian state not under Hamas control, alongside an Israel with secure borders, free from terrorist attack. That has long been my view too. We all want to see an end to the suffering in the middle east, particularly in Gaza, but I believe it is only via a two-state solution that that can ultimately be achieved.

As the hon. Member for Leicester South said, the Opposition believe it is necessary to retain a viable defence manufacturing base in the United Kingdom, both for strategic reasons and because the defence industry plays a vital role in ensuring the nation's prosperity. In economic terms, the Aerospace, Defence and Space trade body estimates that in 2022-23 defence work contributed approximately £38.2 billion to the United Kingdom economy, with exports reaching £38.7 billion. ADS also estimates that the defence, aerospace, security and space sectors combined supported 427,500 direct jobs in the same year.

In addition, it is worth recording that the UK's defence industry has been a key supplier of equipment for the defence of Ukraine. For example, the new light anti-tank weapon, NLAW, was used very effectively by Ukrainian troops in the defence of Kyiv in the first days of the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022. Not only were many of those weapons manufactured in Belfast, but for years, Britain had been training Ukrainian troops, following the first invasion of Ukraine, including Crimea, in 2014.

It was a combination of British military training and British-supplied equipment that helped prevent Russia from overrunning the capital of Ukraine in the first few days of that invasion. It is probably true to say that had we not provided the Ukrainians with those NLAWs and, crucially, trained them to use them in complex anti-tank ambushes, the Russians would probably be having dinner in Kyiv this evening.

There is an inscription on the Korean war memorial in Washington, which says quite simply, "Freedom is not free." That freedom has to be defended, and in the modern world that requires military technology. While I can understand the passion articulated by the hon. Member for Leicester South in this debate, I say to him most respectfully that he is able to make those arguments in a democratic forum and publicly criticise the Government of the day because he is fortunate to live in a parliamentary democracy. That is not something we can say of all the countries in the middle east.

Moreover, yesterday saw the death, at the age of 105, of the last remaining battle of Britain fighter pilot, Group Captain John "Paddy" Hemingway, DFC. We pay tribute to his brave service in Parliament today. Importantly, had we not had a defence industry in 1940, manufacturing Spitfires and Hurricanes, this debate would not even be taking place. We need a defence industry, and we need people at university to be allowed to freely choose to enter it without fear of intimidation.

5.19 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) for securing this debate, and for the way in which he opened it with his questions. I will try to respond to them all, but if I miss one out, given the questions from other hon. Members, I am happy to write to him after the debate to ensure I cover all his points.

I am sure we were all united this morning by our collective disappointment at the developments overnight. Let me be very clear: the reported civilian casualties resulting from Israel's actions are appalling. We do not want to see a return to fighting. More bloodshed is in no one's interest. Our priority is encouraging all parties to return urgently to dialogue, and ensuring that the ceasefire agreement is implemented in full and becomes permanent. Peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians lies down the path of a proper and respected ceasefire, of releasing the hostages and restoring humanitarian aid, and, ultimately, of a two-state solution.

We will step up our work with partners across the region to restore aid and secure the release of the hostages through negotiation. Humanitarian aid should never be used as a political tool. Israel must restart the flow of aid immediately. We are grateful to the Governments of Egypt and Qatar for the important role they are playing in facilitating the hostage release negotiations, and to the King of Jordan for his efforts to increase humanitarian assistance into Gaza. We have all welcomed the release of 38 hostages so far, including Emily Damari and Eli Sharabi, and our thoughts are with those still waiting to be reunited with their loved ones. I repeat our calls for the immediate release of all hostages and for a surge of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

I now turn to the subject of the debate: our military co-operation with Israel. The UK shares an important, long-standing and broad strategic partnership with the state of Israel. Our defence partnership with Israel aims to support the security of an important partner and reduce tensions in the wider region. It incorporates a range of defence engagement activity, including defence education, joint training and capability development. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Luke Akehurst) mentioned, the role our RAF played in thwarting Iran's co-ordinated missile and drone attack on Israel in April 2024, and again in October 2024, demonstrates our commitment to Israel's security and to de-escalating regional tensions.

As the House has been updated previously, in the aftermath of the shocking attacks on 7 October, the RAF has conducted unarmed surveillance flights over the eastern Mediterranean, including in airspace over Israel and Gaza. I reassure hon. Members, because a number of them raised this point, including the hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry), that these flights are solely in support of hostage rescue. Only information related to hostage rescue can be passed to the relevant authority for hostage rescue. We will pass information only if we are satisfied that it will be used in accordance with international humanitarian law.

As in the past, and as with other nations, any future defence activity with Israel will be subject to a rigorous overseas security and justice assistance assessment to assess compliance with human rights obligations and

[*Luke Pollard*]

international humanitarian law. Although we recognise and respect Israel's right to defend itself following 7 October, and condemn the brutal attacks by Hamas in the strongest possible terms, we have had, and continue to have, concerns about Israel's conduct. The Prime Minister and UK Government Ministers continue to raise those concerns with their Israeli counterparts. The Foreign Secretary has visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories three times since taking office, most recently in January, and has pressed for a ceasefire, adherence to international humanitarian law, the return of hostages and a broader resolution.

We are clear that the remaining hostages must be released, and the way to return them safely is through a deal. All parties, including Israel, must observe international humanitarian law. As the Foreign Secretary has said, we urge Israel to lift aid restrictions immediately and restore the supply of humanitarian assistance that the people of Gaza so desperately need.

The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (*Helen Maguire*), mentioned the west bank. We recognise Israel's right to defend itself and the continuing threat posed by armed groups, but Israel must protect civilians and show restraint to ensure that the scale and conduct of its operations are proportionate to the threat posed. The Foreign Secretary has raised our concerns about Israeli operations in the west bank with the Israeli Foreign Minister. Our position remains that Israel's actions in the west bank and Gaza must be in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Mr Adnan Hussain: Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary admitted that Israel is breaking international law. Does the Minister therefore acknowledge that its actions and our Government's refusal to act against them, including by banning all sales of weapons, will be watched carefully by rogue states such as Russia and will be used as a template for the actions that are or are not allowed on the international stage?

Luke Pollard: Our position remains that Israel's actions in Gaza are at clear risk of breaching international humanitarian law, and we will continue to raise our concerns with Israel.

The hon. Member for Leicester South raised the issue of arms exports. In recent years, UK arms exports have accounted for less than 1% of total defence exports to Israel. As hon. Members are aware, when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary took office in July 2024, he ordered a review of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law. On 2 September, he concluded there was a clear risk that UK exports to Israel for use in military operations in Gaza could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations, at which point my right hon. Friend the Business and Trade Secretary took the decision to suspend relevant export licences to Israel.

Tahir Ali: Will the Minister give way?

Luke Pollard: I will make progress because I have only a few moments left.

As hon. Members are aware, the suspension of export licences does not include exports of components for the global F-35 programme. As previously set out to Parliament, it was necessary to exclude exports for the F-35 programme from the scope of the suspension because of the programme's broader strategic role in NATO and its wider implications for international peace and security. Although the UK Government's support for Israel remains steadfast in the face of aggression and terrorism, it is clear that we must have a robust export licensing regime. We keep all licences under close and continual review.

Hon. Members have mentioned the overseas territories. For operational security reasons, and as a matter of long-standing policy, the MOD does not confirm, deny or comment on any foreign national military aircraft movement or operation within UK airspace or on UK overseas bases.

The events overnight were a major setback. Like all Members who spoke today, we want to see the fighting stop. The ceasefire must be re-established, there must be a return to dialogue, the remaining hostages must be released and a surge of aid must be delivered to the people of Gaza. Although the challenge is much greater today than it was yesterday, we will continue to work alongside our allies and partners towards those goals and a two-state solution that delivers security for Israelis, dignity for Palestinians and a lasting peace in the region.

I would be happy to have a further conversation with the hon. Member for Leicester South after this debate about the points I did not get to because of the shortness of time.

5.27 pm

Shokat Adam: I thank all hon. Members for their sincere contributions. We all want the hostages to be released, but as the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said,

"The Israeli government has chosen to abandon the hostages."

I say to the shadow Minister that I agree with the defence industry that we must have a robust arms industry, but I pray that our children's lives are never at the behest of a nation's economic profit.

History will judge us not by our words but by our actions. Let me be completely clear: this debate is not an attack on our Government, nor is it about politics. It is simply about truth. Only truth can serve justice, and only with justice can we bring about peace. I urge hon. Members to reflect not on their political loyalties but on their moral duty. When history looks back at this moment, we must be able to say with absolute certainty that we stood on the right side. That is the least we owe to Shaban, Hind and all the dead children of the conflict.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of military collaboration with Israel.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 18 March 2025

EDUCATION

School Funding: National Insurance Contributions Grant and Pupil Premium

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson): Today the Department for Education has confirmed national insurance contributions grant funding rates and schools' pupil premium funding rates for the financial year 2025-26.

The NICs grant will provide schools, colleges, and high-needs settings with over £1 billion to support them with the increases to employer national insurance contributions from April 2025, broken down as set out in the table below.

Setting/phase	NICs grant funding in 2025-26
Mainstream (5-16) schools and academies	£786 million
High needs settings	£125 million
Local authority centrally employed teachers	£22 million
Post-16 providers	£155 million
Early years providers	£25 million

Despite the challenging economic context, core funding for schools was prioritised in the Budget, and the NICs support is additional to the £2.3 billion increase announced in October. This means that the core schools budget will total over £64.8 billion in 2025-26.

Further information can be found on:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-insurance-contributions-nics-grant-and-early-years-national-insurance-contributions-ey-nics-grant-for-2025-to-2026>.

The pupil premium grant provides additional funding to schools to support disadvantaged pupils so that they achieve and thrive in education. Total pupil premium funding will rise to over £3 billion in 2025-26, an increase of almost 5% from 2024-25.

The pupil premium funding rates are increasing by 2.39%—and then rounded—compared to 2024-25 rates, in line with the forecast GDP deflator measure of inflation. The table below sets out the new pupil premium rates that will take effect from 1 April 2025.

	2025-26 pupil premium rate
Primary pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or have been eligible in the past six years	£1,515
Secondary pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or have been eligible in the past six years	£1,075
Children who are looked after by the local authority	£2,630
Pupils previously looked after by a local authority or other state care	£2,630

The grant also provides support for children and young people of service families, referred to as service pupil premium. The service pupil premium rate is also increasing by 2.39%—and then rounded—in 2025-26, to £350 per eligible pupil from 1 April 2025.

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium>

[HCWS532]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

World Health Organisation Pandemic Accord Negotiations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton): I would like to update the House regarding the latest round of negotiations on a legally binding international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response—the pandemic accord—at the World Health Organisation (WHO).

In March 2021, the UK joined other WHO member states in calling for a pandemic accord that would ensure the world is better prepared for any future pandemic. Negotiations on the pandemic accord have been ongoing since 2022, and member states have until the World Health Assembly in May 2025 to reach an agreement.

The pandemic accord aims to enable a better co-ordinated, global response to pandemic threats and facilitate more equitable and timely access to pandemic-related vaccines, treatments, and tests. With a future pandemic a certainty, the pandemic accord is an opportunity to better protect the UK against this threat and to deliver on the Government's health and growth missions, including through improving pandemic prevention, promoting innovation in pandemic related research and development (R&D), and putting in place systems that can promptly respond to pandemic threats when they emerge. The UK will only sign up to a pandemic accord which is both in the national interest and protects the health of people in the UK and around the world.

Member states have reached provisional agreement on around 75% of the text, while negotiating on the principle that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”. Since the House was last updated in November, provisional agreement has been reached on articles covering sustainable financing for the implementation of the agreement, and R&D. During the latest round of negotiations, between 17 and 21 February, some progress was made on portions of the text covering pandemic prevention, the opening chapter of the accord (covering definitions, objectives, and principles), and pathogen access and benefit sharing (PABS). However, there is still some way to go on several issues, including on technology transfer and further areas within the pandemic prevention and PABS articles, with limited time remaining to negotiate the text. The UK Government remain committed to working with member states to reach an effective agreement.

I will continue to update the House as negotiations near conclusion.

[HCWS529]

JUSTICE

Prison Capacity: Operation Safeguard

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): This Government inherited a prison system on the verge of collapse, which would have left the courts unable to send offenders to prison and the police unable to arrest dangerous criminals. I took decisive action and implemented changes to the standard determinate sentence release point which provided essential but temporary relief to the system.

When I updated Parliament in July 2024, I was clear that the capacity crisis would not disappear immediately and the changes to release points were never the whole solution to the prison capacity crisis we inherited. To put our criminal justice system on a sustainable footing for the long term, I launched the independent review of sentencing in October and set out the 10-year prison capacity strategy to deliver the 14,000 new prison places we promised. In my commitment to transparency, I also laid the first annual statement on prison capacity, setting out expected demand and supply for prison places.

Over the last three months population growth in the prison estate has been high—January saw the highest average monthly prison population growth in almost two years, which has only just begun to slow. As of 17 March, there were 824 places remaining in the adult male estate. We are operating at more than 99% occupancy. Operating this close to critical capacity increases the risk that prisons do not have sufficient space for a given prisoner entering the system and so an alternative has to be found, which is most frequently in a police cell. In recent weeks this has happened hundreds of times, far above the rate seen during normal operations. On the night of 10 March, there were 124 no-space lockouts, which is the highest number of business-as-usual lockouts on record.

We have just opened a new 458-capacity houseblock at HMP Rye Hill. In addition, in a few weeks' time, I will be opening HMP Millsike, a brand new 1,500 capacity prison in North Yorkshire.

However, I expect prison capacity will remain tight until the new capacity is fully operational. Given the recent increase in demand, it is necessary, and prudent, for me to temporarily reactivate Operation Safeguard to better manage the flow of offenders into the prison estate. This is an established protocol that will ensure that His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and police forces can jointly plan which police cells may be required to hold offenders on any particular day. The previous Government last activated Operation Safeguard in February 2023; it ran until it was formally deactivated in October 2024 by this Government. This time we have a clear plan to improve capacity and minimise the use of Safeguard.

Safeguard will help ensure temporary pressures on the prison estate are managed effectively with partners in the police. We will keep its use under constant review

and work closely with police colleagues to ensure we can stand down cells as soon as they are not required.

I am incredibly grateful for the support of police colleagues and want to pay tribute to the continued extraordinary work of our frontline staff in police, courts, prisons and probation whose daily efforts keep the public safe.

[HCWS531]

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill: Public Consultation

The Minister for Equalities (Seema Malhotra): This Government are committed to ensuring that equality and opportunity are at the heart of our programme for national renewal. Our plan for change sets out the ambitious—but achievable—milestones we aim to reach by the end of this Parliament. The work we are doing will improve the lives of working people and strengthen our country.

The manifesto and King's Speech last July announced our intention to legislate to deliver mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for larger employers. These measures will help employers identify and tackle pay disparities across their workforces, remove barriers to opportunity for ethnic minority and disabled staff and support our plan for change in driving up household income for all.

Today we are launching a public consultation in support of this. Responses to the consultation will help shape the pay gap reporting measures that we will include in the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill, to be published later in this Session.

We are particularly interested to hear from those who will be impacted by these proposals, including employers, representative bodies, trade unions, race and disability stakeholders, ethnic minority and disabled people, and disabled people's organisations.

We are considering what other measures the draft Bill could incorporate, including through a call for evidence which will be published separately. The call for evidence will include consideration of how we make the right to equal pay effective for ethnic minority and disabled people.

We are also announcing today that we are establishing a race equality engagement group to help us develop further measures to tackle race inequality. This group, which will be chaired by Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon, will enable us to work closely with communities and stakeholders to find out what matters most to them.

A copy of the consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available on gov.uk.

[HCWS530]

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**not later than
Tuesday 25 March 2025**

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