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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 8 December 2010

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House of Commons

Wednesday 8 December 2010

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Sunbeds (Regulation) Act

1. **Mrs Siân C. James** (Swansea East) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Welsh Assembly Government on the implementation in Wales of the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010. [28250]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): The Secretary of State and I have a wide range of discussions with Welsh Assembly Government Ministers on a range of issues relevant to Wales. The Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 will come into force in England and Wales on 8 April 2011. It will prevent people under the age of 18 from using sunbeds on commercial premises by making it an offence for sunbed operators to provide access.

Mrs James: I thank the Under-Secretary for that answer. As he is aware, my former colleague, Julie Morgan, the previous Member for Cardiff North, and I fought long and hard for the Act. It is vital that we stop under-age use of sunbeds. The Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales is determined to introduce the principle as a matter of urgency. The introduction of the Act on an England and Wales basis is vital. I urge the Under-Secretary to press UK Ministers for action and to keep the issue at the forefront of the public health debate.

Mr Jones: I commend the efforts of the hon. Lady and Ms Julie Morgan in drawing this important public health issue to our attention. As the hon. Lady is aware, the Welsh Assembly Government intend to introduce regulations in 2011 further to regulate sunbed businesses in Wales only, on which they are consulting. This significant measure is aimed at protecting young people, but it also concerns a public health issue for older people. Sunbeds pose a cancer risk and, to be frank, frequently do not produce a very good look.

Labour Statistics

2. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the level of employment in Wales. [28251]

7. **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the level of employment in Wales. [28256]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mrs Cheryl Gillan): I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on the level of employment in Wales. I am pleased that for the past three months in Wales, unemployment figures have fallen while employment has risen—positive signs that our approach is working.

John Howell: Nobody would wish to be complacent, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the good news on employment in Wales is an indication that the hard choices we have made about the economy are working for Wales?

Mrs Gillan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we have had to make hard choices. We are rebalancing and strengthening the economy by cutting the mountain of debt that the previous Government left us, in order that we can improve our economic prospects and ensure that more jobs can be created in Wales and across the United Kingdom.

Stuart Andrew: My birthplace of Anglesey is no stranger to the difficult economic times we have had, particularly given the loss of hundreds of jobs at Anglesey Aluminium Metals. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to encourage employment on Anglesey and across north Wales?

Mrs Gillan: I am sure that hon. Members from all parts of the House agree that the job losses at Anglesey Aluminium Metals were a great blow to the Anglesey economy. I am delighted—and, as an Anglesey boy, my hon. Friend will know—that the life of Wylfa power station has been extended by two years. The site is one of eight across the UK that have been shortlisted for future nuclear generation. That would ensure good employment for the people of Anglesey and north Wales, and I am sure that all hon. Members hope it will come to fruition.

Mr Peter Hain (Neath) (Lab): Of course, those decisions about Anglesey were taken by the Labour Government and supported by the excellent MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). I wish the Secretary of State and all at the Wales Office festive greetings. The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates show that the actions of her Government will result in tens of thousands of public sector job losses in Wales. How many of those will involve women?

Mrs Gillan: I wish the shadow Secretary of State a very happy Christmas and a prosperous new year, and I thank him for his kind greetings. We are certainly not complacent and any job losses are to be regretted. We were pleased, however, that the OBR's original 490,000 forecast for the reduction in public sector staff came down to 330,000 in last week's forecast. I am sure that he will want to welcome that reduction of 160,000.

Mr Hain: I find it astonishing that the Secretary of State has no idea of the number of women in Wales who will lose their jobs as a result of the public sector cuts implemented by her Government. Women make up fully three quarters of public sector workers in Wales, including at Newport passport office, which is being so

shamefully closed. The highly respected Fawcett Society is so incensed at the punitive impact on women of Government cuts that it even tried to challenge them in the High Court. As the first woman Secretary of State for Wales, is she proud of her Government's attitude to Welsh women?

Mrs Gillan: The Government have considered all the possible impacts on women, and many of the changes that we have made to support small companies, for example, will help women, because women are much more likely to work part time. The shadow Secretary of State has misled the House, and—

Mr Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State must not accuse any right hon. or hon. Member of misleading the House. She has a lot of experience, and I know that she will correct what she has just said.

Mrs Gillan: Of course I will correct it, Mr Speaker. The shadow Secretary of State is possibly in danger of misleading the House, because he knows quite well that Newport passport office has not yet been closed and that we have already secured the front-of-house services for it, which will save up to 45 jobs. In 2008, his Government did exactly the same thing to the passport office in Glasgow, so I will take no lessons from him.

Policing

3. **Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on policing in Wales. [28252]

4. **Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on policing in Wales. [28253]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): Effective policing in Wales is of the utmost importance to the coalition Government. Both the Secretary of State and I have had regular discussions with Cabinet and ministerial colleagues on matters affecting policing and law and order in Wales.

Simon Hart: The Minister will be aware of the crucial strategic importance of the Milford Haven waterway as an energy hub serving every constituency in the land. Will he assure the House that Dyfed-Powys police will have the long-term resources necessary to protect that vital asset?

Mr Jones: The Government recognise the strategic importance of Milford Haven and indeed of all other Welsh ports, and we will work closely with ministerial colleagues in the Home Office to ensure that appropriate support is provided in future. Future funding for counter-terrorism policing has been protected as far as possible in the spending review because of the nature of the threat.

Steve Baker: I am sure that Welsh police will welcome the Government's refreshing approach. What else will the Minister do to liberate Welsh police from bureaucracy and get them back on the beat?

Mr Jones: The Government are indeed keen to throw off the legacy of bureaucracy. As a result of the bureaucratic element of Labour policing policy, police officers were left impotent behind desks. Last year under Labour, just 14% of all police officers' time was spent on patrol, compared with 22% on paperwork.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Does the Minister recall the Prime Minister saying during the election campaign that he thought PCSOs did a good job and that we should have more of them? Does he agree, and if so, what representations is he making to ensure that Wales does not lose out on PCSOs?

Mr Jones: The Government do indeed recognise the importance of PCSOs, but the employment of them must be a matter for individual police forces. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the policing settlement is due shortly.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The chief constable of Dyfed-Powys police recently wrote to me outlining the fact that the consequence of the comprehensive spending review for the force would be at least a 20% cut in real terms—a £10 million loss to the budget. With 83% of costs relating to staffing, will that inevitably lead to cuts in front-line policing and a reduction in the quality of service provided in the communities I represent?

Mr Jones: Again, I have to say that the issue of staffing must be one for individual police forces. The Government are trying to be sensitive about the cuts that are necessary as a consequence of the appalling economic legacy that has been left the country by the Labour party.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): Further to the previous question, what representations has the Minister made on the future of the rural policing grant as it affects Dyfed-Powys? The grant is currently £2.64 million and there are real concerns about the implications of any change for the delivery of front-line protection.

Mr Jones: I am sure that that will be a matter of particular concern to my hon. Friend. The Home Office is considering the matter, which will be the subject of an announcement shortly.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): The Minister and the Secretary of State say that individual police forces will be responsible for the cuts that they have to make. However, they will know that North Wales police—overall crime in the area reduced by 40% under the Labour Government—now faces cuts of perhaps 230 officers from 1,600, and 160 police community support officers. If crime increases from the current record lows in north Wales, will the Minister and Secretary of State blame the chief constable?

Mr Jones: Before I answer that question, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being awarded the accolade of "one to watch" in the ITV Wales political awards? I can assure him that I am indeed watching him.

The hon. Gentleman's point has been well rehearsed, but I would rather rely on the chief constable of North Wales, who has given an assurance that the force will continue to protect the public and provide a service in which the public can be confident.

Diamond Jubilee

5. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport on arrangements in Wales to mark the diamond jubilee of HM the Queen. [28254]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mrs Cheryl Gillan): The Government are closely involved in the plans to celebrate Her Majesty's diamond jubilee in 2012. A special four-day jubilee weekend will be held over the first week of June 2012, and other events will be announced in due course.

Andrew Rosindell: Does the Secretary of State agree that all parts of the UK should play their part in ensuring that the celebration of the Queen's 60th anniversary as head of state is a momentous occasion? Will she outline what her Department is doing to work with the Welsh authorities and others to ensure that the jubilee is truly a momentous occasion?

Mrs Gillan: The jubilee will be a truly historic occasion, and certainly a great testament to the hard work and dedication of Her Majesty the Queen to this country and her people. The people of Wales will be able to play their full part in it. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we are working closely with Buckingham palace and the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that the Welsh public are given every opportunity to celebrate the jubilee.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am absolutely certain that large numbers of people in my constituency will want to celebrate the 60th anniversary, just as they did the 50th anniversary. However, I urge the Secretary of State to speak to the police and health service in Wales, because on the last long weekend when we had two bank holidays together several young people in the Rhondda died from drug overdoses, many of them because they were given their methadone for the Monday and Tuesday on the Friday beforehand. Will she ensure that we do not repeat those problems?

Mrs Gillan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that problem, because I was not aware of it. Certainly, that would be sad at a time of celebration. He will be aware that the Government are publishing our new drug strategy, and I will ensure that that problem is brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who is responsible for the strategy. We will take action on that front, but perhaps he could help me by writing to me so that I can take the matter up properly.

Welfare Reform

6. **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on welfare reform in Wales. [28255]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues about a range of issues relevant to Wales. The Government have set out our plans to introduce legislation radically to reform the welfare

system by creating a new universal credit, which will simplify the system, make work pay and combat worklessness and poverty in Wales and throughout Britain.

Mr Turner: Does my hon. Friend accept that it would be far better to have a small number of benefits that make sense rather than a huge number of benefits that are complex and confusing, and that no one could possibly understand?

Mr Jones: Yes—that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions proposes to replace six benefits with one universal credit. That will not only simplify the procedure, but encourage people to get back into work.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): With simplification, there is always the danger of people falling outside categories, and therefore of gross injustices. Will the Minister have a word with the Work and Pensions Secretary about boosting the face-to-face advice that is available from the Department for Work and Pensions, especially in rural areas. That would be a great step forward.

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. As he knows, the matter is the subject of a White Paper and no doubt he will feed into the process. Overall, it is considered that the new benefit will be simpler and easier for people to understand.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I am sure that the Minister will be pleased to know that the number of claimants for jobseeker's allowance in Brecon and Radnorshire has dropped by 25%. Does he agree that that is to do with the resilience of small manufacturing companies such as Beacon Foods—which I visited on Monday—coming through the recession in the way they have?

Mr Jones: Indeed, and one must never forget that small and medium enterprises are the backbone of the Welsh economy. The measures that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has put in place should do much to ensure that they have a successful future.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of the impact on constituents of mine in Bridgend of the lowering of mortgage interest relief for those on benefits from the previous rate of 6.8% to 3.67%? A constituent of mine who has a mortgage at a rate of 5.85% has a shortfall of £236 a month, which is getting him increasingly into debt and he faces losing his property. What help can be offered to people such as my constituent?

Mr Jones: I am sorry to hear of the predicament of the hon. Lady's constituent. If she writes to me, I will pursue the matter further.

Referendum

8. **Mr David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the First Minister on the proposed referendum on law-making powers for the National Assembly for Wales. [28257]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mrs Cheryl Gillan): I have had regular discussions with the First Minister on the proposed referendum. I can confirm that this Government have delivered on their commitment to hold a referendum on further powers for the National Assembly for Wales in the first quarter of next year. The legal instruments setting out the arrangements for the referendum to take place on 3 March 2011 were approved by Parliament and will be considered at the Privy Council meeting later this month.

Mr Amess: In the light of that answer, what consideration has my right hon. Friend given to the outcome of the referendum?

Mrs Gillan: The Wales Office will remain strictly neutral throughout the referendum process, but it is right to consider and prepare now for the outcome, whether it be a yes vote or a no vote. Clearly, a yes vote will transfer primary powers to the Assembly over those areas already devolved, and that will mean a changed relationship with Westminster, including the impact of legislation made in Cardiff on this House and this legislature. If there is a no vote, we will retain the existing legislative process. In that eventuality, I will examine how we can make the system more effective and more efficient, because it is broadly agreed that the legislative competence order process, as it currently operates, is cumbersome and time consuming.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I welcome the referendum on greater law-making powers for the Assembly, and I will campaign and vote for a yes. While the Secretary of State does not have a vote and wishes the Wales Office to be neutral, can she indicate what the Under-Secretary, who is a Welsh MP, will do? Will he vote yes or no, or will he sit on the fence?

Mrs Gillan: Ministers in the Wales Office will remain neutral. Unlike the hon. Gentleman's party, the Conservative party in Wales will allow members a free vote. That is the sensible way to proceed.

Aerospace Industry

9. **Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con):** What recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on support for the aerospace industry in Wales. [28258]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): My right hon. Friend and I have had regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on support for the aerospace industry in Wales. I am pleased that we will take forward our order for A400M transport aircraft and the future strategic tanker programme, safeguarding hundreds of highly skilled jobs in north Wales.

Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend regret the pre-election scaremongering, especially in Wales, that we would scrap the A400M, project?

Mr Jones: I do. The A400M is of crucial importance to the aircraft industry in north Wales. Although the wings are not made there, the technology that produces the wings is based there, and it is of extreme importance to the aerospace industry in Broughton.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I was talking to the managing director of GE Aviation in Nantgarw on Monday and he said that he was willing to work with the Government to encourage other inward investors—for example, Boeing—to add to the aerospace cluster in Wales. Will the Minister take up that offer and work with stakeholders in Wales to increase inward investment and the number of jobs?

Mr Jones: I am very pleased to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Policing

10. **Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab):** What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the likely effects on Wales of spending reductions in respect of police forces. [28259]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): Effective policing in Wales is of the utmost importance to the coalition Government. Both the Secretary of State and I have had regular discussions with Cabinet and ministerial colleagues on matters affecting policing and law and order in Wales.

Chris Ruane: North Wales police force is one of the best in the country. Under Labour, it had record investment, a record number of police officers and a record drop in crime. Under the Con-Dem Government, all that will be reversed when North Wales police will be forced to sack 250 officers and 484 civilian staff. Will the Minister and his team do what they should be doing, stick up for Wales and stop these dastardly cuts?

Mr Jones: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the cuts are necessary entirely as a result of the Labour party's incompetent management of the economy. I reiterate that the chief constable of North Wales has sufficient confidence in his force to say that it will continue to protect the public and provide a service in which the public can be confident.

Railways

11. **Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** Whether she has discussed with the Secretary of State for Transport the electrification of the London to south Wales railway line; and if she will make a statement. [28260]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mrs Cheryl Gillan): I have had, and continue to have, discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport about that matter. We have already announced £7 billion of rail infrastructure improvements that will reduce journey times to Cardiff by 15 minutes. The next step is to work with the Welsh Assembly Government on the business case for further electrification. I have recently spoken to both the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to agree how best to take that forward.

Mr Llwyd: People in Wales will be very disappointed by such a response. Network Rail has allocated no expenditure whatsoever to Wales for the next 12 months. Does the right hon. Lady realise how vital that is to the Welsh economy?

Mrs Gillan: I think I heard that question. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on receiving at the ITV Wales Welsh politician of the year awards the “campaigner of the year” award for his work on aftercare for military veterans. We all congratulate him heartily.

I assure him that I fully support electrifying the great western main line, but the process is not simple and a range of factors must be considered. If he thinks it is such an easy matter, he should ask the people he sits on the same side of the House with why not a single centimetre of line was electrified in Wales under the previous Labour Government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. It is very discourteous to Members and, indeed, to Ministers.

Mr Llwyd: The assurances that the right hon. Lady gives that she will fight her corner for Wales are becoming rather empty—a bit like the situation with tuition fees and the Lib Dems.

Mrs Gillan: It is unusual for the hon. Gentleman to be quite so sour. As he knows, the Department for Transport is considering new inter-city rolling stock to replace the existing InterCity 125s. The two options that remain under consideration are the revised bid from Agility Trains for a mixed fleet of some all-electric trains, and a proposal for a fleet of new all-electric trains that could be coupled to new diesel locomotives. He knows the decision is complex and I reassure him that I am working with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on the business case. My officials are constantly in touch with the Department for Transport. We need to take our time and get this decision right for Wales.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Secretary of State has said that she will resign if the high-speed main line goes through her constituency. Will she resign if she fails to secure the electrification of the line to south Wales?

Mrs Gillan: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Prime Minister is well aware of my constituents’ objections to route 3. If the preferred route on the high-speed rail is route 3, he will expect me to argue against it, not least because we will be holding a proper consultation. He also knows that, when he was in Government, many Cabinet Ministers made representations on post offices in their constituencies after they had supported—

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear Karen Lumley.

Policing

12. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on policing in Wales. [28262]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier response to my hon. Friends the Members for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) and for Wycombe (Steve Baker).

Karen Lumley: Having lived in Wrexham for most of my adult life, I notice that North Wales police force has one of the lowest crime rates and the highest percentage of uniformed officers on the streets compared with other forces in England and Wales. Does my hon. Friend think, as I do, that we could learn something from the North Wales police force?

Mr Jones: Yes, indeed, we can. Principally, what we have in north Wales is a chief constable who has displayed a tremendous can-do attitude and is prepared to live within his financial means.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [29131] **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 8 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to Private John Howard from 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, who died on Sunday 5 December. He was an incredibly gifted and popular Paratrooper. We should send our condolences to his family, his friends and his loved ones at this very sad time. While I was in Afghanistan, I also met the two brave Paratroopers who were wounded at the same time that he was tragically killed. They were in the excellent Camp Bastion hospital, and I know that their families will be relieved to know that they are doing well and are in extremely good spirits.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mark Menzies: I would like to associate myself with the condolences expressed by the Prime Minister. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we invest in the future of the unmanned aerial vehicle programme that has been developed at Warton in my constituency, and will he accept my invitation to come and see first hand the outstanding work force who are driving innovation and skills at that plant?

The Prime Minister: I would be delighted if I could take up the opportunity of seeing my hon. Friend’s constituency and that facility. The truth is that the UAV programme is exactly the sort of defence asset that we should be investing in. It plays an absolutely vital role in Afghanistan—we are increasing our spending on that project—and it shows the point of having a defence review, as it is vital to start spending money on the weapons of the future, rather than on legacies of the past.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): May I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Private John Howard, from 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment? He showed enormous courage. We pay tribute to his sacrifice, and our thoughts and deepest condolences are with his family. I join the Prime Minister also, as he recently came back from Afghanistan, in paying tribute to all our troops serving in Afghanistan and their families.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that after his changes are introduced, English students will pay the highest fees of any public university system in the industrialised world?

The Prime Minister: The figures are well known for what students will pay. They are much lower than what students pay in the United States, for instance, but I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that in the end, we have to make a choice. If we want to see university education expand and universities well funded, we have to work out where that money is going to come from. Our proposal is that graduates should make a greater contribution, but only if they are successful. They will start paying back only when they are earning £21,000. That is better than the system that we inherited.

Edward Miliband: The Prime Minister did not answer the question. This country will have the highest fees for going to a public university in the whole industrialised world. He says that his plans are about properly funding universities. They are not: he is cutting public investment in universities and loading costs on to students and their parents. Will he admit that the reason fees are being trebled is to make up for an 80% cut in the university teaching budget?

The Prime Minister: The reason these contributions are going up is because we were left a completely unsustainable situation. That is why, before the last election, the Labour Government put in place the Browne commission, and why the Conservative party backed it. One party has had the courage of its convictions to see this through. *[Interruption.]* To be fair to the Liberal Democrats, they never signed up to the Browne review. The right hon. Gentleman did, and he is the one guilty of rank hypocrisy.

Edward Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman has given it away: one party. There are 57 Liberal Democrats, and they are split four ways. That is something, even for the Liberal Democrats. Things are so bad that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (John Hemming) is offering his own unique solution to the votes tomorrow. He says that if you run quickly, you can vote both ways. I have to say that if the Kremlin were spying on the Liberal Democrats, we would know why: they want a bit of light relief.

Let us have the Prime Minister answer another question, because he did not answer the first two. He says that he does not want the next generation to be in debt, so does he not understand the anxiety that students and parents have about starting their adult lives with a debt of £40,000?

The Prime Minister: You cannot attack a plan if you do not have a plan. The fact is that Labour went into the last election with a 25% cut planned for the Business Department. The right hon. Gentleman has absolutely no way of making the numbers add up. Everybody knows that they said that they would not introduce tuition fees; they introduced them. They said that they would not introduce top-up fees; they introduced them. They said that they supported the Browne review; he wrote it into their manifesto. Why are they breaking their pledge about the Browne review? Why? The fact is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. All this finger-pointing is very unseemly. I want to hear the response of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: The leader of the Labour party saw a big crowd assembling in the Mall, and he just decided, “I am their leader, I must follow them.” That is his idea of leadership.

Edward Miliband: A week really is a long time in politics—not so much waving but drowning. Let us talk about social mobility, because that is at the heart of these proposals. Let me quote someone whom the Prime Minister used to trust on social mobility—the person he appointed to head his social mobility taskforce: the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). He said:

“I’m concerned about the effect this would have on social mobility and the huge level of debt we are encouraging young people to take on.”

I know that the Prime Minister does not have much time for the right hon. Gentleman these days, but why does he not listen to him on this issue?

The Prime Minister: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what has happened in terms of social mobility. Last year, there were 80,000 students on free school meals; only 40 of them went to Oxford and Cambridge. That is the situation with social mobility. What we are introducing—*[Interruption.]* I know that the Opposition do not want to hear the details. We are introducing a situation where nobody pays fees up front, including part-time students—which is 40% of students—and nobody pays anything back until they are earning £21,000. Under the new system, everyone will pay back less than they pay under the current system—*[Interruption.]* They will pay back less every month; that is the case. The poorest will pay less, the richest will pay more. It is a progressive system, but the right hon. Gentleman has not got the courage of his convictions to back it.

Edward Miliband: Only the Prime Minister could treble tuition fees and then claim that it is a better deal for students. No one is convinced, frankly. Is it not absolutely clear that this policy is in chaos? The Education Minister refuses to answer questions on it, and the Government rush out proposals on it daily. Is it not the most sensible thing for the Prime Minister to go away, think again and come up with a better proposal?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has absolutely no idea what he would put in its place. He supported a graduate tax, which his shadow Chancellor does not back. He was the person who wrote the manifesto suggesting the Browne review. He is just demonstrating complete political opportunism—*[Interruption.]* Yes, total opportunism. He is behaving like a student politician and, frankly, that is all he will ever be.

Edward Miliband: Mr Speaker, I was a student politician, but I was not hanging around with people who were throwing bread rolls and wrecking restaurants. Is it not the truth that all the Prime Minister can offer us is “you’ve never had it so good” on planet Cameron? What does he have against young people? He has taken away the child trust fund; he is abolishing the education maintenance allowance; he is scrapping the future jobs

fund; and now he is trebling tuition fees. Is not the truth that he is pulling away the ladder because he does not understand the lives of ordinary people up and down this country?

The Prime Minister: The fact is that if you introduce a graduate tax, you are going to be taxing people on £6,000, £7,000 and £9,000. Where is the fairness in that? The truth of the matter is that we examined a graduate tax and we know it does not work; the right hon. Gentleman's party examined a graduate tax and knows it does not work; the Liberal Democrats had a look at a graduate tax and they know it does not work. The only reason he is backing it is because it gives him a political opportunity. I know what it is like: you can sit there for year after year; you see a political opportunity, but you will never be a party of Government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in this Chamber; the public absolutely detest and despise it. The House must come to order.

Chris Kelly (Dudley South) (Con): The Prime Minister may be aware that a young constituent of mine, Connor Rankine-Christ, was stabbed in an unprovoked attack at the weekend and has been battling to overcome life-threatening injuries this week. The suspect was released on bail just 24 hours after the attack, which has understandably upset and worried the victim's family. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the courts should still be able to remand individuals in custody in the most serious cases where there is a risk that the defendant will cause injury by reoffending?

The Prime Minister: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right: the courts must have this power. If they believe that someone is dangerous and could offend again, it is absolutely right that that person is not given bail. That happens under our system and it should go on happening under our system.

Overseas Voluntary Sector

Q2. [29132] **Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** What assessment he has made of the likely effects of proposed reductions in expenditure on the programme partnership agreement on the effectiveness of organisations assisted by the Government in the overseas voluntary sector.

The Prime Minister: Expenditure through the programme partnership agreement is not being reduced. We expect to allocate £120 million every year to this programme from 2011 to 2014. At the same time, we are increasing overall levels of support for the most effective organisations working overseas, and we are keeping the promise to reach 0.7% of gross national income for aid by 2013.

Mr MacNeil: Many colleagues on both sides of the House, including myself, have seen at first hand the great work that Voluntary Service Overseas volunteers do worldwide. Can the Prime Minister assure the House that he will continue to provide the necessary and expected support for VSO to continue to improve the lives of 26 million people around the world?

The Prime Minister: I can do that. Voluntary Service Overseas is an excellent organisation and I know it has widespread support across the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is in discussions about how to ensure that its programme goes on succeeding and expanding. Fundamentally, with a growth in the Department for International Development's budget, there is every chance that that could happen; that is what I expect to see.

Mr Speaker: Would a Government Back-Bench Member like to contribute on this closed question?

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Voluntary Service Overseas provides valuable experience opportunities as well as giving people a connection with development. I welcome what the Prime Minister has said, but can he give an assurance that VSO's current concern that its budget might be cut will be overcome by giving it access to other budgets within the Department for International Development?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the discussions are going extremely well and that it will be possible to guarantee that. One reason why people are asking this question about programme partnership arrangements is because the Government want to ensure that organisations are not wholly dependent on Government money, but seek sources of funding elsewhere. As my right hon. Friend says, there are opportunities through other budgets within DFID, and VSO could also make applications to the global fund to combat poverty.

Engagements

Q3. [29133] **Mr David Crausby (Bolton North East) (Lab):** While temperatures drop across the UK, profit margins for the energy companies have risen by an unacceptable 38%, compelling people on limited incomes to turn their heating down. What will the Prime Minister do to force these privatised companies to pay back some of their excessive profits to customers before more pensioners freeze to death?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to ask this question. Two things need to be done. The first is that the regulatory authorities need to be tough with the energy companies—and that is exactly what I expect Ofgem to do. The second thing that needs to happen is that the cold weather payments need to kick in. We have already spent £173 million since the start of the particularly cold weather. One reason why this is working so well is that we have made permanent what was only a temporary increase from Labour before the last election.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): This morning, I spoke to one of my constituents—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray!"] It might come as news to Labour Members, if they were quiet, and they should try it. Mrs Lowther, who is 76 years of age, is disabled and has been housebound for 11 days now, because of the snow and ice in Stapleford. Does the Prime Minister agree that in such inclement weather it is imperative that we are good neighbours, especially to the elderly and the frail?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Of course the Government should be there with cold weather payments, and we are. We should be there with winter fuel payments, and we are. It is also

important that local government plays its role, ensuring that grit supplies are there. By being good neighbours, we can all help those who could suffer in the cold weather, and she is quite right to raise the point.

Q4. [29134] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): As someone who claims to be an avid fan of The Smiths, the Prime Minister will no doubt be rather upset this week to hear that both Morrissey and Johnny Marr have banned him from liking them. The Smiths, of course, are the archetypal student band. If he wins tomorrow night's vote, what songs does he think students will be listening to: "Miserable Lie", "I Don't Owe You Anything" or "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now"?

The Prime Minister: If I turned up, I probably would not get "This Charming Man". If I went with the Foreign Secretary, it would probably be, "William, It Was Really Nothing".

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is simply too much noise. It is very unfair. I want to hear Mr Stewart Jackson.

Mr Jackson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a badge of shame, for which the Labour party should apologise to taxpayers, parents and pupils, that having doubled education spending during their term in office, they managed to drive down educational attainment standards to the bottom of the international league, according to the OECD?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The tables published today make depressing reading. We are falling behind countries such as Poland and Estonia, which we should be well ahead of. Frankly, this comes down to the choice we have to make. We made the choice of putting an extra £3 billion into the schools budget during this Parliament, because we want more done in early years and primary education so that we get the social mobility about which the Leader of the Opposition was posing earlier.

Q5. [29135] **Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Over half the students at the university of Wolverhampton come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This morning, the University and College Union said that Wolverhampton was one of the universities at high risk, owing to the Government's massive 85% cuts to its teaching grant. Will the Prime Minister explain to students and local businesses exactly why he is putting Wolverhampton university at risk in that way?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady stood for election on a manifesto that supported the Browne commission—[*Interruption.*] She did; she can deny it now, but that is what the manifesto written by the Leader of the Opposition said. The fact is that we have to make a decision. Is it right for taxpayers to continue providing the predominant support for university education? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] They say yes now, but that is not what they stood on at the last election. Many taxpayers do not go to university or benefit from a university education, so it is fairer and

better to ask students to contribute, but only when they are successful. No one will contribute until they earn £21,000, which is £6,000 more than under the system that the hon. Lady's party introduced.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as concerned as I am about absurd health and safety legislation, which has reached such dizzy heights in this country that the chief executive of Sainsbury's told me last week that Christmas crackers are now category 1 fireworks, and cannot be sold to anyone under the age of 16 without the risk of a six-month sentence of imprisonment? Will he put a firework up the health and safety legislation?

The Prime Minister: That would give me enormous pleasure, and I look forward to doing so.

Q6. [29136] **Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the House in June that he had been treated not too badly on his last visit to Gateshead—we are, by nature, a very friendly bunch. Will he return to discuss with regional political leaders of all parties their real concerns and fears that the Government's current strategy is undermining the potential for economic recovery in our region, particularly through the slashing of support for the tourism industry? Before he mentions it, we are already trying to squeeze a few gallons out of a pint-sized regional growth fund pot.

The Prime Minister: There is big Government support for the north-east. There is big support for Nissan and its electric car, and we are supporting the National Renewable Energy Centre, which is building the world's biggest testing facility for wave and tidal technology. We have also awarded a £7 million contract for the construction of the first advanced bioethanol plant in the Tees valley. So we are investing in the north-east.

The hon. Gentleman talks about a fragile economic recovery. If we had listened to his party, there would not be a recovery; we would be queuing up with Ireland to go to the International Monetary Fund.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Drunks and binge drinking have fuelled an economy that has sadly seen people the victims of knife crime. May I ask my right hon. Friend to stiffen the Justice Secretary's resolve in dealing with those who carry knives and those who commit knife crimes?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made an important point. If she reads the Green Paper, she will see that adults committing a crime with a knife should expect to go to prison. That is absolutely right, because there are far too many people committing knife crimes today who do not go to prison, and they should.

Q7. [29137] **Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): The dissident terrorist threat is a continuing problem in Northern Ireland, and we have seen some evidence of the terrorists' capabilities in recent months. Will the Prime Minister ensure that if additional resources that were not previously envisaged are deemed necessary by the Chief Constable to deal with such a threat, he will ensure that they are provided without delay?

The Prime Minister: Of course we keep a very careful eye on the situation in Northern Ireland, and on whether additional resources are required. We stuck to the pledges made by the previous Government about properly funding the devolution of policing and justice. I think that decisions are better made locally, which is why that was the right step to take. I know how difficult the security situation is in Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute to police on both sides of the border for the brilliant work that they do. Of course we always stand ready to help, but we did make quite a generous settlement in terms of devolving law and justice, and that should be the first call for resources.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): In Afghanistan on Monday, the Prime Minister said that British troops could start coming home from Afghanistan as early as next year, which is a major policy shift. With which of our allies did he discuss that decision, and does he envisage the gap being filled by the Afghan army or the US army?

The Prime Minister: What I said in Afghanistan was what I said before I went to Afghanistan and what I will happily say again today, which is that the whole of NATO and all the nations of the international security assistance force that are involved in Afghanistan are committed to transition to Afghan control between the start of 2011 and the end of 2014. As that happens, there will clearly be opportunities either to reinvest troops in training missions or, indeed, to bring them home. What the Chief of the Defence Staff and I both said at a press conference in Afghanistan was that it might be possible to bring some of our troops home next year.

Q10. [29140] **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Tomorrow the Deputy Prime Minister will vote to break his election promise on tuition fees. This Prime Minister has also broken his election promise to maintain the child trust fund for the poorest in our society. What message does that send to young people about trusting Government?

The Prime Minister: I seem to remember that the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the last Government, who commissioned the Browne review. [Interruption.] Yes: the Government who went into the election committed to cuts of 25% in the budget of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. If they were committed to that, what were Opposition Members going to do? Were they going to cut the number of people in universities, or were they going to cut the money going to universities? We have had absolutely no answer. The people who are actually behaving in a way that I think drags politics through the mud are people who introduced tuition fees, introduced top-up fees and commissioned the Browne review, and who then, as soon as they are in opposition, behave irresponsibly and run away from it.

Q11. [29141] **George Eustice** (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): There are currently plans to regenerate Camborne and Redruth, which would create 6,000 new jobs and allow the building of a modern, state-of-the-art mine in Redruth. However, the work depends on transport infrastructure improvements which are currently being reviewed by the Department for

Transport. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in difficult times when capital is scarce we should prioritise projects that create jobs and deliver growth, and that the Department for Transport should review its assessment criteria?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks very well for his constituency and fights very hard for the economy in Redruth and Camborne, and he is absolutely right that of course we should give priority to transport projects that have the greatest economic return. That is what the Department for Transport does; it also has to look at environmental and other factors, but decisions should be based on where we can show economic benefits from transport—and remember that we are putting more money into transport capital infrastructure than the previous Government planned to do.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): In light of his experience of the World cup bid in Zurich last week, can the Prime Minister tell us what his view now is of an organisation that engages in the most convoluted and bizarre voting arrangements, that says one thing and then votes exactly the opposite way, and that has a leader who seems more interested in power and prestige than accountability—and after he has finished with the Lib Dems, can he tell us what he thinks of FIFA?

The Prime Minister: I certainly learned one thing: when it comes to breaking promises, politicians have got nothing on football management—there is no doubt about that. [Interruption.] Before Labour Members all start pointing, we should just remember who it was who said, “We will never introduce tuition fees.” Who said, “We will never introduce top-up fees?” Who said “We will back the Browne review”? Who is now an organised hypocrisy?

Q12. [29142] **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): Following the Prime Minister’s visit to Afghanistan and the review of the military covenant published today, will he reassure me that his Government will go that extra mile to support our troops, who have given so much to our country?

The Prime Minister: I am sure the whole House is grateful for what my hon. Friend said about our troops. On my visit to Afghanistan, I was again struck by just how hard these people are working, and how courageous, professional and brave they are. They are genuinely the best of British, and we owe it to them that we support not just them, but also their families. One thing I am pleased we have been able to do is introduce a pupil premium for the children of forces families. I know from my own constituency that many children at schools dominated by forces families leave and go to a different school within each year. I think giving extra support to forces families in this way is absolutely right, and I am sure it will be supported by all.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): In a tragic incident yesterday at the Sonae factory in my constituency, two people working at the plant were killed. I am sure the Prime Minister will join me in expressing deepest condolences to the families of those who were killed, and does he agree that when the Health and Safety Executive and police investigations into what happened have been completed, whatever action that is necessary will be taken?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join the right hon. Gentleman in what he says about his constituents and the dreadful accident that took place. It is important that we have procedures in place for the HSE and others to investigate these issues and, as he says, they should follow the evidence wherever it leads.

Q13. [29143] **Ian Swales** (Redcar) (LD): Does the Prime Minister agree that foundation schools are already free from local authority control, and will he meet me to discuss the cancelled innovative project to join foundation school Redcar community college with Kirkleatham Hall special school, to replace their dilapidated classrooms and provide facilities for the community?

The Prime Minister: I know that my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary will be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss that. The point is that all schools now being given this greater level of independence—whether as foundation schools or the new academy schools—should have greater ability to get together and collaborate to invest in their future, rather than always having to rely on a drip-feed from Government Ministers.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Is the Prime Minister aware that Parliament may have been infiltrated by an imposter? The Deputy Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* The Deputy Prime Minister has said he will vote to treble tuition fees and abolish the education maintenance allowance. Before the general election the leader of the Liberal Democrats said he would vote to abolish tuition fees and keep the EMA. *[Interruption.]* Can the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to finish his question without chuntering and shouting from a sedentary position. The last sentence please.

Jack Dromey: Can the Prime Minister tell the House this: are there two Nick Cleggs?

The Prime Minister: I have to say that the hon. Gentleman has the unique qualification of being one of the brothers who was selected on an all-women shortlist—next time he comes in he should dress properly.

Q14. [29144] **Mr Don Foster** (Bath) (LD): Within the next couple of years the Ministry of Defence will relocate a further 1,300 jobs away from Bath, allowing two major sites in the city to be redeveloped. Given the urgent need for 3,000 additional affordable homes within the city, will the Prime Minister give me the assurance that the MOD will work with the Homes and Communities Agency and the local council to ensure that the sites can be used for those houses, rather than merely to get the best price in the sale?

The Prime Minister: I discussed this with my hon. Friend this morning, and I certainly agree that the Ministry of Defence should work with the HCA to try to bring this about. Sometimes the wheels can turn quite slowly when it comes to Defence Estates. I know that he will work hard, and I will ask the MOD to work hard, to get this fixed.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister will be aware that a week is a long time in politics. Having had all that time, could he now update the House on his rethink on the future of school sport partnerships?

The Prime Minister: I think that there is quite a common position between both sides; I read the debate where the shadow sports Minister said that clearly we could not afford the current level of commitment. He also said that the current way of doing things was not particularly efficient. So we are reviewing it and making sure that we do provide money for school sport from the centre, but that we do so in a better way because, frankly, too many children in too many schools do not have access to sport after 13 years of a Government who talked an awful lot about it.

Q15. [29145] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): The Browne report states that only just over 1% of UK graduates gave gifts to their former universities, compared with at least 10% in the United States. Does the Prime Minister agree that those of us who received free university education and are in a position to do this should be encouraged to do some serious giving to universities to support current students?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is that other countries do better at endowing their universities and making sure that they have a wider source of income. But the fundamental issue is this: if we are going to look at how we are going to fund universities in the future, it cannot be right, and we will not get a proper expansion of higher education, if we just ask taxpayers, many of whom do not go to university, to fund that expansion. It is right that students—only when they are successful, only when they have left university and only when they are earning £21,000—should make a contribution. They should do so in the progressive and fair way that Browne and we have set out.

Gregg McClymont (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (Lab): The Prime Minister will be aware of the Arctic conditions sweeping across central Scotland. Constituents of mine have been trapped in cars and buses overnight, they have been trapped in their own homes, and schoolchildren have been forced to spend the night in temporary accommodation. Can he assure me that the UK Government are offering all possible assistance to the Scottish authorities, up to and including the use of military personnel and equipment?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we stand ready to give any assistance in terms of how we are doing these things. Ministerial meetings at, in effect, the Cobra level, are going through what actions need to be taken. There is a bigger strategic supply of grit than there has been in previous years, the military stand ready to help and I can guarantee him that whatever needs to be done will be done.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the statement by the Minister for pensions, Steve Webb. May I appeal to Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so quickly and quietly, so that we can hear from Minister Webb?

Benefits Up-rating

12.34 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the up-rating of pensions and benefits for 2011-12. I shall place in the Vote Office full details of the new rates that are due to come into force from the week of 11 April 2011 for each pension and benefit, and arrange for the figures to be published in the *Official Report*.

As the Chancellor said in his autumn statement, we have taken

“decisive action to take Britain out of the financial danger zone.”—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2010; Vol. 519, c. 530.]

Our decisions today about up-rating are part of the plan to ensure we both get on track and stay on track, now and in future.

The Department for Work and Pensions is continuing its comprehensive review of social security policy, including pensions and benefits up-rating. As many hon. Members will know, an important component of the future plans for up-rating pensions and benefits is the move to the consumer prices index—the CPI. For 2010, additional pensions and benefits were held at their 2009 levels because the retail prices index—the RPI—was negative, at minus 1.4%. In those circumstances, many people saw no increase in their pensions or benefit. Why did the RPI fall? It was mainly because of falling mortgage interest payments, but only 7% of pensioners have a mortgage. People with earnings-related pensions lost out because of a fall in costs that did not benefit them. Had the CPI been used to measure the change in prices last year, benefits such as additional state pension would have been increased.

The CPI is the headline measure of inflation in the UK as well as the target measure used by the Bank of England, and it is internationally recognised. The CPI uses a methodology that takes better account of consumer behaviour in response to price increases. The Government believe that it is right to use one appropriate index for up-rating additional state pensions, public and private pensions and social security benefits, and that CPI is a more appropriate measure of changes in the cost of living of pensioners and benefit recipients than RPI. In addition, the House may be surprised to learn that the RPI excludes the spending patterns of the poorest pensioners.

For all those reasons, the Government have decided to move to the CPI. I acknowledge that over the long term the CPI tends to rise more slowly than the RPI. However, the question is not which is the higher or lower number but which is the most appropriate way to track and measure the changes in average prices. The coalition will ensure that the value of many important pensions and benefits is maintained through a rise of 3.1% even in these tough economic times. In addition, steps have been taken to protect low-income families with children through above-indexation increases to child tax credits. Such measures are better targeted on low-income families and will ensure that the measures in the Budget and spending review, of which the move to CPI was a part, will have no measurable impact on child poverty in the next two years.

For consistency, we also announced on 8 July that we would move to CPI as the basis for calculating the statutory minimum increases for revaluation and indexation of occupational pension schemes. Hon. Members will wish to note that the annual revaluation order, which implements the decision, is being laid before Parliament today, together with our consultation document which sets out proposals and seeks views on the impact of using CPI for private sector occupational pension schemes.

The consultation document includes three main proposals. First, we propose legislation to ensure that schemes that choose to stay with RPI do not have to pay CPI in those years when CPI is greater than RPI. We do not intend to put an additional burden on schemes. Secondly, we plan to include indexation and revaluation on the list of changes where employers are required to consult with their employees. I was surprised to learn that schemes had been able to change indexation and revaluation without any duty to consult employees. We will change that. Thirdly, we need to consider what to do when schemes specifically state that RPI should be used and when they do not have the power to amend scheme rules.

I know that many people will have been alarmed by press speculation that we were planning to override scheme rules. We were tempted to respond to the inaccurate reports in this morning's press, but we were keen that this announcement should come out in a formal, structured way and to the House first of all. However, I am pleased to announce to the House that, contrary to press speculation, we do not plan to grant schemes a modification power to make it easier to use CPI when they do not already have the power to amend scheme rules. We believe that members' trust in schemes and the scheme rules could be severely damaged if we intervened to give schemes the power to change their rules when the scheme does not already have such a power. Trust in pensions is important and I believe that intervention demands strong justification.

Finally, I should like to turn to one of the early actions of this coalition Government: the restoration of the earnings link for the basic state pension. Unlike the Opposition, who had 13 years to make that important change but failed to do so, the Government made good on the pre-election promises to restore the link with earnings and delivered that promise within months of coming into power. In fact, we have gone further. We have protected the future value of the basic state pension with a triple guarantee that it will rise by the highest of the growth in earnings, prices or 2.5%. The triple guarantee means that even in times of slow earnings growth, we will never again see a repeat of small rises such as the 75p rise in 2000.

The new rate for the basic state pension will be £102.15 a week for a single person—an increase of £4.50 a week. From April next year, single people on pension credit will receive an above-earnings increase to their minimum guarantee of £4.75, taking their weekly income to £137.35. For couples, the increase will be £7.30, taking their new total to £209.70 a week. Separately, to help manage expenditure, the Chancellor used his spending review statement to announce that we will freeze the savings credit maximum. Over time, the savings credit has resulted in more and more pensioners being caught up in the means-tested system. Freezing the savings credit maximum helps us to focus resources on the poorest pensioners.

[Steve Webb]

At a time when the nation's finances are under severe pressure, the Government will be spending an extra £4.3 billion in 2011-12 to ensure that people are protected against cost-of-living increases. We have protected the basic state pension with our triple guarantee and we have confirmed that most people on pension credit will benefit in full from the cash increase enjoyed by those on the basic state pension. Our move to CPI for the uprating of the majority of other pensions and benefits will result in an uplift of 3.1 per cent from next April and will set the future of uprating on a more appropriate, consistent and stable basis that is fair to individuals and the taxpayer. Throughout this statement, I have outlined our firm commitment to ensure that no one is left behind, and I commend the statement to the House.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving me advance sight of the statement today. Both sides of the House agree that we need to cut the Budget deficit, even if we differ in our approaches, but let us be clear from the outset that what is set out today is not about deficit reduction. Making this permanent change from the use of the retail prices index to the consumer prices index, the impact of which will be felt long after the deficit is long gone, is an ideologically driven move that Labour opposes. If it were a time-limited change, we would consider whether it was a fairer alternative to deep cuts in departmental expenditure and would be willing to work with the Government on it. We would have supported a time-limited change to uprating, but why would the Government change the uprating of benefits in a way that will have an impact after the deficit has been reduced if not for ideological reasons? I agree that we need to get the economy back on track, but why will we be punishing the poorest in society and our pensioners even when the economy is growing again? Can the Minister confirm just how much worse off people will be over the next 10 years as a result of the switch and, correspondingly, how much money it will save the Government?

The Minister has conceded today that CPI will rise more slowly than RPI, but he says that the question is not about which index is higher or lower. That might not be the question that he wants to focus on, but for millions of pensioners and low-income families up and down the country, that is exactly the question to focus on. They will be asking how they will make ends meet following these changes. What advice would the Minister give to people who will be worse off year in and year out as a result of his decisions today?

Let us look at the detail. The Minister has outlined the Government's commitment to continue Labour's policy of restoring the earnings link for the basic state pension with a triple-lock guarantee. [Interruption.] The Government Front-Bench team may laugh, but they know that we committed to doing that and they are doing nothing more than continuing with our policy. Given that the Government are usually so intent on regressive cuts, the announcement in the Budget sounded too good to be true. The Minister's statement has confirmed that when something seems too good to be true, it usually is. His statement means that millions of pensioners will see the value of their pension fall every year, and that will be compounded by the increase in VAT, which will leave couple pensioners worse off by

£275 a year and single pensioners worse off by £125 a year. To what extent will the Government's combined measures on the change in uprating of the state second pension, the state earnings-related pension scheme, public sector pensions and the VAT increase wipe out any benefit to pensioners from the triple-lock guarantee?

What of the Government's previous promises? Before the election, the Minister said:

"We are very clear that all accrued rights should be honoured: a pension promise made should be a pension promise kept...we would not make any changes to pension rights that have already been built up. I have confirmed that I regard accrued index-linked rights as protected."

That is quite clear, I think, but today the Minister has confirmed that people who have paid into the state second pension, the state earnings-related pension scheme or a public sector pension throughout their working life will see their pension in retirement uprated by CPI, not RPI, as they had thought, which changes the rules of the game for pensioners and those coming up to retirement.

In just one week, we have seen the Lib Dems break their promises to students and to pensioners. The Minister will know, but for the benefit of others I shall remind him, that I have written to him to ask him to set out why he believes that CPI is a better measure of inflation for pensioners. I have copied that letter to the UK Statistics Authority, which on 6 October said:

"We believe that the CPI should become the primary measure of consumer price inflation but only when the inclusion in the index of owner occupiers' housing costs has been achieved."

I have not had a response to that letter, and given his attempt at explaining today, it is clear why.

The Minister has not produced any evidence to justify the change in indexation. Indeed, for pensioners and low-income families, average inflation is more than RPI and CPI, because of fuel and food costs. It is entirely disingenuous for him to claim that CPI is a better measure of inflation for pensioners when, in reality, pensioner incomes will be lower as a result. It is disingenuous as well to argue that CPI is a better measure of inflation than RPI for those on benefits. Those in that group spend more on food and fuel, so the average inflation is higher, not lower, than either RPI or CPI. Age UK says that CPI is not better, and that evidence is backed up by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. It adds that older people tend to spend more on essentials such as food and fuel, and still spend on housing costs such as council tax. I ask the Minister now, what evidence—not assertion, but evidence—is there that CPI better reflects inflation for pensioners and low-income families?

It is not just pensioners for whom this uprating makes no sense. The Government have said that, from 2013-14, they will uprate local housing allowance by CPI, rather than local rents, meaning a total disconnection between local housing markets and the housing allowance. The long-term consequences are likely to be dire, so will the Minister confirm whether that will be a permanent shift and whether he is comfortable that pensioners and low-income families risk losing their homes because of changes in rents over which they have no control?

The Government enthusiastically talk about making work pay—we would all support that—but we also hear today that they have said that they will freeze working tax credit but uprate jobseeker's allowance. Does that not mean that the gains from moving into work will shrink every year? Will the Minister explain how that is compatible with the drive to get people back to work?

Finally, does the Minister agree with the Child Poverty Action Group, which says that the

“effective inflation rate for the poorest households was higher than RPI in recent years when the cost of basic essentials like food and domestic fuel rose much faster than other prices”?

It adds that CPI up-rating will make inequality and poverty worse.

Steve Webb: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her questions. The CPI

“is more reliable because, taking account of spending by all consumers, this consumer prices index gives a better measure than the old RPIX measure of spending patterns. It is more precise because... it takes better account of consumers substituting cheaper for more expensive goods.”—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2003; Vol. 415, c. 1063.]

How right the previous Prime Minister was when he said those words.

There is a sensible debate to be had about the most appropriate price index. The hon. Lady said that pensioner inflation is always higher. I did not notice the previous Government using a higher inflation measure for pensioners in the 13 years during which they decided these things. In fact, over the past 20 years—not the past five, which Age UK used—the average pensioner inflation and the average non-pensioner inflation were the same. In other words, there are times when it is higher and times when it is lower, as we would expect, but in the long run they are the same. Previous Governments never used pensioner-specific inflation rates; nor do we propose to.

It was good of the hon. Lady to say that she would consider the CPI for this Parliament. Obviously, we are announcing today the benefit rates for next April, so I am assuming that, in the event that the House comes to vote on these matters, she will support the benefit rates that we are proposing. It was not entirely clear to me whether she was for them or against, but I hope that, in due course, it will be clear.

The hon. Lady asked about the use of the RPI and felt, I presume, that it is a better measure of inflation. Does she believe that in the year to September 2009 pensioner inflation was negative? I have never met a pensioner who thought that their inflation was negative. The goal is to use an index that matches inflation experiences, and that is what we have done.

The hon. Lady mentions the IFS and its views on the issue. The main difference between the CPI and the RPI is not the basket of goods but how the two indexes respond to price increases. The IFS found that the substitution effect used in the CPI is a better measure for lower-income households, so its judgment is that, on that key difference, the measure that we are using better fits the inflation experience of lower-income households. I am glad she cited the IFS, because it was right on that point.

The hon. Lady raises the issue of people meeting their fuel bills, and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, the cold weather payment is one of Labour’s ticking time bombs. This winter, it was due to fall to £8.50 a week. That was in the spending plans, but my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions agreed that it was not fair—that paying people £8.50 a week this year would not be

acceptable. So, we found the money to set it at £25 a week not just this winter, but for the whole Parliament, and pensioners on low incomes are better off as a result.

The hon. Lady asks about the net effect of the changes, glossing over the earnings link, which, mysteriously, was Labour policy but never implemented in 13 years. It is funny how things become implementable in opposition but not when one controls the levers of power. The earnings link on average gives about 2% a year above prices; the CPI change on average gives about 1% a year less than the RPI. So for those with low and modest occupational pensions, the net effect on pensioners of the two taken together will be positive.

We have a package of measures to protect the interests of pensioners. The earnings link over the long run will give a newly retired pensioner an extra £15,000 in state pension over their retirement, compared with the prices indexing that Labour, when it had the levers of power, applied for 13 years. That is what it applied in office for 13 years: the prices link. Within months, we have gone to the earnings link, and pensioners will appreciate what we have done for them.

Jonathan Evans (Cardiff North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend have constituents like mine, who are looking forward to increases in SERPs, and who have looked at what they received last year when the RPI was negative and the CPI was positive? Labour Members back then proposed no increase whatever in those pensions. At the same time, looking over 10 years, is it not a little disingenuous to fail to take into account what has happened to house prices over the past decade? It is unlikely to be replicated in the next decade.

Steve Webb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. Many of the letters that I signed as a new Minister were to people complaining about the April 2010 non-increase in pension rates because they were linked to the RPI, which was negative. One of the worst things about using something that is so heavily affected by mortgage interest rates is that a pensioner with savings not only fails to benefit from falling mortgage rates, but is penalised by falling savings rates, so they get a double whammy. Neither factor will affect the CPI.

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): The Minister in his statement said that he will continue to freeze the savings credit maximum, and the reason he appears to give is that over time the savings credit has resulted in more and more pensioners becoming caught up in a means-tested system. Is not another way of looking at the situation the fact that, in future, fewer pensioners on low income will be eligible for pension credit?

Steve Webb: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. She is right: last year the savings credit maximum was increased—by 12p, and by 6p for a couple, so it is important to keep what we are doing in context. If, however, she is accusing us of shifting the balance between means-tested benefits and universal benefits such as the state pension, I plead guilty. We have chosen to focus scarce resources on the basic pension through the earnings link and to constrain the rise in savings credit, which is a relatively ineffective way of reaching poorer pensioners. It has a take-up rate of barely 50%. Half the people who are entitled do not even have it; everyone claims their pension.

Jenny Willott (Cardiff Central) (LD): As the Minister said, the move from RPI to CPI will lead to much more stable increases in the up-rating of benefits and pensions, and the triple lock will ensure that pensioners do not fall behind the rest of society. Some concerns have been raised, however, because the CPI does not include any costs associated with housing. The Government have announced plans to consider including some housing costs in the CPI calculation, but when does the Minister expect that to be done, and what impact is it likely to have?

Steve Webb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right that CPI rises tend to be more stable compared with the surges and freezes that we had with the RPI. On the point about the inclusion of housing in the CPI, costs in the form of rents are in the CPI already, so that is covered for lower-income renters. The CPI advisory committee is undertaking a two-year programme to see how housing costs might be included, but it has already ruled out directly including mortgage interest payments specifically, which will help with the issue that we have raised. As and when the Office for National Statistics comes up with alternative measures, we will certainly look at them, but that is without prejudice at this stage, because the work is ongoing.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The Minister draws attention to the restoration of the earnings link and to Labour's failure over 13 years to make that important change, but does he not feel a little uncomfortable about being in cahoots with the party that broke that link in the first place?

Steve Webb: What is a great source of pride to me is being part of a coalition Government who are restoring the earnings link. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, although the measure was certainly in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer had not been happy with the plan, it would not have happened.

Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one real benefit to pensioners that will result from today's statement is that it gives them certainty and stability, something that, to their frustration, has been lacking over the past couple of years because of the measly and in some ways insulting changes that were made to their scheme?

Steve Webb: My hon. Friend is right. The nature of the triple guarantee is that, whatever happens to earnings and prices, pensioners will be guaranteed a 2.5% rise. Picking up on one of the points that the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), made, I should say that the previous Government, in their spending plans, pencilled in a 2.4% rise in 2012. I have no idea what prices or earnings will be next year, but I do know that 2.5% is bigger than 2.4%.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): If a private company alters its contractual obligations to pay its customers, it is likely to end up in court on a charge of fraud. The Secretary of State admits that CPI increases at a slower rate than RPI. Is not the measure just a simple theft of money from pensioners?

Steve Webb: No, it is not. Each year the Secretary of State has a duty to assess the general increase in prices; that is what the law requires him to do. If the law

required him to link state pensions, for example, to RPI, that would be a different matter, but that is not the duty. The duty is to assess inflation fairly, which is what we are doing. I also announced today that, when companies have RPI written into their rules and no provision for changing those rules, the Government will not allow schemes to change them, precisely for the sorts of reasons that the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): My hon. Friend rightly identified in his statement that the up-ratings policy forms part of a much wider review of social security policy, which will include major investment in the radical universal credit. Which elements of the Government's programme does he think will have the most impact on people of working age?

Steve Webb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for stressing that, as well as setting benefit rates, the Department, led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, is looking at major structural reform to ensure that work pays. The hon. Member for Leeds West asked about making sure work pays, and we need to ensure that the move into work is seamless, people know what they will get and there are not the complexities of multiple withdrawal rates. I think that history will judge this Department and my right hon. Friend's record very favourably for putting in place the structural reform that has been overdue for far too long.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Minister is very good at giving long, process answers to our questions, but I should like to ask him one simple, factual question. How much does he forecast the average pensioner losing over the next five years due to the switch from RPI to CPI?

Steve Webb: My forecast is that the average pensioner will gain from our announcements today. I understand why the hon. Lady wants to pick out one little bit, but she knows that the average pensioner draws a basic state pension, which we have restored to earnings, which more than offsets any change to CPI.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): The Minister rightly reminds the House about the importance of the triple guarantee, which will protect the value of state pensions. What feedback has he had on that important announcement?

Steve Webb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I regularly meet pensioners groups throughout the country, and he will be reassured to know that the restoration of the earnings link has been universally well received.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The Minister will be aware that some of us who now sit on the Opposition Benches never believed that CPI was a better measure because of the fact that it tended to give a lesser increase. However, we do not deny the worth of the triple guarantee. If his concern is to protect the basic state pension, will he address the needs of those people who do not receive its full value because of the high rate of contracted-out deductions? Many people suspect that the rate of deductions is excessive and punitive, and some say that it represents a marginal tax rate of 80% or 90% on their basic state pension.

Steve Webb: Obviously, contracted-out deductions apply not to the basic state pension, but to the additional state pension. The idea of contracting out is that a scheme that offers to provide earnings-related pensions must promise to match the benefits that the state would otherwise have provided. That may not be well understood, but such schemes and the employees who use them pay less national insurance, in return for which, the scheme promises to match what the state would have provided. I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's description, but if he writes to me with specific examples, I am happy to look at them.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): I have been contacted by a large number of constituents who are public sector pensioners, because they are extremely concerned that the pensions to which they have been contributing and which they thought were guaranteed to increase in a certain way should be changed by the Government without any justification. Why is it felt necessary to do that? If it is so good to triple-lock the basic state pension, why is it not equally good for public sector pensioners?

Steve Webb: To take the hon. Lady's second point first, if we were to earnings-link all public sector pensions in payment, it would cause a massive increase in unfunded pension liabilities. She has just spent billions upon billions of pounds, apparently casually, but I am afraid we are not in a position to do that. We have done what Governments have always done, which is to assess the general increase in prices, make a figure for inflation and apply it consistently—in this case, to all social security benefits, tax credits and earnings-related pensions. By statute, public sector pensions are linked to what we do to additional pensions. What we are doing for contracted-out public sector pensions is therefore exactly what we are doing for contracted-in additional pensions.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) asked about pensioners. What pensioners and this House need to know is the difference that is made in monetary terms when pensions are calculated using CPI rather than RPI.

Steve Webb: Under the triple lock, the increase will be determined by whichever is highest between earnings, prices and 2.5%. In the long run, the earnings figure is almost invariably higher than the prices figure, so regardless of which measure of prices is used, we will use the earnings figure. As I have said, CPI for additional pensions is about 1% a year lower. The average occupational pension in payment is about £70 a week, 1% of which is 70p a week. Under the triple lock, as I have just announced, the pension is going up by £4.50. That shows the great advantage of the triple lock.

BILL PRESENTED

ARMED FORCES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Liam Fox, supported by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary William Hague, Secretary Kenneth Clarke, Secretary Theresa May, Secretary Vince Cable, Mr Secretary Mitchell, the Attorney-General and Mr Andrew Robathan, presented a Bill to continue the Armed Forces Act 2006; to amend that Act and other enactments relating to the armed forces and the Ministry of Defence Police; to amend the Visiting Forces Act 1952; to enable judge advocates to sit in civilian courts; to repeal the Naval Medical Compassionate Fund Act 1915; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 122) with explanatory notes (Bill 122-EN).

Points of Order

1.2 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There are widespread reports that the Government will adopt the policy, which seems completely anti-intellectual and irrational, of removing the obligation to have scientists advising the Government on drugs policy. The suggestion is that it will be scientists out, and bigots in. Is it not extraordinary that there has not been a statement in the House so that we might question the Government on that policy? Will you use your good offices to ensure that a statement is made tomorrow, when there is nothing of great significance on our agenda?

Mr Speaker: I fear that the hon. Gentleman overestimates my influence, although I am grateful to him for doing so. He has registered his concern forcefully and it will have been heard by senior Whips on the Treasury Bench. I have a feeling, knowing the ingenuity of the hon. Gentleman, that he will return to this matter, and more than once.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister, I am sure unintentionally, misrepresented the position of those on the Opposition Front Bench with regard to a constructive offer that we made to discuss the future of school sport with the Government. He said that we had said that the current system was unaffordable and not working. That is not the case. You will remember, Mr Speaker, that last week the Secretary of State for Education agreed to meet us to talk about school sport. That has not happened. I raised this point of order to put those facts on the record and to say that I am seeking an apology for the misrepresentation of the Opposition's position on school sport that occurred at Prime Minister's questions.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me advance notice of his point of order. He has put his point very clearly on the record and I dare say that he will want to share it more widely. As an experienced Member and a former Cabinet Minister, he will be aware that a variety of ways are open to him further to pursue this matter and, as appropriate, to seek a correction. I hope that that is helpful.

Council Housing (Local Financing Pathfinders)

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

1.5 pm

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to begin negotiations with certain local authorities with a view to those local authorities leaving the current national housing subsidy system and becoming Council Housing (Local Financing Pathfinders) by April 2011; and for connected purposes.

I am sure that most Members from all parts of the House share the experience that I have in my surgery each week of meeting constituents who do not have a good quality and genuinely affordable home in which to live. Across the country, tens of thousands of families need a home—homes that councils such as mine in Cornwall would like to build. I am in no doubt that we must continue to invest in upgrading existing council housing, but we must also enable councils to build new homes. The ability to deliver the housing and welfare reforms that our society so badly needs is the prize for serving in this Parliament. Together with a good education and a decent job, those reforms will enable millions of hard-working families on low incomes to improve the quality of their lives.

To enable councils to build more homes, we must reform the way in which council housing is financed. Along with Members from all parts of the House, I support the coalition Government's plans to do so. As the Minister for Housing and Local Government said in October:

"For far too long councils have been left hamstrung in their efforts to meet the housing needs of their residents by a council house finance system that is outdated and no longer fit for purpose. The Housing Revenue Account subsidy is in urgent need of reform.

That's why I can confirm that we intend to scrap the current system, and instead replace it with something more transparent that will serve the needs of local communities without interference from Whitehall."

He went on to say that

"we will offer councils the opportunity to keep the rents... This is a key step to transfer powers to councils and communities, so they are free to improve their local services in a way that best meets the needs of local people."

It is anticipated that the decentralisation and localism Bill will provide for the new system. We also anticipate a revised debt settlement, plans for the allocation of debt between authorities and proposals for the system's day-to-day operation.

It is worth recapping the previous Government's work that brought us to this point. In summer 2006, the Housing Quality Network was appointed to undertake business plan modelling with six councils. The six authorities produced model 30-year business plans, based on a one-off settlement with central Government that would allow them to leave the national system. The modelling demonstrated that self-financing could bring improvements in efficiency, long-term planning and asset management. It could attract private investment and provide opportunities for local authorities to add new homes to the housing stock.

In December 2007, the then Minister for Housing announced a full review of the housing revenue account subsidy system to examine further the case for change. That was launched jointly by the Treasury and the Department for Communities and Local Government in March 2008. In June 2009, the then Minister for Housing announced a consultation on the dismantling of the subsidy system and on replacing it with a devolved system of responsibility and funding. The consultation, "Reform of council housing finance", concluded in October 2009. In March 2010, the findings of the consultation were published, along with a set of proposals for further consultation. Following the general election the Government have confirmed that self-financing will be introduced for all local authorities by 2012.

The Bill will create self-financing pathfinders to contribute to the coalition policy of ending the national subsidy system for council housing finance. It will give central and local government the chance to learn lessons on debt redistribution and to evaluate the impact before allowing the remaining local authorities to leave the national subsidy system. It proposes that three councils, Cornwall council, the London borough of Wandsworth and Stockport metropolitan borough council, be offered the opportunity to negotiate terms of exit with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and to leave the national subsidy system in April 2011. To enable that to happen, a minor amendment needs to be made to section 80B of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

The proposed establishment of a pathfinder programme for housing revenue account reform, to be undertaken at the three authorities that I mentioned, could have significant benefits for Government, the council housing sector and wider social housing policy. There would be no cost to the Treasury, which in fact would gain. Although it is impossible to be exact about the final formula, receipts to the Treasury during the pathfinder year would be substantial.

HRA reform is about turning local authorities from state-dependent administrators of council housing in an outdated national system into bodies that are locally financed and develop real long-term plans for more sustainable housing with local people. By working through the complex and detailed processes that are required to transform authorities in that way, we will learn valuable lessons that will minimise the risks of unforeseen problems when the legislative deal is done with the whole sector and 160-plus authorities in 2012. An agreement will need to be signed on a voluntary basis by each of the authorities involved and the Government, and it will need to include the debt settlement for April 2011.

It is worth recalling the housing sector's responses to the July 2009 review, which show its reactions to the self-financing proposals. Although only 6% expressed disagreement with the principle of self-financing, of the

64% who agreed with the proposals, only 10% did so without expressing significant reservations or caveats. Some 49% offered support for the proposals and accepted the redistribution of debt on condition that the amount of debt to be allocated at local level was acceptable. Clearly there is still work to be done with some councils to build consensus and momentum on the proposed reforms. The Bill offers the Minister an opportunity to work with the evangelists and to help him with the doubting Thomases.

The overriding objective is to use the pathfinders to support preparation for national HRA reform, not to divert resources away from the overall project. Such a process should be seen as complementary and beneficial, because it would provide a live testing environment for the detailed proposals as they continue to emerge. For example, the pathfinder councils would be able to participate in the forthcoming Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy consultation in a live situation and provide detailed technical feedback.

The process would clearly be seen as a pathfinder process so that technical, regulatory and financial lessons could be learned. It would not be to the advantage of the three local authorities concerned, save for the de facto benefit of being out of the HRA subsidy system a year early. The pathfinder councils would produce a report, with input from any of agencies that had been involved, such as CIPFA or the Public Works Loan Board, and that report would be made widely available to inform the ongoing preparations for self-financing.

The three authorities in the programme are included on the basis of their high performance, their high standing in the sector and the capacity that each has to take on the work early. There is a geographical mixture of debt take-on and debt write-down, of arm's length management organisations and retained management, and of stock sizes. That will provide an opportunity to maximise learning from the process.

I should like to end by thanking colleagues outside the Chamber from the local authorities, who have been generous with their time and very patient with my questions, particularly the housing officers at Cornwall, Wandsworth and Stockport councils and Steve Partridge at the Chartered Institute of Housing. Finally, I thank my colleagues from the official Opposition and the coalition who are supporting the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Sarah Newton, George Eustice, Sheryll Murray, Andrew George, Dan Rogerson, Stephen Gilbert, Jane Ellison, Ann Coffey and Mr David Nuttall present the Bill.

Sarah Newton accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 January 2011 and to be printed (Bill 124).

Estimates Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

VOTE ON ACCOUNT 2011-12

HOME OFFICE

Police Funding

[Relevant Document: Oral and written evidence taken by the Home Affairs Committee on 23 November on the Effect of the Comprehensive Spending Review on the Home Office, HC 626-i.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012, for expenditure by the Home Office—

(1) resources, not exceeding £4,490,851,000, be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 593,

(2) resources, not exceeding £225,450,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £4,601,101,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Stephen Crabb.*)

1.15 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for allowing us the opportunity to discuss this very important issue. As I did not have the chance to say this yesterday, I hope you had a very happy wedding anniversary.

On 20 October, the Chancellor announced the outcome of the 2010 spending review. The budget of the Home Office will fall by 25% in real terms from 2010-11, and within that the resource budget will fall by 23%, or £2.2 billion. Administration costs are due to fall by 33% and the capital budget by 49%. Taken as a whole, the Home Office has received a settlement with cuts more than twice the average of all Departments, which is 11%. Even ignoring the protected Departments of International Development and Health, the average cut for all other Departments is 17%, or 5% a year.

The comprehensive spending review document states that the Home Office settlement includes support for major policing reforms; a reduction in police resource funding by 14% in real terms by 2014-15; £1.8 billion of capital investment over the spending review period; spending for the delivery of a new national crime agency; and overall resource savings of about 23%. In real terms, central Government funding for the police is due to fall by 20% by 2014-15. As the House will know, part of the police's funding comes from the police precept, and if the police authorities decide to increase the precept at the rate forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility, the overall level of police funding will decline by 14% by 2014-15. There is therefore widespread concern about the level of funding for the police and the Home Office over the next five years, and about the way in which it will be achieved.

What has been described as front-loading—the cuts happening in the first few years—has already caused concern. I understand that the Association of Police Authorities recently wrote to the Minister for

Policing and Criminal Justice, whom I see on the Government Front Bench, to express that concern. It stated that

“a sensible, realistic approach is necessary to realise the savings objectives and avoid long-term damage to policing capability”

and that its members were

“deeply concerned that front-loading cuts will strip out the required financial flexibility police forces need to transform their working practices in order to make savings.”

The CSR document, about which I am sure we will hear more from the Minister, expresses the hope that the savings will be achieved through reducing bureaucracy, modernising pay and conditions for staff, introducing directly elected police and crime commissioners, abolishing the National Policing Improvement Agency and cutting counter-terrorism by about 10% in real terms. After the CSR was published, KPMG was reported as estimating that 18,000 police officers could be lost over a four-year period. The Police Federation was reported as estimating that the number would be 20,000. At Home Office questions on Monday, the Minister said:

“By cutting costs and scrapping bureaucracy, we will save both money and man hours, so I am confident that the spending review should not lead to any reduction in police officers visible and available on the streets.”—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2010; Vol. 520, c. 14.]

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): My right hon. Friend might like to know that this morning a number of my hon. Friends and I met the Minister to discuss the impact of the cuts on the West Midlands police force, which is 80% dependent on central Government funding. My right hon. Friend talks about the impact of the cuts on police numbers, but where police authorities are wholly or mainly dependent on central Government funding rather than the precept, the impact on local communities and police visibility will be that much worse.

Keith Vaz: The Home Affairs Committee has already heard from Chief Constable Sims of West Midlands police. It organised a seminar in Cannock Chase, which is not a million miles from my hon. Friend's constituency, where those concerns were raised. The problem is that individual police forces are currently unable to tell us precisely what effect the cuts will have locally. We will have to wait for the publication of the settlement, which we anticipate in early December. When the Minister speaks, I am sure he will tell us precisely when the provisional police settlements will be announced and placed before the House. He is smiling, so perhaps he will announce the figures today and we can question him on them. I am sure that we will hear soon. Until we do, we will not know precisely what is happening.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Apart from the cuts, which will reduce the overall number of police, I understand that the CSR will mean a freeze on recruitment, the likely application of regulation A19, which will get rid of the more experienced officers, and a freeze on pay. Do they sound like the conditions for a highly motivated, well performing police force?

Keith Vaz: My hon. Friend asks almost a rhetorical question to which the answer must be, “No—people will not be motivated if those cuts take place,” but he is right to raise those concerns. That is why this debate is

important. The Home Affairs Committee is of course aware of the deep concern in the west midlands, which is demonstrated by the number of west midlands MPs in the Chamber this afternoon.

A number of police forces have already issued statements on how the CSR will affect them. In a statement on 22 November, the chief constable of Greater Manchester police and the treasurer of the Greater Manchester Police Authority said:

“Final spending details are not expected until the end of November or early December but if the headline reductions in spending totals for the Police Service are ultimately reflected in GMP’s Formula Grant and Specific Grants, the Force and Police Authority will need to find savings of £134m over the four year period...Savings of £52m will need to be found in 2011/12.”

They estimate in their report that GMP will lose approximately 2,950 posts from a total of 12,000 over the four-year period, and BBC News has reported that 1,387 officers and 1,557 civilian posts could go in Greater Manchester.

Northumbria police also issued a statement, saying that the likely impact of the cuts will be the loss of 450 members of the civilian staff out of a total of 2,500. As my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) said, it looks as though 2,000 jobs will be lost in the West Midlands police force, including 1,050 police officers over the four-year period.

Alun Michael (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I should declare an interest, because my son is the chief executive of a police authority. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the large numbers of police officers that will be lost? The Government imply that the loss of police officers will not be seen on the streets because people can somehow be pulled out of back offices, but many officers who are not on the streets investigate internet-related crime and child abuse, and undertake intelligence and scientific activities to prevent crime. They investigate a range of crime, the evidence for which is not to be found on the streets of our towns and cities.

Keith Vaz: My right hon. Friend is extremely knowledgeable as a former Police Minister. He will know that, depending on the police authority or station, 85 different functions could be performed every day in a police station by people from IT experts to those on the switchboard and reception. Of course, the temptation is to remove the back office, but if we do so, those in the front office—the visible police officers—will have to go there, because there will be nobody else to do that work. My right hon. Friend is right to highlight the problems caused by the suggested front-loaded reductions.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that West Midlands police assume in their planning that they will be unable to cope with cuts on the scale being forced on them by the Government without compulsorily retiring up to 400 of the longest-serving police officers under A19, and without a significant reduction in visible policing on the streets—fewer bobbies on the beat—in the west midlands generally and Birmingham in particular?

Keith Vaz: My hon. Friend is rightly concerned about that. I will be going to Birmingham in a week’s time at

the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak to see how the CSR will affect visible policing.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): In response to an earlier question about the functions of police officers, it has to be said that many were affected by the previous Government’s ill-thought out, badly drafted legislation. For example, the short-term, knee-jerk reaction dispersal orders simply moved one problem to a different street in the same area, which I often saw as a cabinet member for safety in Medway. Of course we must consider the various functions of police officers, but in the past 10 years the police have been tied up with functions they should never have been dealing with.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. One thing I hope we can avoid at all costs is the kind of knee-jerk reaction that he mentioned. I would hate the police service to be subject to the same kind of reorganisation that we have had in the NHS in the past 20 years under the previous Government and the one before that.

I do not intend to go on for long, because many right hon. and hon. Members wish to contribute to debate. The Committee hopes to assist the Government in this difficult process—we want to approach the proposals in a comradely and constructive way. I am glad to see so many members of the Committee in the Chamber. Our longest-serving and most distinguished member, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) is here, as are my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Alun Michael) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak. The hon. Members for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) and for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless) are members of the Committee, and sitting behind them on the Government Benches is a non-member, the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti). The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) is also in the Chamber. She was a member of the Committee but was poached within weeks of her appointment by the Minister to become his Parliamentary Private Secretary. I am sure she is doing a great job.

The Committee has decided to undertake a trilogy of reports on three different aspects of the proposals to assist the Government. It is rather like “The Lord of the Rings”. We have just published our report on police and crime commissioners. As the Minister knows, members of the Committee have different views on the desirability of police and crime commissioners, but I hope he found our report helpful. It outlined a number of issues that we feel could be of value to the country.

We were very concerned that the figures for the cost of police and crime commissioners came out only after we had published our report. Indeed, the proposals came out on the very day that we published our report. Perhaps we can improve our co-ordination. I am not saying that we should be like “Strictly Come Dancing”, but if the Government and the Committee communicated a little bit better, we might be able to see the proposals before we commence our reports, which would make what we say more valuable.

The second report was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth,

[Keith Vaz]

and we will look at the CSR in the light of the decisions that the Minister will make imminently about how much police forces will have as part of that second report on a reduction in police bureaucracy. There is common ground on both sides of the House about the need to reduce police bureaucracy. When my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) was the Minister with responsibility for the police, he also said that he wanted to cut red tape. In the 23 years I have been a Member of Parliament, Ministers have always said that they want to cut red tape, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we need to ensure that it actually is reduced. That is why I hope that Jan Berry will have her term as the police bureaucracy tsar renewed, so that rather than just writing a one-off report she can continue to monitor the situation.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that savings would have to be made whichever party was in government? Will he give us a preliminary figure that he—personally or as the Chair of the Committee—would accept for the reduction in police budgets and numbers?

Keith Vaz: I am afraid that I cannot give him a personal figure. The Committee has not met and has not discussed this matter, nor have we conducted our report. Members of the Committee would be most concerned if I started speaking on behalf of the Committee on a matter that we had not considered. I know that the hon. Gentleman has a great interest in policing matters, and we will look at this very carefully. We will of course take evidence from the police and from others.

The final report that we intend to produce is on the new landscape of policing. The Government have not finally decided precisely where every bit of the old landscape will fit in the new landscape and we hope to help by setting out a landscape that will be accepted by the Government and the Opposition, so that whatever happens on 5 May 2015—or whenever the fixed-term election will be held—and if the Labour party is returned to power, we will not have another reorganisation, as we have had in the health service. Let us reach a consensus about how to proceed.

To that end, I was very pleased that the Minister was able to come to the summit meeting that was organised in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase a few weeks ago. I hope the Minister took away the message that there are stakeholders in the policing process who want to be engaged in what the Government are doing. We heard an excellent speech from my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, and other Members of Parliament attended. We now have, in people such as Hugh Orde, Denis O'Connor, Paul Stephenson, Paul McKeever and others, some truly outstanding leaders in the profession, but we—Parliament and the Government—need to work together to ensure that we have a permanent landscape and to deal with the reductions in a particular way.

I am very concerned that there will be a reduction not only in the number of police officers but in the number of PCSOs. I was deeply concerned by the press statement issued by the chief constable of Lancashire police—which covers the area of Chorley, if my geography is correct,

Mr Deputy Speaker—to the effect that every PCSO has been put on notice that they may lose their posts. They have been a terrific addition to policing.

I recently went to a residents meeting in London—I normally speak at residents meetings rather than attend them, but I was attending as a constituent of the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr Offord). The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) was also there. We heard an excellent presentation from a local PCSO about the work that he does, which includes reducing the work load of police officers, enabling them to do their jobs effectively.

Lorraine Fullbrook (South Ribble) (Con): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that of the 427 PCSOs who received the at-risk notice from Lancashire constabulary, only 149 are completely funded by that constabulary?

Keith Vaz: I did not know that and I am most grateful to the hon. Lady, who is another member of the Committee. However, that still does not address the reductions. If we are to proceed with a view to reaching a consensus—people have strongly held views—we must agree that there is of course a need for an overall reduction in the police budget. However, that hurts us as local MPs when it affects our local areas.

The public want to be able to pick up a phone to report a crime to a police officer and to ensure that that crime is dealt with as quickly as possible. If that is the bottom line, I hope that this debate can be conducted in a way that achieves that purpose. Let us put our party political differences to one side and concentrate on the fact that if a reduction in resources means fewer police officers—as I think it will—the Government will need to think again, and possibly ask the Treasury for additional resources so that we match the spending on the national health service and education. Law and order—the prevention and detection of crime—is a key issue for our constituents and we need to do everything that we can to ensure that it remains at the forefront of people's concerns.

1.37 pm

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and this is the third time in seven months as a Member of Parliament that I have spoken on this issue. It is also a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), a fellow east midlands Member. I am sure he will agree that the east midlands forces have generally fared relatively badly in terms of funding in recent years. We all hope that, as the Minister finalises his funding settlement for the individual forces, he will look favourably on our local forces.

I commend the police for work they do in my constituency and across Derbyshire. I also commend their positive approach in responding to the anticipated level of cuts. They have not thrown their toys out of the pram and panicked that they will not be able to deliver effective policing across Derbyshire. Instead, they have looked at sensible steps that they can take. To be fair, they have been taking such steps in recent years in preparation for this situation, which they knew was likely to arise. Earlier this year, they reduced their control districts from four to three, moving the control district that covers my area from my constituency to

Chesterfield, a move that has been achieved without any real damage to the quality of policing in the area.

We have to be realistic about police funding and accept that there is only so much that forces can do if they do not have the right money in the first place. Making straight-line cuts from the wrong starting position will not leave us in the right finishing position. Derbyshire police estimate that the impact of the comprehensive spending review will result in their needing to make straight-line savings of £6 million in the next financial year. However, they have lost roughly £5 million a year from the damping mechanism, which has cost them some £26 million in the last five years. It is a little much to expect a force that is already £5 million behind where it should have been—which is the equivalent of some 200 police officers compared to how many they would have had with the right amount of formula funding—to be able to absorb a straight-line cut in the same way as other forces that have received much more generous funding. Such a cut is bound to have a serious impact on local policing. It is a little over-ambitious and I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that he will look to reverse some of the negative impact of the damping mechanism, especially during the CSR period. By the end of that period, our police forces need to be in a fair funding situation; otherwise some of them will have received far less money than they should for an entire decade.

It is worth mentioning that forces can do things to save money that do not rely on cutting front-line officers. I have had meetings with people who have given me information about the waste that exists in police forces, and there is scope for tackling that. I have concerns about how a uniformed, qualified officer has to supervise specialist functions within the police force—for example, on forensics. Somebody in a managerial role ends up trying to supervise something that they are not really an expert in and to which they add little value. That is not a necessary part of the structure. I also question whether it is necessary to have quite so many different silos considering different areas of responsibility. It is a struggle to integrate them and bring together a joined-up seamless force. There must be huge scope for making savings but, fundamentally, there is only so much blood we can get out of a stone before we end up without an effective force.

We are in a bit of a strange position in terms of timing. The review of police conditions is ongoing, yet we want forces to start to make significant savings before they have had a chance to work through the impact of that. It would be unfortunate for forces to lose skilled and trained back-office staff or PCSOs because that is the only way they can make headcount reductions as forces cannot currently make uniformed police officers redundant. If we change the rule halfway through the process and decide that having uniformed officers performing back-office functions is not a great idea, we will find we will have already put ourselves in that position by having to proceed too quickly.

I hope that the timing of the spending reductions will be consistent with the pay and conditions review. It is hard for the public to understand why police officers enjoy an almost unique protection from redundancy whereas PCSOs and skilled back-office staff do not. I do not think the uniformed officers in the constabulary in my constituency will be desperately keen on changing

that or on hearing such a change being advocated, but such an approach would give a level playing field for all employees of the police authority.

I do not wish to detain the House for much longer. However, when the Minister considers funding, I urge him one last time—this is the third time I have done so in the Chamber—to acknowledge that straight-line cuts on average will not deliver a fair outcome for forces across the east midlands, especially in Derbyshire. I hope that, over the CSR period, that will be taken into account and that we can move towards having the fairer funding that the formula states Derbyshire police ought to get.

1.42 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is my turn to follow the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills)—the sequence is normally the other way around—and I am very pleased to do so.

I recognise that the Minister has a tough job on his hands. Although I do not agree with a number of his proposals, I accept that his instincts are to try to make the police more efficient and to achieve a better level of performance with the resources he has. His difficulty is that the Home Office did rather badly out of the recent settlement. It is evident that, while other Cabinet Ministers went to bat for their Departments and secured good deals, the Home Secretary did not achieve quite as much. We must now live with the consequences of that. I genuinely and sincerely fear that crime will rise and that we will have terrible difficulties in some of our major cities in trying to combat the particular types of crime that we have been able to bear down on so successfully in recent years.

I do not oppose the Minister's ambitions to achieve efficiencies and use more modern methods. In fact, I agree that change is needed. I support the better use of IT and better procurement, and I believe there is a clear argument for the police shift system to be changed, which would release more officers. We argue about the statistics—the Minister is very keen to gloat about the 11% figure—but the reality is that the police shift system is part of the problem, and I am in favour of changing that.

I welcome civilianisation where it frees police to do policing jobs. However, such an approach means there can be no benefit from the mass sacking of civilians. That is the conundrum. If civilianisation is a good process because it frees police officers to carry out policing functions, it logically follows that the mass sacking of civilians will mean that police officers are taken off front-line functions and sent back to doing civilian tasks. The Minister will have to address that problem. It is likely—my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) made this point—that the initial response of police chiefs will be to sack civilian staff, which will impact on front-line policing. As they struggle to continue to make the budget match up, they will be forced to consider how to sack police officers. The easiest way to do that will be to apply regulation A19, which will mean that some of our more experienced and senior officers will have to go. We will have the double effect of losing civilian staff while officers are taken off the street to do their work and, simultaneously, losing senior and experienced officers.

[*Steve McCabe*]

As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), it seems that that will happen when there is also a freeze on recruitment and a freeze on pay. Those are not the conditions in which we can expect to get the best out of people, or motivate them to embrace change and improve performance; they are the conditions most likely to produce exactly the opposite effect.

I am particularly worried about the west midlands, because our gearing ratio means that we are highly dependent on grant. Earlier today, we met the Minister to discuss that very subject. If we experience a uniform cut in grant without any changes to the damping regime, we will lose out unfairly as a result of an exercise that means we must forgo money and resources, which will be transferred to other police areas. We will have to forgo those resources so that the council tax precept can be kept down elsewhere in the country.

That is a very good argument for what the Treasury want to achieve, and for what the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government might want to achieve. However, it is not an argument that someone who is worried about law and order and police resources should be too willing to embrace. Even at this stage, the Minister should consider whether he still has time to go back to his friends in the Treasury, explain the dilemma and see whether they can help him out of the hole that has been dug for him.

Project Paragon in the west midlands has shown that successful efficiency and reorganisation measures can be taken. However, such measures take time to deliver. Project Paragon cannot be turned on and off like a tap. If such things are to be done successfully, they need a long lead-in time. It takes a long time to deliver efficiencies. One of the by-products of such a change is that crime may rise during the reorganisation period, and there is some evidence in the west midlands to show that that is happening. I see that the Minister is nodding, because I think he also accepts that that is the case.

My concern about these very substantial front-loaded cuts is that such a reorganisation will occur far too fast in forces all over the country, at the very time when we are gearing up for major events, such as the Olympics. That is not something that we should be remotely complacent about. It screams out for re-examination, because the obvious dangers are right in front of us. We still have time to look into this issue, but if we delay too long, things will be upon us and our forces will be in chaos at the very time when demand for policing is at its highest.

I agree with the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. My view is simple: law and order always has to be our No. 1 priority. I genuinely feel that the Government have got the balance wrong. I am delighted that they have selected areas of other budgets that they feel should be protected, but there are times when I would like to hear a more convincing case for those decisions. However, I am disappointed that so little emphasis seems to be placed on law and order. Yesterday we detected the dangerous cocktail of police numbers dropping, crime rising and the courts prevented from sending offenders to prison when that is exactly where they

should be, along with a promise of community punishments, albeit without the resources to make them work. That is a recipe for problems.

Rehman Chishti: The hon. Gentleman makes an assertion about allowing offenders to get away, but between 2007 and 2010, under the previous Government, some 80,000 prisoners were let out of prison early. Surely that was completely unacceptable, and if the hon. Gentleman's previous comment is right, he should accept that that was wrong.

Steve McCabe: Actually, the reality is that under the Labour Government there was a huge rise in prison numbers. It is true that some people were allowed out one month early, but the Justice Secretary proposed yesterday that there should be a threshold in order to reduce the numbers who go to prison in the first place, which means that the courts will be hampered. Indeed, he went on to say that his preference was that people should serve half the sentence in prison and half in the community. I should tell the hon. Gentleman that his constituents will find that much less acceptable than the situation when we were in power. If he does not believe me, I would be happy to go with him to his constituency and talk to them about it, because from what my constituents tell me, I am pretty certain that I am right about that.

Rehman Chishti: The statement by the Secretary of State for Justice was quite clear: those who commit crime should be punished with the efficient force of the criminal justice system, and that includes going to prison. Can the hon. Gentleman show where in the Secretary of State's statement it said that they should not be sent to prison?

Steve McCabe: I can show the hon. Gentleman where in the statement the Secretary of State gave the estimate for what he expected the reduction in the number of people going to prison to be. He stood at that Dispatch Box and said it, and everyone who was in the Chamber heard it—unless they have selective hearing.

I shall now return to what I was saying. There is a difficult balance. Perhaps the cuts are just too much, and the Home Office has got a particularly poor deal. I was surprised to discover, from the evidence that the permanent secretary to the Home Office gave to the Home Affairs Committee, that the Department has not carried out any research into the impact of the cuts on crime. That came from the very same permanent secretary who three years ago ordered a report on the potential impact of a recession on crime. It seems slightly strange that the man who feared then that a recession could lead to a rise in crime, and who said that we should investigate the potential outcomes, does not seem remotely troubled that a background of massive cuts and far too fast and rapid reorganisation could have a similar effect. Perhaps it is just as well that he is planning to retire.

Keith Vaz: The point to emphasise is that the outcome of the research commissioned by the permanent secretary for Jacqui Smith when she was Home Secretary was that crime would rise during a recession, and that was assuming a level playing field for the number of police officers.

Steve McCabe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that point. He is absolutely right.

I have one last point to make. As I said at the outset, I am in favour of the Minister's plans to try to modernise the police force and get greater efficiency. I genuinely wish him well, and I think that some of the things that he talks about are things that we should try to do. I also think that they need a longer lead-in time. Time will tell who is right about that. However, there is one priority that I would not adopt at the moment, especially against the background of the cuts and the reorganisation and efficiency changes that we are about to experience. I would not totally change the management and accountability structure of the police at the same time. It seems ludicrous that we should be subjected to the idea of elected police and crime commissioners now. It might be a good idea—although I think that the Minister is wrong about that as well—but what on earth is the pressing need for something that will have a further destabilising effect on the police, at the very time when they have all those other issues to contend with? If the proposal is a good idea, surely there is plenty of time to discuss it, and to pilot it and see what the consequences—the benefits and downsides—are.

Guy Opperman: In 2008, when the previous Government made the proposal and were considering it in their draft legislative programme, was my hon. Friend in favour of it or against it?

Steve McCabe: I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman is now my hon. Friend. I do not know whether that means that he shares some of my concerns about policing, or whether I have at least one ally on the Government Benches who will talk to the Minister about such issues. Actually, it was never the Labour Government's proposal to have directly elected police commissioners, so no, I was never in favour of that.

This is not the time for that experiment. The Minister has enough on his plate. He needs to get on and get the best deal and the best arrangements that he can from his Treasury colleagues, in order to prevent some of our worst fears from being realised. He would be better off concentrating his energy on that. We can deal with the question of police commissioners another time. What is proposed sounds like a Government in too much of a hurry, with too few resources and too few of the right priorities. If the Minister gets this wrong, not only will he suffer personally in a ministerial capacity, but our constituents throughout the country will suffer as a consequence of reckless behaviour that damages the police.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Just before I call anybody else, let me say that there have been quite a few complaints about the temperature in the Chamber. I can assure hon. Members that, as always in this Chamber, the temperature is now rising, and the problem has been fixed.

1.58 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), because it

gives me an opportunity to express some concern about the fact that I listen to the same statements and participate in the same debates as him, yet I hear different things being said. If he looks carefully at what the Secretary of State for Justice said yesterday about prison sentences, he will see that he was clear that prison is entirely the right place for criminals to be. However, there are a limited number of cases, involving non-violent prisoners who have been given very short prison sentences, in which if it can be proved that a community sentence would more effectively address their reoffending behaviour, that is the appropriate course of action. That, the hon. Gentleman will find, is what the Secretary of State said yesterday, and there is broad agreement in all parts of the House that it is a sensible thing for him to have said.

I am pleased that we have the opportunity to hold this estimates day debate today. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) referred to "Strictly Come Dancing", and said that he was a little worried that the timing of Government announcements was not in keeping with the publication of his Committee's reports. One could perhaps make the same comment about the timing of this debate in relation to the police settlement. Clearly, Ann Widdecombe and Anton du Beke have had some involvement in the timing of this particular choreography, and I suspect that we will have to have a further debate once the police settlement has been announced.

Keith Vaz: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Unfortunately, this was not in the hands of the Select Committee, although we did ask for the debate. May I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's presence at the seminar in Cannock Chase, and the contribution that he made to those deliberations, for which we were very grateful?

Tom Brake: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I commend him and his Committee for their excellent work, and for the advice, recommendations and guidance that they provide for the Government.

The recent report produced by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, the Audit Commission and the Wales Audit Office on police spending, and the ways in which efficiencies can be achieved, is pertinent to the debate. It shows that police spending has grown significantly—by nearly half—since 1997-98. During that same period, the council tax contribution towards police expenditure has gone up by nearly 150%, so the increases have clearly had a big impact on council bills. It is also worth pointing out that only half of the efficiency savings achieved by the police in 2008-09 were used to reduce budget pressures. There is clearly a potential for more efficiency savings to be achieved, and for those savings to be put back into dealing with budget pressures.

All this has to take place while maintaining public confidence in the police. The report is helpful in pointing out that the forces that have achieved the highest cashable efficiencies do not have lower levels of public confidence. One would therefore hope to be able to square that circle, and the report supports that proposition. A priority for police forces must be to ensure that their threat, harm and risk assessments are finely tuned to value for money considerations and to the savings that they need to achieve, so that there is a clear linkage between them.

[Tom Brake]

For me, the strongest point in the HMIC report was that forces are going to need strong leadership to achieve those transformational changes. If they are going to get beyond the typical 3% annual efficiency savings that have been made in recent years, that will require transformational change and significant leadership. The report goes on to state that this is perhaps not always recognised by chief constables. It states that less than a third of chief constables identify leadership skills as important in securing better value for money. I hope that the Association of Chief Police Officers will look into that, because transformational change will clearly need to involve collaboration with other organisations, other forces locally and other partners, and that is not easy to achieve. It will require significant leadership behind it. The report also flags up the fact that more than half of chief constables said that local police unit commanders lacked the financial skills to deliver the savings. Again, that illustrates the need for additional support to ensure that the necessary training is given, so that the significant savings that some forces have already achieved can be achieved by all of them.

Another important barrier highlighted by the report relates to the need to reassure the public that what matters is not the number of police officers, but what the police do. I have to confess that I am a recent convert in that regard. I am sure that there are Members here who received campaign literature from the Liberal Democrats that talked about additional police numbers. That is something that I cannot disguise, and I will not attempt to do so. However, recent reports have made it clear that we need to improve on the figure of only one in 10 officers being visibly available at any one time, and it is surely not impossible for forces to look into that in greater detail. The public are worried about the perception of police numbers and the availability of police on the streets, but that concern can be addressed if we can achieve a better turnout of officers, even if there is a requirement to reduce force numbers.

Others have talked about police overtime. I do not want to overemphasise what can be achieved by reducing overtime, because there are clearly occasions when police forces do not have control over that factor. Tuition fees demonstrations spring to mind. By allowing overtime to be used, local police forces are often in a position to provide additional tasking to hit a particular problem at a particular time. Having said that, it is clear that some forces are achieving significant savings by reorganising the way in which their overtime works, and one would expect other forces to be doing the same thing.

Members on both sides of the House will support the need for more sensitive and more effective procurement. The fact that 14 forces will have managed collectively to save £18 million by 2012-13 through the national forensics consortium leads me to hope that the other 29 forces that are not part of the consortium will actively consider participating in it, because of the potential collective saving of up to £40 million if they were to join it.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman was part of the Select Committee when we published the report "Policing in the 21st century", in which we mentioned procurement.

This is a no-brainer, is it not? Why do all those police forces still buy on their own, even if it is in collaboration with 14 others? Surely there should be more effective leadership, whether from the National Policing Improvement Agency or from the Home Office, to ensure that they buy in bulk.

Tom Brake: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. That is indeed a no-brainer, whether it involves vehicles or IT systems. We need to be careful, however, particularly when the "no-brainer" centralised procurement involves taking existing IT systems and moving them on to a common platform, as that can be quite a complex undertaking. Certainly, projects of that nature in the NHS have proved technically challenging, and such projects need to be dealt with very carefully.

The report identifies up to £1 billion of savings that could be derived without hitting the front line. I take the point made earlier, that it is wrong simply to say, "Front line, good; back office, bad," particularly if the work going on in the back office involves officers engaged in detection and investigation. It is not possible to achieve a simple transfer. However, Members who have seen the HMIC report will know that there are currently 200 officers working in human resources departments. That might be a police role in some shape or form, but I find it difficult to imagine that all 200 of those officers working in HR are working on tasks that require a trained police officer. There is therefore scope for savings in those areas, and in others.

I have mentioned the fact that between the point at which a crime is reported and the final appearance in court, about 100 different processes take place. Some of those involve the police, and it is clearly a labour-intensive process. Anything that can be done to simplify it, while keeping all the usual safeguards in place, will, I am sure, help to improve efficiencies for the police, for the court system and beyond.

The report makes a number of recommendations; I shall highlight a couple of them before finishing. It underlines the need for police authorities to set savings targets for their forces that are more ambitious than those of previous years. I know that that will be a tough call for police authorities at the moment, and it is fair to say that they are not unanimously behind the coalition Government's proposals for elected police and crime commissioners. I know that the police are all professional in their approach, however, and a number of them want to put their names forward for election as police and crime commissioners, so I am sure that they will want to demonstrate their commitment to achieving significant efficiency savings.

I have underlined the importance for the police of making sure that the threat, harm and risk assessment is closely linked with any financial or business planning, and I have also underlined the need, if these transformational changes are to be made, for some clear leadership from senior officers. The changes are not going to happen by themselves; they will need someone to drive them. The Government's role should be to ensure flexibility to allow partnerships between forces and other partners to develop so that substantial savings can be achieved. If a carrot were provided by introducing a linkage between future grant allocations and the efficiency savings that forces achieve, I believe that that would help.

Steve McCabe: On that point, does the hon. Gentleman think that individually elected police and crime commissioners all pursuing their own individual political agendas is more or less likely to encourage force co-operation?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which I think makes a strong point. It has been put—no doubt by him, by me and by others—to the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, who is well aware of it. The legislation will clearly need to set out the requirement for police and crime commissioners to collaborate and co-ordinate activities with others. When they take on this role, they will also have to bear efficiency savings in mind, so making them will also be in their interests. We are watching that issue closely, and we will want to ensure that elected police and crime commissioners understand the need to co-ordinate effectively with their neighbours.

I believe that the report by HMIC, the Audit Commission and the Wales Audit Office provides a substantial body of evidence to support the case that opportunities are available to make significant efficiency savings. I think that they can be achieved, so long as those at the head of the forces provide the necessary leadership to drive the changes through.

2.13 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I decided to join some of my colleagues in speaking in this debate because of the deep concern in the west midlands about the impact of reductions in police officers and support staff.

I apologise for missing one or two speeches, but I pay tribute to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) who, as we all know, chairs the Home Affairs Committee in such a distinguished manner. He made an effective speech, although he will not be surprised to hear that I cannot go along with his taking an “apolitical stance”. I am not aware that I have ever taken an apolitical stance, and it is rather late in the day for me to start! I am not point-scoring today, however, although I am happy to do so on many other occasions.

I said in my opening remarks that people are very concerned in the west midlands, and it is for Members and Ministers to decide whether that feeling is genuine. I have had the privilege of representing my constituency of Walsall North for 31 years, and I have always been concerned—as one would expect of every hon. Member—that the police should be able to deal effectively and promptly with my constituents’ complaints about criminality.

The Minister states that there is no, or hardly any, correlation between the number of police officers and tackling criminality, but, like many Members, I simply do not accept that for a moment. There is a correlation. Common sense dictates that if we have fewer police officers, it is far more likely that crime will go undetected.

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): The hon. Gentleman, like me, is a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee. Bill Bratton, who appeared before our Committee on 30 November this year, said:

“As a police chief for many, many years, I would always like to have more police, but the reality is it is not just numbers but, more importantly, what you do with them.”

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that argument from someone who spent 40 years heading up the two biggest police forces in America?

Mr Winnick: It is common sense that a senior police officer will take the view that the way in which police officers are deployed is very important. No one disputes that for a moment, but did not Bill Bratton say on the very same occasion that he would have liked to have more police officers? The hon. Gentleman just said that.

Between 1997-98 and 2010-11, central Government funding for west midlands police rose by 36% in real terms. Let me ask those who are critical whether I am justified in raising concerns. No Conservative Member suggested at the time that less should be spent on policing in the west midlands. The money was spent not for the sake of it but to reduce criminality, which it did. We know that under the comprehensive spending review, police forces in England will receive 20% lower funding by 2014-15, and it is not likely that the west midlands will be any different.

I take it from the intervention of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) that some Conservative Members—not, I hope, all—do not consider police numbers important. Let me nevertheless cite the numbers for west midlands police, comparing the time Labour first took office with now. In 1996, there were 7,145 police officers. There was then a steady increase, and this year’s figure is 8,536. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Cannock Chase or any other Conservative Member would argue that those increases were unjustified and that there should not have been such a substantial increase.

If necessary, I could provide statistics to show that in the west midlands, as in the rest of Britain, crime has reduced—indeed, the Justice Secretary conceded the point yesterday. I find it difficult to believe, even though the Minister shakes his head in disagreement, that the reduction in crime in my region is not somehow connected with the 36% real-terms increase in police funding and the correlative increase in the number of police officers. There has also been a steady increase in the number of police and community support officers since they were first established.

I am not one who always defends the actions of the police. I might well be critical of some aspects of policing the demonstrations today and tomorrow—so be it; we shall see. On one point, I am absolutely certain, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East also made it abundantly clear: when our constituents phone the police to report criminality they want effective action, not a pre-recorded message with no action being taken for days. I do not suggest that all has been well, but spending less on police, with fewer police officers, will make our constituents’ problems much more difficult.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, in the west midlands, in the black country—not just Birmingham, but my borough, surrounding areas, and the other three black country boroughs—Members have been very pleased, on behalf of our constituents, first and foremost, by the reduction in criminality. Hon. Members may say that we are being too pessimistic, and I obviously hope that a reduction will not lead to the reversal that many of us fear, but we have a duty and a responsibility to ensure that the progress of the past few years is maintained,

[Mr Winnick]

that our constituents are protected from criminality as much as possible, and that the police take effective action against criminality when it occurs.

2.21 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I say what a privilege it is to follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), a distinguished Member of the House? I must say that I agreed with much of what he said. I also thank the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) for his eloquent opening of the debate. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) made the point that law and order is a top priority, and that is a view with which I, and all hon. Members, concur.

We will hear shortly how much our police forces will get. The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, who is on the Front Bench, has received a letter from me, listing a lot of ideas, following a long meeting I had with my chief constable, on how to save on procurement, duplication of effort and needless bureaucracy. Although I will speak in the main from the perspective of my constituency, Dorset is a very large area with a number of MPs, but it has a small police force and low funding. Consequently, we are probably braced more than most for the cuts announcement.

Over the past decade, Dorset police authority has received chronically low levels of Government funding. To make up the funding, it has had to rely increasingly on the council tax precept. In addition, perhaps the Minister would note that our budget for police community support officers is ring-fenced at £3.2 million, which the police feel is unnecessarily restrictive. If they cannot change their financial organisation to meet the cuts and future requirements, they have much less flexibility.

According to benchmarking studies, Dorset police has been praised for cuts in back-office services such as finance and personnel, and its costs are way below the national average. My concern is that, following the announcement, Dorset police will experience further cuts, following year-on-year cuts over the past 10 years, despite being told that they are doing an excellent job—every time they were told that they were doing an excellent job, the chief constable had less money with which to do it.

If police officers on the beat in Dorset are to be reduced, we will have problems. In my constituency, the island of Portland is a case in point. Portland has a population of about 15,000 people, but some years ago it had a population of 8,000 or 9,000. In those days, it had 13 police officers based in a police station. It now has two mobile police officers, with two PCSOs backing them up. Those officers are based near the island—they share the office that the police are using to organise for the Olympic games. Let me give all credit to those two brave officers and the two PCSOs—I have been out with them on patrol on two occasions, and they do a remarkable job. However, the people on the island of Portland are not convinced that the police have a high enough profile. If cuts come, I am concerned that places such as Portland will be affected.

As Portland and Weymouth will host the Olympic sailing events in 2012, let me touch on Dorset's projected budget of just under £64.5 million in that year. In an

Olympic year, therefore, Dorset police will face a £6.4 million shortfall in their budget. We know that there is a budget for the Olympics, and we are assured that the money is there. However, there is no definitive funding amount. Manpower costs for the Olympics are difficult to estimate, and Dorset police suggest that they will need 600 additional officers to provide security for the games. Will Dorset police meet all the costs of those extra officers, or just their overtime? The costs are not negligible. The police presence will be needed for 64 days, from pre-Olympic training, throughout the games, until the Paralympics afterwards. The Olympic policing budgets are centralised, in 16 different silos, which makes planning and preparation difficult and drawn out. For example, deciding whether to place a man or a camera on a strategic corner can take weeks, wasting a lot of money.

Finally, I agree with the coalition Government's stance—I believe that the stance is shared across parties—of wanting more neighbourhood policing. When I ask my constituents whether they have seen their neighbourhood sergeant or constable, they say, "Yes, he was here last week, but for the last two months he's been taken off on other duties." No doubt there is a shortage of officers on the ground, but may I suggest to the Minister, who will probably pale at the additional cost, that we turn back the clock, in a positive fashion, and have police officers based in local communities? I am talking about reopening police stations, which will allow police officers to get to know—and literally smell—their community. They will know when young Jimmy or Jack is about to commit an offence at six or eight years of age, and prevent him from becoming a hardened criminal when he is 18. We must get officers back into our local communities. At the right moment, a firm word and gentle guidance can head off a life behind bars. In the long run, the cost of reopening local stations would be offset against reductions in crime and imprisonment, and would allow police to reconnect with the communities they serve.

CCTV has its place. I am an ex-soldier, and have experience of using technology to get intelligence and so forth. However, CCTV cannot tell us the demeanour of a young man or woman intent on committing crime. A police officer on the beat is able not only to deter such a person from committing crime, but if the crime is committed the police officer can respond immediately. That boosts confidence in the community and helps a raft of other things, not least tourism, which brings in much-needed cash to South Dorset.

As the Minister will announce the figures imminently—I believe at the end of this week—may I ask him, most humbly, and with the Olympics in mind, please to consider Dorset police—[*Interruption.*] And other constituencies, as many Members are also concerned about their police. To get police back into the local community, let us reinvest in police stations, to save in the longer term and fight crime.

2.29 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak after the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), who represents an area that I know very well. For many years I led all the unions at the Portland naval base, and I know that it is a fine community and a fine town.

The hon. Gentleman spoke with passion and conviction about the importance of police officers on the beat to both detection and deterrence. My experience of them, in the west midlands, is very similar to his. I have seen at first hand the outstanding work done by the police service there, and, while I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) that the police do not always get it right, I know that the community in the west midlands value their police service. There have been real improvements in recent years, and I have seen the consequences at first hand. Let me give three brief examples.

The first example is this. Nine months ago, in Stockland Green in my constituency, there was a serious increase in crime, including robberies and violent crime. The police mounted a major operation involving not only police officers on the beat, but the highly effective intelligence work behind the scenes that was described by the hon. Member for South Dorset. As a consequence, a number of arrests were made and the problem was dealt with very efficiently.

Secondly, I have seen at first hand how quickly the police respond to serious crimes in my constituency. I say with some sadness that there have been three knife murders in Erdington over the past nine months. It would not be appropriate to comment on the outcome of legal processes that are yet to be concluded, but I will say that the sheer scale of the operation that was mounted, quickly and effectively, in all three cases was hugely reassuring to a community who were rightly concerned about what were very serious offences.

Thirdly, I have seen at first hand the work of the local tasking groups. In Castle Vale, a very fine community in my constituency, the police sit down together with representatives of the local community, and they work together in a highly effective way to target issues of real concern such as antisocial behaviour.

I pay tribute to the work done by police community support officers, whom I have seen on the beat in the Erdington high street area. They are an immensely reassuring presence and they do a very good job, not least in freeing police officers to concentrate on what police officers are best at. I also pay tribute to our chief constable, Chris Sims. Chris is an able leader of the West Midlands police service, although he has had to deal with some problems in it. He is also the national champion of the Association of Chief Police Officers on the issue of bureaucracy—it is common ground that we can reduce back-office costs, for instance—and gives a national lead in the vital areas of forensic science and detection.

Not only is the West Midlands police service of great importance in the west midlands, but it performs those major national functions, as well as supporting other police services. It will play an important role in the run-up to and during the Olympics, and—as the Minister knows—it also plays an important role next door in Warwickshire when big problems arise. Time and again, the Warwickshire police service can count on the tried and tested west midlands service.

I welcomed this morning's meeting with the Minister. I hope that, for all the reasons that I have given, he will accept the real concern that is being expressed in the west midlands about the potentially serious consequences of a reduction of up to 2,500—including 1,200 police officers—in the West Midlands police service over the

next four years, and of a potential reduction of 400 police officers before 1 April next year.

At the heart of the dilemma facing the police service in the west midlands is the fact that the financial structure in an area of high demand and high need is very different from that in Surrey. More than 80% of the funding of the west midlands service comes from central Government, as opposed to 50% in Surrey. I hope the Minister will accept that if the Government apply quick and deep cuts indiscriminately to all police services, there will be particularly serious consequences in the west midlands.

The police service in my constituency, in Birmingham and in the west midlands, is already having to plan for the consequences of what it faces—including the compulsory retirement, under regulation A19 of the Police Pensions Regulations 1987, of some of the best long-serving police officers, several hundred of whom may have to go before April next year unless the Government change their mind. It is also planning for a significant reduction in the visibility of policing on the streets in the west midlands more generally and in Birmingham in particular, because it believes that it has no alternative. All that is a result of the scale and speed of what is being expected of the police service in the west midlands.

I know of no police service that is incapable of improvement. Yes, there is a debate to be had about how to reduce back-office costs. When our party was in government, it made clear that it considered that to be necessary. However, I ask the Government to accept a simple reality. Unless they change course, and if in 2011 we see a toxic combination of rising unemployment and falling police numbers in Birmingham, crime will inevitably increase. The first duty of any Government is to ensure the safety and security of our communities, in the midlands and throughout the country. Even at this late stage, I urge the Minister, the Home Secretary and the Government to hear the strong concerns expressed by the people of Erdington, Birmingham and the west midlands.

2.37 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I have a background in criminal law, and have spent a large part of my time down the years prosecuting and defending people in various trials, including murder trials.

I have been out on the beat with members of the Hexham constabulary, who do an amazing job in supporting the police and the community. They undoubtedly need our support, and we should provide that support unequivocally—for the police force and for the operational command—if at all possible; but if we are to do that, we must change the position that we acquired on 7 May. There is currently a significant financial deficit, and that means that we must make choices. Whether we like it or not, we have had to make cuts. That gives no one any pleasure, but we have been forced to do it by our present position.

We are adopting a good procedure in attempting to do a series of things at the same time. There will be a settlement. My local chief constable, who has done an amazing job, wrote to me outlining the cuts that she might have to make, which are undeniably significant. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard

[Guy Opperman]

Drax) and others have pointed out that the cuts are a problem that we must address, but choices need to be made, and the chief constable is dealing with them very well. There will be a reduction of 450 officers or civilian staff. In this context, I should remind the House that she was the chief constable who looked after Raoul Moat and all the difficulties and problems that followed on from the events in the summer. She has done a sterling job in trying to hold everything together, but when I asked the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs what he would be cutting and what his approach would be, he initially said, "I can't really answer that question," but at the very end of his speech he said, "This will require the Home Secretary to go back to the Chancellor and ask for more money."

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Like the other Departments.

Guy Opperman: That is an interesting observation, but when the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) was Home Secretary he famously said there would not be enough money to pay for various things, and the home affairs budget would clearly have gone down. It is not in dispute that that will present the Department with a significant problem. Efforts are being made, but a choice had to be made, and I applaud the Government on the choice they made and for going ahead with it.

I asked the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) whether he supported the police and crime commissioner changes. We find from talking to our constituents that the centralisation of control under Labour over the past 13 years is a significant problem. The legislation that the Labour Government brought in put ever more work under Whitehall control. The Home Secretary was given ever stronger powers to intervene and to direct police authorities. Labour's approach failed to recognise the fundamental problem of policing, which is that those who should be in the driving seat, and those who suffer when things do not work, are the public, not the Government.

In the last year prior to the change in Government there were 52 documents of central policy guidance, and a further 60 on planning. The average length of the manuals was just under 100 pages, and they included 4,000 new promises. The principle is very simple: the police are there to serve the local community, not Whitehall, but for too long they have been serving Whitehall.

Jack Dromey: The hon. Gentleman's esoteric dissertation on central Government diktats is all very interesting, but does he not accept this simple reality: as a consequence of what Whitehall is now doing in front-loading major cuts to the police service—7% and 6% in the first two years—local police services generally are faced with a nigh-on impossible problem and the West Midlands police service in particular will lose 400 police officers by 1 April next year?

Guy Opperman: I make this simple point: what would Labour have cut? All parties would now be facing this difficulty and, frankly, it is fanciful to argue there would not have been any cuts whatever to, say, the Birmingham or Northumberland police forces.

I want to turn now to the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill. When under the leadership of the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), Labour planned for elected representatives. In the 2008 draft legislative programme it announced that its Policing and Crime Bill would include proposals to provide

"a clear and powerful public voice in decision making through directly elected representatives".

To my untutored mind, having done nearly 20 years at the Bar, that sounds remarkably similar to what we are introducing now. Labour referred to elected representatives in a policing Green Paper published in July 2008. I accept that I was in another place.

Chris Ruane: The House of Lords?

Guy Opperman: No, you are wrong. The promotion is delightful, but it is premature. Mention has been made of "Strictly Come Dancing" and other things, but I was not in the House of Lords then. Instead, I was probably somewhere near the Old Bailey. My point is that even Ed Balls has conceded that there is more to do on accountability.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. When Members are mentioned they must, of course, be referred to by their constituency not their name, and there must also be no references to "you" or to "me"—after all, I have made no decisions in this area.

Guy Opperman: The shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), has said that there is more to do in respect of accountability, and there is more we can do to deepen local and force-based accountability in policing.

Mr Winnick: If I understand correctly, the hon. Gentleman was criticising the previous Government for having proposed elected police commissioners and for then abandoning the idea. That is what happened, but that is part of the democratic process. The Home Affairs Committee—which by no means has the final say in such matters—heard representations from the police authorities and senior police officers. We discussed the matter and we came to the conclusion that the Government should not go ahead with the idea. That was not decisive in influencing the Government, but there is nothing wrong with a Government listening, and in my view they made the right decision.

Guy Opperman: There were two efforts in respect of this particular proposal, and it is right that certain people have had reservations as time has passed, but let me give one particular example. Sir Hugh Orde was previously a very vocal critic, even predicting that some officers would resign, but following the Queen's Speech he has changed his position. He now welcomes a commitment to local accountability and says he would work with the Government to protect operational independence. As he put it:

"Policing has always been about serving and answering to local communities. Those are the origins of policing in this country and chief officers"—

and I stress this point—

"welcome the commitment towards local accountability."

I should also make the point that this proposal has not come from out of the blue. It has been proposed in the past, and it has also been tried in different contexts in America. If we can harness this new proposal and reform the justice system in the way that, without a shadow of a doubt, it requires, we can make a genuine effort to engage in a three-pronged attack to take this matter forward.

2.48 pm

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I should first declare an interest: I am a member of the Kent police authority.

It is a pleasure to follow my hon.—and perhaps learned—Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), and I particularly welcome the emphasis he placed on the need for the localisation of policing decisions, as opposed to the centralisation that went on before. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who I have not previously had the pleasure of hearing make a speech. There has been strong representation from the west midlands in today's debate, and Members representing constituencies in that area have put their case well. The Conservative party was welcomed by chief constable Chris Sims in October when he organised the security for our conference, and we were very impressed with the service we received.

May I first tackle two propositions put forward by Labour Members? The first is that morale in the police is plummeting and that this settlement will lead to a worse service being provided by them. That is not my experience; I am consistently struck by the professionalism of officers in Kent and elsewhere in the country where I meet police officers. In Kent, we have been planning for many months for these grant reductions. The work that has been done and the engagement of every different area of Kent police in finding substantial savings has been extraordinarily impressive. I have not detected any reduction in morale. Officers and staff appreciate that there has been a very serious recession across the country and in the private sector, where many people have lost their jobs, had pay freezes or had severe pay cuts, and that the police family have come through that period very well. In addition, this Government kept the third year of the pay review that had been agreed, and I know that that was greatly appreciated in many quarters.

The second proposition relates to the debate about police numbers and the level of crime. I heard the interview that the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice gave on Radio 4, in which he made perfectly sensible remarks, and I do not understand the excitement of Labour Members about this issue. The hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) said that the number of West Midlands police officers had increased from 7,135 in 1996 to 8,536 this year. The level of crime did decrease over that period, certainly according to the British crime survey, which Labour Members particularly like to cite. What the hon. Gentleman did not say is that nationally quite a reduction in police numbers took place during part of that period—until about 2002-03—and thereafter those numbers rose. According to the British crime survey, there was a consistent reduction in the level of crime throughout the period—that started in 1994, as we heard from Labour Members yesterday. That does not correlate

with the trend in police numbers over that period, so there is no simple link and it is very difficult to show such a correlation statistically.

What I know from my constituency is that police officers, effectively placed and doing the right thing, can make an enormous difference. For example, we introduced neighbourhood task teams to support neighbourhood policing. Medway has had two teams, comprising a sergeant and five or six constables, which support the neighbourhood policing teams, concentrating on particularly difficult high-crime areas. One huge success has been that, through working with other agencies, they have almost eradicated street prostitution in Chatham, which has been a problem for centuries. This is about working with other agencies. A particular team has helped bring about that success, but overall it is not possible to demonstrate a direct or simple relationship between police numbers and crime, and we need to recognise that.

Decisions on police numbers should be taken by local communities. The single most important change that we are about to see in policing is that, for the first time, this will not be about the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) suggesting that the Home Office commission research to decide what to do or even about this House debating what we want police numbers to be and where we want them to be; this will be a decision for each local community to take, through the commissioner who they elect to oversee and organise their police force locally. That will be a hugely healthy change from the current situation.

I have always found, both as a councillor and as a member of a police authority—and in this House, to an extent—that democratic oversight is one of the key drivers of value for money in public services. This is about scrutinising what the employees, the officers and the people delivering the service are doing and ensuring that they are delivering value for money for the taxpayer. I am not convinced that the same savings have been made in national Government as have been made in areas where there is more direct democratic oversight: in local government and, to an extent, in police authorities. If each Department were to report to the relevant Select Committee and the permanent secretary were to put his budget before that Committee for approval and discussion, item by item, that would help us to find savings.

The Government have set out a strong savings programme, but what I see when I participate in the budget review group and the audit and finance committee of our police authority in Kent is that members of the authority, a majority of whom are elected—it is the elected members who must pass the police precept every year—subject the police officers to an enormous degree of scrutiny. Through that process we have made much more substantial savings than we have been ordered to find by the centre. When we examine the reductions in police grant that are coming, the decision will be taken locally as to what the level of precept will be.

Kent's new chief constable, whom we brought in from Norfolk, where he had been deputy chief constable and had done fantastic work in improving public confidence, making significant savings and restructuring the force, said that he sees these grant reductions as an opportunity to deliver a more efficient and effective force. *[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members say that he has no choice, but very often when the money is increased by year and there is

[*Mark Reckless*]

not the great pressure to find savings and be efficient, it is human nature for people occasionally not to act as efficiently as they might. Perhaps more people are employed in a particular area or perhaps the focus is on something that needed to be done some years ago when things have moved on and it is not necessarily the priority it once was. It is by finding such savings and having proper democratic oversight of that process that we should be able to make our policing more efficient and effective.

Jack Dromey: The constant quest for efficiency and effectiveness is common ground between us, but what has the hon. Gentleman got to say to the people of the west midlands who are led by a chief constable who is the national champion on bureaucracy and they have a police service that has already made very significant changes to promote efficiency and effectiveness, but it now says that because of the scale and speed of what it is being asked to do, there will be significant cuts to front-line policing and some of the best, long-serving officers in the police service will be compulsorily retired?

Mark Reckless: Having a national champion on bureaucracy in the way that it has been organised by the Association of Chief Police Officers, which is an organisation that does not entirely respond to this House and has little if any statutory basis, is not the way to tackle bureaucracy. We have had far more success in finding savings in Kent by having a majority of elected members who sit down with the officers who spend the money.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman rightly says that the work is best done locally, and he showed me the good work being done in Kent when I went to visit his constituency, but there is a need to share good practice. What I saw in Rochester and Strood ought to be rolled out in other parts of the country. So even though the savings are made locally, there needs to be a mechanism—it could be the Home Office or this could be done through Jan Berry—that will make sure that other police authorities can follow what Kent is doing.

Mark Reckless: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, the Chair of our Home Affairs Committee, for his comments. He has kindly arranged to use our website to promote some of that good practice, such as the safe exit scheme and our offender management unit, in which we are working closely with probation and other agencies. There is enormous scope for savings through such collaboration.

I do not understand why most forces in the country are not making significant savings through collaboration. I know that Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire have quite a strong programme, but I have not seen any other forces that have anything like the level of collaboration or are making the savings that have been delivered in Kent and Essex. That might be because the forces and counties of Kent and Essex are of a similar size and there might not be the sensitivities about one force being perceived to be taking the lead. It might also be because the personalities and individuals involved are particularly committed to the process. We now have, however, one single directorate to deal with all organised, serious and major crime. A substantial number of police

officers have been transferred from each force into a joint directorate that reports to a single assistant chief constable. We have a single director of IT and we procure all our services through a joint procurement centre, and I do not understand why other forces have not taken the opportunity to find savings so that they can reinvest them in the front line. It is happening to an extent, but collaboration elsewhere has been very disappointing.

I am speaking about collaboration not just between forces but between different agencies, such as working with councils—a point we heard about from my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti). In Medway we have a basic command unit that is coterminous with the unitary council. That might have assisted us, but it is by working as a team and focusing the resources on the areas where the public want to see them used that we have managed to find savings, to cut crime and to improve confidence at the same time.

Although the process is different in policing than elsewhere in the public sector, there will be the introduction of directly elected police commissioners alongside the front-loading of the reductions, the potential pay freezes for two years and the review of terms of conditions—and I greatly welcome the work that Tom Winsor is doing. I made the point in my ten-minute rule Bill about the importance of police forces' being able to make a rational decision about how many officers, PCSOs and other civilians they need—that issue has also been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak—and it is essential that forces should have the freedom to make that decision. I am delighted that Tom Winsor is working so hard on that and we look forward to his interim report in February. We must knit together the democratic control and the greater efficiency through collaboration, as well have as a sensible review of terms and conditions while recognising how much the police do and what they do to serve this country and our communities. These estimates and the proposals for directly elected police commissioners are the way forward. They will lead to a revolution in policing in our country that will put the public in charge. It is possible for that to happen even in the tightened financial environment in which we find ourselves.

3.3 pm

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): In the current economic climate, the police must play their part and do more with less. That is not an unreasonable request. The private and public sectors have had to make significant reductions and changes in working practices. Opposition Members constantly cite cuts of 20%, but taken over five years that works out as a 4% cut each year over the next four years, taking into consideration the fact that some funds can be raised under the local council tax precept.

There have been references to cuts in front-line officers, and I would like to offer some solutions. Politicians often come up with problems and talk about them in this Chamber for many hours, but they do not always come up with solutions. It concerns me when I hear chief constables and Opposition Members talking about cuts to the number of front-line officers.

Since I was elected for Weaver Vale, which is a mid-Cheshire seat, I have spent as much time as I can with the Cheshire constabulary, going out on night shifts in Runcorn on a Friday night and, last Friday night, in Northwich.

Steve McCabe: I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comment about a rise in the precept. Obviously it varies across the country. What level of increase does he think he would be able to persuade people in his part of the world to accept?

Graham Evans: It varies from community to community. When I was a local councillor, there was much concern about antisocial behaviour. Despite many attempts to get the local police to spend more time on the street corners, as there was concern about youths allegedly causing trouble, they could never afford the time. The parish council made a decision significantly to increase the precept to pay for the new police community support officers. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise figure, but it could be significant if that community decided to increase the precept to allow a dedicated community support officer for that particular area.

The police do their best to meet the public's expectation of having officers on the beat, but no police force can have officers on street corners every Friday, Saturday or Sunday night. The public expect to see officers on the beat, walking around, but that is not always physically possible. Credit should be given to the previous Government for the way they introduced police community support officers, because they made a difference to the perception as well as the quality of life of many citizens. Local communities can get together to pay for PCSOs.

Front-line cuts have been mentioned many times. If there is a freeze on recruitment and pay, over a few years there will be a reduction in the number of regular police officers. However, I do not hear the role of special constables mentioned in this House. I can only refer to Cheshire constabulary, but for many years the chief constables of Cheshire have spent a lot of time training and recruiting special constables.

Last Friday we had a particularly long and frosty evening. A dozen officers were on duty from 7 o'clock in the evening to 3 o'clock in the morning, half of them special constables. I was a special constable in the 1980s, so before I went out I tried on my old uniform. It fitted where it touched, so I quickly put it back in its suitcase and back in the attic. Before I went out, I looked at the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and various police reforms that were made in the '80s so that I could prepare myself for what is going on in the 21st century.

In fact, I was pleasantly surprised by the professionalism of the special constables. Half a dozen were on duty on that evening. Each one is a volunteer and an unpaid volunteer, which is not often mentioned. I hear Opposition Members talking about the big society, and there is no better example of it than the special constabulary. It comprises ordinary members of the public serving their community and they are unpaid. That is not to say that members of the special constabulary do not have the ambition to join the regular force—they do.

My point is that we have a wonderful opportunity to recruit special constables at this difficult time, when there is a freeze on regular recruitment. The training for specials is exactly the same as that given to regular policemen. If an individual wants to join a police force,

they can join the special constabulary, although they will not be paid, and can train over the next two or three years while there is a recruitment freeze. During those two or three years, they can learn the ropes and how to become full-time policemen. I am sure that when they submit their CV and application to become a regular police officer in two or three years' time, their experience will be taken into account by the chief constable. That would enable the communities I serve and represent to have front-line policing, because special constables carry warrants and can make arrests. Indeed, they can do everything that regular police officers can do.

On Friday night, I went out with the police in a minibus, in a Panda car and on foot—walking the main streets of Northwich. Policing is not straightforward. I often hear comments from the public and Members about wanting officers not in cars but on the beat, as though one could simply wave a magic wand to achieve that. If the police are to serve the whole community, there will be times when they need to be in patrol cars and times when they need to be on the beat.

Steve McCabe: I share the hon. Gentleman's view that special constables make an important contribution; I have seen it for myself when I have been out on patrol with them, so I totally agree. However, they are additional officers and the average borough commander cannot place them on the rota because he is never sure how many might be available. There is a difficulty with the suggestion that the hon. Gentleman seems to be coming close to making which is that the specials should substitute for the officers who have been lost through cuts. If that approach were taken, it would become harder to plan basic policing operations because the commander would not know how many specials would be available at any given time.

Graham Evans: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point and I agree with him, but the situation varies from force to force. The leadership and management of individual forces are important; best practice has been mentioned in that regard. Cheshire constabulary has invested a lot of time in special constables because the force is relatively small, and I respectfully suggest that other forces—I am not thinking of any particular force, but perhaps the metropolitan and larger forces—could learn a thing or two about recruiting specials.

The hon. Gentleman says that the officer in charge of his constabulary is never sure how many specials will be on duty at a certain time, but this comes down to leadership and management. The senior officers in my constituency know exactly how many special constables will be there on the all-important Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, which is when additional help is strongly appreciated. I have spoken to special constables who have ambitions to become regular policemen. They work during the day and volunteer their time in the evenings, including Thursday, Friday and Saturday. I do not say that they could be a long-term replacement, but merely point out that in the short term I do not accept what I hear chief constables say about front-line cuts in officers. There are creative ways in which specials can be used as a solution in the short term, rather than talking about headline cuts.

PCSOs also play an important role and really involve themselves in the community. I have heard worrying stories about many PCSOs being lost across the country,

[Graham Evans]

but they can be paid for through local precepting in town and parish councils. I also find that moneys are held in town and parish council accounts for emergencies. I encourage all chief constables and senior officers to look around their communities to see whether any funds have been siphoned or hidden away for a rainy day. I get very concerned when I hear about those vital officers being made redundant, because I do not accept that it is necessary, especially in the short term.

When I went out on Friday night and in Runcorn previously, I was struck by the fact that Cheshire force sends its police out singly. They go out on their own but have significant and efficient back-up available at a moment's notice, which means that there are many police officers on public view. Earlier, I heard it said that 11% of officers are available at any one time, but in Cheshire a significant number of officers are out on the beat working on their own, and support is there for them very quickly if need be.

Cutting the amount of police time spent on paperwork has not really been mentioned. A previous Prime Minister talked about being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. One thing that we could do as a society and as a country is to tackle the abuse of alcohol. Virtually every call on Friday evening involved people who were badly intoxicated and reliant on alcohol. They had lost structure in their lives and it was quite pitiful to be called to the streets or their homes to assist them.

I cannot help feeling that local authorities that grant long, late-night licences to clubs in town centres and elsewhere, enabling alcohol to be served at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, put huge pressures on police authorities and forces. Things might be relatively quiet until 11 o'clock at night, but at 2 o'clock in the morning there is mayhem on the streets with intoxicated people brawling. On Friday night—I was told that it was a relatively quiet night—PC Frost was out in force but there were still several arrests of people fighting in the streets of Northwich. Local authorities have a big role to play and they need to communicate better with the police regarding recommendations on late licensing.

Mark Reckless: My hon. Friend refers to PC Frost and the need for other agencies to work with the police as appropriate. Is he aware of an incident in Kent in which the police control centre received a call—this has been publicised—from a woman asking the police to come out because someone had stolen the snowman she had built in her front garden?

Graham Evans: Yes, we were laughing about that on Friday night. The Kent accents were particularly distinct and we had a laugh about it. There are still plenty of snowmen in Cheshire—at least there were when I left on Monday. [Interruption.] Snow joke indeed.

Local authorities will grant late night licensing to pubs and clubs on the one hand, but on the other they are particularly restrictive regarding new businesses. In my area, a new application has been submitted for a restaurant bar in a particularly pleasant location, but because it is a continental-style restaurant—it has no taps on the bar and serves continental lagers and wine by the glass—the local authority restricts its licence.

People have to drink up by 8 o'clock and the doors have to be closed, which makes the business unviable. We need to look at our licensing laws and help the police do what they are supposed to do, which is to protect us from violent criminals.

To sum up, police forces do not have to cut front-line policing but should utilise the special constabulary. If people want to become police officers, there is no better way of showing commitment than by volunteering their time and serving their community in the current difficult economic climate.

3.18 pm

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this constructive and well-mannered debate. Members on both sides of the House have expressed their genuine concerns in a fairly non-political way.

There has been much speculation today and in the past few weeks about the possible effects of the cuts. It is pure speculation because we still do not know what the individual settlements will be. It is disappointing to Members on the Government side that the Opposition still have not had the good grace to tell us where they would make their cuts. I thought that the answer given by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) when he was pushed on this issue was very interesting. Essentially, he said that he would go back to the Treasury to ask for more money, so perhaps the Opposition do not accept there should be any cuts whatever in policing. It would be interesting if that point were addressed in the winding-up speech.

I want to address an issue at the core of this debate—the effect that the reduction in funding will have on police numbers. I know that that is a totemic issue for the Opposition, and it is easy to understand why, because the Labour Government, in their 13 years in office, were very successful at one thing: persuading this country that only by pouring more money in can we get better results out. That is why the debate about policing has always focused on the number of police rather than what they do all day. [Interruption.] We have a record number—140,000—as someone shouts from a sedentary position, but seemingly, simply because we have record police numbers and PCSOs, Labour Members think we have record effective policing. That is simply not an equation that works.

Labour Members do not care whether police officers are on patrol, filling in forms or responding to jobs. They seem incapable of acknowledging that having more and more police officers doing more and more administrative and bureaucratic tasks does not mean better policing. Sadly for the Opposition, the debate has moved on. They need not take my word for it; they can take that of someone who knows more about policing and fighting crime than all of us in the Chamber put together—Bill Bratton, who was chief of police of the Los Angeles police department, of New York city and of Boston. He is famous across the world for putting the broken windows theory into practice. He introduced the CompStat system of tracking crimes, which is still in use today and massively reduced crime in New York city, where he devolved decision making to precinct level and got rid of a backlog of 50,000 unserved warrants. When he was chief of police in Los Angeles,

crime within that city dropped for six consecutive years. In 2007, the LA police commission reappointed Bratton to a second five-year term, which was the first time it had made such a reappointment in almost 20 years.

It is fair to say that that guy knows what he is on about, and here is what he said to the Home Affairs Committee on 30 November. The Chair, the right hon. Member for Leicester East, said:

“There is a debate at the moment, obviously because of the current economic climate that will result in the numbers of police officers in a local area being reduced. Do you think there is any correlation between the numbers of officers in a particular area and the level of crime?”

Bill Bratton replied:

“As a police chief for many, many years, I would always like to have more police, but the reality is it is not just numbers but, more importantly, what you do with them. More is fine, but if they’re just standing around or if they’re not focused on issues of concern to the public, then those numbers are not... going to achieve what you would hope to achieve, which is improve public safety and reduce crime.”

Steve McCabe: It is only fair to say that Bill Bratton went on to caution the Select Committee against drawing too many conclusions from the American experience, because policing is organised very differently in the United States.

Mr Burley: I shall give another quote from what Bill Bratton said to us:

“So, I had 38,000 police officers in New York City. In Los Angeles I had 9,000. Los Angeles: 500 square miles, worst gang problem in America, 4 million residents. New York: 38,000 police officers, 300 square miles, 8 million residents, a drug crime problem. To have the equivalent of what I had in New York City in Los Angeles, I would need 18,000 police officers, I only had 9,000 but, over a seven-year period, every year crime went down in Los Angeles... the public perception of police and their effectiveness improved”,

which reinforced

“the adage: it’s not so much the numbers but how you use them, how you inspire them, how you direct them and what their priorities are.”

If it is not a matter of numbers, it is about what the police do all day, and the fact is that in this country the police spend a huge amount of time filling in forms. On 15 March 2007, I went out on the beat in Paddington with the Met, one of the more advanced forces in this country. This is what Met police have to fill in for a single domestic violence incident: a 124D paper booklet in the victim’s house; an evidence and actions booklet, which is the same as an old pocketbook, but with structured questions; a custody record, in the station if someone is arrested, with the same details as are in the EAB, which they give to the custody sergeant to rekey into his computer system; a CRISS report, which is an electronic crime report filled in by the officer at the station and that is used for Home Office statistics; a MERLIN report, which involves a national computer system with details of vulnerable children from domestic violence backgrounds—the same details as in the first two forms; a CRIMINT report, which is a Met police-wide intelligence system; and the case papers—that is, the MG forms, which are Word documents that get sent to the Crown Prosecution Service for court. It is not uncommon in the Met and other police forces for officers to be off for the rest of the shift following one domestic violence incident arrest. That is what they are

spending their time doing—this mad bureaucracy and paperwork. It is not about the number of police officers; it is about what they do all day on their shifts.

As we have heard recently, Home Office figures have revealed that officers now spend more time on paperwork than on patrol—just 14% of their time on patrol compared with 20% on paperwork. That is why I am delighted that this coalition, like Bill Bratton, is dealing with the reality of the cuts by focusing not on police numbers, but on what the police do all day. Only by clearing away this bureaucracy and these inefficient, wasteful practices will we get the police service that this country deserves.

3.25 pm

Keith Vaz: With the leave of the House, I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for letting me speak at this point in the debate. I shall explain why I am doing so. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley), who is the youngest member of the Home Affairs Committee. That is my cue to say that the second Wednesday in December is the date of the annual Westminster children’s party for the children of MPs and staff. I am the host, as I have been for the past 14 years; my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), the shadow Home Secretary, is Santa Claus, so please do not detain him for too long. Unfortunately, I am therefore unable to be present for the end of the debate, although I wish I could be. I will certainly read with great care the report of the speeches made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), the shadow Minister, and by the Minister.

The debate has been outstanding, with some excellent speeches, and I commend the hon. Members for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and the hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I also commend the four members of the Home Affairs Committee—my hon. Friends the Members for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), and the hon. Members for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless) and for Cannock Chase—for their contributions.

This debate gives us the perfect setting for hearing what Front Benchers have to say about these issues. I can pledge to Parliament—we have been elected by the whole of Parliament, with members of the Committee elected by their party groups—that we will look at the policing issue very carefully indeed. We will produce thoughtful reports. Sometimes, obviously, we will have to be critical of the Government. When they are doing the right thing we will praise them. I can promise the Minister that we will ensure that the reports are thorough, and that they help him and the rest of Parliament to deliberate on these very important issues. I shall now hand over to those on the Front Benches.

3.27 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) has said, this has been an interesting and thoughtful debate, with a large number of contributions from both sides of the House. Before my right hon. Friend rushes off to his

[Vernon Coaker]

important engagement, may I say to him that his chairmanship of the Select Committee over the past few years has been a model of how to chair a Select Committee? There are difficulties sometimes, because we all have party allegiances, but he knows that one of the strengths of the Select Committee system is the way in which it tries to bring some independence of thought to proceedings. That is particularly important when it comes to the Chairs of those Committees. He has chaired the Committee exceptionally well, and I look forward to reading its further reports on policing matters.

I also congratulate my hon. Friends from the west midlands, my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) and for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who met and made representations to the Minister about their concerns regarding the policing reductions that we will see over the next few years. I hope that when he makes his winding-up speech he will comment in particular on the points that they made.

I shall not pick out every Government Member who spoke, but I found it interesting that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for example, should make a plea for opening police stations—because the Minister is going to close them. I am sure he will have an interesting debate with the Minister about that, but he made an important point about the need for community and neighbourhood policing, and let us hope that, whatever happens over the next few years, neighbourhood policing and police presence on the street will be effectively maintained.

The hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), whom I cannot see in the Chamber at the moment, made an important point when he said that this is all about choices. Indeed it is. He defended the choice before us on the basis of economic necessity, but our view is that the police have fared particularly badly in the budget settlement and comprehensive spending review. Other Departments have fared significantly better, so somewhere along the line a choice was made about the budget settlement for the police, as opposed to the budget settlement for other Departments.

I should like to praise the police service, police officers, police community support officers, police staff and, indeed, police authority members for the excellent work that they do. We have seen it in London, in particular, over the past couple of weeks, but in other parts of the country, too. When we have these debates, it would be remiss of us not to put on the record every time the wholehearted support of all Members for the police throughout the country, and for their hard work. To be fair, I know the Minister does that. There might be differences between us over how we provide that support, but we need always to recognise their dedication and public service, and the duty that they perform on behalf of all us throughout our country.

Helped by a record number of police officers, crime fell by 43% under the previous Government, and the chance of being a victim of crime is at a 30-year low, but the Government's cuts to policing, starting next year as the estimates for 2011-12 show, will put that progress at risk. By cutting police funding by 20% over

the next four years, the Government are taking big risks with the public's safety and undermining the fight against crime and antisocial behaviour.

The speed and scale of the Government's cuts have put police forces and chief constables in an impossible position. A number of forces have already announced plans to lose thousands of police officers and police staff, blowing apart the Government's claims that the front line can be protected. Indeed, many of the most experienced officers in our police forces will have to go.

People will be rightly worried that, at the same time as cutting funding for front-line police, the Government want to spend more than £100 million on bringing in directly elected police commissioners—a sum that, according to the Association of Police Authorities, is equivalent to 600 police officers. That controversial experiment risks politicising the police at huge cost to the taxpayer, and it will do little to improve police accountability.

The coalition's spending review announced that central Government police funding will be cut by 20% in real terms by 2014-15. Funding allocations for individual police forces are expected to be announced in the next few days, so perhaps the Minister will enlighten us on when that will be. Following consultation, a further debate will be possible, as we will know more about the impact on all individual forces. The hon. Member for South Dorset and others, including the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), made the point about what that will mean for individual police forces throughout the country.

The biggest cuts will be next year and the year after, with funding reduced by 6% in 2011-12 and by 8% in 2012-13. Front-loading the cuts will make it even more difficult to minimise the impact on front-line policing through efficiency savings. The Minister has just received a letter from senior Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour and independent members of the APA, urging him to reconsider the front-loaded cuts in 2011-12 and 2012-13 in order to

“avoid long-term damage to policing capability”.

The letter warns that the current cuts timetable will also mean fewer police community support officers and could affect the

“safe and secure delivery of the Olympics”

in 2012.

Those cuts go way beyond what experts believe can be achieved through efficiency savings and better procurement. In other words, a 6% cut next year is too much. Coalition Ministers have regularly quoted from the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, “Valuing the Police: policing in an age of austerity”, which was published in July, and it says that a “re-design” of the police system could

“at best...save 12% of central government funding, while maintaining police availability”.

The front-loaded cuts of 20% that will start in 2011-12 go significantly beyond that.

A number of Government Back Benchers have said that police forces across the country can make efficiency savings without impacting on the front line. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) asked what the Opposition have said about that. The previous Home Secretary made it clear that he accepted the 12% figure and the HMIC report. However, the present Government propose to go beyond 12% to 20%.

The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice (Nick Herbert) *indicated dissent.*

Vernon Coaker: The Minister will hide behind local precepting and councils raising money to make up some of the gap, but that is smoke and mirrors—a sleight of hand. There is a 20% reduction in central Government funding to police forces across the country. That goes beyond the HMIC recommendation. Hon. Members must understand that although some money can be saved through efficiency, that amount cannot be saved without impacting on the front line.

Mark Reckless *rose—*

Vernon Coaker: I will give way after I finish this point. The Home Secretary failed to fight the police's corner in the spending review negotiations, so it falls to Parliament to stand up for the law-abiding public against these reckless cuts.

Mark Reckless: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that the difference between 20% and 12% that he describes makes no allowance for savings from things such as a pay freeze and changes in terms and conditions?

Vernon Coaker: I am quoting the Green Book and the HMIC report. We will see over the next one, two, three and four years whether the hon. Gentleman is right in the statistics that he has quoted from this book—that saving and this saving. We will see whether what he says stands up in police forces in Kent, Nottinghamshire, the west midlands and elsewhere across England and Wales, or whether we will see massive losses of police officers, police community support officers and police staff. Then we will see who has understood the statistics and figures correctly, and who is actually right. I will have a side wager with the hon. Gentleman, and it will not be me who is out of pocket, but him.

I repeat the call that has been made to the Home Secretary and other Ministers to go back and say to the Treasury that the police spending settlement is not acceptable, that it must be reopened and improved. Will the Minister give us that commitment in discussing the estimates for 2011-12, or does he just intend to carry on with the settlement as it stands? As the hon. Member for Hexham said, choices are available to the Government. The Minister can try to argue for a better deal, like those for schools, hospitals and the Ministry of Defence. The big casualty in the comprehensive spending review was the Home Office, and therefore the police service and police forces of this country. I know that the Minister says that there is no link between levels of crime and police numbers, but that is not what the public say.

Let us look at some examples. The hon. Member for South Dorset is already getting cold feet about reductions in police officer numbers in his area, and he will not be the only one. Hon. Members will have to go back and say that things will be tough. There will be police officer cuts across the country: Greater Manchester police have announced a cut of 1,387 officers and 1,557 staff; North Wales police have announced that 440 posts will be cut, made up of 230 police officers and 210 staff; Northumbria police have announced a cut of 450 civilian staff; Thames Valley police have announced 800 staff cuts, but there is no breakdown between police officers

and police staff; and West Midlands police have announced a cut of 2,200 posts, made up of 1,100 police officers and 1,100 staff.

Whatever the book says, and whatever Government Members say, I am willing to go to each and every one of their constituencies and ask the public whether they want fewer police officers or more police officers on their streets. I will ask them whether they believe that the Government should have prioritised police spending more in the Budget so that police officer posts, police staff and PCSOs could have been protected, or whether they were a price worth paying.

A few months into this new Tory-led Government, I believe that people will be astonished that police recruitment has been frozen, thousands of police officer posts are to be lost and experienced police officers will be forced to retire, including in my own area of Nottinghamshire.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Could the hon. Gentleman help us by telling us what percentage of the budget his party would have cut had it been returned to government, and what the consequences would have been for police numbers? It is a fact, is it not, that Labour would have cut the budget by 20% and made as many reductions in police numbers?

Vernon Coaker: That is not the case. The hon. Lady will know, as I pointed out earlier, that we would have accepted what the HMIC report says. The previous Home Secretary made that clear. That report is clear that the level of savings set out in it can be made over four years without having an impact on the front line, but that if cuts go beyond that, they will have an impact on front-line and visible policing.

On top of what I have just mentioned, the number of police community support officers will go down and police staff numbers will fall dramatically. Coalition Members will have some explaining to do when they go back to their constituencies. The estimates for 2011-12 will be just the start, unless the Minister and his colleagues start to stand up for the police. They should stop defending the cuts and start defending the police and the communities that they serve.

3.41 pm

The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice (Nick Herbert): I welcome the opportunity to join in this debate, and I welcome the introduction to it by the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), and the report that his Committee has just published. I am sorry that he is not here to listen to these final contributions, but I understand why he has had to leave. The Committee's report was very helpful, and we look forward to its further reports.

There have been a number of important and useful contributions to the debate, and I hope to address them during the course of my remarks. I am afraid I did not think that the shadow Minister's response did justice to a number of the serious points that were raised by Labour Members as well as by coalition Members about the importance of police deployment, how savings are to be driven in the police and the value of leadership. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) particularly mentioned the important role

[Nick Herbert]

that police authorities will have in the next few months in driving value for money and helping police forces deliver leadership.

Let us begin by discussing what we agree about. We all agree about the importance of the police and of valuing them. The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) was absolutely right to take the opportunity, as I always try to do, to thank the police for what they do. I am sure that they are in action once again just outside the House in relation to the protest that is being run again today. Every day, police officers act to keep us safe and many of them take risks in doing so, and we should thank them for their work. They are an immensely important public service.

I apologise to Members of all parties, because I am afraid I will not be able to indicate the provisional grants for individual forces today. We will announce them before Christmas, and there will be the usual parliamentary debate on them next year. As all Members will understand, I cannot therefore comment on individual forces' specific grant issues. I can say that I am paying the closest attention to hon. Members' representations, including those from the west midlands force area. I will continue to do so after the provisional allocations are announced.

The backdrop to the debate is the spending review. Given the contributions of most right hon. and hon. Members, I do not think it appropriate to rehearse at great length why the Government have to take the action we are taking. I would just point out that we believe it necessary to deal with the largest deficit in our peacetime history, and that debt interest payments alone this year, at more than £40 billion, are far greater than the combined spend of the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.

We announced a reduction in police spending in the review because we believe that dealing with the deficit is essential, and that the police can and must pay their share—

Ed Balls (Morley and Outwood) (Lab/Co-op): Share?

Nick Herbert: The police must pay their share in reducing the deficit. Contrary to what the Opposition suggest—that a poor deal was secured for the police—the deal was rather better than expected in relation to non-protected Departments.

It is important to point out that the reduction in central Government spending on the police is 20% over four years—that is clear from the settlement—does not mean a 20% reduction in the amount of money that forces will have over the period. That is an immensely important point, but I am not sure that the Opposition have fully grasped it. There is a straightforward reason: forces do not raise all their money from central Government—on average, they raise getting on for a third of their money from central Government, or nearly £1 in every £3—and the money that they raise locally is not being cut.

As has been pointed out, that means that if we assume both the OBR forecast of reasonable rises in the precept based on—[*Interruption.*] The OBR forecast is based on the historic trend and the precept freeze,

which the Government are funding next year. That reduces the cut in police force funding over the four-year period to 14% in real terms. The Opposition must explain why they believe that the 12% cut that they concede they would have made to policing, based on HMIC advice, would leave forces strong and secure—I assume that they would not otherwise have proposed that—but that a 14% cut is Armageddon, with all the consequences that the hon. Member for Gedling says will flow?

The difference between a 12% cut in real terms and a 14% cut at the end of the four-year period is £200 million, and the Government are making specific additional proposals, to which my hon. Friends referred, including the review of pay and conditions, which is being set up by Tom Windsor. We also expect the police to take part in the two-year pay freeze, subject to the agreement of the police negotiating board, which will close that £200 million gap. Labour Members simply have not answered the question. Why do they feel able to go around campaigning on, and scaremongering about, the impact of the spending reductions that forces are being asked to make? They are clearly and simply seeking to make political capital out of the situation, yet they would have cut the police budget themselves, in precisely the same order and magnitude as that which the Government have announced—the availability of resources to the police would have been precisely the same. They are perpetrating on the public a great fraud about their position.

Steve McCabe: I do not think that the Minister is deliberately trying to mislead the House, but is it not fair to say that the 12% cut that the former Home Secretary mentioned would be subject to exactly the same precept conditions, so it would have been reduced in the same way as he has reduced his 20% cut to 14%? He has therefore inadvertently misled the House on that point. Of course, he also completely misleads the House in relation to the west midlands—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. The hon. Gentleman may disagree with the Minister, but he cannot accuse him of misleading the House because he is using figures that the hon. Gentleman does not agree with.

Steve McCabe: I am happy to apologise. I was suggesting that the Minister was inadvertently misleading the House by quoting figures that do not stand up to scrutiny.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I heard the hon. Gentleman very clearly and he said it twice. I am glad that he has clarified that he believed that it was not deliberate.

Nick Herbert: I repeat that the Opposition proposed cuts of exactly the same magnitude. Indeed, the shadow Chancellor—when he was shadow Home Secretary—told the House on 8 September that as Home Secretary he had set out savings of £1.3 billion over the next four years, or about 12% of the Home Office budget. He also said that the HMIC report confirmed that, with a lot of effort, it would be possible to save 12% without affecting front-line services—[*Interruption.*] Those are not my words: they are the words of the shadow Chancellor.

As I pointed out on Monday, the shadow Home Secretary told the Home Affairs Committee seminar in Cannock on 22 November that this is a tighter environment for police spending and would be under any Government. Let us nail once and for all the idea that the Opposition would not have cut police spending. They would, and they have admitted it. The order of cuts that they would have made in police spending is exactly the same as we are asking the police to make now—

Richard Burden: Will the Minister give way?

Nick Herbert: No, I am going to make some progress if the hon. Gentleman—whom I met this morning—will forgive me.

The hon. Member for Gedling referred to the letter that the Association of Police Authorities sent me asking for a re-profiling of the cuts. I note that it did not ask us to revisit the overall level of the cuts. I am afraid that it is not possible to revisit the spending review. The settlement, which did not presume that the deepest cut would be in the first year—[*Interruption.*] It will not be in the first year. The settlement fully takes into account the savings that we expect to be made as a consequence of the pay freeze that we expect the police to undertake, which the Opposition have unfortunately discounted in all their considerations.

One of the signatories to the letter is Ann Barnes, the independent chairman of Kent police authority, who is also, I believe, a vice-chairman of the Association of Police Authorities. She is no fan of the Government's proposals to introduce directly elected police and crime commissioners. Nor, by the way, is she one of the hon. Gentleman's friends who oppose the policy while secretly planning to run for office. Ann Barnes issued a news release about that letter in which she said—and it is important that hon. Members hear this—

"I do not think police capability in Kent will be compromised. Neighbourhood policing is the bedrock of policing in Kent and despite the reductions, we are confident that people will see little difference in the level of policing delivered locally."

She was very much reflecting the views that have been put sensibly by my hon. Friends—who have been discussing these issues with their chief officers—that, across the country, chief constables are making every effort to protect front-line policing and that some are guaranteeing that they will protect neighbourhood policing. There is an enormous discrepancy between what chief officers are saying about the impact of these spending reductions on service delivery and the Opposition's claims that there will be some catastrophic collapse in policing.

Richard Burden *rose*—

Nick Herbert: I will make a bit of progress because I am short of time, and then I will give way.

We are confident that these savings can be made because, in part, of the evidence of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, backed up the Audit Commission. HMIC has said that it is possible for forces to make savings of more than £1 billion a year—12% of the annual budget—through things such as improving productivity, cutting costs, sharing services and addressing savings in the back and middle offices of police forces. In addition, further savings can be realised

through areas such as better procurement, although some of those savings were included in the HMIC report.

It is significant that the hon. Member for Gedling and the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) never refer to those issues. They never talk about the savings that could be made by forces, and they are simply unwilling to engage in the necessary debate about how to increase and improve deployment, given the fiscal constraints that confront us.

Ed Balls: To avoid any further inadvertent misleading of the House, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm, first, that the HMIC report that refers to 12% deliverable cuts refers to cuts over four years and, secondly, that it refers to cuts in central Government grant? The HMIC report referred to 12% cuts in central Government grant; the Government are proposing a 20% cut in central Government grant. Will he confirm the difference in those figures and that that was what HMIC recommended?

Nick Herbert: I would have thought that the right hon. Gentleman understood this. The HMIC report was not referring to grant; it was referring to the savings that can be made by police forces. I strongly advise him to read the report again. It is important to understand the savings that could be made by police forces. Hon. Members could then work together sensibly and constructively, as urged by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Leicester East, to support forces in how savings can be delivered.

Police forces and authorities spend about £2.8 billion every year on equipment, goods and services. Ending the practice of procuring things in 43 different ways could drive down the costs of goods, services and equipment by £200 million annually by the end of the spending review period. Furthermore, there is the issue of IT. I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman knows how many different IT systems there are across our 43 forces. There are 2,000 different systems and 5,000 staff involved with them. The information systems improvement strategy programme on savings in IT could save another £180 million annually by transforming how police information systems are developed, procured and implemented. We are convinced that further savings could be made.

It is important for hon. Members to reflect on the fact that half of all spend by police forces is on the middle and back office. The people in those offices are not involved directly in crime fighting activity—although they do important things, such as providing direct support for the front line or keeping the organisation running. Not only is half of all spend made in those areas, but a quarter of all police officers—I am talking about sworn officers—are employed there. HMIC believes that significant savings can be made in the middle and back office by better management while, at the same time, protecting the front line.

Richard Burden: The right hon. Gentleman will know that the chief constable in the west midlands is looking at all those kinds of savings and more. However, he will also know that that will not do the job in the west midlands. Why not? That is because of the disproportionate reliance in the west midlands on the central Government

[Richard Burden]

grant, which we have urged the Minister to address time and time again. I am pleased that he is listening to us on that. However, I would like an assurance from the Minister today not only that he will listen, but that when he comes back to the House, he will do something about the problem.

Nick Herbert: I cannot pre-announce the grant determination. I met the hon. Gentleman this morning, and I will of course pay attention to the particular circumstances of the west midlands if it is receiving less funding from local government. However, I would also like to draw his attention to what the chief constable of the west midlands has said:

“I remain absolutely confident that we will continue to protect and serve people in the West Midlands in the way they expect.” That is a familiar message, because it is also the one being sent out by chief constables up and down the country, who are rising to the challenge of delivering services.

While the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood is here, I wonder whether he will take this opportunity to apologise for what he said on Monday, when he described the figure of 11% of force strength being visible and available to the public as a “smear” and a “corrupt and erroneous statistic”. That was a reference to the report by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary. I find it difficult to believe how the right hon. Gentleman could describe something in such a report as a “corrupt and erroneous statistic” or that Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary was seeking to “smear” police forces.

There is an issue about the visibility and availability of police officers, and we have to address it. The report said that

“general availability, in which we include neighbourhood policing and response, is relatively low. Several factors have combined to produce this ‘thin blue line’ of which shift patterns, risk management, bureaucracy and specialisation are the most significant”—

bureaucracy being one of the factors that needs to be addressed. The real question for this House is why, at a time when we had achieved record resourcing for policing, a record number of police officers and a record size of the police work force, we had visibility and availability at only about 11% of force strength. I agree with the inspectorate of constabulary that that figure is too low. We need to have a sensible debate about how we can address shift patterns, bureaucracy and the drift of officers into specialist units, so that we can protect that visibility and availability, which all my hon. Friends—indeed, every Member of the House—want to improve.

Ed Balls: I will happily take this opportunity to say that I wrote to Sir Denis O’Connor yesterday on the matter, and I copied the letter to the Policing Minister. In that letter I say that I have not criticised—and will not criticise—the 11% statistic, which was drawn up by HMIC. What I have consistently criticised is the way in which that statistic has been used, in a misleading and smearing way, by Ministers—the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Police Minister—to do down the important work of the police. The Minister says that 11% of the time is spent on visible policing, with the other 89% wasted on bureaucracy. That excludes people working on organised crime, in CID, on domestic violence, or on child abuse. That is the smear.

Also, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I just read out the HMIC report, which says:

“A re-design of the system...has the potential”—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I am sorry to have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that he was making an intervention. I think that he has made his point, and the intervention was getting a little long. It would be very helpful if when putting forcefully the arguments on either side of the House, all Members could avoid casting any aspersions on the correctness of another person’s view.

Nick Herbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I strongly agree with that. I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman has been caught out—

Ed Balls *indicated dissent.*

Nick Herbert: He has been caught out. I note that, in his letter to the chief inspector of constabulary, the right hon. Gentleman did not apologise for describing the chief inspector’s report as a “smear” or “corrupt and erroneous”, but that is what he said on Monday. I hesitate, after Monday, to advise hon. Members about using their words carefully, but the right hon. Gentleman should learn that he needs to choose his words more carefully when talking about the inspector’s report. I am sure that he will do so in future.

It is essential that we address the bureaucracy—

Vernon Coaker: I should like to quote from the HMIC report, because the Minister disputed the 12% figure that I used in relation to central Government funding. The report stated:

“A re-design of the system...has the potential, at best, to save 12% of central government funding, while maintaining police availability. A cut beyond 12% would almost certainly reduce police availability”.

The 12% referred to central Government funding, so the Minister was wrong.

Nick Herbert: No, the Audit Commission and HMIC said that the savings that could be made available to police officers were more than £1 billion a year—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood is in no position to criticise anyone for misquoting people—*[Interruption.]* No, I did not.

The Opposition simply do not focus on the importance of reducing bureaucracy or of changing shift patterns. I want to give two quick examples. The action that we are taking to scrap stop forms and to limit stop and search reporting, with all the unnecessary bureaucracy that that has imposed upon officers, will save 800,000 hours of police time. Yesterday, the Assistant Commissioner of the Met, Ian McPherson, told the Greater London authority in an evidence session at which I was present that changing shift patterns in the Met will effectively increase staffing levels by an equivalent of 20% on Friday and Saturday evenings. There are things that we can do to improve the efficiency and deployment of police officers within the availability of constrained resources. That is why it is so important that we continue to reduce interference from the point of view of central Government, and why we have scrapped the remaining targets and the pledge. It is also why we intend to give more discretion to police forces so that they can make these important management decisions.

I want quickly to comment on what hon. Members have said about the use of the A19 procedure to enforce retirement for officers who have served for more than 30 years. There are only 3,000 officers to whom A19 might apply, out of a total in England and Wales of 143,000. It is not the ideal procedure, which is why we have set up a review of pay and conditions by Tom Winsor, which will report in February. It is important that we address issues such as the number of officers on restricted duties—more than 5,500—and the institutionalisation of overtime, when overtime costs are still in the region of £400 million a year. These are all areas in which considerable savings could be delivered to help to protect front-line policing.

Finally, I want to address the issue of police numbers and crime. I want to put on record what I actually said in the interview on “The World this Weekend”, which, by the way, was heavily edited. Nevertheless, as stated in the transcript of the interview that was broadcast, when asked about the link between reducing crime and police numbers, what I actually said was this:

“I don’t think that anyone, and no respectable academic would make a simple link between the increase in the numbers of police officers and what has happened to crime. There is no such link.”

The right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood is not stupid, and he will know that I was quite clearly referring to that simple link. That was my point and I believe it was a correct point—one also made by the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw). It was also made by one of the world’s greatest crime fighters, Bill Bratton, who was quoted earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley). If hon. Members believe that there is such a simple link, perhaps they can explain why police numbers have increased in Sweden and Spain, but crime has increased, too. Perhaps they can also explain why police numbers in the United States have fallen, yet crime has fallen, too.

It is obvious to anybody who thinks about it that there is not a simple link, and that what we should be concerned about is how officers are deployed, whether they are available and visible to the public and whether they are there on the streets when the public want them.

What therefore matters is not the total size of the police work force, but the efficiency and effectiveness of their deployment and how much they are tied up by bureaucracy. That is an issue that the Opposition simply will not address.

Opposition Members talked about the cost of police and crime commissioners. May I point out that the £100 million costing by the hon. Member for Gedling for police and crime commissioners was for a period beyond that covered by the spending review. The annual additional cost of police and commissioners is reflected only in the election cost and there will be no greater cost for the police authorities themselves. The money will not come out of police force budgets. It represents £12.5 million a year on average—less than 0.1% of police spend. Pointing out that an election will cost too much money and should not be held in the first place is not a good argument for any hon. Member to advance against a democratic reform. That is a very weak and poor argument.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) that we are determined to ensure a safe Olympics and that we will make further announcements about the police funding for the Olympics in due course. I would be happy to meet him to discuss any concerns about that.

While Labour Members continue to play politics, continue to criticise cuts, even though they would have made them themselves, and continue to criticise democratic accountability, even though they would have introduced it themselves, Government Members know that we must tackle the deficit. It is in our national interest to do so, not least for the sake of the future funding of police officers generally and of individual officers. We are determined to make the savings by reducing bureaucracy, giving forces more freedom and driving out cost. In so doing, we are sure that we can protect the front line and the visible and available policing that the public value. The public want to know that the police will be there for them, and we are absolutely determined that they will be.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).

**DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Zimbabwe

[Relevant Document: The Eighth Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2009-10, on DFID's Assistance to Zimbabwe, HC 252, and the Government response, Cm 7899.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012, for expenditure by the Department for International Development—

(1) resources, not exceeding £2,498,978,000, be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 593,

(2) resources, not exceeding £700,200,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £2,962,928,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Angela Watkinson.*)

4.13 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to debate the subject of Zimbabwe, particularly the UK Government's aid programme to that troubled country. I am sure that the debate would have taken place earlier, had not the election intervened, and it is important to recognise that there is genuine interest in what is happening in Zimbabwe, in what the UK Government's engagement is doing for the people of Zimbabwe and in how that might most constructively be taken forward. It will obviously not be possible to strike a wholly optimistic note in a debate on this topic.

Eight members of the International Development Committee and two staff visited Zimbabwe between 1 and 4 February this year. I would like to pay tribute to our ambassador, Mark Canning, both for his constructive help and assistance in preparing for the Committee's visit and, perhaps more fundamentally, for the remarkable role he is playing—not just on behalf of the UK, but in reaching out, as leaders of other missions testified, to a number of parties engaged in trying to get some positive forward momentum within Zimbabwe. It is worth noting that, prior to being in Zimbabwe, he was our ambassador in Burma. He certainly gets the pick of the appointments. Clearly, he has experience of dealing with countries where the situation is extremely difficult.

The Committee found a fragile and fraught political situation. I am grateful that the ambassador has today given a timely briefing—I will not read it all out, because I suspect that the Minister may have a copy—which tells me, and the House, that the situation that we perceived in February still pertains. Although some things may have deteriorated, the tensions are similar, the ups and downs are still there, and there are still some positives, with lots of negatives attached.

The UK Government are channelling \$100 million worth of aid into Zimbabwe, and the Committee had an opportunity to see how that was being used in action and in practice. We visited a number of projects—schools, hospitals and other activities—in and around Harare, and did similar visits in and around Bulawayo. We met Morgan Tsvangirai, and Ministers and officials from ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change, and we were invited to meet the President, but the

invitation came about 15 minutes before we were due to leave for the airport to fly home, so we were not able to accept it.

Although the purpose of the debate is not to focus on the politics of Zimbabwe, it is impossible to ignore the political aspect. Observance of the global political agreement—the basis of the Government of national unity—is highly dysfunctional, but, however imperfectly, it did help to create some space in which positive things can happen. My belief, and I think, the Committee's belief, is that if the agreement were not there, or if it failed or was abandoned, much, if not all, that space would rapidly disappear. The situation is not perfect, and no one would suggest that it was. It requires compromises, which, to some extent, are unacceptable. However, we saw genuine benefit to people who had been in abject hopelessness prior to that agreement.

Let us remember that inflation was of astronomical proportions, literally—I think there are billions of stars nearer to planet Earth than the multiplier effect of the Zimbabwe dollar to any other known currency. Almost at a stroke, the US dollarisation of the economy enabled a degree of normal economic functioning to be restored to the country. As we travelled around Harare and Bulawayo, the shops looked much the same as those in a good, modern city anywhere. For most of the people, of course, the problem was that the goods were beyond their reach, but at least the goods were there. For people who could get hard currency, a variety of things could be bought.

The fact that the finances were under the control of the MDC had a significant effect on ensuring that significant parts of the budget could be directed precisely where it was supposed to go, rather than to where it might have gone alternatively, which creates frustration in parties in government that are not comfortable or happy with that situation.

I draw the House's attention to our visit to a hospital outside Bulawayo. The matron who showed us round said that, 18 months before we visited, the hospital was abandoned—no patients, no staff, no drugs, no activity. On the day of our visit, however, she said that it was fully operational, fully staffed, had all the drugs it needed, and was operating as well as any hospital anywhere could be expected to operate. That is a fantastic transformation. Indeed, many parts of Africa with functioning Governments have less well-functioning hospitals than the one that we saw. That is, perhaps, the biggest frustration of all. The capacity of Zimbabwe to deliver what its people need, if it were only given the chance, is probably without equal in Africa.

Although the Department for International Development is employing a rather complex mechanism—we expressed some concern about its complexity as well as its cost—it is nevertheless able to engage with locally based non-governmental and other organisations that can deliver the services that people need. We saw the delivery of health, education and livelihoods. We saw that really happening now, and we saw that there was substantial potential for it to happen on a far greater scale. Of course the Committee was not able to visit large parts of the country, and we were led to believe that had we done so, we would not have seen such a positive picture. The no-go areas are, by definition, unknown, but the implication is that they are receiving no services, or at least no adequate services.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the excellent work that he does as Chairman of the Select Committee. I also congratulate the other members of the Committee, and I welcome the debate.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned human resource. It is, of course, the most important resource in Zimbabwe, but many people have fled Zimbabwe for a variety of reasons. Some have come to the United Kingdom, while others have gone to South Africa, Zambia or other countries in the region. Does he agree that a sign of real political progress and stability in Zimbabwe will be people returning from those countries and others to such places as Harare, so that they can make a real contribution to the country's future?

Malcolm Bruce: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The vast majority of Zimbabweans who are not in Zimbabwe would rather be anywhere except where they are. They would like to be back in Zimbabwe, but, for a variety of reasons, it is difficult for them to go back. It is not just a question of whether they are under threat, whether they can return to any assets that they have, or whether those assets are still there; it is a question of whether they can do anything functionally or economically useful.

We found that some doctors and teachers who had left the country had come back, but they were working for a fraction of the money that they could obtain in neighbouring Botswana or South Africa, let alone the United Kingdom. They were returning because they wanted to help, but they were making sacrifices. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that. One of DFID's activities was trying to supplement those people's salaries, just to add an extra pull, but that still left them earning well below the market rate for the southern African region.

I have no doubt that if only peace and normality could be returned to Zimbabwe, within a very short time the people would come back, economic activity would return and, indeed—this is what is surely so frustrating for everyone—Zimbabwe could provide a shining example for the rest of Africa. People have the capacity to bring that about, given the chance, but clearly they are not being given that chance.

Obviously I want to focus predominantly on DFID's activity, but the ambassador has highlighted the difficulties that were apparent in February and are plainly still in existence. There has been very little progress towards any kind of constitutional settlement, and there are mutterings about when an election may take place. The ambassador made it clear unequivocally that

“The constitutional process needs to be completed in an orderly and well-paced way”.

He said that the Zimbabwe electoral commission and the other commissions needed “to be capacitated”, and that

“technical changes need to be made to the voters' roll”

—and to, for instance, the electoral Acts—

“as well as the putting in place of thorough and comprehensive monitoring arrangements. All this is going to take time if it is going to be held as it should.”

This is the crunch:

“If a poll was held prematurely, it would be most unlikely to be either free or fair”.

It is important for the House to take note of that fresh advice from our ambassador.

We are in a position of compromise—a sort of limbo. The Library note refers to “limping along”. However, the position is better than it was. Few analogies stick for very long, but a slight comparison can be made with some of the hiccups along the way in Northern Ireland. The longer even a small improvement continues, the harder it becomes to go back to the situation as it was previously. There is no guarantee, however, and the big fear is that too many people in powerful positions in Zimbabwe would like to take the country back and they have the capacity to do so. We need to rely on the genuine friends of the people of Zimbabwe, and although the United Kingdom stands among them, I acknowledge that we have a difficult role to play and that we have to play it from a distance. We need to work discreetly and to recognise the legitimate role of the neighbours in Africa, especially South Africa, but also the Southern African Development Community states. In this context, it would be nice if SADC became a more effective and coherent organisation. The fact that the tribunal judgments of SADC have been denounced and ridiculed by Zimbabwe, which says it does not recognise SADC, is clearly a weakness to the south African states in the region.

The continuing situation in Zimbabwe is not only a disaster and a frustration for the people of Zimbabwe; it is a drag anchor for the whole of southern Africa. If the situation is not resolved, the capacity of many other countries in southern Africa to fulfil their potential will be comprehensively weakened. That is perhaps understood more than it was, and the mood is changing, although perhaps too slowly.

We made some specific points in our report, and I would be grateful for an update on them from the Minister. I am sure he will tell us about current DFID activities in the country. The figure was \$100 million, much of it spent on health. Has there been any change in that, or any consideration of whether we could, or should, be doing more on education, or do we feel that others are doing that satisfactorily? Also, do we feel we have the capacity to increase funding?

I think the Committee was in agreement that where we saw funds being effectively spent, they were delivering real results. If we could find comparable projects on a wider scale, we would certainly support additional funding. Again, I would appreciate the Minister stating the Department's view on that. So far as we were able to gauge, the money was going precisely to where it was intended. Great precautions were taken to ensure it did not get into the wrong hands and was not misappropriated, and that it delivered results.

The point about precautions raises the issue of the mechanism or agency used. A number of the partners, both international, local and national, said it led to bureaucratic delays, and to inflexibilities and extra expense, which for some small organisations were disproportionate to what they were trying to achieve. There was an understanding of why the precautions were in place, but if anything can be done to simplify the process and make it more flexible without losing the certainty that money is not being misappropriated, that will be widely appreciated by the partners with whom we are engaging.

There was considerable concern about the extraction of diamonds and the ownership of those diamonds by people very close to the President, and the apparent inability of the Kimberley process to function. One or two of the interlocutors we engaged with said this

[*Malcolm Bruce*]

might be the single issue that would give ZANU-PF the mechanism to destroy the Government of national unity and to re-establish itself as a dominant one party in control, so it is important that they—whoever they may be—are unable to trade illegally in illicit diamonds and thereby secure funding for programmes of expropriation and violence that threaten the state itself. Again, it would be helpful if the Minister could say what action is being taken if not to enforce the Kimberley process, then to isolate the illicit diamonds from Zimbabwe and deny them access to the markets, where they could be used to fund the undermining of the current arrangements.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): The House has been done a great service by the Select Committee's report. What my right hon. Friend has just mentioned raises a dilemma for everyone involved with Zimbabwe. We want to persuade the international community to start to invest in Zimbabwe and to get financial institutions to start to engage with it, but responsible companies, investors and financial institutions are clearly going to be very concerned about engaging with the extractive industries and some of the other key industries in Zimbabwe, for exactly the reasons that he just outlined. How does the Committee see us squaring that circle of encouraging responsible investors to get back into Zimbabwe but doing so in such a way as not to prop up or enrich those who would continue to subjugate Zimbabwe for their own political glory?

Malcolm Bruce: That is a very relevant and pertinent question. The practical thing that people can do is talk to our ambassador, because he has both views on this and indications about what to do.

The next item that I was going to discuss was investment and selective sanctions. The first thing to make clear is that it suits the ZANU-PF dimension of the Zimbabwean Government to make out that the economic failures of Zimbabwe are entirely a result of the application of selective sanctions and that they are targeting the poor people of Zimbabwe and preventing economic activity. The point that the ambassador made is that only one in 70,000 Zimbabweans is at all affected by the sanctions. Of course, he also points out in his statement today that the economy of Zimbabwe has been growing since dollarisation was reinstated. So that particular argument has been nailed. I shall return to my hon. Friend's question, but I just wish to say to the Minister that I understand that some dialogue with the EU is taking place about selective sanctions and it would be helpful if he could update the House on the current position and what the UK's engagement is. My impression is that there is no general view, apart from among the obvious sources, that those sanctions should or deserve to be lifted. However, to be fair, Morgan Tsvangirai said that they were a constant source of friction when he was trying to engage with his ZANU-PF co-Ministers.

There is no restriction on investment in Zimbabwe. There is nothing to prevent companies from outside Zimbabwe investing, apart from one thing that was introduced earlier in the year: the "indigenisation" of business. Again, it would be helpful if the Minister could update us on the position that has been reached. That measure fundamentally said that people could not do business in Zimbabwe other than through a

company that was 51% owned by Zimbabweans—those Zimbabweans would, of course, be those approved by the stronger part of the Government. That may not be a total cast-iron restriction, as there is a Government of national unity and there are Ministers who are trying to offer, with some success, a growth strategy, a development strategy and a rebuilding strategy for Zimbabwe. Businesses may therefore have opportunities to find partners who are not going to subvert the money, but clearly nobody could invest in Zimbabwe without having an assurance. The Minister may be able to provide that or our excellent ambassador may be able to give advice. My instincts are that doing business is difficult, but may not be completely impossible.

That raises an interesting dilemma in the whole issue of development. We engage in states where there is conflict, in post-conflict states and in states with dysfunctional regimes, and the easiest thing is to say, "Let's have nothing to do with them." Yet the one thing that might just break the cycle of poverty, repression and tyranny is some kind of economic opportunity. I do not have an answer to that point, but I am sure that we should not say that there should be an absolute block on doing businesses with countries with dubious regimes. We should find out whether there are ways of doing business that are reputable and safe.

Let me make a somewhat exaggerated comparison. People do business in Russia, which has huge question marks over it and vies with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in terms of corruption. There are probably business opportunities in Zimbabwe that have less risk and they might be worth exploring.

I believe that we should ask people to understand that there will not be a quick and easy solution in Zimbabwe. The Committee's observation was that, imperfect though it is, engagement with the Government of national unity was able to deliver health, education and infrastructure improvements to significant sectors of the people of Zimbabwe who were denied them before. Frankly, that Government are the only thing that stands between Zimbabwe and chaos and we must use whatever influence we have to try to persuade people, wherever they are, that there is a better place for Zimbabwe to head for than back to where it was.

We might need to acknowledge that not everybody in ZANU-PF is entirely self-seeking—we met one or two of them—and that some of them realise that their country has a place to go and that they need to be part of it. That was the other issue that was made quite clear to us. Experience in government, knowledge, contacts, communication and political capacity are mostly controlled by ZANU-PF and not by the MDC. The MDC's members might have learned something in the past year and a half—I hope and am sure they have—but if Zimbabwe is to have a longer-term future, some of the people who have been part of the problem must be part of the solution.

That point was made to us on a few occasions and at the same time it was pointed out that, for example, every Minister was allocated a 24/7 personal "bodyguard" appointed by the President. I am quite certain that that was not an entirely comfortable experience. Interestingly, one politician said that the funny thing about that was that it created a dialogue between two groups of people who had had no connection or communication with each other before and some started to understand that the other side had a more multidimensional aspect. The

avenues of communication are only beginning to open. The report from the ambassador today does not suggest that things have changed very much, and they could get worse.

What is clear is that we should not collude in any early rush to an election. An early election would almost certainly bring the present inadequate partnership to an end in favour of something worse. It could not be free and it could not be fair. The measured words of the ambassador disguise the fact that there is no electoral register, which means that those who control the polling stations can write their own register. That is no basis for any kind of election. It would be a total fiction.

In conclusion, the Committee came away impressed that good things were being done that were having real benefits, that it was possible to reach people, that the longer we could create such space the more chance there was of people seeing a better future, and that we had to put up with setbacks, pitfalls and compromises and not walk away. Nothing can be guaranteed, but we must do nothing that allows this troubled partnership to be brought to an end and the re-establishment of a one-party state. That would set back not just Zimbabwe but the whole of southern Africa for another generation.

4.39 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I, too, thank the House for this brief opportunity to debate some of the International Development Committee's reflections following our visit to Zimbabwe in February. I endorse what the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said about it being important that we went. Before we went, there was nervousness in some quarters about whether we would be sending mixed messages simply by going there. We were conscious that if things went wrong our visit could be seen as some kind of endorsement of the Mugabe regime or a weakening of the international community's resolve; we were firm that we could not let that be the case and I do not think it was.

It is important that we have a clear position on the gross abuses of human rights that went on there and are still going on, and that we make our position absolutely clear. However, as the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, and as the report underlines, Zimbabwe has huge potential as a country, but also has huge needs in human terms. In October, the United Nations Development Programme released its annual human development index, which puts the country last on the indices of education, health and the income of nations. According to UNICEF's mid-year report, which was published in July, Zimbabwe had the most severe health-related emergency of 2010—a major measles outbreak in which there were 7,754 suspected cases and 517 people died. That was reported in 61 of the country's 62 districts. The report states:

“Basic social services, such as access to safe water and coverage of immunization programmes, remain a cause for concern.”

We spent some time looking at those areas when we were in Zimbabwe in February. The report also notes that although schools remain open, the quality of learning “continues to be compromised”, often by

“teachers' low morale, lack of teaching and learning material, and the poor infrastructure of most schools.”

In a whole range of areas, it is absolutely clear that the country has considerable needs.

UNICEF projects a final funding gap of \$44,260,863, which is 40% of its needs. It states:

“If funding requirements are not met the following critical activities may not take place: improving the management of pneumonia and diarrhoea in children under five years, community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM), nutrition surveillance, emergency safe water and sanitation, life skills for HIV/AIDS prevention and health promotion in schools, and the protection and promotion of the rights of children within IDP and migrant-sending communities.”

Zimbabwe is an area of massive need and the evidence of our eyes suggests that we are right to be in there. We have made some suggestions about how the Department for International Development's programmes could be improved or tweaked, but by and large the impact there is positive and we are focusing on the right things.

Let me endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about the protracted relief programme. We saw various projects for which funding had started through that programme and it is clear that an impact is being made, but a number of interlocutors we came across were clearly concerned about the administration and costs of the programme. They had other concerns too, and this is where our report almost argues against itself. It says that we want to be clear that the audit procedures for the programme are robust enough, but one concern that was raised with us was whether, given the use of intermediary organisations, funding was being mediated in the right way and whether the voices of grass-roots community organisations that really know what needs to be done, and how it should be done, are getting through the bureaucracy so that programmes can be approved and money got to where it is needed. I do not think we have any great pearls of wisdom that enable us to say this or that must be done to the protracted relief programme—overall, I am comfortable with the shape of it—but I hope that DFID looks at whether the mechanisms for operating the programme are as good as they should be and whether they are getting resources to the places they need to go, and in the best way.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I have only just arrived in the Chamber and realise that this issue may already have been addressed. While in Zimbabwe, what information did members of the Committee garner from the ambassador about the potential for the neighbouring states to increase their role in effectively achieving a better solution for Zimbabwe? Those states are nearby and have a deep interest in doing exactly that.

Richard Burden: I hope to conclude my remarks by saying something about neighbouring states, because their role is crucial. The hon. Gentleman asks about the ambassador's views on the matter. He has provided a briefing, but I have to confess that I have not seen it. Perhaps the Minister will give us a few ideas about the ambassador's views during his winding-up speech. I shall return to some of the issues on the role of neighbouring states.

We need to engage and we are engaging. By and large, the focus of that is positive. However, it absolutely must be accompanied by our ensuring that measures are taken that express the international community's—I was going to say displeasure, but it sounds a bit weak—views on what the ZANU-PF regime has been doing and continues to do. We must be clear about that.

[Richard Burden]

Again, the right hon. Member for Gordon made it clear that this is an area where Mugabe uses the media inside Zimbabwe completely to distort what the measures that the international community is adopting are all about. While we were there, it was put about time and again that, somehow, the international community is taking action against the people of Zimbabwe. In many ways, the term “sanctions” is a misnomer for what we are doing there. There are targeted measures against individuals and organisations with a direct and responsible role in what goes on. Large amounts of cash and aid go in—probably not enough, as we have heard from UNICEF—that are directed, in the best way we can achieve, to assisting the people of Zimbabwe.

It is important that the measures taken against individuals who are responsible for some quite ghastly acts in that country remain in place and should be removed—indeed, there is an argument that they should be increased—only when we see clear and demonstrable steps towards democracy and respect for human rights. All the indications are that we are a long way from that.

Many of us who had not been to Zimbabwe before were quite surprised that in many ways we did not see the chaos that we perhaps thought we would see. Not only does that country have massive natural resources and massive potential, but we could see in Bulawayo and elsewhere that if the country were able to get itself together, had an economy that worked and had the right kind of governance, it could turn around really quickly.

The infrastructure that had been built up over many years was still there in many instances. There have been major steps forward. Since the dollarisation of the economy, the work of Tendai Biti has been really useful in putting Zimbabwe’s economy on a more rational basis. However, again, there is a dual view of what is going on there: the chaos that perhaps some of us expected to see was not there, yet we could see that the impact of the land seizures had undermined the economy and caused genuine suffering on a scale that is unacceptable. Just before we went to Zimbabwe, some Committee members saw the film “Mugabe and the White African”, which I recommend to hon. Members because it very graphically illustrates the human cost to and, indeed, bravery of some Zimbabweans in standing up to the Mugabe regime.

The land seizures continue, and a recent report by ZimOnline exposes the reality of them. The President and his wife Grace are said to own 14 farms, spanning at least 16,000 hectares. All ZANU-PF’s 56 politburo members, 98 MPs and 35 elected and unelected senators were allegedly allocated farms, and 10 provincial governors have seized farms, with four being multiple owners. Sixteen supreme court and high court judges own farms, too.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Not only is there violence against farmers but all farm workers have been driven away, so there is now almost no production on those farms which, like Zimbabwe, were massively productive. I urge the Government, wherever we can, to help to obtain an audit so that we can get those farms moving. The issue is not only who owns those farms but getting production going, because Zimbabwe should not be starving when it is such a fertile country.

Richard Burden: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. The way the land seizures have worked is wrong in so many respects. It makes little economic sense for the reason that he mentions, and it goes under the title of “land reform”, which is another huge misnomer. It invokes an image of land being taken from people who should not have it, do not use it properly or got it illegitimately and then redistributed to the people of Zimbabwe, but all the evidence is that that has just not happened. It has been redistributed to an elite, who have not used the land’s capacity as they should.

All that does not take away from the fact that land reform is a real issue, and that it needs to be confronted. I suspect that if my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will say something about that, because the all-party Africa group has looked in some depth at the complicated questions of what land reform needs to be, and at the challenges that we have to face.

The land seizures are unacceptable, wrong and, as we saw in the film to which I referred, in many ways inhuman both to the owners of the land and, yes, to the workers who owed their livelihood to it. That is a challenge for us in the international community and, to return to the point that the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) made, to Zimbabwe’s neighbours, in particular. When Mugabe just ignores and cocks a snook at the decisions of the SADC tribunal, that is a problem not just for the people whose farms and livelihoods have been taken away, but for southern Africa as a whole and for the credibility of SADC itself. SADC countries need to face up to that, but most of all South Africa needs to face up to the fact that, in terms of securing leverage and change in Zimbabwe, its role is absolutely crucial. So far, it has not exercised that role as assertively as many of us would like.

Zimbabwe is a country with massive potential, and I endorse what the right hon. Member for Gordon says about elections. I want to see elections in Zimbabwe, but they must be free and fair. We are a long way from that, and it is not always easy for everybody to talk about the impediments to it. In September, an article in *The Guardian* mentioned how in a recent interview Morgan Tsvangirai seemed to have rather more confidence in the coalition of which he was a part than the right hon. Gentleman who leads the Liberal Democrats has in his. It was quite an amusing article, but it had a serious point, which was that Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC have to walk a tightrope. In the ministries for which they are responsible, they must deliver for the people of Zimbabwe as best they can. Walking that tightrope keeps them there and active, and for some of their supporters and members, it keeps them alive. They must work with people who have been responsible for their persecution for many years and, at the same time, they must retain their independence, build their base and try to build a functioning democracy in Zimbabwe. That is a pretty fearsome tightrope to have to walk. They and the people of Zimbabwe need our help to do so.

I am convinced that we must maintain the dual approach that we have adopted of targeted measures that are appropriate and effective against members of the ZANU-PF regime that have brought the country to ruin, combined with an aid and assistance programme that focuses on the real needs of the people. That

programme must be responsive to the voices of the people of Zimbabwe and must address their very real humanitarian problems. It must boost the economy of Zimbabwe so that it can achieve its potential. If Zimbabwe achieves that potential, its role in southern Africa will be very positive and it really should have that role. It behoves us all to do what we can to ensure that that happens.

4.56 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I am delighted to follow two people who have visited Zimbabwe pretty recently and who have guarded optimism about its future, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). It is good to hear from people who have a lot of knowledge of what is happening now.

The attention of the global community has recently been drawn to the forthcoming referendum in Sudan, which in all likelihood will create a new country. However, while the international community looks towards Sudan, the problems faced by other African countries continue. That is particularly true of Zimbabwe.

There is a southern African proverb that states, "Don't look where you fell, but where you stumbled." When reviewing the recent tragedy seen in Zimbabwe, it is right that we should look to where the country stumbled, before we look at where it now lies. Disgruntled war veterans invaded a small number of farms in the run-up to 2000, because they were annoyed with Mugabe's progress towards his promise to redistribute the land back to the people of Zimbabwe. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), not only were white South Africans chucked off the land by Mugabe, but many Zimbabweans lost their jobs. A few months later, Mugabe passed a law to make it legal to take land without compensation.

I believe that it was the violent events at that time that led to Mugabe's legislation between 2002 and 2006 that entrenched his position. The media were stifled by the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Opposition were stifled by the Public Order and Security Act, the Criminal Law Act and the Miscellaneous Offences Act, which worked together to curtail the activities of organisations that posed a threat to the President. Most worryingly, that legislation allowed police and persons assisting the police to use all necessary force to stop all unlawful gatherings. Finally, the Private Voluntary Organisations Act impinged on the freedom of domestic and international non-governmental organisations to carry out vital aid work, which led to many NGOs leaving the country.

Since 2000 we have seen the breadbasket of Africa turn into the basket case of Africa. The commercial farming sector and the economy have collapsed, even though Zimbabwe used to export produce all over the world, and to neighbouring countries, as well as feed all its people. It is a tragedy that that situation is not returning at the moment. The lack of food resulted in the spread of chronic poverty, with about 2 million Zimbabweans depending on food aid. At poverty's highest point, more than 80% of the Zimbabwean population were living on less than \$1 a day. With cholera, malaria and

HIV/AIDS at the worst level of any country in Africa and on the rise, and with Zimbabwe's infrastructure on a sharp decline, the country fell into dictatorial despair.

The Movement for Democratic Change has done well in fighting elections against the ZANU-PF Government, despite the unfair playing field and its internal split in 2005. The international community has condemned the Zimbabwean elections as undemocratic, and cited the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's bias in set-up and actions, and we must do more to entrench democracy in Zimbabwe, as we have heard today.

Zimbabwe stumbled in 2000, and for almost a decade it carried on falling. We must hold our hands up and admit that we and the rest of the international community did not do enough to stop it. Even the Zimbabweans' closest ally, the President of South Africa, achieved very little via his quiet diplomacy.

Thankfully, Zimbabwe has had something of a bounce in recent years, and switching currency has meant goods returning to the shops and the economy making a slight but important step towards recovery. I even note that property prices in Harare are increasing, and many displaced Zimbabweans are returning home.

The global political agreement and the resulting Government of national unity represent a step in the right direction. Some critics have said that the GPA was badly drafted legislation, but the GNU was the only option that offered Zimbabwe a lifeline out of crippling economic and social poverty. The GNU have remained working and—if I may be so bold as to say so—stable for more than a year, and green shoots of recovery really are visible. Schools and hospitals are reopening, and the cholera epidemic that claimed more than 4,000 lives has been brought under some control. Government-led human rights abuses have dramatically reduced, and a new short-term economic recovery programme has been well supported by the international community and the Bretton Woods institutions. I would be interested to hear from the Minister how Britain intends to support that programme, if indeed it intends to do so.

Despite continuing political trouble, including internal power struggles in both ZANU-PF and the MDC, and unemployment that is still at 80%, the creation of the GNU and the change in economic fortunes, although small steps to recovery, are indeed steps. Zimbabwe and the international community must now see what led Zimbabwe to stumble in the past, so that it does not fall again in the future. I am sure that the Department for International Development will play a central part in rebuilding Zimbabwe, and I should like to outline what I see as the key roles that it can play.

It is well documented that President Mugabe loathes Britain. He is documented as having said:

"we must dig a grave not just six feet but 12 feet and bury Mr Blair and the Union Jack".

Despite his reluctance to accept help from the UK, I agree with DFID's assessment that the formation of the GNU has changed the balance of risk and opportunity and justified a structured and incremental re-engagement with Zimbabwe. I am very happy that the UK continues to be one of the top three donors to Zimbabwe, having donated \$89 million in overseas development assistance in 2008, but it is slightly concerning that that is a reduction of almost \$5 million on the 2007 commitment, and that there has been a decrease of almost 10% in our

[*Pauline Latham*]

commitments to overall donor aid since 2006. I hope that future donations from the UK to Zimbabwe will increase year on year until Zimbabwe's crisis issues are dealt with. Increasing our commitments to Zimbabwe would demonstrate to its people that although we will not work with Mugabe, we have not forgotten them.

It is not how much money we spend, but how it is spent, that will make a difference. The Secretary of State has said that a lot since taking office. Between 2004-05 and 2008-09 the balance of DFID bilateral aid to Zimbabwe shifted. At the beginning of the period, most aid was delivered by NGOs, but at the end, most was delivered via multilaterals. The optimist in me hopes that that shift was made not out of choice but out of necessity, and that aid spending via NGOs has decreased as a percentage of bilateral aid because more and more NGOs have moved out of Zimbabwe. Will the Minister tell us whether that trend is likely to continue, or whether, as NGOs such as Voluntary Service Overseas, whose first staff will relocate at the end of this year, return to Zimbabwe, DFID will look to spend more via them? NGOs are often better able to access communities on the ground and spend money where it is really needed.

Although I recognise the importance of the co-ordination that multilaterals such as the UN offer, I agree with critics who cite inefficiencies at ground level. I hope that as NGOs move back into Zimbabwe, we will see the role of multilaterals change from humanitarian to crisis management to overall strategic country growth. It is not often that I agree with the TUC, but I concede that as Zimbabwe's economy grows and the need for humanitarian relief declines, DFID should look to move away from humanitarian relief and towards core development-oriented interventions.

With that in mind, and with the NGO community returning to help to solve Zimbabwe's humanitarian problems, will DFID consider future engagement with the private sector to help to develop the economy? The Secretary of State has on more than one occasion said that economic growth is the foundation of development. It is a major concern, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon mentioned, that an Act was passed by the President in March that requires white-owned companies with an asset value of more than \$500,000 that want to invest in Zimbabwe to surrender 51% of their shareholdings to black Zimbabweans. That is not a great inducement for people to invest. Britain must take an active role in trying to repeal that Act, which was passed without consulting the GNU, because it creates a vacuum of foreign investment. Without that, Zimbabwe's economy will inevitably falter. The British Government have a big challenge on their hands to promote investment in Zimbabwe to support the work of Britain, civil society and the international community.

At the moment the UK spends 43% of its aid on the provision of basic health programmes, which Zimbabwe desperately needs. I commend that spending and recognise that it has been crucial in the past decade, because the state's finances could not cope with need. However, I hope that as the overall health of Zimbabwe increases, DFID will move away from health and towards other long-term aspects of development. I also hope that health spending will move from direct health aid to building the capacity of the Zimbabwean health system.

One of the two most important ways in which DFID can help with the redevelopment of Zimbabwe is helping to fund the land audit. The GNU Finance Minister has allocated \$30 million for a future audit, but previous Zimbabwe Government land audit findings have not been released, and I am sceptical that without the international community's involvement, the findings will be unfair. It is not for me to suggest what conditions the international community should impose on funding for the land audit, but as the DFID Minister at the time of the International Development Committee report stated, a land audit would be the first step towards reform, but it cannot be carried with the current President and his cronies blocking international efforts.

Finally, DFID has a role in developing the political system. I understand the view that the inclusive Zimbabwe Government is not yet the partner that we require to sustain a full development relationship. The global political agreement and the resulting GNU are steps in the right direction, but unfortunately, as Tsvangirai pointed out, things have not radically altered, and Mugabe continues to act without consulting other GNU members. As a result, I believe that DFID's strategy on providing technical assistance and policy support will strengthen the political process in Zimbabwe. I hope that the desired outcome of political change will take place, but if the recent Act concerning white-owned businesses is anything to go by, we have some way to go, as we heard from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield and my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon.

I also applaud the Department's drive for the GNU to adopt policies in line with the Hague principles. Strengthening democracy in Zimbabwe is the key to getting Zimbabwe back on its feet, but I fear that President Mugabe will fight the changes all the way. In 2008 he was quoted in a paper as stating:

"We are not going to give up our country for a mere X on a ballot. How can a ballpoint pen fight with a gun?"

While the President remains in a position of power, I fear that Zimbabwe's future will remain on the precipice. However, if the political institutions of Zimbabwe are strengthened, I hope that unrestricted democracy can flourish. If this is so, the UK and the international community can take greater strides towards building stronger, more long-term development policies in league with the truly democratically elected Government of Zimbabwe.

The problems of Zimbabwe are so varied and complex, and I shall finish where I started. Since 2008 Zimbabwe has started to pick itself up from where it fell. It is right that we should now take this opportunity to see why Zimbabwe fell in the first place, and ensure that the work carried out on behalf of the UK is channelled into programmes that will help to bring true democracy, a stable and diverse economy and, most importantly, a healthy and poverty-free society to Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has a long way to go, but I hope our actions can help get it there.

5.11 pm

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I concur with the comments made about the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and the excellent work of his Committee, including on its visit to Zimbabwe in February. I have long taken an interest—since my arrival in the House in 2001—in events in the African

continent. There is universal good will from political parties across the United Kingdom towards Zimbabwe and a hope that matters will improve there. However, the problems that Mugabe has created in Zimbabwe continue, as he enters his 88th year in a couple of months and shows no sign of being about to release his stranglehold on the Zimbabwean people.

Some of the facts and figures have been outlined by other hon. Members, and the helpful documentation supplied today shows us that while life expectancy is improving generally in sub-Saharan Africa—albeit, of course, from a very low base—it has actually worsened in Zimbabwe in recent years. It is difficult to obtain reliable and well informed statistics, but somewhere between 80% and 90% of the citizens of that nation state could be described as being unemployed.

Some comment has been made about what might be regarded as a precipitate move towards elections, which are due to be held at some point in the next six months. A referendum date on the new constitution is scheduled for 30 June next year. However, the portents are not good. We hear that the Commercial Farmers Union in Zimbabwe has said that intimidation is increasing.

I shall just mention a couple of examples from within the past month. A prisoner who spent two months with his intestines hanging out has finally been taken to hospital for treatment. The Harare remand prison superintendant said that the suspected bicycle thief was given medical assistance after his condition was noticed during an appearance in court, and the chief superintendant said that the suspect was shot in the stomach when police tried to arrest him in September. He has been using colostomy bags to cover his intestines, and taking painkillers. His trial has now been postponed. That report is dated November 2010.

Another report—similarly, from within the past eight or nine weeks—suggests that 1,000 adults are newly infected with HIV every week in Zimbabwe. A similar number of people are dying of AIDS. DFID is doing excellent work, particularly in funding the work of the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, to reduce transmission from pregnant mothers to their babies, so that children can be born HIV free and can go on to lead healthy lives. The scale of the problem is quite staggering. I have given two examples to demonstrate the massive problems in Zimbabwe and the scale of the task that lies ahead.

We understand that the EU's restrictive measures come up for renewal in February next year. Various hon. Members have outlined the scale of our assistance to Zimbabwe. It is important that we try to ensure, as far as possible, that the aid is well targeted. It is difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that every last dollar—or every last cent or penny piece—of the \$90 million or \$100 million of aid to Zimbabwe is not misappropriated by the regime. In so far as practical steps can and have been taken, such an approach needs to be continued to ensure that the regime does not take advantage of the assistance being offered.

Figures show that Zimbabwe is way off target in reducing child and maternal mortality rates. Despite all the efforts of DFID and others internationally to ensure that the carefully targeted assistance reaches those in need, statistics prove that the situation has improved only marginally in the past year or 18 months. I am

reminded of an example that was used some time ago in relation to Zimbabwe. If the United Kingdom had an average household debt of £100,000 and it was reduced to £95,000 would it be argued that things were improving or would people say that we had a long way to go? Unfortunately, that appears to illustrate the position in Zimbabwe.

There has been a marginal improvement, but whatever steps and measures we take—at least one, if not two, hon. Members have made this point—neighbouring states can bring considerable influence to bear on Zimbabwe. It is absolutely clear that however much we rail and rage against Mugabe, he is impervious to the protest, the opposition and the condemnation heaped upon his head. There are neighbouring states with which we can have considerable influence, and we need to ensure that such influence is deployed constructively to get a better conclusion.

South Africa bears a considerable responsibility in trying to ensure that Zimbabwe moves in the right direction. We have influence with South Africa and other neighbouring states. I trust that the good work that DFID has been doing—and will continue to do—will receive the widespread endorsement of Members across the Chamber; indeed, I have no doubt that it will. However, we need to remain focused on the fact that the problems in Zimbabwe are monumental. They are of Everest-like proportions, however insignificantly they have been reduced in the past year or two. We must keep the pressure on through those third party nation states that are close to Zimbabwe and that can apply pressure. We must do what we can to ensure that the people of Zimbabwe have a better future than they have had a past.

5.20 pm

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): We have heard a lot this afternoon, and about a number of issues. As the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said, it is important not to ignore the politics of Zimbabwe in our debate today. The global political agreement—the GPA—was a step in the right direction for Zimbabwe, but, as a number of speakers have acknowledged, it was not ideal. A lot more is required from the Government of Zimbabwe on addressing the health care and education problems that were so eloquently outlined by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell).

The right hon. Member for Gordon also pointed out that the people of Zimbabwe have a tremendous capacity for resilience. That is absolutely right, and it has already been shown. He mentioned the example of the hospital in Bulawayo, but there is another issue that we have to acknowledge in this debate. The infrastructure of Zimbabwe—a country that had one of the leading economies in southern Africa, boasting some of the best universities and hospitals—has been destroyed and degraded by Mugabe over a number of years. Although we want to see teachers, doctors and nurses returning to Zimbabwe, whatever we do with our aid, the key challenge is to help to rebuild that infrastructure, and particularly that university and hospital infrastructure. We still see a great rural-urban divide in health care—something that I want to talk about a little more—especially in women's health, which the hon. Member for East Londonderry also mentioned.

[*Dr Daniel Poulter*]

Other Members have talked about the need for a southern Africa-based solution to the problems in Zimbabwe, and that is absolutely right. Other countries, particularly South Africa, have a role in addressing the issues in Zimbabwe and taking responsibility for their region. However, we have to be wary of that, given the example of what happened in the Congo. We must ensure that those African countries are not exploitative in their interactions with Zimbabwe. Although it is absolutely right that those countries should take a more active role, there are examples from history, including in the Congo, that indicate that such interest from neighbouring countries is not always benevolent.

One thing that we need to stress is that all the aid to Zimbabwe from DFID needs to be results orientated and target driven. We need to ensure that the aid gets to the people. The right hon. Member for Gordon mentioned Zimbabwe's indigenisation restrictions, which prevent many companies and organisations from taking an active role in helping to build up the Zimbabwean economy, because of the need for the state to have a 51% share in those companies. That forms an important backdrop to the debate, because the restrictions prevent the engagement and interest of overseas companies in the Zimbabwean economy. When we focus our aid and our attentions through DFID, it is important to look at where that aid can be effectively targeted. A particularly important aspect of that is health, which I want briefly to talk about now.

As Members will be aware, I have a background in obstetrics, and I have always taken a keen interest in improving women's health, not only in the United Kingdom but overseas. The leading cause of death among women in many countries in Africa is the problems associated with childbirth, including haemorrhage and eclampsia. The single most important focus of intervention in any health care system in many African countries is to ensure that assistance is available at the time of delivery. The World Health Organisation tells us that one of the great problems in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural areas, is the fact that, since the collapse of the health care system, the infrastructure of midwives and obstetricians has been completely degraded and destroyed. If we are going to focus aid effectively, we need to ensure that we provide assistance around the time of childbirth.

I want to highlight a few of the problems that exist. The WHO tells us that, in 1997, the maternal mortality rate in Zimbabwe was 700 per 1,000 live births. In 2005-06, it had more than trebled to 2,500. That is a significant increase, and it dramatically demonstrates the degradation of the health care service in Zimbabwe. Rates of HIV are also increasing. The hon. Member for East Londonderry made the point very well that some of the targeted interventions are working when dealing with the vertical transmission of HIV from mother to child. The rate of contraception use, particularly in urban areas of Zimbabwe, is also rising. Having said that, the HIV rate in Zimbabwe is 15.3% at the moment. The life expectancy for women in many parts of Zimbabwe is only 47, and the primary reason for that is HIV and AIDS.

An issue that I alluded to earlier is that of the rural-urban divide. The problem is particularly pronounced in many rural areas of Zimbabwe, where women—and

people generally—have difficulty accessing health care. Part of the reason for that is the breakdown of the hospital structure, but there is also a need to improve people's knowledge about health care services through education.

We have seen models of health care developed in many other countries in Africa, such as Rwanda, where maternity and other health care services have been built up. Part of that has involved insurance coupons schemes that people can buy into in order to insure themselves against ill health. Another part of the access to health care involves teaching the population to have an awareness of when someone is ill—for example, in maternity, when someone is having an obstructed or difficult labour—and when they need to go to hospital or seek further help. Even when they do that, however, we need to ensure that the vital expertise that they need is available in hospitals. That involves not only supporting the development of the universities but ensuring that doctors and nurses feel safe enough to travel back to Zimbabwe to work there. At the moment, despite all the efforts, that is not happening.

Although we can agree that the Government in Zimbabwe are better than they were, that having a joint Government is a good thing and that steps are being taken in the right direction, a lot still needs to be done. Having a global political agreement is all very well, and it is good that the economy is improving, but the health and education infrastructure is still very much lacking. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that the targeted aid that goes into Zimbabwe will be focused on the health infrastructure, and particularly on issues such as maternal mortality and training midwives in rural areas, as they will really make a difference to the people there.

5.29 pm

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): This has been a good debate, with lots of well informed speeches, but I particularly admire the speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (*Dr Poulter*), who spoke with a great deal of knowledge as an obstetrician. What struck me most about his speech was his understanding that health problems in Zimbabwe are fundamentally constrained within the political environment, and that unless there is a political solution to the crisis that Zimbabwe faces, basic human needs will continue to be poorly met.

I spent a great deal of my time in the 1970s campaigning for change in southern Africa. I was a member of the executive committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I spent quite a bit of time standing outside Rhodesia House, as it was then called, demanding an end to the unilateral declaration of independence and calling for true independence for the country.

I am delighted that Zimbabwe is free and has been free for 30 years—independence in Zimbabwe gave a significant boost to the momentum for independence in Namibia and South Africa—but I am sad that true freedom, human rights, the rule of law, peace and, above all, prosperity for the people of Zimbabwe are yet to come.

The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (*Pauline Latham*) mentioned a southern African proverb: "Don't look where you fell, but where you stumbled." That is good

advice. She talked about one stumble being the cave-in by Mugabe to the unreasonable demands of the so-called war veterans and the subsequent land invasions, but we would misunderstand the situation in Zimbabwe if we felt that that was the first stumble that took place.

The British colonial period did not cover our country in glory. The Jameson raid was a putsch by a white colonial adventurer. The independence process in the late 1950s and 1960s was botched and led to UDI in 1963. Then there were 17 years of an illegal regime—in defiance of this country, the legitimate authority. That delayed independence and created very serious problems for an independent Zimbabwe in 1980—not least a legacy of nearly two decades of war.

The problem of human rights abuse in Zimbabwe was clearly illustrated in the remarks of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell). The country is still plagued by appallingly bad governance and by an absence of the rule of law. When Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister seeks to challenge illegal and unconstitutional appointments to top jobs—for example, the appointment of Gideon Gono as director of the central bank of Zimbabwe—he is unable to use the courts to set them aside and make new appointments, despite the fact that the official procedures should allow that.

Unemployment in Zimbabwe is currently at about 90%. The country used to be better off than most African countries. The latest figures I have been able to dig out show that gross domestic product per capita stands at some \$450. That figure is several years old and it is possible that the position has improved, but that \$450 per person in Zimbabwe compared with \$618 per person in sub-Saharan Africa as whole.

The HIV infection rate, as we have just heard from the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, is extremely high—one of the highest in Africa and about three times the average for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Some 15% of the population are infected compared with a still appallingly high average for sub-Saharan Africa of 5%. Life expectancy at 44 years has fallen dramatically from more than 60 years, which applied at the time of independence. Again, it compares unfavourably with other sub-Saharan countries for which the average is 52 years.

Dr Poulter: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in Swaziland in the early 1980s the HIV infection rate was about 1%, but by 2000 it was nearly 40%? Although we live in an age when there is better access to HIV drugs, even in many parts of Africa, targeted interventions to deal with HIV—given the high rate in Zimbabwe—should form an important part of any aid strategy for the country.

Hugh Bayley: Yes, I strongly agree with that. During the Committee's visit to Zimbabwe in February, we spent some time looking at HIV counselling and testing programmes and other measures funded by DFID that were delivered largely by NGOs. Most certainly, we should be providing aid. Even with a framework of poor governance, it is possible for British aid to make a difference. The availability of antiretroviral drugs, for instance, has improved because of the help of outside donors, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Some indicators are good. Health expenditure in Zimbabwe is higher than the average for sub-Saharan Africa, as are sanitation rates. In Zimbabwe, 69% of mothers are attended by a skilled childbirth attendant, compared with 46% elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, Zimbabwe has the capacity to recover, when it finds the political leadership to enable it to address problems of catastrophically bad governance. Some of its infrastructure—literacy levels, for instance, are better than in many other countries in Africa—provides the country with the opportunity to bounce back.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and for his work on the all-party Africa group. He talks about the country's great potential, but the problem is its political system and governance. Unfortunately, the depressing fact is that what comes after Mugabe may be no improvement. Is it not the case that the urgent issue to address is what South Africa and other neighbouring countries can do to deal with the country's political governance?

Hugh Bayley: The issue must be addressed by all the neighbouring countries—South Africa being the biggest and most powerful and having the most interdependent economy, given that many South African companies still have plant and operations in Zimbabwe. As the country with the greatest number of Zimbabwean refugees on its territory, South Africa also has the most to gain from achieving political progress. We should do everything that we can to encourage and support the South African Government, and the Governments of other neighbouring states, in their efforts.

It would be wrong, however, to make it sound as though nothing has been achieved. After the last election, the global political agreement was brokered and delivered by political pressure from South Africa and neighbouring states.

Several Members have mentioned the catastrophe in agriculture. In 1998, commercial farmers' output was 2.3 million tonnes of beef, grain, tobacco and other crops. In 2007, after the farm invasions, that had fallen to fewer than 1 million tonnes. Equally important, however, is the collapse of rural peasant agriculture. The staple crop in Zimbabwe is maize, and average production throughout the 1990s was 1.7 million tonnes a year, but in 2007-08 it fell to only a third of that—650,000 tonnes. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire and other Members have said, Zimbabwe went from being a food-exporting country to a food-importing country.

The Zimbabwean people show tremendous courage and resilience, as members of the Select Committee saw during our visit. We saw nurses getting on and providing health services in a remarkable way. The hospital that our Committee visited looked and felt better than many hospitals I have seen in Africa. Ultimately, what makes a good hospital is good, well-trained staff who are well managed and well led. Wards are clean, and equipment is repaired.

We also saw good local government officials looking at ways of extending sanitation systems, and brave performers and artists at the Book café in Harare who were prepared to challenge the regime in ways that they could get away with—through culture and music.

The last election was, of course, deeply flawed. Independent observers appointed by other African countries—members of the east African community,

[Hugh Bayley]

the East African Parliament and the African council of churches—reported that it was fundamentally flawed. Morgan Tsvangirai received more votes than Mugabe in the first round, but then the level of intimidation was such that he was driven out of the country and did not compete in the second round. As I said earlier, the global political agreement that was created after the election would not have been created had it not been for pressure from neighbouring African countries.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): There is some concern about Mugabe's appointment of six ambassadors, or titled leaders, across Rhodesia, which will clearly give him some clout in next year's election. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with many of us who are present that if that election is to be fair and democratic, and if the democratic process is to be transparent, the leaders appointed by Mugabe must be removed?

Hugh Bayley: I think that there will be an election next year, and the international community needs to prepare for an election next year. I believe that other countries need to put observers in place now, rather than a month or two before the election, to report on what is happening on the ground, and that those observers need to come from Africa. [Interruption.] I hear my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) protesting, but I still think that they need to come from Africa. [Interruption.] No doubt my hon. Friend will have more to say when she makes her own speech.

Those who delivered the damning reports on the intimidation and violence that took place during the last election were, by and large, African observers, because they could get into the country to observe and others could not. If it is possible to obtain a wider range of observers, that is fine: I would strongly support such a development. However, there is clearly more traction politically when Africans from the region blow the whistle than there is for Europeans who do not live in the region year in, year out—notably those in this country—and who have colonial baggage. It is important to ensure that resources are available to enable observers from non-governmental organisations and other bodies in the region to get into the country, get there early, and start giving us their reports.

The global political agreement was a fragile compromise. It was the best that could be delivered after the last election. However, it has provided a window of opportunity. Zimbabwe is not well governed under the unity Government, but it is governed a great deal better than it was under a ZANU-PF Government. The Ministries that are led by MDC Ministers are much better managed than those that are still led by ZANU-PF Ministers. I hope that the people of Zimbabwe will support the parties whose Ministers are delivering palpable improvements, and that they will be allowed to show that support in an election.

Malcolm Bruce: Does the hon. Gentleman, who is my colleague on the Select Committee, not recall that Zimbabwe's Minister for Health and his permanent secretary were from different parties—the MDC and ZANU-PF—but they were working very effectively together as they had gone to the same school? People

from the two parties are delivering results in some areas, therefore; it is just unfortunate that that is not apparent in many quarters.

Hugh Bayley: I am glad to be reminded of that; yes, it is true. In order to create a good future for Zimbabwe, every opportunity must be capitalised on, and some people from the ZANU-PF political tradition have a great deal to contribute to the future of Zimbabwe.

The UK has always been a large donor. In 2003, we gave some \$59 million to Zimbabwe, and by 2008 that had risen to \$89 million, an increase of 50%. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), the Chairman of the Select Committee, told the House that the figure has now risen to \$100 million. When we were in Zimbabwe, we saw that aid being used to good purpose, such as in health care as both I and the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich have mentioned, and in humanitarian relief. A very small amount of aid goes to the Government to support two or three advisers in the office of the Prime Minister, but almost all the aid is channelled through the United Nations or non-governmental organisations as there is still not sufficient confidence to channel it through the Government of Zimbabwe. DFID ought now to be planning for that to change, so as to be ready to provide aid through the Government when conditions allow.

The global political agreement following the last, flawed, election set a timetable for the approval of the new constitution and stated that a fresh set of elections should be held after the constitution has been agreed. The process is behind time; consultation on the new constitution ended behind schedule, in October. The consultation process was flawed—the security forces were intimidating people—yet it provides a platform for elections to take place.

Robert Mugabe is threatening to end the global political agreement in February next year, prior to an election, because that is the period in which it formally comes to an end. Our country, and other countries in the region, should be saying that the unity Government must continue until there has been a referendum on the new constitution, and if the referendum approves the new constitution, until there is an election. Any manoeuvring to force MDC Ministers out of the Government before an election would hinder a process through which a freer and fairer election could take place.

I do not know whether the UK should be optimistic or pessimistic, but DFID and the Foreign Office must act on the assumption that there is an opportunity to make political progress. If we were to do otherwise, it would become a self-fulfilling prophesy and make a setback more likely. To have got to a position, after decades of single-party rule and catastrophically bad governance, where there is a power-sharing arrangement within the Government, provides an opportunity.

We should be using aid to support a process of reform and change. I do not know whether it will work, but we certainly should not pull the plug. I was pleased that the new Government responded to the report that the Select Committee wrote before the general election, and I am glad that they understand and support it very well. We should be planning to expand our programmes of assistance, so that if there are opportunities, following an election, for a different kind of governance in Zimbabwe,

we will be in a position to move quickly and show that a different style of government delivers tangible benefits for the people.

One thing that we should be addressing is the question of land reform. A report by the all-party group on Africa last year went through some of the history and, I hope, challenged some of the myths, which are widely believed in Africa. One such myth is that Britain failed to deliver on promises to pay billions of pounds for land purchases. Such promises were not made, although Britain has put in official development assistance money for land reform. The programmes of land reform that we funded before the farm invasions made it an impossible thing to do were relatively effective. Funding land reform cannot be left to Britain alone. We should be talking with other donors, in particular the World Bank. We should encourage it to set up a trust fund especially for this purpose, and we should seek to win support for it from others in the EU and from the donor community more widely. We should do all that we can to remain a good friend of Zimbabwe during its troubled times and to prepare to expand our programmes of assistance as soon as we get signals from the country that the money will be well spent.

5.52 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): It is a great honour to follow the contribution of the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), who knows so much about this subject, and indeed the many other distinguished contributions from right hon. and hon. Members today.

I wish to speak briefly about agricultural development in Zimbabwe. Many speakers have outlined the political situation, which is obviously critical and indeed is pertinent to agricultural development. However, although agriculture might not have the profile of mining or tourism, it has always been vital, as hon. Members have said, to Zimbabwe's economy, as a food producer, exporter and employer. I have some personal experience of the very fine quality of Zimbabwean coffee through my employment in the coffee trade over the past 25 years.

I firmly believe that as the political situation is resolved—as it must be—Zimbabwe will begin to resume its place as an agricultural powerhouse of sub-Saharan Africa. That it was a powerhouse is beyond doubt. The hon. Member for York Central mentioned the 1980s, throughout which a newly independent Zimbabwe provided food security for the region, regularly exporting its surplus maize to Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. Zimbabwe also supplied countries further afield, such as Ethiopia. Indeed, it was the place from which donor agencies bought food supplies to send elsewhere as aid. In 1986, the country had a maize reserve of nearly 2 million tonnes after a record harvest of about 3 million tonnes. To put that into context, as the hon. Gentleman did, the production level in 2008 was about 470,000 tonnes. This year, there has been an improvement and the figure is expected to be 1.3 million tonnes, but that is still less than half the level of production in 1986. So, this year, Zimbabwe will still be dependent on grain imports, although to a lesser extent than in the recent past. The welcome deregulation of the market will make it easier to meet the deficit.

I shall leave it to others to trace the history of that decline—the changes in marketing, an increase in land

devoted to cash crops, serious falls in productivity and, in particular, land seizures—as I would like briefly to address the way forward for agriculture. The Select Committee's report states:

“Land reform in Zimbabwe is a complex issue. It is also a highly-charged political issue between Zimbabwe and the UK. However, resolution is essential for political stability and continued economic”

growth. I certainly do not intend to wade into those deep waters—that is for others with far more specific knowledge of the situation. All I would say is that although I have followed events in Zimbabwe from afar, I have spoken with those who were very closely involved on more than one occasion. They filled me with great sadness about what has happened. Reform was desperately needed, but it could have been achieved in a very different way.

I will offer my personal experience from Tanzania, which might show a way forward for Zimbabwe in certain circumstances. In 1973, many commercial coffee farms in Tanzania that belonged to British, Greek, German and other nationals in the Kilimanjaro region were nationalised. For more than two decades, they were then owned and run by local villages and co-operatives, which were generally unable to invest. Production and quality declined so that by the mid 1990s, production was about 10% of what it had been in the early 1970s.

The Tanzanian Government wanted to see a revival of the farms but were conscious of the vital issue of land ownership. They considered two models: joint ventures and long-term leases. I was somewhat involved in the discussions in my capacity as secretary and then chairman of the Tanzania Coffee Association. We advocated leases and the Tanzanian Government, to their great credit, chose that route. We felt that that was the best way forward because, unlike with joint ventures, ownership of the land remained firmly in the hands of the local people, villages and co-operatives. The lease allowed the investor to develop the farm for the long term, paying a rent to the village or co-operative and employing local people while remaining the tenant.

The leases—I declare an interest, as I am involved in one—have so far worked reasonably well. Previously, the land brought almost no income to the community and little employment, and now it brings a healthy rent that has been used by the local communities to build school classrooms and much else. Many smallholder farmers in the surrounding area can supplement their income through employment.

I do not claim that such a model would work perfectly or that it would work in every situation. I am very much aware that there is justifiable anger over the leasing to new tenants of farms that were seized violently from those who had built them up over decades. By contrast, in Tanzania former owners were often encouraged to lease back their former properties and the ownership was in the hands of community groups, not powerful individuals. Such leasing arrangements are a way to put land ownership and its use to work for the benefit of the whole community while attracting investment and skilled management.

One objective of the Zimbabwean Government in recent years has been to transfer land to small-scale farmers. I welcome the objective, although not the manner in which it has often been carried out. My experience of smallholder agriculture, however, is that

[Jeremy Lefroy]

without good infrastructure to support it, it will be at best subsistence farming and certainly will not fulfil its potential. The infrastructure needed is physical—rural roads, storage, equipment, seeds and fertilizers—and, just as importantly, it involves training.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman has not at any stage indicated that out of the 4,000 farms that were seized from white farmers, 2,000 are lying destitute and in ruins. Does he see a role for those white farmers who have had their land seized in perhaps looking after that land again or does he see that land being reinstated to them? I would like to hear his ideas, because their expertise and energy could rejuvenate those farms.

Jeremy Lefroy: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman; in fact, in the example in Tanzania that I gave, two or three of the farms were taken back on long leases by the farmers who had developed them in the first place.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The need to improve the ailing infrastructure for water and sanitation is referred to frequently, as it has been in this debate, in relation to the need to provide clean water to prevent disease. My hon. Friend makes a good point about infrastructure: we need to invest in it to support the nation's agriculture. I hope that DFID will consider how to promote the development of infrastructure in a way that involves good governance and accountability, thereby instilling confidence in the partners who need to involve themselves in such large infrastructure projects.

Jeremy Lefroy: I entirely agree. DFID and aid agencies that give bilateral and multilateral support can play an important role in supporting infrastructure. I have discussed infrastructure in relation to agriculture, and I would add irrigation to that, but infrastructure for sanitation, health and education is also important.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although it is good to get land into small farms and perhaps to start up the co-operatives again, it is vital to have an incentive on pricing? The prices of products must be right so that those people can make a living and so that things do not fall apart again. DFID needs to consider that aspect and to ensure that there are returns on products, many of which, as he will know from his experience, are excellent.

Jeremy Lefroy: That is why I welcome the opening up of agricultural markets in Zimbabwe, which has been one of the most important Government reforms.

The need for rural infrastructure is shown by the figures on maize yields. The area planted to maize in Zimbabwe this year is 1.8 million hectares, which compares with 1.37 million hectares in 2000, but 300,000 fewer tonnes of maize will be produced as yields decline from 1.18 tonnes to 0.74 tonnes per hectare. How can yields be improved? The Select Committee report discusses conservation agriculture, which is supported by the protracted relief programme that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) mentioned. As the report states, Christian Aid recognises that "DFID's consistent support to this area despite initial reluctance by other key stakeholders"

has been vital, highlighting that it "had been particularly beneficial to vulnerable communities" and that it was "proven to lift households out of subsistence poverty".

I congratulate DFID on its support for that programme under both the previous and current Governments and on taking the lead on it.

Conservation agriculture teaches people how better to manage their land and how to get a profitable harvest. According to Christian Aid, it enables households to get at least two, three, five or, in many cases—I could hardly believe this—10 tonnes of maize per hectare. That is quite incredible and I welcome the Select Committee's recommendation that DFID should explore how conservation agriculture could be extended to other parts of sub-Saharan Africa where it could be used. I also welcome the Government's positive response to that suggestion and I ask the Minister to ensure that that support continues.

The ordinary people of Zimbabwe have suffered grievously over the years, but they have shown, as many speakers have said, extraordinary resilience and courage. There is no doubt that the country can once again become the agricultural powerhouse that it should be. Proper land reform, not arbitrary seizure and settlement, is an essential part of that, as is effective support to the growing number of smallholder farmers. I welcome the Committee's report, DFID's response and the Government's continuing commitment to the people of Zimbabwe.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I intend to call the wind-ups at half-past 6 and about four Members wish to participate in the debate. If hon. Members show some self-restraint on time, that will be very useful and will allow more Members to get in.

6.4 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I apologise for having to leave the debate for a short while. I had an 88-year-old constituent, Mary Gentry, coming up today and I had to have a cup of tea with her.

I welcome the report very much. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) persevered although I know there were times when he felt that he would perhaps never get the Committee to Zimbabwe. That was due not necessarily to what was happening in Zimbabwe, but to things at this end. I welcome the fact that he was able to go and welcome in particular the fact that the report highlights the generous assistance given—quite rightly, in my view—by the people of the United Kingdom to the people of Zimbabwe, despite all the lies and the venom that Mugabe and ZANU-PF have directed at us.

As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Zimbabwe, I am glad that we were able to give some little help to the inquiry and to members of the Committee in planning the programme for their visit to Zimbabwe. As the House knows, during the period when it was almost impossible for UK parliamentarians to visit Zimbabwe, I undertook several undercover visits to that country to see at first hand what was happening on the ground. Things have improved, because on my last visit

I was able to go in bona fide as Kate Hoey, Member of Parliament, which was quite nice. However, it is sad that, despite the resilience of those pressing for reform in Zimbabwe, there is still some way to go before conditions will be right for normal engagement by the UK in rebuilding the infrastructure, economy and institutions of Zimbabwe.

Just last week, on 29 and 30 November, our Minister for Africa, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (Mr Bellingham), represented Her Majesty's Government in Tripoli at the third EU-Africa summit. Six topics were dealt with at plenary sessions. Of those topics, two in particular were relevant to creating the right conditions for engagement and progress towards development in Zimbabwe. Topic No. 4 covered peace and security, while topic No. 5 looked at governance and human rights. I very much hope that the Minister here tonight will give us details of commitments made and undertakings given on specific human rights issues by participants at the summit. I am sure he will have been briefed by the Minister for Africa and hope he can mention those subjects.

Unfortunately, Mugabe attended that summit, which in itself is rather outrageous and has been a cause for concern. I hope the Minister can tell us that Mugabe's own record of political violence and human rights abuse was raised during discussions in Tripoli. In February 2002, the European Council imposed restrictive measures on named Zimbabwean individuals, following the expulsion of the head of the EU observer team covering the presidential elections. The Council said at that time that the

"EU remained profoundly concerned at the continuing political violence, the serious violations of human rights and the restrictions on the media in Zimbabwe."

The specific reference to restrictions on the media was significant. Now, nearly nine years later, there is still grave cause for concern—not only at the lack of progress towards freedom of the press, but over there still not being a genuinely open and depoliticised state broadcasting network. People could watch a television news bulletin in Zimbabwe and think that the Movement for Democratic Change and Morgan Tsvangirai did not exist.

Recently, the all-party group on Zimbabwe was addressed by Foster Dongozi. Foster is secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and president of the Southern Africa Journalists Association. He gave a very sobering account of the continuing difficulties facing members of his profession in Zimbabwe and a bleak assessment of the general political environment in the country, rather similar to our ambassador's report.

Dongozi gave examples of abuses of human rights, which sadly continue to be very widespread. Relentless harassment and political persecution are meted out to those who campaign for reform and stand up to the political and economic bullies of the ZANU-PF elite and, increasingly importantly, the military high command.

The country-wide process of consultation on constitutional reform, which should have started but had not done so when the Committee visited, has been severely impaired by violence. There has been a deliberate intimidation programme throughout the country, very carefully planned by those who see reform as a threat to all their entrenched political and economic privilege. That intimidation is reinforced by the many repressive

laws that remain on the statute book. They deny Zimbabweans freedom of association and freedom of expression. Foster Dongozi mentioned a number of statutes that particularly need to be repealed or radically amended: the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Public Order and Security Act and so on. He drew attention to the recent detention of Dumisani Sibanda for reporting that the police force was recruiting Mugabe loyalists, so-called war veterans, in preparation for elections next year, which it is. Mr Sibanda is president of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and works for Zimbabwe's *Newsday* and *The Standard*. Earlier this month, the freelance journalist Sydney Saize was beaten up in Mutare, and on the same day in Harare two other freelance journalists, Nkosana Dlamini and Anderson Manyere, were arrested, detained and then charged with "criminal nuisance".

Roy Bennett, whom we all know very well in this Parliament, a very brave Zimbabwean whose great-grandfather, interestingly enough, came from Coleraine in the constituency of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), has had to leave Zimbabwe again and go to South Africa, because he has been told very clearly that the police are after him. He spent many months in prison. There is even a warrant out for the arrest of Wilf Mbanga, who edits *The Zimbabwean* from exile here in the UK, so I hope that the European arrest warrant does not apply. I hope that Her Majesty's Government use every opportunity to raise those cases directly with the Government of Zimbabwe and with other Southern African Development Community Governments, who stood as guarantors of the global political agreement.

The International Development Committee's report makes one reference to the worrying developments surrounding the recent discovery of diamond deposits in Zimbabwe. Since the Committee's visit, the impact in terms of human rights abuses against those engaged in mining has been widely reported and become a huge issue. The wider impact in terms of corruption and a distortion of the political landscape should not be underestimated, either. It will have a direct effect by undermining efforts towards economic and social development.

The Kimberley process group, at its recent meeting in Jerusalem, could not reach agreement over whether Zimbabwe had complied with the conditions to allow diamonds from Marange to be certified for sale. Despite the deadlock, and in what seemed to be a rather irregular intervention, however, Abbey Chikane, the Kimberley process monitor for Zimbabwe, intervened personally to certify rough diamonds from Marange for sale. The auction raised \$160 million, but when the sale came to light Mr Chikane's actions were overruled by the Kimberley process chairman, Boaz Hirsch.

I have expressed my concern before to the UK Government about the behaviour of Mr Chikane, and I hope that in responding to this debate the Minister will be able to say something more about that important issue. The Kimberley process group is currently chaired by the European Union, so we as an EU member state have some traction and a real responsibility to ensure that the key commitments in the agreed joint work plan are met by Zimbabwe—perhaps even more so, given that the Zimbabwean Minister for Mines and Mining Development announced that Zimbabwe would boycott

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the most recent meeting of the working group on monitoring in Brussels. From what I have said on press freedom, intimidation over the constitution outreach programme, elections preparation and diamond mining, it is clear that in many areas human rights violations continue.

Paragraph 64 of the Committee's report points out that international donor re-engagement will be determined by two key benchmarks: the extent to which the global political agreement is implemented in Zimbabwe, and progress towards The Hague principles. Owing to the lack of time, I shall not go through those principles, but they clearly state that several things must happen, so I urge the Minister to do all he can to ensure that the UK brings the issue to the attention of our EU partners, because, importantly, in February they will consider the renewal of restrictive measures on certain named Zimbabweans.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) quite rightly said that they are not sanctions but restrictive measures, and, although the restrictions, including a travel ban and assets freeze, have been widely misrepresented in Africa, the measures are targeted only at those closely associated with the abuse of human rights in Zimbabwe. It would be foolhardy to lift them on the promise of good behaviour in future, but I worry that behind the scenes somewhere in the European Union people might well be discussing that.

The restrictions must be lifted only once reforms have been implemented on the basis of the undertakings that Mugabe made when he signed the global political agreement. I am sure that ministerial discussions are already under way, because I know that these things take time, and I hope that the Minister takes from this debate a clear message to our EU partners that the targeted measures must be maintained against those who still impede reform in Zimbabwe. I cannot stress how important that is. It is absolutely crucial, because those restrictions continue to play an important part in supporting those who struggle for human rights.

Finally, we all know what an amazing country Zimbabwe is, particularly those hon. Members who have just visited it for the first time. It is a country full of resilient people. It is a country that was once very prosperous and that could be prosperous again. The people just need the opportunity to elect, in free and fair elections, a Government who respect the rule of law and the human rights of every Zimbabwean. There cannot be free and fair elections without a new voting roll, a new constitution and genuinely independent election observers. If, along with the EU, we donate to and help Zimbabwe, there must be monitoring of its elections beyond that of the African Union. The Commonwealth must be involved and there must be commitments from all the countries that have been so supportive. Our new Government, who I am pleased are sticking to what the previous Government did, must keep reminding the Zimbabwean Government, South Africa and the African Union of their responsibilities. South Africa said formally that it would endorse, support and monitor the global political agreement. That must be done, and Parliament will continue to give as much support as possible.

6.15 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I support what the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) said. In 2000, I was an election observer in Zimbabwe. I was banned by Mugabe because I was so critical of the regime—I said that it was destroying democracy and the country.

Regardless of the good or bad of the colonial past, Mugabe is now a dictator, and as such, he needs something to attack. He has therefore attacked white Zimbabweans. Like other hon. Members, while I was there I noted how much respect there was between white Zimbabweans and black Zimbabweans. The issue is a political one that was brought about by ZANU-PF and Mugabe. That concentrates the mind on how he has destroyed the country.

I endorse the Minister's view that the issue is one of governance. Whatever we do in Zimbabwe, unless we get the governance right, most of the money will be frittered away.

As many hon. Members have said, Zimbabwe is not a country that is poor in resources. Speaking as I farmer, I know that it has some of the most benign and beautiful land anywhere in the world. When it was settled many years ago, two crops of wheat could be grown a year. The resources are therefore there. This was not only about sharing out land, but about having commercial farming so that Zimbabwe can produce real resource.

The way in which Mugabe and the ZANU-PF regime destroyed the farms in Zimbabwe did not affect only the people who owned the farms; there were medical centres and schools on the farms, so as the farms were destroyed, the infrastructure was destroyed along with them. Those things must be rebuilt.

The regime now wants to take control of all white-owned businesses. What Zimbabwe actually needs is internal investment. It is good that we can provide investment, but if we could get the political situation right, investment would come to Zimbabwe because it has the potential to build its economy quickly, as many hon. Members have said.

Zimbabwe is an interesting country, because it is—or certainly was—one of the most educated countries in Africa. For a man who wants to run a dictatorship, perhaps that was the greatest mistake: Mugabe educated the people of Zimbabwe so that they could see a better way and a better future. That is what brought about the MDC.

As we help and support Zimbabwe, we must ensure that we do not further the regime of Mugabe and ZANU-PF and that we see real change. It was with great sadness that I and many hon. Members watched that great country being destroyed. It can rise again, and I believe that it will. As the Minister considers support for Zimbabwe, I hope he will bring about real change, and I am sure he will. We must not forget that ZANU-PF and Mugabe do not believe in democracy and do not understand it as we understand it; they just believe in intimidating and persecuting people and ensuring that they vote for them. Anything that we can do to bring about democratic change will also bring about economic change and a prosperous Zimbabwe in future.

6.20 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I should like to bring to the House's attention the plight of

former public sector workers in Zimbabwe, when it was Southern Rhodesia. Their pensions have not been paid for some considerable time—almost eight years, since 2003. Today I ask the Minister to consider what he can do for the aid fund to help those individuals, UK citizens among them, to regain their pensions.

The Minister will be familiar with the history of the case. Between 12 December 1979 and 17 April 1980, Southern Rhodesia was ruled directly by the UK. The pension fund that then existed was a consolidated revenue fund with no trustees. That meant that Her Majesty's Government, who effectively took on responsibility for the fund when they were in government in Southern Rhodesia for that very short period, had a duty of care. On Zimbabwe's independence, the UK Government were concerned to ensure that appropriate provisions were made, and they believed that there were full safeguards in the new constitution for the pension arrangements of former public sector workers. The reality, however, was rather different.

In February 2003, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe failed to make foreign currency available for those pension payments, which was in breach of paragraph 2(1) of schedule 6 and section 112 of the constitution. A number of requests have been made to secure the restarting of the pension payments and, as I understand it, in September 2009 the director of the Zimbabwean Government's pensions office indicated that \$3.5 million might be available and asked for applications from previous public sector workers now living in South Africa, Australia or the UK. So far, 850 applications have been received from those now living in South Africa and 350 from individuals in the UK. They are represented by a body called the Overseas Service Pensioners' Association, which for many years has been championing the cause of getting the pensions payments started again.

OSPA has tried to establish how many individuals are affected across the world, and the best estimate is 1,200. There are different estimates, but OSPA believes that that is the right figure. That is relevant because until we understand how many people are affected, it is hard to quantify the figures that we are talking about and therefore reach a ballpark estimate of how much help we are seeking from the Minister and his aid budget.

Having reached that number and examined the applications already received, OSPA has calculated that if it allows for a reduction of one third for options of commutation, which most pensioners have taken up, and then uprates the figure to reflect the increase in the retail prices index, the appropriate annual figure to cover all individuals affected would be £4 million. It has made the same calculation for the back payment, which comes to £26 million. OSPA is realistic and recognises that there is no real chance of getting the back payment, but it would like some support from the Government to help it at least to reinstate the old pension amount.

OSPA would like the Government to work with the Zimbabwean Government to identify whether they really do now intend to make sums available, and to consider setting up a review of what the Department for International Development can do, using its aid budget or any other source of funds, to put the individuals affected back in pocket. They are ageing, so if we do not do something shortly, the money will not have the value to them that it should.

6.24 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): I should like to make three points to the House in the closing moments of the debate. First, it was extraordinarily helpful that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), the Chair of the International Development Committee, brought the House up to date with the views of our ambassador in Harare. That is a good precedent. Some time has passed since the Committee visited Zimbabwe in February, and it would be helpful if in future ambassadors or high commissioners shared with the House an open letter or report to bring the House up to date on their views before such debates. We are now much more used to open diplomacy, and I would have thought that that would be a genuine benefit to the House.

Secondly, the views of the three members of the Committee who went to Zimbabwe were also a great benefit to the debate. Sections of the Poujadist press seek to portray any overseas visit by right hon. and hon. Members as some sort of a jolly, but having spent a Parliament chairing the International Development Committee, I must say that there is nothing jolly about witnessing other people's chronic and enduring poverty, or seeing people suffering from HIV/AIDS, or talking to people about the deplorable conditions in which they live because of poverty. The House benefits enormously from the first-hand experience and testament of those who have witnessed—in this case—Zimbabwe. The work done by members of the Committee is much to be appreciated, because when they go to places such as Zimbabwe they spend a week away from the House and are unable to do their constituency work, so when they return, the burden on them is even greater.

My third point has not been touched on in the debate, which is why I am keen to make it. I suspect that many right hon. and hon. Members have not insignificant Zimbabwean communities in their constituencies. Many of those people have for some time been in limbo. Comparatively few of them were granted refugee status, but for perfectly understandable reasons, successive Home Secretaries decided not to order those who were refused refugee or asylum status to return to Zimbabwe. Those people have therefore been here in limbo, and many have been unable to take up work.

I am sure that other hon. Members know of people in the same situation. I am talking about teachers, trade unionists and farmers—people who have real skills. One tragedy of conflict-affected countries is the flight of intellect, as much as the flight of capital. Such people could make a real contribution to life in Zimbabwe again. I therefore hope that Ministers will consider this proposal. There will come a time—hopefully—when those people will increasingly want to return to Zimbabwe. I do not think that we should look at my proposal in terms of giving people money to go home, because those people have real skills. Given that the total aid budget for Zimbabwe is \$100 million, will my hon. Friend the Minister consider the possibility of an endowment fund, whereby talented Zimbabweans resident in the UK could apply to DFID for an endowment to return to undertake a specific project or work, whether health care for nurses, teaching for teachers, or farming for those with farming skills? That would be a positive encouragement to people. Their talents could be acknowledged and recognised, and they could go back

[Tony Baldry]

to Zimbabwe with the finances first to give them the confidence to return, and secondly, to make a real difference.

Otherwise, we—the NHS and so on—will benefit from their talent, skills and education, but for a generation all that talent, knowledge and expertise has effectively been stolen from Zimbabwe. That is another piece of collateral damage inflicted upon Zimbabwe by its political situation. I suspect that many of those who are here—especially as they have not been granted refugee status, and given the continued unsettledness of their lives here—would welcome the opportunity to make a contribution in their own country. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and colleagues in the Home Office will give some creative thought to how we can enable Zimbabweans to return to Zimbabwe to make a positive contribution, rather than feel that they have to cling on here because they have no future back home.

6.30 pm

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I join the hon. Members who have thanked the Committee for this excellent report. It has given us a good foundation for our debate today, and I am sure that the House will agree that we have had a particularly well-informed debate because of the expertise shown by many hon. Members across the House, both from their work on the Committee and from previous work experience in Africa and elsewhere.

The key question which faces the Government, and which faced the previous Government, was how we can provide development assistance to Zimbabwe and support for reform and a return to democracy while at the same time ensuring that we do not provide succour for the hard-line repressive elements of the regime. That is a delicate path to tread, but it is our view that the only way forward is to pursue that twin-track approach. We must seek to help the people of Zimbabwe who have suffered so much in recent years, but at the same time we must maintain the pressure for reform, democratisation and an end to brutality and terror by those in the Government who want to maintain their power and corrupt rule.

In the debate, hon. Members have spoken about the poverty, the degradation of the health service, the state of the economy and the political repression in Zimbabwe. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) spoke about the repressive legislation over many years. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) reminded us that the UN human development report placed Zimbabwe last out of 169 countries in its most recent index. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) reminded us that the unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is between 80% and 90%. The hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), using his experience and expertise, told us of the collapse of the health infrastructure, which has caused a massive increase in the maternal mortality rate. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) reminded us of the continuing intimidation of the opposition media in Zimbabwe despite the global political agreement.

As several hon. Members have said, Zimbabwe did not need to be in its present position. The cause of the

people's suffering is the actions—and sometimes the inaction—of the regime. The country still has the potential to be one of the most prosperous countries in Africa, as the hon. Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) reminded us. It is because of the magnitude of the problem that the Labour Government instituted a substantial programme of assistance to Zimbabwe. In 2009 UK aid was worth £60 million, the largest ever programme of UK aid to Zimbabwe. As the right hon. Member for Gordon, who chairs the Select Committee, reminds us, that assistance and those programmes of assistance from other countries have produced results. He told us of his visit to a hospital that had begun to operate very effectively as a result of the assistance given under the programmes. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) also reminded us that with investment and improvements in the infrastructure, the education and health systems could once again provide an effective service in many parts of the country.

The Committee report refers to the protracted relief programme supported by DFID, which—it points out—has already reached millions of vulnerable people in Zimbabwe and has been praised by the NGOs who take part as an “innovative flagship programme” of which DFID should be proud. The Committee recommends that the Department explore the option of scaling up the programme in Zimbabwe, and we support that recommendation.

The report also raises some questions about the operation of the protracted relief programme and makes some recommendations to make it even more effective. I note that that Government's response says that they will consider those issues in their annual review of the programme, and we support that, but it should not be taken as detracting in any way from the overall achievements of that successful programme.

Alongside direct development assistance, the UK has also provided support to the office of the Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai, to enable him and his office to fulfil the functions set out in the global political agreement on policy design and implementation. Again, the Select Committee proposes that such support should continue, and we agree with the recommendation. We also agree with the recommendation that such support should be offered to other reforming ministries in the Government.

There are, of course, many question marks over the future of a power-sharing agreement in Zimbabwe, not least because ZANU-PF has substantially retained much of its hold on power. The Select Committee report points out that Mr Mugabe and ZANU-PF have not fulfilled their undertaking and have sought to undermine the MDC's ability to deliver even in its limited areas of Government. Nevertheless, as the report also points out—and as has been made clear by a number of hon. Members—there has been some progress since the agreement. That is one of the reasons why it is right to continue with the DFID programme of assistance in Zimbabwe. That programme should be along the general lines of the existing programme, although we could make changes to it to draw upon the experience of the programme to date.

I note, for example, that the Select Committee raises the issues of maternal and child health, and suggests that the Government should consider the need and the opportunity for more support to rebuild the health system to provide improved quality of care, especially

for pregnant women and children under five. That support would certainly be most welcome. It would be useful to hear from the Minister how the Government will consider implementing the recommendation relating to that aspect of the Select Committee report.

One suggestion that I would certainly commend to the Government is that DFID should commit itself to help to fund the removal of user fees for health services in Zimbabwe. That has produced amazing results in places such as Sierra Leone. We must also consider ways of supporting civil society organisations more directly, particularly in the run-up to the planned referendum on a new constitution. It must be emphasised that there has to be real progress towards that constitution, which was a crucial element of a global political agreement. A new constitution should have been adopted before new elections were held, and that should certainly still be our objective.

One other question that the Minister might be able to answer is that raised by the Select Committee about the Multi-Donor Trust Fund. Again, that has been widely recognised as providing a way of giving assistance without the risk of funds being diverted away from their intended purpose. The Government do not say anything specific about their attitude to the future of the fund in their response to the Committee's report. I hope that the Minister will confirm the UK's continued support for that type of initiative.

In my opening remarks I said that there must be a twin-track approach. The first track is to provide direct assistance to benefit the people of Zimbabwe and to ensure that that does not in any way provide sustenance to the hard-line repressive elements in the regime. That type of direct assistance must continue, and we endorse the Select Committee's recommendation that the UK should give a high priority to Zimbabwe not only through the work of DFID but through that of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and other Departments where relevant.

Given the obvious reluctance—to put it mildly—of ZANU-PF to share power in a genuine way, the second track is to ensure that pressure for change is maintained. As a number of hon. Members have pointed out, a key role has to be played by Zimbabwe's neighbours. The Zimbabwean Government must comply with the rulings of the Southern Africa Development Community tribunal. The economic decline and instability in Zimbabwe has damaged all its neighbours in southern Africa, and we hope that those neighbours will continue their efforts to bring about reform and the full implementation of a power-sharing agreement. I would be interested to hear the Minister say, if he can, what recent contacts he has had with SADC tribunal members to make the point about the need to provide continued pressure on the Zimbabwe regime.

The entire world community must also play its part. We certainly endorse the recommendation of the Select Committee that

“progress on human rights and democracy must be demonstrated before all the EU's restrictive measures placed on named individuals and organisations...can be lifted.”

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall said about that. There needs to be a flexible approach to the application of such measures, and they need to be kept under review to ensure that they are targeted most effectively. One example concerns the export of diamonds. Hon. Members have raised concerns

that the proceeds have been diverted into the pockets of leading figures in ZANU-PF. That situation, and the evidence of forced labour and of the torture and harassment of miners, means that it is right that Zimbabwe should not be allowed a full resumption of the export of diamonds at this stage.

As I have said, ordinary Zimbabweans have suffered awfully over the past decade. We know that not just from what we see in the media or from the conclusions of reports such as the one that we are discussing today, but from speaking to Zimbabweans who have come to the UK. Like most Members, I meet them in my constituency. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) made some important points about the role that they could play while they are resident in the UK. Zimbabwe has all the potential to become once again an economic and agricultural powerhouse for southern Africa. We believe it right for the UK not just to provide humanitarian assistance in the short term, but to assist with the reconstruction of the country. However, that can be achieved only once there is genuine political reform—a democracy in which all parties compete on a level playing field, a free press, an end to the abuse of power and to violence, and the firm establishment of the rule of law.

6.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Stephen O'Brien): I extend my thanks and congratulations to the Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), on arranging this debate, which allows the Committee's excellent report on its important visit to Zimbabwe earlier this year to gain wider exposure in the House. The visit was extremely welcome, and was regarded as an important and excellently conducted process, not least by the Chairman. That was the feedback that we received from all those who came into contact with him and his Committee. It is unquestionably the case that he set the right tone, so ably and so sensitively, in leading this debate, on a country where we all want to see great improvements for the people, while also recognising that there are great sensitivities that we have to respect and therefore work our way around. It was absolutely right that the Committee should have gone to Zimbabwe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said. Such visits count enormously in ensuring that we are well informed in this House and as part of the decision-making process.

I wish to place on record my admiration for those, from all parts of the House, who have made such thoughtful contributions to this debate, including those who sit on the International Development Committee, and in particular those who sat on it in advance of the general election. I am grateful both to the Committee, for the time and effort that it has put into reviewing my Department's assistance to Zimbabwe, and, similarly, to the all-party Africa group, of which I was formerly a member, for its insightful and authoritative report on land in Zimbabwe earlier this year, which was debated in Westminster Hall. That debate was notably led by the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), who spoke knowledgeably, passionately and pragmatically.

I need to declare a sort-of interest. Although I was born up the road from Zimbabwe, in Tanzania, and was

[Mr Stephen O'Brien]

raised there and in Kenya, my parents lived in Harare in Zimbabwe in the mid-1980s.

The Committee's inquiry into the DFID programme came at an opportune time. It was published about 15 months after the inception of the global political agreement and nearly a year after the formation of the inclusive Government—the Government of national unity. The GPA created the necessary space, as it has rightly been defined, to allow that necessary, but admittedly not perfect, situation to arise. I welcome the report and thank the Committee for its understanding not only of the challenges that Zimbabwe unquestionably faces, but of the significant potential to rebuild the country. The Government, and my Department in particular, greatly appreciate the fact that the report roundly endorsed the UK's work in Zimbabwe and commended many of our programmes.

I am also pleased that the Committee acknowledged that DFID spending—about \$100 million—is effective and reaches the intended beneficiaries, and that we have therefore helped to reassure hon. Members and others who may have had questions about taxpayers' money being well spent. DFID, along with its donor partners, is effective in Zimbabwe at reaching the poorest and most vulnerable people. UK support saves lives, builds livelihoods, helps to restore the foundations for future growth and provides basic services. As has been mentioned, it is equally important to recognise that private sector development activity, both internally and through foreign investment, can help towards achieving the critical aim of generating the necessary conditions for confidence. I should add that the report has been helpful in informing the ongoing bilateral aid review that my Department is undertaking. All the spending plans for each country, including Zimbabwe, are under active consideration, and as the ministerial team member covering Africa, I can testify that this has been an incredibly time-consuming, intense, detailed and rigorous process, but also a very rewarding one.

Since the formation of the inclusive Government, our programme has shifted from one primarily focused on humanitarian support to one focused on the provision of basic services, especially in health, education, water supply and livelihoods, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) pointed out. This evolution towards longer-term programmes that tackle the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability was endorsed by the International Development Committee.

DFID has a high quality, professional team on the ground, led by the DFID head of office, Dave Fish, and I pay a very warm and respectful tribute to him and his team. I note with genuine respect and gratitude the Committee's conclusion that the DFID team has played an important leadership role in creating opportunities for joint efforts by like-minded donors. I am also pleased to note how the various parts of Her Majesty's Government are working extremely well together in Zimbabwe, co-ordinating, collaborating and complementing each other. Tributes have already been paid to Her Majesty's ambassador in Zimbabwe, Mark Canning, who continues to play an absolutely critical role.

The UK led the establishment of the educational transition fund, managed by UNICEF, which will provide a set of core textbooks to every state primary school

student in Zimbabwe this year. The UK also led the negotiations leading to the creation of a multi-donor trust fund that will provide funding to meet critical infrastructure needs, which partly answers the point raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz). UK aid to Zimbabwe has achieved substantial results and brought real benefits to Zimbabwe's people, particularly some of its poorest and most vulnerable and the hardest to reach. It operates without political prejudice, with beneficiaries selected solely on the ground of need, not of political affiliation. One point that came out of the debate was how we need to respond to the demand that is coming up from the people of Zimbabwe, rather than looking at the matter from the top down. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) rightly pointed out that the needs of those people are monumental.

In order to update the House and the Committee on progress, I shall give a few examples of the impact we have had. In 12 months, the UK, focusing very much on results and outcomes, has helped to provide essential medicines to 1,300 primary care clinics and rural hospitals. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) made some important points about that. We have also distributed 43 million condoms and delivered 41,000 antiretroviral treatments. About two thirds of ARVs go to female beneficiaries, and about one third to men. The important work in this area was also mentioned by the hon. Member for East Londonderry.

The UK has refurbished infrastructure in six key public hospitals in cities and large towns across the country: Harare, Mpilo, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru and Masvingo. We have supported 256,000 smallholder farmer households, covering about 1 million people, with seeds and fertilisers in a flagship livelihoods programme, and helped 20 urban councils to provide their residents with access to clean water, reducing the impact of cholera and other water-borne diseases. We have also supported the Ministry of Finance to produce a cash budget for 2010—the first credible budget in years. It is vital to recognise that the health element is a key lever in what we are trying to achieve, along with livelihood programmes in the rural areas.

As all this suggests, the UK has played a leading role in restoring essential health and other services to the people of Zimbabwe, which had collapsed almost completely by late 2008. DFID's support is provided through the most effective mechanisms available in any given sector, and our work with UNICEF and others played a major role in addressing the cholera outbreak in 2008-09.

Phase 2 of the protracted relief programme was mentioned; the PRP is now reaching about 2 million people. It is effective, and we hope that, with gradual economic recovery, PRP beneficiaries will start to be able to meet their own needs and graduate from donor support. We have a series of refreshed and innovative monitoring and evaluation processes in Zimbabwe. We recognise the concerns of some non-governmental organisations about the scale of the PRP, and we have met them regularly, including through issuing open invitations to quarterly meetings with the head of the DFID office. The vast majority of PRP funds go to the recipients on the ground, and to help to keep local NGOs running and operational.

Following the establishment of our coalition Government here in the UK, the Secretary of State initiated a thorough review of all bilateral aid programmes. As this process is not yet complete, it would be inappropriate for me to pre-empt it by anticipating the final conclusion. However, for as long as the UK is able to achieve results and value for money in Zimbabwe, I would anticipate continuing to provide it with substantial support, given the scale of ongoing need and growing demand. This is in line with the conclusions of the International Development Committee inquiry across a number of its recommendations.

For example, the IDC has tasked DFID with doing even more on maternal and child health—a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich—and I am pleased to say that this chimes well with the development priorities of the coalition Government. I simply ask the House to be a bit patient and await the outcome of the review; we can aim for more precision at the end of that process.

Although the revenue of the Government of Zimbabwe is increasing, little money is available for recurrent or development activities once the public service wage bill has been met. The finance Minister there is conscious of the need to maximise Government revenue, particularly from mining. Clearly, all the people of Zimbabwe, not just a corrupt few, should benefit from rich resources.

The issue of diamonds was raised by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and others, not least the right hon. Member for Gordon. Zimbabwe will not be able to export diamonds legally from Murange under the Kimberley process. We and our EU partners have put measures in place to prevent non-Kimberley-process-compliant diamonds from entering our markets, but we call on Zimbabwe to maintain a firm commitment to the process and to continue to take action to bring all operations into compliance with it. That would facilitate contributions to Zimbabwe's economic development. We note with disappointment that the Zimbabwe Minister for mines, Mpfu, declined to attend the Brussels meeting on 23 November. The Brussels working group on the Kimberley process permits exports from compliant mines—Mbada and Canadile—and ensures that exports from mines that are not compliant do not enter EU markets.

Zimbabwe's inclusive Government, which took office in February 2009, have made considerable progress since they started stabilising the economy. The economy is growing for the first time since 1997—by 7% in 2010 and by an anticipated 8% in 2011. Inflation is low and basic education and health services have been pulled back from the brink of collapse. It is fragile and complex, however; it is certainly not quick and easy.

Returnees—whether they be from South Africa or, indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) urged, from the United Kingdom—are an important potential source of the consolidation of the economic reforms. I point out to my hon. Friend that the international health partnerships provide a significant opportunity and that those Zimbabweans without legal status in the UK who decide to return to Zimbabwe voluntarily are already entitled to a package of financial assistance from the Home Office. I hope that provides him with some encouragement. Clearly, the skills are necessary to ensure the economic underpinning.

The same applies to workers who were driven off farms. Another important aspect of our debate has been the importance of underpinning the economic confidence that we require and hope to see develop, which comes from the sensitive complexities of the land reform process.

I was asked what we are doing, above all, to help UK or other businesses to invest in Zimbabwe. Confidence is all, given the real difficulties that exist, not least in the agriculture sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) raised that issue and he was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). Confidence about land tenure is important, and can be achieved either through licensing or by ensuring access to infrastructural developments, whether they relate to irrigation, storage or distribution through transport networks. The fund that we discussed earlier is important and we need to give a cautious welcome to the inclusive Government's decision to review the indigenisation process. It at least sends out a signal in respect of businesses with a 51% so-called indigenous ownership. That is now being reviewed, which we welcome, and it is an important part of the context of the points raised in debate.

Nothing will move in Zimbabwe without recognition of the political context. Progress in stabilising the economy still leaves power in the hands of hardliners, whether in the military, the police or the intelligence services. With an unequal power-sharing agreement, things are difficult. Many Members were right to raise the issue of how neighbouring states, and especially South Africa and the Southern African Development Community, have a genuine opportunity and responsibility to lead engagement with Zimbabwe, hopefully resulting in the brokering of an agreement, which we anticipate will benefit the greatest possible number of people in Zimbabwe. That was the main point made by the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley). As guarantors of the global political agreement, South Africa and SADC are in an important position, which we wish to support. We stand ready to do what we can to support that process.

I will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) about the pensions issue. I must declare an interest, as my father is in a similar position, having been denied much of his pension from his overseas civil service career.

To give time to the Chairman of the Select Committee to reply to the debate, I will finish my remarks by reminding Members of the House that Zimbabwe was brought to its knees in 2008, as a result of years of economic mismanagement and a complete disregard for the rule of law and the well-being of the majority of the people. However, the potential for the country to bounce back quickly is significant. The economic prospects, notably in agriculture, minerals and tourism, are such that if the business climate improved, there should be no shortage of investors. The country's natural assets, combined with the outstanding human capital, even after millions have left the country in recent years, still set Zimbabwe apart from much of Africa. In my belief, the creation of such organically driven conditions is in Zimbabwe's DNA, and its potential can be unlocked once again. As a landlocked country, however, Zimbabwe and its neighbours are interdependent. In that regard, my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford drew on the Tanzanian example, which is extremely important.

[Mr Stephen O'Brien]

So much hinges on the politics and on putting in place a system of governance and accountability that allows the economy and people to thrive. I confirm that the UK is committed to continuing to be involved in a partnership in supporting Zimbabwe and its people to recover and grow. My Department stands ready to continue to play its leading role, as part of a cross-Government approach, in helping to bring that about.

6.58 pm

Malcolm Bruce: I am pleased that you are in the chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I wish to put it on record that you were a member of the Committee that took part in the visit to Zimbabwe. You will therefore have had a personal interest in the debate.

The debate has been extremely valuable, and it has been well informed by Members on both sides of the House who brought a variety of expertise and special interest to bear on the matter. It is also timely, because the next few months will see developments that could take Zimbabwe in a number of directions, not all of which are good, but I hope that some will have positive outcomes. I endorse the thanks not only to our ambassador, but to Dave Fish, whom I should have mentioned in my opening speech. He and his team gave us a huge amount of support and are doing a fantastic job in Zimbabwe.

I want to make two points. On farming, agriculture and land ownership, the tragedy is that the SADC tribunal has identified a way forward, and it has deemed that the regulations being applied by the Government of Zimbabwe are racist, as is the indigenisation legislation, which defines Zimbabweans not as citizens of Zimbabwe, but as black citizens of Zimbabwe, excluding a whole section of the community by their racial origin, not their citizenship. Clearly, it is unsatisfactory that SADC's position is unenforceable in one of its own member states, and that must be addressed in the longer term.

My final point is that however difficult the situation is, the MDC has control of finance through Tendai Biti, and has produced a cash-positive budget—

7 pm

Debate interrupted, and Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).

The Deputy Speaker put the deferred Questions (Standing Order No. 54(5)).

VOTE ON ACCOUNT, 2011-12

HOME OFFICE

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012, for expenditure by the Home Office—

(1) resources, not exceeding £4,490,851,000, be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 593,

(2) resources, not exceeding £225,450,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £4,601,101,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012, for expenditure by the Department for International Development—

(1) resources, not exceeding £2,498,978,000, be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 593,

(2) resources, not exceeding £700,200,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £2,962,928,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

The Deputy Speaker then put the Questions on the outstanding Estimates (Standing Order No.55).

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 2010-11

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2011—

(1) further resources, not exceeding £5,776,805,000, be authorised for use for defence and civil services as set out in HC 536,

(2) a further sum, not exceeding £5,707,827,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, to meet the costs of defence and civil services as so set out, and

(3) limits as so set out be set on appropriations in aid.—(*James Duddridge.*)

ESTIMATES, 2011-12 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012—

(1) resources, not exceeding £215,642,558,000, be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 589, HC 593, HC 596, HC 604, HC 613 and HC 621,

(2) resources, not exceeding £21,660,305,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £195,788,281,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*James Duddridge.*)

Ordered, That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions;

That the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Danny Alexander, Mark Hoban, David Gauke and Justine Greening bring in the Bill.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Presentation and First Reading

Mark Hoban accordingly presented a Bill to authorise the use of resources for the service of the year ending with 31 March 2011 and to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending with 31 March 2011, and to authorise the use of resources for the year ending with 31 March 2012, and the issue of sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending with 31 March 2012.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 111).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, (Standing Order No. 15),

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings on the Motion in the name of Sir George Young relating to Business of the House (Thursday) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—(*James Duddridge.*)

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 216.

Division No. 146]

[7.2 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Alexander, rh Danny
 Amess, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bagshawe, Ms Louise
 Baker, Norman
 Baker, Steve
 Baldry, Tony
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Binley, Mr Brian
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Mr Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Bray, Angie
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brine, Mr Steve
 Brokenshire, James
 Brooke, Annette
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, Fiona
 Bruce, rh Malcolm
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burley, Mr Aidan
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, Mr Simon
 Burstow, Paul
 Burt, Alistair
 Byles, Dan
 Cable, rh Vince
 Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
 Carmichael, Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cash, Mr William
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Clappison, Mr James
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, Stephen
 Crockart, Mike
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davey, Mr Edward
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Glyn
 de Bois, Nick
 Dinenege, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
 Dorries, Nadine
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duncan, rh Mr Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Jonathan
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Field, Mr Mark
 Foster, Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fullbrook, Lorraine
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Mr Roger
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilbert, Stephen
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, Robert
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hancock, Mr Mike
 Hands, Greg
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Mr Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendry, Charles
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark

Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Simon
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kelly, Chris
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Mr Greg
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Latham, Pauline
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leech, Mr John
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Lumley, Karen
 Macleod, Mary
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Patrick
 Miller, Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, Anne
 Moore, rh Michael
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Mowat, David
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks

Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Offord, Mr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Ottaway, Richard
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Pery, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, Dr John
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Robertson, Hugh
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Shepherd, Mr Richard
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, Nicholas
 Soubry, Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian
 Swayne, Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert

Teather, Sarah
 Thurso, John
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew
 Uppal, Paul
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Ward, Mr David
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James

Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Williamson, Gavin
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Duddridge and
Mark Hunter

NOES

Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Anderson, Mr David
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bain, Mr William
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Mr Joe
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blears, rh Hazel
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Blunkett, rh Mr David
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Brown, Mr Russell
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Byrne, rh Mr Liam
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Chapman, Mrs Jenny
 Clark, Katy
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Connarty, Michael
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Cunningham, Tony
 Curran, Margaret

Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Mr Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Dobbin, Jim
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodman, Helen
 Greatrex, Tom
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Mr Tom
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Heyes, David
 Hillier, Meg

Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Illsley, Mr Eric
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 James, Mrs Siân C.
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Jowell, rh Tessa
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian
 MacNeil, Mr Angus
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCabe, Steve
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McKechin, Ann
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mearns, Ian
 Michael, rh Alun
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mudie, Mr George
 Munn, Meg
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Nandy, Lisa

O'Donnell, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osborne, Sandra
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Sarwar, Anas
 Seabeck, Alison
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Soulsby, Sir Peter
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walley, Joan
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Wicks, rh Malcolm
 Williams, Hywel
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mark Tami and
Jonathan Reynolds

Question accordingly agreed to.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the motion in the name of Sir George Young relating to Business of the House (Thursday).

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 216.

Division No. 147]

[7.18 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Alexander, rh Danny
 Amess, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bagshawe, Ms Louise
 Baker, Norman
 Baker, Steve
 Baldry, Tony
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Mr Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Bray, Angie
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brine, Mr Steve
 Brokenshire, James
 Brooke, Annette
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, Fiona
 Bruce, rh Malcolm
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burley, Mr Aidan
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, Mr Simon
 Burstow, Paul
 Burt, Alistair
 Byles, Dan
 Cable, rh Vince
 Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
 Carmichael, Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Clappison, Mr James
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, Stephen
 Crockart, Mike
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davey, Mr Edward
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Glyn
 de Bois, Nick
 Dinenege, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
 Dorries, Nadine
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duncan, rh Mr Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Jonathan
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Field, Mr Mark
 Foster, Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fullbrook, Lorraine
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Mr Roger
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilbert, Stephen
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, Robert
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hancock, Mr Mike
 Hands, Greg
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Mr Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John
 Henderson, Gordon

Hendry, Charles
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Simon
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kelly, Chris
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Mr Greg
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Latham, Pauline
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leech, Mr John
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Lumley, Karen
 Macleod, Mary
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Patrick
 Miller, Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, Anne
 Moore, rh Michael
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Mowat, David
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Offord, Mr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Pery, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, Dr John
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Robertson, Hugh
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, Nicholas
 Soubry, Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian
 Swayne, Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo

Swire, Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Teather, Sarah
 Thurso, John
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew
 Uppal, Paul
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Ward, Mr David
 Watkinson, Angela

Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggan, Bill
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Williamson, Gavin
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mark Hunter and
James Duddridge

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Anderson, Mr David
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bain, Mr William
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Mr Joe
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blears, rh Hazel
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Blunkett, rh Mr David
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Brown, Mr Russell
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Byrne, rh Mr Liam
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Chapman, Mrs Jenny
 Clark, Katy
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Connarty, Michael
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim

Cunningham, Tony
 Curran, Margaret
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Mr Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Dobbin, Jim
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodman, Helen
 Greatrex, Tom
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Mr Tom
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady

Heyes, David
 Hillier, Meg
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Illsley, Mr Eric
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 James, Mrs Siân C.
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Jowell, rh Tessa
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCabe, Steve
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McKechn, Ann
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mearns, Ian
 Michael, rh Alun
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mudie, Mr George
 Munn, Meg
 Murphy, rh Paul

Nandy, Lisa
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osborne, Sandra
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Sarwar, Anas
 Seabeck, Alison
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Soulsby, Sir Peter
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walley, Joan
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Wicks, rh Malcolm
 Williams, Hywel
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mark Tami and
Jonathan Reynolds

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Have you had any indication of a further Government statement on changes to their plans to treble student fees? I ask because the Institute for Fiscal Studies has brought out today a

report in which it confirms that graduates from the poorest 30% of households would pay back more than under the current system—a point seemingly lost to the Prime Minister today—and that the new system will generate perverse incentives for universities charging more than £6,000 to turn away students from poorer backgrounds. Given that it is now clear that the Government's proposals for student support seem to have been written on the back of the Deputy Prime Minister's fag packet, do we not need a statement to clarify things once and for all?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Just to assist the House, I have not been given any indication that there is likely to be a statement today on that or, indeed, any other issue.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The House will know that many Members from all parts of the country have been struggling to get here, and that last Thursday they faced very long journeys back to their constituencies throughout the United Kingdom. Have either yourself or the Speaker had an opportunity to discuss with the two Front-Bench teams and, in particular, the Leader of the House whether it might be appropriate, given the very severe weather conditions and the fact that, for example, the Army has been called out in parts of the United Kingdom, to cancel tomorrow's sitting so that we can reconvene when all Members are able to take part?

Mr Deputy Speaker: If there is likely to be any change to the business of the House tomorrow, the House will be told in the usual manner.

We shall now move on to the motion on the business of the House for Thursday. Before we do so, I ask hon. Members to look at the motion and to see how tight it is. I do not expect tomorrow's debate to take place today; nor do I expect a rehearsal of it.

Business of the House (Thursday)

7.36 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): I beg to move,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 9 December, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Vince Cable relating to Higher Education Higher Amount and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), on the Motion in the name of Secretary Vince Cable on the draft Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations not later than five hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first motion, or at 5.30 pm, whichever is the earlier; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

The motion is sharply focused on the timing of tomorrow's debate. It allows for the motions in the name of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills relating to higher education to be debated together and for the Questions to be put after five hours or at 5.30 pm, whichever is earlier.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No, not at this stage. I will give way in a moment.

I expect to answer the business question tomorrow, but the Government have no plans for any other oral statements. We therefore expect the House to have a full day to debate and vote on the issues.

Chris Bryant: I tried to intervene at the precise moment when the Leader of the House referred to the precise words that I have trouble with: "whichever is the earlier". Why could it not be, "whichever is the later"?

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman had wanted, he could have tabled an amendment to the motion and we could have debated it. No such amendment was tabled by any Opposition Member and I therefore assume that they are entirely content to stop at 5.30 pm.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) rose—

Sir George Young: I want to make a bit of progress and then I will give way.

When I announced the business for tomorrow at business questions last Thursday, no Member on the Opposition Benches raised objections to the timing or the process of the motions. The process that we are using for the debate tomorrow is set out in section 26 of the Higher Education Act 2004, under which the regulations are to be made. The Opposition will be familiar with that process, given that it is their Act that allows us to make these changes by secondary legislation.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way. Why in the motion did he choose the time of 5.30 pm? It is clear that the House's intention is that the point of interruption on a Thursday should be 6 pm. Why is it 5.30 and not 6 pm?

Sir George Young: No representations were made through the usual channels for an extension beyond 5.30. After 5.30, I anticipate that there will be votes, which will take us to 6 o'clock, when the House usually rises.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab) *rose*—

Sir George Young: I will make a bit more progress.

Our original business plan provided for a maximum of four and a half hours' debate.

Mr Hanson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: In a moment. The motion allows for the House to consider the statutory instrument and the resolution in a single debate, which removes the need for two sets of Front-Bench speeches and allows for more Back-Bench contributions.

Mr Hanson: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that in Wales, where my constituency is, there is a policy not to treble tuition fees. Does he think that five hours is sufficient time for more than 500 Members from English seats to look longingly at my country?

Sir George Young: We had an Opposition day debate on the subject, when the right hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to debate the matter at some length. We are using the procedures set out in the legislation introduced by the Labour Government. We are following those procedures to the letter and allowing more time for the debate than was originally planned.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir George Young: I am going to make a bit more progress.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No, I am going to make a bit more progress.

Paul Farrelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is simply not the case that no concerns have been raised about this procedure. I raised them in a point of order last week, if you remember, and they have been highlighted by the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) in an early-day motion. How can the House correct the record?

Mr Speaker: May I say to the hon. Gentleman, first, that as far as he is concerned, he has just done so. Secondly, I do indeed recall his point of order, which was in fact on Monday night. I would have serious problems with my short-term memory if I did not recall it, but I do.

Sir George Young: For the convenience of the House, the Divisions will be taken together at the end of the debate, as specified in the motion. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills has set out previously, it is right that we bring

forward the motions now, to give prospective students and universities certainty before the 2012-13 application round starts.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It has been reported in the press that Thursday was selected as the day for debating the motions because of the hope that Scottish and Northern Irish MPs might not be present. Is there any truth in that? The Leader of the House can take great comfort from the fact that we will be here, and we will be voting against the motions.

Sir George Young: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman will be here. I announced last Thursday that the debate would take place tomorrow, and no one objected once during business questions to the day that we chose for the debate.

A slower process would have been not only unfair to prospective students and their families but irresponsible, because of the need to tackle the fiscal crisis that the previous Government left behind. My intention in bringing forward this evening's motion was to allow adequate time for tomorrow's important debate. I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will support that intention, and I commend the motion to the House.

7.42 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I rise to oppose the motion. I must say to the Leader of the House that I had been expecting a better justification to the House of the thinking that lay behind this timetable motion. Perhaps he is embarrassed by the shambles of the past two days. Those who read *The Guardian* newspaper, as many of us do, will have read with great joy about the reference to the Liberal Democrats' hokey cokey when it comes to voting. Perhaps he did not want to be outdone and decided to have his own hokey cokey on this motion. The timetable motion was on the Order Paper for Monday and was objected to. It was on the Order Paper for Tuesday and the Government did not have the courage to move it, and it is back again tonight.

The Leader of the House says that he has not received any representations about the time that will be allocated. I have news for him: he is about to get a lot of representations, and the most important one of all will be when Labour Members all go through the Division Lobby to vote no to this motion.

The content of the motion is not surprising, even though it has changed a little since the version of yesterday and the day before. It is clear that the Government want one thing and one thing only: to spend as little time as possible on this matter, and to get it out of the way as quickly as possible.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend accept that if only half the Members of the House wanted to take part in the debate tomorrow, that would allow only 50 seconds per Member?

Hilary Benn: I do indeed, and that illustrates a point that I shall come to—the inadequacy of the time that the House is being given to debate the matter.

Kevin Brennan: Is not my right hon. Friend's point completely proved by the motion itself, in that the Government chose 5.30 pm as the time for the debate to end when the moment of interruption for a Thursday, voted for by this House, is 6 o'clock? Votes should take place after 6 o'clock on a Thursday, not before. That shows that the Government are not providing enough time.

Hilary Benn: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. That raises this question: what are the Government worried about in that extra half hour? The truth is that they do not want to listen to any more arguments. Given the problems that they have faced over their handling of tuition fees and their broken promises, that is not surprising. However, it is outrageous—I use that word deliberately—that the Government propose to allow the House of Commons only a few hours to discuss and consider the most fundamental change to student support and the funding of higher education that we have ever seen in this country. It is also breathtakingly disrespectful.

For proof of that, we need only to consider the fact that the debate on this business motion can continue until any hour. In other words, the Government are prepared to spend more time debating the allocation of time than they are prepared to give the House of Commons actually to debate, discuss and vote on their proposals.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): My right hon. Friend might wish to know that I have been informed that the Government Chief Whip has told the dining room not to bother to put on any extra food tonight, because this debate will be over in an hour's time.

Hilary Benn: I do not presume to comment on the powers of the Chief Whip to see the future, except to say that clearly, in view of the problems we had on Monday evening, his powers are not all they are cracked up to be. The truth, as you will know, Mr Speaker, is that the debate will go on for as long as it takes—it depends on how many right hon. and hon. Members seek to catch your eye.

John Robertson (Glasgow North West) (Lab): Further to the point that my right hon. Friend makes, the Leader of the House said that he is "using the procedures". What does my right hon. Friend think the Leader of the House meant by that?

Hilary Benn: To be honest, I have no idea what the Leader of the House was talking about. It is for him to explain his words. The truth is that the procedure that the Government are proposing to use to give the House time to discuss their proposals is completely inadequate.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Tomorrow, 45,000 students will visit London to make their views known. Does my right hon. Friend agree that giving the House only five hours of debate is an insult to them?

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend. It shows what the Government think of all those students that they propose to give so little time to debate this matter.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that not only 45,000 or 50,000 students will be coming down tomorrow? Their parents and grandparents—

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): And great-grandparents!

Robert Ffello: Indeed—in some cases the great-grandparents will be here, along with siblings, nieces and nephews, because hundreds of thousands of people object to the Government's disgraceful behaviour.

Hilary Benn: If great-grandparents are concerned, we must be talking about very young students indeed, but my hon. Friend makes a forceful point about the large number of people in this country who are profoundly concerned about the proposals that we are being asked to debate tomorrow. I am sure that they will share the concern that we are expressing at the lack of time that we are being given.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Was it not terribly unfair of the Leader of the House to imply that last week's Opposition debate revealed that there was ample time? Had he looked at that debate, he would have seen that far more people wanted to make a contribution than the time allowed. He is now making it impossible for hon. Members to represent their constituents.

Hilary Benn: That is absolutely right, and I am sure that we will have the same problem tomorrow if the motion is passed.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in 2004, when the House had before it a seven-part Bill, containing 15,000 words, 50 clauses and seven schedules, there were many, many hours for debate? Given that the Government's proposals are more profound—they introduce a market, which we have never had before in higher education, and the withdrawal of teaching—should we not have more time? Should our democracy not have more time to debate those changes?

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and I shall remind the House later in my speech about the time that it had on previous occasions to discuss legislation to do with student support.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is it not important that we have more time to illustrate the importance of the issue, support for which, as has already been pointed out, is not confined to students? We are proud of those students who are marching and demonstrating, but in tonight's *Evening Standard* reference is made to a 105-year-old person who has sent a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister to say that she wants to march with her 72-year-old daughter but is unable to do so because she is blind. Does not that illustrate that up and down the country adults are supporting the students because they know that the students are right?

Hilary Benn: Indeed they are. I could not have put it more eloquently than my hon. Friend.

Paul Farrelly: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there could not be a greater contrast between the way in which the coalition Government are handling this and the way in which the Labour Government handled it seven years ago, no matter on what side of the argument one stands? Then the 105-page White Paper was published a whole year before the debate and the changes were introduced only after a general election, so the British public had the opportunity to vote on them.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend anticipates the very point that I will come to a little later in my speech.

Robert Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that these are wide-ranging proposals that will completely restructure our university system and that five hours is simply not enough time to discuss these issues? Does this not also show that the opposition are running scared of a proper debate on this issue?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend of course refers to those Liberal Democrats who will vote against these proposals—but not enough will vote against them as far as the country is concerned.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Last week in business questions, the Leader of the House said that on Wednesday next week there would be a Second Reading of “a Bill”, demonstrating some indecision on the part of the Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that shows that the excuse that the Leader of the House has just given to Members from Scotland and Northern Ireland about avoiding a Thursday is paltry, because the Government could have scheduled the debate for Wednesday next week?

Hilary Benn: They could indeed have done so, but responsibility for that rests with the Leader of the House.

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that students from Plymouth and the south-west have a 10-hour round trip to come up to London tomorrow, they deserve more than five hours for an explanation from the coalition of why a pledge to the electorate is worth less than a pledge to the Conservative party in the coalition agreement?

Hilary Benn: They do indeed, and—given the inclement weather conditions—those students will probably spend more time travelling than they will having the chance to listen to the House of Commons debating the motion.

There are three principal reasons—to do with time—why the House should vote down this motion. The first is the importance and the consequence of the decision on tuition fees. When one compares the time allocated to the House when previous changes were proposed—and they were much less extensive changes to student support and the funding of higher education than those before us tomorrow—we can see just how inadequate the time that is being offered is. The second reason is the fact, referred to in a point of order earlier, that this debate and vote are being arranged before the promised White Paper on higher education is published and when a whole series of fundamental questions remain about

how the new world that the Minister for Universities and Science and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills propose will actually work. I shall come to some of those questions later.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The shadow Leader of the House waxes eloquent tonight. Would it not be more credible to be honest with the House and say that stopping free education is not a smaller issue than the one we will debate tomorrow? That is what his Government did.

Hilary Benn: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman and to you, Mr Speaker, but I am afraid I had some difficulty understanding the point he was seeking to make. He clearly had the same difficulty himself. I will happily give way again if he wants to have another go.

Nadhim Zahawi: Absolutely. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the thoughts of Mr Zahawi.

Nadhim Zahawi: The shadow Leader has just told the House that what we are debating tomorrow is of greater consequence than the reneged promise that his Government delivered upon, which abolished free education altogether. That is a wrong thing to tell the House. Will he explain himself?

Hilary Benn: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is in urgent need of a history lesson because I do not recognise what he is describing. There is a profound difference. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot have great eruptions of noise any time a Member chooses, for whatever reason, to leave the Chamber. Members will want to listen to Mr Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn: The point is this: there is a profound difference between the previous system, which was a way of raising additional finance for our universities, and the enormous reduction in funding for our universities that this increase in fees is based upon. That is why it is completely different.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that five hours is hardly enough time for the Liberal Democrats to explain their four different positions?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right. She anticipates the point I will make later. Of all the issues facing the House at the moment, it is clear that on this issue—for the reasons she has just pointed out—lots and lots of time will be required, so that Members can explain their positions. In the case of the Liberal Democrats, four different positions, at the last count, will have to be explained. There is huge public interest in the matter and, in the light of that, the time proposed is wholly inadequate.

I want to quote what Lord Browne had to say in his foreword to the report, “Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education,” which runs to 64 pages. Lord Browne wrote—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members will see in a moment. I quote:

“In November 2009, I was asked to lead an independent Panel to review the funding of higher education and make recommendations to ensure that teaching”—

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the right hon. Gentleman’s remarks do not refer to the timings or business of the House.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am keenly attending to the debate, but I know that he—very distinguished man though he is—would not try to tell me how to do my job.

Hilary Benn: Lord Browne went on to state:

“Over the last year, we have consulted widely and intensively. Our recommendations are based on written and oral evidence drawn from students, teachers, academics, employers and regulators. We have looked...at every aspect of implementing them – financial, practical and educational – to ensure that the recommendations we are making are realistic for the long term.”

The most important words in that quotation are these:

“Over the last year, we have consulted widely and intensively.”

[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to listen intently to what the shadow Leader of the House is saying, but the hubbub is too great. It is calming down now and we will hear the shadow Leader.

Hilary Benn: As I said, the quote from Lord Browne is:

“Over the last year, we have consulted widely and intensively.”

[*Interruption.*] If hon. Members will be patient, they will see what this has got to do with the business motion before us tonight. Let us compare the length of time that Lord Browne took in preparing his proposals to what is before the House tonight. The Browne committee had a year to consider what it recommended; the House is to be given five hours to consider the recommendations and dispose of them. Everybody else was consulted at length, but MPs are to be given just five hours to express a view.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can help me. I have been pondering whether any measure of comparable controversy has ever gone through this House with so little debate and in such a short space of time. Can he help me? Is there any example of that?

Hilary Benn: In preparing for the debate this evening, I, too, asked myself that, and I struggled to think of another example of when the House had so little time to consider something so profound.

Nobody can be under any misapprehension about the scale of the change that is being proposed. Lord Browne said:

“What we recommend is a radical departure from the existing way in which HEIs”—

higher education institutions—

“are financed...Our recommendations will lead to a significant change”.

The plain truth is that the Browne report, which is radical and significant in its implications, has not even been debated in the House yet. Since the report was published, on 12 October 2010, there has been one

urgent question, when the Secretary of State was forced to come to the House and explain what was going on, and one ministerial statement, on 3 November. However, there has been no debate at all on the Browne report in Government time—none.

Pete Wishart *rose*—

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne) seems to be turning into the hon. Member for Taunting. Is there anything that can be done to allow us to listen to the debate, rather than to his ranting?

Mr Speaker: I had been watching and listening closely, and I was conscious—and I was about to comment on the fact—that a rather animated and protracted exchange seemed to be taking place between the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne). Whether some sort of private salon was taking place I do not know, but it must not do so. We must listen to the debate, so no taunting should take place at all. Let us listen to Mr Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn: I think I was in the process of giving way to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart).

Pete Wishart: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can take this opportunity to remind the House how many hours the Labour party made available to debate tuition fees on the Floor of the House when the previous Government attempted to hike them up.

Hilary Benn: I will gladly do that. If the hon. Gentleman is patient, I shall come to that point in a moment.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Let me point out to my right hon. Friend that there is indeed a precedent for curtailing debate, and that is where a great deal of consensus exists across the Chamber. Perhaps he can illuminate for me whether there has been some magic movement on the Government Benches in the past few hours, and whether Government Members now agree with us—and with Wales and Scotland—because then we can indeed have a shortened debate.

Hilary Benn: It would be very nice if that were the case, but I fear that on this occasion the amount of time that the Government want to allocate is in inverse proportion to the consensus. That is the difficulty that we have. The truth is that if the Government could get away with it, they would much prefer the House of Commons not to debate and discuss the proposal at all, so that they could try to get it through on the nod. I can think of no other change in student support that has been put before the House with so little scrutiny or debate.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): I have to say that I find it deeply ironic that so many Members opposite are now raising concerns about the amount of time for debate. I remember that when I was president of Reading university students’ union and was raising concerns with the National Union of Students about the value for money of our affiliation fees, many Members opposite would set the fire alarms off.

Hilary Benn: I can be held responsible for many things, but I am afraid that the use of fire alarms at the university of Reading is not one of them. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There are people chuntering from a sedentary position and urging the hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) to name the people who set off the fire alarms. That would be entirely disorderly and we are not going to have it.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You are ahead of me, because I was given the impression that the culprits were present tonight. If that was the case, I was going to ask you to give them the opportunity to stand up and own up to that heinous crime.

Mr Speaker: I think that I will consider that to be a point of humour, because it certainly was not a point of order.

Kevin Brennan: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. When I was at university, the ones letting off the fire extinguishers were in the Bullingdon club.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I do not know about fire alarms, but people are certainly letting off steam. They have now done so, and we must return to the important subject of the debate on this relatively narrow motion.

Hilary Benn *rose*—

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Sadly, I did not go to university, but during my time in the fire service, setting off fire alarms was considered to be a very irresponsible act.

Mr Speaker: We are all grateful to have the benefit of the hon. Gentleman's experience, and for that recitation of his curriculum vitae, but we must now return to the debate.

Hilary Benn: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

The sense of outrage that is certainly felt on this side of the Chamber is of course shared by those on the Liberal Democrat Benches. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) is not in his place tonight, but he has tabled an early-day motion, which many Members have signed, that makes an eloquent plea for more time.

Fiona O'Donnell (East Lothian) (Lab): Can my right hon. Friend seek some reassurance? Should a fire alarm be set off during the debate tomorrow, would the debate be extended?

Hilary Benn: I do not think that that is the kind of injury time that the Standing Orders would cover. I am beginning to think that my time at university was somewhat sheltered in comparison to the revelations being made on the Floor of the House this evening. The hon. Member for Leeds North West is making the point that

he does not think there has been enough time. He thinks that the proposal should be put to one side so that it can be properly considered.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): Earlier, the Leader of the House made the claim—I think it was simply a mistake on his part, rather than a deliberate attempt to mislead the House—that Members on this side of the House had had the opportunity to table amendments to the proceedings. Given that the motion was not taken last night, and appeared on the Order Paper only this morning, am I right in thinking that there has been no opportunity for us to table amendments?

Hilary Benn: What happened last night was certainly extremely unusual, and the Leader of the House did not seek to enlighten us this evening as to why the Government pulled the plug on their own proposal. Perhaps he anticipated the debate that we were going to have this evening, and the opposition to the motion that was going to be expressed on this side of the Chamber.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am sure that my right hon. Friend really wants to help the Leader of the House to find some additional time, so I refer back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds). We were given an indication last week that an unspecified Bill was going to come before the House next Wednesday. The rumour is that it is the long-awaited and much-heralded localism Bill. There is a further rumour, however, that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is more enthusiastic about that Bill than some of his Cabinet colleagues. If that is the case, can my right hon. Friend give us any more information about whether the Bill has been lost in the fog of Whitehall, and whether there might after all be time to debate this business next Wednesday?

Hilary Benn *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. That is at the very least extremely tangential to the matter that we are supposed to be discussing, and I know that the shadow Leader of the House would not for one moment seek to dilate on the subject of the localism Bill. I know that he is going to proceed with his speech in an orderly way.

Hilary Benn: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As far as the identity of that Bill is concerned, I was going to observe only that it is a mystery. No doubt all will be revealed to us in due course.

Gavin Shaker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): As one of the new Members of this House, I am uniquely placed to offer my experience of student debt, as one of the people in the House who still carries such a debt. How many people are likely to be able to speak in a five-hour debate? Newer Members are more likely to be carrying student debt, and they would like to offer their own perspectives on the matter.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful case for us to have more time, precisely so that the experiences of all Members can be brought to bear on this important question, which will affect future generations of students.

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): The fundamental issue at stake here is that there are genuine arguments for and against tuition fees and for and against the level at which the Government want to set them. I accept that there are arguments on both sides. It is not only Members who should have an opportunity to debate the details that genuinely concern us all; the public have the right to see their legislators spending a decent amount of time doing so. This is not a partisan point. On an issue as important as this, why must we restrict the time for debate? Why can we not have, purely and simply, more time to debate an issue that Members of all parties and the public are both fascinated and worried by?

Hilary Benn: It seems to me that my hon. Friend makes a powerful case. I would gladly give way to the Leader of the House for an explanation. He did not explain in his speech why so little time has been allocated, so perhaps he would like to explain that now. No, he is not inclined to take that—[*Interruption.*] Oh, well.

Sir George Young: If the amount of time allocated for this debate is insufficient, why did the right hon. Gentleman not draw the House's attention to it last Thursday? When I announced today's debate on exactly these regulations, he said nothing at all.

Hilary Benn: It has been very clear for a long time that Labour Members want adequate time to debate this. The way to deal with it is to consider the proposal before us; we will vote against it tonight because inadequate time has been allotted.

Charlie Elphicke: Is it not the case that the shadow Minister failed to spot this last Thursday, failed to move an amendment and has been asleep at the wheel?

Hilary Benn: No, I do not accept that. The hon. Gentleman will discover how awake we are on this side when he has to troop through the Lobby to try to vote in favour of this wholly inadequate allocation of time. The really telling comparison is between how this change is being dealt with and how the two previous changes were dealt with. That is why I shall move on to deal with points raised by Members of all parties about how these matters were handled in the past.

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, the Dearing review, was set up in May 1996 by the last Conservative Government. It deliberated for 15 months and published its report "Higher education in the learning society" in July 1997. There was then a Government statement and a White Paper "Higher Education in the 21st Century", followed by the publication of the Teaching and Higher Education Bill. That became an Act in 1998 having been debated at proper length. Six hours were allotted to Second Reading alone—an hour more than we are to be allocated tomorrow. There were seven Committee sittings and two days on Report. There is the first comparison.

The second comparison is with the Higher Education Act 2004, which the orders that we will discuss tomorrow are designed to amend. It, too, had six hours on Second Reading—an hour more than we will get tomorrow—and there were 15 sittings in Committee, plus a Report stage.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Are not the proposed changes as significant as the Robbins report and the transformation of universities during the second half of the 20th century? To put through the marketisation of our entire university structure within five hours is absolutely shameful.

Hilary Benn: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, who makes an extremely powerful point.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): My right hon. Friend refers to the orders under the previous legislation, which had to be debated by both Houses on the affirmative basis, following a review, before any decision could be made on future levels of tuition fees. The Leader of the House has sought to suggest that the reason for this debate is entirely encapsulated in that particular piece of legislation. Incidentally, I was involved in assisting with the drafting at the time, so I remember it well. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the intention behind the drafting of those clauses at the time was wholly different from what is being put forward this evening, in terms of what should come up first for discussion, what evidence should be placed before Members to debate before any decision is taken, and when any decision should be taken according to the two resolutions?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The usual order is that we have a committee of inquiry; the Government make a statement; they publish a White Paper, then a Bill; the Bill is considered and then regulations are made. In this case, the process has been reversed. We are being asked to approve the statutory instruments tomorrow in just five hours, before we even know the framework for the future of higher education, because the White Paper will not be published, we are told, until the new year. The cart has truly been put before the horse.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend knows, I have been consistently against tuition fees, and voted against them the last time they were debated in the House of Commons. More importantly, I have signed a pledge with the students union that I will not vote for them to be raised, and I will honour that pledge. Surely we need the kind of debate that we had previously for a Second Reading, so that all those Liberal Democrats who will be breaking their pledge will have the opportunity to explain to students across the country why they are doing so.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It will be interesting to see how many Liberal Democrats wish to participate in the debate tomorrow.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has explained the normal Bill process, but is he aware that, as a new MP, I have not seen my postbag filled on any other issue as it has been with concerns about tuition fees? I am concerned to raise those points, so that people in Wirral can have their voice heard. Is he aware of the level of concern in Wirral?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to my attention. No Member can be unaware of the huge concern expressed through our postbags, emails and other means, about the nature of the proposals.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the media have reported tonight that, despite the Deputy Prime Minister saying that all Lib Dem Ministers will support the proposals, two of them will not be present for the vote? Apparently, however, it is all right, because they will be paired—

Mr Speaker: Order. The trouble with that intervention is that it has nothing to do with the allocation of time. The hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record, and he was very cheeky.

Hilary Benn: The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) may have something to do with the length of time that it would take some of those Ministers to return to cast their vote.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Has my right hon. Friend noticed, as I have, the large number of Liberal Democrat Members who are prevaricating and indicating that they may abstain on the issue? Is there not a danger that abstention could be perceived as voting for the motion? Is that not a good argument for extending the time for debate, so that they can come to a decision?

Hilary Benn: That is a powerful point. Last week, I observed that, throughout the ages, Liberal Democrats who have been faced with a tough decision have sat on the fence. I suspect that we will see that tomorrow.

Angela Smith: Is it not the case that the proposals before the House tomorrow radically redraw the relationship between the state and the individual? Are they not predicated on an 80% reduction in funding for teaching? Is it not appalling that an SI should be used for such a radical shift in Government policy?

Hilary Benn: It certainly is. The 80% reduction is implicit in the statutory instruments that we will consider tomorrow, and it is the cause of those statutory instruments, but we will not have a proper opportunity to debate that.

Emily Thornberry: What is a member of the public switching on the Parliament channel to make of this? We could spend more time tonight debating how much time we should be allocated than we will spend debating the proposals tomorrow. How ironic is that? By making petty points about how we should have tabled an amendment here or there to extend the time, Government Members show how out of touch they are. Mothers watching television tonight, desperately worried about their children's future, will feel that we should be ashamed. Why do we not spend tonight debating this matter, and tomorrow as well?

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend, but the answer lies in the hands of the Leader of the House, who has shown a willingness tonight to devote more time to debating the allocation of time than he is prepared to give to debating the proposals themselves.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Some of us have universities in our constituencies, and many students will be coming down here tomorrow. It is no wonder that students are adopting an angry attitude in

the streets when they find out we will have only five hours for the debate. When the Government were in opposition, they used to complain about our guillotines, and we always gave way on time. I am surprised that the Leader of the House, who is usually a reasonable man, has taken us down this road.

Hilary Benn: I agree. I have a great deal of respect for the Leader of the House, but I must say that I do not think he has done his job properly on this occasion.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): Will we have an opportunity, in such a limited time, to raise issues that constituents have raised with us, particularly the withdrawal of funds in July next year from the excellent Aimhigher programme, which will pull up the ladder of opportunity? [*Interruption.*] Perhaps the hon. Member for Tipton, who is shouting derisory comments—[HON. MEMBERS: “Taunton.”] I mean the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne), but perhaps he will be tipped on tomorrow. Anyway, given the limited time allotted to tomorrow's debate, I do not believe that we will have an opportunity to raise valid concerns, such as the fact that children from disadvantaged backgrounds such as those in the area that I represent will be disadvantaged further.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend has made a powerful point. Judging by the attendance in the Chamber tonight, and because so little time has been allotted, I fear that there will not be time for all the Members who will want to participate in tomorrow's debate to have a chance to express their views to the House.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): Although on the face of it the issue at stake is tuition fees in England, the proposal will have profound effects on students from Northern Ireland—and, indeed, those in Northern Ireland. Given the restricted time that we will have in which to debate it, it is unlikely that those of us who represent those students will be able to make our case fully tomorrow. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be wise to allow us to do so, in the light of the profound implications both for students from Northern Ireland and for those who study there?

Hilary Benn: I agree. The proposal does indeed have profound ramifications and implications for students not only in England but in other parts of the United Kingdom, which is why we need more time.

Huw Irranca-Davies: In view of the anomalies that the Bill will throw up west of Offa's dyke, north of Hadrian's wall and so on, does my right hon. Friend think that there will be enough time for us to deal with the subject of the potential migration flows as students and their families—who know that there have always been cross-border issues over health—suddenly realise that there will also be cross-border issues over tuition fees, and that whereas Scotland and Wales are doing the right thing, the tripling of tuition fees will be rammed down the throats of students in England because of the unholy alliance on the Government Benches?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend has made a powerful point, which I am sure that he and other Members will seek to put to the Minister tomorrow. As he says, time is

required for us to be able to consider all the ramifications of the proposals, and the plain fact is that we are not being given enough time to do that.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that members of all generations up and down the land will think that giving the House five hours in which to discuss the denial of access of whole generations, from whole communities, to the higher education that could change the life chances of millions of people is a complete disgrace? Should we not hasten the electrification of the railway line to Wales, so that people can have a proper opportunity to benefit from higher education?

Hilary Benn: I think that you would rule me out of order if I commented on the electrification of the railway line to Wales, Mr Speaker.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would you kindly give the House—and me, as a new Member—guidance on how many important debates were curtailed to five hours by the last Government, so that we can introduce some balance to this evening's debate?

Mr Speaker: The short answer is that if the question is of interest to the hon. Gentleman, he can always undertake the necessary research. I am afraid that it is not the responsibility of the Chair to provide the answer to it tonight.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I believe that I heard a Labour Member refer to a Member on the Government Benches as “the hon. Member for Tipton”. Just in case there is any confusion among my electors, may I make it clear that I represent the beautiful town of Tipton, and that I will be supporting my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and the Opposition tomorrow?

Hilary Benn: I am sure my hon. Friend's constituents will be very glad to have heard that clarification.

Mr Lammy: Is my right hon. Friend aware that just as this House is being denied a full debate, the Minister responsible for universities, who is on the Front Bench now, has been invited to sit-ins at the London School of Economics and the School of Oriental and African Studies but has not attended? Is it my right hon. Friend's expectation that the Minister will go and talk to the students who will be gathering in this House and outside before the debate and after it tomorrow—

Mr Speaker: Order. That may be a point of interest to the right hon. Gentleman, but it is somewhat wide of the terms of the motion. Mr Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think that the very least the architect of the policy could do, particularly in view of the pledge he signed before the election, is go and talk to students and explain why he has changed his mind.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Many Members have tonight mentioned the fact that constituents of theirs—students and potential students—will be coming down tomorrow to lobby their MPs. Is my right hon. Friend aware that under the “#” tag “name and shame”

on Twitter there is a growing list of names of MPs from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties who have refused to meet the students coming down tomorrow? I suspect they are refusing to meet them tomorrow because they will be too busy attending tomorrow's debate. Does that not suggest that we ought to postpone tomorrow's debate so that they have time to meet their constituents who are coming down tomorrow?

Mr Speaker: Order. There is mounting evidence that Members are referring to matters outside the Chamber as a not very subtle ruse to try to get their point across in the House, but unfortunately they are then almost always outwith the terms of the motion. We have had a few examples of that, but I hope we will not have any more. Mr Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Hilary Benn: Yes, I will.

Vernon Coaker: As my right hon. Friend knows, thousands of students from places throughout the country, including Nottingham, will be arriving in London tomorrow. As we shall debate this issue for only five hours, which I think most of those students and their families will find simply incredible, has my right hon. Friend had any discussions with the Leader of the House about informing all those students how this House arrived at that five-hour limit? Have any special arrangements been made to inform them about the decision that has been made to curtail the debate, so that they are properly informed?

Hilary Benn: I had hoped that in moving the motion this evening the Leader of the House would have enlightened us on that very point, but I am afraid no elucidation at all was offered as to the amount of time given to us.

I want to come on to one of the problems that we may face tomorrow. Although what is on offer now—

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way? I have an important point to make.

Hilary Benn: I will.

Mr McCann: I have a specific point I want to make about time. In three minutes' time, constituents in the frozen Lanarkshire district, which includes my constituency, will be donning several layers of clothing and getting their ice picks and shovels out to dig their way out of their homes, so that they can meet up at their selected departure points and travel down for tomorrow's debate. They will be leaving Lanarkshire on the M74 at about 9 pm—if they get there in time, given the horrendous weather conditions. They will be travelling overnight to get here, and they will arrive to find that, having spent over 21 hours getting here and knowing that they are going to face the same journey back, this subject will be debated for only five hours. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is an outrage to our democracy?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, to whom I listened courteously, but there must be no further dilation on the subject of the motorway network. I do not think that that will aid our debate. I know that the shadow Leader of the House will respond to the hon. Gentleman's point briefly, and then develop his further arguments.

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is an outrage, as I indicated earlier.

I wanted to say something about the amount of time that we may actually get tomorrow to debate this subject. Although the five hours that we have been offered is a 30-minute improvement on the previous period allocated, it is not absolutely guaranteed. That is because although the Leader of the House has just told us that the Government do not intend to make any statements tomorrow, it is possible that some matter may arise. You, Mr Speaker, may receive a request for an urgent question, and if that is granted we would lose time, as we will if Government Back Benchers suddenly decide they want to raise numerous lengthy points of order. If either of those eventualities arose, the British public and Members of the House would be denied even the paltry five hours being offered by the Leader of the House.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): We have all noted the restraint that the Speaker has exercised as people have strayed beyond the terms of this motion. But does he not share the concern that my constituents, and I believe his, will feel when they see the House debating what they see as a technical matter and not debating what they wish us to debate, which is the principle of whether education should be the business of the state or a purely private matter, which it will become as a result of the debate tomorrow?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point; indeed, she anticipates something that I am going to refer to a little later in my speech. It is about the nature of the debate that we may find that we are allowed, or not allowed, to have because we will be debating a statutory instrument rather than the White Paper, which has not been published.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Many of the students who have been in touch with me recently have expressed their concern about the fact that the withdrawal of the state from education is directed particularly at people studying the arts, social sciences and related subjects. Does my right hon. Friend believe that there will be time tomorrow to discuss not only the impact of tuition fees, but the very nature of the kind of higher education that we as a society want to value?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. To answer her very direct question, I fear that we will not have enough time to examine that, and many other aspects.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Notwithstanding the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister has just said on Channel 4 that his conscience is clear—so he would presumably like to debate this subject at length—does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason why this debate is being curtailed is to protect the

Liberal Democrats? The clue to that lies in what Chris Davies MEP says in his blog:

“Splits weaken parties, and sometimes destroy them. The reputation of the Liberal Democrat brand is being undermined with each passing hour as the impression grows stronger that on the issue of tuition fees we are not only divided but clueless...In short, we are creating the impression not just of being weak, but of being a joke.”

We should share that joke with this House, if we had sufficient time to debate this issue properly.

Hilary Benn: The point that my hon. Friend has just made illustrates clearly why we need more time tomorrow to examine the position of the Liberal Democrats, in all their splendour.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Is there not a wider and more profound issue at stake here? It relates to legislation, or changes in the law, that are railroaded through this House without adequate time for debate, and what happens when the public outside do not believe that this House has been doing its job properly and scrutinising those changes in the law. When such legislation—the classic example of which was the poll tax—is carried, it will never command the support of the public and the public will never believe that it is being instituted for the right reasons. Are the Government not in real danger of repeating the disaster of the poll tax with this ill-conceived, railroaded piece of legislation on tuition fees?

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend speaks with unique authority and force on that subject. He is giving the House a very clear warning, because if people do not feel that the House of Commons—their elected representatives—has been given adequate time to debate this very profound change, they will be even more angry than they are already.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I was the principal of a sixth-form college until recently, and I have spent my lifetime working with young people—16 to 19-year-olds. The message being given to young people about how decisions about their future are made in this House disturbs me. What does it say if we cannot give the right amount of time to this, and cannot give them the right message that this really matters, that we care about them—and care enough to share our views in full fashion, over as much time as it takes to make the right decision?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a good point: the House would be setting a very bad example to young people if it passed the motion tonight.

Clive Efford: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one reason why it is dangerous for Back Benchers on both sides of the House, and particularly on the Government side, to allow the Executive to truncate debate or the consideration of a Bill is that it limits the scope of Back Benchers to influence Front Benchers? He will recall that when we were setting the cap that we will discuss in the debate tomorrow, which we are now debating, it was Labour Back Benchers who threatened not to support their Government, and made them set it lower. We are not hearing anything of that sort from the Government Benches tonight. If the desire is there to make a change, it is up to Government Back Benchers, especially Liberal Democrat MPs.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Tomorrow the eyes of the House will be on Liberal Democrat Members in particular. Everybody knows that how they choose to vote will determine whether this proposal goes through or not.

Clive Efford: And whether they make that change.

Hilary Benn: Indeed. Back Benchers have the opportunity tonight to decide whether the motion will be passed. That is why I hope that as many as possible will join us in the Lobby to vote it down.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As the Leader of the House has ignored the moment of interruption in his motion, by setting 5.30 as the time for the end of the debate tomorrow, is there any procedure by which a manuscript amendment could be tabled during the course of this debate, to extend tomorrow's debate up until the normal moment of interruption, when any debate on a Thursday should end?

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that it is open to any Member to table a manuscript amendment. Whether the amendment is selected is a matter for the Chair. The Chair would consider a manuscript amendment if and when it were submitted. That is the situation.

Hilary Benn: I am sure that the House is extremely grateful for that guidance, Mr Speaker.

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that one of the greatest achievements in recent years has been extending participation to young people from disadvantaged communities? Salford university takes 45% of its students from the local area, and that includes many young people who otherwise would not have the chance to go to university. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the curtailment of the debate tomorrow will mean that the voices of those particularly disadvantaged young people will not be heard?

Hilary Benn: That is the case. With five hours, there will be an opportunity for only a relatively small number of Members to participate in the debate. The number of Members who have sought to intervene in this debate tonight is a pretty good indication of the number who will want to speak tomorrow.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I am new to this House, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is therefore difficult for me to differentiate between posturing and principle, but I think I am getting a lesson in it tonight from the right hon. Gentleman. The idea of debate is not only to make one's own point but to listen. Too frequently in debates, right hon. and hon. Members make their points and then leave the Chamber. Will the shadow Leader of the House assure us that the Opposition speakers in tomorrow's debate will be in their places for the entire five hours of the debate? Or will there be a lot of popping in and then popping out when they have made their posturing points?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. Even interventions must be relevant to the debate that we are having this evening. The subject of who will attend tomorrow is not a matter for Mr Benn.

Hilary Benn: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point was indeed irrelevant and, I think, inconsequential.

Robert Ffello: I am grateful yet again to my right hon. Friend for giving way, and for the generosity that he has shown in doing so. I am following his speech with great interest. I look forward to taking part in the debate tomorrow, if I should catch the eye of Mr Speaker or of one of the Deputy Speakers—and, indeed, if there is time. Does my right hon. Friend wish to comment, however, given the short amount of time that will be available, on how much time—should I be able to catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair and make my point, along with other colleagues—the occupants of the Government Front Bench will have to respond to the points made by Opposition Members? How will the Government be able to answer the points that we raise, given that there is such a short time for the debate?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The large number of matters that Members will undoubtedly wish to raise tomorrow will only add to the pressure on time, if Ministers are even to begin to attempt to answer them all.

Emma Reynolds: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears), who expressed the concern that she has many potentially disadvantaged students in her constituency; I do too, and I should like to have the time to represent their concerns tomorrow. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Leader of the House was disingenuous in suggesting that we had sufficient time—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Lady should accuse the Leader of the House of being disingenuous. I am sure she would like to rephrase that.

Emma Reynolds: I apologise to the Leader of the House. He said only moments ago that we had sufficient time to debate these issues in the Opposition day debate, but does my right hon. Friend agree that, as the Government made a statement on that day, tomorrow will be the second time they have tried to curtail the time allowed to debate this issue?

Hilary Benn: That is indeed the case. The Leader of the House's idea of sufficient time is not our idea of sufficient time.

Mr Tom Harris: In my right hon. Friend's considered opinion, what would have been the chances of the Deputy Leader of the House supporting this programme motion had it been moved by a Labour Government? Should not this Damascene conversion to the value of the programme motion at least be counted in the top-10 Liberal Democrat U-turns of 2010?

Hilary Benn: There are many U-turns fighting to get into that top-10 list, but my hon. Friend makes a good point. Had the roles been reversed, the Deputy Leader of the House would have been fulminating from the Dispatch Box about how outrageous it was. He could have the opportunity to do so now, but I see that he simply wants to remain in his place.

[Hilary Benn]

I should like to make a suggestion about how we could guarantee even the inadequate amount of time given so far. We have just had very helpful guidance from the Speaker about making manuscript amendments, and the Leader of the House could amend his own motion to ensure that there would be injury time if an urgent question were to be granted or if extensive time were taken up with points of order. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is not a fan of injury time and I suspect that is because the coalition Government are not terribly keen on having a full and open debate on the matter in hand.

There is another reason why more time is required. The measures we are being asked to vote on tomorrow cannot be described as the original proposals of Lord Browne. That is why my earlier quotation was relevant. When Lord Browne produced his report, he said that his proposals had to be considered together, but we now know that the Government's plans differ from those of Lord Browne. That is very pertinent to the argument about why more time is required, especially when one bears in mind that the Government have had no debate in their own time on Lord Browne's proposals.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) made, would not a greater amount of time and a longer process allow Back Benchers on both sides and the official Opposition to make alternative proposals so that at the end of the process there would be much greater consensus, as there was in 2004?

Hilary Benn: That is indeed the case. Hon. Members are being denied that opportunity because the Government have chosen to put the cart before the horse.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: Does my right hon. Friend share my frustration that the Deputy Prime Minister came to my constituency the day before the election to reinforce his pledge not to raise tuition fees, but that because of the lack of time tomorrow I will not have the opportunity to challenge Liberal Democrat Members on why they are breaking that pledge?

John Robertson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There seems to be a lot of chuntering from a Government Whip, making remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods). Is that in order, and is he allowed to do it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I did not hear any remarks myself, and there is quite a lot of noise in the Chamber, which makes it difficult for all Members of the House to hear. It would be best at this time if we could proceed. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing this matter to my attention, but I do not think that it is a point of order.

Hilary Benn: Thank you very much indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was about to give way—

Robert Ffello: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you please clarify something for me? Are Government Whips entitled to take part in

debate? My understanding is that they are not. If they are not entitled to take part in debate, why is that happening?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I understand it, any Member is entitled to speak in a debate in the House. There may be conventions that are normally followed, but remarks, comments or shouting across the Chamber from a sedentary position in order to disrupt the debate are not permitted. I am sure that nobody will do that.

Hilary Benn: Thank you very much indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was about to respond to the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham. Yes, many people in the country have watched the video that the Deputy Prime Minister made in which he uttered the pledge. [Interruption.] It has to do with the time because we need to hear from Liberal Democrats—perhaps we will be lucky and hear from the Deputy Prime Minister in tomorrow's debate, but who knows?—and we need time for an explanation of what exactly happened between the making of that pledge and the U-turn that he has performed in introducing these proposals tonight.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need more time to get the information about the various proposals that have been trailed through the press this week, which the Government suggest would justify to the House and to the public an increase in fees? Tomorrow's debate would enable that if there were time. A number of suggestions have been made—for example, on those students who might get financial assistance. Do we not need time to hear the details of that before the House is asked to vote?

Hilary Benn: We do indeed. One of the big problems that Members will face tomorrow is that we do not yet have a lot of the information, and a lot of the questions that have been asked have not yet been answered. How on earth is the House meant to make up its mind on a fundamental part of these proposals in the absence of all that?

Jim McGovern (Dundee West) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Liberal Democrats will never be knowingly understood? If we locked two Lib Dems in a room, we would get three political opinions coming out. Five hours is not nearly enough time to try to work out what the Lib Dems think.

Hilary Benn: I fear that even five days may leave us none the wiser as to the position of the Liberal Democrats, but we live in hope.

Huw Irranca-Davies: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Pursuant to the point of order made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), may I ask you to explain the tabling of a manuscript amendment? There are many new Members here in the House, and people will be watching and listening to the proceedings. Not everyone will be familiar with the tabling of a manuscript amendment, so it would be of great benefit to the House to know how difficult or how simple it is.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am grateful for that point of order, but rather than take up time in the debate I suggest that any Member who needs clarification on how to table a manuscript amendment should go to the Clerk to ask for guidance. Perhaps we can return to the debate.

Kevin Brennan: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I also recommend “Erskine May”, which is lying on the Table and explains fully how to lay manuscript amendments—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you—*[Interruption.]* Thank you very much, Mr Brennan. I am eternally grateful. I would like us to focus now on the debate.

Hilary Benn: I happen to have a copy of “Erskine May” and am very happy to lend it to my hon. Friend, as long as he gives it back to me, because I intend to quote from it a little later.

Thomas Docherty: I think I heard the Leader of the House correctly when he appeared to indicate earlier that the Government Front Bench might be prepared to restrict the amount of time they take when opening tomorrow’s debate. The concern that many Opposition Members will have, however, is not only that the Business Secretary will not have time to use his fancy footwork to explain exactly how he has made such a U-turn, but that Opposition Members will not have the opportunity to tease out of the Government exactly what their policies mean. It is simply unacceptable to use that substitute in order to avoid difficult questions.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is, indeed, right. The Leader of the House could indicate now what self-denying ordinance or otherwise Ministers will adopt in order to give Members as much time as possible for debate. There is a fundamental problem, however, because Ministers want to say a lot on the matter, and they should rightly have that opportunity, but Members want to raise a lot of points, too, and we cannot fit it all into the five hours for which the motion provides.

Emily Thornberry: On the issue of time, and for the 10,000 students who live in halls of residence and attend university in my constituency, I should like to put it on the record that I sat all the way through the previous Opposition day debate, hoping to be called, and would very much like to be called tomorrow.

Hilary Benn: I am sure that the occupant of the Chair will have noticed that advance bid, but I fear that tomorrow many Members will end up disappointed because not enough time has been allocated for the debate.

Paul Farrelly: Is my right hon. Friend aware of all the details of the business due to come forth tomorrow? Can he satisfy himself that we will actually get five hours and not fewer?

Hilary Benn: That is the point I advanced a moment ago, because whether we get the full five hours depends very much on what happens before the debate. I fear that we might not, which shows just how inadequate the motion is.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will recall that before the election the then Opposition objected very strongly to non-English MPs voting on matters such as tuition fees. Has he had any indication or representation from the Government on whether they still hold the same position?

Hilary Benn: I am afraid I cannot give my hon. Friend any guidance on that at all. Perhaps a Minister on the Treasury Bench would like to answer his question. I would very happily give way if they wanted to inform the House.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Perhaps one reason why there is no objection to Welsh and Scottish Back Benchers debating the issue is that we in Wales, through the Assembly Government, have not only ensured that students do not suffer the draconian decrease in university course funding, but very importantly decided to cut the teaching grant not by 80%, but by only a very small 38%, improving Welsh universities and providing opportunities at them for higher degrees and research.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point about why we need the time to debate at length the impact that the change will have.

Steve McCabe: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The clock in the Chamber is not working properly. Is that another device to con us out of more hours for debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The clock seems to me to be working fine. If the hon. Gentleman has a problem, perhaps he will come to the Chair. I am sure that Members are riveted by the debate and time will fly by.

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing my attention to that clock. I fancied that I had been speaking for slightly longer than four minutes, but who knows?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Time is indeed flying. I think that I have worked out how we will have enough time. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) said earlier that if all hon. Members were to speak, we would have roughly 50 seconds each. From the showing tonight, there is no indication that Government Members want to take part in the debate. We will therefore have about one and a half or two minutes each. Does my right hon. Friend consider two minutes to be adequate to reflect the postbags of Opposition Members?

Hilary Benn: It is completely inadequate. We have, however, found a solution for tomorrow, because if we could ensure that that is the clock by which the debate is timed, all right hon. and hon. Members might have the opportunity to participate.

Mr Tom Harris: Further to the points of order made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies), Madam Deputy Speaker. If the Chair were to accept a manuscript amendment, how much time would be allocated to debating that change, and would that time be added on to the time that we already have for tomorrow’s debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a hypothetical question. We should wait to see whether there is a manuscript amendment, and for Mr Speaker's subsequent decision.

Kerry McCarthy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether it is in order for you to reveal to the House how many people have applied to speak tomorrow? That is pertinent to how long we need for tomorrow's debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That would not be in order. I therefore suggest that we return to Mr Hilary Benn's comments from the Dispatch Box.

Hilary Benn: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify—this point is pertinent and not hypothetical—whether a manuscript amendment that is tabled tonight will be discussed tonight or tomorrow?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If a manuscript amendment were tabled and it was selected for tonight's debate, it would be debated tonight. As one has not been tabled, the hon. Gentleman is still asking a hypothetical question.

Hilary Benn: A moment ago, I was pointing out that the proposals that the Government have decided to adopt are different from those that Lord Browne proposed. He said that student numbers should rise by 10% over the next three years, that there should be clawback to deter unnecessarily high fees and that there should be the right to go to university, determined by academic qualifications. We need more time to discuss the report, precisely because the Government have not adopted all its recommendations. We have not had a chance to debate that matter.

Mr William Bain (Glasgow North East) (Lab): Is it my right hon. Friend's view that five hours is enough time to address the points that have been put to me by staff and students at the university of Glasgow, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Ann McKechnie)? Indeed, I believe that the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills was a lecturer at that institution some years ago. I am not sure that he would get a very warm welcome if he went there tomorrow. The staff and students put important points to me, such as the cut of £400 million in the Scottish block grant, the increase in the number of EU students and the hugely damaging effects that there will be on social mobility for a generation of Scottish students. Does my right hon. Friend think that five hours is enough time to discuss those important points?

Hilary Benn: Undoubtedly, it is not enough time. My hon. Friend makes an extremely powerful point.

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend enlighten me on whether we will discuss student bursaries in tomorrow's debate? I believe that should be the subject of its own debate and not be crammed into the five hours that we will have tomorrow. If bursaries are paid for by universities, universities that draw from the poorest people in the population, such as the university of Bolton, will be badly disadvantaged. There will be no similar effect on universities such as Oxford and Cambridge.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Whether that would be in order is a matter for the Chair. Mr Benn is addressing today's debate, so perhaps we can get on with it.

Hilary Benn *rose*—

Gavin Shaker: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Hilary Benn: I will respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) before I take any further interventions. She raises precisely the type of matter that needs to be explored properly and fully in the debate tomorrow. The fact that we will have inadequate time means that we run the risk of its not being addressed.

Mr Slaughter *rose*—

Hilary Benn: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Angela Smith: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As most of us do not have the benefit of having the time to look at "Erskine May" during the debate, may I ask for your guidance on whether a manuscript amendment would have any impact on any attempt by the Government to move the closure of the debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already explained to Members that if they want specific advice on the tabling or effects of a manuscript amendment, they should speak to the Clerks. Then they will get the answers to their questions about how such an amendment may or may not affect the debate.

Hilary Benn: I was about to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter).

Mr Slaughter: As the debate goes on, does it not become obvious how grotesquely short five hours is? It took the Liberal Democrats an hour and a half in Committee Room 11 yesterday to narrow down their voting options to four. It will take five hours for the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to explain the different positions that he has taken in interviews over the past week. My constituents want us to get on to the real issue, which will not happen in a five-hour debate.

Hilary Benn: It certainly will not.

Paul Farrelly: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are now only 21 hours, give or take a minute, from now until the moment of interruption tomorrow? Depending on how long the debate goes on tonight, Members may need some time to recover so that they are in full possession of their wits for tomorrow's debate. Would it not be better to delay tomorrow's debate until next week at least?

Hilary Benn: A very powerful case has been made this evening for providing more time, and given where we are now, the only way in which more time could be provided would indeed be for the matter to be put off until another occasion.

Nadhim Zahawi *rose*—

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman is going to have another go.

Nadhim Zahawi: Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that ending the debate tomorrow at 5.30 pm will provide ample time for the Leader of the Opposition to join the protestors outside?

Hilary Benn: The Leader of the Opposition needs no lectures from the hon. Gentleman about talking to students and, more importantly, listening to what students have to say—a problem from which Members on the Government Benches are suffering.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I happen to have in my hand a piece of paper that has miraculously appeared. According to the Speaker's office, 26 Labour Members have so far applied to speak tomorrow and, we are told, a lot more from the Government side of the House have done so too. Is that not a clear indication that five hours will not be enough time for people to have their say?

Hilary Benn *rose*—

Jim Sheridan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Following on from the comment of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), tomorrow thousands of students will be coming to the capital of the UK from all over the country, wishing to get access to their MPs, because many MPs have temporary notices up in their constituency offices. Can you assure us that those responsible students who come to the House tomorrow seeking access to their MPs will be given access, and that those MPs will be notified that people are looking for them?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am assured that proper arrangements will be made, as always on these occasions, by the Speaker and the House authorities.

Hilary Benn: I am not in the least bit surprised that so many Members have put in to participate in the debate tomorrow. The information that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) has just given the House demonstrates the complete inadequacy of the time that we are being offered, because it is very hard to see how all those Members will be able to participate in the debate.

Robert Flello: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for his continued generosity and his superb speech. Will he give some thought to the fact that we are expecting unprecedented levels of security tomorrow in and around the Palace of Westminster? Right hon. and hon. Members may have difficulty getting to the Chamber to take part in the debate, and some Members who have a burning desire to be here to represent their constituents might take considerable time to get here. Five hours therefore might not be adequate.

Hilary Benn: It is very important that Members of whatever party have full and ready access to the House, particularly tomorrow, given the importance of the

subject of the debate and the significance of the vote that we will cast—if the business motion is passed—at about 5.30 pm tomorrow.

Mr McCann: My constituents will be making their way down for tomorrow's debate from the frozen north, but may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to an article in *The Daily Telegraph* last Thursday on the constitutional implications of having such vastly different tuition fee arrangements in the different parts of the UK, and the difficulties that that will create? Does he think that five hours is enough to discuss those issues?

Hilary Benn: Undoubtedly, that is not enough time. If the number of Members who have already indicated that they want to speak is anything to go by, they could have, depending on the length of speeches by Front Benchers, about four minutes each or even less. How can any Member advance a reasonable argument in that inadequate amount of time?

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend will know that the Government's proposals will deter poorer students from going to university, but allow less able students from public schools to do so because of their financial means. Does he agree that Government Members who have not-very-able children in public schools should declare an interest? Will there be time in five hours to make all those declarations of interest?

Hilary Benn: I am not sure that the current Register of Members' Financial Interests extends that far. Hon. Members will want to make a lot of points in tomorrow's debate. Indeed, as this evening progresses, we will hear from other hon. Members who will want to speak tomorrow. That reinforces the point that the Leader of the House has now perhaps taken on board; namely, that it would have been much more sensible to have given us enough time to debate the proposals than to debate the problems tonight.

Gavin Shaker: My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) advanced the point that 26 Labour Members have placed a note with Mr Speaker, but it occurs to me that that may not reflect the true number of those who want to speak in that five-hour period. Both Government and Opposition Members may want to indicate their wish to speak tomorrow as we discuss the provision of time tonight.

Hilary Benn: Indeed—that may well be the case. As the evening wears on and as the sense of anger grows among Opposition Members at the inadequacy of the time, more Members will probably be encouraged to go to Mr Speaker's office to indicate that they wish to take part in tomorrow's debate.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): Is it not instructive and illustrative that we will have just five hours tomorrow to debate the Government's proposals? Does that not tell us, as we heard from the Leader of the Opposition today, just how extraordinarily out of touch the Government are with ordinary working people in this country? The measures will be a strong disincentive to those people to go to our universities. That is why the debate deserves far more than five hours. It is not us who deserves more than five hours, but those students.

Hilary Benn: I could not put it better myself.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Hilary Benn: I shall make a little progress and give way later.

The Government of the day would normally have published a White Paper before asking us to vote on such proposals. I have inquired at the Vote Office, but it does not have a White Paper, because the Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary has not yet published one. On reflection, that is quite extraordinary. We will be asked in a few hours—less than 21 hours—to take a decision that will pre-empt the whole of the Government's policy on higher education without our having a chance to find out what that is. It is interesting that the explanatory memorandum that accompanies the Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 states:

“The Regulations raising the basic and higher amounts are the first elements in the reform package to be presented for Parliamentary approval. Without prejudice to their subsequent proper Parliamentary consideration, the Government believes it is appropriate to refer in this Memorandum to the other elements of the funding and finance package in the context of which the new basic and higher amounts are made.”

These are not the first elements: these statutory instruments are the consequences of other decisions that the Government have already made.

Tristram Hunt: Is not that very much the point, because what we face tomorrow is a bridgehead for an extraordinary revolution in higher education on which we deserve a full debate about the consequences? Five and a half hours will not begin to do justice to the issue.

Hilary Benn: It certainly will not, which is why we need more time.

Pete Wishart: The right hon. Gentleman has now been speaking for an hour and a half. Does he feel like stopping? As we have only five and a half hours tomorrow, will he promise not to make another speech like this one?

Hilary Benn: That is a trifle ungenerous, because I am trying to assist the House so that it will have enough time tomorrow to debate this.

Paragraph 8.1 of the explanatory memorandum on the consultation outcome is germane, because it states:

“These Regulations are informed by Lord Browne's review which took evidence from students, teachers, academics, employers and regulators over a period of almost a year. The need to provide clarity for students and universities about the contributions they can expect to make and receive means that the timetable for laying the Regulations has been highly compressed, and this has prevented a separate external consultation exercise on the Government's proposals.”

Highly compressed? It is more like “cut and run”, because that is what we are dealing with tonight.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): May I just put on record how important it is for me that this motion is opposed and we have proper time to debate? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), I put my name down for the Opposition day debate on higher education because of the hundreds of families in Walthamstow

who have contacted me because they are deeply concerned about the increases in tuition fees. I am serving on the Public Bill Committee considering the National Insurance Contributions Bill tomorrow and so will not be able to participate during the meagre five-hour debate. If we do not have proper time to debate this issue, I fear that I will not be able to raise the concerns of the people of Walthamstow, so I hope that my right hon. Friend is successful.

Hilary Benn: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I am sure that her constituents, like those of other hon. Members, would wish their representative to have the opportunity to participate in the debate tomorrow.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend may not be aware that the number of Labour Members wishing to speak in the debate tomorrow has now swelled to at least 28. I am one of those Members who sought to speak in the debate last week, but I was unable to catch Mr Speaker's eye because of the lack of time. In view of the importance that my constituents place on this issue, does my right hon. Friend agree that allocating only five hours is totally inadequate to allow me and my right hon. and hon. Friends an opportunity to articulate the concerns of our constituents so that they feel that their views are adequately taken into account?

Hilary Benn: I certainly do. I hope that the force and the number of interventions that I have taken this evening will have some impact on Government Front Benchers and, even at this late stage, they will think again about the time that they have allocated.

Steve McCabe: I am another of those who have been denied the opportunity to represent their constituents by the Leader of the House. Should it not be abundantly clear to him now that his motion does not reflect the mood of the House? Will not the watching public suspect that a fix has been attempted because the Government cannot defend the policy that they are about to impose on young people?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The number and strength of the interventions that we have heard this evening are for a specific purpose—to try to win for this House enough time to debate this issue. The fact is that the number of Members who are in their places, especially on the Opposition Benches, is a sign of the anger and outrage that is felt about the amount of time that has been allocated. It is in the Government's hands to bring this particular debate to an end by saying that they will go away and think again. I hope that the Minister will do so.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Many constituents have contacted me because they want me, as their MP, to put forward their views about the future of higher education. Given that so many hon. Members will want to speak in tomorrow's debate and will not be able to do so, is such a compression not bringing Parliament into disrepute? If the people of this country cannot have their Members of Parliament raising their concerns on an issue of such importance, there are much wider implications.

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend. People look to the House of Commons to speak for them and they look to us as Members to represent their views. They want us to consider in appropriate depth and with adequate care the proposals that come before us. The number of people who are concerned about what we will be asked to consider tomorrow should find expression in the number of voices that are heard in this Chamber. We will be denied that opportunity because of the inadequacy of the time that is being offered.

Kevin Brennan: Is my right hon. Friend aware that journalists in the Committee corridor last night were reporting that the Lib Dems had as much time as they liked in their meeting and could speak for as long as they wanted on the matter without any timetabling of it in private? However, in public and in this Chamber, they are seeking to limit the debate to a mere five hours. Is that not a very telling point?

Hilary Benn: It is. If such an approach is good enough for Liberal Democrats in private, it ought to be good enough for the House of Commons in public. We are the voice of the nation.

Nic Dakin: My right hon. Friend is being most generous tonight in giving way. The fact that the Government are not listening to people's voices—we are hearing about that and reflecting that in our contributions tonight—and want to constrain a debate to just five hours or less completely flies in the face of the new politics that the country asked for and the fresh approach that it welcomed.

Hilary Benn: It certainly does. As my hon. Friend says, there is a serious issue here. If the public do not think that we have properly considered the matter, it will not build their trust and confidence in Parliament, and it certainly will not build their trust and confidence in the Government—it will damage it.

Mr Slaughter: Does my right hon. Friend know that the Deputy Prime Minister is now on Sky News saying that he would love to get rid of university tuition fees, but that he lives in an imperfect world? He says that he hopes that tuition fees will go in the future and blames the Labour party for not supporting him in the past. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party would be happy to vote with him tomorrow against the motion? Should the Deputy Prime Minister not be—

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have listened very patiently to this entire debate. I seek your guidance on whether we can hear repeated any more outbursts on what is happening in corridors and on Sky News, which has nothing to do with the timetabling of the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): I am sure that the hon. Lady appreciates that I am following the debate very closely. If contributions are not in order, I will say so.

Hilary Benn: The Deputy Prime Minister will have to explain his imperfections and I hope very much that he will participate in tomorrow's debate, because many hon. Members will want to intervene on him.

Mr Slaughter: I am sorry that the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) had the discourtesy to interrupt me in that way. The point I wished to make is that it is a discourtesy to the House for the Deputy Prime Minister to be on television doing a mea culpa and trying pathetically to justify himself, rather than being here and explaining why we have only five hours to debate the matter.

Hilary Benn: Indeed. Given the number of things that the Deputy Prime Minister has had to say about the tuition fee increase that he intends to vote for tomorrow, the very least he could do is to come into the debate. I hope that he might be able to participate, because many people would like to hear how he explains the change in attitude—the 180° turn—that he has performed in a very short space of time.

Paul Farrelly: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the ground keeps shifting from day to day? The coalition Government have now admitted that deterrence because of debt is an issue, and they have announced a national scholarship fund. Does he consider five hours to be sufficient time in which to debate all the details of the proposals and to examine whether the Government are, in effect, just making policy up on the hoof?

Hilary Benn: It is clearly not sufficient time to debate those matters, which brings me to the second reason why more time needs to be found, which is the nature of the change that the Government wish to make. The proposals on fees that we are being asked to consider tomorrow cannot really be seen in isolation from the wider Browne proposals or the Government's spending review. The truth is that they are intimately bound up, one with another, which is why the House needs proper time to consider both. As we know, the huge fee increase is a result of the Government's decision in the spending review to impose on universities not the average cut that they have been applying—a cut of 11%—but an unprecedented 80% reduction in university teaching budgets.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend consider five hours to be enough time in which to debate the £50 million that I understand will come out of the economy in Hull, owing to the changes that will be introduced tomorrow afternoon if the proposal goes through? My constituency, which is a disadvantaged community, relies heavily on the university of Hull. I am concerned that five hours will be insufficient to debate fully the impact on the local economy in my constituency.

Hilary Benn: I share my hon. Friend's frustration, because one of the things that we need time to debate tomorrow is the consequence of the fee increase, which is the result of the 80% reduction. What will that mean for some universities? That is a perfectly legitimate question that Members may wish to ask tomorrow.

Charlie Elphicke: In the spirit of assisting the House, let me point out that the right hon. Gentleman has been on his feet for an hour and a half. That is fine, but I invite him to consider allowing Back Benchers to make speeches as well.

Hilary Benn: Because of the generosity of the Leader of the House, who has said that debate can continue until any hour, there will be plenty of time for Back Benchers to contribute to this debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Hilary Benn: And judging by the number of Members who wish to intervene, this is probably just a prelude to the speeches that they will make.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) *rose*—

Clive Efford: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that you were listening intently to the intervention from the hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke), who called for more time to allow Back Benchers to participate in this debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. I am sure that everybody heard exactly what the hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) said.

Mr Tom Harris: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Two amendments have now been submitted—the first from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), asking for the debate to be continued until 6 o'clock tomorrow, and the second from me, in an attempt to be popular with my Scottish colleagues, asking for the debate to be continued until 10 o'clock tomorrow evening. Can you tell the House when Mr Speaker will make a decision on whether those amendments will be accepted and say how that decision will be communicated to the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite right: Mr Speaker will make a decision on those manuscript amendments in due course, and I am sure that he will ensure that the House knows when he has decided. I call Mr Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was giving way to my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley).

Barbara Keeley: My right hon. Friend has been very generous in giving way this evening. Let me touch on the point that he made about the impact on universities. We have already heard a little about Salford university this evening, and about how many local young people attend it. Indeed, there are two Salford graduates on the Labour Benches listening to this debate, and we are very concerned indeed about the possibility of our course—politics and contemporary history, which we both did at Salford university—disappearing. Will there be time in five hours to consider not just the future of social science courses such as the politics and contemporary history course at Salford—which was an excellent course, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) will agree—but the future of this House? Where are the future Labour and other candidates going to come from if these politics and contemporary history courses disappear?

Hilary Benn: The importance and the power of a university education is indeed to give people the chance to understand where we come from. If we do not understand where we come from, it is difficult to work out where we should be going.

Tristram Hunt *rose*—

Hilary Benn: Speaking of an understanding of history, I shall gladly give way to my hon. Friend.

Robert Ffello: Further to the previous point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Two manuscript amendments have been tabled and are currently with Mr Speaker. Is there a way for the House to convey to Mr Speaker just how strongly we feel that the suggestion of continuing the debate until 10 o'clock would be the better of the two?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No. Mr Tristram Hunt was about to make an intervention.

Tristram Hunt: As a new Member of the House, I am finding the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) a complete tour de force. We are learning a great deal from him tonight, and it would ill behove him to rush. On the broader point of the time limit for tomorrow's debate, is he aware of the numerous protestations that I have received from academics, students and postgraduates in the humanities community, who are worried not only about the situation facing history and modern politics but about what could happen to classics, divinity, theology, social anthropology, archaeology, anthropology and many other subjects? We could not possibly deal with all those concerns in five hours.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hilary Benn: I bow to my hon. Friend's expertise in these matters. He illustrates the point that many people are interested in all those subjects, as well as others that he did not have the opportunity to mention. They want us to have the chance to debate these matters tomorrow.

Mr Bain: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, since he began his speech, it has been reported that the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change might not be in the House tomorrow to attend the debate or to vote? Does not that reinforce the argument that five hours will not give him enough time to explain whether he is abstaining or simply hiding in Cancun?

Hilary Benn: I have followed with interest the various reports of the movements and non-movements of the Climate Change Secretary who, in fairness, is doing very important work in Cancun because we need a global climate deal. Having seen some of the newspaper reports that we should have offered him a pair, however, it seems to me that the easiest thing would be for him to pair with one of his colleagues who is going to vote on the other side. There is no need for him to come and seek our assistance.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend recall the debates on the national minimum wage, when we sat up all night because the Conservatives were determined to oppose the proposals and fought them every inch of the way? Does he agree that we should be equally willing to fight this legislation, and that we should stay up all night if necessary?

Hilary Benn: The determination of Opposition Members to do everything we can to ensure that we get a proper amount of time to debate the issues and the chance to vote the proposals down is evident. My hon. Friend makes a powerful point.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) *rose*—

Hilary Benn: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Emily Thornberry: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps you can help me on this point. Is the reason that we can have only a five-hour debate tomorrow the fact that the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, finds it difficult to stay awake? I can see him sleeping on the Front Bench—

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is absolutely not a point of order.

Ian Paisley: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. As he will know, these measures will also have a considerable impact on the devolved region of Northern Ireland. One in every three students from Northern Ireland attends a university here in England, and if the Government push through a change in the legislation, the Assembly in Northern Ireland will have to pick up the tab for the increase in fees for those who study outside Northern Ireland. The figures indicate that, on top of the current spend of about £90 million on students travelling from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom, an increase of between £30 million and £60 million will have to be found to cover the fee increase. Where is that money going to be found, given that the Government are already asking the Assembly to cut back in other areas? We do not—

Mr Speaker: Order. First, my strong impression is that the hon. Gentleman's intervention is beyond the scope of the debate. Secondly, it is longer than is desirable or acceptable. Interventions need to be shorter from now on.

Hilary Benn: I wish I could help the hon. Gentleman by answering his question, but I cannot. One of the people who could help him is sitting on the Government Bench, but I do not know whether he will want to intervene on me to give the hon. Gentleman the information he seeks. This provides another powerful reason to have more time tomorrow to answer the hon. Gentleman's question and many other questions that right hon. and hon. Members will want to ask.

I shall make a little more progress. One issue that the House will need more time to debate tomorrow is the potential financial consequence of the fee increase, which is presaged on an 80% reduction in funding for institutions that right hon. and hon. Members have the honour to represent in their constituencies. We still do not know for certain by how much each university is going to be affected by the introduction of the near-trebling of fees, particularly when universities are also going to be affected by other changes. For example, we know that the regional development agencies are being abolished, that the funds for regional development, some of which have been used in partnership with institutions of higher education, are being reduced and that the local economic partnerships have not been properly established in many places because of the state of chaos. Universities do not know how much they might have to find in the current financial year, never mind the impact that these tuition fee changes will have. This could affect students this year and in subsequent years as the transition from the current to the new system is managed. These are all questions that we need time to debate.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is discussing fees, and the university in my constituency of Bolton South East is one of 20 widening participation universities. As a result of the Browne review and tuition fee changes, it is expected that those 20 universities will collapse and will be unable to carry on serving the needs of the most vulnerable students in our society. Is five hours enough time to discuss the fate of the 20 universities that are likely to collapse?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point—one that I am addressing at the moment: the potential financial impact of these changes on a number of universities. That is precisely one of the points that we need to debate tomorrow, but we have been denied sufficient time to do so on the current arrangements.

Chris Williamson: My right hon. Friend has been extremely generous in giving way this evening and I am very grateful to him for his kindness in giving way to me on this occasion. Does he agree that restricting the debate to five hours will give scant time for me to raise the concerns that I know exist in Derby in respect of Derby university? It has been calculated that, as a result of the 80% reduction to which he referred, that university will find a black hole of about £30 million. It will find it extremely difficult to increase tuition fees to the level that would be necessary—

Mr Speaker: Order. First, there is the issue of scope. Secondly, I know that the hon. Gentleman, who is a very well-behaved man, would not seek to make a speech when he is supposed to be making an intervention. *[Interruption.]* Order. He has registered his point, to which I know the shadow Leader of the House will want to respond.

Hilary Benn: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I believe that my hon. Friend should have the opportunity tomorrow precisely to put that question to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Angela Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way; he is being very generous with his time. Sheffield Hallam university could lose about £70 million because of this decision. Is it not imperative that Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and myself make a contribution tomorrow, especially given that the Deputy Prime Minister has refused to meet the local student union to discuss the matter?

Hilary Benn: I am surprised and concerned to hear that news. It seems from what my hon. Friend says that the right hon. Gentleman is willing to spend more time in the television studios, describing the changing positions of his party, than he is prepared to spend talking to students who are going to feel the consequences of what he is proposing.

I turn to a difficulty that might arise for all Members tomorrow, because all we are discussing—I say “all” in a contextual sense—is two statutory instruments. Here I seek guidance from the Leader of the House and possibly from you, Mr Speaker. The House will be aware of the rules governing the scope of debate on statutory instruments. A little while ago, I promised that I would quote from “Erskine May”, and page 681 states:

[Hilary Benn]

“Debate on any statutory instrument, whether subject to the affirmative or the negative procedure, is confined to the contents of the instrument, and discussion of alternative methods of achieving its object is not in order. Where the effects of an instrument are confined to a particular geographical area or areas, discussion of other areas is out of order. Nor is criticism of the provisions of the parent Act permitted.”

Mr Speaker, does that mean that Members will be restricted tomorrow in what they can discuss and what they can say? Does it mean, for example, that Opposition Members who would wish to argue the case for a graduate tax cannot raise it in the debate? Could they be ruled out of order? If right hon. and hon. Members want to refer to the implications of the proposals for other parts of the United Kingdom, will they be ruled out of order? Were that to be the case, it would show how improper is the Government’s decision to bring the statutory instrument before the House tomorrow. If that interpretation of “Erskine May” is applied—

Mr Speaker: Order. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will resume his seat. I am not sure whether his inquiry was a genuine one or a rhetorical one, but he has referred to the fact of the motion and the narrow terms of the statutory instrument, and he raises the concern about how much scope there will be for Members fully to develop their points. It might help him and the House if I point out that the two—the motion and the SI tomorrow—have been conflated for the purposes of the consideration, and the intention of the Chair would be to adopt a broad and generous interpretation of what could legitimately be said in the debate. I hope that that is helpful to Members in all parts of the House.

Hilary Benn: It was a genuine inquiry, Mr Speaker, and I am extremely grateful to you for your guidance. When I read that section in “Erskine May”, I was genuinely concerned that Members might be denied the opportunity to have the full debate that we require tomorrow.

Thomas Docherty: Has my right hon. Friend noticed, as I have, the silence and lack of activity from Government Members? Is it his view that they agree with us that this is a horrible stitch-up by those on the Government Front Bench, or, as Government Members have suggested, do they also wish to contribute speeches tonight? Does my right hon. Friend look forward to many of them joining us over the next few hours, as we debate this important matter?

Hilary Benn: If we do hear this evening the voices of Government Members, I hope that they might persuade the Leader of the House to change his mind about the proposal that he wants us to vote for tonight. We have no intention of doing so.

Dr Whitehead: Notwithstanding the clarification about the scope of tomorrow’s debate, does my right hon. Friend accept—bearing in mind that the White Paper relating to the orders will come along later and that details of changes will follow—that if a student got the results of the exam first, then the exam paper, and finally the lecture notes, it would be a rather strange way to go about their university education?

Hilary Benn: It certainly would be, although reflecting on the scenario that my hon. Friend sets out, there might be certain advantages, especially for students who had not been applying their minds to their studies. He makes the point, however, that the Government are going about this matter in completely the wrong way.

I am sure that a large number of Members wish to take part in this evening’s debate, as well as the very large number who wish to take part in the debate tomorrow. The third reason that I wish to advance for our need for more time tomorrow is the fact that, as we have already established this evening, Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament on their own could occupy the whole five hours by explaining the multiple positions that they are adopting notwithstanding the efforts of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Albert Owen: Following your helpful confirmation, Mr Speaker, that we will debate all the issues, is it not imperative for us to be given an extended period allowing us to discuss the points made by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) and others about the Northern Irish, Welsh and Scottish perspectives, involving those who are domiciled in their own countries but come to England to study? Is there not a greater imperative for the time to be extended now that we are clear about the boundaries of tomorrow’s debate?

Hilary Benn: It is indeed important for the time to be extended to allow full debate. We need time to hear the views of not just the Liberal Democrats who have decided to break the pledge and vote for the fees increase tomorrow, but all the Liberal Democrats who are going to abstain.

We know that the Liberal Democrats have wrestled with their consciences over the last few months, and we know that that has been difficult for them. I think that the House owes them a chance to seek to catch your eye one by one, Mr Speaker, so that they can explain why they have chosen to sit on the fence, and why they believe that that will absolve them of what they have done and clear their consciences. No doubt many Members on our side will seek to catch your eye, Mr Speaker, in order to point out that abstaining will do no good at all, because a betrayal is still a betrayal whenever it is undertaken.

Robert Ffello: I look forward to catching your eye myself shortly, Mr Speaker, so that I can make my own contribution to the debate.

Does not what we have heard tonight—and what we have had to rely on as a statement from you, Mr Speaker, about the need to widen the scope of the debate—merely underline the shoddy and appalling way in which the measure is being railroaded through the House? Is this what the Deputy Prime Minister meant by “new politics”?

Hilary Benn: If it is the new politics, heaven help us all.

This is a defining moment for the coalition Government. It is the moment when the bonds of that coalition will be sorely tested. The trebling of tuition fees, the debt that will be incurred by future generations, the threat to the finances of some universities—all those will be at stake in the debate tomorrow. If that is not an argument

for the House to be given proper time in which to debate such matters, I do not know what is. The truth is that the Government have treated the House with contempt, and I urge the House to reciprocate by treating the motion with the contempt that it deserves and throwing it out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Two hon. Members have submitted manuscript amendments which I myself saw a matter of a few minutes ago, and which, to my certain knowledge, have been submitted within the last hour or so. It is right that I give the House a verdict on the matter. I have not selected either of the amendments. There was plenty of time in which manuscript amendments could have been submitted: they could have been submitted much earlier in the day, but that did not happen.

It may also be helpful if I point out that the House is having—I emphasise the words “is having”—a very full debate on all the relevant issues relating to time. There has been, and continues to be for as long as the debate continues, a very good opportunity for Members who wish to argue for particular allocations of time to do so. That is the situation, and we must now move on.

Paul Farrelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you tell us whether you have received any amendments to tomorrow’s motion other than from the Opposition Front-Bench team, and in particular whether you have received a cross-party amendment to the motion?

Mr Speaker: I was slightly perplexed and taken aback by that attempted point of order for the simple reason that we are not discussing tomorrow’s motion, and I am not going to get into the subject of amendments thereto. I was focusing simply on manuscript amendments tabled tonight by, I believe, the hon. Members for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) and for Glasgow South (Mr Harris). It is with that, and that alone, that I was, and am, concerned.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you advise us whether it is in order for Members to seek to speak in this evening’s debate if they were not present for the whole of the opening two speeches?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. [*Interruption.*] Well, I do not think the hon. Gentleman is applying to make a speech, so I do not think he is caught by his own stricture. I consider it to be a general courtesy applying to all debates that if a Member wishes to speak he or she should be present for the opening speeches, and that is the basis on which I work. I hope the hon. Gentleman is content with that response.

Robert Ffello: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will take a small number of further contributions of this kind, but I will want to get on with the substance of the matter soon.

Robert Ffello: I am not sure whether you were in the Chair at the time, Mr Speaker, but earlier in the debate the issue of Members who have other business in the House was raised. I am concerned that there may well be Members who are unable to attend the opening speeches tonight or tomorrow because of other duties in this House. They may be delayed and they may therefore not be able to catch your eye, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I have a sense that that is a continuation, and perhaps even a development, of a point that was made earlier, not least by the hon. Gentleman himself, but it is not a point of order for the Chair.

Before we get on with any continuing debate, I will just emphasise that the Chair will have the very keenest regard to the closeness to the motion that Members demonstrate in their speeches. There has not yet been a Back-Bench speech, and I am happy to hear one, as they are important, but Members must stick to the terms of the motion, and I will be focusing very intently on whether that is being done, and on the economy displayed in developing the arguments.

9.47 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I rise to oppose this evening’s motion tabled in the name of the Leader of the House and the Minister for Universities and Science. It is interesting that it is two Conservative members of the coalition who have put their name to the motion, and that the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, who was here earlier, has not put his name to it. Earlier on, he was sitting in his place with a face which the funeral industry beckons because of what he had to sit through tonight.

We are here to discuss a business motion that is another example of something we have already seen this week: how the Government have attempted to restrict debate on this vital matter for many thousands of not only our constituents now but future generations. Tomorrow’s debate will, in five hours, change the relationship between people and the state and how we provide higher education in this country. To do that in five hours is totally unacceptable.

Angela Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that the House should put on record its grateful thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) for having done such a grand job in defending the rights of the House and of the people of the country in how he led tonight’s debate?

Mr Jones: I would always agree with that. My right hon. Friend is a very good friend and he has done an excellent job in defending the rights of Back Benchers and the House.

Later, I will remind some Members on the Government Front Bench how eager they were in opposition to argue, on the subject of programme motions, that we needed to have more debate. That is especially true of the Deputy Leader of the House, although he is not in his place. I remember having to listen to hours of his droning on about why—

Paul Farrelly: Have you got a list?

Mr Jones: I will have later on.

Steve McCabe: Is my hon. Friend at all concerned for the well-being of the Business Secretary? If he cannot bear to sit through this debate about the time required to discuss the issues, how on earth is he going to cope with the criticism of his policy tomorrow?

Mr Jones: I do not wish to get off the subject of the debate, and my hon. Friend tempts me to do so. Clearly, Mr Speaker would rightly pull me up if I were to start talking about the health of the Business Secretary, which has no relevance to this debate. However, I must say that the Business Secretary is a very nice gentleman, so we should all be concerned about his health and the difficulty that he is clearly going through on this policy.

Mr Slaughter: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is relevant that barely 10 Liberal Democrat Members have been in throughout the debate? The latest estimate is that 100,000 students will be coming tomorrow, yet nobody on those Benches has the courtesy to listen to the debate. Five hours seems to be as long as they are prepared to give to this issue tomorrow. Is that not hugely disrespectful to all our constituents, who care about this issue?

Mr Jones: I note what my hon. Friend is saying but, again, I wish to stick to discussing this business motion. I would not want Mr Speaker to pull me up for being tempted to go down a path that would not be in order.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend reminds us that we must return to the motion, so what does he think of the Government's practice of setting the time for tomorrow's debate to finish at 5.30 pm and ignoring the moment of interruption, which this House democratically voted to put at 6 pm on a Thursday?

Mr Jones: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend has got good eyesight or was reading my mind, because that was exactly the point that I was going to make next. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) says that he is "Mystic Kev", and clearly he is. An important point is at issue, because when the Leader of the House made his opening remarks he was asked why the debate was going to finish at 5.30 pm and not 6 pm tomorrow and we are still waiting for an answer. That was the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) tried to tease out with his manuscript amendment. Clearly, Mr Speaker, you have ruled that that is not in order, but we have still not heard an explanation of why 5.30 pm was chosen.

We have seen a strange thing this week, because this motion allows us five hours for the debate tomorrow, yet a matter of a day ago a motion proposed that we have three hours for that debate. No explanation has been given of why two hours have suddenly been conjured up—I will allow people to intervene on this. If we can suddenly, in a day, conjure up two hours, why can we not conjure up more time, as is clearly needed for this vital debate?

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I am hoping to catch Mr Speaker's eye tomorrow in the debate and I have much that I wish to say about this very important matter. If I cut to the bone what I wish to say, I will need at least 20 minutes to do any justice to the subject. What prospect does my hon. Friend think I have of having 20 minutes in which to speak tomorrow?

Mr Jones: The point has been made that if everyone spoke, they would get about 50 seconds. I know that my hon. Friend speaks very eloquently and, on occasion, can go on at length, as we all can, but I am sure that he could get his remarks down to fit the timetable. However, the fundamental point tomorrow is that we will have five hours in which to discuss these vital points.

Thomas Docherty: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I do not wish to rain on his argument, but he is constantly referring to the five hours allowed. He might want to check the motion. If we have an urgent question or if business questions overrun—they are always popular thanks to the charm of the Leader of the House—we will have less than five hours to discuss this issue.

Mr Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. When the Leader of the House opened the debate, he gave an assurance that the Government would not make any statements tomorrow that would eat into the time. My hon. Friend makes a good point, though: issues might arise overnight to do with the weather in Scotland and other parts of the country, or to do with the demonstration tomorrow, or with something else. An urgent question might be sought and Mr Speaker might allow it. A statement might have to be brought forward. If that happens, that will eat into the five hours that we have been allocated.

Paul Farrelly: Given the number of applications to make a speech—there has been a running total throughout the debate—may I tempt my hon. Friend to inquire of Mr Speaker whether he has decided that there will be a time limit on speeches?

Mr Jones: I am sorry, but I would not dream of telling Mr Speaker how to do his job. It will be up to Mr Speaker to decide the allocation of time and who is called. Given the numbers who have expressed an interest in the debate, I think a time limit might well be introduced.

Mr Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can be helpful both to the hon. Gentleman and to the House. The time allocated for the consideration of these important matters tomorrow is specified and protected time. Any concern that the hon. Gentleman might have of the kind that he has just expressed is almost certainly unfounded. I think it would be better if he were to develop his argument on other fronts. In the process, may I gently remind him that I am having some regard to the economy of speeches? I am interested to hear voices, but there must be economy.

Robert Ffello: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Forgive me, but I am in some confusion. I am looking at the order paper, which reads

"not later than five hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first motion, or at 5.30 pm, whichever is the earlier".

How does that mean that that is protected time. Will you clarify, please, if you would not mind?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was justified in being confused. I was speaking off the top of my head and I suffered from the disadvantage of being wrong. I thought I was right, but I was wrong, and people should admit when they are wrong. The hon. Gentleman's concern is justified and I apologise to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). My point and stricture about economy, however, still apply.

Mr Kevan Jones: I think we have seen an historic moment tonight, Mr Speaker. I did not think it was possible for you ever to be wrong. The way in which you handled that is a credit to you.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend considered this matter in the historical context? The last time we had such a considerable change to the funding system for higher education was in the 1940s. The Education Act 1944 was considered by many people to be the key reform in higher education and it was debated for a full year before the 1945 election. Has my hon. Friend taken that into account in considering his remarks tonight?

Mr Jones: I do not really want to go back to 1945, but I shall make some references to the Higher Education Act 2004 that are relevant to the time that has been allowed.

I want to ask the Leader of the House about the change that happened this week, from allowing three hours to allowing five. The motion was not moved last night and two hours were added to the debate. I think that everyone welcomes that, but it still gives inadequate time to cover the points that we have to make in the debate tomorrow. Whether that was another great concession wheedled out of the coalition by the Liberal Democrats I do not know; I am sure that if it was, we would have heard about it by now.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that rather than looking set to fall asleep, Liberal Democrat Members on the Government Benches would be well advised to be on their feet pleading for more than the five hours that has been allotted to the debate so that they can tell their constituents and the nation how they have got into this appalling mess and perpetrated this betrayal of their constituents' trust?

Mr Jones: I do not want to intrude on the personal grief of the Liberal Democrat party. Like any other Member of the House, in the limited time available tomorrow, they can try to catch the Speaker's eye to make their points. I am sure that those who signed the pledge during the election but will vote in favour of the increase tomorrow will want to come to the House to explain why they have changed their minds. It is entirely open to individuals to do that.

Nic Dakin: I calculate that we have had about two and a half hours of debate, in which only three people have spoken, on an issue that might seem unimportant to people outside—whereas tomorrow we will have only twice as much time as that to debate something of great importance. I think that tells the story.

Mr Jones: I am sorry, but I must disagree strongly with my hon. Friend, because the amount of time that the House and Back Benchers get to scrutinise the Executive is very important.

Mr Tom Harris: Given the severe and absurd restriction on the time we have to debate this issue tomorrow, is it not likely that both Labour and Conservative Back

Benchers will be given slightly more time, in the likely event that the Liberal Democrats have difficulty mustering Back-Bench speakers? They are unlikely to get the number of their speakers even into single figures!

Mr Jones: We will have to see what happens, but a very important point was raised earlier about the amount of time that will be available for Government Front Benchers to reply to the debate tomorrow. If we have a packed House with a lot of speakers, there will be limited time for Ministers to explain to the British public the policy that they are putting forward.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and fellow north-east MP for giving way. Tonight I have spent some time with the North East of England Process Industry Cluster, which tells me that it recruits many graduates in the north-east. I am sure that it will share my concern that those graduates—its feedstock—may not be available in future if these student fees are imposed. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is another good reason why we need more time to debate this important issue?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I told the Whips tonight that I was giving up the opportunity to dine with people from north-east industry, so I have given up that very nice dinner and an opportunity to discuss with those individuals, who are very important to the north-east, higher education and other issues.

Kevin Brennan: The Government's response to the debate is a key factor, is it not? If they had simply allowed the debate to extend to the normal moment of interruption on a Thursday, there would have been half an hour for them to respond, but as things stand, we will probably have only something like five minutes each at the end.

Mr Jones: I accept what my hon. Friend is saying, but I do not think that an extra half hour would give the House enough time to debate this issue. The words of the Leader of the House in his opening statement are important. As a reason why the statutory instrument needs to be rushed through this week, in a matter of five hours, he said—I wrote this down—that otherwise we would slow the process down, and that the fiscal position we are in is important. That exposes the truth of why this measure is being driven through. It is nothing at all to do with higher education or ensuring that Members can have a debate tomorrow. Rather than the Government thinking about the future of the country and its educational needs, they are saying that future generations will have to start paying now, to try to help them in the financial position in which they now find themselves.

Julie Hilling: Does my hon. Friend agree that tomorrow we will be debating an issue of such importance for all young people in this country that we owe it to them to spend a reasonable time having a reasoned discussion, in order to make a decision on something that will live with them until they reach retirement?

Mr Jones: It will, and what seems like a simple statutory instrument will tomorrow change fundamentally the future of higher education in this country. That is why five hours is not long enough.

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): As somebody who is not doing a U-turn, I ask the hon. Gentleman: if you are spending more time tonight debating the issue of how long tomorrow's debate will be than that debate will take, why, at 7 o'clock tonight, did you vote not to discuss this at all?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have not done any of the things of which I am accused.

Mr Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for coming in. I do not think that he has been here all night, unlike the rest of us. Clearly he has had his dinner, unlike me, and many other Members who have been sat here since 7 o'clock.

Angela Smith: I have looked around me and seen on this side of the House at least four Members who once worked in higher education. They have the expertise that could be brought to bear on the issue in a Public Bill Committee. Should this legislation not be in a Bill, and be considered on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend takes me on to my next point, which is about the decision to debate the issue in five hours tomorrow. That is to ensure that the measure will be dealt with before the framework document is in place, but it seems ludicrous to have the discussion tomorrow and fundamentally change the funding of higher education in this country before we have the full framework policy document. That should be in place, not only to reveal how what is decided tomorrow may be interpreted, but to allow some newer universities a debate about their financial future. It is clear to me that some of them will struggle when these measures are implemented.

Mrs Moon: Is it not one of the risks that we are running that many universities in England will find it more attractive to bring in overseas students paying, yet again, higher fees? English students will not be able to afford to go to university. We are going to debate the issue within five hours, but the structure of education in Britain is to change dramatically. We need more than five hours to discuss that.

Mr Jones: I thank my hon. Friend, who makes a good point about the five-hour limit.

Thomas Docherty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am struggling to hear my hon. Friend because of the large number of conversations taking place on the other side of the Chamber. Is there anything you can do to ensure that I can hear my hon. Friend?

Mr Speaker: All Members, including those in the Chair, should exercise a self-denying ordinance in these matters. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it would be good if the decibel level went down. *[Interruption.]* Order. Mr Ruane. *[Interruption.]* Order. Mr Roger Williams, you should not be chuntering away in a private conversation when I am trying to give a helpful ruling. It would help if the decibel level went down and we could hear the speeches.

Mr Jones: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) made a good point, because tomorrow is not just about raising the cap. It is about the consequences of raising the cap, which will have an effect through the recruitment of foreign students. Earlier, a point was made very eloquently by a Northern Ireland Member about the effect on Northern Ireland students. Tomorrow we will have to cover a range of issues, which will be difficult to do in the short time that we have.

Mr Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Hon. Members have referred to Northern Ireland, but the regulations are specific to England. Of course, we are concerned about the whole United Kingdom, however, and we are talking about a variable geometry over the United Kingdom. Is it not right and proper, therefore, that we should have plenty of time to compare and contrast the situation in England with that in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Jones: That is a very important point, which the hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long) eloquently made earlier. The changes that we make tomorrow will affect students not only on the mainland, but in those countries with devolved Administrations.

Naomi Long: At the Northern Ireland Grand Committee yesterday, we were advised that the Barnett consequentials of the anticipated decision tomorrow, and of any bursary or student support arrangements that may or may not be introduced, have already been passed on to the Northern Ireland Assembly in the block grant. I would presume that it might take more than five hours simply to understand how such a calculation could be made.

Mr Jones: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. My right hon. Friend's central message was that tomorrow we need to discuss, and will discuss, those complex financial implications. There are implications not just for universities and individual students, but, as the hon. Lady quite rightly says, for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Paul Farrelly: I am listening to my hon. Friend with great interest, but I fear from the smile on the Government Chief Whip's face that he is considering when to cut my hon. Friend off in his prime. If a closure motion is called, would it be remiss of Liberal Democrats to vote to curtail the debate?

Mr Jones: I am sorry, but it is entirely up to the Chair to decide whether to allow a closure motion.

Robert Flello: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Jones: Briefly.

Robert Flello: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, whose speech I am enjoying greatly. I am also looking forward to making my own speech in due course, so I hope that there will be no closure motion. Owing to the joys of modern technology, Members in the Chamber can monitor their e-mails and see the constant stream of communication from students and their families who are worried about what will happen tomorrow and the amount of time we will have to debate this matter. Has he too received a huge number of representations, in his e-mail account and otherwise, from people concerned about the time we will have tomorrow?

Mr Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that very short intervention. No, I have not. As everyone knows, I am not the most technical person.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a matter of some great contention, and we know—indeed, you will be aware, Mr Speaker—that in the previous Parliament a disturbance during proceedings on the Hunting Bill debate caused the House to be suspended. In the unlikely and absolutely dreadful event of that being repeated tomorrow, would the five hours be protected, or would any suspension of the House eat into that time?

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that he is raising a hypothetical question, and my attitude is best encapsulated in the wise words of the late Lord Whitelaw, who famously said that on the whole he preferred to cross bridges only when he came to them.

Mr Jones: It is important to put this business motion into context. It is a Government motion that seeks to regulate the business and sitting of the House, and page 368 of “Erskine May” sets out the details about such motions clearly, stating:

“Such motions, which do not have precedence...are normally moved by the Leader of the House and invariably require notice”.

We have clearly had notice of tonight’s motion. Indeed, we had notice of an alternative motion this week, but unfortunately the Government did not move the first motion that they tabled.

“Erskine May” continues by stating that the motions regulating business are, first,

“those...referred to specifically in Standing Order No 15 (exempted business), which are moved at the interruption of business”.

The second type is also described on page 368.

“Erskine May” continues:

“Under recent practice, such motions are more commonly moved in the ordinary course of the day’s business in relation to the business proposed for a future day, in which case notice is given as for any other notice of motion. Typically, such motions may set a time limit for a future debate”—

that is clearly the intention of the Government’s motion tonight—

“and may provide for the putting of questions by the Speaker after a certain period or at a specified time.”

That last point relates to the limit of 5.30 pm tomorrow. It goes on to say that such motions “may be complex”. According to “Erskine May”, the purpose of such a motion may be

“To give precedence to government business over private Members’ business either on a particular day or days or for a period, for example, until the end of the financial year.”

Mr Slaughter: I wonder whether my hon. Friend is moving towards the recommendation of a specific time limit. If he is, I urge him to consider that eight hours might be more suitable than five, because according to a poll by *The Sun*, eight hours would allow one hour for every 1% of support that the Liberal Democrats now have among the people of this country.

Mr Jones: I note my hon. Friend’s wit, for which he is not famous. He has obviously worked very hard on that intervention, and I congratulate him. However, I will not go down that route.

“Erskine May” suggests that other purposes for such a motion might be

“To give precedence to specified business...on a particular day”,

“To provide for a Saturday sitting”,

or

“To provide for adjournment at a stated hour”

on a sitting day. As is eloquently laid out in “Erskine May”, the effect of motions such as the one before us is to limit discussion. In this case, it will limit discussion on a vital piece of legislation to five hours.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: Does my hon. Friend agree that one thing that will make life difficult tomorrow for those of us who wish to speak on behalf of our constituents is that the context in which the statutory instrument sits is changing all the time? For example, today there were yet more changes concerning part-time fees. That makes it impossible to work through the impact of the changes.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, representing a university city as she does. I remember working hard to get her elected in 2005, when we had to put up with more nonsense from the Liberal Democrats about tuition fees. No doubt my hon. Friend and I will remind them of that later this week when they are deciding how to vote.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I am concerned that he, like others, has suggested that the motion will give us five hours to debate the principle tomorrow. In fact, Standing Order No. 16, to which the motion refers, protects debate on statutory instruments. There will be two statutory instruments before us, which under the Standing Order will take up three hours of the debate. There will therefore be only two hours left to debate the fundamental principle of how we fund higher education.

Mr Jones: I must tell my hon. Friend that she is technically not correct. Mr Speaker explained that the statutory instrument and the general principle will be put together to allow five hours’ debate. The effect of tonight’s motion will be to limit debate. It will clearly not provide enough time to discuss the issues that have been raised in the House tonight. It will dismay the many thousands of electors who will be affected by the measures now or in the future, that a fundamental change to education in this country can be decided and voted on in five hours.

Emily Thornberry: Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) on the concessions that are being made, is my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), as an experienced Member of this House, confident that there will not be a Cancun concession tomorrow that will also have to be debated, so that there will be another last-minute change?

Mr Jones: I think that we have heard about four different options from the Liberal Democrats this week: vote against, vote for, abstain or delay—

Chris Ruane: Vote both ways.

Mr Jones: Indeed, or delay the debate until another day.

It is important that people who signed the pledge, as they called it, have the opportunity to come here tomorrow and take part in the debate. It was interesting that in last week's Question Time the Deputy Prime Minister refused on several occasions to indicate how he or his party intended to vote. We were told earlier tonight that the Liberal Democrat group had unlimited discussions the other night to try to get some consensus on how they would vote, and they still could not come to a decision.

Chris Ruane: It was a three-hour meeting.

Mr Jones: It was. They are obviously spending almost more time in private discussions than they are willing to allow the House to debate the matter.

Helen Goodman: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has calculated this, but had the proposal gone through a normal legislative process, we would probably have had 170 hours' debate. We are to have precisely 3% of the amount of time that we would have had. Has he also noticed that the motion before the House this evening specifies when the matter will be debated, Thursday 9 December, and has—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must resume her seat. It is absolutely understandable—I have said this so many times—that Members look behind them when they think they are addressing a colleague behind them. The hon. Lady must address the House. Secondly, the intervention is rather long, and I feel sure that it is coming to an end. In fact, I think it has probably reached its end, has it not?

Helen Goodman *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Yes, I think it has.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the specific day that the Government picked for the debate. We have seen changes to the motion this week, and it would be interesting to know why the motion for a three-hour debate was not moved the other night. I return to the point that I have yet to learn the justification for why we got the extra two hours. If we can allow two extra hours, I am sure we can allow more.

Albert Owen: My hon. Friend is making a strong point. The Leader of the House has been here throughout the debate, and he is very courteous and usually very helpful. He could clear the matter up by coming to the Dispatch Box and explaining to us why we have a 5.30 pm cut-off. I am dismayed that he has not taken up the opportunity. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Jones: I am sure that the Leader of the House—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I think that barracking the Leader of the House is wrong, because he is a very

courteous individual who respects the House. I am sure that in his winding-up speech, he will want to explain why we have the extra two hours.

We have already explained how the motion before us tonight relates to “Erskine May”. It is the same principle as a programme motion.

Sandra Osborne: Does my hon. Friend recall the regular songs and dances in the previous Parliament from both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats about programme motions, and about how if they got into power they were going to do away with them? Does he think that is consistent with what they are doing tonight?

Mr Jones: No, and my hon. Friend is another Member who has read my mind, because I was just about to come on to that. The Deputy Leader of the House, who has now resumed his place, used to give long lectures on why programme motions were so evil, but the effect of tonight's motion will be to limit the time for debate in a similar way to a programme motion.

I do not intend to go through the entire history of how we came to have programme motions, because that would lead us away from the point, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Sandra Osborne) said, in the last Parliament we were regularly told how evil programme motions were. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) set out his views clearly on many occasions about why programme motions, or limiting the time for debate—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I say to the hon. Gentleman that, as I think he knows very well, he has a well honed technique of informing the House that he is not about to talk about something, before proceeding to do precisely that? He said that he would not rehearse the history of programme motions, and he is absolutely right, he will not. I hope that he will now focus on the specifics of the motion as, presumably, he is drawing his remarks to a close.

Mr Jones: I was going to do so, Mr Speaker, but I was making the point that the effect of the business motion is to limit debate. When the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were in opposition, they made it quite clear how terrible programme motions were.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): He's still talking about programme motions!

Mr Jones: Programme motions are very similar to the motion that we are debating. If the hon. Gentleman had been here, which he quite clearly has not, he would be following the debate rather than chuntering from a sedentary position.

I should like to compare this situation with the two previous occasions when the House debated changes to the system of tuition fees—before the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 introduced the £1,000 fee for students, and before the Higher Education Act 2004 introduced variable top-up fees. In 1998, the Government introduced a number of programme motions. A report said that nobody objected to them, but six hours was allowed to debate amendments. No one spoke against or resisted those programme motions.

It might help if I set out in terms on the Floor of the House the consideration of the 2004 Act. Far more than five hours was allowed for debate. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central said, in 2004, there was more time on Third Reading and Report and otherwise to debate amendments, and the Government also ensured that there was a full debate on the implications of variable top-up fees—we will discuss increasing the cap on top-up fees tomorrow.

On both those occasions, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats spoke against limiting the time—the generous amount of time—that was allowed for debate. It is important to remember that there is some inconsistency in what the coalition Government are proposing, because when the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were in opposition, they opposed programme motions on the ground that they limited time, but they are tonight going to go through the Division Lobby to allow only five hours to debate the increase in the cap on tuition fees.

Dr Whitehead: My hon. Friend is reflecting on the 2004 Act. He will recall that at the end of the lengthy discussions on that, a sunset clause was inserted that required any suggested increase on the cap on tuition fees to be the subject of a full debate on positive resolutions in both Houses. Does he consider that the hours allocated for tomorrow discharges that clause?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend played a key part in that legislation, and he makes a good point. If we are to have a detailed discussion on the implications of the Government's proposals, we need time. That was not the case in respect of the discussion on the 2004 Act. Time on the Floor of the House was given for full discussions on the implications of the measures. I also remind the House that many Labour Members at that time made key points to try to get concessions out of the Government, including my hon. Friend, to ensure that poorer students were protected.

Steve McCabe: Is my hon. Friend aware that since this debate began, a further 23 Members have applied for permission to speak in the debate tomorrow, taking the total to more than 70? Does that not show that it would be ludicrous for the Leader of the House to stick to his current position? Now is the time for him to recognise the mood of the House and agree to an extension of the time.

Mr Jones: It is not only the mood of the House: it is also the mood of the country. As with many things that this Government are doing, they are rushing things through. If we had pushed through legislation and ignored the House to this extent, we would have been rightly criticised. Sometimes we did not allow the House enough time for true debate and we were criticised in the press. The point has already been made that curtailing debate also leads to bad legislation, because the implications are not scrutinised either on the Floor of the House or in Committee.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend knows that this House has taken a few knocks to its reputation in the last couple of years. Will not the public be staggered when they find out that not only will the debate tomorrow be limited to five hours, but that the Government are not

even proposing that the House uses up the time that it normally has available on a Thursday and finishes at half-past 5 instead of 6?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend has made that point eloquently for the third time. I know that repetition is important, but I do not want to repeat points that have already been made well. It is true that we still have not had an explanation for the finishing time from the Leader of the House.

In conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] I could start from the beginning if people want me to do so—[*Interruption.*] The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne) has been chuntering from a sedentary position all night. I do not know whether he actually wants to make a contribution to the debate tonight or tomorrow, but as he has given up his principles for his red box and car, perhaps he should explain why.

In conclusion, five hours is completely inadequate to discuss the important implications of the motion tomorrow. It will affect not only thousands of students who are now in university, but thousands in the future. It will change the relationship between the state and higher education. It is not acceptable to rush that motion through in five hours without any justification for why three hours was okay two nights ago and five hours is adequate now. I urge hon. Members, especially those Liberal Democrats who still have their backbones in place, to vote with us and object to this programme motion tonight.

10.32 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I have a great deal of affection for the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable)—and the stadium in his constituency. He is usually a reasonable man, but in this case he is in an unreasonable hurry.

While the focus has been on the Liberal Democrat position, I fear that five hours will not give us enough time to look at the more interesting views of some influential Conservatives. For example, I would like to have more time to consider this view:

"Some people will, apparently, be put off applying to our elite institutions by the prospect of taking on a debt of this size. Which, as far as I'm concerned, is all to the good. The first point that needs to be made about the so-called deterrent effect of a...loan is that anyone put off from attending a good university by fear of that debt doesn't deserve to be at any university...if you're such a fool that you don't want to accept that deal, then you're too big a fool to benefit from the university education I'm currently subsidising for you."

Those words were written by the Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), when he was a columnist on *The Times* in 2003. Of course, the level of debt will be double or more if these proposals go through.

The Government have admitted that debt deterrence is a factor, but as the ground shifts I am not sure that we will have time tomorrow—in five hours—to debate the new national scholarship fund that the coalition are introducing. Very sketchy details have been given to the House about that. We need time to debate that fund and the evidence on which it is based.

Steve McCabe: As well as discussing the reasoning behind the piece of writing my hon. Friend mentions, could we not also ask the Minister for Universities and Science, the right hon. Member for Havant (Mr Willetts), to explore what has happened to his thinking? He wrote a book called “The Pinch,” which describes how our generation is robbing today’s teenagers. He is now setting out to do the exact opposite to his book’s conclusions.

Paul Farrelly: I agree with my hon. Friend. The views of the Secretary of the Secretary of State for Education can perhaps be described as ultra logical. The Minister for Universities and Science is himself a logical man, but clearly when one admits that the fear of debt, however illogical, is a factor, we must have the time to inquire further into such policies.

Kevin Brennan: Is the point that my hon. Friend is making about the vagueness of some of the detail of the proposal not absolutely vital to the issue of having only five hours for the debate tomorrow? A debate in this House should not simply consist of the Government putting forward their proposals and ramming the measure through on a majority; it should consist of sufficient time for opposition and other Members to scrutinise and ask questions of the Government. That simply will not be able to happen tomorrow.

Paul Farrelly: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Evidence shows—I hope to come on to some of the evidence—that in constructing any higher education package, it is important that the whole is taken together. The reality of politics means that if the fee levels are set in a five-hour debate tomorrow, those people who are concerned about student support and other elements of the package that may or may not count as deterrents will lose their leverage in future negotiations. My hon. Friend is absolutely correct.

Mrs Moon: One of the problems with a five-hour limit is that the legislation is complex and many young people may arrive here tomorrow wishing to clarify the terms and conditions under which their future education will depend. They will need to spend time talking to their Members of Parliament, but they will not have time to do so in that five hours. In particular, I know that young people have been unable to access their Liberal Democrat MPs because of notices on their office doors that say the office is closed.

Mr Speaker: Order. First, that intervention was too long and, secondly, the issue is not how much time visitors to the House have to raise matters with Members who might or might not be taking part in a debate; the issue is the allocation of time for Members of Parliament to debate the issues.

Paul Farrelly: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. What young people will take away from just five hours of debate tomorrow is the fact that going for a degree will cost them much more. They will not have any details on how they will be supported. Such information would allow them to form a considered view. Some of the evidence that I fear the House will not have time to consider tomorrow shows that, where variable fees have been introduced overseas, there is a deterrent effect. That is clear from the Ivy League in the United States. Again we will simply run out of time tomorrow to give proper consideration to the US experience.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the deterrent effect is particularly keenly felt by students who will be the first in their families to go to university? That is the case for many students in my constituency who are, frankly, put off by the terrifying prospect of £30,000 or £40,000 of debt.

Paul Farrelly: I was the first in my family ever to go to university. It is certainly a challenge for the Government to ensure that students who do not come from a background where higher education is the norm are not put off. I fear that that will be the starting point if we are allowed to debate the matter for only five hours tomorrow.

Robert Flello: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Paul Farrelly: I will certainly give way to my hon. Friend and next-door neighbour.

Robert Flello: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and next-door neighbour. My constituency covers a third of Stoke-on-Trent, a very challenged area, where one of the best ways forward for young people is to go either to the fine university of Keele or to the fine university of Stafford. How will they be able to do so if we do not have the time tomorrow to debate the full intricacies of the issues, so that they can be reassured?

Paul Farrelly: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the situation in north Staffordshire, where we live, which is a situation that will be replicated across the country. The danger is that we will not have the time to debate, area by area, the risk to the entirety of an institution that will follow—or may follow—the teaching cuts and the fees combined.

Julie Hilling: Does my hon. Friend agree that people studying courses such as youth and community work will be disadvantaged? It is mainly poorer and older people who go into the profession, and they are people who spend their lives in the service of young people and their communities, but who will never earn the salaries—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is very much focusing on the substance of the issue, but we must get back to the allocation of time.

Paul Farrelly: I am acutely aware, as my hon. Friend is, that the Government are saying on the one hand that they want the best and brightest to go into teaching, for example, yet on the other hand they are making it more difficult, and that we will not have enough time tomorrow to debate all those intricacies or how the Government plan to tackle the issue.

John Robertson: People outside this place will be affected by what will happen and what will be discussed tomorrow, but how much time from those five hours does my hon. Friend think will be devoted to the problems in the devolved areas?

Paul Farrelly: Mr Speaker has graciously allowed a wide-ranging debate tomorrow, but inevitably—this is at the Speaker’s discretion—there will be limits. It will be difficult for Members, if they are called, to expand fully on the arguments in the time available. The

international evidence is vital. Good, sound policy should be based on evidence. Frankly, we need the time, as an intelligent House, to debate it.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern and that of million+, the think-tank, that we do not have sufficient time to deliberate on the impact of some of the Government's proposals on women's participation in university? Some of the assumptions are very false. Women will take longer to pay back the fees and will therefore end up paying more in the long run.

Paul Farrelly: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend; the effect on women is also something that the House should be given time to consider. Million+ is a great institution that has put forward many practical alternatives. It disputes some of the Government's assertions about who will bear the greatest burden, which is something that we have now heard the Institute for Fiscal Studies doing too. We will simply not have time in five hours to get to what is fact and what is fiction in the Government's position.

The market system is most fully developed in the United States, and we should be given time to look at the effects there.

Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) (Con): Obviously this debate is focused on the opportunity to debate the subject tomorrow, but on Monday the Opposition had their eighth allotted Opposition day debate. They chose to discuss not tuition fees but local government funding. Perhaps when they are complaining about a lack of time, they could remind the House that when they had the opportunity on Monday, they did not take it.

Paul Farrelly: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been for the past few days, but we have just had an Opposition day debate on that very subject.

If we had the time, one of the things that we should look at is the experience in the US. Some 34% of young white people in the United States earn an honours degree, compared with only 19% of African-Americans and 10% of Hispanics. Again, we will not have time to look at the international experience. In Canada, when fees for medical schools went up from roughly the same level as ours are now—the equivalent of £3,000 in their currency—to \$15,000, which is much the same as £9,000, participation among children from lower income backgrounds dropped by a third. We simply will not have the time—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hooray!”] We will not have the time to rehearse all that evidence.

Robert Ffello: My hon. Friend is making some extremely important points about having the time—[*Laughter.*] He is talking about having the time tomorrow to debate these important issues, yet all that we can hear from across the Chamber is hysterics. Is it really that funny to prevent young people from going to university because of these fee increases, and not having time to discuss it?

Paul Farrelly: Most Members of the House are very well behaved and listen politely when other Members are on their feet. Mr Speaker, I will not try your patience by going through every fee level, which we will

not have time to debate, in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, institution by institution and region by region. The fact is, however, that if the motion goes through tomorrow, we will have the highest levels of fees across the board outside the United States. The implication of that—

Mr Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is in danger of catching North Durham disease. The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was fond of saying what he would not talk about before proceeding to talk about it, and I hope that the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) is not going to follow suit.

Paul Farrelly: I apologise if I have given that impression, Mr Speaker. I take it that North Durham disease is a mining affliction; I come from a mining area myself.

Mr Tom Harris: It has been announced tonight that the latest YouGov poll puts the Liberal Democrats on only 8%. Would it not be to their benefit to have more time to debate these matters tomorrow, in order for them to persuade the country that they have actually stuck to their principles? Or does my hon. Friend believe that, if they were given more time, that 8% might look quite optimistic in a couple of weeks time?

Paul Farrelly: I hope that it will not take 5% of five hours to persuade the Liberal Democrats to join us in asking for more time tomorrow.

The evidence from the UK needs to be properly considered as well, including the evidence on price sensitivity. And the Government have not explained the evidential base on which their policy is based. We need time to fathom that.

Helen Goodman: I would not wish to make a political point, but does my hon. Friend agree that the Leader of the House might have been influenced by the fact that the statistics for applications from UK-domiciled students for undergraduate courses at the colleges of Oxford university show that 10 times as many come from Hampshire as come from County Durham?

Paul Farrelly: My hon. Friend has put her point firmly on the record, and I hope she will get the opportunity to expand on it if she is called to speak later in the debate.

There are a great many documents from institutions in the UK that have been looking at the effect of fees on participation, and we really need the opportunity to debate them. One such document, an interim impact assessment on higher education funding, shows that, according to the evidence on price sensitivity, a £1,000 increase in fees reduces participation by about 4.4 percentage points, yet here we are, facing a £6,000 rise, which would imply a reduction in participation by a quarter. We need time to look at all that evidence, which the Government have not been forthcoming in producing to back up their plans.

The Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) has placed great emphasis on social mobility. He has even stated that these proposals will increase social mobility, and we need time to be able to cross-examine that view and to see the evidence for it.

[Paul Farrelly]

We also need time to give an airing to all the views of the young people that have come to us from across the country, e-mail by e-mail. We need more than five hours to do that.

Catherine McKinnell: On social mobility, another issue that I am sure we will not have time to debate properly tomorrow is the removal of the education maintenance allowance. That, as well as the issue of tuition fees, is relevant to social mobility and the two issues will have a cumulative effect, preventing people from accessing universities or even from getting into a position to think about going to university in the first place.

Paul Farrelly: My hon. Friend will have heard me mention the Secretary of State for Education—a lovely man, although he has some energetic views. What we really need is time to see whether the Government are engaging in joined-up policy. How does the abolition of the EMA affect participation and how will it increase mobility? The same applies to the abolition of the Aimhigher programme. We simply have not had the time and I do not think we will have the time in five hours to debate that.

Mr David: As already noted, the statutory instrument applies only to England, but a number of Welsh colleagues have been in active dialogue with our friends in the Welsh Assembly. A different regime, of course, will be implemented there. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be good for debate if we had ample time to bring forward the Welsh experience so that we could compare it with what is going to happen in England?

Paul Farrelly: Indeed. I think that the Leader of the House should find time—separate time—to look at Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Barbara Keeley: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; he is being generous with his time. As for understanding how the abolition of the EMA will affect different groups, I hope we will get enough time to discuss the impact on young carers. I recently spoke to someone who worked in a young carers' project in Salford who told me that all but one of the young carers, aged 16 to 18, were on the EMA. She was very worried that they would lose out on the end of their education. Maintaining an education alongside a big caring work load is a very difficult thing. Let us hope that we will have enough time to discuss that issue.

Paul Farrelly: Indeed. People who have to take a break from work—women raising a family, for example—will lose out in terms of their ability to repay because they become carers. Again, we need more time to look at the impact of the changes on such people.

Albert Owen: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you help me? Have you had any indication from the Leader of the House whether he intends to wind up the debate on behalf of the Government? He has been sitting there motionless throughout the evening and has not taken the opportunity to explain why he has imposed the 5.30 pm deadline and why he has not answered the

question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) about the increase from three to five hours.

Mr Speaker: I have received no such indication. I did not invite it and it has not been proffered. That is the situation. I think it is fair to say that the hon. Gentleman's point is not a point of order but a point of inquiry, which is not quite the same thing.

Paul Farrelly: Just to conclude my response to the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), we need that vital time to assess the implications for all those people in those situations.

Sheila Gilmore: My hon. Friend appeared to say that separate and additional time would be required to deal with Wales and Scotland. I ask him to consider the fact that once the motion has been passed, if it is passed tomorrow, decisions will have been taken that will have impacted on those areas and that this is a major change from what went before. We therefore need time within the debate before a decision is made on the level of fees.

Paul Farrelly: Unfortunately, I am not responsible for scheduling the business of the House, but I think that the Leader of the House should be as generous as possible in allocating time to debate these issues. For instance, we need time to examine the views of young people. Let us think of the Youth Parliament—an institution that we have encouraged. We have invited it here to debate and its members have sent e-mails to Members of Parliament. We need time to debate the views of Ahmed Siddiqui, a 16-year-old who asked us not to give up on helping his generation to become everything they can be.

Steve McCabe: Is my hon. Friend rapidly coming to the same conclusion as I am—that, having heard from only four speakers in this rather short debate so far this evening, we have nevertheless heard a large number of issues raised and concerns expressed, so it is now time for the Leader of the House to realise that he should do justice to this debate, which requires not five hours but two days?

Paul Farrelly: You will be glad to hear, Mr Speaker, that I plan to conclude very shortly, to give more Members—including, I hope, Government Members—an opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend mentioned that the Youth Parliament came here to debate the very same issue. Would it not be ironic if we spent less time in the House debating the subject than the Youth Parliament, because of the inadequacy of the motion?

Paul Farrelly: It would be not only ironic, but tragic and a dereliction of the House's duty—and a bad example to the UK Youth Parliament.

As my hon. Friend encourages me to talk more about the UK Youth Parliament, I should say that we need time to consider the views of Sam Hatzigeorgiou, a 16-year-old, who says:

"I am seriously considering giving up any hope of university education. Please think about that before you vote."

Why can we not have time to consider what Chloe Shaw, who is just 15 years old, says? She says:

"I will be 18 when the policy comes into action. I am so worried about the rise in tuition fees. I am only going to be applying for the cheapest universities. Shouldn't I be making the most of my abilities, rather than going for the cheaper options?"

Mr George Howarth: Will my hon. Friend add to his list the views of the students of All Saints school in my constituency? A couple of weeks ago, they told me that they see themselves facing a triple whammy: the loss, for many of them, of the EMA; the scrapping of Aimhigher; and the removal of the opportunity to go into higher education.

Paul Farrelly: My right hon. Friend's point is well made. Traditional industrial areas, such as his and mine, are in need of all those schemes to encourage people and give them a fair chance to go to university. We need time to discuss that.

We need time to discuss other matters of which young people may not be fully aware. At the moment, they are just aware that it will cost them more to go to university, but perhaps they are not aware that some universities might not exist in future because they are threatened by teaching cuts. Without being parochial, I should like to discuss my university, Keele, where there will be an estimated 46% cut in the teaching grant, from £29 million to £13.5 million.

Robert Ffello: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his generosity with his time—

Mr Bone: We're over here.

Robert Ffello: My apologies. It is good to see the hon. Gentleman in his place; he has been a little bit on and off over the past few hours. *[Interruption.]* I hope he is saving himself for my speech later as well.

My point, of course, relates to the motion before us this evening. Would my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) care to comment on the fact that there are a huge number of organisations on which the House relies for information, support and knowledge that wish their views to be represented through their Members of Parliament, but that under the motion we will not have time to discuss properly the issues that they have raised with us?

Paul Farrelly: My hon. Friend is correct. There are wider issues involved in the contribution that higher education makes to local economies. For instance, in our area, Staffordshire university may face cuts across the board that will damage the great job it does in regeneration and teaching new ceramics skills and design.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend think that the motion will give the House sufficient time to discuss all the implications of the fact that the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) has announced tonight that he will not vote for the tuition fee increases?

Paul Farrelly: I fear that there will not be time to discuss everything that has been said on the issue, or even to fathom whether Members have the courage to turn up in the Chamber and abstain in person, rather than simply stay away.

Helen Goodman: Another consideration—

Mr Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Lady to face the Chair.

Helen Goodman: Another consideration is the impact on universities of excluding able young people who simply cannot afford to go to the best universities. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is not just bad for the young people but bad for the universities? Will there be time for us to discuss it?

Paul Farrelly: I do agree, and I have already said that we will not have time to discuss the ins and outs and the evidence base of the national scholarship fund. We are told that 18,000 to 20,000 students might be helped, but we have not been told where those figures come from.

Thomas Docherty: I do not know whether Members have had a chance to read the House of Commons Information Office's excellent publication on statutory instruments, but I had a chance to pick up a copy yesterday. We will be discussing a statutory instrument tomorrow. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that in the House of Lords, determination of the time to be allocated to debate on statutory instruments is based on the number of speakers who have indicated that they wish to take part. Does my hon. Friend agree that, given that we will not have enough time tomorrow, the Procedure Committee of the House of Commons should consider again whether the system works for the purpose for which it is intended?

Paul Farrelly rose—

The Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household (Mr Alistair Carmichael) claimed to move the closure (*Standing Order No. 36*).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 300, Noes 201.

Division No. 148]

[11.1 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Blackwood, Nicola
Afriyie, Adam	Blunt, Mr Crispin
Aldous, Peter	Boles, Nick
Alexander, rh Danny	Bone, Mr Peter
Amess, Mr David	Bottomley, Peter
Andrew, Stuart	Brady, Mr Graham
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bray, Angie
Bagshawe, Ms Louise	Brazier, Mr Julian
Baker, Norman	Brine, Mr Steve
Baker, Steve	Brokenshire, James
Baldry, Tony	Brooke, Annette
Barclay, Stephen	Browne, Mr Jeremy
Barwell, Gavin	Bruce, Fiona
Bebb, Guto	Bruce, rh Malcolm
Beith, rh Sir Alan	Buckland, Mr Robert
Beresford, Sir Paul	Burley, Mr Aidan
Berry, Jake	Burns, Conor
Bingham, Andrew	Burns, Mr Simon
Birtwistle, Gordon	Burstow, Paul

Burt, Alistair
 Byles, Dan
 Cable, rh Vince
 Carmichael, Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cash, Mr William
 Chishti, Rehman
 Clappison, Mr James
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crockart, Mike
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davey, Mr Edward
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Glyn
 de Bois, Nick
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
 Dorries, Nadine
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duncan, rh Mr Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Jonathan
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, Michael
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Field, Mr Mark
 Foster, Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freer, Mike
 Fullbrook, Lorraine
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Mr Roger
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilbert, Stephen
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Halfon, Robert

Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hancock, Mr Mike
 Hands, Greg
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Mr Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendry, Charles
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Hunter, Mark
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kelly, Chris
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Mr Greg
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Latham, Pauline
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leech, Mr John
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Lumley, Karen
 Macleod, Mary
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen

McVey, Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Miller, Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, Anne
 Moore, rh Michael
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Offord, Mr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, Dr John
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Robertson, Hugh
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Miss Chloe

Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian
 Swayne, Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Teather, Sarah
 Thurso, John
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Uppal, Paul
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Ward, Mr David
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Williamson, Gavin
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Duddridge and
Stephen Crabb

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, Heidi
 Anderson, Mr David
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bain, Mr William
 Balls, rh Ed

Banks, Gordon
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Mr Joe
 Berger, Luciana

Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Brown, Mr Russell
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Byrne, rh Mr Liam
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Chapman, Mrs Jenny
 Clark, Katy
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Rosie
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Cunningham, Tony
 Curran, Margaret
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Mr Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dobbin, Jim
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodman, Helen
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Mr Tom
 Healey, rh John
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Heyes, David
 Hillier, Meg
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hoey, Kate
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Illsley, Mr Eric
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 James, Mrs Siân C.
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Jowell, rh Tessa
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Ian
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCabe, Steve
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McKechin, Ann
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mearns, Ian
 Michael, rh Alun
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Munn, Meg
 Murphy, rh Mr Jim
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osborne, Sandra
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Sarwar, Anas
 Seabeck, Alison
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Owen
 Soulsby, Sir Peter
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walley, Joan
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Wicks, rh Malcolm
 Williams, Hywel
 Williamson, Chris
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
 Phil Wilson and
 Mark Hendrick

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question put accordingly.

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 202.

Division No. 149]

[11.18 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Alexander, rh Danny
 Amess, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bagshawe, Ms Louise
 Baker, Norman
 Baker, Steve
 Baldry, Tony
 Barclay, Stephen
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Mr Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Peter
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Bray, Angie
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brine, Mr Steve
 Brokenshire, James
 Brooke, Annette
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, Fiona
 Bruce, rh Malcolm
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burley, Mr Aidan
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, Mr Simon
 Burstow, Paul

Burt, Alistair
 Byles, Dan
 Cable, rh Vince
 Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
 Carmichael, Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cash, Mr William
 Chishti, Rehman
 Clappison, Mr James
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, Stephen
 Crockart, Mike
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davey, Mr Edward
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Glyn
 de Bois, Nick
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
 Dorries, Nadine
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Mr Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham

Evans, Jonathan
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, Michael
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Field, Mr Mark
 Foster, Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fullbrook, Lorraine
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Mr Roger
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilbert, Stephen
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Halfon, Robert
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hancock, Mr Mike
 Hands, Greg
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Mr Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendry, Charles
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Simon
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kelly, Chris
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Mr Greg
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Latham, Pauline
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leech, Mr John
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Lumley, Karen
 Macleod, Mary
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Miller, Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, Anne
 Moore, rh Michael
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Offord, Mr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric

Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, Dr John
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reevell, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Robertson, Hugh
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian

Swayne, Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Teather, Sarah
 Thurso, John
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Uppal, Paul
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Ward, Mr David
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Williamson, Gavin
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Shailesh Vara and
Mark Hunter

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, Heidi
 Anderson, Mr David
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bain, Mr William
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Mr Joe
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Brown, Mr Russell
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy

Byrne, rh Mr Liam
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Chapman, Mrs Jenny
 Clark, Katy
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Rosie
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Cunningham, Tony
 Curran, Margaret
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Mr Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dobbin, Jim
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.

Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodman, Helen
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Mr Tom
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Heyes, David
 Hillier, Meg
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Illsley, Mr Eric
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 James, Mrs Siân C.
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Jowell, rh Tessa
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Ian
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCabe, Steve
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, John

McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McKechin, Ann
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mearns, Ian
 Michael, rh Alun
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mulholland, Greg
 Munn, Meg
 Murphy, rh Mr Jim
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osborne, Sandra
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Sarwar, Anas
 Seabeck, Alison
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Owen
 Soulsby, Sir Peter
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walley, Joan
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan

Wicks, rh Malcolm
 Williams, Hywel
 Williamson, Chris
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete

Woodcock, John
 Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
 Wright, David
Tellers for the Noes:
Phil Wilson and
Mr David Hamilton

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 9 December, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Vince Cable relating to Higher Education Higher Amount and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), on the Motion in the name of Secretary Vince Cable on the draft Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations not later than five hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first motion, or at 5.30 pm, whichever is the earlier; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

Thomas Docherty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am very disappointed that we were cut off in our prime this evening, but tomorrow we have important business questions and I very much appreciate that the Leader of the House is a star draw. Will you ensure that important issues are not curtailed tomorrow lunchtime thanks to the actions of the Government deputy Chief Whip?

Mr Speaker: The Chair always seeks to ensure that there is a good opportunity at business questions for right hon. and hon. Members to raise issues of concern to them. I know the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to say now for how long business questions will run. That would be wholly unreasonable of him, and he is not an unreasonable man, but I note what he says, I bear it in mind and I will make what I hope is a reasonable judgment in the circumstances at the time.

Mr George Howarth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the House, during the course of the debate, admonished my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) for not tabling an amendment to the order, but I should just like to quote from “Erskine May”, page 675, on the section that deals with delegated legislation. It states:

“Though they may be moved as independent motions, motions which propose to treat delegated legislation, or other matters subject to proceedings in pursuance of an Act of Parliament, in a manner which would be outside the provisions of the parent statute, such as motions to refer instruments to select committees, or motions not to approve instruments or to approve them upon conditions, may not be moved in the House...as amendments to questions which arise in the normal way out of proceedings”—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman—[*Interruption.*] Order. No, no. I am extremely grateful. He has had his say, and I am very grateful to him, but my concern is that he is confusing the statutory instrument for consideration tomorrow with the motion that we have been debating tonight. So, on the assumption that I am correct, and I know that the right hon. Gentleman would not dispute that I am, there is nothing further upon which I need to adjudicate—

Mr Howarth *rose*—

Mr Speaker: And that therefore is the end of his point of order.

Mr Howarth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I assume it is a different point of order.

Mr Howarth: Well, it is. I am very grateful, Mr Speaker, and of course I would not in any circumstances challenge any judgment that you made in this House. However, the quotation refers to proceedings, not necessarily to the instrument itself. If I am correct in that assumption, it may well be that the Leader of the House, who is an honourable man and would never knowingly mislead the House, may have been guilty of terminological inexactitude.

Mr Speaker: I think I am right in saying that the reference is to proceedings on an order, and if that be correct I stand by the proposition that I have just put to the House, which is that there is nothing further upon which I need to rule. But the right hon. Gentleman, although he has been here two decades or more, is, like we all are, on a learning curve, and, if in pursuit of those procedural matters he wishes to improve his knowledge, he can always consult the Clerks at the Table. He might find that a profitable exercise.

Steve McCabe: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. What advice would you give me when I try to deal tomorrow with constituents who will want to know why I am not able to represent their views in the debate on tuition fees because of the disgraceful timetable, and why it was not possible, when 30 Labour Members sought to catch your eye tonight, for us to continue to query the business motion? When my constituents ask me if that smacks of a coalition dictatorship, what advice should I give them?

Mr Speaker: We must not continue the debate that has just been had. I would say that the hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member, and the notion that he needs advice from me about communication with his constituents is as flattering to me as it is insulting to him.

Mr Tom Harris: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that you take very seriously the reputation of this House and how we are perceived on television. Tonight, the many hundreds, or probably dozens, of people watching these events will be appalled by the Government's attempts to curtail free speech. Would it be in order, when you are using your judgment to draw up the speakers' list for tomorrow, to give precedence to Labour Members who voted in favour of free speech tonight and to put Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs, who have voted against free speech, further down the speaking order? That might not be within the rules of the House, but it would certainly be just.

Mr Speaker: That was an extraordinarily discursive attempted point of order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to anticipate the selection decisions of the Chair. He has made his point.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I sat assiduously through the earlier debate from 7 pm, hoping to raise issues on behalf of my constituents and the all-party parliamentary university group, but sadly I was prevented from doing so by the closure motion. I urge you to do as you usually do and seek to include as many Members as possible in tomorrow's debate.

Mr Speaker: I shall do what I can in the circumstances. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her application, on which I will not adjudicate.

Robert Ffello: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Like my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods), I was in the Chamber for the entirety of tonight's debate. Unfortunately, I was unable to catch your eye before the ruthless move from those on the Government Benches to curtail tonight's business. Will you advise me, as a still relatively new Member of the House, on the procedural move whereby the closure motion was put by a Liberal Democrat member of the Government, who had not been in attendance for the debate? Is it normal that somebody can come in almost at the end of the debate and move a closure motion?

Mr Speaker: Anyone in the House of Commons can move a closure motion.

Kerry McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that 49 Labour Members have applied to speak in tomorrow's debate and that the number for Government Members is between 20 and 30. It will obviously be very difficult for everyone to get in. Will you consider over night whether there ought to be a limit on Front-Bench contributions? We obviously want to hear about the proposals from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills or whomever he delegates to do his work for him, but it is important that Back Benchers get a chance too.

Mr Speaker: I cannot adjudicate on that matter now, nor give any advance indication to the hon. Lady on how the debate will run. I say only that I am sure that Members will want to be courteous to each other. We are all concerned that right hon. and hon. Members from the Back Benches should have a chance to air their views. That is right and proper, but I shall be here and I attach great importance to these debates in the interests of all Members.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. What was novel about the motion that we have just passed was not that it timetabled business—of course, that does happen—but that it timetabled business to come to an end half an hour before the moment of interruption. I cannot remember another occasion on which that has happened, but hon. Members might tell me that I am wrong. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that if the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Mr Randall) wants to say something further to my point of order, he will get to his feet in a minute. Will you advise me, Mr Speaker, on the best way to take this matter forward? Is it to write to the Procedure Committee? *[Interruption.]* I am not wasting time; it is the Government who are wasting time, because they said that they wanted to have that half an hour for voting. Voting

should take place after the moment of interruption, and it always has. They have taken half an hour off tomorrow's debate, and that is a serious matter.

Mr Speaker: What I say to the hon. Gentleman is twofold. First, he should not seek to continue the debate. Secondly, he rather anticipated my thoughts. If he feels strongly about this matter, a comprehensive memorandum from him to the Procedure Committee would be a very interesting memorandum to study. It would probably take him some little while to attend to it and I feel sure that that is just what he will want to do.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you can give me some direction as a new Member of the House. Many coach loads of students from Edinburgh are heading south as we speak, not only to attend marches tomorrow but to attend the debate in the House. The inclement weather in Scotland and the north of England is very much unprecedented, and I wonder whether it is in your gift, given that the Government have just curtailed tomorrow's debate, to delay proceedings at any point if people are stuck and unable to take part.

Mr Speaker: There is no such power for the Chair. The timing of tomorrow's business is always in the hands of the House. It is a matter for the House, not for the Chair.

If there are no further points of order—I am grateful to Members for those that they have put—we come to motion 7.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ANIMALS

That the draft Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010, which were laid before this House on 8 November, be approved.—(*Bill Wiggin.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 15 December (Standing Order No. 41A).

PLANNING: NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENTS

Ordered,

That, for the purposes of the revised draft National Policy Statements on energy laid before the House on 18 October, the designated date in Standing Order No. 152H(5) (Planning: National Policy Statements) shall be the fourteenth day before the expiry of the relevant period defined under section 9(6) of the Planning Act 2008.—(*Bill Wiggin.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2010 (S.I., 2010, No. 2835) and the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Amendment Order 2010 (S.I., 2010, No. 2836), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin.*)

PETITION

Further and Higher Education Funding

11.41 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I am presenting a timely petition to the House tonight. It was gathered by school students across Wirral, who recently demonstrated peacefully outside Wallasey Conservative headquarters and marched to the town hall to register their strong objection to the Government's proposals on the educational maintenance allowance and tuition fees. It is signed by 875 pupils, and I strongly agree with it.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Sarah Smith and students from schools across Wirral,

Sheweth, that the Petitioners believe that the Government's abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the proposals to lift the cap on University fees will prevent students from poorer backgrounds having full and fair access to education.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House rejects any proposals to remove the cap on University tuition fees and urges the Government to enhance equality of opportunity and equal access to education instead of cutting off support for students and creating some of the most expensive tuition fees in the World.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

[P000869]

Mental Health Services (Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Bill Wiggin.)

11.43 pm

Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak about acute mental health service provision in Lancashire. Since August it has become clear that the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust has a clear strategy of closing adult in-patient care units for people with serious mental health conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Initially, the plan was to be realised and carried out in secret, without the knowledge or consent of the democratically elected governors of the trust. However, once the staff at the Avondale unit of the Royal Preston hospital became aware of the fact that patients were being refused admission or sent for care at alternative facilities, they leaked the information to the local newspaper, the *Lancashire Evening Post*. Very quickly, campaigners and myself decided to take on the trust—if we can call it a “trust”—and fight the case. The people of Lancashire are enraged about closures across the county, such as that of the Pharos unit in Fleetwood earlier this year, and now the planned closure of the Avondale unit before the new year.

In order to fight the closures, the campaign organisation SAFE—Save Avondale For Everyone—was set up and is led by a courageous and determined set of activists: Andy Hanson, Alison Ball, Fiona Jones, Nadia Southworth, Steve Weyer and Lisa Daley. Along with many others, they have taken on the might of the autocratic managers with six-figure salaries who have no respect whatever for the democratically elected governors of the trust, or the people of Lancashire whom they are employed to serve.

Preston needs the Avondale unit, which has served and saved many lives over the decades: it has saved people from suicide and serious mental illness. Everyone in Preston knows somebody or has a relative who has needed treatment at the unit. As the coalition cuts begin to bite more people will become unemployed, which will cause more mental illness. Preston is a military town, with Army and Territorial Army barracks. Many armed forces personnel will return to Preston from conflict zones around the world with different degrees of mental illness. Returning forces will need that facility. Preston also has many students, many of whom suffer from mental illness because of the stresses and strains of exams—and, of course, student debt, which is topical at the moment. I understand that the Minister will be absent tomorrow; he will be with the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) in Torbay because he does not wish to vote for the coalition’s legislation—but that is by the way.

The closures mean that extremely vulnerable patients with mental illness from Preston will be forced to travel to Blackpool, Chorley or Ormskirk for treatment and care, despite the Government’s promise to ring-fence spending on the NHS. That promise is not worth the paper it is written on, because the trust is not only cutting spending this year, but will cut spending across Lancashire by £33 million next year.

The Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust has this mission statement:

“To improve the lives of the people we serve and ensure that mental health matters across the whole community” and this strategic aim:

“To deliver high-quality, person-centred, compassionate services for mental health”.

It claims to have the following values:

“Teamwork...Compassion...Excellence...Accountability...Respect...Integrity”.

Let us check the evidence on that. What do people want in Preston? We want local integrated in-patient and community care services; choice in accessing local services, and for that choice to be respected; and the continuation of local in-patient services in the city of Preston, which is the capital of Lancashire and its administrative centre. We have overwhelming local support: I have a petition with thousands of signatures that I will present to the Minister following the debate. The petition is very clear. Everybody in Preston and the surrounding areas wants the Avondale unit to be saved.

We accuse the funding bodies, the primary care trusts and the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust of driving through hidden changes that will have profoundly detrimental psychological, economic and social effects on the people of Preston. There will be many other downsides. For example, the *Lancashire Evening Post* recently reported on the anger at the travel ordeal that patients will face in future. On 14 July it said:

“Mental health patients may have to travel from Preston to Chorley following the closure of...facilities in the city”.

The chairman of the Lancashire mental health and social care partnership board believes that the consultation process was inadequate. He said:

“It is unclear how the priorities identified at these events translate into a one option consultation—surely this means that there is no choice.”

Let me give a few examples of what patients will be faced with in future. If someone travels from Preston to Blackpool to get treatment, the cost implications for one adult visiting five days out of seven is £29 a day, with a minimum travel time of three hours a day. The average length of stay is 34 days, so the total cost would be around £145. For someone being treated in Ormskirk, the travel cost is £45 a day and minimum travel time is five to six hours. Again, if an average length of stay is 34 days, the total cost would be £225.

The authority clearly wants to adopt a strategy of having some provision at home. The claim is that

“when people are able to stay in their home environment they maintain contact with their family and friends, have less risk of losing their jobs, and can continue living their normal lives.”

That is a quotation from Steve Ward, the medical director of NHS Central Lancashire trust. The chief executive of the trust said:

“We know that community services such as crisis resolution, home treatment and assertive outreach teams enable more people to be treated safely and successfully in their own home or in the community, which is where they tell us they prefer to be treated”.

That is code for cuts, and it is finance-driven, not care-driven.

When the Care Quality Commission looked at the provision of services in its community survey, only 5.5 out of 10 was scored on the question of whether

“those that had used the crisis number in the last 12 months...believe...they received the help they needed, the last time that they called this number.”

On trust performance review, a staggering 66% of patients have had to have a formal review of their care within 12 months, which clearly shows that the current system of providing care in the home is inadequate.

On the subject of suicides in Lancashire, the actual number of suicides in the Preston area in January to March this year was 12, and for April to June it was nine. The total number of suicides for people in contact with Lancashire Care NHS trust mental health services over the last two years is 80. The removal of local patient beds in Preston will increase the already unacceptably high number of suicides. All of these suicides were in the community. One headline reads “Suicidal patient told ‘no beds at Avondale’”.

There has been no consultation on the total closure of Avondale, and no working in partnership or public involvement. As I said earlier, the governors of the trust have been treated with contempt. There has been complete disregard of and disrespect for the wishes of the people of Preston, as the petition, which has thousands of signatories, makes clear. There has been a total lack of openness and transparency. Plans are only now being talked about in any detail, and are being presented as a fait accompli—by diktat, not by discussion with the governors or the people of Preston.

Preston community mental health services will be unable to manage crisis without local beds; they are struggling now. In order to close Avondale, they have had to refuse patients or move them elsewhere, in many cases to private units, which is privatisation by the back door. Patients in Preston face an unclear and constantly changing service plan. The governors have no power over the executive, which has become unaccountable and unrepresentative in its decision making.

The question is not whether Preston can manage without Avondale, but whether it should have to do so. The answer is clearly no. People manage to live through most disasters, but should we allow a publicly funded organisation to develop into a disaster for some of the most vulnerable people in Preston’s population? The evidence of the impending disaster is clear. In the review in 2006, Whyndyke Farm, Ribbleton hospital and Burnley were seen as sites that could have either new facilities or extensions to existing facilities. The plan was to close smaller units. No evidence exists that remote, large hospitals improve mental health care, but there is a lot of evidence that they do not. The deal on new facilities has now been reneged on. There is planning permission for Whyndyke Farm near Blackpool, but Ribbleton hospital will not receive an extension and Burnley will probably never get off the ground. Indeed, I would be very surprised if the extension at Whyndyke Farm sees the light of day. Questions remain over the capacity of local community health services to manage crisis without local in-patient beds in the long term.

A city the size of Preston needs its own in-patient beds and deserves to be consulted about what kind of care its citizens can expect to receive. A city the size of Preston should not be treated as if it were an afterthought, and it should not be forced to fit in with a corporate, financially-driven view of what Lancashire should look like. Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust does not care, and cannot be trusted.

As part of the campaign, there have been public meetings, demonstrations and a whopping petition that I shall serve the Government with at the end of the

debate. I call upon the Minister and the Secretary of State to approach Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust and tell it that this plan does not serve the interests of the people of Lancashire or their mental well-being. The proposal is vandalism, and flies in the face of the Government’s promises to protect the NHS. It will result in more suicides and more vulnerable people coming to harm from others, as well as from themselves.

The former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher claimed that the NHS was safe in Conservative hands. Well, we all know what happened. If this Government repeat her mistakes, they will pay for it with the lives of vulnerable people in Preston and across the country. Ultimately, they will pay for such actions by being turfed out of office again for those mistakes.

11.56 pm

Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Preston (Mark Hendrick) for allowing me to participate in this debate. The Avondale clinic is, of course, in my constituency. When the issue was raised by a constituent, I did my best to get to the bottom of the process before, first, forming a position and, secondly, tackling the Government and the NHS trust with some questions and requests.

I surveyed all the GPs in the north and south of Preston and in Chorley. I spoke to the professionals and visited the alternative in-patient centre in Chorley. I visited the Avondale site and spoke to many constituents to assess the key issues. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of sound concerns about the mental health trust, but I am afraid he also raised a number of partisan points. That is extraordinary—the evidence is not about that—given that much of the consultation on mental health reconfiguration started in 2006.

What I found from the surveys of GPs was absolutely clear. Although they were happy with the performance of the community mental health teams and the out-patient service that people were getting, and they were happy with settled and stable treatment in the community—many of them were very impressed by it—they were deeply worried by what was available for patients in crisis and for constituents who needed urgent referral. They found that, for people using the helpline or in serious mental difficulties, the service just was not there. There was a real gulf between what the mental health trust thought it was delivering and the experience of GPs and my constituents of what was delivered.

I have some real concerns that the closure plan trailed for Avondale unit is far too premature. At the very least, it does not take into account some of the changes to the primary care trusts and commissioning that might happen in the next few months or by next year, when the PCTs are abolished and GPs might want to use Preston capacity rather than that in Chorley. The mental health trust has not done anything like enough to answer constituents’ questions about what will be put in Avondale’s place, and how people will travel to it. The trust has talked about a shuttle but, frankly, that is not good enough.

Having visited both Chorley and Avondale, I can say that neither of them is fit for purpose. Chorley is not a great alternative to Avondale. It has had a new lick of paint, but there is nothing significantly better that would

[Mr Ben Wallace]

drive me to say, “Okay, on this occasion, the professionals are right. The facilities are better.” They are not; they are not outstanding. There is very little room for people to go out and walk and come to terms with some of the illnesses that they are suffering. That needs a lot more work.

In a submission to the latest consultation, I asked the trust to delay the proposal and to go back, fill that gap and ensure a seamless service for urgent referral, community care and in-patient care. Until it does that, the proposal should not be rushed through. It is very important that we ensure that the NHS reforms that the coalition Government are putting into place come to fruition and, at the same time, that patients are given the out-patient crisis support and referrals that the GPs are demanding. We also need to address GPs’ concerns. Once that is done, we will all be in a position to make a proper assessment of what is right.

However, we should not forget that Preston is a major city in Lancashire and the north-west, as the hon. Gentleman said, with a large hospital in my constituency. It would be wrong just to abandon in-patient capacity in that part of Lancashire without really thinking through the strategic impact on in-patient facilities throughout the county, and perhaps even in neighbouring counties. There are lots of black holes in Lancashire, so we must not let that happen. Let us proceed on the basis of evidence. We are not talking about a cuts-driven Government agenda. The trust has got a lot of things wrong, and it is the trust that must address them. That is what I am pressing for, and it is also why the closure of Avondale must not be proceeded with until those things at the very least have been sorted. I would like us to reconsider where the best place is in Lancashire for in-patient care.

12 midnight

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Paul Burstow): I congratulate the hon. Member for Preston (Mark Hendrick) on securing this debate. On the many occasions during my 13 years in the House that I have secured these Adjournment debates, I have always taken the view that one should see them as an opportunity to present a case, not to try to score party political points. There are plenty of other opportunities to do that. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) perhaps demonstrated the way in which a case can be made without scoring cheap points.

There are also some points that I would like to spend some time making. In my view, the hon. Gentleman’s comments about students being under pressure and his suggestion that this causes them to rely on mental health services were deeply stigmatising and really unhelpful in trying to promote a sense of mental health and well-being. He does students a disservice by portraying them in that light. The suggestion has also been made that there is some sort of hidden agenda. Well, if there is a hidden agenda, let us be clear that this issue goes back to 2006. The work done then—which resulted in the plans that we are discussing, including the proposals for Avondale—came out of a set of principles in a national service framework for mental health that was drawn up by a Government of whom the hon. Gentleman

was a member. That prompts some questions about quite where his attention ought to be focused now and where it ought to have been focused in the past.

Mark Hendrick: I will indeed make reference to the 2006 consultation and the report that came afterwards. It recommended that new facilities be built, but as I said, those facilities are very unlikely to be built, because of the financial pressures created by the Government’s cuts. On the one site there is only planning permission, and on the other two sites there is no sign of any building or any commissioning of building yet to take place.

On the question of students, many are indeed suffering great deals of stress and worry about debt. There are cases up and down the country of students who have committed suicide or who are suffering from mental illness as a result of stresses associated with debt, worries about exams, and pressure from parents and society. It is glib of the Minister to dismiss that in the way that he has.

Paul Burstow: The hon. Gentleman’s contribution may well have been glib; my concern is about stigmatising people and creating even more concern about mental health problems.

The 2006 consultation looked at strengthening community-based services, in order to reduce reliance on acute hospital care, as well as phased closures of 15 facilities over a number of years, as demand reduces owing to other measures. They were to be replaced by a smaller number of purpose-built units, which I will talk about in a moment. Lancashire primary care trusts spend £23 million a year on community-based mental health services—an increase of 46% since the 2006 consultation, which has resulted in spending per head that is higher than the average for England. Just 4% of service users now need in-patient care in Lancashire, and many facilities are significantly underused as a result.

Many existing in-patient facilities are not fit for purpose—dormitories rather than single rooms; problems separating male and female sleeping areas; no outside space; privacy compromised. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North made a case about some of those facilities in his speech. The PCT has plans for four new purpose-built units, the first of which, at Whyndyke farm, is due to open in 2013. The PCT assures me that plans to develop the Ribbleton hospital site are proceeding.

The hon. Member for Preston mentioned concerns about beds. I am assured by the PCT that the closure of facilities has been carefully phased to ensure sufficient capacity. I have looked at the figures, and I have been told that there is an average of 35 spare beds across Lancashire. I shall take no lectures from the hon. Gentleman on the use of taxpayers’ money to get the best possible results for patients, but it hardly makes sense to have an excess of supply of beds such as we are seeing in Lancashire. Indeed, only last week, the King’s Fund demonstrated that better outcomes could be achieved through effective use of resources.

Mark Hendrick: Will the Minister give way?

Paul Burstow: I will in a moment.

That is why we believe that the proposals make sense, and simply to talk about a potential mental health beds crisis is unnecessary scaremongering.

Mark Hendrick: This is far from scaremongering. People are committing suicide in Lancashire, and people are being turned away because of a lack of beds. People come to my surgeries who are suffering from stress and mental illness, or who are caring for someone who is trying to get into the Avondale unit. The Minister mentioned the 36 spare beds, but that is the figure across the whole of Lancashire. The occupancy rates across Lancashire range from 85% to 90%, which are rates that any hotel would be proud of.

Paul Burstow: It is important that the changes that are resulting from the consultation in 2006 are properly implemented, that they are led by clinical evidence, that they take account of legitimate public concerns, and that they involve appropriate scrutiny. That is why I have asked questions about the nature of the consultation that took place in 2006. More than 115,000 consultation documents were sent out, 74 public meetings and events took place, and independent evaluation by Salford university found that the engagement process was robust and comprehensive. All Members of Parliament, including the hon. Gentleman, were sent the consultation documents and offered briefings by the chair of the primary care trust's joint committee. However, the only MPs to respond were the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper) and the former Member for Fylde. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman appears to have come late to this issue. I understand that he started to get interested in it only earlier this year. I must question why he did not pursue it when it was being consulted on in 2006, when he might have had an opportunity to shape the proposals a little more than he has so far.

Mark Hendrick: Will the Minister give way?

Paul Burstow: In a moment.

When the proposals went to the Lancashire joint overview and scrutiny committee, which was formed in 2006 to consider the proposals, it was committed to ensuring that there was proper engagement. It took the view that there had been significant engagement around these proposals.

Mark Hendrick: I want to address two of the points that the Minister has made. First, we were happy with the consultation that took place in 2006, and with the report. Now, however, the NHS trust is reneging on that report, because it will not have the necessary resources—and, in my view, it does not have the determination—to complete the new units that were promised. On the Minister's point about not contributing to the consultation or making any objections, we were perfectly happy to see the Ribbleton Hall site extended and improved to accommodate extra beds, but at the moment there is no

sign that the extra beds will go there. Until the new facilities are built, I see no logic in closing the Avondale unit, or any other facilities.

Paul Burstow: I have just given an indication of the PCT's position in respect of Ribbleton Hall. The PCT is in the process of conducting a further review of the proposals and has produced a revised case for change. That explores the overall clinical model, but does not alter any plans for specific site closures. It does revise the case, which is supported by GP commissioners. I will, however, make sure that the points that both hon. Members have raised in the debate are passed to the PCT, so that it is aware of their ongoing concerns.

The hon. Member for Preston also talked about a city the size of Preston having the right to be consulted. It is worth bearing in mind that, while the city council raised its concerns in August this year, and objected to the closure of Avondale ward, Preston councillors who were sent the original consultation—just like everyone else in Lancashire—and invited to offer feedback and comments about the proposals, did not offer a response, yet the proposals in 2006 included the proposal about Avondale.

I am of course aware of the petition that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, but I do not think that his presentation of the case has helped his constituents advance this matter at all. He has been stigmatising in some of his remarks about mental health, and I think it is important to value community-based care. It is essential that we see continuing developments in that regard. There is clear evidence that it leads to better clinical outcomes for patients, and the NHS in Lancashire should be congratulated on its strong record of investing in community services.

Changes to acute mental health services, including the closure of outdated facilities, are a necessary part of the local NHS's strategy for mental health and are necessary to deliver better results and better value for money as well. It is the right approach, delivered in the right way with proper engagement and careful management of available beds, to deliver better results for people in this area of health care.

I have listened carefully and I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman's representations are fed back to the primary care trust and other NHS organisations concerned. I am sure that he will continue to make these points, and we will continue to improve mental health services, as this Government are determined to do. We entirely reject the notion that there is in any way an agenda of cuts and closures driven by this Government. These initiatives started under the previous Government. They were about improving services then, and they are about improving services now. That is what this Government will deliver.

Question put and agreed to.

12.11 am

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 8 December 2010

[MR JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

Defence Spending (Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Stephen Crabb.)

9.30 am

Mrs Siân C. James (Swansea East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to secure this important debate, and to the Minister for attending. Wales has a long and proud heritage with the armed forces, and is home to the British Army's most famous regiments, great ports, and RAF bases. Many towns are affiliated with Royal Navy warships and submarines. It is a world leader in the aerospace and defence industries, and from a strong cluster around Airbus UK in the north to GE Aviation, General Dynamics, NORDAM and British Airways in the south, manufacturers and suppliers employ thousands of highly skilled people in high-tech, highly paid jobs throughout the country. Wales is also an important recruiting area, and many young men and women in Swansea, and particularly in my constituency, join up.

That legacy dates back more than 300 years, and is strongly intertwined with our industrial past and communities throughout Wales. Indeed, the cenotaph at the heart of St Athan village is dedicated to the memory of

“the youth of all nations who fell that war might end, by the boys of the South Wales coalfield.”

That is an enduring tribute to the link between our nation's proud coalfield communities, and the young soldiers who fought so selflessly to protect them. What gives that message even wider symbolism is the heartless graffiti and vandalism that has recently desecrated the memorial. Without wishing to make too blunt a point, it is difficult to ignore the parallels with the cruel disregard for St Athan shown by the coalition Government. They made an abrupt decision to scrap the plans for the St Athan defence academy, and I shall focus on that today.

The Government's decision is a huge blow not just to the Vale of Glamorgan, but to the whole of Wales. The project would have led to the creation of thousands of training, support and construction jobs, and would have provided significant opportunities for local suppliers and the local community. The coalition Government's decision to cancel the Metrix consortium project will mean losing up to 2,500 training and support jobs and up to 1,500 construction jobs, as well as the loss of a £700 million to £800 million defence technical college construction contract and the £60 million annual supply chain expenditure, and a £500 million annual boost to the Welsh economy from operational activities, and a large boost to local tourism.

Wales makes up 5% of the UK population, but contributes 8% of the armed forces. The Government pride themselves on fairness, so surely Wales should

receive an equal proportion of military spending. South-east England receives £7.1 billion pounds and Scotland receives £1.5 billion, but Wales receives just £390 million.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Blaenau Gwent contributes many servicemen and women to our armed forces, and we have had some great armed forces days in recent years. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: according to statistics that I have seen, Wales receives just £380 million in defence expenditure. Surely that is not enough.

Mrs James: I agree with my hon. Friend. Wales received the second lowest military investment of any region in the UK. Surely that cannot be right. The decision in the summer to award Gwent-based General Dynamics a £500 million contract to help to equip the Army with a fleet of new Scout combat vehicles was very welcome, and that should have been followed with an annual £500 million boost from St Athan. Together, they would significantly have redressed that unfairness. Instead, the coalition dithered, and that has cost us dear.

Mr Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): On the defence technical college, does my hon. Friend agree that it is bizarre that, at a time when south Wales is likely to lose many thousands of jobs in the public sector, that private sector development will not go ahead?

Mrs James: I agree, and there are many such examples; I will home in on that issue later.

Alun Michael (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): In addition to the issue of the unfairness, does it not seem that the coalition Government are determined to cut off their nose to spite their face, because they will lose the savings and efficiencies that the new academy would have created?

Mrs James: I agree with my right hon. Friend. Unfortunately, the Government cutting of their nose to spite their face does not help people in south and wider Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan): I am listening with surprise to the hon. Lady, because she seems to be saying that we should make defence decisions based on employment in south Wales, rather than on the needs of the armed forces and the nation. Is that right?

Mrs James: I cannot agree with the Minister. I am saying—I thought I had done so clearly—that there is a disparity, which would have been reduced if the Government had decided to go forward with the defence technical college. It is not rocket science; a decision to build the college would have provided more equality and fairness. It would not have endangered front-line services, but would certainly have helped our forces, who serve so valiantly in Afghanistan.

Mr David: On that important point, if the Government were concerned about the well-being of the armed forces, they would have ensured that the technical college went ahead. That point illustrates that the Government are not concerned about the long-term defence of this country.

Mrs James: I thank my hon. Friend for that. What have we heard from the coalition? The Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary maintain that there is still a bright future for the area, and that a decision will be made in the spring. The Welsh Secretary insists that she is continuing to press the case for St Athan, but we have all witnessed the power that she wields in the Cabinet. There have been so many words, but so little action—there was the decision to close the Newport passport office, deferral of the electrification of the south Wales main line, and the fact that Wales was not included among the new superfast broadband pilot areas.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend include cancellation of the north Wales prison on that list?

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady answers, I remind hon. Members that we are debating defence spending in Wales. It is not in order to discuss other projects that may or may not have been cut.

Mrs James: I thank my hon. Friend—and I include the north Wales prison on my list.

We are already witnessing the impact of the Government's dithering, delay and abandonment. Last week, business confidence in Wales dropped severely from 22.4 points last quarter to 6.3 points. Scrapping the St Athan project was mentioned explicitly as a "significant dampener on confidence". That is hugely worrying, and demonstrates the huge risk in the coalition's assumption that the private sector will provide jobs for those in the public sector who become unemployed. For Wales, the stakes are even higher. Public investment plays a greater role in our economy than in England, and our business sector is much more fragile. As our Labour First Minister in Wales, Carwyn Jones, has said, the spending review is clearly regressive. The human and social impact could be both devastating and wasteful, and the real cost could be with us for generations. It further demonstrates how the Government are pursuing cuts with a scale, scope and speed that risk Welsh jobs, Welsh growth and Welsh recovery, and puts the squeeze on the most vulnerable in our society.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that a strategic investment of the magnitude that we are talking about would have a major multiplier effect on inward investment in Wales? I am talking about not just visitors and tourism, but the clusters of aero-industry, and encouraging early rail electrification, which has been delayed. Such measures work together in harmony for Wales, and without them the opposite applies.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. I am sure that the hon. Lady will not allow herself to stray when responding to that intervention.

Mrs James: Success breeds success, and if the scheme had gone ahead, we could be looking forward to a much brighter and more successful future. Wales still has a lot to offer British troops serving in the UK and overseas. Increasing the defence footprint in Wales will strengthen

the Union and local communities. The benefits are wide and invaluable, but the matter is not being addressed by the coalition.

When asked about the equitable distribution of defence spending across the UK, the Defence Secretary stated:

"When I meet troops in Afghanistan, they do not ask one another whether they came from Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh or London. They are forces under the Crown and proud of it."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2010; Vol. 513, c. 18.]

And rightly so.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): That is good stuff, but will the hon. Lady explain why over the past 13 years, two military establishments in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire have been gradually eroded, so that they are now approximately one third of the size that they were in 1997?

Mrs James: As we understand, things have been—and are—very difficult. There was an alternative, and under a Labour Government there would have been an opportunity for the defence technical college. As Welsh MPs, we lobbied long and hard for the defence technical college, because we knew that it would bring opportunities and investment.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): One of the big success stories of the defence budget in Wales, and the UK, is RAF Valley in my constituency. It is a centre of excellence for fast jet training, and has had hundreds of millions of pounds of new investment. That is now under threat.

Mrs James: I agree, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on that; it is important that places such as RAF Valley continue to thrive and prosper. They add to the defence footprint in Wales and need to be enhanced.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my regret that over the past few months we seem to have lost cross-party consensus on protecting the interests of Wales, particularly in terms of defence? I pay tribute to the work of those hon. Members who, under the previous Government, fought to persuade military chiefs and the MOD that south Wales was worth investing in. That support has been lost, and it bodes badly for the future that there will be only one or two parties in Wales to speak up for the interests of Wales.

Mrs James: My hon. Friend is correct. I was part of that lobbying group, and we worked hard to demonstrate how we could provide a service that would have been world-beating, and that would help ensure the safety and future of our brave young men and women.

When I talk about those brave young men and women, I am thinking about people in my community. When we talk to families about how well their sons and daughters are doing, they tell me about the problems and challenges that they face as individuals and as part of the wider community. They are troubled about their future, and given that more than 60,000 people face losing their jobs, the decision on St Athan means that many people have little hope for the future. Those families deserve to be rewarded for the great contribution they have made.

The defence training academy is not only an economically sound investment, a socially beneficial plan and a strategically intelligent initiative, but fair. It is fair that a highly skilled work force should get the investment they deserve, and it is fair for our armed forces to be equipped with the best training and facilities possible.

Simon Hart: Are those brave young men and women the same brave young men and women who had to buy their own kit to fight in Afghanistan over the past few years?

Mrs James: We have heard such tales. I have been approached by families and relations, and I went to the bother of checking out every story. I found that such statements were just not true. There were opportunities for the families to do other things, but the troops had equipment of the highest standard. I can pass on letters that I wrote to Ministers and those I received in reply. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

Chris Ruane: Why?

Mrs James: Well, the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) is entitled to his opinion, just as I am entitled to mine. It is fair that a community with a proud military history should continue its lasting legacy, and it is fair for Wales to get military investment to match its contribution to our armed forces. The Secretary of State for Wales repeatedly states:

“We have secured a fair settlement for Wales.”—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2010; Vol. 514, c. 904.]

and the Defence Secretary insists that the best decisions will be made for the defence of the UK. Neither has yet delivered on those promises, although that could change today.

Geraint Davies: Is my hon. Friend surprised that although Conservative Members complain about individual areas of underspending under the previous Government, they support massive cuts to the defence budget, particularly in St Athan? That is absolute hypocrisy.

Mrs James: I am not surprised; I think that is to be expected. The people of Wales know what is to be expected, as do people in other parts of Great Britain.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): My hon. Friend says that the people of Wales know what to expect. Yesterday, I looked at the part of the Ministry of Defence website about defence in Wales. It said that the £14 billion investment in St Athan was still to go ahead. Would it be helpful if the people of Wales were able to look at that website and see accurate information? Perhaps when the Minister responds, he will announce that the website is in fact accurate.

Mrs James: I urge people to look at that website. We must have the most up-to-date information, and I hope that the Minister will give us good news today.

In my closing remarks, I will quote the memorial in St Athan. It says that the boys of the coalfield will “dedicate themselves to complete the task so nobly begun.”

I hope that the Minister will return to his Department and dedicate himself to completing this task for St Athan, the people of Wales and our brave soldiers.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. A large number of people are trying to catch my eye. I intend to call the Front-Bench speakers at 10.40 am, and I appeal to all those who wish to contribute to do so as briefly as they reasonably can.

9.46 am

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, Mr Gray, and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. As a member of the Defence Committee, although not a Welsh MP, I take a keen interest in these matters. As the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) will acknowledge, the Committee’s report pulled no punches when it came to reviewing the Government’s attitude to the strategic defence and security review, and in reporting its conclusions.

I agree with the concept of a defence training college. One of the critical challenges facing the armed forces is the need to avoid duplication and streamline training processes. When the Defence College of Electro-Mechanical Engineering—DCEME—was formed in April 2004, it brought together a number of separate service training organisations, all of which delivered different forms of engineering. The aim was to exploit synergies, improve training delivery and increase efficiency and effectiveness.

The notion of a defence training college is sound. There is a lot of training duplication across the three services, and anecdotally, there are many common factors to basic engineering training programmes, although that is not always acknowledged by the different services. It is clear that St Athan should play a key role in delivering a harmonised service.

In theory, a further rationalisation to one site could reduce costs and save money. That should bring areas of expertise and excellence together and lead to greater co-operation between the services. However, it is not clear whether the work has been done by the three services to align their training requirements. There are always good reasons to compromise, and different services have different needs. Such matters need to be ironed out, and we must be clear what we are aiming for in this investment.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman is taking part in the debate. It is important to have members of the Defence Committee in the Chamber, because this discussion is not only about Wales but about what is best for the armed forces. I appreciate his train of logic, which steers us towards the rationale of having tri-service training on one site—we hope that it will be in Wales, but please let it be somewhere—for the good of the armed forces. However, the hon. Gentleman is approaching a compromise.

I do not want to digress from the subject of the debate, but when the decision was taken on Sheffield Forgemasters, there was an undertaking that discussions would continue. However, nothing has happened. We hear that the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns) is delighted that discussions are continuing

[*Huw Irranca-Davies*]

on this matter, but yet we have heard nothing. Will the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen), or perhaps the Minister, illuminate us on what exactly the future holds for the tri-services and St Athan?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am confident that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with that point; obviously, I am not in a position to verify it. However, I will point out that the defence academy at Shrivenham is a good example of successfully bringing together different service needs in delivering training. That defence academy has proved a resounding success. The majority of training there is postgraduate, with accredited civilian qualifications the result for many people.

Geraint Davies: The question was asked: where is the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns)? Given that this issue is so strategically important for his constituency and that he is the new MP for the constituency, and if he is saying things about discussions, why is he not here? Where is he?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I understand from colleagues that my hon. Friend is working in the Vale of Glamorgan today. Obviously, I cannot account for the movements of other hon. Members.

The concept of St Athan was good, but it was decided that the project was undeliverable by the Metrix consortium. It is clear that a huge number of courses across the services need harmonising.

Alun Michael: I am a little puzzled about the decision. What the hon. Gentleman refers to was clearly decided—he is right about that—but it does not seem to have been decided on the facts, which demonstrated savings for the armed services as well as efficiencies from the proposals, which were assessed very carefully before the decision to go ahead was made. So why was the decision made to change that? It had all-party support. There was careful examination of the benefits to the services. Where did the decision come from?

John Glen: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. No doubt the Minister will want to deal with the point about the logic of the Government when they made the decision.

What is confusing to me, as someone who has taken an interest in defence matters, is the extent of the investment at St Athan. Let us say that three services are coming together and, for example, work is being done on ship engines. How reasonable and cost-effective will it be to get engines from Portsmouth to St Athan? Is that the right option? To what extent will all that work be cost-effective? Presumably it would be helpful to have a driving range for tanks if people wanted to test the tanks on whose engineering they had been working.

How does the Minister reconcile the fact that, as the hon. Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) said, Wales receives the second lowest “investment” from the MOD with the arguably bigger imperative to achieve value for money for the MOD as a whole and for UK defence as

a whole? Looking to the future, I am clear that defence training needs to be harmonised. That issue needs to be considered on two levels. Where would be the best place to site such a college from a UK defence perspective? In addition, such a decision should not be wholly based on relative under-investment in one region of the country or another.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Glen: No, I shall make a little more progress and come back to the hon. Gentleman in a minute.

If the best place is St Athan, there is a need to bring certainty to the decision and clarity on the time scale and scope of the project. However, I do not believe that money should be spent in Wales just because it needs the investment. That is just one part of the decision. It is critical to ensure that any consolidated training college addresses the broadest possible needs.

Mrs Moon: I am extremely pleased to see my colleague from the Select Committee on Defence here today and I pay tribute to the work that he does as a Member for whom I have a great deal of respect. However, what he is suggesting today is that the Ministry of Defence has failed over the past three years rigorously to examine the proposal for St Athan. He is suggesting that civil servants and Ministers have neglected to consider all the issues that he has raised. That is just not true.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I have a great deal of respect for her and her knowledge of this subject, but it was her party that was in government for several years and had an opportunity to bring this matter to a conclusion before the election. I wonder why it did not do so.

For me, the challenge remains the need to rationalise defence training and spending across the three services to the broadest possible extent. Let us consider leadership and management training. There are a huge number of locations throughout the UK. There are separate leadership schools and centres of excellence. There are vast numbers of adventure training establishments and music schools. I am frustrated that there is not enough clarity about taking the process that I have described to the furthest extent and perhaps giving greater scope for initiatives such as those that I am discussing.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Glen: Yes, but this will be the last time; I have nearly finished my speech.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I worry that what we have here is a softening up. The hon. Gentleman serves on the Defence Committee. Surely he has the ear of the Minister and speaks to him in the corridors, as we try to do as well. Our suspicion is that discussions will continue about St Athan till the cows come home on the pastures of St Athan and that we are being softened up for the tri-service academy not going ahead in any shape or form that we recognise. It will be dispersed somewhere else in the UK or to various other sites in the UK. That is what the hon. Gentleman is hinting at.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Obviously, not being the Minister, I do not have the ability to make those decisions. I am just flagging up the wider defence interests that are at play. A serious examination is needed of what is right for UK defence interests as a whole and the efficient delivery of tri-service support. I am making the case for that to be as broad as possible and for the right decision to be made for the UK.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): I call Mr Jonathan Edwards.

9.56 am

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Diolch, Mr Gray; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) on achieving this very important debate about defence spending in Wales. The reality is that the trajectory of Government policy in recent years has seen a reduction in defence spending in Wales, and it is very important that we have a discussion about that. Hon. Members are here largely to express their concerns about the ending of the Metrix proposal for the defence training college at St Athan, about which the hon. Member for Swansea East spoke eloquently. It was cancelled in October by the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government in Westminster.

As with other areas of defence, such as the £10.5 billion contract with AirTanker Ltd, the Public Accounts Committee has pointed to the flaws in defence procurement and the difficulties in keeping a lid on projects paid for under private finance initiatives. Indeed, the estimated budget for St Athan, even before work really commenced, had increased substantially, from an original estimate of £12 billion to £14 billion, and that at a time when the recession hit and the necessary capital from land sales was not becoming available as expected.

We shall see in the spring whether St Athan will be successful again, depending on the new criterion being announced for defence training by the UK Government, which will of course have changed in the light of the strategic defence and security review and the downsizing of the number of UK troops who will require those training facilities. However, we can be sure of one thing: the scheme will not go ahead as previously envisaged.

While I am on the subject of St Athan, I need hardly remind everybody that the number of staff working at the site is falling, with 339 job losses having been announced this time last year. Further to that, a response to a parliamentary question a fortnight ago from the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), whom I notice is not here today, concluded that no further work would be done using the super-hangar to maintain and repair RAF aircraft at the base after 2010. Make of that what you will.

However, the topic of today's debate is defence spending in Wales, and it is good that we can have a debate about that, because those figures have been made available to us. Thanks to the "UK Defence Statistics" annual publication for 2010, published on the Defence Analytical Services Agency website, we can see that the number of jobs as a result of defence spending in Wales under the last Government fell from 8,990 in 1997 to 4,900 today—a drop of 42%. In terms of service personnel, that is a

drop of 13% from 3,300 in 1997 to 2,930 this year. In England, the figure has risen by 3%. For civilian personnel, it is a far more substantial drop of 62%, from 5,100 in 1997 to 1,970 today. In England, the figure has fallen by only 30%, which is less than half the fall that happened in Wales. The south-east of England has the largest number of service personnel, with almost 45,000, or, in other terms, 15 times the number of service personnel based in Wales. In percentage terms, those figures might be more striking. Although Wales has 5% of the UK population, only 1.7% of service personnel are stationed there and only 2.8% of civilian Ministry of Defence jobs are in Wales. Meanwhile, of course, almost 20,000 service personnel remain in Germany—seven times as many as in Wales—and there are almost as many service personnel stationed in Cyprus as in our country.

Unfortunately, this year's figures do not include those for the estimated UK regional direct employment that is dependent on MOD expenditure, which were included in previous editions, such as, "UK Defence Statistics 2009". In the past, those figures were provided through the MOD by DASA according to country, so that we could see what was taking place—a concentration of defence spending in England, away from Wales, Scotland and the other Celtic nations. The figures in last year's statistics show that 92% of MOD employment is in England, which has 84% of the UK population, and that 1% of the employment is in Wales. There has been growing centralisation, with that figure rising from 89% of employment in England in 2003-04.

The figures are true for both equipment expenditure and non-equipment expenditure. However, our ability to be aware of those figures and scrutinise them is under threat. Instead of the Government's being accountable for changes in policy, manpower and spending in different parts of the UK, they will simply no longer publish the statistics relating to them, and, indeed, they have already stopped doing so. That was the subject of a Westminster Hall debate in July secured by my friend, the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), after the Minister for the Armed Forces initially said on the Floor of the House that such country and region statistics would continue, only for a later note to confirm that he had misspoken and the series of statistics would, in fact, be discontinued. This is a matter of freedom of information, as much as anything else. In the United States, such statistics are available to state level, and in Canada, a Commonwealth country with a similar military and parliamentary system to our own, the Department of National Defence produces similar statistics, down to provincial and even constituency level. The simple fact is that we must have open books.

The coalition agreement says

"technological innovation has—with astonishing speed—developed the opportunity to spread information and decentralise power in a way we have never seen before. So we will extend transparency to every area of public life.

The Government believes that we need to throw open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account."

There are two specific commitments in the deal, first:

"We will require full, online disclosure of all central government spending and contracts over £25,000."

and, secondly,

"We will create a new 'right to data' so that government-held datasets can be requested and used by the public, and then published on a regular basis."

[Jonathan Edwards]

It seems almost self-evident that that transparency and openness necessitates continuing the series of national and regional data in the defence industry, so that we can easily see and scrutinise the amount of spending in the defence sector, inside and outside the UK. If we cannot see the effect on our countries of UK defence spending, how can we, as Members of Parliament, be effective judges of it? I hope the Minister will confirm that the UK Government intend to maintain the series of statistics in accordance with the spirit of their coalition deal. *Diolch yn fawr iawn.*

10.3 am

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is depressing for the second time in a fortnight to listen to one or two Opposition hon. Members talking down the Welsh economy in this context. I listened with interest in the Welsh Grand Committee the other day, and nothing much has changed. Let us look at the context, and the Opposition may take some credit for this: 180 companies currently dependent on the MOD in Wales, 25,000 jobs, £220 million of expenditure and £250 million put into the local economy.

I am a beneficiary of that expenditure in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire; we have a great but small MOD establishment at Castlemartin camp. I am hoping for some good news, as the closure of certain tank training ranges in Germany might bring some positive benefits to the area. We have a small MOD establishment at Penally, upon which the local community heavily depends. We have an independent weapons training centre at Pendine, which is crucial to MOD development, not only in Wales but across the UK, and we have at least one very decent Territorial Army unit based in Carmarthen.

I should declare a slight interest in that I served in the Territorial Army for a number of years, and very good years they were too. I acknowledge the comments made by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) about the colleagues I used to deal with back in those days. What a different place it was then—the most dangerous place I ever went to in the TA was Warminster. Now the regiment with which I served goes to a lot more dangerous places than that. Not only do the local soldiers contribute to the Territorial Army in west Wales, but so, too, do their employers, which let them off work without concern for what effect it might have on their businesses, day after day, week after week, and weekend after weekend. In the interests of the nation, they gladly let these guys go off to train. Those are all positive things, which the MOD and wider armed service community bring to our local area.

Geraint Davies: I am bemused. Surely the hon. Gentleman should be calling for greater investment on behalf of his constituents to bring jobs and prosperity to his constituency rather than supporting cuts. I cannot understand this.

Simon Hart: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He troubles me, because, surely, defence of the realm is the most important thing on which to base our decisions in this context. Delightful though it is, this is not a job creation scheme. This is about defending

the nation in the context of an extremely complicated and rather depressing financial background and the £38-billion black hole in defence procurement spending, with which we were left.

Chris Bryant *rose*—

Geraint Davies: Is it important today to back the deficit and cuts generally, ignoring the difference between investing in our strategic interests for the future to defend our country and spending? Clearly, this is all about cuts and not the interests of the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Simon Hart: I could not disagree more, the point I made about Castlemartin is valid in this context. Of course I have been in touch with the Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister about the future of that depot and others.

Chris Ruane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hart: No. It is simply not possible to have this conversation as if the UK economy did not exist. We have to operate within the context of the wider economic circumstances in which, for whatever reason, we have been placed. That is where we are. Of course the decisions have to be taken with local interests in mind, but, ultimately, as the Minister said earlier, surely this has to be about defence needs in that wider context.

Albert Owen *rose*—

Chris Bryant *rose*—

Simon Hart: The choices are almost too tempting. Who was first? I believe the hon. Member for Rhondda was the patient one.

Chris Bryant: I had almost given up on the hon. Gentleman, but now I am on my feet I am grateful to him for giving way. He referred to the completely fallacious figure of £36 billion—or he may have inflated it to £38 billion. The National Audit Office made it clear that if there was a gap at all, it was of £6 billion. He should not perpetuate these myths.

Simon Hart: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased that I am able to quote. The black hole of £38 billion in unfunded procurement commitments to which I referred is from an MOD brief, post-SDSR defence SB, from 19 October 2010. If that is good enough for the MOD, it is good enough for me. I am sorry that it is not good enough for the hon.

Mr Robathan: My hon. Friend is making a very powerful case. The figure is not fallacious; the MOD budget was projected to be overspent by £38 billion over the next 10 years.

Chris Bryant: Drivel.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order.

Mr Robathan: It is not drivel. My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) knows that the previous Labour Government

were planning cuts across the board, throughout Government spending, of 20%. Hearing people defending such matters does not go down well.

Simon Hart: I thank the Minister for his intervention.

Let me turn briefly to St Athan. It is not my normal habit to come to the defence of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), but he is actually in the Vale of Glamorgan today, where he is working hard on behalf of his constituents.

Chris Bryant: How do you know?

Simon Hart: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), I am not, sadly, in possession of the diary of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan. *[Interruption.]* I wish I had not bothered to do this. However, nobody can doubt my hon. Friend's commitment to the future of St Athan. *[Interruption.]* I would love to continue, but if anybody wishes to intervene, they can do so.

Chris Ruane *rose*—

Simon Hart: I am sorry that it took such a long time to give way to the hon. Gentleman—it is nothing personal.

Chris Ruane: What could be more important to a Member than defending a £20 billion investment in their own constituency?

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman answers, let me say that it is a long tradition of the House that we do not discuss Members who are not present in the Chamber unless we have given them notice that we intend to do so. This particular discussion is not necessarily central to our debate on defence spending in Wales, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman returns to the main topic under discussion.

Simon Hart: Absolutely, Mr Gray. I apologise for coming—unnecessarily, as it turns out—to the defence of my colleague.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hart: No, I want to make a wee bit of progress. Fun though these exchanges are, they will come to an end in the very near future.

The facts are these. As I said earlier, one of the depressing features of the Welsh Grand Committee—I will be reprimanded again in a minute—is the extraordinary denial about the past 13 years; it is as if they never existed. The truth is that Metrix simply could not deliver what we hoped on time or on price. If there is a difference between the previous and the current Governments, it is that the current Government are not prepared to go down the road of signing off, willy-nilly, contracts that we can justify neither financially nor in the context of defence.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I genuinely thank the hon. Gentleman for his clarity and honesty, because we are seeing a complete volte-face from the Conservative party's position before the election, when there was

cross-party sign-up and support for the Metrix bid and the MOD's analysis of it. The hon. Gentleman has now made it clear that the bid did not stack up—not in terms of the MOD's priorities, but in terms of spending, and that is a tragedy. We now know that if we argued for the Metrix bid for St Athan, we would not have the Conservative party's support.

Simon Hart: I thank the right hon. Gentleman—I think he is right honourable—for his contribution.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I would like to be, but I am not right honourable yet.

Simon Hart: It is only a matter of time. Despite that, I do not agree with a word that the hon. Gentleman said. The Government faced some extremely difficult choices—hon. Members have heard that expression before—in the context of not only defence spending, but every other form of inward investment in Wales. The evidence speaks for itself, and the Minister will no doubt put us right. We should also not allow ourselves to be tempted into believing that this is somehow the end of the road for St Athan, because it has been made perfectly clear that it is not. However, we will hear more about that, and I do not want to steal the Minister's thunder.

I said that this would be a brief contribution, although it has been slightly longer than I had intended. However, as an ex-serviceman on the very fringes of the military, I think it is simply nonsense to believe that decisions can be taken on the basis purely of local need or local economic considerations, rather than the nation's overall defence needs in the overall context of the UK economy.

Mrs Moon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hart: No. I am coming to an end.

We are holding the telescope to the wrong eye if we think the nation can proceed in that way economically or in a defence context. I am delighted that we are facing up to that issue, because Labour Members have not done so before. That depresses me, and every intervention by a Labour Member has simply confirmed my fear that they are prepared to take decisions with no possible concern for the economic, local or defence consequences.

Mrs Moon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hart: No. I will finish now. I am sure that the hon. Lady will then have the floor.

To end on a lighter note, there is one decision on which I commend the previous Government: they ensured that the Welsh Guards regimental goat, William Windsor, survived their various assaults on the armed services in Wales. However, it is all very well the hon. Member for Swansea East referring to the many letters that she may have received from satisfied servicemen's families. I do not know what world she inhabits, but I can assure her that, in the world that I have been inhabiting, I have had personal contact year after year, month after month, and day after day with people who are in the service of our country abroad who have been begging for some small improvement in their lot. They are deeply frustrated by the inactivity or incompetence—I do not know which—that, I am afraid, epitomised 13 years of Labour rule for those who happened to be armed servicemen.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. A further seven or eight hon. Members are trying to catch my eye. According to my elementary arithmetic, that means that they will have three or four minutes apiece. It would be courteous if hon. Members could keep the length of their contributions down to something of that order.

10.15 am

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I want to distance myself slightly from something that the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) said. This is a serious debate, and Labour Members do not see it as fun. Wales is strategically important for defence training and the security of the whole United Kingdom, and Labour Members are proud of the investment that has gone into enhancing that capability over the past 10 years. The best pilots in the world are trained in Anglesey, and they are there because of the strategic importance of its RAF base. Those facts do not bear out any of the hon. Gentleman's points.

I pay tribute to the Welsh personnel who serve in the armed forces and who serve overseas. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Mrs James), whom I congratulate on securing the debate, I think it is important also to mention those behind the scenes who are involved in setting up operations. Similarly, it is important to mention the Territorial Army, and that is one thing on which I agree with the previous speaker; Wales makes one of the greatest contributions of volunteers, and I pay tribute to them. I am sure that the Minister will join me in that.

Defence spending in Wales is vital to defence training in the whole United Kingdom and to the important role that that plays in NATO. The United Kingdom is part of NATO, and plays an important defence role in that context. However, we need commitment and sustainability for the future, and that is what the debate is about.

I am concerned that the strategic defence and security review was conducted in a hurry. It was done just before a comprehensive spending review and was, frankly, caught up in it. I would rather that decisions had been made in the cold light of day, based on strategic defence requirements, than in the heat of a comprehensive spending review. The strategic defence and security review must be bolder and look at broader issues. It must look at least a quarter of a century ahead. I welcome the Government's five-year review, which is important, because things change. The threats to the United Kingdom change considerably, and we do not know where they will come from in the next three to four years, let alone the next 25 years. I therefore agree with the idea of a five-year review.

It is important that the Minister tells us what impact the departure, in my constituency, of 5,000 air personnel from the RAF would have on defence spending and defence personnel in Wales.

John Glen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Albert Owen: I will give way briefly, but I am aware of the time constraints.

John Glen: If the hon. Gentleman is so supportive of a regular review of defence spending now, will he tell us why there was not one between 1997 and 2010?

Albert Owen: Actually, I have lobbied on these issues. If the hon. Gentleman knows me, he will know that there is no difference between my criticisms of the Labour Government and of the current Government when I think that they are wrong. I think the current Government are wrong to have carried out the review so quickly. There is a window of opportunity to review things in five years, but that might be too late—that is the risk. We should have taken about 18 months to have a proper defence review. Whichever party was in office, the comprehensive spending review would have had to be done, and there would have had to be cuts, but we could have seen things in the cold light of day and had those strategic defence reviews in the future. That is my point.

I am conscious of the time, and had wanted to speak a bit longer than I will now be able to, because the subject is very important to Wales and my constituency. As the Minister knows, RAF Valley is in my constituency and is a centre of excellence for fast jet training with Hawks. There has been huge investment there in the past 10 years. Only last week a new building was opened, which will house the new Mk 2 jets. They are fantastic equipment and I am proud that they are British and will be part of our defence training.

The search and rescue headquarters is also based at RAF Valley. I was not 100% keen on the decision of the previous Government about part-privatisation, but I did understand the need to harmonise Navy and RAF helicopters, and, indeed, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency search and rescue, and bring them together. That decision—with billions of pounds of private investment coming into it—has been put on hold, and that will have a considerable impact on defence expenditure in Wales and my constituency. I am concerned about it and would like the Minister to clear up the matter of whether we shall continue with a part-privatisation, or whether there will be full privatisation. The uncertainty is affecting the morale of people employed in my constituency, who include a very famous member of the royal family, Flight Lieutenant Wales; that has got some attention.

The base is strategically important for search and rescue. If the part-privatisation had gone ahead, RAF Valley would have been the first base for such training in the whole United Kingdom. That would have been massively important to the local economy of north-west Wales, and the rest of Wales. I want some answers from the Minister about that, if possible. It is hugely important, and the base is there not because of job opportunities but because of Anglesey's strategic importance to the United Kingdom. The base has an excellent record.

As to the strategic defence review itself, the impact that the loss of 5,000 personnel from the RAF alone will have on Wales is important. I do not believe everything that I read in the newspapers, but I was very concerned—I want the Minister to deal with this if he has the opportunity—to read an article in *The Sunday Times* of 28 November with the headline "Cuts leave RAF with fewer jets than Sweden". I do not know much about Swedish defence, but I know that Britain trains and provides the best fighter jet pilots in the world, and I

want that to remain the case. The article continues to say that many of the smaller NATO countries—and on the graph we are one of the smallest NATO countries with military fighter attack—would use a NATO base in Texas. I am happy to acknowledge the contribution of the Americans, but I do not think that their pilots are as good as ours. We need European and British involvement in NATO, and I cannot see why we cannot enhance our bases here, and get more Americans and Canadians. Canadians, Indians and Saudis come to RAF Valley now to train.

Billions of pounds have been invested in strategic defence. Hundreds of millions have been invested in the past 10 years in RAF Valley. I want that to continue. There are 1,500 personnel there, both civilian and military. It is top quality. It is a centre of excellence, not just in this country, but in the world. The search and rescue headquarters has people coming from all over the world, including Hong Kong, to see what we do, because we do it best. I am concerned that the strategic defence and security review, coupled with the comprehensive spending review, could undermine that and have a huge impact on strategic defence, and on local economies in Wales.

10.23 am

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this feisty and entertaining debate. I thank all hon. Members who have taken part and congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) on securing it.

As hon. Members can probably tell, I am not a Welsh speaker or, for that matter, a Welsh Member of Parliament. I represent Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, one of the finest naval bases in the country. I am struck by the fact that no one seems to have mentioned at any length during the debate the financial position that the coalition Government found they were in when they came to power. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I know that it is something we would all like to try to ignore, but unfortunately it is an issue that must be tackled. Whether hon. Members believe it or not, when the Government came to power they found that they had a £38 billion shortfall in the Ministry of Defence budget. At some stage that had to be dealt with. I realise that there are some who may feel that we do not need to tackle that issue at this stage of the game, but the civil servants who gave the coalition Government advice are the same ones who were in post prior to the general election, and they gave that advice to the Labour Government.

Albert Owen: I think that we need to kill this myth. We are talking about strategic defence for the next 25 years, not an economic cycle. Is the hon. Gentleman honestly saying that the Government are setting their priority for the defence of the nation within that five-year cycle?

Oliver Colville: I wrote, during the run up to the strategic defence and security review, my own submission, in which I said that we certainly needed to re-order our priorities, and that defence was No. 1 of the two issues that I thought were important, along with long-term care for the elderly, which I still think is a very important issue for us to deal with. However, we are where we are. None of us came into the House to vote to cut defence expenditure. I for one will continue to campaign to ensure that my constituency stays firmly up in its position alongside other such places.

Before I go any further I pay tribute to the Welsh servicemen who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq, and those who have served in the Falklands, along with many Royal Marines from my constituency; no one should underplay the contribution they made.

Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport has, in the past 10 years, had similar concerns about what would happen to it to those outlined by hon. Members. Frigates were potentially to be moved to Portsmouth—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. That is not about Wales.

Oliver Colville: If I may say so, Mr Gray, there is a similarity with some of the issues that affect Wales.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. Similarity is not enough. The debate must be about defence spending in Wales, and not about Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, close as it is to the hon. Gentleman's heart.

Oliver Colville: The issue of where in the United Kingdom public expenditure will go must be taken as a whole.

Nick Smith: With respect, the hon. Gentleman is the second Government ringer who has been brought into the debate this morning. We need to talk about the defence of this country in Wales, and not to hear about his constituency.

Oliver Colville: Fine. What I will say is that Wales has a significant part to play in the defence of our country, as have other parts of the United Kingdom, including my area. I should be interested to hear from the Minister not only what action he will take on issues to do with various bases in Wales, but what activity there will be in Wales to ensure that there are combat stress facilities, and similar things. We should not be talking just about investment in defence procurement and infrastructure. We need also to ensure that our servicemen and women, who have done such a good job for our country, have the opportunity to be well looked after, when they have done their time with the services. I ask the Minister to consider that and set out what is being done.

Debate on the subject will continue for some time, and I welcome the decision to have regular reviews. I will be fighting from my perspective, and I have no doubt that Opposition Members will do so from theirs. It is up to us to see who shouts loudest and puts forward the best case for the Government to listen to.

10.29 am

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) on securing the debate. Even in a debate about defence spending, we cannot talk about defence without paying tribute to our brave men and women fighting overseas. I stood, like many other hon. Members, at cenotaphs in St Fagans, Pontllanfraith and Cefn Fforest in my constituency, and Maes-y-cymer, where we paid tribute to our war dead. We should always keep them in mind when we talk about defence.

I want to focus on the effect of defence spending on the wider economy. The defence footprint in Wales is massive and hugely underestimated. I often liken it to

[Chris Evans]

the car industry. There is no Welsh car but our supply chain, which manufactures components for cars, has a massive effect on the car industry. About 2,300 people work in defence in Wales; £250 million is spent by the Ministry of Defence with firms in Wales. My hon. Friends the Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) and the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) discussed St Athan, the training college, and made an important point about RAF Valley. A delay in one thing has a knock-on effect on the economy. With the promise of an MOD contract, firms ask to borrow money from banks. The bank manager will ask when the contract is arriving. They wait and wait, but still nothing. What happens is that the firm goes to the wall, the contract is eventually awarded by the Government, but there is no firm to produce the components needed.

That strikes at the heart of the problem with this Government at the moment: a real lack of understanding of economics. The idea that the public sector and the private sector should be separate is absolutely wrong, and if anywhere that can be shown to be the case, it is in the defence industry. Ian Godden, the chairman of ADS, the British aerospace and defence industry body, has warned that the British defence industry will halve in size from 10% to 5% of the UK's manufacturing output. The main customer for the defence industry is the Government, who have the power to shrink or grow the sector. Unfortunately, they have made the decision to shrink it. It is not about cutting an aircraft carrier or a tanker; it is about cutting investment for the future. That is the problem with defence cuts.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): The hon. Gentleman appears to be making the case for defence spending to be used as an economic development tool, which contradicts the comments made about the need for a strategic defence view of the world. In the context of arguing for defence spending as an economic development tool, can he justify why for the past five years—between 2003-04 and 2007-08—defence spending in Wales was less than 1% of the total under the previous Labour Government?

Chris Evans: I will come to that point when I discuss General Dynamics in my constituency.

This is about the knock-on effect on the economy. If a major defence contractor comes to a constituency—as we have been lucky enough to experience in Islwyn with General Dynamics UK—the knock-on effect is amazing. GDUK came to Islwyn, because Government encouraged it to invest in the community, and we are glad that it is there. If we look at the knock-on effect, a ground-breaking innovation centre—the EDGE facility at Newbridge—has been set up to enable small and medium-sized enterprises to transform innovative ideas into products fit for market. The centre acts as a springboard for new IP—intellectual property—providing a collaborative environment where the MOD, Britain's leading universities and high-tech SMEs are able to conduct rapid testing of new advances in technology.

That is the reality of defence. GDUK is a Welsh success story. The battlefield communication, Bowman, was developed in my constituency. The company has sent technology all over the world and has invested in upskilling its workers. The company takes the view that

that would have been impossible without the support from Government for its successes. The fact is that once the technology is cut, it never returns. That is what we need to see when we are talking about defence. I have kept my comments short in order to allow other speakers an opportunity to make a speech..

10.33 am

Mrs Moon: It is highly appropriate that you are chairing this Committee, Mr Gray, given your knowledge and experience in the field of defence.

As a newly appointed member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I have recently discussed with Members across Europe their view that the British defence and security review was rushed. That is not just an impression in the UK, but across NATO, where there is concern at the result of the cuts for European defence.

We are here to look specifically at the impact on defence in Wales. I recall a statement of my mother's that she threw at me many a time: "Decide in haste, repent at leisure." That is the situation with the strategic defence and security review—a decision that is going to impact dramatically on our sovereign capability, our skills capability and our financial—

Oliver Colville: The Labour Government were in power for 13 years yet, after the initial period, they failed to produce a review. Why did they not have a review much sooner, as the coalition Government have had?

Mrs Moon: The Labour Government held a number of reviews, but not full defence and security reviews. There was a constant review of our capability, which had to take place because of our involvement in Afghanistan. I do not think anyone can say that the Labour Government failed to review and assess constantly the needs of our armed forces.

I want to focus on the issues of sovereign capabilities and skills capabilities in the defence industry in Wales. I am particularly concerned that we are not looking at the impact of cuts on our long-term capacity to protect our troops with the equipment and the platforms that they need. Prime contractors are represented in Wales, as colleagues have mentioned. Defence manufacturers based in Wales include EADS in Newport, General Dynamics in Islwyn and Thales Optics in St Asaph. For every job created by the industry, 1.6 jobs are created elsewhere in the economy. It has been calculated that a £100 million investment in the industry creates 1,885 jobs throughout the UK economy, 726 of which will be directly in the defence industry.

I want to focus on the role of SMEs in the defence sector in Wales, and to make the case for supporting and nurturing them in the months and years ahead. According to research from the Defence Industries Council, there are more SMEs in the UK defence industry than in the French, German, Italian and Spanish industries combined. Interestingly, General Dynamics—in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans)—said in evidence to the Select Committee on Defence:

"GDUK believes passionately in building a strong supply chain based on British companies, and in particular SMEs; and we practise what we preach. 70% by value of our work on Bowman is undertaken by British companies."

The Bowman programme is based in south Wales. In the same evidence, GDUK stated:

“We took a deliberate decision to concentrate that growth on south Wales. Following the recent signature of the contract for the Demonstration Phase of the Scout Platform, we expect the size of our work force to grow steadily over the next three years, again with much of that in south Wales.”

We have to remember that the impact of the growth of General Dynamics will rely strongly on 70% of SMEs being financially capable of surviving the current round of cuts and insecurity around contracting coming out of the MOD.

Guto Bebb: It would appear that we are again receiving a lecture about the role of defence spending in economic development. I am bemused by the fact that between 2003-04 and 2007-08, defence spending in Wales fell from £430 million to £390 million under the Labour Government.

Mrs Moon: The hon. Gentleman is trying to turn the whole debate. I am frightened by the debate, because the Government seem not understand that our defence capability relies on the defence industry being able to provide the equipment, and on our having the skills and the sovereign capability to provide our troops with the ability to defend this country.

John Glen: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Moon: No, I am not giving way again; our time is severely limited and I want to make progress.

I have made contact both with SMEs that form part of the supply chain of equipment to the MOD and with the large companies that I mentioned earlier. In my constituency, I have TB Davies, AMSS Ltd, Spectrum Technologies and TES Aviation, all of which are not only vital to the economy of Wales and of my constituency but provide the skills base that allows the MOD to provide the platforms needed by our armed forces.

It would be irresponsible not to consider the implications that the loss of the skills of the SMEs based in Wales would have for our prime contractors; we should remember that 70% of the work of those main contractors is allocated to SMEs. If we do not protect those SMEs, if we do not consider that skills base, if we do not consider our sovereign capabilities, we will put the defence of this country at severe risk.

10.41 am

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) on securing this debate. I put on record a point that has been made by Members on both sides of the Chamber: we should continue to pay tribute to our armed forces personnel for the job that they do, often in extremely difficult circumstances. Of course, they are backed up and supported by civilian personnel, who provide their own area of expertise.

We had a full debate on the strategic defence and security review on 4 November. The last thing that we want this morning is a re-run of that debate. That is not what today is about. It is a real opportunity to show just how much defence spending means to Wales as a nation. I hope that Labour colleagues, at least, will accept that

as a Celt, I recognise what defence spending means in Wales, and in Scotland and every other part of the United Kingdom.

Nick Smith: Does my good friend agree that what we heard from Members on the Government Benches today was a shameless misrepresentation of Labour's position? Labour in Wales is standing up for the defence of our country, while recognising that employment is important to our constituencies. All that we had from the other side was a couple of defence ringers, who did not properly recognise our emphasis on our country's defence.

Mr Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I hope to cover some of the points that have been raised this morning, and I shall comment on that.

It is pretty clear that military establishments and bases are dotted across the entire UK. It must be recognised that those facilities become part of day-to-day life in those communities, whether through a sense of pride in being associated with the defence of our country, or simply because of the employment opportunities that they may bring. Frankly, whatever the reason, it all matters.

I want to quote from the debate of 4 November, because comment has been passed on the manner in which the strategic defence and security review came about. The quotation, from *Hansard*, is:

“The strategic defence and security review was an opportunity to reshape the UK's military force in that changing global security landscape. Unfortunately, according to the Royal United Services Institute, 68% of the defence and security community felt that it was a ‘lost opportunity for a more radical reassessment of the UK's role in the world’.”—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2010; Vol. 517, c. 1074.]

Many of us, including all Labour Members, have said that it was far too quick. The previous full review under the Labour Government took some 15 months to complete.

Chris Bryant: I hope that my hon. Friend will make it clear that there has been another loss of opportunity in relation to the St Athan defence technical college. We supported it not primarily because we wanted investment in Wales but because we wanted to improve training for our armed forces. So many of our young men and women go into the armed forces, and we wanted to make sure that their lives were protected and that they had the best training possible.

Mr Brown: Absolutely. I shall come to that later, but I have to say to my hon. Friend that I could not have put it much better. Until now, at least, there has been more than a fair degree of consensus on what was to happen at St Athan. It is somewhat disappointing that we are not getting the same feeling today.

Mrs Moon: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Select Committee on Defence carried out a full and thorough inquiry into the proposed training academy at St Athan, and felt that it was the right place for it, and that it was the right activity to carry out there?

Mr Brown: My hon. Friend is an extremely knowledgeable member of the Select Committee, and is exactly right; indeed, the hon. Member for Salisbury

[Mr Russell Brown]

(John Glen) indicated the same thing at the start of his speech. It basically made sense, and the Select Committee gave it full backing.

John Glen: I said that the Defence Committee's report was pretty clear about the SDSR being undertaken in the wrong circumstances. I did not mention the report on St Athan.

Mr Brown: I clearly picked up from the start of the hon. Gentleman's contribution that St Athan, and what was previously proposed on a cross-party basis, made sense. However, *Hansard* will show what was said.

We see uncertainty in the questions that are being tabled, whether on departmental redundancies, rescue services or the level of savings. This morning, in contributions from both sides of the Chamber, we have heard that that uncertainty still exists. We need to be clear about where we are going with St Athan. I am not convinced that the Minister will be able to tell us today, but indications are that we might hear in the spring. For all concerned, I sincerely hope that we will have a clearer idea by then.

A question was asked about what that uncertainty does for communities. The debate is about defence spending. It is about investment. It is about the future of our armed forces, and what we are best able to do to serve those who serve the nation in difficult circumstances. They do not need uncertainty. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) made the valid point that small and medium-sized enterprises in many communities play a vital role. Uncertainty about where we are going can destroy SMEs, a point made also by my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans). Delays lead to economic uncertainty.

The figure of £38 billion was mentioned once again. I wish to make it abundantly clear that that sum was never to be found in any document. The figure that was spoken of came from page 22 of the MOD major projects report of 2009, which mentioned £6 billion over 10 years. The only way that that £6 billion could become £38 billion was to assume that there would be no increase in Britain's defence budget until 2021. That was never going to be the case under a Labour Government, and I sincerely hope that it was never going to be the case under any coalition Government. In fact, there was a 10% rise in defence spending between 1997 and 2010. In this country, defence spending consistently formed 2.5% of GDP—one of the highest levels in the world, so it is not that we scrimped at all.

I appreciate that I need to allow time for the Minister to speak. I am only sorry that I cannot give him more time. Members on the Opposition Benches have been clear this morning: they want more certainty on the matter. Let me finish with something that was said by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile)—he and I sat together at a dinner a couple of weeks ago. There was almost an admission from him that this rushed strategic defence and security review was financially driven; it was not in the best interests of our country, our defences or those who serve in foreign lands.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan): This is the first Westminster Hall debate to which I have contributed in the past five years. It is a pleasure to be here and to be under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Mrs James) on securing the debate. She spoke about the effects that choices on defence spending can have on regions of the United Kingdom, and I hope to return to her words shortly.

There has been some suggestion that the Government are, in some way, anti-Welsh; that they have their daggers out for Wales. That is absolutely not the case. Let me give my own credentials. My great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather were doctors in Islwyn, in Risca. My grandfather was headmaster of Llandaff Cathedral school.

Chris Bryant: So what?

Mr Robathan: I am just saying that I am not Welsh [Interruption.] Rather, I am not anti-Welsh. The name Robathan is Welsh. In fact, in Islwyn, there are many Robathans in the telephone book. I had a great-uncle in the Welsh Guards, and another great-uncle who was killed at Gallipoli.

Chris Bryant: That has nothing to do with it.

Mr Robathan: The hon. Gentleman is always full of hot air. If he could listen for a bit, he will hear what I have to say about some of the comments that have been made. I also had a great-uncle in the Welch Regiment who was killed at Gallipoli. I would rather not be accused of being anti-Welsh. I can promise that I have spent more time on the Brecon Beacons in the driving rain and snow and in Sennybridge than most people in this Chamber, possibly with the exception of you, Mr Gray, and my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart). I have also climbed from Capel Curig adventure training camp. Those are all the military assets in Wales that I have used in my life. I would rather not hear the suggestion that we are anti-Welsh. This is the first Welsh debate in which I have taken part, because I am not representing Wales.

Let me pay tribute to all the civilians who work for the MOD and in defence projects in St Athan and elsewhere in Wales. I should also like to pay tribute to all the armed forces who are based in Wales or who are from Wales. Indeed, I support anyone who supports the defence of the United Kingdom from wherever they come.

I have been surprised by this debate because I have found it extraordinarily narrow and partisan [Interruption.] Did the hon. Gentleman say because it is Welsh? I find it astonishing. The hon. Member for Swansea East compared the desecration of war memorials in her constituency with the fact that we are not proceeding with the Metrix bid at St Athan. I can see no relationship there at all; I do not believe that her constituents or people outside will, either.

Hon. Members have spoken about the SDSR, but let me be quite clear about it. Across Government, we have faced the worst financial and economic crisis that anybody

in this room has seen in their lifetime. *[Interruption.]* It is no good groaning. The hon. Member for Rhondda was a Minister in the previous Government and he knows that it is true.

We are currently borrowing £143 million a day. In terms of defence in Wales, that would buy, every week, three Type 45 destroyers. *[Interruption.]* Do they never go to Welsh ports? It is not fallacious, as the hon. Member for Rhondda said—*[Interruption.]* Gosh, he witters. It is not fallacious that defence budget was overspent by £38 billion; it is true.

Let me turn briefly to some of the remarks that have been made. First, the hon. Member for Swansea East quite reasonably wants to hear about St Athan. One of the biggest decisions that the Ministry of Defence had to take was on the defence training rationalisation programme. We have heard at length about its cancellation. Put simply, that project, in the guise that it was in, was never going to be made affordable. Despite strenuous efforts by the Department—under both the previous and current Administrations—it became clear that the bidder, Metrix, was unable to deliver an affordable, commercially robust proposal within the prescribed period. On that basis, the Defence Secretary decided to terminate the project.

We continue to believe that individual technical training co-located on fewer sites, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) mentioned, remains the best solution for the armed forces, but not necessarily for St Athan. The SDSR committed the Government to continuing to look at options from pre-training across the services.

Chris Bryant: This is a serious point. Many of us believe that bringing together all the forces for technical training is an important part of what was suggested in the past. It has worked extremely well at Shrivenham. Who would ever have thought that the Royal Navy would be prepared to leave Greenwich? It has, and it has worked. Is the Minister still saying that he wants to achieve purple training in, we hope, St Athan or elsewhere?

Mr Robathan: As the hon. Gentleman will understand, I have to be very careful not to commit myself to things that we are reviewing at the moment. None the less, we do see a need and a sensible way forward for more purple training on some issues. Some of that may take place in St Athan and some elsewhere.

I can assure hon. Members that St Athan is still being considered; a substantial amount of training continues at St Athan.

Geraint Davies: Will the Minister give us some indication of the time frame in which we will get clarity over whether there will be a joint establishment and where it will be? Will it be in a year, two years, three years, or does he just not know?

Mr Robathan: The review does not have an end date, but I expect it to be within the next few months.

I appreciate that the cancellation of the DTR was not something that the hon. Member for Swansea East or the people of south Wales wanted to hear. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) pointed out the rocketing costs of the DTR in St Athan. He said that in two years they had gone up from £12 billion to £14 billion. He mentioned the job losses. He said that almost half the people who were employed by the MOD 13 years ago are now not employed. He also talked about the Red Dragon hangar. The previous Government decided to build that hangar. It cost £107 million and it was to accommodate the refurbishment of 48 Tornados and Harriers. The repairs and refurbishment were cancelled before the hangar was completed in 2004; it was a complete waste of money.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) talked about the Metrix decision being made in the context of the SDSR. He is wrong. It was separate from the SDSR and not part of our overall view. He also talked about RAF Valley. I can reassure him that RAF Valley plays a very important role in pilot training—fast jet training. If there are changes, we will keep him informed. He is also welcome to write to me, and I will write to him if changes come up.

The hon. Gentleman talked about Texas. I have to say that the weather is generally better there than in Anglesey.

Albert Owen: Will the Minister tell us the position with regard to replacing Sea Kings with Sikorsky helicopters? The £7 billion contract is important.

Mr Robathan: I am afraid that I do not have the time, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

In conclusion, the previous Government let down the United Kingdom. They let down United Kingdom defence and they let down Wales. I was told today that Labour was standing up for defence. It has not been standing up for defence in Wales but for narrow partisan interests. Frankly, it is a scandal. We will not make defence decisions based on regional party political advantage, or on the advantage of the Principality; we will make a clear-headed assessment on what is best for our armed forces, the United Kingdom—including the Principality—and its defence.

Football Grounds (Regulation)

11 am

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to have this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. When I submitted my request for this short Westminster Hall debate, the title had the words “Keep Scunthorpe Standing” in it. The Table Office informed me, in its own inimitable way, that that was sloganeering and would need to be improved. Hence the title that we have today. Nevertheless, it is on Scunthorpe United that I wish to focus my attention. I should certainly declare my interest as a season ticket holder at Glanford Park, albeit in the seated Grove Wharf stand.

Before I go further, let me take the opportunity to praise all associated with Scunthorpe United. It is a small club that, despite a recent run of results that we would rather forget, is punching above its weight. It has, in Steve Wharton, a chairman who, like his father before him, has run the club sensibly and in a businesslike manner that some might say could be a model for other clubs up and down the land.

Scunthorpe United is not a club that changes its manager every five minutes. Instead, it grows managers out of its coaching personnel. It has been well served by Brian Laws and Nigel Adkins, and it is now being well served by Ian Baraclough. They have built good teams out of scarce resources, and the players are to be applauded for their achievements in recent years. Having said that, the “team” of a football club includes all the other staff who work day-in, day-out, to make all the backroom activities happen, and those other staff at Scunthorpe United are also brilliant.

Scunthorpe United is a club rooted in its community that does excellent work in education through its “Study United” programme, and it takes on apprentices each year as part of an ongoing commitment to sports development. It also has loyal and dedicated fans, such as David Beverley and his colleagues, who have been working with the Football Supporters Federation on the “Keep Scunthorpe Standing” campaign.

Currently, the rules state that once a club has been in the championship for three years, its stadium must become an all-seater stadium. Everyone fully understands the awfulness of the Hillsborough stadium disaster of 15 April 1989, and the recommendations for all-seater stadiums were a key component of Lord Justice Taylor’s excellent report into the disaster. There have been many significant strides forward in ground safety since that time. Thankfully the world—in terms of stadium safety—is a different place today.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster) made an excellent speech yesterday introducing his ten-minute rule Bill, in which he very ably set out all these issues. As he explained, it is perfectly possible for the United Kingdom to have safe standing in the same way that the Bundesliga does.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue to the House. AFC Bournemouth is doing very well in the first division at the moment, and this issue concerns AFC Bournemouth, too. There is a change in technology, which I hope the hon. Gentleman will recognise, that makes things very different from how

they were at the time of the terrible events at Hillsborough, to which he referred. I hope that that change in technology is something that we might be able to embrace, and I hope that we will say, “Can we actually introduce this now?”

Nic Dakin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I compliment AFC Bournemouth on the good season that it is having. He is right to draw attention to changes in technology and stadium management, and more modern methods of properly policing football grounds and ensuring fans’ safety. Those are the issues that we need to look at. The rules on all-seater stadiums need to be revisited for modern times. There should be no compromise on safety, but there should be common sense. If Scunthorpe’s standing capacity has been safe for all these years and appropriate safety management is in place, there is no strong argument for replacing it with seating.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although it is very important to have safety, it is surely not impossible to marry safety with the finance available? Finance has to be a key factor for any football club and any football ground at the present time.

Nic Dakin: I absolutely agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Safety is crucial and should never be compromised, but there also needs to be a sensible way forward. In these difficult financial times, that is very important. The Glanford Park terracing has stood for more than 20 years. It is under threat solely because the football team has been successful. It is my contention, and that of the Football Supporters Federation, that Scunthorpe United and its supporters should not be penalised and lose the safe standing option because of the club’s success.

If the current rules are adhered to, a very small club will have to spend significant amounts of money during these difficult financial times to convert the safe standing area into seating. That would mean that the club would have the invidious choice of paying even more for a larger seating area, to maintain the maximum ground capacity of around 9,000, or reducing the ground capacity significantly.

Seating the Doncaster road end would reduce Glanford Park’s capacity by about 1,000. That would mean fewer tickets would be available for big games, such as the recent Carling cup game against Manchester United or the forthcoming FA cup visit of Everton. In turn, that would mean more disappointed fans and less revenue for the club. There is a danger that such a move would harm the club because it would be forced to divert its limited financial resources and energy into redeveloping the stand; that money would be better spent on improving the team or enhancing the experience of supporters.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate and, as he is obviously aware, Glanford Park is in my constituency and I am delighted to work closely with him on this issue. However, is there not an even more important issue here? We talk about localism a lot; this issue is about what the fans want, and what the fans of Scunthorpe

United are saying very clearly is, “Let us make our decision about what we want, and let us keep our terraces.”

Nic Dakin: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right in many respects. It is important to listen to what local people and local fans are saying. However, we would not and should not compromise safety. Nevertheless, it comes back to looking at this issue in the modern circumstances of today and recognising that Scunthorpe United’s stadium is a 9,000-capacity ground, with average crowds of 5,000. I will just make a little more progress now before taking any other interventions.

The Football League, in its letter to the Minister for Sport and the Olympics of 22 October, stated quite clearly:

“Football League clubs, particularly in Leagues One and Two, are evidence that standing at football is safe when managed correctly.”

That is a very helpful statement.

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being generous in taking interventions. It is important that safety is stressed. Cost is also critical. AFC Bournemouth is in dire straits, as are many other football clubs. The solution of allowing standing by using new technology would help. However, the point that I wanted to underline—I want to ask the hon. Gentleman if he agrees with this—is about the atmosphere that would be created by having standing capacity. Every time that a goal is scored or play builds up towards a goal, everybody ends up standing up anyway. There is a sense of atmosphere in standing areas that will encourage more people to come through the gates, which will help the gate receipts and the running of the club, from a cost perspective.

Nic Dakin: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the atmosphere in grounds, which is an important part of the football experience. Scunthorpe United is a well-run football club, which stays very carefully within its means. The club moved to the purpose-built Glanford Park in 1988, where the affectionately named “Donny road end” has always been a safe standing area.

That small club, with a ground capacity of just over 9,000 and average gates of around 5,000, is being caught up in safety rules designed in another age for much larger grounds. If the club remains in the championship for another year, the safe standing capacity will have to be removed and replaced with seating. That will cost money at a time when resources are scarce; it will reduce the ground capacity, and it will take away choice and enjoyment, as the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) has pointed out, from those fans who prefer to stand. Moreover, once the ground has become all-seater, it will not be able to revert back to having a standing area, even if the club spends the rest of its life in the lower divisions.

Cardiff City was allowed to retain standing for six years in the championship league. Why should Scunthorpe United, the smallest ground in the league, not be given a similar dispensation? There are much larger grounds in the lower leagues, such as the Carlisle United grounds, that are not affected by the rules. Will the Minister examine the experience of safe standing in other parts

of the world, including Germany, and review the current requirements for all-seater stadiums in the premiership and championship leagues?

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate; it is only right and proper that the issue should be debated fully. Will he explain or tease out the assurances regarding ground safety that he outlined that will ensure that we never return to the circumstances that resulted in the Hillsborough disaster of 1989?

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend asks an important question. Lord Taylor’s report was thorough and found many causes for the problems that occurred. Standing was not one of them, but none the less, all-seater stadiums were seen as an important part of the solution. We must consider the experience around the world, particularly in Germany, whose strong record of safe standing demonstrates that it can be done. I agree with my hon. Friend that there should be no compromise on future safety in the interests of standing; we should ensure that any standing is safe standing. However, I draw attention to the fact that Scunthorpe United’s ground has always had standing and has always been safe.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has secured an excellent debate. I echo his comments about Scunthorpe club being a role model. On the point just raised, I have every sympathy with what he is saying, but I am extremely nervous. Since Lord Justice Taylor’s report, safety in grounds has been improved and transformed. The prospect of a change makes me nervous.

Nic Dakin: As I have said all along, safety should never be compromised, but we need only look across to the Bundesliga to see an example of how one of the best leagues in the world manages safe standing alongside seating, using modern technologies. I agree with hon. Members’ comments. I welcome the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) that this is the right debate to have, but in no way should we prejudice safety in this debate. That would be wrong.

My second question to the Minister is this. Will he review the requirements that apply to small grounds such as Glanford Park, and allow the Football League to use its discretion, where local circumstances and common sense allow, to provide dispensation for small clubs such as Scunthorpe United to retain some safe standing capacity? Scunthorpe has had safe standing for its whole history, during which three England captains have played for the north Lincolnshire side: Kevin Keegan, Ray Clemence and, of course, Ian Botham. I thank everybody who has attended and contributed to this debate. Up the Iron!

11.13 am

The Minister for Sport and the Olympics (Hugh Robertson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing this debate and on how he has conducted it. I pay tribute to him for his work on a number of football issues since his arrival in the House, and I join him in paying tribute to his club, which has done exceptionally well. It is a proper community club in every way, and he is absolutely right to pay tribute to the current chairman and his predecessor for their

[Hugh Robertson]

running of it. It is an example of the sort of football club that we all want to encourage, and I wish Scunthorpe the best of luck for the remainder of the season.

Having said that, I remind the hon. Gentleman, as well the hon. Member for Bradford South (Mr Sutcliffe), that the Minister's powers in this area are limited. I can ask the Football League to re-examine the issue, but I could not sign an order forcing it to, even if the hon. Gentleman convinced me to do so today. The issue concerns not only many of his constituents but supporters up and down the country. As he correctly stated, the current rules go back to the Taylor report, published in the aftermath of the unnecessary loss of life at Hillsborough. He is absolutely right that that tragedy is the backdrop to this debate, and as he will know, many in his party as well as mine feel strongly about the issue. The Minister for Sport who preceded the hon. Member for Bradford South was among those who felt strongly that there should be no return to safe standing.

Having considered the basics of the case, I think that it is now generally accepted that most football grounds, for a vast number of reasons, are safer and more comfortable than they were 15 or 20 years ago, although I understand why many supporters miss the tradition, the feel and the atmosphere that some grounds had before. I checked the injury statistics for the past few seasons collected by the Football Licensing Authority. They suggest that spectators are less likely to be injured at all-seater grounds than at those that retain standing accommodation. I am aware that those statistics rely on self-reporting, which is always a dangerous statistical basis, and therefore might not provide a wholly reliable indicator of the relative injury rates, but I think that it is generally accepted across football that standing still presents a greater risk of injury, although the extent of that risk is open to debate.

Seating also offers higher standards of comfort, as is probably self-evident, and provides spectators with their own defensible spaces, which can only contribute to encouraging families and increasing the diversity of those attending football matches in recent years. I am sure that we all support that. I know that no one is suggesting that we should return to the arrangements in place 15 or 20 years ago, but I am not convinced at this stage that a compelling case has been made to change the policy on standing areas.

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the tone in which he is responding to this debate and for acknowledging that the power does not lie with him, but I hope that he will also acknowledge that there were other factors leading to the 1989 Hillsborough disaster. Yes, seating was one, but there were also crowd control issues, and there were no spill-over areas. The many changes that have been implemented and are now displayed every Saturday or Tuesday night mean that standing or seated, we can avoid what happened on that day. I hope that new technology might allow clubs not in the premier or championship leagues to consider piloting that idea in certain parts of the stands.

Hugh Robertson: I do not believe that the presence of all-standing areas was the contributory factor at Hillsborough; that is self-evidently ridiculous. A basket

of factors contributed to that disaster, including crowd control, as my hon. Friend says. He is also right that technology has moved on considerably during that period. That said, there are also new elements of technology that rely on fans being seated—the police, for example, say that crowd control via CCTV is much easier if fans are seated than if they are standing—so the argument cuts both ways.

As the hon. Member for Scunthorpe knows, our coalition partners previously agreed a conference motion asking for the provision of some safe standing areas to be considered. I remember that the hon. Member for Bradford South and I kicked about the issue, if that is not an unfortunate pun, a year or so ago when we were on opposite sides of the House. At the urging of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster), I have reconsidered the issue, as I promised in opposition we would. I have written to all the football authorities, and we are in the process of collating their responses.

I say gently to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe that he was right to quote the letter from the Football League. As he correctly said, they replied:

“Football League clubs, particularly Leagues One and Two, are evidence that standing at football is safe when managed correctly.”

But the next sentence reads:

“However, we cannot support a retrograde step that would lead to clubs seeking to replace seating with terracing. The Football League strongly supports existing legislation.”

There is a balance to be struck. We are in the process of collating football authorities' responses. I am keeping an open mind, but to be honest, there is no groundswell of opinion from the football authorities in favour of a change. I think that they are just as scarred by the Hillsborough experience as many of us who are or have been in government. That is a powerful backdrop and should always be so. There is considerable nervousness about moving, giving that backdrop.

Steve Rotheram: I think that the Minister would agree that this country has had an exemplary record since the Hillsborough tragedy, but that is not necessarily the case for the rest of the footballing world. Because of all-standing stadiums, there are tragedies all too regularly in which people are crushed to death, and it is obvious that that fear is the backdrop against which my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe has put forward his proposals.

Hugh Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and, once again, for the excellent debate on football that he secured in this Chamber a few months ago. He has put his finger exactly on the issue. The matter is characterised less by people being at either one end of the argument or the other, and more by a balance of risk somewhere in the middle.

I absolutely accept the arguments that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe has put forward, and many people feel that the risk could be safely managed in such a way that retains the traditional feel of football clubs. On the other hand, a considerable body of opinion on the other side of the line would argue that there are a number of reasons why that should not happen. On the balance of opinion, therefore, and given the backdrop of Hillsborough, we must do nothing that could in any way lead to such a tragedy. That, in a nutshell, is the argument about balance that I am trying to sum up.

We have looked at the experience of other countries and will continue to do so. I am aware of the arrangements in Germany, funnily enough, because I attended football matches there when I was serving in the forces in the early 1990s. I am also aware that things have moved on considerably in the 18 or 19 years since then. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe might be interested to know that the Culture, Media and Sport Committee is planning to look at the matter in the new year as part of its wide-ranging inquiry on football governance and intends to visit Germany to look at the experience there, so the matter remains current and is being examined.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's football club, to which I once again pay tribute for its achievements, the difficulty is that it has had three years to comply with the requirement. I understand why it does not welcome any sort of financial outlay in the current economic situation, particularly to make a correction that it does not feel is necessary on grounds of safety. However, since Hillsborough there has been a set of basic criteria governing the regulation of football. That has been lifted only once, for Cardiff City, because of a particular set of circumstances.

I can promise the hon. Gentleman today that we will most certainly keep the experience in other countries in the forefront of our minds. It is not a matter that we will review once and then drop. The fact that the hon. Member for Bradford South and I discussed that at considerable length when he was in government and I was in opposition should give the hon. Member for Scunthorpe confidence that it is something that the Government keep permanently under review. There are also pressure groups that ensure that we keep it permanently under review, and we will continue to do so. I will wait until I have received all the responses and then have some proper police advice, so for the moment I am keeping an open mind.

However, it would be dishonest not to tell the hon. Gentleman today that in my view the judgment will very much relate to the balance of opinion, and there is not a groundswell of opinion, from either the football authorities or the police, that would support a change in the legislation. For the moment, I simply congratulate him on securing the debate and for the way in which he has raised the matter. I appreciate the sensible and constructive way in which he has brought the problem forward. Most importantly, I wish his club good luck; it is a fantastic example of what we are looking for in community football. We will keep the issue under review, but I am afraid that I do not think that there is a compelling case at the moment for altering the rules, set against the backdrop of the Hillsborough disaster 20 years ago.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Seaside Towns (Regeneration)

[MR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): It is a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby, and to see so many colleagues from all parts of the perimeter of this country here today.

I am sure that the Minister was as pleased as I was when the Prime Minister described tourism as one of the best and fastest ways of generating the jobs that the country so badly needs. For too long, it has been the Cinderella business sector. It has been ignored for many years, but the Prime Minister put it on the pedestal that it deserves.

No one would be here today if they did not recognise the value of tourism to their constituency. In Thanet alone, it is valued at £162 million a year. We want to ensure that the tourism sector grows, that the small businesses in it thrive, and that new businesses are created in our coastal regions. Tourism and the associated economic activity are critical to our future.

Coastal communities are what I call pocket economies. They do not always react in the same way as the rest of the country; they often behave counter-cyclically. When the rest of the economy was thriving in the 1980s, seaside towns, and Thanet in particular, were suffering. During the Brown boom, Thanet did not benefit from the economic vibrancy of the rest of the country. Deprivation increased, worklessness was not addressed, and property prices rose only modestly. Coastal communities lag behind the rest of the economy and, in some instances, are passed by altogether.

Coastal communities have much more in common with one another than with their prosperous neighbours. If we compare Thanet with Canterbury, which is a mere 20-mile drive away, in Thanet, average salaries are £60 a week less than in Canterbury, there is double the number of jobseeker's allowance claimants, and vacancies are 25% of those available in Canterbury. There is no guarantee that our pocket economies will necessarily benefit from any upturn in the general economy. We also have high levels of public sector jobs, and few, if any, large company employers. Currently, my constituency is the 64th most deprived district in the country—not exactly the profile one would expect in the south-east.

On a positive note, perhaps the lack of modernisation and development can deliver a unique proposition. Cloned high streets have passed us by, large hotel chains and restaurants prefer more central locations, and developers have looked for easier pickings. We are unusual and quirky, and we have personality and character—a rarity in the world which should offer us a competitive edge. Thanet has 26 miles of sandy beaches, cliffs like those in the Algarve, walks suitable at any time of the year, and architecture that rivals any in the country. It is an historic mecca: from the Romans to the Beatles, we have had it all, with every invasion other than the Norman conquest and every major war fought from Thanet's shores, and we have all the sights that go with those great British triumphs.

Two weeks ago, Thanet was nominated as one of the 12 most desirable locations in the world—can hon. Members believe that? We were celebrated in the same

[*Laura Sandys*]

breath as Rio de Janeiro, Santiago in Chile, and Stockholm. This week, one of our local hotels was named the best small hotel in the country, and we have many more hotels and bed and breakfasts like it. However, we need a step change. We need to change the way in which our coastal towns are perceived and marketed. Traditionally, seaside towns have been marketed as locations for the sunny summer months but, to maximise the opportunities and great visitor experiences, we need clear strategies to increase significantly our out-of-season business.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. I represent what is perhaps an unknown part of the country in west Wales—the Ceredigion coastline. The hon. Lady is getting to the point where she is really talking about responsibility for the branding of our respective areas. I applaud local initiatives such as the Cambrian Mountains initiative, and I have hopes for the promotion of Cardigan bay. Who will be responsible for branding? Will we rely on local initiatives, or do we expect—and, I hope, anticipate—more of a lead from the centre, in particular VisitBritain?

Laura Sandys: Those are certainly questions for the Minister, but I think that what we need to do centrally more than anything else is to change the perception of seaside towns. The view is that if we put a beach on the website, the tourists will come over the summer months—and they do. Certainly Thanet does not need as much input for the summer months. However, we need to ensure that people appreciate the area whatever the time of year. I was walking on a beach with snow on it, and it was stunning. We have to understand that there is an all-year-round marketing opportunity.

Further to what my hon. colleague rightly said, we need a Minister for out-of-season marketing. Last weekend, I looked at the VisitBritain and VisitEngland websites. In many ways, they do a great job promoting this country, but it took six clicks to reach one seaside resort—Eastbourne—and no other. Under “things to do”, there is no mention of seaside towns. In the packages that they present for Canterbury and Lincoln, there is no suggestion that visitors extend their stay by a couple of days to visit the beauty of Thanet or Skegness, only a few miles down the road.

I accept that this is not an obvious time to visit our beaches, but I would like to ask the Minister what he thinks about the beaches in Weston-super-Mare at this time of the year. Would families not love to visit the SeaQuarium in Weston-super-Mare on their way to Wookey Hole? We need to ask our tourism marketers to be more creative about the opportunities that they offer to extend the season in areas that have been wrongly pigeonholed as summer locations, to think creatively about how they can add economic value and play a part in the regeneration of our coastal communities with taxpayers' pounds, and not just be offered as window dressing for locations that are already international household names.

Extending the season is crucial for us all. If we could achieve that, we would increase revenues by 15% to 25%, increase employment, which is currently seasonal, and support our high streets and small retailers. That

must be a crucial objective for us all. We need to be on the main websites all year around—that is fundamental—so changing the mentality of the marketers is crucial.

We must also look at what other countries do very successfully, not least social tourism, which is a concept not well understood in the UK; frankly, it is not understood at all. It is about offering out-of-season opportunities to people on lower incomes, people with disabilities and older people. The models range from those that involve public subsidy to those that cost the Government nothing. The Belgian tourism body will not register a hotel or holiday establishment that does not provide free or discounted holiday nights out of season. At no cost to the public purse, it incentivises accommodation owners to ensure that they provide discounted offers. In Spain, the Imerso scheme, which offers senior citizens off-peak holiday breaks by the sea, has led to a 10% increase in tourism revenue and a 16% increase in tourism employment. In France, 135,000 establishments accept vouchers available for those on low incomes, generating €3 billion for the French tourism economy every year. That system costs the Government nothing and is an incentive package that companies offer their lower-paid workers. I am sure that many hon. Members in the Chamber would like to establish a working group with the Minister's Department to see if we can create a sustainable scheme that would generate such revenues for our seaside towns out of season.

There is one final issue on which I should like the Minister's support. Many of us who spoke, or who wanted to speak, in the debate on the Daylight Saving Bill on Friday were a little disappointed. The measure would support our weaker pocket economies in coastal areas at almost no cost, and if they adopted it, the Government would increase Thanet tourism revenue by 10%. Nationally, the measure would boost tourism revenues by £3.5 billion and generate about 80,000 jobs—quite an impact for just one measure. The fact that the Government did not even want to investigate what measures could be put in place was particularly unhelpful. Even the Scottish nationalists, who are against the proposal, conceded that perhaps there is a case for putting back the date when we revert to Greenwich mean time. Even an extension to the end of November would make a serious difference. I hope that my hon. Friend, as Minister responsible for tourism, will make further representations to other parts of Government to consider this issue again.

I urge the Minister, who is a great champion of tourism and heritage and who represents a seaside town, to support us in this push for greater marketing out of season, for consideration of social tourism or other mechanisms to ensure that we can get the most out of our exceptional accommodation on the coast and for daylight saving to be regarded as a priority for the regeneration of our coastal communities. That is not just for our benefit. It would benefit the Treasury in increased taxes. The Minister could put a smile on the face of the Department for Work and Pensions by reducing unemployment in some of the most intractable parts of the country, help the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills increase the number of new business start-ups in coastal towns and help us break the cycle of deprivation and economic stagnation that so many of us face locally.

2.43 pm

Dr John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on giving a focus to this debate by analysing with great skill many of the problems in seaside towns.

I apologise if I do not sound like my usual cheerful self, Mr Crausby. I have a disease that I am trying to throw off. Were I in the sun-kissed environment of Southport, I am sure that this would not be so. I represent Southport, which some people say is only technically a seaside resort, because we have so much beach that it takes some time to get to the sea. None the less, it has regenerated itself successfully in recent years and I am proud of what has been achieved there.

It might help new hon. Members if I rehearsed some things that were done in the previous Parliament. There has always been a group of Members of Parliament from seaside resorts who have got together to co-ordinate their efforts and put pressure on the Government to deal with their specific concerns. In the previous Parliament, we were helped by a report on coastal towns from the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. I sat on that Committee and I assure hon. Members that it was not easy to get Committee members to consider that matter, because they thought that it was a marginal issue and perhaps not sufficiently substantive to occupy a serious Committee. But that was done, and it was a surprising success.

Initially, the Government response to that report was fairly negative and bland. Phyllis Starkey, then Chair of the Committee, asked the Department to consider its response again and, to our surprise—there might have been a change of Minister—the second response was a great deal more positive. “Sea Change” funding appeared, which was to be administered by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, and there was a clear cross-departmental focus on the problems of seaside resorts, which was wholly helpful. At about that time, regional development agencies were given responsibility for tourism and asked to look specifically at the regeneration of seaside towns, in addition to other topics that they are more familiar with, such as urban regeneration.

We found from the Committee’s report that it was hard to generalise about seaside towns, because they are all so different; they are not only in different parts of the country, but are different in character and history. Some concentrate on fishing and others on fairgrounds. There really are quite stark differences between many resorts. Skegness is not the same as, or anything like, Brighton, although it happens also to be on the sea.

A cluster of problems can be found in most seaside towns. They normally have an interesting past, but equally they have a rather uncertain future, and sometimes an uncertain view of where they should go. I visited Margate with the Select Committee, not too far away from the constituency of the hon. Member for South Thanet, and found a town torn in two directions. People wanted to go different ways. Some wanted the old fairground back and wanted Margate to become a place of pleasure rides, and others wanted to build on the Turner heritage, and the light of that area, and have a more aesthetic development. I am not sure which direction that area went in, but that difference of opinion

crystallises a general view that I have formed, which is that all seaside resorts, if they are to go anywhere, need some view of what they are essentially like.

Southport has been successful because it has not tried to rival Blackpool and has a concept of itself as a classic resort, which is distinctive, and it plays to its strengths, such as Lord street and, generally speaking, the Victorian environment—and as a market brand, it works. But like many other places, it also has problems with its housing stock, particularly the hosts of large houses built for the days when thousands of people trooped there regularly to fill out boarding houses. That means that such places end up with a skewed housing stock. In some towns on the Kent coast, that housing stock is filled with a disproportionate number of benefit claimants. There are genuine housing problems. Sorting out seaside towns’ problems is not just about attending to tourism, but about attending to housing and transport, which is a huge issue for most seaside resorts because they are often difficult to access, having been built and grown up in the days when trains were the way forward.

In making changes and developing the character of these places, we should consider that often seaside towns are blessed with a disproportionate number of retired people. That has a good effect, in so far as it ensures that there is a relative level of prosperity in the town. However, in respect of implementing change, as people get older they possibly do not welcome change in the same way as people do when they are young. In resorts that we Committee members visited, we often found contentious political divisions about the character of development in the town. An additional problem is generated by the fact that a lot of people living and working in seaside towns work in the public sector and will feel the impact of public sector cuts.

Sorting out the problems of seaside towns is not something that should just be thrown at the door of the Minister with responsibility for tourism; it should be thrown at the Government as a whole, because it is a matter of cross-departmental working. The previous Government recognised that.

Laura Sandys: I totally agree that the issue of coastal towns is a multi-departmental one; I do not detract from that, but I feel strongly that we in coastal communities have to address the each of the issues with each of the Ministers, and then bring that together through the cross-departmental committee. It is crucial that Ministers with responsibility, who can have an impact on our communities, understand that we face many challenges and find out what levers they can pull to assist us. The fact that the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), has responsibility for tourism and is the MP for a seaside town is a great asset for us.

Dr Pugh: Absolutely. I do not disagree with that analysis. Tourism genuinely helps in an extraordinary way. Too often in our tourist propaganda, we forget that our coasts are a fantastic asset. We tend to think of London, Edinburgh and bits in between, such as Stratford-upon-Avon. International publicity does not stress a strength that was well illustrated by the BBC programme. We have a fantastic coast, which is a fantastic asset, and we should make more of it. When I was at an embassy in France, I picked up propaganda for the north-west of

[Dr Pugh]

England, hoping to find references to Southport, or at least Blackpool, but there were none. I found Oswaldtwistle, but I do not even know what it is, and I have lived in the north-west most of my life.

VisitBritain—I have said this before—has something to learn, but we must all learn how to deal with our new environment. If regeneration of seaside resorts is to progress, we will presumably have to work hand in hand with the new local enterprise partnerships, which will be centred predominantly in urban conurbations and will not have a natural feel for the problems of seaside resorts. They will need to be advised, instructed or directed not to leave out places that will, in most LEPs, be on the margins or the coast.

We must also recognise among ourselves—the community of coastal MPs—that whatever prospects we thought there were, before the time of austerity, of new transport links being delivered overnight have probably receded, and that that will not happen any time soon. We must work hard for our salvation. Most seaside resorts, their communities, and councils who understand the state of play recognise that. I believe that there is a role for the Government—this was the theme of the speech of the hon. Member for South Thanet—in sewing the pieces together and ensuring that good practice is spread, and in ensuring that when resorts have a clear vision of their own destiny and are prepared to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, they are given every encouragement to do so.

2.52 pm

Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con): I want to focus briefly—I know that other hon. Members want to speak—primarily on the economic importance of tourism to Great Yarmouth and other coastal towns. We know that tourism is one of the largest employment industries in the country. I think it is the fifth biggest, involving more than 200,000 people. In Great Yarmouth, it is the biggest employer by quite a long way—the NHS is second—with 5,600 people involved. To put that in context, tourism is one of the largest industries in Norfolk, where there are about 11,000 people working in it. More than half of the entire county's employment in tourism is in Great Yarmouth, so its importance to our economy is massive.

Tourism is driven primarily by local, private, often family-owned businesses, such as hotels and providers of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and the tourist authority is very active. We are talking about 30% of the entire work force of Great Yarmouth, and half of that 30% work in seaside-related tourism. Those are the figures, and Steve Fothergill's work on that is to be commended and should be read by everyone who is interested in coastal towns, but in a town such as Great Yarmouth, it is probably more like 80% or 90% who are tied to the coastal attraction. Our only other areas of tourism that do not have the seaside link are the broads, a third of which are in Great Yarmouth.

It is important when moving forward to consider how to market our coastal towns, and it is absolutely correct that we must consider how to develop them in the 21st century. Tourism in many of our coastal towns is that classic British archetypal postcard idea, but things

have moved forward. Apart from the fact that there is more competition, because people can travel abroad more cheaply and find guaranteed weather more easily, we all demand more value for our money, particularly in times of austerity. It is important that coastal towns recognise that.

Great Yarmouth has done some excellent work in developing and improving tourism. Some independent and family companies, such as Potters, a family holiday resort, have upgraded to become five-star resorts, and that has a positive impact on the entire area, as does focusing on attracting people and explaining that there is more than just the seaside. There are zoos and the broads. We must be clear about that.

It is extremely beneficial to all tourism areas, especially coastal areas, to have a Minister who really understands the issues. He is methodical and careful about ensuring that he is briefed on the entire range of issues affecting tourism towns. I look forward to welcoming him to Great Yarmouth next year, and I hope that that will be when the weather is just a bit warmer.

It would be hugely beneficial to consider how marketing is carried out, particularly through VisitBritain and VisitEngland. At the moment, much of that marketing is funded through the regional development agencies, and a complaint that I often hear is that the RDAs, particularly the East of England Development Agency in the eastern region, do not understand or focus on what coastal towns want. We need a body that understands and focuses on tourism, and a body that our tourist authorities and local authorities can better understand, instead of the quango system. That would be a more logical way of moving forward.

There are opportunities, and their economic value is huge. In Great Yarmouth we hope to have one of the large casinos. That would bring the benefit of up to 1,000 jobs, and bring a different type of person to the town. The best we can achieve from debates such as this, and from the Government, is help to raise our profile nationally, and to show people the importance of tourism. Much tourism in coastal towns focuses on independent businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises that need extra motivation and support to ensure that they can develop. Many areas suffer from a limited season, including Great Yarmouth, where one of the most deprived wards in the country has unemployment of 16% and, in some years, 18% just because of seasonality.

We are moving forward. We are developing the energy industry and considering how, with the casino and other developments, to extend the season, but we need extra motivation and support. If we can find some economic drive, and courage to change the way in which we market such towns, that might help to stretch the season. We must incentivise independent business people to understand that they should invest further, and persuade some of the bigger organisations and companies who invest in coastal and tourism towns throughout Europe to look at the benefit of investing in British coastal towns. When they understand that even a town that is not the biggest in the world, such as Great Yarmouth, has a tourism industry that is worth around £500 million a year with more than 5 million visitors, they will see that there is a huge amount of business for people, and that will bring a real benefit to the British economy. I recommend that the Government support that as much as they possibly can.

2.57 pm

Mike Weatherley (Hove) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on securing this debate. Just as tourism is often the reason for the existence of our seaside towns, it is often key to the ongoing regeneration and growth of those communities. The leisure and business facilities that attract inbound visitors also improve the economic and cultural lives of our residents. Anchor attractions, quality hospitality, retail facilities, festivals and events are key drivers in regenerating seaside towns, revitalising the image and refreshing the offering. I want to highlight a few ways in which the tourism sector can be a driver for the regeneration of seaside towns for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

The first is cultural tourism. The reputation of seaside towns as backward and tacky is turned on its head when a more inspirational offering is added to the mix, such as has been done in Brighton and Hove. Recent years have seen a huge increase in the popularity of festivals and events, and Brighton and Hove can probably claim the title, “City of Festivals”, with its year-round calendar of major events incorporating music, arts and theatre, food and drink, sport and outdoor pursuits, fashion and retail, and many more.

Festivals are a relatively low-cost and self-contained way for seaside towns to reposition themselves. For example, the Brighton and Hove food and drink festival supports the entire supply chain from farm to fork, and creates year-round promotion of the city as a quality destination for food lovers. The Sussex fashion awards, which are scheduled for February 2011, are another example and had the good sense to invite me to be a judge. Brighton dome and festival is a pairing of a year-round cultural festival to provide joined-up thinking and resources. However, health and safety rules, licensing costs, and restrictions applied by local councils on outdoor events and carnivals can have the effect of de-incentivising organisers. As events are one of the key creators of a buzzing, thriving economy, this is one relatively straightforward area where local councils and the Government can act rapidly to allow the private sector to facilitate change.

Simon Kirby (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): My hon. Friend will know how lucky he is to represent a constituency that is so close to mine in the great tourist resort of Brighton and Hove. It has nearly 8 million visitors a year who provide £0.75 billion to the economy every year, and 14,000 people are employed in the tourism industry. He is right to say that tourism is not just about the beach and the sea. There is a variety of important cultural attractions in the city that we represent. Things such as music and arts, which I know are dear to my hon. Friend’s heart, are important drivers, together with traditional attractions such as the Palace pier.

I would like to raise one point, and I thank my hon. Friend for allowing this interruption—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): It is a rather long interruption.

Simon Kirby: Does my hon. Friend agree that we need better train services to enable people to come and see our great city?

Mike Weatherley: I thank my hon. Friend for that speech, and for taking the impact of most of my speech away. If I may, I will return to the point about transport in a few minutes.

Unfortunately, many seaside towns in the UK have problems managing the night-time economy. Many councils and residents look with disdain at bars and clubs and their patrons, and a cultural shift is required to move on and recognise the economic benefits of that sector. Within Brighton and Hove, the night-time economy raises a figure in excess of £400 million a year, which goes a long way towards the figure mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet. A thriving night-time economy is one of the strongest draws for visitors to the coast and, increasingly, for the “silver mature” market, which includes myself. The night-time economy should be embraced and helped, not legislated against. Extended licensing hours, for example, have generally benefited the city, rather than had a negative effect.

One of the main blocks to feel-good tourism in the UK is the continued lack of investment in the infrastructure of seaside towns. That leads to limited and expensive parking and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Simon Kirby) noted, inadequate rail facilities. Due to necessary but never-ending engineering works, Brighton and Hove is often inaccessible by direct rail at weekends, and the road works and lack of road capacity result in endless traffic jams at peak times. The cumulative effect of that has a negative impact on visitors, and the lack of investment in city centre parking in Brighton and Hove is a major obstacle to future development. The past decade of discouraging car use was a mistake; an integrated transport system is required, rather than forcing through one form of transport.

Congestion charging says to visitors, “Please do not come here.” Let us hope that that idea is never implemented in Brighton and Hove, which depends on welcoming visitors rather than turning them away. The same applies to parking fines. Car parking should be a council priority when looking at investment in buildings and other attractions. I would also like to see proposals for the monorail along our seafront progressed. That would be an innovative scheme, and a first for the country. Such proactive development will boast the importance and desirability of the city as a destination.

I welcome the coalition shift towards having more planning decisions taken locally, and I hope that that does not lead to fewer planning approvals. Our record in Brighton and Hove over the past 20 years may be attributed to the proposal of inappropriate schemes, and to intransigent developers trying to foist their schemes on the city. It is also due to a cumbersome planning permission regime.

Although it is important to protect the unique Georgian and Victorian architectural heritage of our seaside towns, which have no equivalent in the world, it is equally important to see them as living, breathing spaces with economies to support. We need to get the balance right between protecting the best bits, and being bold enough to replace the mediocre.

In summary: it is time to regenerate. Tourism is vital important to my constituency, and we should encourage investment in destination hotels and attractions—the relaxation of some planning controls would help. We should also embrace the night-time economy, avoid

[Mike Weatherley]

excessive legislation and red tape, improve transport infrastructure, especially car parking, and recognise the importance of the tourism sector with tax breaks for small companies. For example, I would like to see the national insurance scheme currently proposed for the rest of the country extended to those cities in the south that require an occasional boost to tourism. Such issues are vital for Hove and Portslade, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and to working with the Government.

3.5 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on securing this important debate. Like a moth to a flame, as a Blackpool MP I find it hard to resist any debate on tourism and seaside towns. Today, however, I do not want to talk about Blackpool. Close observers of the annunciator will have noticed that I represent Blackpool North and Cleveleys. Cleveleys is also a seaside town with a tourism industry, although it does not receive as much attention as its big brother to the south.

Many people holiday in Cleveleys without going anywhere near Blackpool. It offers a wonderful expanse of coast and some of the finest promenade architecture that we have seen built in this country over the past 25 years. Bus trips come for the day from far and wide. During the general election, I had a street stall in Cleveleys. By half-past 10 in the morning I was spending more time convincing voters from constituencies such as Stoke-on-Trent Central to vote Conservative than I was convincing those from my constituency. Obviously, I did not do enough because we failed win the seat in Stoke-on-Trent Central, but I did my bit.

Cleveleys has flat pavements. Hon. Members may wonder why I mention that, but flat pavements are unusual in seaside towns and they make the town accessible. A large number of coaches come to Cleveleys full of disabled tourists who know that it is an accessible resort that they can get around despite their mobility problems. Large numbers of pensioners also come to Cleveleys—again, because it is easy to get around.

Cleveleys has a good variety of shops and a large number of cafés for people to sit in should a shower pass over. One such place is the Carousel Café, which is run by the president of the chamber of trade, Martin Hunns. Although Cleveleys has some wonderful, positive aspects, it also has a few downsides. If one asked Martin about Cleveleys, as I am sure people do, he will say one thing:

“We have gone on for years about parking in Cleveleys. All this money has been spent on this beautiful promenade but people are being turned away because there is nowhere to park.”

The town is concerned about the sustainability of the range of shops on the main streets, and the future of its indoor markets. One such market is to close suddenly, although I gather that an improved version is on the way. A medium-sized seaside town such as Cleveleys has positive and negative aspects, but the main challenge it faces is that of marketing, branding and

communication—something that other hon. Members have also mentioned. Who should do that marketing, and how?

I want to pay tribute to a lady called Jane Littlewood who runs a small business, Rabbit Design. She moved to Cleveleys from South Yorkshire, and saw the opportunity the moment she arrived. She now runs a website that promotes tourism in Cleveleys, which she does entirely on her own without any public funding. Unsurprisingly, the website is called visitcleveland.co.uk, and I encourage hon. Members to do just what it says and visit Cleveleys. As Jane says,

“the coastal Wyre area hasn't previously been strongly promoted as a tourism area, and Cleveleys has plodded along under its own steam...Promoting the website and promoting Cleveleys are inextricably linked, and a raft of publicity has gone out this year in north west publications, including Lancashire Life. Links are being developed with the local authority and tourism marketing agencies to develop the brand much further for the future.”

What Jane does is more than a voluntary initiative and a nice idea; I think that it is the future for destination marketing in this country. For too long, we have assumed that the responsibility for marketing our seaside towns should lie with some sort of public body, be it local government, VisitEngland, VisitBritain—or visit whoever—or even the Minister's Department. Here, however, we have someone taking the initiative and doing something for the benefit of their community without a public body intervening. I hope that hon. Members will not groan when I say that that might just be an example of the big society in action.

If we look a little to the south of my constituency, although not as far as Southport, we see that South Ribble and West Lancashire have the Heart of Lancashire Tourist Association. It was recently spun off as a community interest company and is owned by the very businesses that it promotes. It is a true co-operative and does not need to be sustained by public funding. When we see the Minister's domestic tourism strategy, I hope that VisitEngland will have become not a body that picks and chooses the places that it promotes, but a repository of understanding and knowledge about how best to promote tourism in the UK.

VisitBritain's role is quite distinct: it is to encourage overseas visitors to come to the UK. I hope that it will work hard to encourage Chinese people to come and enjoy Blackpool pleasure beach, which will certainly be a cultural experience for them in many ways. VisitEngland, however, really has to focus on understanding how we promote domestic tourism. We all talk about the cliché of the “staycation”, which might well be a passing, transient phenomenon, but we need to understand that there is a wide variety of holidays that our citizens can take in this country.

I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet mention the concept of social tourism, which is close to my heart. I urge anybody who does not know what it is to come to the inaugural meeting of my all-party group on social tourism next week, where they can find out far more about the subject. They might even take part in the inquiry that the Family Holiday Association is organising for the start of next year on defining just what we mean by social tourism. We should try to find new ways of developing tourism and spreading its wider benefits to disadvantaged groups.

I wonder how many Members here have heard of the Family Fund, an organisation that spends almost £30 million of Government money on giving families with disabled children short breaks in the UK. Many people say that we do not do social tourism in the UK, but we do, and the Government already spend £30 million a year on it. We need to understand what goes on already and what could go on in the future, and my hon. Friend mentioned many examples. We need to understand what benefits that could bring us.

I am really looking forward to reading the Minister's domestic tourism strategy, and I hope that it is a long read, because there is a lot that we need to deal with. When he presents it, however, we will have to address the fact that tourism does not stand in isolation. Tourism promotion, particularly in places such as Blackpool, can be hampered by some of the negative feelings that people have about seaside towns. Branding is not just about Blackpool town, the pleasure beach or the nice seaside; it can also be about some of the negative headlines on social problems that people read in our newspapers.

Before the debate, I asked the Library to put together a ranking of all Conservative-held constituencies by deprivation. I had a theory that there would be a concentration of very poor Conservative-held seats in seaside towns, and that is indeed the case. Of the top 10 Conservative-held constituencies by deprivation, six are seaside towns, and the list is topped, unfortunately, by the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd)—that is perhaps not a list that she would wish to top, but she does none the less. I come in at No. 4.

Clearly, the role of tourism in the economic regeneration of seaside towns is crucial, but we cannot see it in isolation, and we must tackle every other silo of Government activity. That is why I am so pleased that responsibility for this issue, in addition to being based in the DCMS, ranges across several Departments. That is crucial, because until we get the whole picture right, we cannot hope to get tourism right.

3.14 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I am delighted to take part in the debate, which gives many of us in the Chamber an excellent opportunity to share our concerns about tourism in seaside resorts.

I want to begin by talking about deprivation. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), I have done some research, although not just into Conservative-held seats. When I looked at the ranking of towns according to the number of personal insolvencies and bankruptcies, four of the top five were seaside towns. I am afraid that one of them was Hastings, while another, which is closer to my constituency, was Plymouth, although it was a little further down the list.

One reason why such towns are so deprived is that they have relied on support from industries such as engineering and fishing. Teignmouth, in my constituency, used to have a much more active and profitable fishing industry, but that is no longer the case, and most of the catch must now be landed in Brixham. Solving the problems of seaside towns is not, therefore, just about tourism, although it plays a key role. We must also look

at how we build supplementary businesses and industries. Much as I agree with hon. Members that the challenge is to ensure that tourism continues all year round, we must accept that there will always be more of it in the summer and that there will be a fair few part-time, rather than full-time jobs.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I completely support my hon. Friend's point. Does she agree that year-round interests, such as food tourism and heritage, are a particularly important part of the tourism offer? I am thinking particularly of food tourism in Kent, which has been a big growth area in the Canterbury and Faversham area and in Romney marsh, in my constituency.

Anne Marie Morris: I certainly agree, and that well-made point reiterates that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mike Weatherley).

The value of tourism is enormous. Members have mentioned several figures, but when I last looked at the issue, the prediction was that tourism would be worth £180 billion in this country by 2020. By that point, it will also be responsible for providing 2.89 million jobs, which is phenomenal. That would make a big difference to the current parlous state of the economy.

I represent part of Devon, which has 5.3 million visitors each year. That accounts for 7% of the Devon economy, which is well above average. In Teignbridge—the small heart of the part of Devon that I represent—32% of the work force are involved in tourism in some way or other. That is a very high figure, but it is not out of line with many of the figures that hon. Friends have mentioned.

Help is needed, because tourism is valuable for the growth of our economy and the recovery, but we need to identify how we make that help available, as many hon. Members have said. Perhaps I can briefly mention the key seaside towns in my constituency to help us see what the right solutions might be.

Dawlish Warren is a huge success story, and I am pleased about that. We have 800,000 visitors a year—on a good day, there are 20,000, which is a significant number. Why do we get those visitors? We have some excellent blue flag beaches and 505 acres of nature reserves, which attracts an interesting mix of tourists. However, we face the challenge of erosion, which is slowly pulling the beach back. As many hon. Members have said, the ability to solve such problems is not, dare I say it, in the gift just of this Minister, and I am pleased to say that I have had favourable responses on these issues from some of his Front-Bench colleagues.

Teignmouth is beautiful. It is a quintessential Victorian seaside town, but it, too, has its challenges. It has an ageing pier. It would be lovely if some of the suggestions made about lottery funding before the election could become a reality, because that could help. The town also has an ageing fish quay, which could receive EU funding and input, but those are proving quite elusive, and help from the Government in enabling seaside towns to make the most of EU opportunities would be extremely welcome.

Dawlish, which is a regency resort, is best known for its black swans. Jane Austen also stayed in the Strand, which is the main street running through the town. In

[*Anne Marie Morris*]

answer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys I would say that the big society is here in seaside towns. All three communities that I have mentioned have put together their own plans. They are well supported by the local community; there is not a great division. Indeed, the Dawlish plan is today on the Strand, ready to be inspected. What they need, having come up with the plan, is help with the solutions.

Clearly, No. 1 is marketing. I must declare an interest, because I am a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, and the issue is close to my heart. One of our concerns is that, while we need the big society, with communities doing their bit, we also need an appropriate framework and strategy, and a toolkit for making tourism work, and marketing it, as my hon. Friends the Members for Hove and for Blackpool North and Cleveleys were saying earlier. South West Tourism is the body that provides that guidance and framework at the moment in my part of the world. It will be disbanded in 2011 because it was under the aegis of the regional development agency, which clearly will not survive. What will replace it is an issue that is dear to my constituents' and my heart. VisitEngland and VisitDevon provide some help and assistance, but they do not go to the heart of the need.

We need to grapple with the question of what the target market for tourism is. As hon. Members have articulated, the days of the bucket and spade brigade have declined, because those people are going to sunnier climes where they can guarantee the weather, and it is cheaper because they do not have to pay for entertainment when it is raining. We must think about not just social and cultural tourism, which are important, but those people who no longer have children at home—the so-called empty nesters—who are looking for a different type of holiday. They may want to combine a holiday across seaside resorts and rural sites. We need to think about what the target market is and how we segment it—by the type of holiday that people want to enjoy, or by geography? We need such a strategy, because otherwise all the efforts made locally will be fighting against each other. That has been one of the problems to date. In Dawlish the community has got together as a group to ask, “What do we do about our brand? What does Dawlish stand for? How could we market ourselves, together with Teignmouth, and perhaps some of the other destinations out on the moor?” Marketing is a key thing, and that is clearly one of the solutions.

The second issue relates to regenerating not just the housing stock but the fabric of the landmarks in the relevant communities. I have referred to our pier. I should love to find some money, perhaps from the lottery, to sort it out. One of the challenges with refurbishing seaside towns is VAT. VAT on new build, which is not really appropriate in this case, is zero-rated. However, we shall feel the full weight of the 20% rate next year. Would not it be wonderful if, for that type of regenerative building, the VAT rate could be 5%? I know that that is not in the Minister's gift, but it is perhaps in that of some of his colleagues.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that we are one of only six countries left in Europe who

charge double figures for hotel accommodation. The 21 who do not are all reporting increased turnover, increased tax take and an increased ability to create jobs. Does my hon. Friend agree that our Government should seriously consider that?

Anne Marie Morris: I certainly agree. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) has raised that matter over the years. As my hon. Friend says, the rate is much lower across the continent. France has just brought it down to 7%. We need to look at that issue.

I suggest also that the Minister should consider business rates. They are the bugbear of many small businesses. Might we conceivably consider enabling communities to reinvest the business rates that are charged back into the community, the small businesses, and particularly tourism, which, certainly in my constituency, makes up a large part of the small business?

Damian Collins: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is encouraging that the Government, in their local growth White Paper, are including consideration of how councils can invest in the business infrastructure of their community and recoup that investment through tax increment financing in the future?

Anne Marie Morris: I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend makes a good point.

I want to talk now about the challenge of part-time workers. There is often a disincentive for them to take jobs because of the way the tax system works. If they are not working enough hours to take them over the threshold below which they do not pay tax, when they take a second job they are instantly thrown into paying the full base rate. There needs to be a way to simplify the process, so that individuals who take on several part-time jobs are not penalised, and do not have to reclaim overpaid tax.

I know that Front Benchers are considering the issue of people working 16 hours before losing benefit, which has meant that holiday businesses that employ people on a short-term basis find that when they want the flexibility for that individual to work a couple more hours it cannot be done without a huge problem for the employee.

I want finally to reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) about local enterprise partnerships. They can play a crucial role in providing the strategy and support that will enable community plans to become a reality. They can also play a crucial role in enabling us to find the funds for the different plans. It would be helpful if the Minister and his Front-Bench colleagues could reinforce that point.

I look forward positively to the domestic tourism strategy. I am delighted that the Prime Minister said that he would like domestic tourism to increase from 35% to 50%. That is fantastic, and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to make my case.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): There are three hon. Members left to speak. I intend to call the Front-Bench spokesmen at 3.40 pm exactly, so if hon. Members could share the time between them, that would be appreciated.

3.26 pm

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I shall keep my comments brief, Mr Crausby, and, if hon. Members do not mind, turn their attention to Wales for a short moment, in the full understanding that some of what we have been discussing this afternoon is devolved; the issues are common to seaside towns throughout the UK.

There are a few areas on which I should like the Minister, if possible, to comment, and reassure us. In my constituency we have 10 seaside towns, and no two are the same in their complications and economic and environmental circumstances. First, national parks are without a shadow of doubt a great asset, to be protected, and essential for a successful and effective tourism industry. However, there is a feeling, at least in my part of the world, that national park planning departments are a barrier to investment, progress and individuals who want to expand their tourist industry. It would be encouraging to hear from the Minister whether consideration will be given to merging in some way the local authority and national park planning functions, to minimise the chance of complications, which inevitably lead to the rejection of perfectly reasonable and positive planning applications, to the detriment of the local economy.

Secondly, I want to raise a planning-related matter—it has been mentioned before, but I want to put it in the specific context of agriculture: that is ensuring that the people on the fringes, not necessarily in the seaside towns, can diversify their agricultural businesses in a way that benefits the overall tourism attraction of the area. That issue is common to national park planning applications and to local authority applications.

Mr Mark Williams: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in a Welsh context, the planning experience he alluded to has hampered the development of agri-tourism, food tourism and green tourism, which we in west Wales are uniquely placed to develop fully?

Simon Hart: The hon. Gentleman is completely right. His constituency is only a few miles up the coast from mine and I recognise his concerns.

My third and penultimate point is about road and rail infrastructure. Of the 1 million international visitors to Wales, who have brought in £321 million in the recent past, a significant proportion—92%—made their journey to Wales in a car, but once people get as far as about Swansea it is almost impossible to travel any further west with any degree of comfort. It is even more difficult on a train. That is a subject for a future debate, when we will discuss the electrification of rail lines. We are not making things easy for the tourism industry in the west of Wales in that respect.

Finally, for the sake of brevity, let us not lose sight of the fact that although tourism is the subject of this debate, in my part of west Wales at least, coastal town regeneration is just as dependent on other industries as it is on tourism. To take the Milford Haven waterway as an example, in that location, there are two oil refineries and two gas terminals, and the biggest gas-fired power station in Europe is under construction. The inward investment to those enterprises is vital not only for the people who are immediately connected with them. The

surrounding tourism industry and economic environment are linked to large-scale industrial investment just as much as they are to tourism. We must not lose sight of that. This is not a case of either/or; it can be both. I hope that in the Government's proposals, those few points are taken into account.

3.30 pm

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this important debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on initiating it. I will try to be brief, and I will of course add to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), in that I am bringing Wales to the table today.

I have the privilege of being the Member of Parliament for Aberconwy. That means that I represent the seaside resort of Llandudno, which is recognised in Wales as the queen of Welsh resorts. The experience of Llandudno is very positive, because it has been a success story in many ways during the past few years, but before I focus on Llandudno, it is important to point out that seaside resorts and former seaside resorts have developed in different ways during the past 15 to 20 years. For example, the resort of Llanfairfechan in my constituency, has developed into a dormer village or dormer town. People live there to enjoy what is available there: the scenery, the beach and so on. Tourism can play a part in the further regeneration of Llanfairfechan, but the town has played its own game and decided to serve as a residential community, which is obviously perfectly acceptable.

Penmaenmawr is another resort in my constituency. Believe it or not, Penmaenmawr was the favourite resort of Gladstone, the former Prime Minister. He used to go there every summer to recharge his batteries. Penmaenmawr became an industrial area, dependent on quarrying, but it is now rediscovering tourism as a means of regeneration. The residents of Penmaenmawr, who are very proud of their association with the former Liberal Prime Minister, would be more than delighted to welcome the current Deputy Prime Minister. If things become a bit hot in London during the next few days, he is more than welcome to come to Penmaenmawr, where he can enjoy the seaside and the mountains and contribute to the redevelopment of the tourism sector in that town.

However, the real issue for me today relates to Llandudno, which is a great success, as it has retained its Victorian ambience but has also tried to modernise itself and ensure that it is a seaside resort that works all year round. A previous contributor commented on part-time work and casual work. One of the big challenges in relation to tourism and economic redevelopment is to ensure that the tourism sector can provide year-round employment. Llandudno is keen to ensure that it develops year-round tourism, and it has done that by being proactive about its marketing, ensuring that it draws in the Christmas market and so on. However, it has also worked in partnership with the local authority to ensure that it can offer conference facilities and entertainment. The local authority has worked with the tourism association in Llandudno to develop Venue Cymru, for example, where there are a large theatre and conference facilities. That means that Llandudno attracts tourists all year round, which has the added benefit of allowing businesses

[Guto Bebb]

servicing those tourists and visitors to employ people and give them proper jobs for 52 weeks of the year, as opposed to the casual employment that they had to depend on in that sector in the past.

Another of Llandudno's successes results from the fact that it has not seen tourism as something that works in isolation. In addition to being the queen of Welsh resorts, it has been the main shopping centre for north Wales for generations. The investment in retail has continued, and the important thing about that investment is that it is not just about the high street multiples, which are obviously very important to the local market. The wonderful thing about Llandudno is that it also offers independent retailers, who add to the experience for tourists when they come to the town. They have the feeling that they are in an old-fashioned resort. They can see the high street multiples, but they can also go to the back streets and find interesting retailers offering something completely different.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a council working with other councils in the region could bring in tourists for everyone? If a push is made to bring tourists to one village on its own, sometimes that does not work, but if a council works with other councils and other tourist destinations, with all their different attractions, everyone can benefit.

Guto Bebb: That is a very valuable contribution. Conwy council, which represents Llandudno, works in partnership with other local authorities, especially in relation to marketing the advantages of Snowdonia, for example, so yes, I agree with that point.

We are very fortunate that a large part of the town of Llandudno is under the management of Mostyn Estates. One of the strengths of Llandudno is that it has retained its character, due to the sympathetic management of the town by Mostyn Estates. That management has ensured that, for example, when people hit the prom in Llandudno, it looks extremely impressive. There are controls over the colour of the paint that can be put on hotels and there are controls in terms of not allowing buildings to be turned into houses in multiple occupation. That has kept the character of the town and has contributed to Llandudno's success.

I shall finish with these questions and points for my hon. Friend the Minister, because I am aware that time is pressing. The Llandudno Hospitality Association has a number of concerns, including one that was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire. I am referring to VAT on hotel rates. One of Llandudno's successes is that it has turned its attention to offering a broad range of accommodation, from bed and breakfasts to high-class boutique hotels. However, there is a concern that we face a VAT rate of 20% on hotel accommodation, compared with much lower rates in the rest of Europe.

It is worth mentioning that 3.1 million people live in seaside resorts in the UK. That is more than the population of Wales. Wales has a Secretary of State and a Welsh Assembly fighting its corner. Is the voice of seaside resorts heard across Government? I am sure that the coalition Government will ensure that that is the case, but I would like reassurance on that point.

Tourism should not be seen as a Cinderella sector in economic development. Local enterprise partnerships in England offer the opportunity to ensure that tourism development is part of those strategies. I hope that the LEP process in England learns the lesson from Wales. I am very disappointed, because the Welsh Assembly recently announced that it was targeting six specific sectors of the Welsh economy for growth and, for some bizarre reason, tourism was not included. I hope that the Minister will have more success in selling the importance of tourism as an economic development tool than his colleague did in the Welsh Assembly.

3.37 pm

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I have sprung to my feet in defence of the town of Hastings in my constituency, as it was placed in a not very positive category by a number of my colleagues. Deprivation in seaside towns is a fact. The point is well rehearsed and has been repeated by many hon. Members here today. It is true that Hastings suffers on many indexes of deprivation, but I will not refer to that now, because I should like instead to draw attention to some of the many wonderful aspects of Hastings. It has a large natural park around it. We have wonderful food and drink, and next year will see the arrival of the new Jerwood art gallery, which I hope will contribute to regenerating the town.

I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister about the amusement industry. We all know that the seaside tourism industry is linked to the amusement industry, and if the amusement industry is hampered, so is the economic growth of seaside towns. The amusement and bingo industry has been under pressure as a result of the Gambling Act 2005 and, as we know, that has been exacerbated by the recession. Given the wider debate about the economic viability of seaside towns, it is very important that the amusement industry is supported. We have heard today about many new initiatives to support seaside towns and their industries, but we must not forget the old one—the amusement industry and its slot machines, which are important in attracting tourists to our towns.

The regulatory framework of the 2005 Act is robust and exhaustive and went a long way in defending and supporting people, but it also had some unintended consequences, damaging seaside towns. I know that at the moment a Government consultation is under way about maximum stakes, premises and entitlements. I hope that the Minister will be able to introduce some positive changes when the consultation finishes, because many seaside towns have been suffering under those measures. I am thinking particularly of private clubs that are no longer allowed to offer high-paying slot machines. People who wish to use such slot machines must go instead to casinos and gambling places, which have a less benign atmosphere than private clubs, which causes problems. Will the Minister consider carefully what can be done to support the amusement industry, which is so important to seaside towns?

3.40 pm

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on securing this important debate. She spoke passionately about the issues, which are vital to the lives and livelihoods

of many people in her constituency, as they are to the people and economies of many other seaside towns up and down Britain. I hope that she and the other hon. Members who spoke will use their influence with their parties to bring the issue to the attention of the Government, and to press for the necessary steps to secure the future of our seaside towns and ensure that the regeneration of seaside and coastal areas does not slip off the agenda.

Tourism is incredibly important for the survival and regeneration of British seaside towns. It creates huge numbers of jobs, both for people directly employed in the industry and for many thousands more working in related industries. Millions of people visit the seaside every year—after London, Blackpool and Scarborough are the country's second and third most popular destinations for overnight stays. In total, about 25% of domestic tourism is made up of people taking holidays at seaside and coastal towns. I have learned that Cleveleys is an attractive destination. The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) spoke about the town's accessibility, and I shall certainly look at the website he mentioned.

Many hon. Members noted that tourism alone cannot be held responsible for ensuring the future of coastal communities, but it has also been noted that it is essential to start with the industry that made these places popular and, in many cases, famous and well loved. That means supporting tourism and directing support to seaside towns that rely on it as an economic lifeline. As the hon. Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) said, it means adopting a cross-departmental approach to help seaside and coastal towns tackle the problems that they face, and ensure that they remain, or return to being, places in which people want to live and work, as well as visit.

The coalition Government must take steps to end the cycle of seasonality that particularly affects coastal communities and to tackle joblessness and youth unemployment. The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis) spoke about the importance of the tourism industry in providing jobs for his constituents. The coalition should also act to provide better-quality and more affordable housing; to support the delivery of strong public services and infrastructure; to take steps to reduce the anti-social behaviour and crime that blights so many of our seaside towns; and to safeguard the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. The amusement industry, to which the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd) referred, falls within that sector.

I have spoken to members of the tourism industry, and I was told this morning that, after a period of neglect and decline, it was the previous Labour Government who ensured sustained investment in seaside towns, delivered in particular through the regional development agency, which the coalition has scrapped. The previous Labour Government backed coastal tourism and worked hard to ensure that the British seaside was becoming, once again, an attractive place for people to live, work and enjoy simple pleasures, such as the beach and the sea, and popular visitor attractions.

Earlier this year, Labour launched its strategy for seaside success, which included £5 million to help the most deprived seaside authorities, building on its record in government of targeting an additional £127 million of funding on coastal local authorities to help them meet the particular challenges that seaside towns can

face. The hon. Members for Brighton, Kemptown (Simon Kirby), for Hove (Mike Weatherley) and for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) discussed additional provision and activities in our seaside towns. Labour's strategy also involved a "seasiding" campaign to promote festivals, other cultural initiatives and the non-seasonal economy, and to support the development of heritage attractions, for example, the renewal of historic piers. Those things are needed to make our seaside towns year-round destinations. The campaign involved plans to improve infrastructure, tackle disproportionate levels of deprivation in seaside towns, and work with regional and local bodies to ensure that seaside towns and seaside tourism could flourish. Hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), talked about the problem of deprivation in such areas.

The coalition's cuts to RDAs and the budgets of organisations set up to promote tourism will hit hard and hurt at a time when the industry needs support, particularly in seaside towns that still depend heavily on tourism. The Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, have yet to show that they have the plans to secure the future of our seaside towns. Yes, we have heard lots of warm words about the state of seaside tourism in Britain, but I argue that they are simply an endorsement of Labour's record, rather than a strategy that the Government will pursue while in office.

The Minister has taken the trouble to visit Britain's seaside towns, which is to be welcomed, but we have yet to hear his findings, and we look forward to doing so. If the Government are to support seaside towns and continue Labour's work to regenerate such areas, the coalition must tell people, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) said, how seaside holidays and attractions in coastal towns will be advertised to appeal to visitors, following the 34% cuts to VisitBritain and VisitEngland and the 32% cut to the English Heritage grant. As the hon. Member for Southport said, what role will local enterprise partnerships play now that the Government are going to abolish regional development agencies? Will LEPs have any responsibility for the regeneration of our seaside towns?

The hon. Members for Newton Abbot and for Ceredigion referred to the impact on the tourism industry of the VAT rise to 20%. Has there been an impact assessment of its effects on our seaside and coastal towns? If so, I would like to see it. In short, what is the Government's strategy for ensuring that tourism is supported so that it can continue to play an integral part in our seaside and coastal towns? Without Government support, British seaside towns and the people who live and work in them face another period of decline.

It is not enough to rely, as the Conservative party so often does, on the power of the private sector. I spoke to Peter Hampson, director of the British Resorts and Destinations Association, this morning, and he shares my concerns that, if the challenges facing seaside resorts are not addressed, if resorts are not protected and developed, and if budgets to attract tourists to them are consistently cut, then people will simply go elsewhere.

The coalition needs to answer a question for the tourism industry: the people whose livelihoods rely on seaside and coastal tourism and those who have chosen to make their lives at the British seaside. How much of the overall spend on promoting tourism will be directed to seaside towns? What plans do the Government have

[Gloria De Piero]

to ensure that work to support and regenerate seaside towns will continue? How can the Government expect the private sector to invest in seaside towns without seeing a clear lead from Government and the public sector? Without a clear and cohesive public policy to support seaside tourism and seaside towns, the risk is that places such as Ramsgate in the constituency of the hon. Member for South Thanet and other coastal resorts, about which we have heard a lot today, will decline once again.

3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (John Penrose): It is a pleasure to have you as our Chairman today, Mr Crausby. I echo other hon. Members' thanks and congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on securing the debate and leading it so well. She demonstrates that she is sticking up for her constituents in an incredibly effective fashion. Her lead has been followed during the debate by a great many other Members from seaside towns all around the country.

I think it was the hon. Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) who pointed out that although the problems and issues faced by seaside towns have a common thread running through them, seaside towns are different in different parts of the country. However, on the basis of today, if one thing about every seaside town is clear, it is that they all have a pretty determined local Member wanting to stick up for them here in Westminster. To put it politely, we are all as biased as each other, and convinced that our seaside town is far better than anyone else's. I suspect that I fall into the same category, because I am of course convinced that Weston-super-Mare is the best seaside town in the country—I am getting frowns from the rest of the room.

Important points have been made. I will not take them in any particular order, but will endeavour to respond to as many of the questions and points raised as possible in the limited time available. There has been a shared conviction throughout the debate that tourism is an incredibly important part of the regeneration opportunities available to any seaside town. Tourism provides a superb opportunity for rapid economic growth in a financially efficient fashion.

We are lucky in the coalition Government to have a Prime Minister who was willing to mark his enthusiasm for the sector and recognise its importance by making a speech about it in August. Older hands at DCMS tell me that they cannot in recent decades remember a Prime Minister making a speech about the visitor economy within the first 100 days of a new Administration, and making the point that the sector is so important to the British economy that he wants to put it front and centre of the Administration's economic plans. We are lucky to have the prime ministerial wind in our sails; it is tremendously helpful to have that kind of support. That is because, as a number of Members have rightly pointed out, tourism cuts across a wide variety of different Departments in Whitehall, so it is up to me and anyone else interested in the visitor economy to make the case for tourism in the Department for Transport, in the Home Office and with the UK Border Agency, and in all the different Departments that tourism touches.

It is essential to ensure that everybody knows that we have high-level patronage and a great degree of importance attached to the industry.

The most commonly mentioned concern and opportunity was marketing. It was raised by a series of Members—my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), the hon. Member for Southport, and my hon. Friends the Members for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), and for Hove (Mike Weatherley); apologies to anyone I have left out. Marketing is essential, because since the 1980s seaside towns have faced the difficulty of establishing a new USP, or unique selling proposition—a new position within the market to bring people to them in the wake of the relative decline of the UK seaside bucket-and-spade holiday, after everyone started going to Spain and other places on cheap charter flights.

Some places have managed that brilliantly. We can all think of examples round the country where seaside towns have done well: Bournemouth has done extremely well out of the conference trade; Rock in north Cornwall has done well out of food tourism; festivals have brought seaside towns to life; and funfairs are one of the major draws to Blackpool, even now. A lot of development capital is going into the Blackpool seafront as we speak. There are ways of re-positioning a seaside town, by establishing a new marketing position that creates a new draw and underlying *raison d'être*. However, it is up to that individual seaside town to come up with its specific local example and to put it out there, so that people know why they might want to come to Weston-super-Mare, Hastings or wherever.

It is essential that the Government help that process to happen. The Government cannot do that from the centre, and tell any one seaside town what its new USP ought to be. That has to come from the local economy and the local tourism industry, supported by the local authority. One of the coalition Government's most important initiatives is to assist the birth of a new kind of destination management organisation—a new kind of local tourism board, whatever it is called. It will be led by the local tourism industry, which lives or dies by the success of its local destination. We all have examples in our constituencies of well-run, high-powered, large and small local tourism firms that know what is right for them, and for Weston-super-Mare, Hastings or South Thanet. It is up to them to tell us what to do, and for us to ensure that they can create a destination marketing organisation that will position the town and attract new visitors to it on a sustainable basis.

That means that we need to have an organisation that is primarily managed and led by the local industry, rather than by the public sector. The public sector needs to support, help and do what it can, but we want the local industry to take a hard-headed commercial look at what the town can offer to visitors, and then market the heck out of it in the most commercially savvy way.

That means that the new DMOs, or whatever we want to call them, will essentially be managed and led by the local tourism industry. It is essential that that takes place. Equally, it is worth remembering that the phrase "destination management organisation" is not the same as "destination marketing organisation", though they share an acronym. It is vital that when we have

created the local destination marketing organisation, it acts as the voice of the visitor in the local community. The local industry should say, "It is essential that, working in conjunction with the local authority, we are able to frame our local tourism industry and attractions, and organise the local public spaces, in a way that shows off our town and its attractions to the best advantage." That means it must have a strong voice—a seat at the table—with the local authority, and act as the voice of the industry and the visitor in any decisions that the local authority may take, in order to ensure that each seaside town's unique charms are shown off to their best.

That is how we need to reform marketing. There will be a new kind of partnership marketing, a partnership between the local tourism industry and the local authority—ideally with matched funding—so that we can maximise the money being spent in an effective, commercial way to promote each seaside town to the utmost.

A number of Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, and for South Thanet, mentioned social tourism. That is a particularly interesting idea that I discussed recently with Mr Tajani from the EU. There is an EU-wide programme called Calypso under way at the moment. It is an interesting notion that we need to explore carefully. Members will be aware that there is a very limited pot of public funding. Therefore, anything we do in this area has to be done in the way described by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet; as she said, we do not have to spend additional public funding on it. I welcome that instinct; I think she is absolutely right to say that we need to come up with solutions that are not going to add to the burden on the taxpayer. If there are proposals coming out of the new all-party parliamentary group that is being set up, I will be interested to hear them. We are also engaging with the European effort via Mr Tajani.

The issue of daylight saving was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet. I will not add much to that, because the subject was debated fully on Friday. The tourism industry is very much behind the initiative. It is convinced, as are other industries such as

retail, that it will greatly help the sector. However, it is not as simple as that, as I am sure my hon. Friend will realise, because grave concerns about the impact on quality of life have been expressed by our colleagues in the north of Scotland. It would be dangerous—and potentially divisive—for the rest of Britain, and certainly England, to impose a solution without the consent of Scotland. A point made strongly on Friday was that any progress needs to be made through consensus, having built up a democratic voice across the UK, rather than having one sector of the country trying to impose the change on another. We have the opportunity to build such a consensus, because the Bill is to go into Committee, and I welcome that.

There were a couple of comments about VAT and business rates. That is a tremendously important area, but I am conscious of time coming to an end, so I shall be brief. We dealt with business rates during an intervention, pointing out that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already announced that there will be an opportunity in future for local authorities to keep some of the proceeds of growth from the additional business rates that are created by local economic growth, potentially generated by the tourism industry. That will provide local authorities with a powerful incentive for getting behind local tourism bodies that are trying to drive economic growth through tourism; they will have a strong financial incentive to take part and assist, which they did not in the past.

I have received representations from the tourism industry about VAT on a number of occasions. I have given the industry the following challenge on that issue. We all appreciate that we have a huge financial deficit—bequeathed by the previous Government—that needs to be closed. It would therefore be extremely difficult for any Chancellor of the Exchequer to hand out tax reductions in the short to medium term. The challenge the tourism industry needs to face up to is this: if it wants a better deal than any other sector of the economy, it needs to explain why it is more important than all the others, which will also be asking for a special deal on VAT or other taxes. That will include the miners, the banks, the IT sector and all other sectors of our economy. If that case can be made, I will be delighted to make representations to the Treasury—but not until then.

Rail Services (Nuneaton)

4 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to discuss an extremely important matter for my constituents, namely the provision of rail services to Nuneaton. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister, who has taken time from his busy schedule to respond to the debate. I also thank those of my hon. Friends who are here this afternoon for their support; the issue clearly affects neighbouring constituencies as much as it does mine.

My hon. Friend the Minister will no doubt be fully briefed on the subject. However, it might be of some assistance if I first set out the history and background to Nuneaton station. I shall then speak about the west coast main line and lastly about local services, particularly the Nuneaton to Coventry service.

Nuneaton station was opened in 1874, when the London and North Western railway opened the Trent valley section of the west coast main line. It was built to avoid the congested areas of Coventry and Birmingham—even then, we had problems with rail capacity. Unfortunately, Nuneaton's rail services were considerably reduced under the Beeching axe of 1963. That led to the closure of Nuneaton Abbey Street, Stockingford and Bedworth stations later that year. In addition, in 1965 the Nuneaton to Coventry line was closed to passengers. Happily, in 1988, under the previous Conservative Administration, the Nuneaton to Coventry line was reinstated for passengers, as was the station at Bedworth.

Nuneaton's association with the west coast main line has not always been a happy one. Tragically, on 6 June 1975 six people died and 38 were injured when the Euston to Glasgow sleeper express crashed just outside the station. The train was carrying the then Labour Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Fred Peart, who survived after a short spell in hospital. I do not remember much about the crash as I was only one at the time, but I have seen the dramatic press photographs of that awful incident.

Let me deal with the specific issues that affect Nuneaton rail services. The first is to do with the west coast main line. Traditionally, Nuneaton station's place on the west coast main line has been a great advantage. Nuneaton enjoyed fast hourly services to London and the north-west, peak and off-peak, until 2008. In that year, the very high frequency timetable was introduced, at which time fast off-peak services from Nuneaton disappeared.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this valuable debate. My constituency is immediately adjacent to his, and those who live in the north of my constituency are served by Nuneaton station. Does my hon. Friend agree that one problem is that investment in the west coast main line led to an imperative on the operator to minimise city-to-city times? One way to achieve that was to reduce the frequency of stops at stations such as Nuneaton and Rugby.

Mr Jones: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. I shall return to the subject later.

Passengers wanting a fast service from Nuneaton now face the significant inconvenience of having to take an additional train to Coventry or Rugby to pick up a fast service. The alternative is to make a 30-minute car journey to Coventry or Rugby to catch the fast train.

I campaigned on this important issue before the general election. I wrote to the Department for Transport and to Virgin Trains, the train operator. The response was most unsatisfactory. The Department for Transport blamed timetabling changes on the operator, and the operator blamed the Department for Transport. Neither offered a solution to the loss of amenity for passengers from my constituency. That loss of amenity is substantial, and I fear that it will greatly reduce Nuneaton's ability to attract inward investment from business and commuters. That is particularly galling given that we are now only an hour away from London and from the north-west.

Dan Byles (North Warwickshire) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I echo what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey).

Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem is much wider and that it affects not only the people of Nuneaton but people from Bedworth and the surrounding area of my constituency? They rely just as heavily on effective and fast rail services from Nuneaton station.

Mr Jones: As my hon. Friend knows, Nuneaton and Bedworth borough council takes in part of his constituency. People from Bedworth, too, have been disadvantaged by the timetable changes.

That brings me to the future of timetabling. Under the previous Government, there was an unfortunate tendency for too much political interference with timetabling. That often prevented operators from giving better services, including the sort of improvements demanded by my constituents. I was therefore greatly encouraged that the coalition agreement included the clear intention of looking at rail franchising differently, and of considering how the Office of Rail Regulation works so that we have a more powerful regulator. I hope that the Minister will assure me that the regulator's role is to be strengthened, and that we will see improvements in rail services from my constituency.

I am aware of this week's announcement on rail franchising, and I broadly welcome the statement. However, I am slightly concerned about the proposed west coast main line refranchising. That will be let from 2012 to 2026, when the first trains are projected to start running on High Speed 2. I was initially led to believe that HS 2 would improve high-speed rail capacity on the west coast main line. However, having had many conversations on the matter with various interested parties, I am slightly concerned that that may not be the case. Will the Minister assure the House that fast services on the west coast main line will survive post-HS 2?

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. The problem affects my Hinckley constituents as it does those of surrounding areas.

I might be able to help my hon. Friend. I believe that that the 16.10 Euston to Bangor train may stop at Nuneaton when the new Pendolino trains come into operation. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Department for Transport made that point in a letter to a user group. Has my hon. Friend received information on similar lines?

Mr Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that. I have not received that information, but if what my hon. Friend says is right, it is most welcome.

It is important that the preferred bidder on the west coast main line deals with a number of points. First, consideration should be given to Nuneaton's becoming a regular pattern stop, as it once was, to enable more frequent fast services to run from there. Secondly, we should end the moderation of competition rules to allow new providers into the market. I am fully aware that if substantial investment is involved, it may impede changing the rules in that regard. Substantial upgrade work was undertaken at Nuneaton station in 2004, so I hope that changing the rules will not be so much of an issue. I am also aware that open access providers have been assessing the viability of providing additional services on the west coast main line, which brings me to my next important point.

I have discussed capacity with a number of operators and potential operators. My discussions all lead me to believe that there is additional capacity on the west coast main line. If the Minister would confirm that this possibility is under definite consideration, I would be most grateful. Rail usage at Nuneaton has increased over the past five years by 37%, and I have little doubt that there is still capacity to increase it. The neighbouring constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for North Warwickshire (Dan Byles) and for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and mine give a catchment area of more than 300,000 people, which has substantial potential.

Having set out my case for additional fast services on the west coast main line, I should like to turn now to the provision of local services, particularly the link with Coventry. My hon. Friend the Minister is no doubt aware of my interest in this matter. He knows, too, that the Secretary of State has kindly arranged a meeting with me next week, which will be attended by several colleagues.

The importance of the link between Coventry and Nuneaton cannot be overestimated. Coventry is the closest city to my constituency. Statistics show that there is a clear correlation between the more affluent areas in my constituency and a travelling distance of 10 and 15 miles to the workplace, and Coventry is the only geographical location that fits that description. There is currently an hourly service from Coventry to Nuneaton, with a stop at the neighbouring town of Bedworth.

Access to employment opportunities for my constituents is vital, as indeed is access to both Warwick and Coventry universities for higher education opportunities. If we are really serious about improving social mobility within the areas of relative deprivation in my constituency—there are a number of such areas in the bottom 20% of the national deprivation indices—improved rail services will play a vital part in closing that gap. An example of how the inequality gap can be bridged is demonstrated by Coventry's plans to redevelop part of the city centre that surrounds the railway station. The redevelopment scheme is projected to create some 15,000 jobs, from which my constituents would benefit if only there was more convenient rail access for them.

That brings me to the Ricoh arena, which is home of Coventry City football club and the Arena Park shopping centre. Some 600 people are employed there and further development is envisaged. Both facilities are adjacent to the railway line, but, currently, there is no station for a

stopping train. That is perverse given that the arena contains not only a large shopping area and conference venue but a stadium, which is set to host football matches during the 2012 Olympic games.

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend will be aware that the reason for the location of the football stadium—immediately adjacent to the railway line—was that the primary means of access would be by train, yet there is no station. I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to press for such a facility to be introduced at the earliest opportunity so that people from across the country can easily get to the stadium, particularly in time for the rugby world cup in 2015.

Mr Jones: That is a perverse situation. On the drawing board, it was envisaged that there would be a station adjacent to the stadium. Unfortunately, it has never materialised. It has been under discussion for 10 years, I think, and, unfortunately, it was very much neglected by the previous Government.

The improvement of Nuneaton's rail services has been recognised as an issue of great importance for nearly a decade. It is a conundrum that has been greatly ignored. I hope that the coalition Government will give the matter much more urgent and sympathetic consideration. Capacity can be improved, and frequency and usage increased by taking the following measures: improving the line's infrastructure, including a new platform at Coventry; providing new stations at Bermuda in Nuneaton and at the Ricoh arena; and providing additional rolling stock.

There is a huge lack of capacity at Coventry station, because the Nuneaton-to-Coventry service currently shares a platform with the fast service that connects to the west coast main line. At the moment, providing more local services has to be traded against the loss of the fast services on the west coast main line from Coventry, which is clearly not going to happen and is not an option. An additional station bay at Coventry station would remove the current impediment and allow for a twice-hourly service between the two stations of Nuneaton and Coventry.

A new station at Bermuda in Nuneaton would further strengthen access to the service, particularly from the adjacent area of relative deprivation. The Ricoh arena station would increase opportunities for my constituents to reach a greater diversity of employment and provide much improved access to the arena when matches and events take place. It could also strengthen the position of Nuneaton as a pleasant place to stay during such events, thus increasing the chances of inward investment for the hotel, leisure and hospitality industry.

As I mentioned earlier, additional rolling stock will be required to achieve these improvements. I was glad to see in the Secretary of State's recent statement that an additional amount of new rolling stock is to be introduced to the overall network. I hope that such an investment will enable existing stock to be moved to lines such as the Coventry to Nuneaton line. I ask my hon. friend the Minister to take these arguments back to the Department, where I know that an assessment of the Coventry to Nuneaton upgrade project is now under way.

In conclusion, I hope that I have set out an argument based not just on narrow and parochial terms but on economic and social grounds because improvements in

[Mr Marcus Jones]

services would lead to real benefits for constituencies across Coventry, Warwickshire and Leicestershire. Such benefits would inevitably help a region that has really suffered under the recession that was bequeathed by the Labour Government and reinvigorate an area in which private-sector growth and jobs are badly needed after years of decline.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) on securing this debate and on providing an opportunity for the House to debate rail issues at Nuneaton. Let me preface my remarks by referring to recent statements by the Secretary of State. I hope that my hon. Friend is pleased with the level of the Government's investment in rail. We recognise the value of rail both in helping growth and cutting carbon emissions.

Let me turn first to the west coast main line. The £9 billion west coast route modernisation project renewed and upgraded the country's key main rail line. It accommodates many long-distance passenger trains and numerous local and regional passenger services, and handles 40% of the nation's rail freight business. It was a good example of the railway industry pulling together to deliver a very important project.

Modernisation has delivered a successful and robust railway that has headroom for passenger and freight growth. The west coast main line regularly achieves more than 90% reliability. Passenger growth has been very encouraging, with 4 million additional journeys following the completion of route modernisation, and I expect the growth to continue. This week, I noted that the first new 11-car train of the 106 Pendolino vehicles on order was delivered to the UK for testing and approval ahead of passenger service. Given the level of investment in both the trains and the infrastructure, it is important that the west coast main line timetable secures the best return for taxpayers on the money spent. The timetable ensures that rail contributes the maximum possible to the overall transport network of the country. It has delivered a significant modal shift from car and air. Rail has now doubled its share of the London-to-Glasgow market to around 13%, and to between 75 and 80% of the London-to-Manchester market. Rail serves those markets well.

The current timetable maximises the use of line capacity and fleet resources. However, some difficult choices had to be made when the current west coast main line timetable was designed. As my hon. Friend knows, a few established services and calling patterns were changed. No towns were left isolated. Overall, the vast majority of passengers have benefited, as is demonstrated by the growth that is now being witnessed. Headline improvements delivered with the completion of modernisation include: three trains an hour to both Manchester and Birmingham; new hourly all-day services from London to the Trent valley, Crewe to London and London to Chester; significant journey time reductions, including London to Warrington and Preston to Glasgow services, which are now 30 minutes faster, and London to Liverpool, which is 25 minutes faster; and a full weekend service with journey times and frequencies very similar to weekdays.

I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that all such improvements are very welcome. One of the difficult choices was the decision to remove the Nuneaton stop from Virgin and west coast off-peak services. Unfortunately, it is not a high-earning station in off-peak times or one where business is likely to grow significantly when compared with other opportunities on the line. Quite simply the revenue and growth opportunities are much greater elsewhere.

The removal of the fast off-peak service was forecast to lose around £200,000 in revenue from Nuneaton. That needs to be set against the £600 million that modernisation will have generated between 2003 and 2011. In the current service pattern, London peak traffic, which accounts for the vast majority of demand and revenue at the station, benefits from a standard journey time of around one hour for the 97 miles. The fastest journey achieves an average speed of over 100 mph, which is one of the fastest commuter services in Europe. To serve more diffuse evening peak travel patterns, fast Virgin services continue to call at Nuneaton throughout the evening.

Off-peak services are provided by the new 100 mph air-conditioned Desiro trains that are operated by London Midland. These services give Nuneaton new hourly direct journey opportunities to towns such as Stoke, Tamworth, Rugby and Milton Keynes. They also provide the opportunity of cross-platform connections with Virgin west coast services at Rugby, giving a total journey time of one hour and 12 minutes to Euston. The previous direct hourly train completed the journey in the longer time of one hour and 15 minutes.

The timetable proposals for the current west coast main line services were widely consulted upon and welcomed in many parts, particularly in the north-west of England. However, I suspect that my hon. Friend wishes to promote Nuneaton's case further. Therefore I urge him to comment on the consultation draft of the Network Rail west coast main line route utilisation strategy, which is published today. Nuneaton stakeholders will also get the opportunity to present their case during the consultation phase of the west coast franchise competition. The Government plan to issue an invitation in the Official Journal of the European Union for the competition in January 2011 and in due course we will issue the inter-city west coast franchise consultation document. I also urge my hon. Friend to discuss his ideas with the accredited franchise bidders once they have been selected.

The Secretary of State recently gave his approval for Network Rail to proceed with construction of the north chord, which will improve the capacity and reliability of the west coast main line and provide freight trains from the east coast with improved access to the midlands and the north-west. I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman today, if he does not already know, that that project has recently attracted €5 million of European Union funding from the trans-European network towards its £29 million cost. I expect construction to start in spring 2011 and take about 18 months to complete.

The hon. Gentleman asked a couple of questions about the west coast main line. In particular, he asked what would happen when the new high-speed line opened. I am advised that it is too early to say what the stocking patterns will be on the west coast main line, but it is obviously anticipated that the faster inter-city services

will use the new high-speed line. Perhaps he will want to have discussions with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers), who is the rail Minister, closer to the time, to ensure that the inter-city services are properly factored into the timetable for the west coast main line as it pertains after High Speed 2 opens.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about spare train paths on the west coast main line, in particular whether there were any spare train paths for open access operators. I am advised that the Office of Rail Regulation is investigating that matter, but the key question is whether it is best for an open access operator or for an additional franchise service to use any spare train paths. Open access operators would provide perhaps five trains a day. London Midland has also applied to improve the London to Crewe service. So we must reach a balance in the public interest between the open access arrangements and what might come in from a franchise operation. Nevertheless, his comments are noted by my colleagues.

Let me consider the Coventry to Nuneaton upgrade. Earlier this year, we received a business case submission from Coventry city council, Centro and Warwickshire county council. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the upgrade consists of doubling the frequency of the service between Coventry and Nuneaton, new stations at Bermuda—is that right? I thought that Bermuda was elsewhere.

Mr Marcus Jones: It was named after the country.

Norman Baker: As I was saying, there will be new stations at Bermuda and the Ricoh arena, and longer platforms at Bedworth. To accommodate the more frequent service, a new bay platform will be required at Coventry station, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. As he knows, all those features are included in the bid.

Consideration of the bid was put on hold pending the spending review. The Department's spending review settlement was a good outcome for transport, but it was not sufficient to fund the full pipeline of schemes prioritised under the previous system of regional funding allocations. Tough decisions are necessary to get the best value from the available public funding.

The Coventry to Nuneaton rail scheme has been included in the pre-qualification pool for funding from the local major transport schemes budget. That is because we have not yet verified the scheme's value for money. We will conduct a preliminary sift and make decisions by January about whether that scheme and other such schemes can join the development pool. The decisions in January will be based largely on the ability to deliver significantly within the spending review period and the scope for reduced Department for Transport contributions from those most recently requested, as well as the potential for a scheme to demonstrate a compelling value-for-money case by the final 2011 deadline.

We also need to ensure that some of the more challenging aspects of the scheme are fully addressed. They relate primarily to the ability of the railway to handle the size of the crowds that are forecast for major events at the Ricoh arena and the availability of rolling stock, especially for evening events at the venue. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there is a safety issue in relation to huge numbers of people turning up at a relatively small station to try to access a short train; that is a serious issue with using rolling stock for such events at the Ricoh arena. We are now reviewing the business case and we are in regular contact with officials at the three authorities to seek further clarification about certain matters to ensure that we have all the information we need for the sifting process in January 2011.

As I have said, there are a large number of extant schemes in the pipeline. I am sure that some will drop out because they will not be progressed by the promoters of the schemes, and we hope that other schemes will see a reduced cost. Generally, the more we can reduce the cost of schemes, the more likely it is that we can proceed with more of those in the pipeline.

Dan Byles: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way; I am conscious that we are short of time. Some of my constituents are concerned that high-speed rail—HS 2—and the level of investment that will be required for that project could lead to a crowding-out of investment in more local rail services. Can the Minister give us an assurance that, if high-speed rail goes ahead, that will not happen?

Norman Baker: I hope that high-speed rail is going ahead. The Government have made it very clear in the coalition agreement that we are committed to it and the Secretary of State has been working very hard on it, taking personal responsibility for promoting it. However, my hon. Friend will also have noticed that, since the formation of the coalition Government, we have announced, for example, the progress of 2,100 new carriages; an electrification programme across the country; that Crossrail is going ahead in its entirety; that the Thameslink programme is going ahead, and new light rail extensions in Birmingham and Nottingham. The public at large can be in no doubt that the Government are committed to investment in rail: high-speed rail; conventional rail, and indeed light rail. We see that investment as a way of creating growth in the economy and cutting carbon emissions. I can therefore give him an absolute assurance that we will not see local services carved out. We are determined to ensure that rail has a future, both for local services and for high-speed services.

The Secretary of State will be happy to give my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton more detail about the Coventry-Nuneaton line in the meeting that I understand has been scheduled between them for later this month.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. As the Member who has secured the next debate and the Minister who will respond are present, we will begin.

Civilian Deaths (Ballymurphy)

4.27 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a privilege to open this Adjournment debate under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby.

On Monday 9 August 1971, the then Northern Ireland Government introduced internment without trial. That policy was dramatically and drastically imposed by the British Army. It could only have been implemented with the sanction and counsel of the British Government and their agents. It was a misguided and counter-productive response to the security and political concerns of Government at the time. However, in today's short debate, we need to consider first not the longer-term fallout from the disaster of internment, but an immediate fatal atrocity that was perpetrated with its imposition. On 9, 10 and 11 August 1971, 11 innocent civilians were killed in the Ballymurphy area of west Belfast by the Parachute Regiment, the same regiment that was specially deployed to Derry months later on 30 January 1972—Bloody Sunday.

The fact that 11 innocent victims of Ballymurphy were killed over three days at a time of wider, serious conflagration, repression, violence and many other deaths meant that Ballymurphy was not really landmarked as an atrocity in its own right, either at the time or for some time after. That is why the victims' families and the people of Ballymurphy have challenged us all to acknowledge that theirs has been the forgotten atrocity. They have resolved that it will be forgotten or passed over no more. They need to set their truth free, to have the innocence of their loved ones fully vindicated, to have the enormity of what was perpetrated and then papered over fully understood, and to have responsibility taken for those awful events by the forces and power of the state.

I salute the dignity and determination of the families who have come together in such a purposeful and powerful way, and who have lobbied all the parties in Northern Ireland, the Irish Government and the British Government. In recent times, they have been briefing Members of this Parliament about those dark events that have been frustratingly and disturbingly overshadowed for too long.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I was lobbied by the sons of one of the people murdered, and I was taken aback by the ferocity of the force used on that day. A mother had half her face blown away. People lying wounded on the ground were shot at point-blank range. Wounded people were taken to the barracks and killed there. Atrocities were committed, and I fully support my hon. Friend in his fight for justice.

Mark Durkan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He rightly brings us to the details of what happened during those three days in Ballymurphy. I acknowledge that these were not the only deaths that occurred during that period; in fact, there were 28 deaths in total. The wider scale of the deaths should not be used by anyone to diminish the seriousness of the questions that must be asked about Ballymurphy, nor should those questions diminish the seriousness of the grief felt by the families of other victims killed then

and since. It is important, if that atrocity is not to be forgotten, that the victims should not be forgotten. Particularly in a debate such as this, their names and what happened to them should be remembered.

The first victim, on 9 August, was Father Hugh Mullan, who was shot as he carried a white cloth while going to the aid of someone else who had been shot and wounded. In a debate in the main Chamber of the House of Commons, the hon. Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins) spoke poignantly about his regard for the iconic image of Father Daly in Derry on Bloody Sunday. In Ballymurphy, another priest with a white cloth went to the aid of a victim, and that priest was shot. When Frank Quinn, seeing him lying wounded, went to his aid, he too was shot. Both of them were then shot further as they lay on the ground. A priest who went to the aid of an injured parishioner was killed, and someone else who came from his place of safety into Army gunfire was killed as well.

The third victim was 200 yards away. At exactly the time when Father Mullan and Frank Quinn were being shot, the Army was firing near the Taggart barracks at the top of Ballymurphy. Paratroopers were firing indiscriminately. Noel Phillips, a young man of 19, was shot and wounded. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) said, a woman, Joan Connolly, came to his aid, calling to Noel Phillips that it was all right; she was coming to him. She was then shot in the face. Joan Connolly was a mother of eight.

The fifth victim was Daniel Teggart, a father of 13. He was initially shot while running for cover, but was then repeatedly shot—up to 14 times—while he lay defenceless on the ground. Also on 9 August, Joseph Murphy, a father of 12, was shot in the leg. He received no medical attention; neither did some of the other victims, including Noel Phillips.

On 10 August, the seventh victim, Eddie Doherty, was killed as he made his way home along Whiterock road. A digger and a Saracen moved in to dismantle a barricade blocking the road. From the cab of the mechanical digger, a member of the Parachute Regiment shot Eddie Doherty in the back.

Early in the morning of 11 August, John Laverty, age 20, was shot dead by soldiers. Joseph Corr, a father of seven, was also shot and died of his injuries on 27 August. The Parachute Regiment alleged that both men were firing at the Army. Neither men were armed, and all ballistic and forensic evidence disproved that testimony.

The 10th victim was Paddy McCarthy, a community worker, who was wounded in the hand while attempting to leave the local community centre to distribute bread and milk. Hon. Members must understand that after the introduction of internment, no normal commercial or other services were running, so people engaged in that sort of operation at the community level. After Paddy McCarthy decided to continue with his deliveries hours later, he was stopped by soldiers and beaten. He suffered a massive heart attack and died as a result of that ordeal.

The 11th victim, John McKerr, was taking a break from his work at Corpus Christi church in Ballymurphy and had walked 50 yards from the chapel gates when a British sniper shot him. Local residents went to his aid and remained at his side until an ambulance arrived, but he died of his wounds on 20 August.

I read out those details because when we talk about events such as Ballymurphy, all of us can speak in shorthand using particular names and locations, but it is important to remember specific events. This is the first debate on this subject, although I believe that there will be others, so it is important that the background facts are spelled out.

One problem at the time was that the Royal Ulster Constabulary did not investigate the deaths, because that was not the done thing in those days. The arrangement was that killings and other actions by the Army were investigated by the Royal Military Police. As we know from the findings of the Historical Enquiries Team, those interviews seem to have been conducted on a tea-and-sympathy basis. Officers' versions of the circumstances and their actions would become the RMP's accepted version, which would then become the received version accepted by both the Northern Ireland Government and the British Government of the time. The RUC was basically left to accept those conclusions as a matter of fact. For those reasons, the killings were not properly investigated at the time.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mark Durkan: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) first.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I commend my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I, too, have met the Ballymurphy families in Westminster, at Stormont and in Ballymurphy. I am struck not only by their innocence but by their sheer humility and need to find justice and truth. Does my hon. Friend agree that the activities of the Parachute Regiment must be examined in connection with their use and deployment at the time in Belfast, Derry and throughout Northern Ireland?

Mark Durkan: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. Wider questions must be asked of the powers that be, in both military command and political oversight, about how the Parachute Regiment was deployed in Northern Ireland in those days. Clearly, the Parachute Regiment's behaviour in Ballymurphy should have been factored into the thinking about its future deployment. People should have had that in mind when it was decided to send the Parachute Regiment, specifically, to Derry for Bloody Sunday. Of course, the Parachute Regiment must account not just for the deaths in Derry and Ballymurphy, but for the killing of two innocent Protestants, Mr Johnston and Mr McKinnie, in September 1972 on the Shankill.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): My hon. Friend's words hang heavy in the air, and it will take more than the wind of history to blow them away. In a speech last month, my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) referred to the stigma still attached to the families. Does he believe that an inquiry could finally establish the innocence of the victims, bearing in mind the statements that were released at the time, which appeared to give a contrary impression but were never substantiated?

Mark Durkan: Yes, I believe that it could. The state adopted the view at the time that what the Royal Military Police established in its inquiries with the

soldiers who carried out the actions would be the official, received version of events. So long as the state does not specifically repudiate that version of events, it will be left hanging there. That is one of the reasons why the families want to see that version properly probed and resolved, not just for themselves, but because there are surely wider questions for us all about how the state could conduct itself in that way and ignore the serious questions that arose as a result.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): I commend the hon. Gentleman on bringing up the matter in a debate in Westminster. As Lord Mayor of Belfast, I had the opportunity last year, and even before that, to meet the families of the victims. Does he agree with me that in both Ballymurphy and Bloody Sunday—the two incidents have to be looked at as related—the pain of loss was compounded by the fact that those who were victims of a crime were effectively treated as though they were in some way guilty?

Mark Durkan: The hon. Lady has put her finger on an important point. I do not talk about the victims of Ballymurphy or Bloody Sunday as if they were the only people who suffered grievously and need truth and justice, because there are many other victims of other forces or self-styled forces who are also due that. However, one thing that sets the victims of Ballymurphy and Bloody Sunday apart is that they were denied the promises, albeit hollow promises, made by the state at the time that no stone would be left unturned in the pursuit of justice. The state and its political establishment denied them the sense of solidarity that other victims were given. They were accorded no sympathy or recognition of their innocence. Their innocence was impugned, because the suggestion was that they had somehow conspired to bring death on themselves or others.

That is one of the reasons why the other victims who not only received mortal injuries but found themselves in the twilight zone of state condemnation are due vindication and proper affirmation of their innocence through independent international assessment, and that is also why someone must be held responsible and why responsibility must be taken. That is important, not least in the light of the important and positive statements that the Prime Minister made when the Saville report was published, and in the light of those important findings themselves. The Prime Minister said several times on that day, and it was repeated on the day of the Saville statement and when the report was debated last month, that the Government take responsibility. It is important that the families of the victims of Ballymurphy hear someone take responsibility for those events.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): My hon. Friend has been an absolute champion, as have his colleagues, of those families for many years, and I am sure that he will ensure that they are never forgotten. Does he agree with me that, although the role of the Parachute Regiment, who were quite clearly murderers in this case, should not be overlooked, the state itself had a failing, and is there not arguably a direct link between its inaction over Ballymurphy and Bloody Sunday? Does he agree that, had the state done the right thing in Ballymurphy, we might have avoided what happened on Bloody Sunday?

Mark Durkan: That is a very pertinent point. The Parachute Regiment committed those killings in one area in a concentrated operation, and just because they did not take place in one day, it does not mean that it was not a concentrated operation. Those deaths were not properly investigated alongside other Army killings.

We now know, because of investigations by the Historical Enquiries Team and work done by the Pat Finucane Centre, that in the autumn of 1971 there were liaison meetings between a representative of the military and the then Attorney-General for Northern Ireland, Basil Kelly, to look at the possible risk of prosecution of soldiers for some of their conduct. The Attorney-General seems to have suggested that prosecutions might have to take place on some matters, such as traffic offences, but he was seized of the need to try to avoid prosecutions for more serious or controversial offences. In December 1971 he decided, on the basis of the shooting of Billy McGreanery that September, that no soldier should be prosecuted for anything they did in the line of duty. As I say, that decision was made in December 1971, and it is hard for those of us who know about that not to believe that in the minds of the Army, that became the going rate, as regards what the yellow card did or did not mean. It meant that they could behave with impunity. It is hard to believe that the Army, and certainly the Parachute Regiment, were unaware of the Attorney-General's decision.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): I am listening with great interest. Some deeply pejorative statements have been made about an organisation that is being referred to as the Parachute Regiment. The Parachute Regiment is an enormous organisation consisting of three battalions. As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say during the debate on the Saville report, what we are talking about seems to relate to one battallion, and indeed to one specific company within it. The Parachute Regiment has given invaluable service to this country. It might have had some difficulties and problems and done some wrong things, but I beg that we be more specific about an organisation that is very gallant, and whose services have been well recognised.

Mark Durkan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. By referring to the Parachute Regiment in broad terms, I was certainly not trying to impugn anyone or extend my remarks to anyone who feels that they are in a position to disown and disclaim what happened that day. I am aware that today we heard condolences expressed in the House regarding a member of 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, who lost his life tragically in Afghanistan. I am sensitive to those considerations and take the hon. Gentleman's sensitive admonition in the spirit in which it was intended and in which it was conveyed.

When the Attorney-General made his judgment following the killing of Billy McGreanery, the RUC commander in Derry at the time, having read what the military police had said in relation to the shooting and the statement of the soldier concerned, recommended that that soldier be prosecuted for murder. That recommendation was endorsed at RUC headquarters, and it was the Attorney-General who subsequently created the new rule about prosecutions. That is why I think that all those events raise wider issues that need to be pursued.

None of that information was available to the Saville inquiry, because it had not yet been discovered by the Historical Enquiries Team and the Pat Finucane Centre.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with me that that has to be described as an atrocity? Eleven people died, and yet 39 years on we still have no resolution, no apology has been offered to the families and there has been no independent inquiry. What do the Ballymurphy families need in order to be able to move on with their lives and draw a line under this?

Mark Durkan: I thank my hon. Friend—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I respectfully point out to the hon. Gentleman that this is a 30-minute debate, so if he expects a comprehensive response from the Minister, he will need to give him some time.

Mark Durkan: I was about to thank my hon. Friend for his question and say that I look forward to it perhaps being answered by the Minister. I spoke with the Minister earlier, and he told me how much time he would need and expressed a wish to see interventions taken so that we have could have a free-flowing debate.

I hope that the Minister has heard all the points that other Members and I have made, but, most importantly, I hope that he is in a position, working with the Secretary of State, who has already met the families, to address some of the questions that he knows the families have. This debate is to let them and the Minister know that the questions do not come only from the families.

4.50 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I am most grateful to you, Mr Crausby, for chairing this afternoon's proceedings, and I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for securing this debate.

I start with a sin of omission rather than commission. Yesterday was my first encounter across the Floor with the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound). I congratulate him and welcome him to his new role as shadow Minister—indeed, he is my shadow. I know him well from the past. We served together on the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, and I know that he has given that Committee long and distinguished service. Its current Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), is here today.

The hon. Member for Foyle spoke in detail today about the Ballymurphy families' campaign. The hon. Members for Belfast East (Naomi Long) and for South Down (Ms Ritchie) stated that they had both met the families as, indeed, have my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I. We met them in October to discuss their case. The families recounted their moving stories at length, and we both expressed our profound sympathy for the loss that they had suffered.

We also listened carefully to the families' requests for an independent international investigation, recognition of the innocence of their loved ones, and an apology. We did, of course, note the ongoing independent investigation into the case being carried out by the Historical Enquiries Team. I understand that many of the families do not support that investigation, but it is right that I reiterate this afternoon the Government's

strong support for the work of the HET. It has demonstrated on several occasions, whether in the Majella O'Hare case or the McGreanery case in the constituency of the hon. Member for Foyle, to which he referred, that it carries out its investigations with absolute professionalism and independence.

Furthermore, as I said last night in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, the HET's projected spend to 2011 is £32.5 million. If we compare and contrast that with the cost of the Bloody Sunday inquiry at £191.5 million, the Rosemary Nelson inquiry at £45.5 million, the Robert Hamill inquiry at £32.4 million and the Billy Wright inquiry at £30.4 million, we can begin to see the good value for money that the HET provides. I understand that the families have presented information to the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland and have asked him to consider using his powers to reopen the inquests into the deaths. Such decisions are, of course, properly a matter for the Attorney-General, not the Government.

Several Members rightly pointed out that the Government need to consider their response to the Ballymurphy campaign in the wider context of how we deal with the painful legacy of Northern Ireland's past. However, we must also consider the wider context of the events in Northern Ireland in August 1971, a time when violence was escalating at a rate that would lead to the bloodiest year in Northern Ireland's history. Between 9 and 11 August, there were 28 deaths in total across Northern Ireland, 11 of which were in Ballymurphy.

The Government's approach to the conclusions of individual reviews and reports is absolutely clear: where wrongdoing or failings by the state are clearly identified, we will accept responsibility and apologise. In that context, I would associate myself more closely with the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) than with the somewhat rash comments made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty).

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his statement on the Saville report, we do not honour all those who have served with distinction in upholding the rule of law in Northern Ireland by hiding from the truth, but neither do the Government believe that the past can be adequately addressed by focusing solely on the actions of the state. To respond to the point made, I believe, by the hon. Member for Ealing North, that is why we do not believe that selecting a further series of cases to be subjected to a lengthy public inquiry is an appropriate means of addressing the legacy of a conflict that saw more than 3,500 people from all parts of the community lose their lives.

Naomi Long: I welcome the Minister's strong support for the work of the HET, but does he agree that if we are not to have further individual inquiries, the Government must take—and lead—a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past and its legacy? I fear to say that, as yet, that has not been forthcoming.

Mr Swire: Indeed, if the hon. Lady will allow me, I will just say:

"Having recapitalised the banks, it seems as if we are recapitalising the legal profession in Northern Ireland. I'm sure the pain of the past has been eased in the case of the barristers but I'm not sure whether any material benefit has been achieved for the people of Northern Ireland."

Those are not my words, but the words of the hon. Member for Ealing North, as reported in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 5 November 2004.

Thomas Docherty: Without wishing to compound his ire towards me, can the Minister clarify whether he is therefore criticising the decision to hold the Bloody Sunday inquiry? It sounds as if he is saying that it was held only to line the pockets of lawyers rather than to help bring some comfort and closure to the families.

Mr Swire: The hon. Gentleman should not conflate the two things. I was repeating what the *Belfast Telegraph* reported the hon. Member for Ealing North as saying about further costly inquiries. As for ire directed towards the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife, if I heard him correctly, he made some severe criticisms of the Parachute Regiment which were then picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark.

Various Members, not least the hon. Member for Belfast East just now, asked how the Government thought inquiries could be replaced. We are committed to listening to the views of people across Northern Ireland on dealing with the past. It was clear from the summary of responses that we published to the previous Government's consultation on Eames-Bradley that there is little consensus at present. However, as we emphatically do not believe that the past can simply be shut down, we will continue to seek a way forward.

Stephen Pound: I thank the Minister for his kind words earlier. Much of what he is saying is outside the remit of the HET—and I understand and support his comments about it. What assurance can he give us tonight, what process can he offer, what peace can he bring to those family members who still desperately need nothing more than the truth to be brought out? If not the HET, what?

Mr Swire: The Government are looking in a measured way at options that might command support across the community, including the option of creating an information-sharing process that could help families and the wider society achieve greater understanding of the events of the past 40 years. We are consulting on that. There is no easy or quick answer. I tend to agree with the hon. Gentleman that further costly inquiries are not the way forward, but I stress again that that does not mean that we can bury the past. We have to address the issues, and we will do so in a measured and, I hope, sensitive way.

In conclusion, I welcome this important and valuable debate and again thank the hon. Member for Foyle for bringing the matter to the House. I reiterate that the Government are committed to considering carefully the Ballymurphy case in the context of how we deal with the legacy of Northern Ireland's troubled past.

Question put and agreed to.

4.58 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 8 December 2010

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education Funding and Student Finance

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): I am today announcing further improvements to the proposed package of reforms to higher education funding and student finance in England.

Our proposed reforms were announced by the Minister for Universities and Science on 3 November. They will introduce a significantly fairer and more progressive new system in which no eligible student has to pay upfront fees, there is a better deal for students while they are studying, and a fairer system of repayments for those who have completed their studies and are realising the benefits of a university education.

Since that announcement, we have continued to discuss the proposals in detail with Members of Parliament, universities, students and other stakeholders. In the light of those discussions, we have decided to make three further enhancements to the package to ensure that the package is as progressive as we can make it for full-time students, while at the same time providing better support for part-time students.

First, the proposals announced on 3 November already make significant steps to improve the support available for part-time students. For the first time, eligible part-time students would qualify for loan support for their tuition costs on the same basis as full-time students. These changes have been welcomed by many as a critical measure in redressing long-standing discrimination against part-time students. However, discussion with the higher education sector has highlighted that the proposed threshold of 33% intensity for full loan entitlement may inadvertently deprive a significant number of learners from receiving support. We therefore propose that the level of intensity be reduced to 25%—that is, any eligible student studying for more than a quarter of their time will be eligible for full loan support for their tuition costs. This will better reflect the way that many part time courses are structured.

Secondly, we have been keen to ensure that there is adequate protection for lower earning graduates in our new system. One critical component of this protection is the income threshold at which graduates start repaying, and the way that threshold is then uprated in future years. As announced on 3 November, that income threshold will be £21,000 as from 2016, compared with the current threshold of £15,000. Our modelling to date has assumed that that threshold should be uprated every five years in line with earnings. In order to give better protection for those on lower incomes, we now propose that the uprating should instead be made every year. Around a quarter of graduates will be better off in this new, more progressive regime than under the current regime.

Thirdly, we have reviewed the repayment position of students and graduates under the existing student finance system. The current income threshold for repayments was first announced by the previous Government in 2004, and has never since been uprated. The effect is that the value of that threshold has been declining with inflation, with graduates required to start paying at relatively lower levels of income. That is not fair to existing students and graduates. So we have decided that the £15,000 income threshold for those in the existing system should be uprated annually in line with inflation from 2012 to 2016.

These improvements further enhance a reform package which will put higher education funding and student finance on a sustainable footing, improve the quality and viability of our university system, offer more progressive support to those on lower incomes both while studying in higher education and when repaying as graduates, and contribute to paying down the deficit.

DEFENCE

Foreign Affairs Council in Defence Formation (9 December 2010)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan): Please find the agenda of discussion points for the Foreign Affairs Council in Defence Formation on 9 December 2010 detailed below. I am writing as Duty Minister. The Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for international security strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr Howarth), will attend.

Informal meeting with NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen: Ministers will be accompanied by the NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen for an informal discussion of EU-NATO relations. No firm agenda has been released for this session, but it is likely to encompass capability development in the form of “quick win” projects, and ongoing contact between the European Defence Agency and the Allied Command Transformation. The UK’s objectives are to welcome the renewed focus on EU/NATO relations under Ashton and Rasmussen and to continue to press for improved co-operation.

Formal working session on military capabilities: This formal discussion of capabilities will follow on from the informal meeting in Ghent in September. Again, no agenda has been issued, but we expect the discussion to concentrate on initiatives for pooling and sharing capabilities, and on bilateral and multilateral co-operation in capability development. This will highlight the UK-France defence agreement. The UK will welcome the continued emphasis on capability development, but resist calls for the creation of any additional institutions or processes.

EDA Steering Board: Ministers will discuss the work programme for 2011, the nomination of the new chief executive, the level playing field, Single European Sky, defence research, and pooling and sharing. The UK will work with the agency and its member states to develop and improve the agency effectiveness and performance, but will urge the EDA to be realistic about its budget requirements. Unless postponed, the EDA budget will

be discussed as an agenda item in the Council meeting. On current plans, we intend to oppose any budget increase for the agency in 2011.

Informal working lunch discussing operations: Ministers will be accompanied over lunch by the three EU operational commanders (Op ATALANTA/ Op ALTHEA/ EUTM Somalia) in an informal discussion of progress. Some member states will also wish to discuss possible future operations, likely to focus on the Sahel and the Sudan. The UK supports the ongoing operations, and will stress the urgency of developing an internationally recognised strategy for Somalia.

Taskforce on the Military Covenant

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan): In July the Prime Minister asked Professor Hew Strachan of Oxford University to lead an independent taskforce to develop innovative ideas to help rebuild the military covenant.

His report, published today, looks at support that can be provided across Government and throughout society and makes many recommendations for the Government to consider. A copy of the taskforce report will be placed in the Library of the House.

I will publish a full response to this report's recommendations on behalf of the Government in spring 2011. However, we intend to take forward work on two of the report's recommendations in advance of that. The first is for an armed forces community covenant, which will encourage communities across the UK to volunteer support for their local armed forces. The second is for a chief of defence staff commendation scheme, which will allow the head of the UK's armed forces to thank individuals or bodies who give exceptional support to our armed forces.

The Government are very grateful to Professor Strachan and his team for their contribution to rebuilding the military covenant.

HEALTH

“Valuing People Now: Summary Report March 2009 - September 2010”

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Paul Burstow): I am today publishing the “Valuing People Now: Summary Report March 2009 - September 2010” along with the easy read summary and good practice examples.

The report includes findings from all the 152 learning disability partnership board self-assessments in 2009-10. It shows that good progress has been made in improving outcomes for people with learning disabilities and their family carers over the 18 months to September 2010. It includes many examples of good practice which show how to drive forward efficiencies while improving the lives of individuals.

We know that there is still more to do to ensure that the Government's vision of equity and excellence and personalised services delivers for all people with learning disabilities.

Achieving genuine equality and tackling disadvantage requires continued engagement across the health and social care system and across the community and voluntary sector in the three priority areas of health, housing and employment to improve outcomes for people with learning disabilities and their families.

Today's publications have been placed in the Library. Copies of the summary report are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office and for noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

CRB Independent Complaint Monitor Annual Report 2009-10

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Lynne Featherstone): The 2009-10 Independent Complaints Monitor annual report for the Criminal Records Bureau has been published today. It is available on the CRB website and a copy has been placed in the House Library.

Drug Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Brokenshire): I am pleased to announce that we are today publishing the cross-Government drug strategy “Reducing Demand, Restricting Supply, Building Recovery—Supporting People to live a Drug Free Life”. The strategy sets out a fundamentally different approach to preventing drug use in our communities and in supporting recovery from drug and alcohol dependence.

In a major change to Government policy, the strategy puts recovery at the heart of our response, with more responsibility on individuals to seek help and overcome their dependency. The strategy sets out a more holistic approach to supporting people dependent on drugs or alcohol, not just through treatment, but also by addressing offending, employment and housing issues, all of which are critical to overcoming drug or alcohol abuse.

This is an ambitious strategy aimed at reducing demand. It takes an uncompromising approach to cracking down on those involved in drug supply, both at home and abroad. There will be renewed focus on seizing the assets of those involved in the drugs trade and we will strengthen our ability to respond swiftly to so-called “legal highs”.

Power and accountability to tackle drugs and the harms they cause will be passed to local areas. With the introduction of police and crime commissioners, the reform of the NHS and the creation of Public Health England, local partnerships will be responsible for designing and commissioning services that meet the needs of their communities.

We received over 1,800 responses to the targeted consultation held over the summer and we are grateful to all those who responded and, in doing so, supported the development of this strategy.

The drug strategy will be available on the Home Office website and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Development Ministers Foreign Affairs Council

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The Foreign Affairs Council (Development) will meet in Brussels on 9 December. The meeting will be chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, and Vice-President of the European Commission, Baroness Ashton.

Due to priority parliamentary business that day, I regret that my ministerial colleagues and I will not be able to attend. The UK will be represented by the UK's Permanent Representative to the EU (Kim Darroch). The expected agenda items are as follows:

Green Paper on EU development policy in support of inclusive growth and sustainable development—Increasing the impact of EU development co-operation.

There will be an initial discussion on the main issues presented in the Commission's recent Green Paper on inclusive growth and sustainable development. This wide-ranging paper is currently the subject of a public consultation. Discussion topics include governance, security and fragility, the co-ordination of aid, budget support, growth, regional integration, climate change and biodiversity, energy and development and agriculture and food security. This is a welcome initiative and a chance to put forward our broader views on the future of EU development policy, albeit with a specific focus on growth.

Afghanistan

EU Special Representative to Afghanistan, Ambassador Usackas, will give a report and update the Council about the latest situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a key UK development priority and we look forward to a productive discussion about how best to co-ordinate efforts in the context of the EU action plan on Afghanistan and the Kabul conference. Afghanistan is also on the agenda for Foreign Ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 December.

Haiti

Given the desperate humanitarian crisis in Haiti, and the recent cholera outbreak, this discussion will focus on how to best deliver support to the Haitian people. This is particularly poignant as we are approaching the first anniversary of the Haitian earthquake on 12 January. The post-earthquake humanitarian support provided by the UK has funded vital work by UN agencies and international NGOs, and helped to provide 380,000 people with food, clean water and medical care.

In response to the cholera crisis I have announced additional help to supply clean water and improve sanitation and hygiene for up to 340,000 people in the north of the country. UK support will also bring in emergency supplies and more than a thousand trained medical practitioners to staff up to 12 major cholera

treatment centres and 60 subsidiary cholera treatment units, capable of treating several thousands of cholera victims over the next two months and helping to stop the outbreak spreading across the region.

Mutual Accountability and Transparency

My Swedish counterpart will lead a discussion focused on transparency as a prerequisite for better accountability and more effective development results. This is a UK priority, and we are working hard to encourage other EU member states to agree steps to improve transparency and to ensure EU aid information is published in comprehensive, accessible and comparable ways. We are also working towards an international standard in aid transparency, which will help us to bring aid information closer to user needs as well as meeting our international transparency commitments. We are also supportive of work to encourage greater accountability between those receiving and those providing aid, and their respective citizens.

Innovative Financing Mechanism

The High Representative and Belgian presidency will lead a broad discussion about innovative forms of development financing. The UK is supportive of exploring new innovative finance mechanisms, while emphasising that these should complement, and not deflect from, commitments made by member states to meet agreed targets of 0.7% of GNI for official development assistance by 2015.

International Development Conferences in 2011

The Council will have a first discussion of the key issues to be tackled in two important conferences in 2011.

The least developed countries (LDC) summit will take place in Istanbul from 30 May to 3 June 2011, under the Hungarian EU presidency. We are keen to ensure the outcome of the summit builds on the 2010-15 action agenda agreed at the UN MDG summit in New York in September 2010.

The fourth high-level forum on aid effectiveness will take place in Busan, Korea from 29 November to 1 December 2011 under the Polish EU presidency. The UK is looking forward to working closely with our EU partners in the lead up to the forum, including on strengthening the emphasis on results, value for money, transparency and accountability.

EU-US Summit

The High Representative will report back on the development discussions that took place at the EU-US summit in Lisbon on 20 November 2010. In the summit statement, the EU and US pledged to continue and strengthen co-operation on food security, climate change and the millennium development goals, including health. Discussions will continue through the EU-US dialogue on development and the UK is supportive of this process.

TRANSPORT

Maritime Industry and Light Dues

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): I am today announcing a package of measures relating to the maritime industry following the spending review and a recent review I have undertaken of light dues.

Shipping is important to the UK both as the means by which the majority of goods are moved in and out of the country and as a significant contributor to the UK economy in its own right. The Government therefore wish to see a strong and sustainable maritime sector for the future and to minimise the burdens the industry faces.

With this in mind, the Government have listened carefully to the views of both the shipping industry and the general lighthouse authorities on the need for stability in the future level of charges set by the Department for Transport for marine aids to navigation.

In my written ministerial statement of 26 July 2010, *Official Report*, columns 75-76WS, on marine aids to navigation, I announced that the Government do not intend to change the basis on which light dues are currently charged. I am now pleased to announce a commitment that there will be no increases in light dues for at least the next three years.

I am also inviting the views of the Lights Finance Committee, which includes representatives of the payers of light dues, on what an appropriate level of dues for the future would be that balances the need to reduce demands on the shipping industry with the need to maintain essential aids to navigation. I have asked the committee to report its conclusions to me by February 2011.

Sustainable economic growth also requires investment in training and skills. I am therefore also pleased to be able to announce that, despite the difficult public spending climate, the Government will continue to provide a partial financial contribution towards the cost of training seafarers under the existing support for maritime training scheme, with the remainder of those costs being met by employers.

Within its spending review settlement the Department for Transport has been able to allocate some £12 million to support maritime training in the next financial year. I intend that the majority of this money should be focused on supporting initial training for cadets studying at junior officer level (SMarT 1). I estimate that this will enable the Department to contribute to the training of up to 1,000 new cadets starting their training during the next academic year. In order to provide reassurance, I can also confirm that we will make funding available beyond next year for all cadets starting SMarT 1 training in 2011-12, and those already undergoing SMarT 1 training, for the duration of their studies to officer of the watch certificate.

In addition, I intend that funding should also remain available next year for ratings training and for ratings to officer conversion training and I anticipate that some

funding should be available to support the first instalment of SMarT 2—helping those SMarT 1 officer cadets who are also working towards foundation and other degrees, higher national diplomas or Scottish diplomas to complete their studies.

For the remaining parts of the SMarT programme, including SMarT 2 training beyond the first instalment, the Government believe that in current circumstances it is more appropriate that the cost of this additional training should be met in full by employers.

During the year I intend to commission a review of the support for maritime training scheme to consider the continuing requirement for Government support for training and skills development in this sector and how best to spend any continuing Government funding. I will report back to the House on the terms of reference for the review in due course.

In current fiscal circumstances, the Government have also had to look hard at other areas of taxpayer support to shipping.

The current crew relief costs scheme (CRCS) provides limited financial assistance to shipping companies towards the cost of officers or ratings joining or leaving their ships abroad. Shipping companies gain many benefits from the employment of British officers and ratings and, in light of this, the Government have come to the conclusion that continuing to provide commercial shipping companies with a subsidy to meet part of the costs of fares for seafarers can no longer be justified. The current CRCS will therefore cease on 8 March 2011. However, under the Merchant Shipping Act, the Secretary of State, with the consent of the Treasury, will still be able to provide financial assistance in respect of travel and other costs in exceptional cases. I am also inviting those with an interest in CRCS to submit suggestions for how the Department may be able to provide non-monetary assistance to encourage the continued employment of UK seafarers.

The Department for Transport also currently provides a financial contribution towards the costs of the confidential hazardous incident reporting programme for shipping (CHIRP) which provides an outlet for mariners to voice safety concerns. However, the scheme has not gained the traction hoped for in the commercial shipping and fishing sectors and there are other services established by the industry such as the Nautical Institute's mariners' alerting and reporting scheme. I have therefore concluded that the Department should cease to provide financial support for this scheme at the end of this financial year. The Department will work closely with the commercial, fishing and recreational sectors to see how confidential reporting opportunities might be provided in the future without financial assistance from Government.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 December 2010

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Departmental Manpower

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many agency staff his Department and its non-departmental public bodies employ at each pay grade. [27792]

Robert Neill: The following table shows the breakdown of admin and clerical staff by grade working in the Department of Communities and Local Government as of 4 November 2010. The Department engages in total 10 admin and clerical staff. At EO, SEO and G7 there are fewer than five individuals engaged. We cannot disclose the exact number owing to reasons of confidentiality. The five agency staff are funded by the Ministry of Justice to cover the costs of a short term service provided by DCLG.

Grade	Number of agency staff
AA	0
AO	6
EO	<5
HEO	0
SEO	<5
G7	<5
G6	0
SCS	0

DCLG does not hold central staff records for its non-departmental public bodies and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether social landlords letting properties in local authority areas where social rents are in excess of 80 per cent. of market rent will be required to reduce rents when the affordable rent model is introduced. [29232]

Grant Shapps: Social landlords will not be obliged to charge a different rent on social rented properties due to the introduction of affordable rent. None of the new affordable rent proposals have any impact on existing social tenancies.

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether a social rented home under his proposed affordable rent model would be classified as affordable if the rent were in excess of the housing benefit cap. [29233]

Grant Shapps: Affordable rent levels can be up to maximum of 80% of local open market rents. Our expectation is that providers will want to take into account housing benefit caps when setting rents.

Local Government Boundary Commission

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for the work of the Local Government Boundary Commission; and if he will make a statement. [29314]

Robert Neill: The work programme of the independent Local Government Boundary Commission is a matter for it and this House to which it is accountable for its budget through the Speaker's Committee. Under the statute my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may request the Commission to undertake reviews of administrative boundaries, but currently has no plans to do so.

Local Government Finance

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what reserves were held by each (a) local authority and (b) category of local authority in (i) 2009-10 and (ii) 2010-11. [29226]

Robert Neill: I have today placed in the Library of the House a table that gives, by each local authority in England, and for each class of local authority in England, the non-school reserve level figures for the start and end of the financial years, revenue expenditure data for each financial year and non-school reserves at 31 March as a percentage of revenue expenditure for (i) 2009-10 (outturn) and (ii) 2010-11 (budget).

Newcastle Airport

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent representations he has received on payments made to chief operating officers and chief financial officers as a result of the refinancing of Newcastle airport; and what his policy is on the making of payments outside normal salary arrangements to senior officials as a result of financing agreements made by local authorities and their trading partners. [29173]

Robert Neill: Neither the Department for Communities and Local Government, nor the Department for Transport, have received any representations on payments made to chief operating officers and chief financial officers at Newcastle airport. All payments made to senior officers by their local authority employers and their trading partners must be lawful and locally justifiable. The forthcoming Localism Bill will contain provisions to increase accountability and transparency over the setting of senior officers' pay packages.

WALES

Railways

13. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the electrification of the great western main line. [28263]

Mrs Gillan: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my oral response to the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) earlier today.

RAF Valley

14. **Albert Owen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the likely effects on RAF Valley of the outcomes of the strategic defence and security review; and if she will make a statement. [28264]

Mr David Jones: The Government are addressing the full range of issues affecting the defence estates following the strategic defence and security review.

Devolution

Paul Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when she last met the First Minister for Wales to discuss the implications for Wales of the Government's proposals for constitutional change. [29182]

Mrs Gillan: I regularly meet with the First Minister, to discuss a wide range of issues including constitutional reform. The most recent meeting was on 6 December.

Great Western Railway: Electrification

Dr Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the timetable for electrification of the Great Western main line. [28261]

Mrs Gillan: I have had, and continue to have, discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport about this matter. We have already announced £7 billion of rail infrastructure improvements that will reduce journey times to Cardiff by 15 minutes and we will now work with the Welsh Assembly Government on the business case for further electrification.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services: Concessions

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many older people were eligible to receive a free bus pass in each local authority area in the latest period for which figures are available; and what methodology he uses to determine the number of older people that are eligible to receive such passes. [29311]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport does not maintain figures concerning the number of older people eligible to receive a free bus pass.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes details on the number of people aged over 60 and living in England. At the mid-point of 2009 there were 11.5 million people aged 60 and over living in England. This figure can be broken down to local authority level and this breakdown has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Until 6 April 2010, the eligible age for concessionary travel was 60 and therefore all 11.5 million people included within the ONS figures were eligible to receive a free bus pass.

Since 6 April 2010, the eligible age for concessionary travel for both men and women has been linked to the state pension age for women.

As the pensionable age for women increases from 60 to 65 so too will the age of eligibility for concessionary travel. The age of eligibility will increase in line with any future changes to the state pension age for women. It will therefore not be possible to derive straightforward estimates of the number of older people eligible for concessionary travel from future ONS figures.

Concessionary travel is a devolved policy area so the arrangements in England differ from those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—the number of people of eligible age in those areas is a matter for the relevant authorities.

Departmental Consultants

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the (a) purpose and (b) nature was of the management consultancy for which his Department paid AECOM Ltd. (i) £100,000 on 2 July 2010 and (ii) £150,000 on 22 July 2010. [27223]

Mrs Villiers: The payments to AECOM Ltd relate to the joint Department for Transport-Regional transport study considering access to/around the Tyne and Wear city region for freight and passengers, and the joint Department for Transport-Northern Way transport study considering movements between (and beyond) Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield for freight and passengers.

Further details of the purpose of the studies can be found on the Department's website at:

www.dft.gov.uk

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the (a) purpose and (b) nature was of the management consultancy for which his Department paid MVA Consultancy £107,819.18 on 9 July 2010. [27224]

Mrs Villiers: The payment to MVA Consultancy is in relation to a Department for Transport led study considering challenges on Strategic National Corridor (SNC) 10 between London and Yorkshire (taking account of movements to and from the North East and Scotland) for freight and passenger movement.

Further details of the purpose of the study can be found on the Department's website at:

www.dft.gov.uk

Departmental Publications

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the expenditure of his Department and its predecessors on printing (a) Command Papers, (b) papers laid before Parliament by Act, (c) consultation documents and (d) other papers in each of the last 10 years. [28373]

Norman Baker: Publications are produced through various channels depending on value for money and official publishing requirements. Separating out the costs for each publication from the wider communication costs would require manual analysis of the Department's electronic financial system, which would require extensive resources and could be done only at disproportionate cost. The position is further complicated, in that over this 10-year period, some publications were managed and procured by the departmental publishing team and others were managed and procured by TSO (The Stationery Office) directly.

Driving: Licensing

Mark Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason Directive 2009/113/EC has not been implemented in the UK in respect of driving licence rules for eyesight, epilepsy and diabetes; and what deadline the European Commission has set for implementation of the Directive in member states. [29241]

Mike Penning: The UK has considered carefully, with the Secretary of State for Transport's expert medical panels, proposals to make changes to the standards. We are awaiting final cross-Government clearances before public consultation.

Member states can have stricter health standards for driver licensing than those included in the directive. However, the deadline for implementing the directive for member states not meeting the minimum health standards was 25 August 2010.

Freight Facilities Grant

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding his Department plans to provide for the Freight Facilities Grant in each of the next three years. [26909]

Mike Penning: No formal announcement on the future of the Freight Facilities Grant (FFG) scheme has yet been made by the Department for Transport. Following the spending review settlement, we are currently considering what budgets will be available across a number of the Department's smaller programmes (including FFG).

Parking: Fees and Charges

Mr Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 18 October 2010, *Official Report*, column 434W, on parking: fees and charges, whether any companies have been removed from the list of parking enforcement companies eligible to receive Driver and Licensing Agency vehicle keeper data since November 2009. [28642]

Norman Baker: Since November 2009, six companies have had their access to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency vehicle keeper data terminated.

Parking: Fines

Mr Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 1 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 815W, on parking: fines, which

six local authorities have written to his Department on increases in charges for parking penalties. [29130]

Norman Baker [*holding answer 7 December 2010*]: The approaches received by the Department for Transport to review parking penalty charges were from the following:

Hartlepool Borough Council
Lincolnshire County Council
Somerset County Council
St Albans City and District Council
Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Council jointly

Railways: Brighton

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the likely effects of raising the existing cap on rail fares on (a) the number of journeys (i) by train and (ii) by car, (b) levels of carbon dioxide emissions and (c) road congestion between Brighton and Hove and London; and if he will make a statement. [20169]

Mrs Villiers: The Department for Transport expects that rail passenger journeys will continue to increase during the period from 2012 to 2014.

Railways: Construction

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which proposals in the Network Rail Control Period 4 delivery plan in each (a) nation and (b) region of England (a) are being carried out as scheduled, (b) are being carried out with a delayed completion date, (c) are suspended or pending and (d) have been cancelled; for what reason each proposal not carried out as scheduled has been (i) delayed, (ii) suspended and (iii) cancelled; and what the cost of each proposal is, expressed in 2009 prices. [26075]

Mrs Villiers [*holding answer 23 November 2010*]: The scope and costs of the Network Rail Control Period 4 delivery plan are determined by Network Rail and, when approved by the independent Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), are published by Network Rail. Changes to this plan are subject to rail industry consultation and to approval by the ORR, which publishes all such approvals. Despite a tough spending review, the great majority of Government investment in rail infrastructure in England and Wales has been confirmed. The Government expects to announce its position on the remaining projects shortly. The specification and funding of infrastructure outputs in Scotland is a devolved matter.

Road Traffic Controls

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated on the effects of speed humps on vehicle suspension systems. [28552]

Norman Baker: In 2004 the Department commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL), to evaluate the impact of road humps on vehicle suspension systems. TRL found no evidence of any damage, provided the humps were constructed to the requirements of the

Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999 and were driven over at an appropriate speed. The research report is available from the TRL website at:

www.trl.co.uk

under the title 'TRL Report 614: Impact of road humps on vehicles and their occupants'.

The Department's Local Transport Note 1/07: 'Traffic Calming' also summarises this and other research into traffic calming. It is available from the Department's website at:

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/tpm/ltnotes/

Road Traffic Controls: Ambulance Services

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated on the effects of speed humps on ambulance services. [28551]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport has not carried out any research specifically into the impact of road humps on ambulance services.

Local highway authorities must consult the local emergency services on the practicality of any proposed road hump measures in relation to their response times and vehicle types. 'Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/07: Emergency services traffic calming schemes: A code of practice', published in 2007, sets out good practice arrangements for consultation.

Road Works

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for introducing a road lane rental mechanism for utility firms which wish to excavate on the public highway; and if he will make a statement. [27773]

Norman Baker [holding answer 6 December 2010]: The Department for Transport's business plan includes a commitment, by December 2011, to consult on and finalise regulations enabling new lane rental schemes in England. Once the necessary legislation is in place, it would then be for local highway authorities to submit proposals for approval.

Roads: Construction

Jack Lopresti: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his Department's circular on Planning the Strategic Road Network to allow local decisions on infrastructure changes. [29383]

Mike Penning: There are no plans to update the circular, but we will consider whether revision is necessary following wider reforms to the planning system, which are intended to lift the burden of bureaucracy and empower communities to do things their way.

Circular 2/07 on "Planning and The Strategic Road Network" exists to ensure that the impacts of new development on the network can be properly mitigated and does not worsen transport conditions for local residents. It explains the Government's policy in relation to development near the strategic road network and how the Department will use its powers to prevent the network becoming overloaded.

Roads: Snow and Ice

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what (a) financial and (b) physical resources are available to the Highways Agency to deal with adverse winter weather; what plans he has for the future level of such resources; and if he will make a statement. [25599]

Mike Penning: The Highways Agency is responsible for maintaining the strategic motorway and trunk road network in England. The maintenance works, including the provision of a robust winter service, are delivered by Highways Agency contractors who are paid through fixed price contracts covering a range of routine maintenance activities. The cost for winter maintenance activity is included within the Highways Agency's annual budget, with a typical cost of £20 million. In addition to the preparations it has made for the winter ahead and following the recommendations in the Independent Winter Resilience Review led by David Quarmby, the Highways Agency is also facilitating the import of 250,000 tonnes of salt as a strategic reserve to support local highway authorities. The costs for this salt acquisition, storage and management will be reimbursed by authorities who receive salt from the strategic stocks.

With respect to physical resources, the Highways Agency fleet of 437 new winter service vehicles (gritters), all with snow ploughs ready to be mounted during snow conditions, together with an additional 23 snow blowers, are ready for deployment. Prior to the current period of severe winter weather, the Highways Agency contractors held over 250,000 tonnes in their depots ready for use.

Following the comprehensive spending review, Departments are assessing and confirming detailed allocations to their individual business areas. The Highways Agency is undertaking a review of all of its maintenance activities including winter service to maximise value for money and to ensure that priority areas receive the level of future funding required to maintain the appropriate level of service.

Severn Bridge: Tolls

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects credit card payment facilities to be made permanently available for users of the Severn Crossing. [26330]

Mike Penning [holding answer 25 November 2010]: The Highways Agency anticipates that a permanent card payment system will be fully operational early next year.

Transport: Aberdeenshire

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 24 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 303W, on transport: Aberdeenshire, what information his Department holds on major transport infrastructure projects which have been completed in the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire local authority areas between 1980 and 1999. [28637]

Norman Baker: None. As I indicated in my previous reply, this is devolved to the Scottish Government and is therefore a matter for Scottish Ministers.

Transport: Concessions

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what special grant funding he plans to allocate to each integrated transport authority to carry out its statutory duty to fund the national concessionary travel scheme in each of the next three years. [26181]

Norman Baker: Special grant funding provided by the Department for Transport to integrated transport authorities (ITAs) was only intended to cover the period from 2008-09 through to 2010-11. From April 2011 this funding will be subsumed into formula grant alongside the rest of the funding for concessionary travel which gives local authorities the freedom and flexibility they want in their use of funding. ITAs will therefore need to obtain the entirety of their funding to carry out their statutory duties in relation to concessionary travel through the levying process with metropolitan district councils.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy Supply

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many homes in (a) the west midlands, (b) London and the south-east, (c) England and (d) the UK received electricity supply from renewable sources in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [28874]

Charles Hendry: The majority of renewable electricity generated is supplied to the National Grid, who then transmit it across the country, so all grid connected UK homes will receive some electricity originating from renewable sources. DECC holds data on the total amount of electricity supplied by renewable sources, as well as total domestic electricity consumption. DECC does not collect data on the number of homes supplied solely by renewables—these would be homes directly connected to a renewable electricity generation facility and not taking any supply from the National Grid.

In 2009, 6.7% of electricity generated in the UK was from renewable sources.

EU Law

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many EU directives are pending transposition into domestic legislation by his Department; and what estimate he has made of the cost of each such transposition. [27497]

Gregory Barker: The following EU directives are pending transposition by my Department. Total estimated economic, social and environmental costs and benefits are presented in present value terms from published impact assessments where available:

1. 2009/72/EC—Electricity directive. EU Third Package—concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity. Costs yet to be confirmed.
2. 2009/73/EC—Gas directive. EU Third Package—concerning common rules for the internal market in gas. Costs yet to be confirmed.

3. 2009/71/Euratom—Safety of nuclear installations. Costs yet to be confirmed.

4. 2009/28/EC—Promoting the use of energy from renewable sources. Cost £19.85 billion; Benefit £11 billion.

5. 2009/31/EC—Storage of CO₂. Costs yet to be confirmed.

6. 2009/119/EC—Oil stocking. Imposing an obligation to maintain minimum stocks of crude oil and/or petroleum products. Costs yet to be confirmed.

7. 2009/29/EC—Directive amending 2003/87/EC so as to improve and extend the greenhouse gas emission allowance trading scheme of the Community. Costs yet to be confirmed.

In addition, we have consulted on the inclusion of nitrous oxide in the EU ETS (2003/87/EC). Cost £32.3 million; Benefit £508.3 million.

Geothermal Power

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for what reason the UK Renewable Energy Strategy anticipates no contribution from deep geothermal energy; for what reason his Department has reduced the level of grant funding to the deep geothermal industry; what his policy is on deep geothermal heat and power; and if he will make a statement. [28426]

Charles Hendry: The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (RES) was published by DECC in July 2009. It recognised the potential of deep geothermal energy, noting (page 43) that:

“although...geothermal [power] projects are not included in the lead scenario, they could contribute going forward”.

Reflecting this positive view of the technology, the RES also noted (page 145) that:

“as it matures [deep geothermal power] could become a significant player in the UK’s energy landscape”.

The RES also announced a commitment of financial support to the deep geothermal sector, through an initiative which became the Deep Geothermal Challenge Fund.

The decision to reduce the level of grant funding for deep geothermal projects this year from £2 million to £1 million was taken in July as part of DECC’s £85 million contribution to the overall Government effort to deliver £6 billion of savings in this financial year.

The Government recognise the potential of deep geothermal energy as a low carbon, renewable and non-intermittent energy form that can produce both power and heat, and have encouraged it through the Deep Geothermal Challenge Fund.

Renewable Energy

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent assessment he has made of the UK’s capacity to meet the EU renewable energy target for 2010; and if he will make a statement. [28875]

Charles Hendry: The EU 2020 renewable energy target requires the UK to obtain 15% of its energy (electricity, heat and transport) from renewable sources by 2020. We also inherited from the previous Government a non-legally binding target for 10% of UK electricity to be from renewable sources by the end of 2010.

As a result of the failure to make sufficient progress in past years, the UK will miss the 2010 renewable electricity target this year. However, analysis of the pipeline indicates that the rate of deployment is increasing and we estimate reaching 10% in 2012.

For 2020, the latest statistics show that 3% of our energy came from renewable sources at the end of 2009¹. Analysis carried out in 2009 shows that meeting our 2020 target is challenging but achievable. We will publish a Renewables Delivery Plan in the spring which will drive faster deployment through the decade.

¹ Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics (DUKES) 2010

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Equal Pay

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities when she plans to announce her decision on the implementation of the Equality Act 2010 provisions relating to gender pay information. [28929]

Lynne Featherstone: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) announced publication of the Government's equality strategy in a written ministerial statement on 2 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 87WS. The strategy includes a commitment to develop a voluntary approach on gender pay reporting in the private and voluntary sector. While we work with business and others to ensure this approach is successful, we will not commence, amend or repeal provisions in the Equality Act 2010 relating to gender pay information.

Public Sector: Disability

Jo Swinson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities when she plans to bring forward proposals to provide additional support for people with disabilities who wish to become (a) hon. Members, (b) councillors and (c) other elected officials. [29060]

Lynne Featherstone [holding answer 6 December 2010]: We have made a commitment as part of our coalition document to introduce extra support for disabled people who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected officials. We hope to consult on proposals later this month with a wide range of organisations including disability organisations, political parties and other partner organisations. In devising the proposals, we have drawn on evidence collated by the cross-party Speakers' Conference, which reported in January 2010, with recommendations on increasing diversity in parliamentary representation.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Public Accounts Committee

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what National Audit Office resource was made available to support the work of the Public Accounts Committee in the latest period for which figures are available. [28460]

Mr Tyrie: In the 2009-10 financial year, the full cost of the National Audit Office supporting the work of the Public Accounts Committee, and in particular its consideration of the Reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General, was £2.082 million.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Training

Mr Chope: To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, what estimate has been made of the likely cost of the House of Commons tour guide training programme in 2010-11; what the duration of the course for each trainee is; what arrangements are in place for payment of trainees; and what the cost is of employing tour guides to substitute for those under training. [29405]

John Thurso: Following a detailed review of all aspects of visitor management at Parliament, an enhanced training and accreditation programme for in-house guides has been introduced as part of a package of measures designed to regularise and professionalise all aspects of guiding at Parliament.

The cost of the training programme will depend on the final number of participants, but were all of the 80 guides currently registered on the in-house guide list to undertake the training, it would cost a maximum of £34,186 gross. The costs are shared between the Commons and the Lords on a 70:30 basis, so the cost to the House of Commons would be £23,930.

The programme includes information about Parliament and the Palace, updates on developments in both Houses, and training in the mechanics of guiding and managing groups. Guides attend seven 90 minute training sessions, one longer communications seminar, and some practical tour sessions. In line with standard practice for House staff attending training, guides are not expected to undertake this training in their own time without recompense. Therefore, guides who also work at Parliament in another capacity either undertake training in work time with their line manager's agreement, or they undertake training outside of their other working hours, in which case they are paid for every 90 minutes of training at the rate of one tour (£34.29). It is not possible to give total costs as the training is still under way. The training sessions are being run more than once, to allow flexibility. Tours continue to run while the training programme is under way. Guides who are leading tours are taken from the existing pool while others are being trained.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Contracts

Nicola Blackwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department plans to take to encourage and support small and medium-sized enterprises and third sector organisations to compete for departmental contracts, in line with value-for-money policy, UK regulations and EU procurement directives. [28105]

Chris Grayling: The Department for Work and Pensions is fully engaged with Government initiatives to promote the use of small and medium sized enterprises (SME) and third sector organisations (TSO) and increase the level of business they get from Government. This business can be either direct, by winning departmental contracts, or indirect working as partners with or sub-contractors to the Department's prime contractors.

The Department is achieving the new Government commitment that 25% of contracts will be let to SMEs and in 2009-10 achieved 29%. The Department is also fully committed to using the new cross-Government pre-qualification questionnaire which is designed to simplify the tendering process for small and medium enterprises and will be launched in December 2010.

The Department's plans to encourage and support SMEs and TSOs form part of a wider approach set out in the DWP commercial strategy. This has objectives to make it easier for suppliers to compete for contracts and encourage a diverse supply base.

SMEs and TSOs are encouraged to contract with the Department, either as first tier suppliers, where capable, or as sub-contractors for more complex contracts. Part of the approach is to use the DWP supplier charter, signed by the department's top suppliers, which refers to extending its principles to SMEs as sub-contractors. Under the charter, larger suppliers are expected to use SMEs and voluntary organisations as sub-contractors, where it is appropriate, and brings definite added value for money.

A significant proportion of the Department's business with SME and TSOs is in welfare to work provision, where their specialist and local expertise can add great value. In preparing the market for the Work programme the Department has engaged with these organisations to gain their views and encourage them to become involved. It has taken steps to encourage potential prime contractors to come together with a range of partners and sub-contractors, particularly to use SMEs and TSOs where they could add value to bids. The Department will run local events to help prime contractors understand the needs and issues within each locality so they can put together appropriate supply chains for that area. The assessment of Work programme bidders will include a requirement to name all of their key sub-contractors and partners in their tenders and provide a letter of intent from each, this will allow assessment of SME and TSO involvement and the nature of their arrangements with the prime contractor. The department will expect its prime providers to gain accreditation of the Merlin Standard, to ensure provider supply chains are effective, high performing and that smaller organisations are treated appropriately and fairly. The Department recently won the Compact award for National Partnership Working, for development of the Merlin Standard, which demonstrates its commitment to stewardship of the welfare to work market, and equally the involvement and health of TSOs in prime provider led supply chains.

Each year the Department measures the number of SMEs and TSOs it has business with and the value of this business. In 2009-10 the Department had business with 5,039 SMEs, spending a total of £509 million with them, an increase of 18% over 2008-09. In 2009-10 the Department had business with 1,421 TSOs, spending a total of £305 million with them, an increase of 15% over 2008-09. Currently, some 30% of welfare to work provider sub-contracts are with voluntary sector

organisations. The Department therefore has a strong record of encouraging, supporting and using SME and TSOs to support its business, either as direct contractors or as sub-contractors in supply chains. Current plans are expected to improve on this record.

Employment Schemes: Disability

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the merits of allowing incapacity benefit claimants to access elements of the Work Programme; and if he will make a statement. [19237]

Chris Grayling: The Work Programme will support a wide range of customers—from jobseeker's allowance recipients who have been out of work for some time, to customers who may previously have been receiving incapacity benefits for many years. We intend to give all customers in receipt of employment support allowance the opportunity to access the Work Programme, on either a voluntary or a mandatory basis—depending on their circumstances.

However, we do not believe it would be appropriate to refer customers in receipt of incapacity benefit to the Work Programme until we have carried out a work capability assessment to properly establish their support needs.

Employment: Ex-servicemen

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to issue guidance to local councils on assistance for veterans to enter employment. [25704]

Chris Grayling: The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has no plans to issue guidance to local councils on assistance for veterans to enter employment.

Jobcentre Plus has armed forces champions in every Jobcentre Plus district who liaise with local authority forces champions and other local stakeholders on employment related issues.

Housing Benefit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average eligible rent for claimants of housing benefit (*a*) in receipt of passport benefit, (*b*) not in receipt of passport benefit, (*c*) of working age, (*d*) of pension age, (*e*) in a regulated private tenancy and (*f*) in a deregulated private sector tenancy and (i) claiming and (ii) not claiming local housing allowance was in (A) April 2007 and (B) November 2008. [29407]

Steve Webb: Information is not available on amounts of weekly eligible rents for November 2008.

The Department does collect information on weekly eligible rents from the housing benefit/council tax benefit data Source (SHBE) but to assess the completeness of recording and quality assure the figures to answer this PQ would incur a disproportionate cost.

Housing benefit caseload and average weekly amounts are available at local authority area level and these are published on the Department's website at:

<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=hbctb>

The information we have as at May 2007 is shown in the following table.

<i>Average weekly amounts of eligible rents, Great Britain, May 2007</i>	
	£
Average weekly eligible rent for working age claimants	83.44
Average weekly eligible rent for Elderly claimants	65.62
Average weekly eligible rent for private regulated tenants	69.32
Average weekly eligible rent for private deregulated tenants	103.13
Average weekly eligible rent for local housing allowance tenants	n/a
Average weekly eligible rent for claimants receiving a passported benefit	75.65
Average weekly eligible rent for claimants not receiving a passported benefit	80.01

Source:

Housing benefit and council tax benefit management information system quarterly 100% data taken in February, May, August and November.

Marginal Deductions

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the average marginal deduction rate for each decile of the population (a) in 2010-11 and (b) following the implementation of the proposed universal credit under the assumptions contained in the White Paper on welfare reform. [26639]

Chris Grayling: Presenting average marginal deduction rates by income decile is potentially misleading as it groups together many different family types, with differing circumstances and treatment under the tax and benefit system, into specific groups.

As such, this Government have followed the same approach as the previous Administration in setting out the number of families that face high marginal deduction rates by marginal deduction rate bands, and would view this as providing a clearer picture of the impacts of the tax and benefit system on families than presenting averages by decile. Details of estimates in 2010-11 and 2011-12 can be found in Table A3 in Annex A of the June Budget. Additionally, in the White Paper 'Universal Credit: Welfare That Works', estimates have been provided under the universal credit system. Refer to Table 1 and Table 2 on pages 54 and 55 for further details.

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of individuals who will have marginal deduction rates of (a) 61 to 70 per cent., (b) 71 to 80 per cent., (c) 81 to 90 per cent. and (d) 91 to 100 per cent. in each of the next five years. [26640]

Chris Grayling: The Government's recent White Paper, 'Universal Credit: Welfare That Works', shows marginal deduction rates for people in receipt of income-related benefits, tax credits or universal credit, separating earners above and below the tax and national insurance threshold.

<i>Earning below the tax threshold</i>			
	<i>Million</i>		
<i>Marginal deduction rate for non-taxpaying earners in receipt of IRBs/TCs or universal credit</i>	<i>Current system</i>	<i>Universal credit</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Up to 60%	0.3	0.1	-0.3
60% to 70%	0.0	0.5	0.5
70% to 80%	0.0	0.0	0.0
80% to 90%	0.1	0.0	-0.1
Over 90%	0.1	0.0	-0.1
<i>Earning above the tax threshold</i>			
	<i>Million</i>		
<i>Marginal deduction rate for taxpaying earners in receipt of IRBs/TCs or universal credit</i>	<i>Current system</i>	<i>Universal credit</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Up to 60%	0.9	0.8	0.0
60% to 70%	0.2	0.4	0.2
70% to 80%	1.7	2.0	0.3
80% to 90%	0.4	0.0	-0.4
Over 90%	0.1	¹ —	-0.1

¹ Denotes fewer than 50,000 people; figures may not sum due to rounding.

If we consider all working-age individuals, rather than just those on income-related benefits and tax credits or the universal credit, then we estimate that one million households will face a marginal deduction rate of 61% to 70% and two million will face a marginal deduction rate of 71% to 80% under universal credit.

It is important to note, as set out in the spending review, that presenting analysis far into the future may not be representative of the impact of future Government policy, and would not, for example, take into account the aim to increase the personal allowance to £10,000—a reform which will tend to reduce marginal deduction rates for lower earners.

After the introduction of the universal credit there will be a number of years of transition as existing cases migrate to the new system and as such it is not possible to produce estimates of the marginal deduction rates during this transition period.

Estimating marginal deduction rates within the current tax and benefit system is the responsibility of HM Treasury and it would incur a disproportionate cost to provide marginal deduction rates for all individuals for the intervening years between now and the introduction of the universal credit in 2013. However, Table A3 in Annex A of the June Budget set out the Government's estimates of marginal deduction rates in 2010-11 and 2011-12 following the implementation of June Budget measures. This is for working heads of families who are in receipt of income-related benefits or tax credits, where at least one person works 16 hours or more a week, and the head of the family is not receiving pensioner or disability premiums.

Nanotechnology: Safety

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Health and Safety Executive is taking to reduce the health risk to the public from nano-silver in consumer hygiene products. [23003]

Chris Grayling: Presently HSE has no specific activities on nano-silver in consumer hygiene products. Such disinfectants are not subject to the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986, and do not have to be authorised under national legislation implementing the Biocidal Products Directive (98/8/EC) pending completion of an EU review of the active substances in such products. Sweden is rapporteur for the nano-silver reviews, and is due to report its findings to the Commission and other member states on 31 March 2011.

Presently such disinfectants are subject to the Consumer Protection Act 1987, which is administered by BIS and enforced by trading standards officers. Such products may also be subject to the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2009 and to EC Regulation 1272/2008 on classification labelling and packaging which, for consumer products, are also enforced by trading standards officers.

There is no general ban on nano-silver products under the Biocidal Products Directive. However, EU legislation on biocides required industry to indicate which active substances they wished to support through the review. Where active substances have not been supported for specific uses, products containing these active substances should have been removed from the market. Removal in these circumstances is most likely to reflect commercial decisions and not health and safety concerns. Where HSE has been made aware that specific products may be unlawfully on the market it has taken action, usually by alerting trading standards officers.

Pension: Reform

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to combine the replacement SERPs scheme with the graduated pension payment scheme to create a single pension scheme; what assessment he has made of the effects of implementation of his proposals on pension reform on women who do not have a full record of national insurance contributions at the point of their retirement; what plans he has for the future of means-testing on pension entitlements; and if he will make a statement. [27092]

Steve Webb: The Government are currently considering a number of options for simplifying the state pension system but final decisions have not yet been made.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to simplify the processes involved in applying for benefits; and if he will make a statement. [27086]

Chris Grayling: Universal credit will replace working tax credit, child tax credit, housing benefit, income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance and income-related employment and support allowance. By using the best data technology available, we will streamline the system to improve efficiency, reduce administration costs and minimise the opportunities for fraud and errors at the same time. This will make it easier for people to see they will be consistently and transparently better off for each hour they work.

Social Security Benefits: Ex-servicemen

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of his Department's budget is allocated to programmes for veterans. [25775]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

While the Department for Work and Pensions does not have any bespoke programmes in place for veterans, a number of flexibilities that specifically favour veterans are available. For example, where appropriate, ex-armed forces and spouses of serving armed forces personnel are given early access to employment programmes.

Jobcentre Plus has also appointed a named armed forces champion in every Jobcentre Plus district. These champions liaise with local regular and reservist units, providing employment and training advice and guidance for both forces.

It is not possible to say what proportion of the department's budget is spent on veterans, as this information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has accrued to the Exchequer in recouped benefit payments after convictions for benefit fraud in each of the last five years. [17442]

Chris Grayling: We are not able to provide data on how much money has been recovered from people that have been convicted of benefit fraud as they are not classified as a distinct category in our debt recovery systems.

The Department published a new fraud and error strategy on 18 October 2010. The strategy sets out the Department's plans for improving the effectiveness of the current recoveries system which include increasing by around 25% the rate at which we recover fraud debts by deduction from benefit, introduction of powers to deduct money directly from an employee's earnings and in the most serious cases seeking court orders to seize a person's assets or force them to sell their houses to repay their fraud debt.

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria he plans to use to determine whether benefit claimants have deliberately not informed the relevant agency of a change in circumstances. [19837]

Chris Grayling: Where a customer deliberately does not inform the Department of a reportable change in circumstance this would constitute benefit fraud. The Fraud Investigation Service investigate cases thoroughly, and an admission of fraud or proof beyond reasonable doubt are the criteria used to determine whether fraud has been committed.

In cases where there is no fraudulent intent on behalf of the customer and a change in circumstance went unreported as a genuine mistake, the case would be referred to customer compliance.

The Department takes fraud very seriously and has recently published a new joint strategy with HMRC for tackling welfare fraud and error. This sets out a strong sanctions regime to punish those who are caught of committing benefit fraud and includes a new civil penalty for genuine mistakes.

Social Security Benefits: Illegal Immigrants

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of his Department's expenditure on welfare payments to illegal immigrants in the last 12 months.

[24952]

Chris Grayling: No such estimate has been made.

Welfare State

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to increase efficiency within the administration of the benefits system; whether he has considered the merits of gathering customer feedback to inform decision-making on efficiency measures; and if he will make a statement.

[27088]

Chris Grayling: We are creating a new universal credit which will replace working tax credit, child tax credit, housing benefit, income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance and income-related employment and support allowance. The new benefit will transform service standards in welfare systems leading to a significant reduction in administration costs and better value for money for the taxpayer.

We intend to seek the views of current benefit and tax credit recipients at various stages in the development of the new service.

Work Capability Assessment Programme

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what mechanism he plans to put in place to measure work incentives under the new work capability assessment programme.

[26994]

Chris Grayling: The work capability assessment is an objective medical assessment of someone's functional capability for work and is used to determine entitlement to employment and support allowance. It assesses an individual's capability for work by looking at their ability to carry out a range of physical and mental, cognitive and intellectual functions, and looks at how these are affected by a health condition or disability.

By accurately assessing someone's capability for work, we can better identify the right support to help them return to suitable work or prepare for a return to work, where possible. However, the WCA in isolation is not designed to incentivise work.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the data used to determine that the aircraft carrier contract was more expensive to cancel than it was to complete.

[28536]

Dr Fox [*holding answer 3 December 2010*]: The Government's decision on the carrier programme was based on an assessment of a number of options and their financial, capability and industrial implications. This covered, among other things, our financial liabilities under relevant contracts and industrial agreements, including the so-called "Yellow Book". The Government have already published advice received from BAE Systems and will shortly be releasing redacted copies of the contract for the Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carrier Project and the BAE Systems Surface Ships Terms of Business Agreement for consideration by the Public Accounts Committee.

Armed Forces Covenant Task Force

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to publish the report of the Armed Forces Covenant Task Force.

[28533]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 3 December 2010*]: The independent Armed Forces Covenant Taskforce report, produced by Professor Hew Strachan, has been published today.

Armed Forces: Drugs

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether soldiers in the Army have their urine samples tested for mephedrone.

[27724]

Mr Robathan: The Army drug testing programme does not currently include a specific bulk test for mephedrone. However, the programme of tests does detect a number of substances, some of which may include variants of mephedrone or its component parts. In addition to the Army drug testing programme, the Army has taken proactive measures to ensure that the dangers of mephedrone are addressed through a programme of education.

Armed Forces: Mental Health Services

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding his Department plans to allocate to (a) long-term care and (b) mental health care for veterans in addition to funding announced prior to the comprehensive spending review in each year of the spending review period.

[28193]

Mr Robathan: The NHS is responsible for funding health care for veterans.

The Ministry of Defence is working closely with the Department of Health to implement the recommendations of the report into mental health care for serving personnel and veterans by the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison).

Armed Forces: Pensions

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the potential effects of changing the inflation measure used to up-rate pensions from the retail price index to the consumer price index on the pension of a private aged 20 years who has suffered

injuries and has received compensation at the top level of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme in each of the next five years. [29058]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 6 December 2010*]: No assessment can be made as the retail price index and consumer price index rates are not known.

Combined Cadet Force

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on cadet force activities in each year from 2001-02 to 2009-10. [27710]

Mr Robathan: Figures relating to expenditure on cadet force activities are held centrally only for the years 2007-08 and 2009-10. This amounts to £141 million and £146 million respectively. Information relating to the other years could be obtained only by conducting a manual search of records on multiple sites thus incurring a disproportionate cost.

Defence: Procurement

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has estimated how much it plans to spend with UK suppliers in each year to 2014-15. [26859]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence has estimated that we will spend around £50 billion on equipment and support over the next four years.

Departmental Art Works

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his most recent estimate in of the annual cost to the public purse of insurance for the fine art and antiques held on his Department's estates. [27829]

Mr Robathan: In common with other Defence fixed assets, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) art collection is not insured. The risk of damage or loss is accepted by the Government. Neither are further insurance policies covering fine art or antiques owned by MOD arranged centrally. Other non-departmental art collections may be held on Defence estates by messes, regiments or other groups; these are not owned by the MOD and insurance arrangements are the responsibility of the owners.

Departmental Finance

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on (a) recruitment materials (b) schools visits and (c) other outreach programmes for people under the age of 18 years in each financial year from 2001-02 and 2009-10. [27711]

Mr Robathan: We do not account separately in our recruitment effort for those under the age of 18 years. However, we have been able to identify some costs incurred by the Army for the year 2006 onwards. Data in respect of the other two services are not held in the

form requested and could be obtained only through a search of records and invoices that would incur a disproportionate cost.

The following table lists expenditure relating to recruitment materials, school visits and other outreach programmes conducted by the Army since 1 April 2006:

	Recruitment materials	School visits	Other outreach programmes
2006-07	1,942,000	n/a	301,000
2007-08	2,058,000	237,000	670,000
2008-09	1,361,000	191,000	758,000
2009-10	2,615,000	155,000	698,000

n/a = Not available

Note:

All figures rounded to the nearest £000.

Departmental Sponsorship

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure (a) his Department and (b) its non-departmental public bodies incurred on sponsorship in each year since 1997 for which figures are available. [27519]

Mr Robathan: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs. The main sponsorship activities that are covered by the Ministry of Defence are sports and educational outreach.

Ex-servicemen: Radiation Exposure

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason his Department has not compensated nuclear test veterans for the adverse effects on their health arising from their participation in nuclear tests. [28427]

Mr Robathan: Well-documented formal procedures were in place to ensure the health and safety of those participating in the tests. The majority of nuclear test veterans (NTVs) received little or no additional radiation exposure as a result of participation. We believe there is no evidence of excess illness or mortality among NTVs which can be linked to their participation in the tests or their exposure to radiation as a result of that participation, with the exception of certain leukaemias.

Compensation in the form of a war pension is available to all former members of HM armed forces who suffer disablement which is attributable to service prior to 6 April 2005 including nuclear test veterans. The scheme also makes provision for the widows and widowers of service and ex-service personnel whose death is attributable to service in the form of a war widows/widowers pension. Individuals can and do appeal to an independent appeals tribunal if they are unhappy with a particular decision.

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken to comply with the direction of the War Pensions Tribunal to disclose all documents relating to nuclear test veterans' exposure to ionising radiation by 30 November 2010; and what progress it has made in complying with the direction of the Tribunal to (a) search for and (b) disclose all documents relevant to nuclear test veteran compensation claims by that date. [29011]

Mr Robathan: There have been an unusually high number of complex requests for classified information and documents in the current group of war pensions appeals cases. The Ministry of Defence continues to work closely with the War Pensions Tribunal to find proportionate and cost-effective ways of ensuring that all relevant documents are disclosed and to meet the timescales set out in the judge's latest set of directions. Special security arrangements have been agreed with the tribunal to ensure appropriate handling of any highly classified documents.

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review his Department's policy on causal links between exposure to radiation during nuclear testing it carried out in the 1950s and the onset of cancer and other illnesses in test veterans against policies on similar circumstances adopted by his international counterparts. [29012]

Mr Robathan: There are no plans to review the policy on causal links. The Ministry of Defence policy on causal links between exposure to radiation during the UK atmospheric nuclear tests and the onset of cancer and other illnesses is in line with generally accepted contemporary scientific and medical understanding based on the published peer-reviewed international literature. The policy requires ongoing routine scrutiny of the literature to detect and as appropriate reflect new and emerging evidence.

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what benchmarking assessment his Department has made of the provisions for nuclear test veteran compensation under the US Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. [29013]

Mr Robathan: No benchmarking has taken place.

In the United Kingdom evidence was provided in the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) reports of the three follow-up studies on the health of over 20,000 nuclear test participants and a matched group of military controls. For the United States atomic veterans no comparable large scale epidemiological US study was carried out.

The Ministry of Defence also provides pensions automatically to nuclear test veterans who have one of a list of 22 cancers presumed to be causally linked to service. For other cancers, claims may be accepted on the basis of calculated radiation exposure assessment. In the US, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) will pay a one time lump sum of 75,000 US dollars for cancers on their own list.

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical records of nuclear test veterans his Department have identified for further post mortem research. [29014]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence has not identified any medical records of nuclear test veterans for further post mortem research.

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of his action at the War Pensions Tribunal in respect of nuclear test veterans; and if he will make a statement. [27983]

Mr Robathan: To date the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has been notified of bills totalling some £150,000 (including VAT) for work associated with defending the civil action.

This figure does not include the cost of any associated MOD staff effort.

It is difficult to estimate future costs at this stage for the current group of war pensions appeals as these are dependent on the case put forward by the appellants and the judge's future directions.

We remain keen to work with the tribunal and appellants with a view to ensuring that costs relating to all war pensions appeals are proportionate and kept to a minimum.

Korea: Politics and Government

Rehman Chishti: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has had recent discussions with the US administration on its operations in the Korean peninsula. [27827]

Dr Fox: The Secretary of State for Defence has not had direct contact with the US Administration on this issue, but Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials maintain strong contacts with our US and Republic of Korea (ROK) allies and regularly discuss regional issues, including the recent exchange of artillery fire between North Korea and ROK.

Military Aircraft

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many (a) BAe 146 and (b) BAe 125 aircraft were sold by his Department in each year since 2003; and how much revenue was raised from each sale. [26926]

Mr Robathan: No BAe 146 aircraft have been sold by the Ministry of Defence since 2003. Five BAe 125 aircraft were sold in 2007 for a total of just under £30,000.

Morocco: Military Exercises

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions UK and Moroccan defence agencies have participated in joint exercises (a) bilaterally and (b) as members of collective security organisations since 1997. [28438]

Mr Robathan: The UK undertakes modest, but important annual bilateral defence activity with Morocco. Our bi-lateral joint exercises since 1997 to date have been as follows:

Ex Jebel Saharah: a very successful bilateral ground and airmobile annual exercise which is run in the Marrakech region has now been run 10 times since its inception in 2000.

Ex Jebel Tarik: Morocco has contributed service personnel to this annual bilateral deployment of two companies (up to 180 personnel) of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment (RG) to the UK, on seven occasions since 2003.

Ex Desert Vortex: a one-off bilateral helicopter exercise which was run between 16 May and 30 June 2009. This was a UK training exercise with objectives set by Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) and run concurrently with Moroccan Air Force annual helicopter crew training.

The UK and Moroccan Defence agencies have not participated in any joint exercises as members of collective security organisations since 1997.

HMS Northumberland was due to take part in the NATO Standing Naval Maritime Group 1 (SNMG 1) staging in Casablanca in September 2010. Unfortunately, UK participation did not materialize as HMS Northumberland had to be re-tasked and did not visit Morocco.

NATO

Ms Gisela Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the UK made to the US and Estonian Joint NATO exercise in October 2010; and if he will make a statement. [27111]

Mr Gerald Howarth: There were no US and Estonian joint NATO exercises in this period. I assume the hon. Member refers to the non-NATO exercise Sabre Strike which took place in Latvia from 18 to 31 October 2010. Members of the armed forces from the US, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania took part. The UK made no contribution.

Nimrod Aircraft

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account he took of the increased capacity of the Nimrod MRA4 in determining the future size of the Nimrod fleet; and if he will make a statement. [28414]

Peter Luff: The strategic defence and security review took account of the Nimrod MRA4's range of capabilities. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 October 2010, *Official Report*, columns 450-51W, to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Mr McCann), the right hon. Member for Coventry North East (Mr Ainsworth) and the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

Trident Value for Money Review

Mr Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Trident value for money review. [20480]

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the Trident replacement value for money review. [21143]

Tessa Munt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what date he expects to present to Parliament the full results of the Trident value for money report; [20721]

(2) if he will ensure that Parliament is given the opportunity to review the Trident value for money report and the strategic defence and security review before any contracts for the Future Submarine programme are placed. [20850]

Dr Fox [*holding answer 3 November 2010*]: The value for money review's outcomes were published as part of the strategic defence and security review.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture: Finance

Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of funding from the public purse received by the farming industry from (a) UK and (b) EU sources in each year since 1997-98. [28798]

Mr Paice [*holding answer 6 December 2010*]: The following table shows the funds provided to farmers less levies in £ million. While the majority of funding is from the EU, the precise EU/UK split is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The fact the UK contributes to the EU budget further blurs the line between EU and UK funding sources.

	<i>£ million</i>
1997	2,773
1998	2,639
1999	2,684
2000	2,474
2001	2,445
2002	2,665
2003	2,758
2004	2,945
2005	3,030
2006	3,028
2007	3,015
2008	3,293
2009	3,644

Source:

Agriculture in the United Kingdom

Angling

Mr Marcus Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of progress in the (a) protection and (b) improvement of coarse and non-migratory trout fisheries. [28326]

Richard Benyon: Coarse and non-migratory trout fisheries are protected under various legislative measures. Under the Environment Act 1995, the Environment Agency (EA) has a statutory duty to "maintain, improve and develop fisheries for salmon, trout, eels, lampreys, smelt and freshwater fish". In addition there are UK obligations under the European habitats directive that covers several freshwater species and habitats. Continued and effective management of fisheries is essential to defining and achieving "good ecological status" as required in the water framework directive.

In general the status of non-migratory freshwater fish stocks is encouraging. Coarse fish numbers are increasing and are a big improvement on two decades ago, when many rivers were heavily polluted, with fish communities restricted in distribution and numbers. Many non-migratory trout are caught in put-and-take fisheries on still waters, and improvements to these depend largely upon local stocking policies. Wild non-migratory brown trout are the same species as migratory brown trout and the juveniles cannot be distinguished, and so it is not possible to assess their status independently.

Regular monitoring is undertaken to help identify where improvements to fish populations are required and where additional protection is needed to prevent them from deteriorating.

Animal Welfare: Inspections

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many welfare inspections by Animal Health were carried out on rabbit farms in 2009; and what level of compliance with animal welfare legislation and the welfare code was recorded as a result of such inspections. [28794]

Mr Paice: Animal Health does not conduct routine welfare inspections of rabbit farms as there is no specific requirement to register rabbit farms with Animal Health or the Rural Payments Agency. However, Animal Health will conduct a welfare inspection if they receive a complaint or allegation about poor welfare and when a targeted, or follow up visit is required. In 2009 Animal Health recorded three incidences where the level of compliance with animal welfare legislation resulted in a failure.

Badgers: Bovine Tuberculosis

Gordon Birtwistle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tests her Department carries out to ensure that badgers culled to prevent the spread of bovine tuberculosis carry the virus. [28687]

Mr Paice: We are currently consulting on a proposal for badger control to tackle bovine TB. The consultation period ends on 8 December. No decisions have yet been taken.

In theory, the ideal culling strategy would be selective, i.e. only infected badgers would be culled. However, no diagnostic test is both sufficiently sensitive and suitable for use in the field, so a policy of selective culling is not currently being pursued.

Given the extent of evidence already available on the prevalence of bovine tuberculosis in the badger population, we do not propose in the current consultation to post mortem culled badgers to check whether individual badgers were infected with *Mycobacterium bovis*.

Badgers: Disease Control

Gordon Birtwistle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to reduce the number of badger culls. [28549]

Mr Paice: We are currently consulting on a proposal for badger control to tackle bovine TB. The consultation period ends on 8 December. No decisions have yet been taken.

As stated in the consultation document, we would not want to see culling for longer than is necessary and would intend to review how the policy is working after four years.

Common Fisheries Policy

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the scope for devolution of powers under the review of the common fisheries policy. [29151]

Richard Benyon: We will continue to call for genuine, radical reform of the common fisheries policy, to overcome its current serious structural failings. This means replacing ineffective, centralised micro-management with simplified and de-centralised decision making, enabling those closest to fisheries to plan for the long term, and allowing fishermen to take responsibility for prosperous and sustainable fishing operations.

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent progress has been made on the review of the common fisheries policy. [29207]

Richard Benyon: The EU Commission's 2009 Green Paper provides a compelling case for fundamental reform of the current common fisheries policy; changes that simplify and decentralise fisheries management, enabling those closest to fisheries to plan for the long-term, and giving fishermen greater incentive to fish sustainably. We expect the Commission to publish draft proposals next spring.

We are working with other member states, and interested parties, to build support for genuine, radical reform ahead of negotiations next year.

Departmental Conferences

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken since her appointment to reduce expenditure on conferences from budgets within her responsibility. [28355]

Richard Benyon: In response to the arrangements for advertising and marketing put in place by the Government, my Department has established an internal panel to consider all proposals for expenditure arising from communication activity.

As a result of the panel's work, planned expenditure on all elements of communication has been substantially reduced.

Approval has been given to expenditure on seven conferences. Five were approved following reduction in costs requested by the panel. Two were accepted by the panel without change. The total cost of the seven conferences was £34,285.

Departmental Manpower

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many agency workers her Department and its agencies employ at each pay grade. [28503]

Richard Benyon: In line with Government policy, this Department and its executive agencies have and will continue to reduce the number of temporary agency staff used. Central records on numbers in the core Department and executive agencies will vary daily as reductions are implemented.

Manual processes have been introduced in the core Department to record the number of non-permanent staff deployed at the end of each month and at the end of October 2010, there were 145. These processes will be moving to quarterly from December 2010. This number

includes temporary staff, contractors, interims and some specialist consultants. The pay grade is not yet recorded in all records. Introduction of similar processes in executive agencies is being reviewed.

Fisheries: Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on future provision for fishermen in any revisions to rules governing jobseeker's allowance. [29245]

Richard Benyon: No discussions have been had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) on future provision for fishermen in any revisions to rules governing jobseeker's allowance.

Flood Control: Local Government

Ian Mearns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 24 November 2010, *Official Report*, columns 39-40WS, on the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (England), what discussions her Department is having with local government representatives to discuss the funding of new burdens placed on councils under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010; [29414]

(2) what steps the Government is taking to ensure that new burdens placed on councils under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 are fully funded; [29415]

(3) what progress has been made by the DEFRA/LGA Joint Legislative Implementation Panel on identifying and resolving the concerns of local authorities in relation to funding for the requirements placed on them under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010; [29416]

(4) what requirements have been placed on local authorities under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010; and what steps the Government is taking to ensure that such requirements are cost neutral for local councils. [29417]

Richard Benyon: We remain committed to fully funding new local authority burdens under the Flood and Water Management Act, and to ensuring a fair outcome for both local authorities and the taxpayer. £36 million a year will be provided directly to lead local flood authorities (£21 million in 2011-12 due to phasing-in) through area based grant. The Government have set up a joint implementation review panel with the Local Government Association. This independently chaired panel meets regularly and recently commissioned a survey of local authority preparations for implementation of the Act.

Forestry: Grants

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has assessed the merits of making grants to ensure that privately-owned forests and natures reserves are managed appropriately to maintain their benefits to the public. [28767]

Mr Paice [*holding answer 6 December 2010*]: The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) runs from 2007-13 and is designed to support agri-environment and other land management schemes. We are currently undertaking a Mid Term Evaluation that includes an assessment of the effectiveness of the funding which is made available to forestry owners and other land managers to encourage management practices that deliver public benefits. We will publish the Mid Term Evaluation of the RDPE in the new year.

Payments are currently made to private owners of national nature reserves in two main ways: through statutory agreements on the land between Natural England and the landowner; and/or through an Environmental Stewardship agreement.

Landowners receiving funding support under either of these approaches must agree to undertake specific actions that will deliver the agreed public benefits such as: community engagement, access, education, and research as well as nature conservation. These benefits go over and beyond statutory requirements or cross-compliance with wider schemes such as the Single Farm Payment. The required actions are set out in a management plan or agreement for the land. The provision of payments is subject to compliance with this plan or agreement.

Quantification of these widespread merits is difficult. However, we have commissioned a study, which we expect to report in the new year, to estimate the benefits to society of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (which include national nature reserves); quantifying them where possible.

Hemp

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had on the promotion of hemp crop trials. [29418]

Mr Paice: I have not been involved in any discussions on the promotion of hemp crop trials. Nevertheless, I do wish to see hemp cultivation expand in the UK, capturing the environmental and sustainability benefits the crop can provide and keeping the UK at the forefront of the development of new, high-value end uses for the crop.

Hydrofluorocarbons

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of the contribution which will have been made to global warming by hydrofluorocarbons previously used as refrigerants by 2050. [28804]

Richard Benyon [*holding answer 6 December 2010*]: A study undertaken by AEA Technology on behalf of DEFRA and the Department for Energy and Climate Change considers the use and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons in the UK in all sectors where emissions occur. This study revalidates and updates historic consumption, and provides an estimate of emissions through to 2050. The report is available from the DEFRA website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/air/fgas/background.htm#publications>

Incinerators

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for incineration as part of her waste management policy. [27994]

Richard Benyon: The Government's approach to waste management is underpinned by the waste hierarchy, which ranks waste management methods in order of environmental preference. For waste that cannot be prevented, re-used or recycled, recovery of energy is a preferable alternative, and recovering energy from waste is almost always preferable to landfill (unless analysis of the overall environmental impact for specific types of waste shows otherwise).

The waste hierarchy will shortly become law through the revised Waste Framework Directive, which seeks to promote waste prevention, increase recycling, and ensure better use of resources, while protecting human health and the environment. Recovery of energy from waste, including but not limited to incineration, has a role to play in managing waste according to the hierarchy.

A full review of waste policy is currently being carried out, with initial findings due in spring 2011. The role of recovering energy from waste, including incineration, will be considered as part of the review.

Marine Scotland

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on issues relating to the ownership and burdens of roads 12, 18 and 19 in the Almondbank complex consequent on the proposed closure of Marine Scotland: Science in March 2011. [29391]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA and Scottish Government officials met on 26 November 2010 to discuss the legal title of the roadways serving Scottish Executive's retained land. Discussions are ongoing and Scottish Executive colleagues are continuing to consult their legal advisers on the legal title.

Military Bases: USA

Caroline Nokes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the potential health risks arising from the consumption of food products that do not conform to EU regulations on US military bases in the UK. [27962]

Anne Milton: I have been asked to reply.

In terms of food safety and food hygiene the United States conforms to high standards, and US requirements are broadly comparable with European Union food regulations. Food imported from the US for consumption at US military bases is subject to EU border controls, and the perceived risk to human health, from consumption at military bases or in the wider community, is judged to be negligible. For that reason an assessment of the health risks has not been conducted.

Caroline Nokes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will assess the risks to public health from the provision of US

military food supplies via warehouses (a) in the UK and (b) in Germany. [27963]

Anne Milton: I have been asked to reply.

Where consignments originating from the United States are destined for NATO or US bases different procedures apply depending on the location of the warehouse of destination.

If the warehouse of destination is not on the NATO or US base but on European Union/European Economic Area territory (which is the case for all bases in the United Kingdom), the consignment is treated the same as any other import to the EU. It must undergo veterinary checks at a border inspection post (BIP) to ensure that it meets all of the required animal and public health import conditions before it is released to its destination.

If the warehouse is located inside a NATO or US base in the EU (as may be the case in Germany), the consignment should be treated as a consignment in transit and must fulfil animal health requirements, including checks that it is accompanied by the appropriate animal health certification. The BIP will carry out a documentary and identity check, and transmit the relevant information to the competent authority responsible for the warehouse (the designated exit point from the EU). Subsequently the competent authority will confirm arrival of the consignment, which is not permitted to enter free circulation within the EU.

In addition, the US authorities publicise information on the rules for personal imports, of products of animal origin and plant and plant products, which may be posted to US personnel.

Office of Water Services

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost to the public purse of Ofwat has been in each year since its inception. [28988]

Richard Benyon: Ofwat's expenditure requirements are covered by licence fees recovered from the companies it regulates. There is no cost to the public purse.

Ofwat's resource accounts are published at:

<http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/aboutofwat/reports/resourceaccounts>

Recycling: Business

Nicola Blackwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to encourage businesses to recycle their waste. [27969]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA has recently published interim results from a survey of commercial and industrial waste in England, which indicate that the current rate of re-use and recycling of business waste is 58%, compared to 43% in the equivalent 2002 survey. These data sets are interim estimates and are subject to change. The final survey results are planned to be published on Thursday 16 December.

The Government are carrying out a review of waste policies in England, due to be completed in spring 2011, and that review is looking at ways of encouraging

further improvements in waste prevention and recycling by businesses, including SMEs, for example by exploring voluntary responsibility deals with particular business sectors.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Arrest Warrant: Dr Daniel Ubani

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Attorney-General whether (a) the Crown Prosecution Service, (b) Cambridgeshire constabulary and (c) any other Government Department notified the German authorities of an intention to serve a European arrest warrant in respect of Dr Daniel Ubani prior to 12 March 2010. [29428]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General is only responsible for the actions of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). There was no communication by the CPS with the German authorities, in advance of 12 March 2009, regarding an intention to submit a European arrest warrant. The CPS have no record of any contacts made in this matter by other public bodies.

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the answer of 25 October 2010, *Official Report*, column 64W, on European arrest warrant: Dr Daniel Ubani, whether the European arrest warrant received by the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) on 9 March 2009 was (a) sent to or (b) drawn to the attention of the German authorities by (i) the Crown Prosecution Service, (ii) SOCA, (iii) another Government Department and (iv) any other organisation or individual. [29429]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General is only responsible for the actions of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). There was no communication by the CPS with the German authorities regarding the European arrest warrant (EAW) dated 9 March 2009. The CPS have no record of any communication made with the German authorities in this matter by other public bodies, organisations or individuals.

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the answer of 1 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 498W, on Daniel Ubani, if he will place in the Library a copy of the German prosecutor's document which suggests that legal proceedings were initiated against Dr Ubani on 12 March 2009. [29431]

The Solicitor-General: The document referred to by the hon. Member is an official document from the German prosecutor to the German court. Given this, the German prosecutor's office would need to be consulted about the placing of the document in the Library. The CPS will contact the German prosecutor on this point.

Timber

Mr Bain: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the compliance of (a) the Law Officers' Departments and (b) their agency with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's criteria for sourcing sustainable timber. [27857]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officers Departments are committed to contracting suppliers through the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions Framework and endeavour to ensure that wherever possible products are procured from sustainable sources in line with the UK Government's Timber Policy.

JUSTICE

Civil Proceedings: Legal Costs

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which proposals in the Civil Litigation Funding Green Paper require primary legislation to be implemented. [28969]

Mr Djanogly: As stated in the consultation paper 'Proposals for Reform of Litigation Funding and Costs in England and Wales—Implementation of Lord Justice Jackson's Recommendations', published on 15 November 2010, a number of the leading recommendations, particularly for reform of the conditional fee agreement regime and wider availability of damages-based agreements, would require primary legislation to be implemented. The primary legislation required will depend on the outcome of the consultation, and the Government will set out the legislation required in due course.

Discharge Grant: Uprating

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will bring forward proposals to increase the discharge grant by the rate of inflation each year. [29386]

Mr Blunt: There are currently no proposals to increase the discharge grant issued to prisoners on release from prison.

The provision of a lump sum discharge grant is not a very satisfactory way of meeting prisoners' immediate financial needs on release. The National Offender Management Service is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to identify the best way to address the prisoner finance gap.

Domestic Violence

Karl McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people of each sex were (a) prosecuted and (b) convicted for domestic abuse offences in (i) Lincolnshire and (ii) England and Wales in (A) 2008-09 and (B) 2009-10. [29433]

Mr Blunt: Information collated centrally by the Ministry of Justice holds details on defendants proceeded against, found guilty and sentenced for criminal offences in England and Wales. It does not include the circumstances of each case or hold specific information on offences beyond descriptions provided by the statutes under which proceedings are brought. It is not possible to separately identify domestic violence offences from other offences of assault and violence against the person.

However, the Crown Prosecution Service has provided data relating to the number of persons proceeded against and found guilty in Lincolnshire and England and Wales for the prescribed periods. This information is as follows.

Crown Prosecution Service—defendants prosecuted for domestic violence crimes

(i) Table 1: CPS Lincolnshire

	2008-09					2009-10				
	Convictions		Unsuccessful		Total prosecutions	Convictions		Unsuccessful		Total prosecutions
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Female	25	67.6	12	32.4	37	28	84.8	5	15.2	33
Male	434	76.8	131	23.2	565	383	77.8	109	22.2	492
Unknown	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Total defendants	459	76.2	143	23.8	602	411	78.3	114	21.7	525

(ii) Table 2: England and Wales

	2008-09					2009-10				
	Convictions		Unsuccessful		Total prosecutions	Convictions		Unsuccessful		Total prosecutions
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Female	2,968	69.6	1,298	30.4	4,266	3,494	68.8	1,588	31.2	5,082
Male	45,484	72.4	17,321	27.6	62,805	49,843	72.2	19,176	27.8	69,019
Unknown	13	56.5	10	43.5	23	10	83.3	2	16.7	12
Total defendants	48,465	72.2	18,629	27.8	67,094	53,347	72.0	20,766	28.0	74,113

Land Registry

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the potential savings to the public purse of the reconstitution of the Land Registry in each of the next five years. [29000]

Mr Djanogly: As a trading fund Her Majesty's Land Registry is a self-funding organisation that is not funded by the public purse.

On 17 March Land Registry announced the outcome of a consultation on its Accelerated Transformation Programme. The figures published in the decisions report indicate the following savings over the next five years:

	£ million
2011-12	79
2012-13	80
2013-14	81
2014-15	94
2015-16	86

On 14 October it was announced that the Ministry of Justice would be carrying out a feasibility study into private sector involvement in Land Registry, with a range of options being considered. The outcome of the study will be announced in the new year.

Legal Aid: Asylum

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effects of reductions in the legal aid budget on families seeking asylum; what plans he has to ensure that asylum-seeking families have access to high-quality legal advice early on in the process; and if he will make a statement. [29266]

Mr Djanogly: We propose to continue providing publicly funded legal assistance in asylum cases. We are also working with the UK Border Agency to help improve the quality of asylum decision-making by piloting the provision of legal advice earlier in the asylum process.

Offenders: Employment

Mr Charles Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will bring forward proposals to require the National Offender Management Service to track employment outcomes for offenders (a) six months and (b) one year after release as part of the payment by results system; and if he will make a statement. [29152]

Mr Blunt: The Department for Work and Pensions is launching a new approach to improving employment outcomes based on payment by results and has, jointly with the MoJ, set out its intention to incentivise Work programme providers to give employment support to unemployed offenders, including those leaving custody. We are exploring what data will be required as part of these plans.

Personal Injury

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many personal injury claims were brought against his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years. [28903]

Mr Djanogly: The information requested for the last three years is set out in the following table:

MOJ and agencies including NOMS, HMCS, Tribunals and OPG	Number
2007-08	1,224
2008-09	1,593
2009-10	1,394

Personal Injury: Damages

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent representations he has received from the Law Commission on the level of general damages in personal injury claims; and what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of that level. [29031]

Mr Djanogly: I have not received any recent representations from the Law Commission on the level of general damages in personal injury claims. The assessment of the appropriate level of general damages is a matter for the courts to decide.

Prisoners

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prisoners (a) of each sex and (b) in each age group received an indeterminate sentence for public

protection in each month between December 2009 and November 2010. [29187]

Mr Blunt: The table shows the reception figures of prisoners on indeterminate sentences for public protection in all prison establishments in England and Wales in each month between December 2009 and June 2010 (latest date for which figures are available).

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Receptions of prisoners on indeterminate sentences for public protection, by sex and age group, December 2009 to June 2010

		All	Age group							
			15 to 17	18 to 20	21 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 and over
December 2009	Male	59	0	7	9	7	14	12	7	3
	Female	4	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0
January 2010	Male	43	1	4	10	9	6	9	3	1
	Female	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
February 2010	Male	39	4	3	6	3	11	11	0	1
	Female	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
March 2010	Male	68	0	5	13	17	8	13	11	1
	Female	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
April 2010	Male	60	2	8	8	5	17	15	4	1
	Female	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
May 2010	Male	60	3	6	15	8	14	9	4	1
	Female	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
June 2010	Male	49	0	4	11	6	16	9	3	0
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many prisoners serving an indeterminate sentence for public protection on 30 November 2010 were beyond a tariff of (a) two years or less, (b) three years or less, (c) four years or less and (d) five years or less; [29191]

(2) how many prisoners (a) of each sex and (b) in each age band were serving an indeterminate sentence for public protection on 30 November 2010; and how many had (i) exceeded their tariff and (ii) exceeded their tariff and had not completed an offenders' treatment programme. [29192]

Mr Blunt: On 17 November 2010 there were 6,375 offenders in custody (including those serving their sentence in secure mental hospitals) for an indeterminate sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) or Detention for Public Protection (DPP), of which 3,173 were past tariff (excluding offenders who have been recalled to custody).

Of the 3,173 offenders whose tariff had expired:

(a) 1,432 had a tariff of 730 days or less (approximately two years or less).

(b) 2,601 had a tariff of 1,095 days or less (approximately three years or less).

(c) 3,080 had a tariff of 1,460 days or less (approximately four years or less).

(d) 3,169 had a tariff of 1,825 days or less (approximately five years or less).

The following table presents a breakdown of the population of IPP and DPP prisoners by gender and age-group. This also excludes 41 where there was no tariff expiry date on the Public Protection Unit Database (PPUD) on the 17 November 2010. Of these, 36 offenders were sentenced in 2010.

Age-group	Men		Women		Total	
	Total	Past tariff	Total	Past tariff	Total	Past tariff
15-17	40	5	0	0	40	5
18-20	226	60	3	2	229	62
21-24	1,102	559	21	16	1,123	575
25-29	1,384	725	31	25	1,415	750
30-39	1,641	851	63	41	1,704	892
40-49	1,217	558	36	20	1,253	578
50-59	414	204	9	6	423	210
60 and over	186	100	2	1	188	101
Total	6,210	3,062	165	111	6,375	3,173

The figures above were taken from PPUD in the National Offender Management Service, and, as with any large scale recording system, it is subject to possible errors arising from either data entry or processing. PPUD is a live database, updated on a regular basis. As a result, snapshots taken on consecutive days will contain differences reflecting updates.

On 3 December 2010, there were 498 offenders who were past tariff and had not completed at least one programme, of which 455 were men and 43 were women. It should be noted that some of these offenders had started or started and not completed a programme. An age band (as at 17 November 2010) breakdown is presented in the table below. This information was taken from a database held by the Public Protection and Mental Health Group at the National Offender Management Service.

Current age	Offender without a complete programme
15-17	2
18-20	12
21-24	66
25-29	108
30-39	128
40-49	112
50-59	42
60 and over	28
Total	498

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many prisoners (a) of each sex and (b) in each age band serving indeterminate sentences for public protection have been released on licence in each year since 2005; [29257]

(2) how many prisoners (a) of each sex and (b) in each age band serving indeterminate sentences for public protection have been recalled to prison in each year since 2005. [29258]

Mr Blunt: The number of indeterminate sentence Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) or Detention for Public Protection (DPP) offenders released into the community by year of latest release broken down by gender (Table 1) and current age (Table 2) is presented in the following tables. These include offenders that have been recalled to custody but exclude those who have been deported. Please note that both tables exclude five men where the latest release date was not available.

Table 1: Offenders released (latest release) broken down by gender

Year of latest release	Men	Women	Total
2006	3	0	3
2007	7	3	10
2008	31	2	33
2009	53	1	54
2010	80	7	87
Total	174	13	187

Table 2: Offenders released (latest release) broken down by age band

Current age	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
15 to 17	0	0	0	0	0	0
18 to 20	0	0	0	0	1	1

Table 2: Offenders released (latest release) broken down by age band

Current age	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
21 to 24	1	1	8	10	13	33
25 to 29	1	2	10	14	34	61
30 to 39	0	1	8	17	15	41
40 to 49	0	5	5	10	14	34
50 to 59	0	1	1	1	5	8
60 and over	1	0	1	2	5	9
Total	3	10	33	54	87	187

The number of offenders recalled to prison by year of latest recall broken down by gender (Table 3) and current age (Table 4) is presented in the following tables. For offenders who have been recalled into custody more than once, only the latest recall was considered.

Table 3: Offenders recalled (latest recall) broken down by gender

Year of latest recall	Men	Women	Total
2007	2	0	2
2008	7	0	7
2009	14	2	16
2010	21	1	22
Total	44	3	47

Table 4: Offenders recalled (latest recall) broken down by age band

Current age	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
15 to 20	0	0	0	0	0
21 to 24	0	3	4	1	8
25 to 29	0	2	6	9	17
30 to 39	0	1	4	5	10
40 to 49	1	1	2	4	8
50 to 59	1	0	0	1	2
60 and over	0	0	0	2	2
Total	2	7	16	22	47

The figures above were taken from the Public Protection Unit Database (PPUD) in the National Offender Management Service, and, as with any large scale recording system, it is subject to possible errors arising from either data entry or processing. PPUD is a live database, updated on a regular basis. As a result, snapshots taken on consecutive days will contain differences reflecting updates.

Prisoners: Death

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) whether he has made an estimate of the number of prisoners who committed suicide within six months of their release from prison in each of the last five years; [29075]

(2) how many prisoners (a) in total and (b) aged 60 years or over died of natural causes in prison in each of the last five years. [29109]

Mr Blunt: The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) systematically records deaths of inmates who are directly in its care. This covers deaths which occur while in direct prison custody or while released on temporary licence for medical reasons. Deaths of those in approved premises are also recorded. NOMS does not collect figures for the number of prisoners who committed suicide after release; that may or may not be under supervision. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The information requested in question two is displayed in table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Annual totals of natural causes deaths by age: 2005-09¹—
England and Wales

	Apparent natural causes	
	All age bands	60 and over
2005	88	32
2006	83	34
2007	91	33
2008	99	41
2009	105	45

¹ From the safety in custody statistics 2010:
www.justice.gov.uk/publications/safer-custody.htm

NOMS has a broad, integrated and evidence-based prisoner suicide prevention and self harm management strategy that seeks to reduce the distress of all those in prison. This encompasses a wide spectrum of Prison and Department of Health work around such issues as mental health, substance misuse and resettlement. Any prisoner identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm is cared for using the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) procedures.

Prisoners: Older People

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prisoners aged 60 years or older there were in each of the last five years. [29110]

Mr Blunt: The following table provides the information requested on the number of prisoners aged 60 years or over in England and Wales as at 30 June in each year from 2006 to 2010.

	Number
2006	1,954
2007	2,213
2008	2,393
2009	2,539
2010	2,849

Note:

The data for 2010 are taken from a new source to that used previously and hence are not fully consistent with published data for 2009 or earlier years. However the differences are small—in June 2009 the total prison population was 63 higher in the old source out of a total prison population of just over 85,000.

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Prisoners: Speech and Language Disorders

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps are taken to identify language and communication difficulties in respect of offenders before their arrival in prison. [29072]

Mr Blunt: Escort staff bringing prisoners to prisons carry a Person Escort Record form, which includes a reference to any communication difficulties the prisoner may have. All prisoners are interviewed on first arrival in prison to assess whether they have any language or other communication difficulties. Any problems identified must be recorded and the information forwarded to other relevant departments within the prison.

Prisons: Alcoholic Drinks

Nick Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what consideration he gave to the merits of including in his Department's Business Plan provision for action to address offenders with alcohol problems. [29147]

Mr Blunt: The MoJ has set out proposals for consultation in its Green Paper aimed to improve access to treatment for drug or mental health problems, which should also help those that have linked alcohol related problems. In addition, the Government will look to explore how payment by results might be extended to cover specialist alcohol treatment for offenders.

Prisons: Private Sector

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many former (a) Prison Service employees, (b) Prison Service employees at governor grades, (c) officials in his Department and (d) National Offender Management Service officials each private sector prison operator employs; and if he will make a statement. [29172]

Mr Blunt: The National Offender Management Service does not hold centrally information on the numbers of former Prison Service employees (including governor grades), Ministry of Justice employees or National Offender Management Service employees who are employed by private sector prison companies. Staff have the opportunity to complete an exit questionnaire on leaving the National Offender Management Service but this does not record whether or not staff have secured a post with private sector contractors.

Information obtained from contractors indicates that at least 90 former Prison Service, National Offender Management Service or Ministry of Justice staff currently work in private sector prisons. This figure includes 15 former Prison Service governor grades. However, these figures are the best available and may not be complete.

Remand in Custody: Young People

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what percentage of children who were remanded in custody were subsequently (a) acquitted or (b) given a community sentence in each of the last five years. [28946]

Mr Blunt: The estimated number and proportion of juveniles remanded in custody at magistrates courts and the Crown court in England and Wales 2005 to 2009 (latest currently available), who were (a) subsequently acquitted or (b) given a community sentence is shown in the following table.

Estimated number and percentage of juveniles¹ remanded in custody² who were subsequently acquitted or received a non-custodial sentence³ at magistrates courts and the Crown court, England and Wales 2005-09

	2005	2006	2007	2008 ⁴	2009
Number					
Magistrates courts ⁵					
Acquitted	949	847	791	660	339
Immediate custody	907	914	811	931	888

Estimated number and percentage of juveniles¹ remanded in custody² who were subsequently acquitted or received a non-custodial sentence³ at magistrates courts and the Crown court, England and Wales 2005-09

	2005	2006	2007	2008 ⁴	2009
Non-custodial	1,480	1,459	1,664	1,511	977
<i>Of which:</i>					
Community sentence	1,145	1,113	1,244	1,073	694
<i>Crown court</i>					
Acquitted	182	149	162	167	237
Immediate custody	815	814	783	1,052	918
Non-custodial	271	216	211	264	239
<i>Of which:</i>					
Community sentence	205	180	170	212	192
<i>Percentage</i>					
<i>Magistrates courts⁵</i>					
Acquitted	28	26	24	21	15
Immediate custody	27	28	25	30	40
Non-custodial	44	45	51	49	44
<i>Of which:</i>					
Community sentence	34	35	38	35	31
<i>Crown court</i>					
Acquitted	14	13	14	11	17
Immediate custody	64	69	68	71	66
Non-custodial	21	18	18	18	17
<i>Of which:</i>					
Community sentence	16	15	15	14	14

¹ Defined as being aged 10 to 17 at the date of appearance in court.

² Includes those remanded in custody at any stage of proceedings at magistrates and the Crown court who may also have been given bail at some stage of those proceedings.

³ Magistrates courts figures exclude those committed for trial or sentence at the Crown court and those who failed to appear. Non-custodial sentences include discharges, fines, community sentences, and a number of other sentences that do not involve incarceration. Acquitted includes proceedings discontinued, discharged, withdrawn and dismissed.

⁴ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

⁵ Percentages here represent the proportions of all juveniles who were remanded in custody, excluding those who failed to appear and where the magistrates court committed the defendant for trial or sentence to the Crown court.

Notes:

1. Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

2. It is known that in some police force areas, information on remand decisions is not always readily available to those coding court proceedings returns. In certain cases, the return may be mistakenly coded as if no remand had taken place. For magistrates court proceedings, the number of remands and more importantly, the number which are in custody, are believed to be under-recorded in total. As the breakdown of remands into bail and custody cases for a number of forces is not accurate for a number of forces, estimates have to be made to provide national figures.

3. Some percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Young Offenders: Basic Skills

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of young offenders completed (a) literacy and (b) numeracy courses in each of the last five years. [29111]

Mr Blunt: The data provided in the following table displays the number of young people who have achieved a qualification in Prison Service Young Offender Institutions.

Comparable data are not available for the academic year 2005-06, or for courses completed in Secure Children's Homes, Secure Training Centres, or privately run prisons.

Academic year (1 August to 31 July)	Literacy	Numeracy
2006-07	2,014	2,680
2007-08	1,826	2,260
2008-09	1,350	2,429
2009-10	1,350	1,813

Data are not available on the proportion of young offenders who have completed these qualifications because data are collected on the number of episodes started in public YOIs, and not the number of young people. An episode refers to a period a young person has spent in custody and it is possible that one young person can start or finish more than one custodial episode at different points of each year for different offences.

The number of episodes started in the academic year 2006-07 was 9,118 and in 2007-08 was 9308. Data has not yet been published for academic years 2008-09 or 2009-10.

It should be noted that a large number of these episodes are young people who have been remanded to custody, often for very short periods of time. The number of young people remanded in custody in the financial year 2007-08 was 5663 and 2006-07 was 6360.

There has been a significant reduction of the number of young people in custody since 2008.

Young Offenders: North West

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what specialist accommodation is available for under-18s on bail or remand in the North West.

[28936]

Mr Blunt: Young people who are subject to bail or non-secure remand and who are in need of accommodation can be housed in a variety of lodgings. These can be provided by either the local authority or private providers including: foster homes; children's homes; hostels; bed and breakfast accommodation; or accommodation provided by voluntary organisations. Such placements are arranged by a youth offending team worker and social worker, and put before a placement panel. While there is no specific definition of "specialist" accommodation, the underlying principle will be to identify suitable accommodation that would most appropriately meet the needs of the young person, taking into account the nature of the offence and protection of the public.

Young males aged 15 to 17 who are remanded to custody in the North West would normally be placed at HMPYOI Hindley. In a small number of cases where there are specific concerns about an individual's ability to manage in mainstream YOI accommodation, they may be remanded to HMPYOI Wetherby in West Yorkshire, which has additional dedicated accommodation for 15 to 17-year-old males. Females aged 17 who are remanded

to custody would be placed at the Rivendell Unit which is a dedicated young women's unit at HMPYOI New Hall in Wakefield.

All young people aged 12 to 14 and females aged 15 and 16 who are remanded, are subject to a court ordered secure remand. Where a court decides to remand them to secure accommodation they would be placed in either a secure training centre (the nearest to the North West region being Hassockfield in County Durham) or a secure children's home (the two in the North West being Barton Moss in Manchester and Red Bank in Merseyside). Additionally, males aged 15 to 16—who are deemed by a court to meet certain vulnerability criteria—may also be given a court ordered secure remand and may be placed at a secure training centre or secure children's home. Males aged 15 to 17 who are not deemed to be vulnerable, would be remanded to a young offender institution. Children aged between 10 and 12 can be remanded to the local authority and if they meet certain criteria may be placed by the local authority into a secure children's home.

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of inmates at each young offender institution in the North West was able to exercise outside on a daily basis in the latest period for which figures are available. [29073]

Mr Blunt: At HMYOI Lancaster Farms, the only dedicated Young Offender Institution in the North West, all young offenders routinely have the opportunity to exercise in the open air on a daily basis.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

British Overseas Territories

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what official visits Ministers in his Department have made to UK overseas territories since 1997. [28822]

Mr Duncan: The information requested is as follows:
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State George Foulkes visited Montserrat from 12-13 January 1999.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Gareth Thomas visited Montserrat from 21-22 June 2004.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Michael Foster visited the Turks and Caicos Islands from 24-28 May 2009, to attend the annual meeting of the Caribbean Development Bank.

Details of all travel costing in excess of £500 by all Cabinet Ministers since 1997, and by all Ministers since 2007, up until May 2010, are available on the Cabinet Office website at:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Details of travel undertaken by Department for International Development (DFID) Ministers since May 2010 are available on DFID's website at:

www.dfid.gov.uk

Departmental Manpower

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many of his Department's staff at each civil service grade have experience in

working on matters of agricultural policy; and how many of them are currently working in each division of his Department. [28795]

Mr O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 6 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 36W, to the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander).

Departmental Travel

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department spent on grey fleet in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [28844]

Mr Duncan: Grey fleet travel refers to mileage in employee-owned vehicles. The Department for International Development (DFID) reimburses employees for private mileage undertaken in the direct implementation of their role at either the standard mileage rate, or the cost of public transport if public transport is less. In order to claim reimbursement at either rate, the employee must have a full comprehensive insurance policy permitting the use of their motor vehicle in connection with DFID business.

DFID is unable to provide the information requested without incurring disproportionate cost. Due to updates in our central accounting system across the Department, DFID will be able to report spend on such reimbursements from 2010-11 onwards.

Developing Countries: Health Services

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if his Department will provide (a) technical assistance and (b) advice to developing countries to support the elimination of user fees for healthcare for poor people. [29082]

Mr O'Brien: The Department for International Development (DFID) is currently reviewing all its aid programmes, including our support to the health sector, to assess the impact of these programmes, and to ensure UK aid is effective, accelerates progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and represents value for money.

DFID has agreed to provide technical assistance to developing countries wishing to implement pro-poor health financing reforms. This will initially be done through support to the World Health Organisation (WHO) to implement the recommendations of the World Health Report and will be in the form of a senior health economist being seconded to WHO by DFID for two years.

We are also evaluating proposals to provide additional financial resources. These resources will be used to provide direct assistance to developing countries wishing to implement pro-poor health financing reforms. WHO is anticipating a large increase in demand for this type of assistance following the recent publication of the World Health Report, and has approached DFID for this support due to our well-proven and valued track record of providing assistance in this area.

Overseas Aid: Cost-effectiveness

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date a comprehensive value for money assessment was last made in respect of each multilateral agency in receipt of funding from his Department. [28819]

Mr Duncan: On 9 June 2010, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development launched the multilateral aid review to ensure maximum value for money from the Department for International Development's (DFID's) contributions to multilateral organisations. The review will look at all organisations to which DFID provides core funding, and will assess the relevance of each organisation to the UK's development objectives, their organisational effectiveness and their ability to deliver results on the ground. This is the first time such a comprehensive value for money assessment, looking across all agencies, has been undertaken by the UK Government. The findings of the review are due to be published in February 2011.

Overseas Aid: Expenditure

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding his Department has provided to each multilateral agency since 1997. [28821]

Mr Duncan: Details of the Department for International Development's (DFID's) aid expenditure are published in "Statistics on International Development", which is available in the Library of the House and on DFID's website.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding his Department has allocated to the Turks and Caicos Islands in each of the last 10 years. [28810]

Mr Duncan: Details of the Department for International Development's (DFID's) aid expenditure, including in the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), are published in 'Statistics on International Development', which is available in the Library of the House and on DFID's website. Bilateral programme expenditure and imputed expenditure through multilateral organisations in TCI from 2000-01 to 2009-10

are shown in the following table. Figures for 2010-11 will be published in the next addition of 'Statistics on International Development'.

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total DFID bilateral</i>	<i>DFID imputed multilateral shares</i>
2009-10	4,690	n-a
2008-09	1,000	0
2007-08	178	358
2006-07	149	886
2005-06	357	0
2004-05	1,187	0
2003-04	741	2
2002-03	1,532	0

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total DFID bilateral</i>	<i>DFID imputed multilateral shares</i>
2001-02	2,719	256
2000-01	2,845	0

n-a = not available

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support his Department is providing to the interim administration in the Turks and Caicos Islands. [28811]

Mr Duncan: The Department for International Development (DFID) has provided a short-term loan, currently totalling £19.7 million, to help the interim Administration meet unavoidable commitments, including payment of public sector salaries.

DFID is also providing technical assistance, including through funding a chief financial officer who has assumed direct control for all financial decisions.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many officials from his Department are stationed in the Turks and Caicos Islands. [28812]

Mr Duncan: There are no Department for International Development (DFID) staff members permanently stationed in the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). UK-based staff make occasional visits to TCI to provide advice and assistance when necessary.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Aviation: Security

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates she has discussed air security issues with the Secretary of State for Transport since 11 May 2010. [22748]

Mrs May [holding answer 8 November 2010]: I chair a weekly security meeting bringing together a wide range of Government Departments and agencies which contribute to our counter-terrorism and security work. The Department for Transport is represented at that meeting. Since the attempted terrorist attacks on cargo aircraft on 29 October I have had a number of discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport. We met in COBR on 1 November and 4 November to lead the Government's response to the attempted attacks and continue to meet regularly. Our Departments are working together closely on the review of air freight security which I announced in my statement to the House on 1 November, *Official Report*, columns 632-634. Our officials meet regularly both bilaterally and with industry to discuss improvements to aviation security.

Containment

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she plans to review her Department's policy on the use of containment in respect of (a) children and (b) adults; and if she will make a statement. [27682]

James Brokenshire: The use of police tactics, such as containment, is an operational matter for police forces. The courts have ruled that containment is a lawful tactic when used proportionately.

Criminal Records

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what period a conviction remains on a criminal record. [28467]

Lynne Featherstone: A conviction held on the police national computer will normally be retained for 100 years from the date of the subject's birth.

Demonstrations: Parliament Square

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bosworth of 24 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 257, on what dates she discussed the matter of protesters in Parliament Square with the Mayor of London; what the venue was of each such meeting where this issue was discussed; what the outcome was of each such discussion; and if she will make a statement. [28072]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 2 December 2010*]: My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister has regular meetings with ministerial colleagues, officials and others.

The Government have introduced measures in the Police Reform Social and Responsibility Bill to support rights to peaceful protest around Parliament while also tackling encampments and other disruptive activity on Parliament Square.

Detention Centres: Children

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has had with officials at the UK Border Agency on her Department's policy on the detention of children. [29323]

Damian Green [*holding answer 7 December 2010*]: The Government are committed to ending the detention of children for immigration purposes. A review is under way to consider how this can be done in a way which protects the welfare of children and ensures that families with no right to be in the UK leave. During the course of that review the Home Secretary and I have had frequent discussions with officials.

Freedom Bill

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress she has made on the timetable for the introduction of the Freedom Bill; and if she will make a statement. [29436]

James Brokenshire: As set out in the Home Office Business Plan (published on 8 November) we will introduce a Freedom Bill by February 2011.

Human Trafficking

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what non-governmental organisations she (a) has consulted and (b) plans to consult in

formulating her Department's new priorities for reducing the incidence of human trafficking. [28175]

Damian Green [*holding answer 2010*]: As part of the new strategy to combat human trafficking, which I announced on 14 October, my officials will be consulting relevant voluntary organisations in due course to ensure that their views are heard. The Home Office will shortly be contacting relevant groups regarding consultation.

Identity and Passport Service: Newport (Gwent)

Jessica Morden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has had with the First Minister of Wales on the consultation on the proposed closure of Newport Passport Office. [29162]

Damian Green [*holding answer 7 December 2010*]: The Identity and Passport Service is currently engaged on a formal consultation with the trade unions on the proposed closure of the passport application processing centre at Newport. The First Minister has written a number of letters on the subject.

Identity Cards: Information and Communications Technology

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of IT equipment purchased by or on behalf of the Government in respect of the identity cards scheme; what was done with that equipment when she decided to end that scheme; and how much such equipment will be deployed for other purposes in government. [28769]

Damian Green: The cost of IT equipment purchased was £6.5 million in respect of the Critical Workers Identity Card and Early Interest Scheme. All IT equipment has been withdrawn from operation as part of the ID card decommissioning activities and securely stored. Assets and IT equipment relating to the National Identity Register require disposal/destruction and IPS will ensure that this happens in line with agreed guidelines.

The secure disposal or re-use of new or nearly-new IT equipment is dependant upon the level of protectively marked material or personal data stored on the system. As our IT equipment is generally managed under contract by our IT service providers, they will manage the re-use or disposal according to central Government security policies. The Home Office has a general policy of sharing, re-use and commonality of IT capabilities, in order to increase efficiency, reduce costs and improve environmental sustainability.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants were removed from the UK in (a) July, (b) August and (c) September 2010. [27793]

Damian Green: The following table shows the number of removals and voluntary departures for July to September 2010.

Removals and voluntary departures^{1, 2}, from the United Kingdom, by type, July to September 2010

Number of departures³

	Enforced removals and voluntary departures			Total	Non-asylum cases refused entry at port and subsequently removed ⁷	Grand total
	Enforced removals and notified voluntary departures ⁴	Assisted voluntary returns ⁵	Other voluntary departures ⁶			
July	1,700	430	1,245	3,380	1,555	4,935
August	1,690	430	1,250	3,370	1,600	4,975
September	1,730	390	1,145	3,265	1,520	4,785
July-September	5,125	1,250	3,640	10,015	4,675	14,690

¹ Figures are rounded to the nearest five and may not sum to the totals shown because of independent rounding.

² Provisional figures. Figures will under record due to data cleansing and data matching exercises that take place after the extracts are taken.

³ Removals and voluntary departures recorded on the system as at the dates on which the data extracts were taken.

⁴ Includes persons leaving under Facilitated Return Schemes.

⁵ Persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organization for Migration. May include some on-entry cases and some cases where enforcement action has been initiated.

⁶ Persons who it has been established left the UK without informing the immigration authorities.

⁷ Includes removals performed by immigration officers at ports using enforcement powers and cases dealt with at juxtaposed controls.

The Home Office publishes statistics on the number of persons removed or departed voluntarily from the UK on a quarterly and annual basis, which are available from the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html

A copy of the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary United Kingdom July-September 2010 will be placed in the House Library.

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate she has made of the number of people living illegally in the UK.

[29325]

Damian Green [holding answer 7 December 2010]: The UK Border Agency does not capture data relating to the number of people living illegally in the UK, because it is not possible to quantify this number accurately.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Minister of State for Borders and Immigration plans to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 20 October 2010 in regard to Mr Muhammad Moazzam Nadeem.

[29294]

Damian Green [holding answer 7 December 2010]: I wrote to the right hon. Member on 2 November 2010.

Offences against Children

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training (a) senior investigating officers and (b) other police officers receive on (i) the operation of extraterritorial legislation and (ii) investigation of allegations of child sexual abuse committed overseas.

[29219]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 7 December 2010]: The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre has developed a unique programme of professional development courses. These courses are designed to

support professionals working to protect children from sexual abuse and law enforcement officers who work to hold offenders to account.

These include a course on 'Understanding Child Sex Offenders: A Foundation Course in Behavioural Analysis'; a course on the Sexual Offences Act and a piloted course on Travelling Sex Offenders.

CEOP, through its Overseas Tracker Team, also gives tactical and strategic advice to police forces and senior investigating officers in relation to the application of extraterritorial legislation and investigations into child sexual abuse committed overseas.

Passports: Biometrics

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether biometric data must be resubmitted each time a person applies for a visa.

[28962]

Damian Green: All visa applicants who are required to submit their biometric data must do so each time they apply for a visa.

Police: Demonstrations

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions she has had with the Metropolitan police on the estimate made of the number of children aged (a) 16 and under and (b) 17 to 18 years who were present at the demonstration in Westminster on Wednesday 24 November 2010 prior to the decision to contain protesters being taken; and if she will make a statement.

[28689]

James Brokenshire: The use of police tactics is an operational matter for local police forces. The Home Office has not held discussions with the Metropolitan police on the numbers of children present at the demonstration in Westminster on 24 November prior to the decision to contain protesters.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions she has had with the Metropolitan police on the decision (a) to use horses to disperse the crowd and (b) to contain protesters during the demonstration in Westminster on Wednesday 24 November 2010; and if she will make a statement;

[28690]

(2) whether she has assessed any video recordings of the use of horses at the demonstration in Westminster on Wednesday 24 November 2010; and if she will make a statement; [28691]

(3) what information she has requested from the Metropolitan police on (a) the impact on protesters and (b) the outcome for police operations of the decision to (i) contain protesters and (ii) use horses to disperse the crowds at the demonstration in Westminster on Wednesday 24 November 2010; and if she will make a statement; [28692]

(4) what discussions she has had with the Metropolitan police on the proportionality of decisions (a) to use horses to disperse the crowd and (b) to contain protesters at the demonstration in Westminster on Wednesday 24 November 2010. [28757]

James Brokenshire: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary routinely discusses a range of policing matters with the commissioner of the Metropolitan police. However, police tactics, including the use of horses and containment, are operational matters for the police. The Home Secretary has not made an assessment of video recordings of police tactics used on 24 November. The Home Secretary has not requested specific information related to the use of containment or police horses but has been provided with an overview of the police operation. The police have to maintain a difficult balance between supporting rights to peaceful protest and ensuring local communities are properly protected, and the Home Secretary has written to the commissioner conveying her support for the police operation on 24 November.

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers the police have to control and manage street demonstrations; and if she will make a statement. [28787]

James Brokenshire: The legal framework for policing demonstrations is set out in the Public Order Act 1986 which gives the police powers to place conditions on demonstrations to prevent serious public disorder, serious disruption to the life of the community and serious damage to property. The legal framework for policing static demonstrations in a designated area around Parliament is set out in sections 132-138 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 which gives police separate powers to place conditions on static demonstrations.

The police have a range of other powers to deal with any criminal offences which take place at demonstrations.

Public Order Offences

John Glen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were (a) arrested, (b) proceeded against and (c) found guilty of offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 in each year from 2000 to 2009. [27867]

James Brokenshire: The information requested on arrests is not collected centrally.

The arrests collection held by the Home Office covers arrests for recorded crime (notifiable offences) only, broken down at a main offence group level, covering categories such as violence against the person and robbery.

From these centrally reported categories it is not possible to separately identify offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986.

The Ministry of Justice have provided data relating to the number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under section five of the Public Order Act 1986, England and Wales, from 2000 to 2009. This can be viewed in the following table.

Number of persons proceeded against at the magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the Public Order Act 1986, section 5, England and Wales 2000 to 2009^{1, 2}

Offence description	Statute	Year	Proceeded against	Found guilty
Harassment, alarm or distress	Public Order Act 1986, section 5	2000 ³	24,336	16,603
		2001	23,203	15,479
		2002	23,500	15,951
		2003	25,225	17,410
		2004	25,006	18,164
		2005	24,684	18,092
		2006	26,406	19,536
		2007	27,683	21,525
		2008 ⁴	24,869	19,986
Racially aggravated harassment, alarm or distress	Public Order Act 1986, section 5 as amended by Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 31(1)(c) and (5)	2000 ³	772	461
		2001	1,181	734
		2002	1,165	710
		2003	1,376	913
		2004	1,646	1,079
		2005	1,903	1,338
		2006	2,409	1,737
		2007	2,811	2,100
		2008 ⁴	2,827	2,251
Religiously aggravated harassment, alarm or distress	Public Order Act 1986, section 5 as amended by Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 31(1)(c) and (5)	2000 ³	—	—
		2001	—	—
		2002	3	3
		2003	12	6
		2004	16	13
		2005	20	17
		2006	36	30
		2007	38	32
		2008 ⁴	44	30
2009	50	30		

Number of persons proceeded against at the magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the Public Order Act 1986, section 5, England and Wales 2000 to 2009^{1, 2}

Offence description	Statute	Year	Proceeded against	Found guilty
Racially or religiously aggravated harassment, alarm or distress	Public Order Act 1986, section 5 as amended by Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 31(1)(c) and (5)	2000 ³	—	—
		2001	—	—
		2002	7	7
		2003	85	71
		2004	155	100
		2005	228	161
		2006	360	271
		2007	400	314
		2008 ⁴	437	351
		2009	511	411

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

⁴ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

UK Border Agency: Liverpool

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the likely effects of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review on the number of staff employed by the UK Border Agency in Liverpool; and if she will make a statement. [28244]

Damian Green [holding answer 2 December 2010]: The spending review settlement for the UK Border Agency will mean that it needs to reduce staff numbers by about 5,200 by the end of the spending review period. This will reduce the work force to around 18,000 by 2015. It is not possible to say what the likely effects of the reductions in staff number in Liverpool are at this stage. The UK Border Agency is still working through detailed planning but will let staff and the public know as soon as the plans are clear. However, the UK Border Agency is committed to discussing work force planning in detail with the unions and our staff before confirming any changes.

On 4 November, the Home Office implemented a new restructuring, redeployment and redundancy policy, based on ACAS best practise, which provides a framework within which to manage down headcount. Compulsory redundancy continues to be a last resort and the UK Border Agency have committed to using a range of redundancy avoidance measures including voluntary early release, a recruitment freeze on external appointments and redeployment to ensure that this is the case.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Departmental Catering

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent by his Department on outside catering in each of the last five years. [28576]

Alistair Burt: We cannot separate out catering costs from wider official hospitality expenses without incurring disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of his Department's expenditure on printing (a) Command Papers, (b) papers laid before Parliament by Act, (c) consultation documents and (d) other papers in each of the last 10 years. [28380]

Alistair Burt: This information is not held in the form requested and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Redundancy

Mr Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff of his Department have (a) been made redundant and (b) accepted redundancy terms since May 2010; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of those redundancies. [27726]

Alistair Burt: Since May 2010 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not made any permanent member of staff redundant. We have made payments equivalent to statutory redundancy to two non-permanent members of staff who were appointed on fixed term contracts and were entitled to a redundancy payment following expiry of their fixed terms. The cost to the public purse of these payments was £2,850.

Departmental Travel

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on grey fleet in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [28851]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) spent the following on grey fleet (re-imbursing mileage expenses) in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10:

(a) £146,557.31. This is made up of £50,949.98 by FCO UK, and £95,607.33 by FCO Services.

(b) £175,999.24. This is made up of £53,925.01 by FCO UK, and £122,074.23 by FCO Services.

Human Rights

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in respect of which states his Department has received allegations of human rights abuses in the last 12 months. [29157]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's overseas missions receive information on human rights, including allegations of abuse, from a wide variety of sources. These include local non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders and local media. Our missions use this information in their assessment of the local human rights situation, and raise allegations of human rights abuses with host Governments on a case-by-case basis. We do not centrally hold information on reports of individual cases of human rights abuses, so to answer your question, an FCO-wide search would be required which would incur a disproportionate cost.

Human rights reporting is key to our work to promote and protect human rights around the world. The FCO will publish a command paper in spring 2011 which will detail our human rights work around the world and our assessment of the human rights situation in a number of countries.

Iran: Human Rights

Mr Frank Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his foreign policy objectives are in respect of Iran; and what assessment he has made of the implications for those objectives of the recent UN statement on human rights violations in that country. [29195]

Alistair Burt: The central objective of our policy is to stop Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon. To this end, my Department is playing a leading diplomatic role in an internationally-agreed strategy of pressure in the form of sanctions, and engagement, to persuade Iran to resolve the concerns over its nuclear programme.

We would also like to see a significant improvement in the human rights situation in Iran. The UK strongly supported the recent UN General Assembly resolution on human rights in Iran and my ministerial colleagues and I take every opportunity to highlight cases of concern.

Japan: Whales

Joan Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Japanese government on its whaling activities in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary; and if he will make a statement. [29434]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We regularly raise the issue of whaling at ministerial and official level with our Japanese counterparts. Most recently, I raised my Government's concerns about Japanese whaling with the then Deputy Foreign Minister, Takemasa, during my visit to Japan from 9-10 September. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary also raised the issue during his 15-16 July visit to Japan. The Japanese Government are in no doubt as to the strength of feeling in this country about all of Japan's whaling activity. We consider Japan's lethal whaling for 'scientific research' purposes wholly unnecessary.

We remain opposed to all cetacean hunts, and will continue to work to challenge Japan's position and seek a change in their policy.

Kashmir

Mr Frank Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the government of Pakistan on the Kashmir territorial dispute. [29255]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my response to the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 6 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 42W.

Western Sahara: Human Rights

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 29 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 559W, on Western Sahara: violence, what the restrictions on access for international observers are; and by whom these restrictions are imposed. [29285]

Alistair Burt: Our understanding is that there are currently no restrictions on access to Western Sahara and that members of civil society and embassies in Rabat are able to visit.

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 29 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 559W, on Western Sahara: violence, if he will instruct HM Ambassador in Rabat to send observers to Western Sahara. [29286]

Alistair Burt: Officials from our embassy in Rabat regularly visit Western Sahara and will continue to do so. I raised the point about Independent monitoring during my recent visit to the region.

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 29 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 558W, on Western Sahara: human rights, if the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will raise with the government of Morocco its duty to protect the citizens of Western Sahara and allow human rights monitoring as a signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention when he visits Morocco. [29287]

Alistair Burt: I have recently returned from Morocco where I discussed the issue of Western Sahara with my Moroccan interlocutors. During my visit I repeated our wish to see the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism in Western Sahara.

TREASURY

Banks: Loans

Ms Bagshawe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he plans to bring forward proposals to discourage banks from changing the terms of finance for small and medium-sized enterprises at short notice; [28120]

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to discourage banks from changing at short notice their terms relating to (a) finance, (b) credit and (c) overdrafts in respect of small and medium-sized enterprises. [28923]

Mr Hoban: The Government believe that it is in the interest of banks to serve the needs of businesses, to treat customers fairly and support access to finance. Decisions about the terms and conditions of individual loans are a matter for banks to make on a commercial basis and it would be inappropriate for Government to intervene in these decisions.

Earlier this year, the six major UK banks and the British Bankers Association (BBA) established a BBA Taskforce, in response to the Government's Green Paper on business finance. The BBA Taskforce committed to improving customer relationships through a new Lending Code, ensuring better access to finance and promoting better understanding amongst their customers. In order to ensure better access to finance, the BBA Taskforce also committed to establish and invest in a new £1.5 billion Business Growth Fund, which will provide capital to growing businesses.

Further information about the BBA Taskforce is available at:

<http://www.bba.org.uk/media/article/business-finance-taskforce>

Departmental Reviews

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what departmental policy reviews his Department has undertaken since 6 May 2010; on what date each such review (*a*) was announced and (*b*) is expected to publish its findings; what estimate he has made of the cost of each such review; who has been appointed to lead each such review; to what remuneration each review leader is entitled; how many (i) full-time equivalent civil servants and (ii) seconded staff are working on each such review; from which organisations such staff have been seconded; and how much on average such seconded staff will be paid for their work on the review. [21884]

Justine Greening: The Treasury only commissions reviews where the external expertise on offer is in the public interest. Any costs of external reviews falls within the Treasury's departmental expenditure limit which is due to decrease by 33% across the spending review period.

Details of policy reviews undertaken since 6 May 2010 are as follows:

A review of public sector pensions was announced on 20 June 2010 and is expected to be completed by Budget 2011. The review is being led by John Hutton who is being paid £4,000 per month plus reasonable expenses in line with Treasury expenses policy. The Independent Pension Commission is supported by 11 full-time equivalent staff who have been drawn from HM Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions, Ministry of Defence, Treasury Solicitors, PwC and KPMG. The pay costs of seconded staff are, in the main, met by their parent organisation. The cost of the review is being met by reprioritising existing budgets with no consequent increase in public spending.

A review of fair pay in the public sector was announced on 19 July 2010 and is expected to be completed by March 2011. The review will be led by Will Hutton who will be able to claim reasonable expenses in line with Treasury rules but will receive no other remuneration. The review is estimated to cost £125,000 which is predominantly the salary costs of one part-time and

three full-time civil servants. The cost will be met from within existing provision and will not therefore increase public spending.

The Independent Commission on Banking, chaired by Sir John Vickers, was announced on 16 June 2010 to recommend structural and non-structural measures to reform the banking system. The Commission has been asked to produce a final report by September 2011.

Sir John Vickers will be paid £60,000 per annum and work an average of two days per week. Other Commission members will not be paid and work an average of one day a week on Commission business. All Commissioners will be reimbursed for such travel and subsistence expenses as they incur in pursuit of Commission business, in accordance with HM Treasury's expenses policy. The Commissioner's letters of appointment detail this information, and are available on the Commission's website.

The Commission is supported by a full-time secretariat of 14 officials drawn from HM Treasury, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Financial Services Authority, the Bank of England and the Office of Fair Trading. The pay costs of staff seconded to the secretariat are being met by their parent organisations and are not available centrally.

The Commission will be provided with such other resources as are necessary to perform its task. All Commission costs are being met by reprioritisation from within existing budgets and there will be no consequent increase public spending.

As announced at the launch of the Office of Tax Simplification on 20 July 2010, the office will carry out two initial reviews on tax reliefs (final report by Budget 2011) and small business taxation (interim report by Budget 2011). The office will be led by right hon. Michael Jack as chairman and John Whiting as tax director and neither will receive any remuneration but will be eligible for reasonable expenses in line with Treasury expenses policy. The cost of the individual reviews has not been estimated but the running costs of the office as a whole are estimated to be in the region of £500,000 per annum. The office is staffed by three full time civil servants with backgrounds in HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs. There are four staff seconded at no cost to the office from PwC, BDO, Deloitte and private business, see:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/ots_who_we_are.htm

Further details on these reviews can be found on the Treasury website:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

Departmental Travel

Ian Austin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much expenditure his Department incurred in respect of travel undertaken by each Minister in his Department in (*a*) May and (*b*) June 2010; [8181]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of its expenditure on travel undertaken by (*a*) him and (*b*) each other Minister in his Department in (i) September and (ii) October 2010. [21859]

Justine Greening: As set out in the Ministerial Code Departments will publish, at least quarterly, details of all travel overseas by Ministers. The expenses for the

period 13 May to 31 July 2010 were published on the Treasury website on 28 October 2010. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

All travel is undertaken in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

EU Grants and Loans: Republic of Ireland

Naomi Long: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland on the effects of the financial assistance package for Ireland on (a) the Northern Ireland economy and (b) financial institutions operating in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

[28629]

Mr Hoban: Treasury Ministers and officials have discussions with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

Health Centres: Christchurch

Mr Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 30 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 679W, on health centres: Christchurch, what assessment he has made of the taxpayer interest protected by the outcome of his Department's review of the proposed disposal of the former Saxon Square Health Centre on terms acceptable to the district valuer and the Department for Health.

[29437]

Danny Alexander: The Treasury aims to protect the taxpayer interest by ensuring public expenditure is good value for money.

Public Expenditure

Simon Kirby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of GDP was allocated to expenditure by central and local government and their agencies in each year since 1997; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of GDP so allocated in each of the next four years.

[28793]

Danny Alexander: Details of local government and central Government expenditure as a percentage of GDP are shown in the following table. These figures are calculated from forecasts contained in the Office for Budget Responsibility's November 2010 Economic and Fiscal Outlook and historical data published by the Office for National Statistics.

Table 1: Details of CG and LG expenditure as a percentage of GDP

	Central Government and local government expenditure	Nominal GDP	Local and CG expenditure as a percentage of GDP
1997-98	320.6	843	38
1998-99	328.7	890	37
1999-2000	342.1	945	36
2000-01	362.4	990	37
2001-02	386.7	1,032	37
2002-03	418.3	1,092	38
2003-04	453.4	1,157	39
2004-05	488.2	1,215	40
2005-06	515.9	1,274	41

Table 1: Details of CG and LG expenditure as a percentage of GDP

	Central Government and local government expenditure	Nominal GDP	Local and CG expenditure as a percentage of GDP
2006-07	545.5	1,348	40
2007-08	578.1	1,424	41
2008-09	621.7	1,434	43
2009-10	664.9	1,403	47
2010-11	689.0	1,483	46
2011-12	694.8	1,550	45
2012-13	702.6	1,628	43
2013-14	710.5	1,721	41
2014-15	723.7	1,817	40
2015-16	744.0	1,916	39

Sources:

1. Expenditure is defined as the central and local government contribution to total managed expenditure, which is current expenditure plus capital gross expenditure (before deducting depreciation). Historical data are from the following ONS series:

Central Government calculated as ANLP—ANNS + NSRN

Local government calculated as ANLQ—ANNT + NSRO

2. Future years are from corresponding lines of table 1.12 in fiscal supplementary tables to the Economic and Fiscal Outlook November 2010 published by the OBR.

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow North of 11 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 474W, on public expenditure, what discussions he has had with (a) ministerial colleagues and (b) the devolved Administrations on calculating the Statement of Funding Policy for the purposes of the Barnett Formula according to the level of individual programmes rather than at departmental level; and whether he has made an estimate of the effects of calculations made according to the level of individual programme rather than at the departmental level on the level of payments made.

[29156]

Danny Alexander [holding answer 7 December 2010]: The 2010 edition of the Statement of Funding Policy was agreed with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland following consultation with the devolved Administrations.

Spending review settlements are agreed at departmental level and not individual programme level and the Barnett Formula is applied to total budgets. No Barnett consequentials have been calculated for individual programmes.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Apprentices

Gordon Birtwistle: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what steps he plans to take to ensure parity of esteem between apprenticeships and university degrees;

[29221]

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to establish graduation ceremonies for students who have completed courses in practical skills for the purposes of encouraging parity of esteem between manual and academic achievements.

[29222]

Mr Hayes: The Government believe that achievement of high standards in academic study and in practical skills are equally worthy of celebration. Proposals are therefore being developed to secure greater public recognition for those who successfully complete skills training and, in particular, apprenticeships.

For example, we are already working with the National Apprenticeship Service to introduce graduation ceremonies for apprentices, an apprentice Roll of Honour and new alumni networks. We are also considering how apprenticeship training can be recognised as conferring “technician” status in appropriate sectors. And we will further ensure there are clear progression routes into and through apprenticeships into higher level skills training.

Business: Government Assistance

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what measures he plans to introduce to meet the Government’s commitment to manufacturing and new green businesses. [26694]

Mr Prisk: The growth review announced in November sets in train an intensive programme of work to address the barriers to growth facing business that will form the basis of this Government’s agenda for the rest of this Parliament. It is very much a sign of the importance we attach to manufacturing that one of the first sector growth reviews will be advanced manufacturing. The advanced manufacturing growth review will report back with policy proposals by Budget 2011.

In the Local Growth White Paper, we have set out specific national green growth priorities on which we want to engage with local enterprise partnerships. This includes low carbon/green innovation, which will be taken forward nationally through bodies such as the Technology Strategy Board and Carbon Trust.

We have announced £60 million funding to support the development of infrastructure for offshore wind manufacturing.

In spring 2011, we will publish a Green Economy Roadmap to bring together the key elements of the green economy into a single document, providing business and investors with as much certainty as possible about the future.

The UK economy requires significantly higher levels of investment in, particularly green, infrastructure. The Green Investment Bank (GIB) is one of a number of policies which, together, will support UK growth, environmental and climate change targets. The GIB will be funded by £1 billion from departmental budgets and significant additional proceeds from Government sale of assets. The GIB will be operational by September 2012.

Copyright: EU Action

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions the Government has had with the Hungarian government on progress on the draft EU Copyright Term Directive during the Hungarian presidency of the Council of Ministers. [28834]

Mr Davey: My officials have met with their Hungarian counterparts and discussed a range of IP related issues, and noted that term may be an issue during the Hungarian presidency.

Departmental Postal Services

Brandon Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which services of his Department and its predecessors have been the subject of a contract awarded following a tender process in which Post Office Ltd submitted a bid since 1997-98. [24902]

Mr Davey: Following an *Official Journal of the European Union* (OJEU) competition run by the Department’s facilities management team, courier contracts were awarded in April 2004 to:

Royal Mail Group, to provide same day courier services, and
Parcelforce Worldwide, to provide next day/48 hour courier services to the Department.

Departmental Sponsorship

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what expenditure (a) his Department and (b) its non-departmental public bodies incurred on sponsorship in each year since 1997 for which figures are available. [27514]

Mr Davey: The BIS accounting system does not disaggregate expenditure between sponsorship and other form of support given. Therefore, the amount spent on sponsorship could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information for non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All expenditure has to be incurred in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety.

Departmental Travel

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much his Department spent on grey fleet in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [28845]

Mr Davey: The following amounts were spent on grey fleet by BIS and its predecessor Departments:

	£
2008-09	1384,157
2009-10	1352,297

¹ These amounts will also include charges for parking and tolls as such costs are included in claims for mileage allowances. These can be excluded only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Written Questions

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent estimate he has made of the number of questions to his Department tabled in the (a) House of Commons and (b) House of Lords that remained unanswered after 10 working days as a

result of observation of guidance on the timing of answers to similar questions tabled to more than one Department in the latest period for which figures are available. [28495]

Mr Davey: In the case of questions that are deemed to be “round robin”, “The Guide to Parliamentary Work”, published by the Leader of the House of Commons

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/government-business/parliamentary-business.aspx

states that Departments should not delay preparing an answer until ‘round robin’ advice is provided, and should not miss the target deadlines for this reason.

Higher Education: Northern Ireland

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions he has had with the Finance Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive on the likely effect of his proposed changes to higher education funding (a) on the Northern Ireland Block Grant via Barnett consequentials and (b) on funding available for Northern Ireland universities in the period between the implementation of the proposed arrangements in England and the introduction of any new arrangements for Northern Ireland by the devolved administration. [29246]

Mr Willetts: Adjustments in the block grant totals for the devolved Administrations through the Barnett formula are calculated on the basis of the overall change in departmental expenditure limits rather than any particular programmes within them. We have consistently indicated that each devolved Administration will need to make its own decisions about how to fund higher education and the other services for which it is responsible within the overall total available to it. Although we have discussed our proposals for reform of higher education with the Minister for Employment and Lifelong Learning in Northern Ireland it has not been discussed with the Finance Minister.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people resident in Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency attended university in each of the last three years. [28442]

Mr Willetts: The latest available information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is shown in the table. Figures for the 2009/10 academic year will be available in mid January 2011.

The Department has recently received updated postcode information; therefore figures may not match previously published information.

Constituency level information is not available for students who study higher education courses in further education colleges.

Enrolments¹ by Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency²
UK Higher Education Institutions—academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09

Academic year	Enrolments
2006/07	2,195
2007/08	2,255

Enrolments¹ by Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency²
UK Higher Education Institutions—academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09

Academic year	Enrolments
2008/09	2,380

¹ Covers enrolments to all levels and modes of study.

² Excludes enrolments whose constituency could not be established due to missing or invalid postcode information.

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded to the nearest five.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Innovation

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which innovation centres supported by regional development agencies are designated as excellent. [29178]

Mr Willetts: The starting point for the future funding of technology and innovation centres will be the priorities for the Technology Strategy Board’s overall programme of work and its objectives for specific technology areas.

Some of the existing RDA funded centres may form the basis for a future technology and innovation centres with further development. However, no decisions have been made and the Technology Strategy Board will work with industry, stakeholders, and wider government to identify the priority areas and governance structure for the elite network of technology and innovation centres by April 2011.

Post Offices: Credit Unions

Susan Elan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions he has had with the Post Office on the integration of credit unions into Post Office branches. [28323]

Mr Davey: The Post Office already works with Credit Unions, and many Credit Union account holders can already access their accounts at post offices through arrangements with the Co-Operative Bank. It is estimated that in the last six months almost 80,000 Credit Union transactions have been carried out in post office branches.

On 9 November the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published a policy statement on the future of the Post Office: ‘Securing the Future of the Post Office in the Digital Age’, which firmly supports a stronger link up between the Post Office and Credit Unions. We are actively looking into ways the Post Office and Credit Unions can work more closely together, and I have discussed this issue with senior management at Post Office Ltd.

Radio Frequencies

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what representations he has received from Vodafone on the forthcoming digital dividend spectrum auction in 2010. [29176]

Mr Vaizey: UK mobile network operator, Vodafone has made a number of representations to me, both verbally and through written communication, on the

proposed auction of 800 MHz spectrum including the importance they place on being able to participate in that auction.

Retail Distribution Review

Mark Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he has made an assessment of the effects of the Retail Distribution Review on (a) independent financial advisers and (b) other small businesses. [29244]

Mr Hoban [*holding answer 6 December 2010*]: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on 6 December, *Official Report*, column 95W.

Sixth Form Education: Capital Investment

Damian Hinds: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many sixth form colleges and further education colleges have undertaken capital works in excess of (a) £100,000 and (b) £1,000,000 which have attracted a value added tax rate of zero in the last 10 years; [29179]

(2) what the monetary value was of capital works undertaken by sixth form colleges and further education colleges which have been zero-rated for VAT in 2009-10. [29180]

Mr Hayes: Capital funding for further education colleges is administrated by the Skills Funding Agency and I have asked Geoff Russell, the chief executive of Skills Funding, to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested. A copy of his letter will be placed in the House Libraries.

South West Regional Development Agency

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much he plans to allocate to the South West Regional Development Agency in (a) 2011-12 and (b) future years to enable it to honour outstanding commitments. [29193]

Mr Prisk: The allocation to the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) for 2011/12 is expected to be confirmed shortly. Subject to parliamentary approval of the Public Bodies Bill, SWRDA is expected to close by 31 March 2012. No allocations to it will be made after closure. It is expected that legal commitments still remaining after closure will transfer to successor bodies and be met from the resources provided by the spending review settlement.

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which organisations his Department has proposed to staff of the South West Development Agency as options for transfers of employment. [29194]

Mr Prisk: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have confirmed their intention that activity to deliver the Rural Development Programme for England will transfer from South West Development Agency and other regional development agencies (RDA)

to core DEFRA in due course. Further announcements on other organisations transferring in functions and RDA staff will be made in the coming months as transition and closure plans are developed.

Spam: E-mail

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he has assessed the merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to reduce or eliminate unsolicited e-mails, in particular those of a pornographic nature; and if he will make a statement. [28734]

Mr Prisk: The Information Commissioner's Office has responsibility for enforcing the regulations to control unsolicited e-mails (spam) and complaints about breaches of enforcement notices. Such a breach is a criminal offence with a maximum fine of up to £5,000.

The Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 require organisations to only send marketing e-mails to individuals who have agreed to receive them, except where there is an existing clearly defined customer relationship.

Spam is a global problem and now accounts for over 85% of all internet traffic¹. Approximately 96%, of spam originates outside the UK and for that reason, the steps we can take in the UK to reduce its incidence and effect are limited.

¹ *Source:*

Symantech—The State of Spam—November 2010

Students: Fees and Charges

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) if he will meet a delegation of students from Northern Ireland to discuss the implications for them of his proposals to increase tuition fees in England and Wales before his proposals are put to the House for agreement; [28664]

(2) what meetings he has had with representatives of students since his announcement of a proposed increase in tuition fees. [28670]

Mr Willetts: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is responsible for the funding of higher education in England only. It is for the Northern Ireland Executive to decide how it wishes to fund higher education students from Northern Ireland.

My ministerial colleagues and I are in regular contact with Aaron Porter and the National Union of Students (NUS) at a national level and through the National Scholarship Programme, the latest meeting for which was held on 6 December. We also hold discussions with students whenever we visit a higher education institution.

Damian Hinds: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what estimate he has made of the contribution to tuition fees that would be required of a newly-starting (a) nurse, (b) teacher and (c) social worker who had attended a three year course at a university charging (i) £4,000 and (ii) £6,000 per annum in the first year of their employment; [29220]

(2) if he will estimate the average weekly student loan payment for a newly-qualified (a) nurse, (b) teacher and (c) social worker in their first year of employment who had attended a university charging £3,290 per year in tuition fees under the existing student finance system. [29300]

Mr Willetts: Student loans are repaid on an income contingent basis; the amount borrowed by an individual would have no bearing on the amount of contribution repaid in the first year or any year of their employment.

Under the current student finance system, borrowers repay 9% of their income over the income threshold of £15,000. A nurse in the first year of employment earning a salary of £21,000, would pay £10.38 per week; for a teacher earning £24,000, this figure would be £15.58 per week; and for a social worker earning £23,000, the weekly payment would be £13.85.

All borrowers under the proposed future system will repay 9% of their income over an income threshold of £21,000. A nurse in the first year of employment earning £21,000, would pay nothing as their income would not breach the threshold; for a teacher earning £24,000, this figure would be £5.19 per week; and for a social worker earning £23,000, £3.46 per week.

All figures are expressed in 2010 prices.

Vocational Training: Finance

Mr Binley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had on the establishment of a single funding council for skills training. [29273]

Mr Hayes: The Skills Funding Agency is the single agency responsible for funding skills training for adults, including apprenticeships aged 16 and over. In order to streamline arrangements for FE colleges and other training providers we will transfer responsibility to the Skills Funding Agency for dispensing calculated 16-18 grants to FE colleges and independent training providers on behalf of the Young People's Learning Agency, so that FE colleges and training providers will have a single point of contact with one agency, with a single discussion on performance and audit. This is a significant change sought by the sector for some time. The Young People's Learning Agency will remain responsible for calculating 16-18 grants for named colleges on the basis of lagged pupil numbers and the 16-18 national funding formula.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Servants

Ian Austin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what records his Department holds of occasions since May 2010 on which civil servants have expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the (a) involvement of, and (b) direction of civil servants by, officers of a political party in events organised for the Prime Minister in his official capacity; and on what date each such occurrence was recorded. [28984]

Mr Hurd: It has never been the case that employees of political parties can manage civil servants.

Departmental Travel

Paul Maynard: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much his Department spent on grey fleet in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [28839]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office spent £15,225 in 2008-09 and £12,700 in 2009-10 on grey fleet.

Electronic Government

Simon Kirby: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he expects to implement the changes to the DirectGov website recommended in the report to his Department by Martha Lane Fox. [28749]

Mr Hurd: My officials are working on the recommendations from the Martha Lane Fox Strategic Review. They are consulting with colleagues and preparing an implementation plan for how this work will be taken forward taking consideration of the spending review.

Simon Kirby: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether he plans to invite Martha Lane Fox to review further central Government websites; and if he will make a statement. [28750]

Mr Maude: I have taken a number of steps to review online Government services and the websites used to access these services. These include asking Martha Lane Fox in her role as Digital Champion to review the Directgov Website, and asking Government Departments to review their own websites.

There are no current plans to invite Martha Lane Fox to review further central Government websites.

Simon Kirby: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent assessment he has made of the value for money of Government websites. [28751]

Mr Hurd: In June 2010, we published the costs and usage of all central Government Department websites in accordance with the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee. URL ref:

www.coi.gov.uk/websitemetrics2009-10

Electronic Government: Publicity

Simon Kirby: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps his Department is taking to encourage people to access Government services online. [29308]

Mr Maude: I have taken a number of steps to review online Government services and the websites used to access these services. These include asking Martha Lane Fox in her role as Digital Champion to review the Directgov Website, and asking Government Departments to review their own websites.

On 23 November I published the report on Directgov prepared by Martha Lane Fox and my response to that report. Copies of both documents are available in the Library. My response outlined plans for making a first wave of Government services 'Digital by Default'—these are:

Job seekers allowance

Services provided by Companies House

Student loan applications

My officials continue to talk with officials from other Departments to identify further services to become Digital by Default.

Work also continues with organisations, such as the Post Office and UK Online centres, on developing ‘assisted digital’ access to support those who need help to access digital services, to ensure that in making services Digital by Default no-one gets left behind.

Finally, I and my Department continue to support the work being done by Martha Lane Fox and her team under the Race Online 2012 initiative to help get more people online—and I would like to see all Government Departments make pledges in support of Race Online 2012.

Heart Diseases: Primary Care Trusts

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the mortality rate was in respect of heart disease in each primary care trust in England in each of the last five years. [28921]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated December 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the mortality rate was in respect of heart disease in each primary care trust in England in each of the last five years. (28921)

Table 1 provides the age-standardised mortality rate per 100,000 population, where ischaemic heart disease was the underlying cause of death, for each primary care organisation in England, for the years 2005 to 2009 (the latest year available). A copy has been placed in the House of Commons library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Cultural Relations: Australia

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what his policy is on the repatriation of Australian indigenous human remains held by UK institutions. [28814]

Mr Vaizey: Claims for the repatriation of human remains held in UK collections are for the trustees or governing authorities of the institutions involved to consider and the Government do not intervene. However, in 2005, the Government published, on behalf of the museums sector, ‘Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums’, which includes advice on dealing with repatriation claims. I am strongly of the view that any institution which currently holds Australian indigenous human remains should do its utmost to return them.

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with publicly-funded museums on the repatriation of Australian indigenous human remains. [28816]

Mr Vaizey: None.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many Australian indigenous human remains have been repatriated from public bodies since the issuance of UK Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums in 2005. [28817]

Mr Vaizey: The Government do not request this information from UK collections but are aware that a number of successful repatriations have taken place.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will estimate the number of Australian indigenous human remains held in UK institutions. [28818]

Mr Vaizey: The Government do not hold such information. However, the Australian Government estimate that there are approximately 730 Australian indigenous human remains held in at least 18 UK institutions.

Departmental Temporary Employment

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many agency workers his Department and its agencies employ at each pay grade. [28502]

John Penrose: The tables set out the number of agency workers and interim managers employed in the Department and its agency at each pay grade.

<i>The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)</i>		
<i>DCMS Grade</i>	<i>Civil service grade equivalent</i>	<i>Agency workers</i>
Senior civil service	Senior civil service	0
Grade A	Grades 6/7	14
Grade B	Higher executive officer/senior executive officer	0
Grade C	Executive officer	10
Grade D	Administrative officer/administrative assistant	4
Total		28

<i>The Royal Parks (TRP)</i>		
<i>TRP Grade</i>	<i>Civil service grade equivalent</i>	<i>Agency workers</i>
Senior civil service	Senior civil service	0
Grade IV	Grades 6/7	0
Grade III	Higher executive officer/senior executive officer	0
Grade II	Executive officer	3
Grade I	Administrative officer/administrative assistant	2
Total		5

Internet: Further Education

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the likely effects of the implementation of the provisions of the Digital Economy Act 2010 on the regulation by colleges of student access to the internet. [28632]

Mr Vaizey: I have been asked to reply in my capacity as a Minister in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

There are simple and proportionate steps that institutions such as colleges can adopt to prevent the use of their networks for the online infringement of copyright. Many already do so and, in many cases, their activities to prevent infringement already go far beyond what the Digital Economy Act requires. We expect that colleges will continue to put in place such measures to prevent infringement on their networks, when the Act is implemented.

Local Press

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent assessment he has made of trends in sales of (a) local and (b) regional newspapers; and if he will make a statement. [29315]

Mr Vaizey: Local and regional newspapers continue to meet the twin challenges of structural and cyclical change. While print circulation is falling, viewing of online news is growing rapidly. The issue is how to successfully monetise this.

The Government announced on 29 November 2010 that we will be carrying out a growth review of the digital and creative industries which will include the publishing sector.

Nicholas Shott: Newsquest

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 1 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 838W, if he will place in the Library a copy of the minutes of the meeting between Nicholas Shott and Newsquest. [29399]

Mr Vaizey: Nicholas Shott is undertaking his review of local TV in an independent capacity and any papers relating to the review remain his own. His final conclusions will take account of the meetings he held with various groups of stakeholders. His report will be available on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's website in due course.

HEALTH

Accidents: Fees and Charges

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the maximum sum per case his Department seeks to recover in respect of charges for NHS treatment of those involved in accidents; on what date the maximum was last reviewed; and if he will review them in order to achieve full recovery of NHS expenses from the insurers of those responsible for such accidents; [29016]

(2) how much the NHS spent on the treatment of those involved in accidents in cases where some or all of the cost of treatment was recovered from the insurers of those held responsible for the accident in each of the last three years; [29017]

(3) how much his Department recovered from insurers in repayment of NHS treatment expenses in respect of those involved in accidents in each of the last three years; and how many cases were involved. [29018]

Mr Simon Burns: The maximum sum that the Department is able to recover for any case under the NHS Injury Costs Recovery scheme is currently £42,999. This is uprated annually in line with hospital and community health service inflation and was last changed in April 2010. The Department continues to monitor the operation of the scheme but has no immediate plans to remove this cap.

Total cases and amounts recovered through the scheme for the last three years for the national health service in England were as follows. Figures reflect the expansion of the scheme to include injury claims other than road traffic accidents in 2007:

	Cases (Thousand)	Income (£ million)
2007-08	147	121
2008-09	160	135
2009-10	182	158

The Department does not hold records of the costs of treatment relating to insured accidents.

Ambulance Services

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to ensure that ambulance services commissioned by GP consortia provide a resilient service. [28790]

Mr Simon Burns: The White Paper 'Liberating the NHS' set out our proposals to devolve power and responsibility for commissioning services to local consortiums of general practitioner (GP) practices, supported by the creation of an independent NHS commissioning board.

Consortiums of GP practices working with other health and care professionals will commission the great majority of national health service services including urgent and emergency care and ambulance services for their patients. They will not be directly responsible for commissioning services that GPs themselves provide, nor will they be responsible for commissioning the other family health services. These will be the responsibility of the NHS Commissioning Board, as will national and regional specialised commissioning.

Our proposals for this new model of commissioning draw on the regular contact that GPs have with patients and their more detailed understanding of patients wider health care needs. The NHS commissioning board will hold GP consortiums to account for both their stewardship of NHS resources and the health outcomes they achieve.

'Liberating the NHS: Commissioning for Patients' invited views on a number of areas of the commissioning agenda. The engagement exercise closed on 11 October and the Department is now analysing all of the contributions received.

Blood

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the merits of introducing pathogen reduction technology as a standard treatment for blood products in the NHS. [29312]

Anne Milton: A pathogen inactivation system is currently used to treat plasma from the United States where levels of viral markers are higher than in the United Kingdom.

A different pathogen inactivation system suitable for platelets was evaluated by the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood Tissues and Organs (SaBTO) in January 2010. Taking into account the available information, with specific reference to efficacy, safety cost effectiveness and potential ancillary benefits, SaBTO does not recommend pathogen inactivation for platelets at this time.

Neither of these pathogen inactivation systems are currently suitable for use with red blood cells.

Blood: Donors

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to review the appropriateness of the National Blood Service's policy on the donation of blood by men who have had sex with men. [28930]

Anne Milton: The Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO) is currently reviewing the evidence base for donor deferral in relation to sexual behaviours, including the exclusion of men who have ever had sex with men.

The Committee considers that it is extremely important that the work of this group is based on the available scientific evidence and expects to make its recommendations on the most appropriate ways to ensure the safety of the blood supply in early 2011. The Department will consider SaBTO's recommendations once they have been made.

Breast Cancer: Screening

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what treatment tariffs are available to hospitals in respect of breast screening. [28961]

Mr Simon Burns: There are no specific tariffs available to hospitals in respect of breast screening services, which are funded through local contracting arrangements between trusts and primary care Trusts. However, tariffs available for breast biopsy procedures are shown in the following table.

<i>Healthcare resource group code</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>2010-11 in-patient elective and non-elective tariff (£)</i>
JA09A	Intermediate breast procedures with complications and comorbidities	1,848
JA09B	Intermediate breast procedures without complications and comorbidities	1,172

Children: Cycling

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the contribution cycling makes to children's health; and if he will make a statement. [29393]

Anne Milton: The Department has not undertaken an assessment of the contribution cycling makes to children's health. However, in 2007 Cycling England reviewed the

evidence that supports the health benefits of cycling. The report "Cycling and Health—What's the evidence" indicates that regular physical activity through cycling has positive health benefits for children and young people.

Cycling can contribute to the 60 minutes of daily physical activity recommended under current guidelines for children's general health benefit.

We are reviewing the evidence about the health benefits of physical activity for children and young people and will be producing updated physical activity guidelines in 2011.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what meetings (a) Ministers, (b) special advisers and (c) officials in his Department have had with representatives of (i) Diageo, (ii) Kraft, (iii) Unilever, (iv) Kellogg's, (v) Nestle, (vi) McDonalds and (vii) Pepsico since May 2010; [26480]

(2) what meetings (a) Ministers, (b) special advisers and (c) officials in his Department have had with representatives from organisations in the advertising and marketing industries since May 2010. [26481]

Anne Milton: In discharging their official duties, Ministers, special advisers and departmental officials meet with representatives from such organisations in a wide range of forums, including speaking engagements, conferences and seminars.

Other than multi-stakeholder meetings, since May 2010, departmental Ministers have held meetings with Unilever, McDonalds and Unacom, while the Department's special advisers held meetings with Diageo and Kellogg's.

During the same period, departmental officials have held meetings with Diageo, Unilever, Nestle, McDonalds, the Advertising Association, 23Red, Freud Communications, M and C Saatchi, VCCP, MCB and Fast Track Agency.

Departmental Telephone Services

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much revenue was received or saved through the use of non-geographic telephone numbers by (a) his Department and (b) the NHS in (i) 2008-09 and (ii) 2009-10; and how much he expects to receive or take from their use in 2010-11. [28792]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact each primary care trust and national health service body for this information.

Epilepsy

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely effects of extending the role for national commissioning in the provision of epilepsy services; and if he will make a statement. [28755]

Paul Burstow: It is the responsibility of local health commissioners to ensure that they commission local services to meet the needs of their population living

with epilepsy. This includes ensuring that all relevant guidelines, including those issued by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence are able to be implemented where deemed appropriate.

We have made no assessment of the likely effects of extending the role for national commissioning in the provision of epilepsy services.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he took of (a) rates of misdiagnosis of epilepsy, (b) access to tertiary referral for epilepsy services, (c) rates of avoidable death owing to epilepsy, (d) the number of annually-required epilepsy surgeries and (e) the number of epilepsy surgeries performed annually when developing the proposals in the Health White Paper, *Quality and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*; and if he will make a statement. [28756]

Paul Burstow: The White Paper 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS' sets out the Government's vision for the national health service. While its proposals will impact patient care across the spectrum of health needs, it does not set out a strategy for individual conditions. The Government consulted widely on the implementation of the White Paper proposals and have received over 6,000 responses from a wide range of individuals and organisations, including patients, clinicians, professional bodies, and epilepsy-related organisations and charities. We will publish our response to the White Paper consultations, including further detail about the implementation of our proposals, in due course.

General Practitioners

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he plans to take of the views of local authorities on the numbers of GP consortia in their area in approving the establishment of GP consortia. [28791]

Mr Simon Burns: The NHS Commissioning Board will have the duty and powers to authorise consortia, once it is satisfied that they have the necessary arrangements and capacity to fulfil their statutory duties and accountabilities and that there is clarity about the geographical area that they cover. Further details will be set out in the Government's forthcoming response to the consultation on the White Paper "Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS".

General Practitioners: Working Hours

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs provide out-of-hours care (a) nationally and (b) in Milton Keynes. [28959]

Mr Simon Burns: This information is not collected centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact each primary care trust for this information.

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications are required of GPs to enable them to provide out-of-hours care. [28960]

Mr Simon Burns: General practitioners (GPs) providing out of hours care must be on the General Medical Council GP register and on a Primary Care Trust GP

Performers List. A trainee must be registered with the General Medical Council with a licence to practise, included on a Primary Care Trust GP Performers List, and supervised by an approved GP clinical supervisor.

In addition, out-of-hours providers have a responsibility to ensure the clinical competence of all employed doctors.

Health Centres: Christchurch

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason his Department did not accept the district valuer's assessment of his Department's liability in respect of its leasehold interest in the former health centre premises at Saxon Square, Christchurch; [29394]

(2) what steps he has taken to bring the empty leasehold premises at Saxon Square, Christchurch back into use; what steps he plans to take to (a) rectify the dilapidations and (b) market the premises; and if he will make a statement. [29395]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department took into account the report from the district valuer when giving consideration to the figure that the landlord was prepared to accept for a surrender of the lease. The proposed surrender payment was also considered by HM Treasury in their role of reviewing spending decisions to ensure value for money and affordability. Their views were reflected in an offer recently made to the landlord with whom discussions continue.

The Department has previously marketed the property; its availability is on the e-PIMS database managed by the Government Property Unit and discussions have been held with the landlord with regard to alternative uses for the property. These discussions will continue and also in respect of required repairs. Further marketing will be undertaken if required.

Health Services: Weather

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 1 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 911W, on health services: weather (1) what temporary measures have been necessary; [29169]

(2) whether strategic health authorities have identified operational issues in their area through daily winter reporting; and in respect of which hospital trusts local winter plans have been escalated to mitigate operational issues. [29170]

Mr Simon Burns: It is for individual local health economies to ensure that appropriate services are available for their patients during winter.

The national health service is well versed in winter planning and each year works closely with the Department, through winter leads in strategic health authorities, to anticipate and manage any increased pressure and demands placed on local health economies and social care services throughout the winter period.

As it has done in previous years, the NHS is working in partnership with social care and community organisations to ensure that it has robust local plans in place to deal with anticipated winter pressures. These reflect the escalation processes that are enacted and built on throughout the year, whenever a local health economy experiences pressure.

It is inevitable that there will be occasional peaks in demand during the winter season. This can mean temporary measures (postponing routine elective activity to make way for more urgent cases), are necessary to ensure a safe and effective service is maintained, but these are kept to an absolute minimum.

Herbal Medicine: EU Law

David Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had on the future use of traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic compound herbal remedies under the provisions of the Traditional Herbal Medicines Directive; and if he will make a statement. [29100]

Mr Simon Burns: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has regular discussions with the Herbal Forum, an umbrella group representing manufacturers' trade associations and practitioners in the herbal sector, about the implementation of the directive on traditional herbal medicinal products. The MHRA has also attended various events where the directive has been discussed.

There is the potential for some herbal medicines from non-western traditions to be registered under the traditional herbal registration scheme. However, many herbal medicines from the traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic sectors are more suitable for supply in the context of a practitioner/patient relationship. The Government are currently considering their overall strategy on professional regulation, including the possibility of establishing a registration scheme for practitioners of these traditional forms of medicine.

David Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has made an assessment of the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament concerning the Report on the experience acquired as a result of the application of the provisions of Chapter 2a of Directive 2001/83/EC, as amended by Directive 2004/24/EC, on specific provisions applicable to traditional herbal medicinal products, with particular reference to page 10, paragraph 5; and if he will make a statement. [29352]

Anne Milton: The European directive on traditional herbal medicinal products is intended for relatively low risk manufactured herbal medicines suitable for use without medical supervision. It is unclear that there would currently be sufficient support across the European Union for a much wider initiative to introduce new European legislation lifting or modifying the existing requirements of the medicines regulatory regime in relation to systems of traditional medicine.

The Government are currently considering their overall strategy on professional regulation, including the possibility of establishing a registration scheme for practitioners of these traditional forms of medicine.

Hospitals

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how many he expects the number of single patient rooms in NHS hospitals to increase between 2010 and 2015; what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of such an increase; and from what sources he expects such costs to be met. [29038]

Mr Simon Burns: The information is not available in the precise format requested.

Each NHS trust makes an informed choice locally regarding the appropriate percentage of single room provision based on practical considerations such as site restrictions, affordability as well as clinical and operational limitations. In some cases, providing single rooms for all patients may not be clinically appropriate. Details of plans for such provisions are not collected centrally. Where possible, as resources allow, hospitals are advised to support patient privacy and help reduce the risk of infection by increasing the number of single rooms.

The cost of providing single patient rooms will be met by the national health service organisation involved as part of the overall cost of the project. Details of such costs are not collected centrally.

Where major NHS capital schemes are approved by the Department, the number of single rooms can be reported. Available data for these schemes, which are under construction or opened shows the single patients rooms provision as follows.

<i>NHS trust site</i>	<i>Project detail</i>	<i>Operational date</i>	<i>Proportion of single rooms (percentage)</i>
Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust	Replacement of St Luke's hospital offering general and forensic mental health services	May 2010	100
North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	Reconfiguration of acute hospital services	June 2010	37
Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	Rationalisation from two main sites to one at Pinderfields Hospital. Small unit at Pontefract	June 2010	50
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	Relocation of Maternity Unit and modernisation of acute services including Diagnostic Treatment Centre in Chelmsford	November 2010	38
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	Modernisation and reconfiguration from four sites to two at Pembury and Maidstone	Quarter 1 2011	100
University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust/Stoke-on-Trent NHS Primary Care Trust	Major new build and reconfiguration at University Hospital site	Quarter 4 2012	50
Barts and The London NHS Trust	Acute site rationalisation.	Quarter 4 2013	40
North Bristol NHS Trust	Likely relocation of acute services onto single site	Quarter 1 2014	175
Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals NSH Foundation Trust	Reconfiguration of acute hospital services (UC)	November 2010	52

¹ Proposed

Hospitals: Milton Keynes

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mortality rate is for hospital patients (a) on weekdays and (b) at weekends (i) nationally and (ii) in Milton Keynes. [28958]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is not held centrally. Information about the mortality rate for hospital patients on weekdays and at weekends in Milton Keynes may be available directly from Milton Keynes Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Liskeard Community Hospital: Private Finance Initiative

Sheryll Murray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the running costs of Liskeard Community Hospital was paid to the private finance initiative (PFI) provider in each year from 2005 to 2009; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of running costs that will be paid to the PFI provider in (a) 2010 and (b) 2011. [27629]

Mr Simon Burns: The information is not available in the format requested. However, data for net operating expenses for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust (PCT) in respect of its private finance initiative (PFI) schemes, is set out in the following table.

Data are not held centrally for 2010-11 or 2011-12.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly PCT—proportion of total net operating costs relating to PFI

	Percentage of total revenue expenditure relating to PFI
2005-06	0.1
2006-07	0.1
2007-08	0.1
2008-09	0.1
2009-10	0.1

Notes:

1. The percentages provided represent the net operating expenses in respect of PFI schemes as a proportion of total net operating costs.
2. 2005-06 to 2008-09 figures compiled under UK generally accepted accounting practice.
3. 2009-10 figures were compiled under international finance reporting standards under which PFI costs in the audited summarisation schedules of trusts are split between capital repayments and revenue expenditure elements, which does not make a precise like for like comparison with earlier years in this table possible. However, an estimate of the PFI unitary payment for 2009-10 is held centrally by the Department as well as the audited outturn for the net operating costs for the PCT for this year; an estimated percentage figure for this year has therefore been calculated using these two figures.

Source:

Audited summarisation schedules of the PCT for 2005-06 to 2009-10.

Maternity Services

Mr Graham Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many and what percentage of pregnant women normally resident in (a) the East Riding of Yorkshire and (b) England were transferred to hospitals other than that of their preferred choice due to an insufficient number of neonatal intensive care cots in (i) 2008-09 and (ii) 2009-10; [29101]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of moving pregnant women normally resident in the East Riding of Yorkshire to hospitals other than their preferred hospital due to insufficient neonatal intensive care facilities in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [29102]

Anne Milton: Information is not collected centrally on the number and percentage of women transferred to hospitals other than their preferred choice. As set out in the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence Quality Standard for Specialist Neonatal Care, networks, commissioners and providers will wish to undertake an annual needs assessment and ensure each network has adequate capacity. This will include ensuring there are appropriate numbers of neonatal intensive care cots.

No estimate has been made on the cost of transferring women to a hospital other than her preferred choice.

Meat: Dairy Products

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to publish evidence from (a) the Food Standards Agency and (b) other advisory bodies on the potential effects on (i) public and (ii) animal health of the entry of meat and dairy products from cloned animals to the food chain. [27812]

Anne Milton: The Board of the Food Standards Agency discussed the implications of animal cloning at its open meeting on 15 September 2010. The record of that discussion, including the Agency's advice to Ministers, is available on the Agency's website at:

www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/ourboard/boardmeetings/boardmeetings2010/100915/boardmins150910

A copy has been placed in the Library. The safety of meat and milk from cloned cattle was subsequently considered by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes on 25 November 2010 and the Agency issued a news report the same day with the Committee's conclusions. The draft minutes of the Committee's discussion will be published within two weeks of the meeting via its website:

<http://acnfp.food.gov.uk>

The European Food Safety Authority published a detailed opinion on food safety and other implications of animal cloning in 2008, and this was updated in June 2009 and again in September 2010. These reports can be found at:

www.efsa.europa.eu/en/ahawtopics/topic/cloning.htm

Meat and dairy products from cloned animals or their descendants cannot be distinguished from those obtained from conventional animals and the entry of such products into the food chain would not affect the health of other animals. Advice on cloning from the National Standing Committee on Farm Animal Genetic Resources is available on its website at:

www.defra.gov.uk/fangr/documents/100914-cloning-statement.pdf

The Farm Animal Welfare Council intends to issue an opinion on breeding technologies in 2011 in a follow up to its 2004 report on the welfare implications of breeding and breeding technologies in commercial agriculture. More recent advice specifically on cloning was passed to Ministers in 2007. These reports are both published on the Council's website at:

www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/breedingreport.pdf

and

www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/250107.pdf

Medical Equipment: Expenditure

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS has spent on medical supplies and equipment in each year since 2000. [29036]

Mr Simon Burns: Total revenue expenditure on clinical supplies and services, taken from the national health service (England) summarised accounts, is shown for each year since 1999-2000 in the following table.

Supplies and services clinical

	£000
2009-10	4,777,151
2008-09	4,922,822
2007-08	5,036,713
2006-07	5,042,886
2005-06	5,067,562
2004-05	4,953,088
2003-04	5,325,620
2002-03	4,805,109
2001-02	4,312,459
2000-01	3,878,782
1999-2000	3,435,273

Revenue expenditure on clinical supplies and services is taken to include drugs, dressings, medical and surgical equipment, x-ray equipment and supplies, laboratory equipment, appliances (eg artificial limbs and wheelchair hardware) and the maintenance of equipment. The Department does not collect information that allows capital expenditure on medical equipment to be disaggregated from total capital expenditure.

NHS Litigation Authority

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims the National Health Service Litigation Authority settled without proceedings being issued in each of the last three years. [28774]

Mr Simon Burns: The NHS Litigation Authority (NHSLA) supplied the information requested in the following table.

Numbers of overall claims settled by the NHSLA by year and by funding arrangement, including the subset of those claims that were settled with damages

Settlement year	Legal Aid funded	Legal Aid funded and settled with damages	Conditional fee arrangement funded	Conditional fee arrangement	
				funded and settled with damages	Before the event funded
2007-08	1,806	1,168	5,135	3,589	1,204
2008-09	1,690	1,091	5,065	3,611	1,183
2009-10	1,822	1,263	5,843	4,270	1,509

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the national health service litigation authority. [28808]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government are committed to ensuring that wherever possible resources are used to support the frontline. For this reason departmental officials are commissioning an industry review of the NHS litigation authority (NHSLA). The review will determine if the introduction of commercial techniques could improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which the NHSLA performs its functions.

The review is due to report in the new year.

NHS: Negligence

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of

Number of claims the NHSLA settled without proceedings being issued from 2007-10

Settlement year	Number of claims
2007-08	6,170
2008-09	5,708
2009-10	6,608

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends that the NHS Litigation Authority provide insurance cover for private providers of NHS services in the future. [28789]

Mr Simon Burns: The NHS Litigation Authority does not currently provide insurance cover, but provides a discretionary indemnity to members of the statutory schemes established under section 71 of the National Health Service Act 2006. Membership of the schemes is voluntary.

The Department is committed to making sure the same arrangements that provide clinical negligence cover to NHS bodies are also available to other providers that deliver NHS care, including other public sector providers and private providers.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases brought against the National Health Service Litigation Authority were funded by (a) legal aid, (b) a conditional fee agreement and (c) by other forms of funding in each of the last three years; and how many in each category resulted in a compensation payment. [28807]

Mr Simon Burns: The NHS Litigation Authority (NHSLA) supplied the information in the following table:

clinical negligence claims brought in cases where (a) the NHS and (b) clinicians acting for the NHS have been demonstrated not to have adequately investigated clinical errors in the last 12 months. [28809]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department has not made an estimate of the number of clinical negligence claims brought in cases where the national health service or clinicians acting for the NHS have been demonstrated not to have adequately investigated clinical errors in the last 12 months. Such information is not held centrally.

NHS: Procurement

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the level of commercial skills among staff involved in NHS procurement. [28948]

Mr Simon Burns: It is up to local trusts how they develop and deploy their procurement expertise, according

to local needs. However, trusts are able to use collaborative partners to help them with their procurement. These partners include NHS Supply Chain, NHS Commercial Medicines Unit, Buying Solutions and regional Collaborative Procurement Hubs.

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much he expects the NHS to spend on (a) procurement processes and (b) procured goods and services in each year from 2011-2015. [29037]

Mr Simon Burns: In seeking to improve outcomes for their patients, local national health service commissioner and provider organisations are best placed and free to determine how much of the funding allocated to them they spend on procurement processes and on the procurement of goods and services. As part of this, the NHS will need to consider the scope for improving the efficiency of their procurement, as part of their requirement to deliver total efficiency improvements of up to £20 billion over the next four years.

Public Health

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from local authorities on the transfer of public health responsibilities from primary care trusts. [26535]

Anne Milton: As part of the consultation of 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS', local authorities made a number of representations, both in their own right and through their representative bodies including the Local Government Association and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. Almost all upper tier local authorities in England and a large proportion of lower tier authorities responded to the consultation.

In general, local authorities strongly supported the transfer of public health functions to local authorities and welcomed the dedicated resources that will follow the transfer of these functions. However, specific representations were made concerning ring-fencing public health resources at the local level, and the need for the public health outcomes framework to be produced in close partnership with local government.

Following publication of the Public Health White Paper 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England', the Government will shortly consult on both the public health outcomes framework and the commissioning and funding for public health. We will continue to work closely with local government during and after the consultation period, to ensure that we address areas of concern.

Responsibility Deal Networks

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what (a) individuals, (b) companies and (c) other organisations have (i) attended and (ii) been invited to attend meetings of the Responsibility Deal Networks on (A) food, (B) alcohol, (C) behaviour changes, (D) physical activity and (E) health at work. [26479]

Anne Milton: A list of attendees at the meetings of the five Public Health Responsibility Deal networks has been placed in the Library.

Strokes

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many readmissions to hospital there were within 28 days of discharge in respect of patients originally admitted for stroke in each primary care trust in England in each of the last five years. [28920]

Mr Simon Burns: Data for financial years 2004-05 to 2008-09 showing the number of 'Emergency readmissions to hospital within 28 days of discharge: Stroke (ICD 10 codes: 161 to 164)' (all ages, persons) are shown in the following table.

These data were sourced from NHSnet version of the Compendium of Clinical and Health Indicators:

www.nchod.nhs.uk

Where the number of readmissions in a year is between one and five inclusive, data for that primary care trust (PCT) have been suppressed in the table and replaced with 'X'. This is in line with the Hospital Episode Statistics protocol.

Primary care organisation of residence		Number of readmissions				
PCO code	PCO name	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
5A3	South Gloucestershire PCT	26	71	106	29	24
5A4	Havering PCT	15	19	32	31	23
5A5	Kingston PCT	9	14	17	11	13
5A7	Bromley PCT	29	44	43	27	28
5A8	Greenwich Teaching PCT	26	13	19	19	23
5A9	Barnet PCT	26	39	30	13	32
5AT	Hillingdon PCT	19	24	17	21	24
5C1	Enfield PCT	32	24	23	15	40
5C2	Barking and Dagenham PCT	11	10	15	11	8
5C3	City and Hackney Teaching PCT	14	7	13	12	11
5C4	Tower Hamlets PCT	19	14	18	14	15
5C5	Newham PCT	21	12	21	15	17
5C9	Haringey Teaching PCT	11	13	38	28	34
5CC	Blackburn With Darwen PCT	9	12	9	17	8
5CN	Herefordshire PCT	11	20	18	12	X
5CQ	Milton Keynes PCT	19	20	X	15	23
5D7	Newcastle PCT	29	46	28	19	22
5D8	North Tyneside PCT	18	18	15	25	25
5D9	Hartlepool PCT	8	15	12	19	19
5E1	Stockton-on-Tees Teaching PCT	28	19	19	18	25
5EF	North Lincolnshire PCT	13	8	12	10	21
5EM	Nottingham City PCT	31	25	14	18	36
5ET	Bassetlaw PCT	11	13	8	9	6
5F1	Plymouth Teaching PCT	11	14	13	25	20
5F5	Salford PCT	35	40	42	45	41
5F7	Stockport PCT	35	30	33	38	54
5FE	Portsmouth City Teaching PCT	12	19	20	14	13
5FL	Bath and North East Somerset PCT	19	28	22	21	18
5GC	Luton PCT	17	16	17	9	20
5H1	Hammersmith and Fulham PCT	11	10	18	16	15

<i>Primary care organisation of residence</i>		<i>Number of readmissions</i>					<i>Primary care organisation of residence</i>		<i>Number of readmissions</i>				
<i>PCO code</i>	<i>PCO name</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>PCO code</i>	<i>PCO name</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>
5H8	Rotherham PCT	26	38	45	31	38	5N6	Derbyshire County PCT	73	63	66	58	73
5HG	Ashton, Leigh and Wigan PCT	33	30	32	21	35	5N7	Derby City PCT	17	25	23	19	34
5HP	Blackpool PCT	11	15	10	10	12	5N8	Nottinghamshire County Teaching PCT	49	60	49	63	66
5HQ	Bolton PCT	20	22	14	21	22	5N9	Lincolnshire Teaching PCT	73	104	73	77	69
5HX	Ealing PCT	32	18	34	30	27	5NA	Redbridge PCT	15	33	21	31	16
5HY	Hounslow PCT	20	20	7	22	18	5NC	Waltham Forest PCT	10	22	23	15	33
5J2	Warrington PCT	13	9	10	21	26	5ND	County Durham PCT	36	41	45	51	57
5J4	Knowsley PCT	22	23	19	13	18	5NE	Cumbria Teaching PCT	67	58	61	52	64
5J5	Oldham PCT	29	35	29	31	25	5NF	North Lancashire PCT	21	34	30	27	27
5J6	Calderdale PCT	16	22	20	16	20	5NG	Central Lancashire PCT	21	50	50	44	72
5J9	Darlington PCT	7	11	12	11	14	5NH	East Lancashire Teaching PCT	33	33	28	32	46
5JE	Barnsley PCT	21	33	26	15	28	5NJ	Sefton PCT	59	41	33	47	36
5JX	Bury PCT	14	13	23	22	16	5NK	Wirral PCT	48	52	49	50	55
5K3	Swindon PCT	15	13	12	15	21	5NL	Liverpool PCT	61	65	55	76	62
5K5	Brent Teaching PCT	20	23	27	19	39	5NM	Halton and St Helens PCT	30	36	23	19	41
5K6	Harrow PCT	18	11	14	13	20	5NN	Western Cheshire PCT	28	21	27	26	17
5K7	Camden PCT	24	17	16	15	16	5NP	Central and Eastern Cheshire PCT	28	34	23	37	43
5K8	Islington PCT	13	10	26	18	23	5NQ	Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale PCT	22	22	30	25	22
5K9	Croydon PCT	44	33	29	25	31	5NR	Trafford PCT	15	13	11	24	21
5KF	Gateshead PCT	23	16	18	24	30	5NT	Manchester PCT	48	44	49	61	55
5KG	South Tyneside PCT	11	9	11	11	19	5NV	North Yorkshire and York PCT	70	64	62	67	71
5KL	Sunderland Teaching PCT	22	26	29	16	20	5NW	East Riding of Yorkshire PCT	26	21	19	34	46
5KM	Middlesbrough PCT	22	9	17	21	24	5NX	Hull Teaching PCT	23	20	20	25	24
5L1	Southampton City PCT	13	14	6	21	23	5NY	Bradford and Airedale Teaching PCT	45	52	52	58	59
5L3	Medway PCT	23	23	28	29	28	5P1	South East Essex PCT	41	54	38	38	45
5LA	Kensington and Chelsea PCT	12	20	13	16	19	5P2	Bedfordshire PCT	28	27	21	26	32
5LC	Westminster PCT	19	25	18	21	20	5P3	East and North Hertfordshire PCT	33	33	31	36	38
5LD	Lambeth PCT	22	22	18	20	27	5P4	West Hertfordshire PCT	45	51	52	46	64
5LE	Southwark PCT	22	16	15	17	35	5P5	Surrey PCT	78	74	102	114	126
5LF	Lewisham PCT	20	25	41	41	38	5P6	West Sussex PCT	90	83	99	69	80
5LG	Wandsworth Teaching PCT	26	24	17	26	30	5P7	East Sussex Downs and Weald PCT	36	26	24	41	43
5LH	Tameside and Glossop PCT	30	26	33	24	30	5P8	Hastings and Rother PCT	25	36	48	29	42
5LQ	Brighton and Hove City Teaching PCT	20	36	30	32	27	5P9	West Kent PCT	53	66	68	66	74
5M1	South Birmingham PCT	22	29	30	30	37	5PA	Leicestershire County and Rutland PCT	38	52	65	78	74
5M2	Shropshire County PCT	28	30	22	27	28	5PC	Leicester City PCT	16	27	21	37	28
5M3	Walsall Teaching PCT	24	34	31	38	40	5PD	Northamptonshire Teaching PCT	67	51	52	45	62
5M6	Richmond and Twickenham PCT	12	12	X	8	19	5PE	Dudley PCT	22	29	38	29	31
5M7	Sutton and Merton PCT	35	26	26	38	38	5PF	Sandwell PCT	26	44	37	35	32
5M8	North Somerset PCT	21	24	40	20	19	5PG	Birmingham East and North PCT	39	41	56	67	71
5MD	Coventry Teaching PCT	28	22	24	25	24	5PH	North Staffordshire PCT	14	8	16	16	27
5MK	Telford and Wrekin PCT	12	22	16	19	25	5PJ	Stoke On Trent PCT	27	17	28	22	34
5MV	Wolverhampton City PCT	31	24	19	21	28							
5MX	Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT	19	23	22	35	54							
5N1	Leeds PCT	98	69	61	53	70							
5N2	Kirklees PCT	32	31	37	29	28							
5N3	Wakefield District PCT	29	46	35	43	37							
5N4	Sheffield PCT	54	70	59	70	63							
5N5	Doncaster PCT	32	40	37	28	27							

Primary care organisation of residence		Number of readmissions				
PCO code	PCO name	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
5PK	South Staffordshire PCT	52	48	44	67	54
5PL	Worcestershire PCT	54	44	43	46	77
5PM	Warwickshire PCT	52	54	39	31	57
5PN	Peterborough PCT	17	13	13	14	17
5PP	Cambridgeshire PCT	42	51	45	54	51
5PQ	Norfolk PCT	62	54	60	70	75
5PR	Great Yarmouth and Waveney PCT	22	36	18	18	30
5PT	Suffolk PCT	57	55	63	66	70
5PV	West Essex PCT	25	23	33	33	32
5PW	North East Essex PCT	29	48	33	25	38
5PX	Mid Essex PCT	34	33	33	32	31
5PY	South West Essex PCT	35	31	34	30	25
5QA	Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT	69	83	90	101	109
5QC	Hampshire PCT	93	107	79	109	116
5QD	Buckinghamshire PCT	40	41	25	49	37
5QE	Oxfordshire PCT	55	42	36	45	56
5QF	Berkshire West PCT	31	23	30	20	28
5QG	Berkshire East PCT	24	24	32	22	38
5QH	Gloucestershire PCT	51	65	56	47	64
5QJ	Bristol PCT	35	85	110	65	37
5QK	Wiltshire PCT	43	38	41	31	36
5QL	Somerset PCT	56	69	67	55	63
5QM	Dorset PCT	52	51	36	47	58
5QN	Bournemouth and Poole Teaching PCT	32	50	38	40	37
5QP	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly PCT	55	69	52	49	54
5QQ	Devon PCT	68	80	70	72	76
5QR	Redcar and Cleveland PCT	24	19	12	19	14
5QT	Isle of Wight NHS PCT	13	12	9	7	23
TAC	Northumberland Care Trust	39	65	57	39	45
TAK	Bexley Care Trust	18	21	36	24	26
TAL	Torbay Care Trust	17	14	23	19	19
TAM	Solihull Care Trust North East Lincolnshire Care Trust	17	26	23	33	27
TAN	Plus	10	14	X	12	10

EDUCATION

Academies

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have been removed from the list of those expressing an interest in becoming an academy because they were included in error. [10599]

Mr Gibb [holding answer 8 December 2010]: Any school may choose to register an interest in becoming an academy, and equally they may request that their interest is de-registered at any time. We do not collect information on why they have asked that their interest is withdrawn, and we no longer publish such a list. We do, however, on a monthly basis publish the total number of schools which have registered an interest in converting

to academy status and the names of those which have formally applied. This was last updated on 3 December and the link can be found on the Academies pages of the Department's website:

www.education.gov.uk

under the heading "Schools submitting applications and open academies".

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools he estimates will have signed academy agreements under the terms of the Academies Act 2010 by September 2010. [12554]

Mr Gibb [holding answer 6 September 2010]: As at 30 September 2010, 144 Academy Orders had been signed covering 152 schools.

Building Schools for the Future Programme: Coventry

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will estimate the costs incurred by schools in Coventry in respect of their preparation and presentation of bids for inclusion in the Building Schools for the Future programme. [27460]

Mr Gibb [holding answer 1 December 2010]: No estimate has been made by the Department of the costs incurred by schools in Coventry in preparing and presenting bids for BSF projects and we have no plans to estimate them.

The design of the BSF programme meant that significant sums had to be spent by schools before contracts were finalised. We have terminated the BSF programme to prevent waste of that kind. The review of DfE capital led by Sebastian James is looking at alternative designs to avoid waste.

Children: Communication Skills

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will (a) prioritise communication competency in his forthcoming Schools White Paper and (b) assess the merits of including communication competency as a measurable outcome in the school curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [23617]

Mr Gibb: We are determined to create an education system that delivers high standards for all children, and communication skills are an important part of this. All aspects of communication competence are built into the curriculum framework for English in primary schools and are subject to assessment at key stages 1 and 2. The Schools White Paper focuses on a range of key issues including the curriculum. Copies of the Schools White Paper can be found in the House of Commons Library and also at the following link:

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction:=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=CM+7980&>

We will be announcing plans for a review of the national curriculum shortly.

Discretionary Learner Support Fund

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he plans to announce the mechanisms by which the Discretionary Learner Support Fund will operate in

the 2011-12 academic year; and what guidance his Department plans to issue to further education institutions on that fund. [26464]

Mr Gibb [*holding answer 25 November 2010*]: We plan to allocate the enhanced funding in line with the timetable for overall funding allocations for schools and colleges, which will be made by the end of March 2011.

We will work with representatives of schools, colleges and training providers to finalise the arrangements for the enhanced fund, including how the funding will flow to institutions and what guidance is required to administer the fund effectively.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department will retain responsibility for the funding allocated to the Discretionary Learner Support Fund when it replaces education maintenance allowance. [26465]

Mr Gibb [*holding answer 25 November 2010*]: The Department for Education will be responsible for the new enhanced discretionary learner support fund. The Young People's Learning Agency will allocate funding to schools, colleges and training providers on the Department's behalf.

Teresa Pearce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding formula will be used to allocate funding from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund to schools, colleges and sixth forms; and whether additional costs in respect of administration of that fund will be met separately from the funding for students. [26578]

Mr Gibb [*holding answer 25 November 2010*]: We expect the administration of the enhanced discretionary learner support fund to be based on existing arrangements for such funds, which allow schools, colleges and training providers to target support to those young people in greatest need.

Under current arrangements, schools and colleges are able to use up to 5% of their allocation to meet the costs of administration. In finalising the arrangements for the enhanced discretionary learner support scheme the Department will consult with schools, colleges and training organisations.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether there will be an automatic entitlement to financial support through the Discretionary Learner Support fund in the academic year 2011-12 for students (a) with special educational needs, (b) who are looked after by the local authority and (c) who have a physical or mental disability. [26433]

Mr Gibb: Decisions regarding the new discretionary fund will be made locally, enabling schools, colleges and training providers to target support at those young people in greatest need.

In finalising the arrangements for the enhanced discretionary learner support, the Department will consult with schools, colleges and training organisations and other interested parties, including on how to ensure that the most vulnerable young people, who are facing genuine

financial barriers to participation, receive appropriate support to enable them to continue in education or training.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how student need will be defined in relation to eligibility for assistance from the Discretionary Learner Support fund in the academic year 2011-12. [26436]

Mr Gibb: Decisions regarding the new discretionary fund will be made locally, enabling schools, colleges and training providers to target support at those young people in greatest need. The Government do not intend to dictate to schools, colleges and training providers how they should determine which young people should benefit from the new fund.

In finalising the arrangements for the enhanced discretionary learner support fund, the Department will consult with schools, colleges and training organisations, including on what guidance is required to administer the fund effectively.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consultation he has undertaken with (a) further education colleges, (b) young people and (c) local authorities on the ending of education maintenance allowance. [26437]

Mr Gibb: The Government took the decision to end the education maintenance allowance (EMA) on the basis of evaluation and other research evidence which indicates that the scheme does not effectively target those young people who need financial support to enable them to participate in education and training.

The changes have been discussed with the Learner Support Consultative Forum, operated by the Young People's Learning Agency, which involves representatives of young people and of colleges. In finalising the arrangements for the enhanced discretionary learner support scheme that will replace EMA, the Department will consult with schools, colleges, training organisations and other interested parties.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for North West Durham on 15 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 592W, on education maintenance allowance, on what date the discretionary learner support fund will begin issuing funding to students; what mechanisms will be in place for student support before grants from that fund are made available for the next academic year; and if he will make a statement. [26438]

Mr Gibb: The new enhanced discretionary learner support fund will be introduced for the start of the 2011/12 academic year. All young people who apply for an education maintenance allowance (EMA) before 1 January 2011 and are assessed as eligible may continue to receive EMA through to the end of the 2010/11 academic year (providing they meet any conditions set by their school, college or training provider). Discretionary funding is also available in 2010/11, under current arrangements.

We plan to allocate the enhanced funding in line with the timetable for overall funding allocations, which will be made by the end of March 2011.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Greater London

Teresa Pearce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of young people entering an institution of further education in the 2011-12 academic year who will receive financial support from the Government. [26505]

Mr Gibb: Decisions regarding the new discretionary fund will be made locally, enabling schools, colleges and training providers to target support at those young people in greatest need. It is not, therefore, possible to estimate the proportion of young people entering an institution of further education in the 2011-12 academic year who will receive support under the new arrangements.

The current discretionary scheme supports around 200,000 young people each year.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Stoke-on-Trent

Tristram Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many young people resident in Stoke-on-Trent Central constituency have received education maintenance allowance since its creation. [26990]

Mr Gibb: This is a matter for the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) who operate the education maintenance allowance for the Department for Education. Peter Lauener, the YPLA's chief executive, will write to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent Central with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Libraries.

Tristram Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many young people resident in Stoke-on-Trent Central constituency receive education maintenance allowance. [26991]

Mr Gibb: This is a matter for the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) who operate the education maintenance allowance for the Department for Education. Peter Lauener, the YPLA's chief executive, will write to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Libraries.

Education: Assessments

Alok Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what (a) methodology and (b) tools were used to assess the progress of children who did not sit SATs in 2010; and whether the baseline against which such assessments were made was adjusted to take account of those children who did not sit SATs; and if he will make a statement. [24371]

Mr Gibb: In 2010, 4,005 maintained schools did not administer the key stage 2 national curriculum tests, representing 26% of the 15,515 schools expected to administer them. It is unfortunate that parents and pupil in those schools will not have benefited from the information that the test results provide. At the end of key stage 2, schools are also required to report a teacher assessment result to parents.

The Department published the national key stage 2 test results on 3 August. Information on progression in

English and Mathematics between key stage 1 and key stage 2 was published on 7 October. This information is based on pupils who sat the tests in 2010 and can be viewed at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000949/index.shtml>

The Department's chief statistician has confirmed that the 2010 national key stage 2 test results are representative of the national picture and comparable to previous years.

Families: Advisory Services

Margot James: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for (a) the future and (b) future funding of the Family Information Direct programme. [26864]

Sarah Teather: I appreciate the hard work of the organisations that have been funded through the Family Information Direct programme to deliver support to families. As the National Prospectus published by my Department on 22 November 2010 states, we are currently considering inviting bids for a range of future family services delivered online and through telephone services from April 2011; and further information will be available in due course.

Free Schools: Inspections

Mr Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent discussions he has had with Ofsted on procedures for registering and monitoring free schools. [24019]

Mr Gibb: The Department has regular discussions with Ofsted on a range of matters including free schools. As independent schools, free schools, like academies will be subject to a pre-registration inspection, which occurs under section 160(4) of the Education Act 2002. Once open, in the same way as academies, free schools will be subject to regular inspection by Ofsted under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. Section 5 inspections apply to maintained schools and academies.

Free Schools: Playgrounds

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on the provision of outdoor play space at free schools. [20740]

Mr Gibb: Free schools are subject to the requirements of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations require that there should be appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for pupils to play safely.

The terms of reference for the current review of capital investment in schools, early years, colleges and sixth forms include the review and reform of the requirements on schools including regulations, design requirements and playing field requirements.

New Schools Network

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 6 September 2010, *Official Report*, column 350W, on the New Schools Network,

what meetings (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department have had with representatives of the New Schools Network since 30 June 2010. [22408]

Mr Gibb: Ministers met New Schools Network (NSN) representatives on 1 October, 12 October, 20 October and 10 November 2010. Officials meet NSN on a regular basis to review proposals they have receive.

Pupils: Disadvantaged

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the number of children who would qualify for the proposed pupil premium under each of the three possible sets of criteria set out in his Department's consultation document. [22779]

Mr Gibb: The three options set out in the consultation documents were (a) Free School Meals—either for those eligible in-year; for those eligible in any of the last three years, or for those eligible in any of the last six years—(b) for those children whose parents receive the Out of Work Tax Credit, or (c) using a geodemographic measure such as ACORN or MOSAIC.

For the Free School Meals and Out of Work Tax Credit options, the approximate numbers are as follows:

Option	Pupils qualifying
FSM in-year (16%)	1,079,000
FSM ever 3 (19%)	1,281,000
FSM ever 6 (24%)	1,618,000
Out of Work Tax Credit (20%)	1,348,000

Notes:

1. These figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000.
2. Based upon a total pupil population of 6,741,607 FTE pupils (which is Reception to Year-11 pupils in mainstream settings funded through the DSG plus those in academies).
3. Figures are for 2010-11, because this was the basis for the other figures included in the consultation document.
4. These figures are intended only for use in comparing between these four options.

ACORN and MOSAIC are geographical based measures and the number of children who would qualify for the premium would depend on which groups and postcodes are used.

There was a range of responses to the consultation with each option having its supporters. These are being considered and we expect to make an announcement shortly.

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the funding likely to be allocated to schools in Newham through the proposed Pupil Premium. [26487]

Mr Gibb: We are considering the responses to the consultation on school funding which ended on 18 October, including the question of which deprivation indicator to use. The amount of funding that will be allocated to schools in a constituency will depend on this decision.

Runaway Children

Ann Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education by what mechanisms local authorities collect data on the number of children who run away from (a) home

and (b) care; and how many children have run away from (a) home and (b) care in each local authority area in each of the last 30 years. [21424]

Tim Loughton [*holding answer 4 November 2010*]: Local police forces are currently required to share data from the Police National Computer (PNC) on the numbers of missing young people reported to them with the Missing Persons' Bureau in the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA). It is for local authorities to then determine the best ways to work with the police to collate the data on numbers of runaways in their area, whether from home or from care.

It is not known how many children have run away from home or care in each local authority in each of the last 30 years as this information is not collected centrally.

School Food Trust

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what functions with respect to school meals his Department will have responsibility for when the School Food Trust becomes a charity; [23219]

(2) what assets are held by the School Food Trust; and whether these will revert to his Department when the Trust becomes a charity; [23220]

(3) for what reasons he proposes to convert the School Food Trust to a charity; [23221]

(4) under what circumstances the School Food Trust will become a community interest company; and what assessment he has made of the potential effects such a change of status will have for (a) schools and (b) pupils. [23222]

Sarah Teather [*holding answer 11 November 2010*]: The School Food Trust was established as a charity in 2005. From 1 April 2011, it will cease to be an arm's length body, but will continue as a charity. The School Food Trust also plans to set up a community interest company to work alongside the charity.

The Government's review of the School Food Trust, as part of its wider review of arm's length bodies, concluded that schools, local authorities and others would continue to benefit from expert advice about school food, but that this need not come directly from Government. The School Food Trust will therefore continue to have an important role to play in supporting schools and local authorities to meet national nutritional standards for school lunches.

This reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring that pupils can eat healthy, nutritious food. The School Food Trust will continue to work for the benefit of schools and pupils by giving advice, including to government, informed by its expertise and by the practical work it does out in the field.

The Government and the School Food Trust are continuing to work through the practical and legal issues, such as the ownership of assets, in time for its change of status from next April.

The Department for Education will continue to have policy responsibility for the nutritional standards for school food and for the provision of school meals.

Schools

Mr Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many secondary schools in England are (a) community, (b) voluntary-aided, (c) voluntary-controlled, (d) foundation, (e) academy and (f) city technology colleges; and how many schools in each category offer vocational educational courses to 14 and 15 year olds. [22383]

School type	No. of schools with at least one pupil at the end of KS4	No. of schools with entries in vocational qualifications ¹ (including general vocational qualifications ²)	% of schools with entries in vocational qualifications ¹ (including general vocational qualifications ²)	No. of schools with entries in vocational qualifications ¹ (excluding general vocational qualifications ²)	% of schools with entries in vocational qualifications ¹ (excluding general vocational qualifications ²)
Community	1,619	1,613	99.6	1,608	99.3
Voluntary Aided	515	503	97.7	499	96.9
Voluntary Controlled	81	81	100.0	81	100.0
Foundation	743	723	97.3	718	96.6
Academy	123	121	98.4	120	97.6
City Technology College	3	3	100.0	3	100.0

¹ Vocational qualifications include NVQs, BTEC First Certificates and Diplomas, OCR National Awards and Certificates and other vocationally related qualifications at levels 1 and 2.

² General vocational qualifications include vocational GCSE single and double awards and GNVQs.

Schools: Asbestos

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will commission an assessment of the risks from asbestos in schools to (a) children and (b) other occupants; [27283]

(2) what estimate he has made of the (a) extent, (b) type and (c) condition of asbestos present in the fabric of maintained schools; [27284]

(3) what measures he has put in place to identify asbestos in (a) secondary and (b) primary schools during refurbishment work; [27285]

(4) what measures he has put in place to prioritise those schools with the most dangerous asbestos for refurbishment or replacement works; [27294]

(5) what measures he has put in place to remove asbestos when refurbishment takes place in (a) secondary and (b) primary schools; and if he will make a statement. [27295]

Mr Gibb [holding answer 30 November 2010]: The Department has no plans to commission an assessment of the risks from asbestos in schools. The Government Scientific Advisory Committee Working Group on Action to Control Chemicals (WATCH), which considers all aspects of risk from toxic chemicals including asbestos, is currently examining the risks of lung cancer and mesothelioma from low level exposure to asbestos fibres. Their findings will be made known to the recently formed Asbestos in Schools Steering Group chaired by the Department.

On the numbers of maintained schools containing Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs), I refer you to the answer given to me on the 4 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 657W, by the former Minister of State for Schools. This stated that:

“Our best estimate in September 2008 was that around 70% of school buildings contain some ACMs.”

Mr Gibb: The Department does not hold information on the courses offered by secondary schools but does hold information on the qualifications entered. The following table gives the number of secondary schools with pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in each category that were published in the 2009 Achievement and Attainment Tables and the proportion of these schools that had at least one entry in a vocational qualification.

These schools are likely to contain a range of ACMs, e.g. moulded or preformed asbestos in the lagging used as thermal insulation on pipes and boilers; asbestos insulating board used for fire protection, thermal insulation, partitioning and ducts; and asbestos-containing floor tiles and textured coatings. The responsibility to assess the condition of ACMs falls to the duty holder under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006.

Under the Control of Asbestos Regulations, statutory duties are placed on those who are responsible for repair and maintenance of non-domestic premises. In a maintained school, the duty holder is normally the maintaining local authority—where there is delegated funding this duty is often shared with the head teacher. For academies, voluntary aided and foundation schools, the duty holder is the school’s governing body. For independent schools, it is the proprietor, governors or trustees. The Department is working with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and asbestos training providers to produce training for head teachers to make sure they are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities.

A recent questionnaire survey and follow-up work of HSE shows that the majority of local authorities were managing asbestos in their schools. Formal enforcement action in the form of 18 improvement notices and one prohibition notice was taken against 10 local authorities requiring improvements to their asbestos management arrangements. The reports of this work and the letter to local authorities reminding them of their responsibilities under the Control of Asbestos Regulations can be found at:

www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/information.htm#asbestos

It is for the duty holder to assess, with expert advice, the action which needs to be taken when buildings are refurbished, depending on the location of the asbestos materials in relation to the location, nature and extent of the works to be carried out. Removal, encapsulation, repair or management in situ may all be appropriate

actions. Responsibility for prioritisation of specific projects rests with individual schools and local authorities.

Asbestos does not pose a serious risk if it is in good condition and managed in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations. HSE does not recommend the routine removal of asbestos. Its advice remains that, providing that ACMs are maintained in good condition, they can be left in situ and managed until a building reaches the end of its life, at which time ACMs can be removed without risks to building users who would otherwise be exposed to fibres arising from significant disturbance.

Schools: Meat

Mr Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will review levels of meat consumption in schools for the purpose of improving public health. [23134]

Sarah Teather: The Government have no plans to review the levels of meat consumption in schools. School food must meet the nutritional standards.

Pupils need the right balance of food and nutrients to develop and grow. The nutrient-based standards have been designed to make the food offered healthier by increasing the vitamin and mineral content and by decreasing the fat, saturated fat and salt content. Meat is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals, such as iron and zinc.

The regulations which set the standards do not specify that schools must provide meat options or vegetarian options. Schools should make every effort to cater for all pupils' needs in order to provide a popular, viable service that is also compliant with the standards. In doing so, many will want to take account of environmental and health considerations.

Young People: Crime

Mr Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much funding his Department has allocated for youth crime provision in London in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what estimate he made of the amount of such funding allocated in respect of young people aged (a) 12 years and under, (b) between 13 and 17 years and (c) between 18 and 24 years in 2009-10. [24628]

Tim Loughton: For 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 allocated funded for youth crime provision in London is set out as in the following table:

<i>Programme</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>£ Total</i>
Intensive Intervention programme (2 projects)	450,000	450,000	450,000	1,350,000
Challenge and support (11 programmes)	1,100,000	825,000	825,000	2,750,000
				4,100,000

In the same period 13 London boroughs were allocated the following for youth crime provision:

	<i>£</i>
2008-09	65,000
2009-10 ¹	350,000
2010-11 ¹	350,000

¹ This includes funding allocated for Family Intervention (FIPs) and Think Family reforms. FIPs and Think Family reforms are not solely aimed at youth crime.

This funding was allocated from a joint pot from the Home Office, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the then named Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) under the Youth Crime Action Plan to tackle offending by young people aged under 18.

The Ministry of Justice has provided the following amounts to London Youth Offending Teams over the last five years:

	<i>£</i>
2009/10	24,428,567
2008/09	23,572,365
2007/08	21,311,756
2006/07	19,983,897
2005/06	17,118,846

These figures include funding from both the Home Office and the Department but cannot be separated out due to disproportionate cost, and are not broken down by age range.

In addition the Department also allocated £4.1 million in 08-09 and £3 million in 2009-10 to the Youth Justice Board to support Intensive Fostering Pilots.

It is not possible to provide a break down for different age categories of young people beyond the broad distinctions set out above.

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