

**Wednesday
16 July 2014**

**Volume 584
No. 25**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 16 July 2014

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 July 2014

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Saville Inquiry

1. **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): What assessment she has made of the value for money of the Saville inquiry. [904823]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr Andrew Murrison): When the previous Government set up the tribunal in 1998 to investigate the tragic events of 30 January 1972, no one could have anticipated that it would take 12 years to complete and cost more than £191 million. The inquiry produced the definitive account of the tragic events of that day, the value of which is very clear.

David Mowat: I thank the Minister for that answer. One hundred and ninety-one million pounds would have paid for 10,000 nurses for a year or, indeed, transformed a large part of the economy of Northern Ireland. It is clear that the Government completely failed to control the costs. Can the Minister confirm that never again will an inquiry be set up with no attempt whatever to control costs and that the relevant civil servants understand that as well?

Dr Murrison: Notwithstanding my remarks about the value of the inquiry, the Government have been clear that although each case will be considered on its merits, we should indeed resist further costly, open-ended inquiries. I note that the Inquiries Act 2005 will help in that regard.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): May I welcome the Minister to his new position? Does he agree that the taxpayer is still paying for the ongoing costs of the Saville inquiry—as a reply I received from the Secretary of State in the past few weeks made clear—10 years after the last witness left the stand and after the £191 million was expended?

Dr Murrison: Yes, I can only say that the Saville inquiry was set up under the previous Administration, under rules that existed at that time, and that Lord Saville was given free rein—rightly—in his independent inquiry. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, so

many years after this began, the costs are still coming in. Nevertheless, the value of the Saville inquiry is clear, and we need to understand that.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): May I welcome the Minister to his new role? In order to deal with the issues of the past in a more comprehensive way, we obviously require some momentum to take the discussions between the parties in Northern Ireland forward. What role will the Northern Ireland Office play in trying to bring parties back together, when some have walked away from the challenge of dealing with the past in a comprehensive manner?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that a long-term peaceful settlement relies entirely on co-operation between the parties. The Northern Ireland Office has done, and will continue to do, everything in its power to bring the parties together so that we can ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Northern Ireland.

Economy

2. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the outlook for the Northern Ireland economy. [904825]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): Figures released this morning show that the claimant count fell by 900 in June, the 18th consecutive month it has fallen in Northern Ireland. Economic commentators have forecast growth of 2.8% this year—more than many major economies around the world. The Government's long-term economic plan is working in Northern Ireland.

Andrew Selous: Does the Secretary of State agree that in order to attract further inward investment to Northern Ireland, we need to project an image to the world of peace and stability? In that vein, does she further agree that the recent peaceful passing of the twelfth of July celebrations gives us hope for the future and is something we can build on?

Mrs Villiers: I agree with my hon. Friend. The fact that there was a peaceful twelfth of July is an important step forward for Northern Ireland. It has been rare over recent decades that one can say that the twelfth of July weekend has been entirely peaceful. I commend the efforts made by Unionist leaders from a range of parties and the Orange Order—and, indeed, by nationalists as well—to keep the situation calm, despite the distress and upset caused by the Parades Commission determination.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating companies in Northern Ireland that have recently announced major investment? The Moy Park organisation, the Almac corporation and Thompson Aero Seating have invested tens of millions of pounds in the economy, creating hundreds of new jobs?

Mrs Villiers: I will join the hon. Gentleman in that. We have had a hugely successful month for inward investment over June and July. I am sure that everyone

who watched the World cup saw the Moy Park adverts, demonstrating that Moy Park is a world beater. That company alone announced 628 jobs in Dungannon, Craigavon and Ballymena. We have had further good news, with jobs announcements from Alexander Mann Solutions, HeartSine Technologies, Wrightbus, Thales, First Derivatives and, of course, Thompson Aero Seating.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): In balancing the Northern Ireland economy away from its over-reliance on the public sector, what are the prospects for rapid growth in the digital information services sector in the Province?

Mrs Villiers: I think there is great scope for growth in this area. The Digital Derry initiative is one that immediately springs to mind, but I believe that the strength of Northern Ireland's creative industries also opens up great opportunities for success in the digital media world. A number of software companies have had great success in Northern Ireland, which is now ranked by the *Financial Times* as one of the best places in the world for financial services technology investment.

11. [904835] **Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Some four years into this Government, we had the announcement this year of the first pilot enterprise zone in Northern Ireland. When does the Secretary of State believe that we might be able to have further enterprise zones, and is she open to the idea of working with the Irish Government and the Executive to have a cross-border enterprise zone in the north-west?

Mrs Villiers: We are certainly open to discussions with the Irish Government about cross-border initiatives to boost the economy, which could well include enterprise zones. Our report back on the Government's economic pact with the Northern Ireland Executive made it clear that the Treasury is prepared to discuss the possibility, subject to affordability, of additional enterprise zones in Northern Ireland, and I think it would be great if those discussions went forward.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) to his new role and thank the right hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Mr Robathan) for his contribution during his period as a Northern Ireland Minister.

The Secretary of State will be aware of the economic impact that parade-related disorder has had in the past on local shops and businesses in Northern Ireland. Does she therefore agree with me that the leadership shown over the weekend, both by political leaders in all communities and the Orange Order, demonstrates what can be achieved if local leadership is shown at its best in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: I agree, and I think the hon. Gentleman puts the point very well. Sadly over recent years, we have seen a number of instances of public disorder in Northern Ireland, but the weekend shows that that is not inevitable and that if leadership is demonstrated, people on the streets will hear it. As hon. Members have said, it is crucial for Parades Commission determinations to be respected and that we do not have public disorder

because those kinds of incidents cause great damage to Northern Ireland's reputation abroad and make it harder to attract the inward investment we are discussing.

Mr Lewis: The Secretary of State is also aware that unresolved issues around parades will continue to have an economic as well as social cost. Will she therefore indicate how she intends to respond to the First Minister's request for a commission on Ardoyne and wider associated issues, and what she is going to do to strengthen confidence in the downgraded Parades Commission, which she established with undue haste and with fewer resources than its predecessor?

Mrs Villiers: I can assure the shadow Secretary of State that the Parades Commission has not been downgraded. In response to his question about Unionist leaders' proposal for a commission on the situation relating to the Crumlin road in north Belfast, I will meet those leaders in a few days' time to discuss those proposals. I will listen carefully to what they have in mind. It is, of course, important for any way forward to take account of the position of the Parades Commission and to do nothing to undermine its responsibilities.

Security Situation

3. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had about the security situation in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [904826]

4. **Mrs Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had about the security situation in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [904827]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The threat level in Northern Ireland remains severe, with persistent planning and targeting by terrorist groupings. However, action by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and its partners continues to keep the pressure on these terrorist groups, with significant arrests and charges over recent months.

Mr Hanson: Instability in the Northern Ireland security system continues to be fuelled by organised crime and criminal activity. I therefore ask the Secretary of State this question again. Royal Assent for the National Crime Agency was achieved on 13 April 2013, so what steps has she taken since the last Northern Ireland questions to ensure that the NCA operates in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that I have raised this repeatedly with political parties in Northern Ireland. If we are to give the people of Northern Ireland the same protection against organised crime as is currently the case in Great Britain, I believe it essential that the National Crime Agency is given its full powers of operation in Northern Ireland. I am working with Keith Bristow, the Home Secretary and Justice Ministers to do all we can to build a consensus for the introduction of full powers for the National Crime Agency.

Mrs Glindon: Question 4, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The question is grouped, so the hon. Lady need not hold her fire; let us hear it.

Mrs Glindon: I apologise, Mr Speaker.

While this year's parade season has been relatively peaceful, the PSNI is experiencing a budgetary shortfall and does not have the requisite number of officers. What can the Secretary of State do to enable it to fund sufficient police numbers to ensure that there is continued peace and security?

Mrs Villiers: The Government have stepped in, providing an additional £231 million to support the PSNI's efforts in regard to national security matters. That will help across the board, assisting community policing as well. It is, however, of grave concern that the failure of Sinn Féin and the SDLP to agree on welfare reform is having an impact on the budgets of other Departments in the Northern Ireland Executive, and, sadly, that includes the PSNI.

Mr Andrew Robathan (South Leicestershire) (Con): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, let me first commend my right hon. Friend for her excellent work to secure peace and prosperity for all the people of Northern Ireland.

My right hon. Friend may recall that about three weeks ago I visited south Armagh, where is little security and where criminality runs rife despite the PSNI's best efforts. We need the National Crime Agency in south Armagh, and in Northern Ireland as a whole. Will my right hon. Friend please put pressure on the good people of the SDLP, who are opposing that, and on Sinn Féin, which has been subsidised in the past by the very terrorists who are still running the criminality in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: I warmly commend my hon. Friend for all the brilliant work that he did in Northern Ireland. I also warmly welcome his successor as Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison).

I agree that NCA capability in Northern Ireland is crucial. Only recently I had a conversation with Keith Bristow, the head of the NCA, who commented that a major child protection operation had been inhibited in Northern Ireland. The NCA had had to ask the PSNI to carry out work that was being carried out by the NCA everywhere else in the United Kingdom. That put further pressure on PSNI resources, which need not happen.

12. [904836] **Mr Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that close co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána is essential? Does she share my optimism that the leadership of the guards is now more proactive and imaginative when it comes to closer working with its opposite number in the north?

Mrs Villiers: My hon. Friend is right. The working relationship between the Garda and the PSNI is crucial to the combating of both terrorism and cross-border organised crime. As recently as May, the Garda made major arrests in relation to terrorism offences, and in a number of instances plots have been frustrated and

arrests have been made as a result of a working relationship between the Garda and the PSNI that is better than it has ever been before.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State reiterate her commendation of leaders of the north Belfast community, political leaders at all levels, and the Orange institution for having devoted many hours of work to ensuring that the twelfth of July passed peacefully, despite provocation and republican threats of violence? Will she now recognise that this issue is not going to go away, and that she and the Minister need to make every effort to ensure that a solution is found?

Mrs Villiers: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and I repeat my commendation of the efforts that have been made. I know that those efforts were assiduous, and that they involved many conversations with people on the ground. I think that had it not been for the efforts made by the leaders of Unionist political parties, by Members of Parliament such as the right hon. Gentleman, and by the Orange Order itself, the situation on the twelfth of July would have been very different. The determinations of the Parades Commission must always be obeyed, and those who disagree with them must find a peaceful and lawful way in which to express their concern.

Mr Dodds: I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's undertaking to look carefully at the Unionist leaders' proposal for a commission of inquiry, and to consider all practical options to resolve the situation in north Belfast. Does she accept that respect for, and tolerance of, both traditions is at the heart of that? If a shared future is to be meaningful in Northern Ireland, it must mean sharing space as well.

Mrs Villiers: I agree. I believe that what is happening in Northern Ireland illustrates that it is possible to enable loyal order parades to take place peacefully and without problems, often in areas with a predominantly nationalist population. There are many examples of that, but Derry/Londonderry is frequently cited. It is possible to enable people to express their culture in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, and I recognise that that is an important goal in north Belfast.

13. [904837] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): In the light of the recent incident involving two petrol bombs being thrown at Willowfield police station in east Belfast, what steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure local police officers are given sufficient safeguards against extremist acts?

Mrs Villiers: Of course that was a disgraceful attack, as was the shooting attack on a G4S vehicle involved in tagging offenders. PSNI officers subject themselves to risk every day. The terrorist threat continues to be lethal and is predominantly focused on police and prison officers. That is one of the reasons why this Government acted to provide an additional £231 million of funding to help the PSNI fight terrorists and maintain the safety of its officers.

10. [904834] **Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): Can the Secretary of State confirm that an independent arbitration body is absolutely necessary to arbitrate the contentious parades, and will she confirm that the Parades Commission is the law and that those

who want to support law and order must support the Parades Commission rulings, even if they disagree with the detail of a decision?

Mrs Villiers: Yes I can. The Parades Commission is the lawfully constituted authority. Its determinations have the force of law. They must be obeyed and I welcome the huge efforts made over the weekend to ensure the determination in north Belfast was obeyed. I am afraid that I think we always will need some form of body to adjudicate parades where there is no local agreement, but I hope in all cases as much effort as possible is made to try to reach local agreement so there is not a further need for a determination.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Minister—my fourth—the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) to his position, but I confess myself saddened by the Government's decision to downgrade the post from Minister of State. I hope this is not indicative of any diminution in the Government's commitment to the proud people of Northern Ireland. I would also say that those on my Front Bench need be under no duty to emulate that.

While the whole House will pay tribute to outgoing chief constable Matt Baggott—and I hope I speak for everyone—the Secretary of State will shortly be meeting the new chief constable. What are the strategic priorities she will wish to establish with the new chief constable?

Mrs Villiers: I have met the new chief constable on a number of occasions. I commend him and his officers on the work they did over the twelfth of July. I am sure his strategic priorities will continue to be countering the lethal terrorist threat from dissident republicans, keeping Northern Ireland safe and secure from that threat, and also being absolutely serious and determined in providing community policing as close to the community as possible and cracking down on organised criminals in cities in Northern Ireland.

Inward Investment

6. **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): What recent representations she has received on levels of inward investment into Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [904830]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): I regularly discuss inward investment with Northern Ireland Executive Ministers, including at the recent meeting between the Prime Minister and the First and Deputy First Ministers.

Glyn Davies: Some 16,000 new employee jobs were created in Northern Ireland over the last year, the vast majority of them in the private sector. As we see in Wales, so we can see in Northern Ireland that the Government's economic strategies are working well. What plans does my right hon. Friend have for building on this success, particularly through Invest Northern Ireland, to ensure that it continues into the future?

Mrs Villiers: The Government are working closely with the Northern Ireland Executive on economic matters. Following the economic pact we signed last year, we have recently published an update demonstrating

achievements on improved lending to small businesses—that is up 46% on last year—and we have got the enterprise zone set up, and access to finance initiatives from the business bank are also helping to restart the economy in Northern Ireland. Securing 100% assisted area status for Northern Ireland is also hugely helpful to Invest NI in attracting inward investment.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The economic package agreed between the Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Executive is now a year old. It was designed to rebalance the economy. What specific measures in that package have now been implemented that will assist in attracting inward investment, dealing with youth unemployment and rebalancing the economy?

Mrs Villiers: There are some which I just mentioned; the specific inward investment conference attended by the Prime Minister, which prompted 800 new jobs at Convergys and EY; the banking transparency measures, which were a specific ask of the business community—we now have details of lending to small and medium-sized enterprises published for the first time in Northern Ireland; the enterprise zone has been set up; we are pressing ahead with projects from the green investment bank on anaerobic digestion in parts of Northern Ireland; and we are pressing ahead with a UK-Ireland visa system, which means that business people from China and India can visit our two countries with just a single visa, thus encouraging tourism, business links and inward investment.

Shared Education

7. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Minister for Education in the Northern Ireland Executive on shared education. [904831]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr Andrew Murrison): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had a number of discussions with the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and Northern Ireland Minister for Education on this issue. Shared education featured prominently at the recent meeting of the Prime Minister, Secretary of State, First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Through the capital borrowing provisions in the economic pact, the Government have supported a number of initiatives to promote shared education, including the Lisanelly project in Omagh. I look forward to visiting Lisanelly shortly. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. There are very serious matters affecting the people of Northern Ireland, and it would be a mark of respect for the people of Northern Ireland if the questions and the answers could be heard.

Kevin Brennan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I recently met the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland and the Chair of the Education Committee there, and we discussed shared education, among other things. I was listening carefully to what the Minister just said and although I would not expect him to have met the Minister for Education, can he confirm whether the Secretary of State has ever done so?

Dr Murrison: Yes.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to his new position. Clearly, one key issue in Northern Ireland is the future of education, so can he set out his plan for how he is going to encourage the breaking down of the divide in terms of the sectarian side of schooling in Northern Ireland?

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it is important that we move towards shared and integrated education where the parents wish that that should happen. He will know from the pact, and from the update that is to be published shortly, that £100 million of additional borrowing has been made available as part of that pact for shared education and shared housing, both of which will be of help.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): When the Secretary of State meets and has further discussions with the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, will she ask him to expedite the digging of the first sod of the Parkhall integrated college in Antrim as soon as possible, because that new build has been announced for some time, and the staff, pupils and community are anxious for the work to commence right away?

Dr Murrison: Through the noise I think I just about made that out, Mr Speaker. I am sure that *Hansard* will record it accurately and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take note of it for her next meeting with the Minister for Education.

Youth Unemployment

8. **Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): What recent progress the Government have made on reducing youth unemployment levels in Northern Ireland.

[904832]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr Andrew Murrison): Tackling youth unemployment remains a critical issue, but specific measures to address it in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Executive. The Government are reducing the largest structural deficit in UK peacetime history, and that, more than anything, will help deliver a sustainable economic recovery and so directly assist young people to get into employment.

Ms Ritchie: I welcome the new Minister to his position. Almost one in four young people in Northern Ireland are out of work. Many are forced to seek agency jobs on zero-hours contracts, while others are taking the path to emigration because of the downturn in the construction industry. Will the Secretary of State and the Minister have discussions with the Chancellor about the need to reduce VAT on tourism, as such a reduction would provide an opportunity for these young people to remain in Northern Ireland, working in tourism attractions and so on?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that. She will of course have seen today's figures, which show that although youth unemployment in Northern Ireland is 20.4%—that is too high—it has dropped by 2.1% over the quarter. I am sure she will warmly welcome both

that and the drop by 1% to 6.7% in the overall level of unemployment in Northern Ireland—the 18th successive drop in the claimant count. I hope she warmly welcomes that, as right hon. and hon. Members from across the House certainly will.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Young Protestants in Northern Ireland are experiencing great difficulty in seeking employment. Will the Minister confirm the steps that the Government are taking to help those Protestant youths gain worthwhile skills, training and employment?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need to work at school level and to build the number of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland to ensure that the figure to which I have referred, which remains too high—albeit fairly good in comparison with many other countries in Europe—comes down dramatically.

Mr Speaker: The last question relates to the commemoration of the first world war, so I hope that there will be respectful attention.

First World War (Commemorations)

9. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What role her Department is taking in commemorations to mark the centenary of the first world war.

[904833]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr Andrew Murrison): The Northern Ireland Office is committed to assisting in the delivery of the Government's programme for the first world war centenary. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr Donaldson) for his work on the Prime Minister's advisory group. The Department is also co-ordinating closely with the Irish Government on the centenary and the wider decade of commemorations in the island of Ireland.

Andrew Stephenson: Earby town council in my constituency has given the freedom of the town to all world war veterans. Will the Minister join me in welcoming the initiative, and will he encourage local councils across Northern Ireland to consider doing the same?

Dr Murrison: I very much welcome the move of my hon. Friend's local authority in that respect. It is absolutely right. There is great potential over this centenary period for local authorities to mark appropriately the contribution made by local people. That goes for Northern Ireland as it does for the rest of the country.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements

Q1. [904883] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 16 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): 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.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Given the Prime Minister's commitment to equality, will he explain why 75% of his Cabinet are still men?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is being a little bit churlish. The Government before mine had four women Cabinet Ministers and three additional women attending Cabinet. We now have five full members of Cabinet and an additional three attending, so more women are attending. I am of course leading a coalition Government, and when it comes to Conservatives sitting around the Cabinet table, I am proud to say that a third of them are now women.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): Having rightly reaffirmed his confidence in the Transport Secretary, may I urge my right hon. Friend to urge the Transport Secretary to give early priority to the improvement of the railway lines serving East Anglia?

The Prime Minister: I am well aware of this problem and campaigns such as Norwich in 90. I know that my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary, now backed by a larger team of Ministers in the Department for Transport, will give it his urgent attention.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): We have always said that we will support the Government when they do the right thing, so can I join thousands of parents across the country in congratulating the Prime Minister on getting rid of the Education Secretary? Why did he demote him?

The Prime Minister: Before answering the question, I hope that the whole House can come together in this way. My right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young) has served in this House of Commons for over 40 years and will be retiring at the next election, so when it came to replacing an extraordinary politician and someone who has given so much to this country as the Chief Whip, I wanted to find the very best candidate, and I am proud to have done so in the former Education Secretary.

Edward Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman obviously has a very short memory, because this is what he used to say about the former Education Secretary:

"I want to trust"—
the Education Secretary—

"to get on with that job for many years rather than saying... 'I'm now going to shove you over somewhere else.'"

So why did he do it? Is it the shortage of primary school places, the unqualified teachers, or the failure of his free schools?

The Prime Minister: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what the former Education Secretary achieved: a record number of academies, new free schools, standards rising across the country and reforms that will endure. Is it not extraordinary that on the day of a record increase in the numbers in work in our country, the right hon. Gentleman will do anything not to talk about economic recovery, the deficit falling, the economy growing or the numbers in work rising? I am not surprised that he does not want to talk about people in work; his own job looks a bit shaky.

Edward Miliband: I am bound to say that if it has all been such a great success, I still do not know why he has sacked the Education Secretary. Let us talk about the figures today. We have welcomed the fall in unemployment, but his real problem is that this recovery does not benefit most working people, who are working harder for longer for less. There are 7 million people in working families who are paid so little that they are in poverty. Does he think that the economy is working for them?

The Prime Minister: Let me bring the House up to date on the unemployment figures released this morning. We see employment up by 254,000 this quarter, women's employment up, youth employment up and the unemployment count falling by 121,000. We have reached an important milestone, which is that there are more people in work in our country than ever before in our history. We can now say that since this Government came to office there are 1.8 million more people in work. That is a record of which we can be proud.

On an issue that the Labour leader has raised week after week, long-term youth unemployment is now lower than when this Government came to office. Of course, it is disappointing that pay is not rising faster, but let me remind him of what the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies said:

"We've had a great big recession. We had the biggest recession we've had in 100 years; it will be astonishing if household incomes haven't fallen and earnings haven't fallen."

That is what has happened, and we know who is responsible for the great economic recession because, extraordinarily, they are still in their jobs.

Edward Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman is in his fifth year as Prime Minister and all he can do is try to blame someone else. He just does not get it. This week, we saw shocking figures about another group suffering from the cost of living crisis: millions of young people whose earnings are falling faster than everyone else's. One in four are living with their parents because they cannot afford to buy a house or even rent one. Does he honestly think that they are feeling the benefit of the recovery?

The Prime Minister: Of course we want living standards to recover faster and there are two things we need to do to make that happen. First, we need to get more people into work, and we are getting people into work. Secondly, we need to cut spending so that we can cut taxes, which is exactly what we are doing. Yesterday, Labour made the important announcement that it is now its policy to put up taxes on middle-income people. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can now get to his feet and tell us which taxes on which people.

Edward Miliband: I ask the questions and the right hon. Gentleman fails to answer them. The reality is that he has the worst record on living standards of any Prime Minister in history. There is one group—*[Interruption.]* Government Members are shouting "weak". I will tell them what is weak: saying a month ago from that Dispatch Box that he is happy with his team and then sacking part of his team.

One group is feeling the benefit of the recovery. Will the Prime Minister confirm that while average pay is down £1,600 a year since the last election, last year the top 1% took home an extra £15 billion after his millionaires' tax cut?

The Prime Minister: I have to say that I am happy with my team and, looking at the shadow Chancellor, I am pretty happy with the right hon. Gentleman's team too. Let me explain one of the things that was not noticed that happened yesterday. The deputy leader of the Labour party said on the radio, and I want to quote her very precisely:

"I think people on middle incomes should contribute more through their taxes."

That is what she said—[*Interruption.*] They should? There we are. That is their policy. The squeezed middle will be squeezed more. Now the right hon. Gentleman needs to tell us which people will pay which taxes, because on this side of the House we have cut council tax, we have cut petrol duty, we have cut the jobs tax and we have increased the married couple's allowance. Labour would put a tax on your job, on your mortgage, on your home and on your pension, so will he tell us where the middle-income taxes are coming from?

Edward Miliband: This is totally desperate stuff because the Prime Minister has nothing to say about the cost of living crisis. That is the reality, and his reshuffle had nothing to do with the country and everything to do with his party. After four years of this Government, we have a recovery that people cannot feel, a cost of living crisis that people cannot deny, and a Prime Minister whom people cannot believe.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about five years under this Government. We have record numbers in work, the economy growing, record numbers of businesses, record numbers of women in work, our health service is improving, and everyone can see the contrast: in this party, the leader reshuffles the Cabinet; in his party, the shadow Cabinet desperately wants to reshuffle the leader.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Charles Kennedy. [HON. MEMBERS: "More! More!"] I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is delighted to be lauded in such enthusiastic fashion.

Mr Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (LD): It is just like the old days, Mr Speaker.

As the Prime Minister is enjoying a week in which he is making a lot of new best friends, when he gets to the Brussels summit will he give a particularly warm greeting to the man who might yet be his best and certainly his newest friend—President Juncker, who yesterday called for more European reform and warned that applicant states who want to join the European Union face a complex, difficult and drawn-out period of up to, perhaps, five years? As we do not meet before the Scottish referendum, barring a recall, should not the Scots voters bear those words in mind?

The Prime Minister: This is a remarkable moment when the right hon. Gentleman and Jean-Claude Juncker have together said something with which I wholeheartedly agree. It is noticeable in what the right hon. Gentleman said that there would not be new members joining the European Union in the next five years. That is very important in the context of the Scottish referendum debate. But I will take him up on one point. He says we

will not meet again before the Scottish referendum. According to my diary, the House of Commons will be meeting in September.

Q2. [904884] **Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Prime Minister explain why he has now given more knighthoods to men he has sacked than he has given Cabinet jobs to women?

The Prime Minister: It is always interesting to take a lecture from a party that gave a knighthood to Fred Goodwin. That is always a good place to start. I have appointed more women to the Front Bench and more women to our Cabinet on the basis that they deserve those jobs. I want a team that reflects modern Britain and can be everything that modern Britain needs it to be. I make no apology for saying that I think in public life we should recognise public service—people who have worked hard, people who have contributed to our nation and to our Government. I think that is a good thing to do.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): People with autism have specific social and communications needs which can cause distress and misunderstanding, particularly when they are admitted to hospital for routine or emergency treatment. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating Baroness Angela Browning and the National Autistic Society, who tomorrow will launch the new hospital passport for people with autism? That will make a great difference to many people's lives in this country.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this important issue. Baroness Browning has worked very hard on this issue over many years in both Houses, as has my right hon. Friend with the Autism Act 2009, which is making a huge difference to the way that we help young people with these conditions. I join her in making sure that these services are properly put together.

Q3. [904886] **Mr Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Given that recent data show that the gender pay gap is increasing again, can the Prime Minister confirm the excellent news that any woman not receiving equal pay for equal work will now have her salary topped up from Tory party funds?

The Prime Minister: First, it is welcome news that under this Government the pay gap for those below the age of 40 has all but disappeared, so we are making progress. I am happy to confirm that the Leader of the House of Lords will do the same job as her predecessor, will sit at the same place round the Cabinet table as her predecessor, and will receive the same amount of money.

Q4. [904887] **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Charlotte's Helix is part of an international research project seeking to establish a link between the DNA of anorexia nervosa sufferers. This afternoon, the project is coming to Parliament, seeking to obtain DNA samples from former sufferers, including my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Newmark). Will my right hon. Friend commend

the work of Charlotte's Helix and all those who have been brave enough to speak out about their struggles with eating disorders?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue. I am sure that everyone in the House has friends or family who have been affected by the condition and who desperately want to see the help that we provide as a country improve. I commend the bravery of all those who have spoken out about their experience with eating disorders. It is not an easy thing to do. We need to learn more about these conditions so that we can provide the right kind of support. In that context, what the Government are doing about parity of esteem for mental health conditions is also important.

Q5. [904888] **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): We now know for certain that last year taxpayers were robbed of around £1 billion because of the botched, bargain basement fire sale of Royal Mail. Will the Prime Minister now do as the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills has asked and publish the list of those preferential investors? When will somebody be held to account for this right Royal Mail fiasco?

The Prime Minister: I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman. For year after year, Royal Mail lost money and the taxpayer had to back it up. This Government have achieved what no previous Government have achieved, which is a successful privatisation of Royal Mail. The taxpayer has received money from that sale and we now receive the tax on the profits of Royal Mail, rather than the losses and the mismanagement of the Labour years.

Q6. [904889] **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Later this year, North Yorkshire will become the best connected county in terms of superfast broadband, which is hugely helpful for our growing hospitality and tourism industry, which already provides thousands of jobs in my Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency and received a wonderful boost from the recent visit of the Tour de France. Does my right hon. Friend agree that rolling out superfast broadband is a great boost for jobs in all sectors, not just hospitality, and will help to build upon the wonderful economic legacy of the Tour de France?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for the warm welcome that he and people in Harrogate gave me during the stage of the Tour de France, marred only by Mark Cavendish's tragic accident. It was an extraordinary event and showed his constituency and the whole of Yorkshire in their best light. He is quite right about the importance of superfast broadband. We are putting £790 million into superfast broadband access. We have half a million UK premises connected already and around 400,000 new premises are being upgraded every week. Everyone in the House has a duty to get out there to help to advertise what is happening with broadband and to encourage take-up rates.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): It is fundamental, is it not, that the holder of the office of Attorney-General should be fiercely independent, defend the rule of law and be ready to speak legal truth to power. Given the

distinction and respect with which the holder of that office pursued that role, what possessed the Prime Minister to dismiss him yesterday?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is vitally important that the Attorney-General gives unvarnished, independent advice, and is the Government's legal adviser. But I also believe that, in government, when someone has served extremely well for four years, there are often times when it is right to bring on new talent and to make the most of all the talent in one's party. That is the approach that I take as Prime Minister, and I explain that very clearly to my team.

Q7. [904890] **Julian Smith** (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): The number of young people coming off the unemployment register across North Yorkshire is at a record high. Does the Prime Minister agree that today's small business Bill, Conservative-inspired, is yet another boost to the women and men who are creating the jobs to make this happen?

The Prime Minister: Today's Bill will help to make the United Kingdom the most attractive and easy place to start, to finance and to grow a small business. That is our ambition. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the unemployment figures. In his constituency, the claimant count has fallen by 37% in the last year and by 51% since the election, and the long-term youth claimant count is down 60% in the last year. The most important thing is to make sure that young people are getting those opportunities.

Q8. [904891] **Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The last two European Commissioners from the UK have held major portfolios that have been central to our interests. The outgoing Commissioner has been the spokesperson on foreign affairs, and her predecessor held the trade portfolio. What post does the Prime Minister hope to secure for his nominee, Lord Hill, as the consolation prize for his failure to prevent the appointment of Mr Juncker? How does he intend to build support for his objective this time?

The Prime Minister: First, I think this is a good moment for everyone across the House to pay tribute to Cathy Ashton and to the very good work that she has done as the High Representative—effectively the Foreign Minister for Europe—over the past four years in what is a gruelling and exhausting job. We will be discussing these issues tonight; whether there will be a resolution or not I do not know, but there is an opportunity to ensure that Britain has an important portfolio so that we can maximise our influence in the areas that we care about the most. Those are areas to do with our economy, and we will work very hard to do that. Lord Hill has experience in the previous Conservative Government and in this Government, holding as he does the equivalent post that Baroness Ashton held before she became a Commissioner, and he will do a very good job for our country.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): My constituency is very dependent on the oil and gas industry, in which the unemployment rate is currently 0.5%. The Prime Minister will therefore understand

that there is some concern following the reshuffle, given that the Treasury Minister and the Energy Minister responsible for that industry have been changed yet again. Will he take this opportunity to reconfirm the commitment to implement the Wood review, as announced by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in a written statement today?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. North sea oil is absolutely vital and we must ensure that we have the tax regime appropriately in place. Implementing the Wood review is absolutely something that we are committed to. My hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), the new Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, will do an excellent job, and I am delighted to welcome her to the Treasury.

Q9. [904892] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): On 4 August, people from across the country will come together to mark 100 years since the outbreak of the first world war. That is an important opportunity to commemorate a conflict that changed Britain for ever. Will the Prime Minister join us in supporting the 14-18 NOW “Lights Out” campaign and encourage people across the UK to turn out their lights between 10 and 11 pm on 4 August, so that as a country, we can pay a fitting tribute to those who sacrificed themselves and served their country 100 years ago?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise that excellent campaign, which was inspired by Sir Edward Grey’s famous remark on the eve of the war:

“The lamps are going out all over Europe”.

This is a way to get people, particularly young people, engaged with what happened a century ago and to help them to understand the consequences for Europe, for our world and for our society. A lot of events will take place this year to commemorate the first world war appropriately. One of the most significant will take place tomorrow when the Imperial war museum—an absolutely superb museum—reopens to the public after a major investment. I know that my own children enjoy going there, and I am sure that many people will make the most of it.

Q10. [904893] **Mr Stephen O’Brien** (Eddisbury) (Con): Given the north-west’s and Cheshire’s proud history of contributing significantly to our national economy, does my right hon. Friend acknowledge the importance of the rapid and safe development of fracking to boosting the competitiveness of our country and to ensuring that the north-west and Cheshire continue to be a significant contributor to our wealth and welfare?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. It is good news that, in the north-west, we have seen the claimant count in his constituency come down by 40% in the past year. If we want to sustain the increase in employment and sustain our economic growth, however, we should not hold ourselves back from new sources of energy, including unconventional gas. It is striking that the United States has something like 100,000 unconventional gas wells, whereas there are only about 100 in the whole of Europe. We have about three quarters as much unconventional gas across the

EU as there is in America, and I do not want us to miss out on this. It could help to deliver more competitive energy prices, it will help to keep our economy and our industry competitive, and I think it is vital for the future of our country.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Parliament may be about to close down for the summer, but that will not stop people from having babies, getting injured and needing routine and emergency care on the NHS. In the light of the forthcoming report into safety at Stafford hospital by the Care Quality Commission, will the Prime Minister have a word with his friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to ensure that the Treasury funds in full the changes to health services across north Staffordshire that the University hospital in Stoke-on-Trent has to provide—and provide at no extra cost to the health of people in Stoke-on-Trent?

The Prime Minister: I certainly take into account what the hon. Lady says. I am following the situation in Staffordshire very closely and am regularly advised about it. Changes do need to take place, and the inspection that is under way is vital. The important thing is that where we have problems in the health service we should not hide them but properly address them. Today, Bruce Keogh is reporting a year on from his report. He put something like 11 hospitals into special measures. What his report will show is that all 11 of them are making improvements, and that five of them can come out of special measures all together. We need to ensure that we see improvements in all our hospitals.

Q11. [904894] **Anne Marie Morris** (Newton Abbot) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for supporting the west country and particularly for investing in our railway in Dawlish and in our broadband. Does he agree that our recently announced growth deal of £130 million needs to be matched by a fairer funding formula for rural councils such as mine in Devon, which play a vital part in delivering the Government’s long-term economic plan?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We must continue to support transport infrastructure in the south-west. We have the important report on Dawlish coming out, and work is being done right now to ensure that the line is more resilient. We have had the important announcement about the sleeper service to the south-west and announcements about a number of other road and rail schemes. I will look carefully at what she says about fair funding, because it is important that everyone can see that the situations are fair.

Q12. [904895] **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Figures from the Office for Budget Responsibility show that the Government’s new system of student fees will add £15 billion more than expected to Government debt by the end of this Parliament. Have the Government not got it all wrong when it comes to tuition fees?

The Prime Minister: Of course, what we were told by Labour is that no one would take up these loans, no one from poorer backgrounds would go anywhere near university and the numbers going to university would collapse. What has actually happened is that record

numbers are going to universities, including record numbers from low-income backgrounds. Obviously, we need to ensure that this system is cost-efficient, but I am satisfied it is working. The Chancellor announced in his recent Budget that, far from having problems with the funding, we are uncapping the numbers that can go to university. That is the aspiration society we are building in this country.

Q13. [904896] **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): Unemployment has more than halved in my constituency since 2010, and York is poised to benefit from a multi-million pound investment through three agri-science projects as it strives to become a world-class centre of excellence in agriculture. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that clearly demonstrates our commitment to tackling the north-south divide and delivering a northern-led long-term economic plan?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to share with my hon. Friend the fact that the claimant count in his constituency is down by 42% over the past year, and by 61% since the election. [*Interruption.*] I know that Labour does not want to hear about falling unemployment numbers and the numbers of people in work, but the fact is that every single one of these people getting a job is someone having a livelihood and the chance to provide for their family. That is what this is about. He is absolutely right to raise the importance of the agricultural and linked industries in Yorkshire. I am sure that the new Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary will want to make an early visit to her birth place of Yorkshire.

Q14. [904897] **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Specialist spinal cord injury beds are a precious resource for people and patients in desperate need. Why is it therefore that, on the Prime Minister's watch, specialist beds at the Stoke Mandeville spinal injuries centre are being used for people who do not have spinal cord injuries?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, decisions are for individual trusts and individual clinical commissioning groups, but we made two important decisions as a Government: to fund the NHS with extra money, £12.7 billion in this Parliament; and to abolish the bureaucracy that built up under Labour, with 17,000 fewer bureaucrats. Both those decisions were opposed by the Labour party, but we can see 7,000 more doctors, 4,000 more nurses, more patients treated and an NHS that is doing well.

Sir Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): In the recent case of Nicklinson, on the question of assisted dying, Lord Neuberger, President of the Supreme Court, said that Parliament now had the opportunity to consider reforming the law in the knowledge that if Parliament does not act, the courts may. That could raise serious constitutional issues. Does the Prime Minister agree

that, whatever one's views on the subject, the other place is to be commended for having a debate, but what the public really want is a debate in this House?

The Prime Minister: It is good that a debate is being held. I am sure it will be worth while reading the report of the debate that will take place on Friday in the other place. I am very happy for a debate to be held here, and there are opportunities for Back Benchers to secure debates in the Chamber. I am sure that the new Leader of the House of Commons—I am sure we all want to welcome him to his place—will be listening carefully to that request. I myself am not convinced that further steps need to be taken. I worry about legalising euthanasia because people might be pushed into things that they do not actually want for themselves, but by all means let us have the debate.

Fiona O'Donnell (East Lothian) (Lab): Returning to the issue of taxes and the wealthy, when will the Prime Minister keep his promise and publish his tax return?

The Prime Minister: On the subject of taxes and middle income people, when will we get an answer from Labour about what the deputy Leader of the party meant when she said—let me repeat it again for the record:

“I think people on middle incomes should contribute more through their taxes”?

As we go into the summer, there is one party in this House with a big tax problem, and I am looking at it.

Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): Given that poor mental health is the single biggest driver in relation to well-being in this country, will the Prime Minister act on a recommendation from the think-tank CentreForum and tackle the £23 billion cost to business of poorly supporting mental health by signing the Government up to the mindful employer framework? They should tackle those issues by giving a lead as a Government.

The Prime Minister: I will look very carefully at the CentreForum report that the right hon. Gentleman mentions. It is important—he helped to do this in government—that we now have a situation where mental health is given proper parity of esteem through the NHS constitution. We have made good progress in making available more talking therapies for mental health patients in the NHS, and I will look carefully at the report.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman but there is a statement now and, as he will know as an experienced parliamentarian, points of order follow statements. We will hear from him later.

Special Measures Regime

12.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about hospitals in special measures, and the next steps for rolling out a new inspection regime in the social care sector.

One year ago in the wake of the Francis inquiry, Professor Sir Bruce Keogh delivered his report into NHS hospitals with the highest mortality rates. Shockingly, he found that the poor care swept under the carpet for four years at Mid Staffs was not an isolated incident or “local failure” as some have claimed, and he recommended that 11 trusts should be placed into special measures. As a result of the new independent hospital inspection regime introduced by this Government, a further five trusts have been placed into special measures, taking the total to 16 trusts—more than 10% of all acute trusts in the NHS in England. Today I am reporting back to the House on the progress of the first trusts to be put into special measures, and on how the lessons we have learned can be applied to adult social care.

I would like to start by thanking all the front-line staff who have been involved in the special measures process, which can often be traumatic and stressful, with difficult media coverage in local and national newspapers. Thanks to their superb efforts, I am pleased to report today that progress is being made in nearly every trust and that the chief inspector of hospitals has recommended that five should now come out of special measures. Together with Monitor and the TDA—the NHS Trust Development Authority—he will shortly be publishing a report of his findings.

Across all the initial special measures trusts, leadership capability was carefully reviewed, leading to 53 changes at board level. A hundred more doctors and 1,300 more nurses and nursing support staff have been recruited. Every hospital has put in place a comprehensive improvement plan and was partnered with at least one other high-performing hospital, giving access to best practice and hands-on guidance and assistance.

The chief inspector and Monitor have confirmed that Basildon and Thurrock NHS Foundation Trust can leave special measures with no further support. Under Clare Panniker’s inspired leadership, the trust has appointed 241 additional nurses and has been given a “good” rating overall, with its maternity unit the first in the country to be rated “outstanding”. The chief inspector has recommended that George Eliot NHS Trust should also exit special measures, with a new acute medical unit, 31 more doctors and a strong partnership with University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust.

The chief inspector and the TDA have confirmed that Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, where there has been good progress on staffing, nutrition and hydration, should also leave special measures, with some continued support in place. The chief inspector has recommended that East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, with some 238 more nurses and nursing assistants in place, should also exit special measures with some continued support. He has recommended that Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Foundation

Trust should also leave special measures, with some continued support in place, having improved stroke care and employed 166 extra nurses and nursing assistants.

While United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust has made progress, including the employment of 140 additional nursing staff, work remains to be done, and the chief inspector has recommended that it should remain in special measures for a further six months. Turning around a hospital which had significantly high death rates going back to 2006 is a big task, but I know, having visited the trust myself, how much enthusiasm there is to exit special measures.

At North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust, a further 90 nursing staff have been employed, and mortality is now within normal limits. However, the chief inspector has recommended that further progress is still needed, although we are hopeful that this will be completed within six months. At Tameside Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, while staff are reporting a better leadership culture and there have been improvements on some key safety indicators, he recommends a further six months in special measures to ensure that sustainable improvements really are in place.

The chief inspector continues to have strong concerns about Medway NHS Foundation Trust—an organisation with long-standing difficulties, care failures and high mortality rates going back to 2005. He recognises some progress, including the recruitment of 113 nurses, but has concerns about the sustainability of those improvements. He will make his recommendations about Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in the next few days, following their local quality summits.

All the Care Quality Commission’s recommendations will need to be fully considered by Monitor or the TDA before they are confirmed. I pay particular tribute to the work done by the chief inspector and his team from the CQC, and to Monitor and to the TDA, for the extraordinary effort they have put into making the improvements outlined above.

However, the responsibility for safe and compassionate care goes far beyond hospitals. Hundreds of thousands of people—some of the most elderly and vulnerable in our society—receive care in their own homes or in residential and nursing homes. Yet in recent years a member of the public, Jane Worroll, discovered from a secret camera that her mother was being systematically abused in Ash Court care home in London. Another secret camera filmed a resident being slapped and mocked at the Old Deanery home in Essex earlier this year. Perhaps most shocking of all was, in the words of the west Sussex coroner, the “institutionalised abuse” handed out to the residents of the Orchid View care home in Copthorne, where five people were found to have died as a result of poor care. The long list of failings included residents being left in soiled sheets, call bells ignored or left out of reach, and medications mismanaged.

Every older person has a right to be treated with dignity and respect in the way we would all wish for our own parents and grandparents. This Government are determined to see demanding standards and tough enforcement apply as much outside hospitals as inside.

Inexplicably, the previous Government scrapped expert-led inspections of adult social care organisations—as they did for hospitals. The same individuals, therefore,

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

might have been inspecting a large teaching hospital and a small care home in the same week without any opportunity to develop the detailed expertise necessary to make important judgments.

Today I can confirm that we are bringing back expert-led inspections for adult social care, and I am encouraged that the new chief inspector of social care, Andrea Sutcliffe, has announced the toughest ever enforcement regime, to ensure that ongoing abuse and neglect in residential care homes and domiciliary care services is stamped out once and for all.

Alongside the new programme of rigorous and independent inspections, the CQC is being given the power to produce ratings of care providers that will provide a fuller picture of the quality of care than mere compliance with minimum standards. The first ratings will be published in October.

New fundamental standards of care will also be introduced, which will allow the CQC to prosecute those responsible for unacceptable care. In addition, we are introducing safeguards that will allow the CQC to remove and bar individual directors.

I can announce today that once in special measures, care services will be given six months to shape up or action will be taken that will lead to them closing down. This regime will start next April. From then, any care service rated as “inadequate” under the new ratings system will be required to improve within a time-limited period. The CQC will then take action to close down any services that do not meet the standards that people have a right to expect.

My Department and the CQC will work with the sector on the details of that framework, including what support can be given to failing providers and the timing of any closures. In particular, the CQC will work with people using services, their carers and their families to ensure that no one suffers as a result of any service closing down.

We are taking these steps because we have a moral duty to our most vulnerable people to ensure that they receive the best possible care and that they are treated with compassion, dignity and respect. We also owe it to those many excellent providers who deliver good care every day and need proper recognition.

When this Government took the tough decision to confront the reality of poor care within the NHS, people said we were running down the NHS and its dedicated staff. But we refused to accept a status quo that tolerated poor standards, betrayed NHS values and, most of all, betrayed hard-working staff who have given their lives to the care of others.

As a result, we are finally turning around performance in failing hospitals—something we are today extending to social care. Much remains to be done, but after a traumatic moment in its history, both the NHS and the social care systems have faced the truth, confronted the past, and can now face the future with confidence.

I commend this statement to the House.

12.43 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): Anyone who supports the NHS must always be prepared to shine a light on its failings so that it can face up to them and improve. Therefore, I welcome much of what the Secretary of

State has said today, and I join him in thanking Sir Mike Richards and Sir Bruce Keogh. Their work builds on foundations laid by the previous Government, and I do not think the Secretary of State helps his case today by continuing to make assertions not supported by the facts. Let me once again gently remind him of the broader context.

It was following care failures in the 1980s and 1990s that independent regulation of the NHS was introduced for the first time by the previous Government. It was that independent regulator that, as Sir Bruce Keogh said, helped reduce mortality in all NHS hospitals over the past decade and then uncovered problems at Mid Staffs.

The Secretary of State was right to say that Mid Staffs needed to be a moment of change for the NHS. The central lesson of the first Francis report, which I commissioned, was that staffing levels were critical to safe care. The big question that arises is for this Government to answer: why, following that report, did they fail to learn the lesson and allow staffing to fall across the NHS in the first three years of this Parliament? Nurse numbers were cut by almost 6,000 in the three years between July 2010 and July 2013, but the cuts fell particularly hard on some of the 11 trusts that we are considering today. North Cumbria cut 148 nursing posts, United Lincolnshire cut 179 and Basildon cut 345. When the Health Secretary was forced to put those trusts into special measures, it was because they were getting worse on his watch.

The Health Secretary mentioned Basildon—like him, I congratulate the trust and its staff on its improvement—but I left a clear warning in place about Basildon in 2010, following a statement I made to the House. Why on earth was it allowed to cut so many staff in the following three years when Francis had already warned of the dangers of doing so? I have an answer to a parliamentary question that shows that Ministers did not hold a single meeting about Basildon up to its being placed in special measures, presumably because they were distracted with their reorganisation. Will the Health Secretary now admit that it was an error to cut so many nursing staff, and will he today accept the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommendations on safe staffing levels?

Let me turn to the special measures regime. We welcome the improvements at some of the 11 hospitals and pay tribute to the staff, but it is a concern that four are showing only limited signs of improvement. One trust, Medway, has barely shown any, but how can that be after a year in special measures? Does it not raise questions about whether the regime is providing enough support to improve? A CQC inspection published last week found a catalogue of concerns at Medway—patients on trolleys overnight without appropriate nursing assessment, medication given without appropriate identification of patients, and insufficient nursing levels with an over-reliance on agency staff. The Secretary of State claims that all the problems are long-standing ones, but the CQC found that happening right now. The trust has been in special measures for one year. How can there have been no improvement, what is he doing to help Medway to improve, and given its worrying lack of progress, will he report back to the House at the first opportunity?

There are also questions about the inspection regime. Last week, it was revealed that in 2012 the CQC employed as inspectors 134 applicants who had failed competency tests, of whom 121 are still in place. Again, how was that allowed to happen? Is the Health Secretary confident in the ability of those inspectors, and if not, what is he doing about it?

Three of Cumbria's four largest hospitals are in special measures. General practitioners are under severe pressure, and my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) relayed their warnings to the House yesterday. Is there not a much wider failure in the health economy, as he warned, and with an overly hospital-focused inspection programme, is there not a risk that wider problems in the health economy are being missed? Is it not the case that hospitals are often dealing with pressures and problems not of their own making—but due to cuts to primary care, social care or mental health—and to be truly effective, should not the Health Secretary's inspection regime take a much wider view of the whole health economy?

That brings me to social care, about which the Health Secretary is right to say that we have seen appalling failures in recent years at Winterbourne View, Orchid View and Oban Court. We welcome the extension of the special measures regime to care homes, but I must say that it sounds like a U-turn. Only recently, he legislated to remove CQC's role in assessing whether councils commission care effectively. Is he conceding that that was a mistake, and does he accept that it must be reversed if we are to have truly effective care inspection?

Local authority commissioning can be the root cause of care failures, but so can the impossible budget cuts that many providers now have to absorb. Is that not the real reason why we have such problems in our malnourished social care system today? New House of Commons Library analysis—we are publishing it today—shows that £3.7 billion has been cut from adult social care since 2009-10. That is not sustainable. How does the Health Secretary think that older and disabled people will ever get the standards of care to which he aspires with cuts on this scale?

The truth is that the collapse of social care is in danger of dragging down hospitals, which are becoming dangerously full of older people and struggling to function. The Health Secretary will not like to admit it, but in the year to the day since he stood at the Dispatch Box and made his first statement on the Keogh report, hospital accident and emergency departments have missed his own lowered A and E target in every single one of those 52 weeks.

Does that not tell us more clearly than anything that it is not just a small number of trusts that have got worse on his watch, but the whole NHS? The cancer treatment target has been missed for the first time ever, it is harder to see a GP, and waiting lists have hit a six-year high. He does not just need a plan for some trusts; he urgently needs a credible plan to get the whole NHS back on track.

Mr Hunt: I had hoped for a little more consensus on the issue of dealing with poor care. I am afraid that what we had from the right hon. Gentleman was a set-piece speech. However, let me go through the points that he raised.

First, the right hon. Gentleman spoke about nursing numbers. Let us look at the number of nurses since the Government took office. We have 6,200 more nurses on our wards than when he was Secretary of State for Health. Why is that? It is because we took the difficult decision, which he opposed every step of the way, to get rid of the bureaucracy, the primary care trusts and the strategic health authorities—19,000 administrators—so that we could afford more nurses, more doctors, more paramedics and more front-line staff. It is time that he admitted that he was wrong to oppose those important reforms.

The right hon. Gentleman then talked about trusts missing A and E targets. Despite the fact that we are doing better on A and E than he did as Health Secretary, he has missed the point about targets. It was an obsession with targets under Labour that led to the problems in Mid Staffs and many of the trusts that are in special measures today. Let us just take one example. [*Interruption.*] The Opposition should listen to this example because it provides an important lesson about targets that the Labour party has still not learned. Buckinghamshire had a terrible tragedy in 2004 and 2005, when more than 30 pensioners died in a clostridium difficile outbreak. Why did that happen? The independent report said that the trust was too focused on Government targets.

That is the dividing line. The Opposition want an NHS that is obsessed with targets. The Government recognise that targets matter, but also that treating people with dignity, respect and compassionate care matters. Is it not extraordinary that the party that founded the NHS has got itself into a position where it does not care how people are treated in the NHS?

The right hon. Gentleman talked about social care. If he wants more funding for social care, why has he called for the better care fund to be halted, when it will put an extra £1.9 billion at the disposal of the people who commission adult social care?

Let us look at some of the examples that the right hon. Gentleman raised. He talked about Basildon. When he was Health Secretary, the CQC sat on a report about that trust for six months that talked about bloodstains on the carpets, blood on the floors and vital safety measures being ignored. When the reason why the report was not published for so long was looked into, people at the CQC said that they were afraid to publish something that could embarrass the Government of the day. Is it not time that he admitted that the way the Labour Government ran the CQC was wrong? We now have an independent inspections regime, which is a big step forward.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about Cumbria. There are real issues in some of the hospitals in Cumbria. However, when Labour was in office, somebody in one of those hospitals—North Cumbria—was paid £3.6 million because they were disabled for life. Should that not have been a warning sign? There were also issues at Morecambe Bay involving children.

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): What are you doing?

Mr Hunt: What are we doing? We are doing what I set out in the statement. We are putting more nurses and doctors into hospitals that are in special measures. We are turning around the failing hospitals that Labour swept under the carpet.

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

Even if Labour has not understood the lessons of Mid Staffs, the NHS has. We have 6,000 more nurses; five hospitals are out of special measures; there is record public confidence in safe and compassionate care; and, from today, we have new plans to stamp out poor care in adult social care. When everyone in the NHS is so keen for those plans to work, is it not time that Labour ended its denial about the past and backed them as well?

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on bringing back an expert-led inspection regime for adult social care. I ask him to learn from the experience with schools in Birmingham five, six or seven years ago, which managed to bamboozle Ofsted by planning for the inspections. I ask him to ensure that a good proportion of the inspections under the new regime have no notice whatsoever.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend, as ever on health issues, makes an extremely important contribution. She is right that we drew a lot of inspiration from the Ofsted regime, which is clear, transparent and easy for the public to understand. She is right that snap inspections are importation. I reassure her that the CQC has the power to perform snap inspections. It has already used that power and will continue to do so.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is a tribute to the new leadership of Professor Eileen Fairhurst, the chair of the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, the other senior clinicians and managers, and the vast majority of staff at the trust, who are of a high quality, that the trust has been able to turn around and get out of special measures? Does he also accept that, as Professor Sir Bruce Keogh makes clear—these are my words, not his—it is essential that the trust does not take its foot off the gas, but continues the process of change and, above all, cultural change in the way that patients are treated? Lastly, although the additional nurses are welcome, will he say something about the implications for the future funding of the trust?

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman makes some important points. I will start with the point that provides a broader lesson for the NHS. Not taking our foot off the gas is really important. This is the start of a very long journey. I said last year that it would take about three years to turn around a hospital where the wrong culture has become entrenched.

I pay tribute to the leadership at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust. The CQC report said that the staff on the front line now feel more supported, more empowered to take decisions and more able to raise concerns. If there is one thing that we have learned, it is that successful hospitals make it easy for their staff to speak out and support them in speaking out. The hospitals with problems are the ones where people feel bullied and intimidated when they speak out. I am delighted with the progress that has been made.

In respect of finances, this is a challenging time for finances across the NHS. I simply say that, as I am sure the leadership of the right hon. Gentleman's trust recognise,

the most expensive thing of all is delivering poor care. The most important way of saving money is ensuring that the care that is delivered is safe.

Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I very much welcome the changes the Secretary of State has announced on social care inspections. However, standards and enforcement alone are not sufficient. Does he agree that we need to look at the support that is provided to organisations so that they can change before they get to a point of crisis? If so, will he look at the work of My Home Life, which runs programmes to transform the lives of people in care homes and improve their quality of life by working with staff in a different way? I commend that work and hope that he looks at it.

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I would like to see a lot more innovation. Even in the best care homes, which deliver good care by today's standards, there is room for much more innovation and imagination in seeing how we can make people's last years ones that they really enjoy. I have seen some amazing dementia care homes that break the mould. I am very happy to look at the work of that organisation. I am sure that there is a lot we can all learn.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State said that 16 trusts are in special measures, but he mentioned only 11 of them. As he knows, Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust includes King George hospital in my constituency. Will he take this opportunity to explain why he has not said anything about that trust? Is it because the plans to close the A and E this year or next year are in total disarray, but he does not want to admit it publicly? Will he take this opportunity to clarify—yes or no—whether it is still his intention that King George hospital's accident and emergency will close?

Mr Hunt: First, let me reassure the hon. Gentleman on the last point. The trust has made it absolutely clear that the change in A and E will not happen until it is safe. It is very unlikely that it will happen in the near or medium term. The reason I did not mention his trust is that the statement was about the 11 trusts that were put into special measures exactly a year ago and his trust was not put into special measures until just before Christmas. It, too, is making progress. It has employed 31 additional nurses, it has an excellent chief nurse, whom I have met on a number of occasions, it has had a new chief executive since April and there is an increase in patient satisfaction. However, there is still a long way to go because it is a very challenged trust with some deep-seated problems. We need to support it at every step of the way.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Today's statement and the appointment of the chief inspector of hospitals arise from the Francis report on Mid Staffs in my constituency. I am sure my right hon. Friend acknowledges the great improvements that have been made at Mid Staffs thanks to the hard work of staff and others, but he will also acknowledge that the situation remains fragile. Will he ensure that both Stafford and the University Hospital of North Staffordshire are given

the full support they need to come together and implement the recommendations of the trust special administrators in full, as a minimum?

Mr Hunt: I pay tribute to the staff in Stafford hospital. I also make the point that, even through the four years when those terrible examples of care happened in the hospital, much excellent care was happening, too, and the hospital had dedicated and hard-working staff. This has probably been tougher for them than for anyone else in the whole NHS. I thank my hon. Friend for the way in which he has campaigned for his local hospital. No one could have done more for their local services. I agree with him that we must implement the very detailed recommendations of the TSAs quickly and in full, and ensure that we give every bit of support necessary to both Stafford and UHNS to ensure that that merger works.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Health Secretary talked about denial of the past, but that was a bit rich given that Conservative Ministers gave Jimmy Savile a managerial post at Broadmoor. He wants to think about that a bit more.

In view of the disgraceful care failures the Health Secretary detailed, I find it surprising that he relies on inspection to raise standards and ignores the obvious impact of cuts of £3.7 billion in social care budgets. Does he not see that inspection will not fix the parlous state of social care?

Mr Hunt: I am afraid that that is the difference between Government and Opposition Members. The hon. Lady says that there was denial over Jimmy Savile, but I stood at this Dispatch Box and apologised to relatives and members of the public for the mistakes relating to Jimmy Savile. I do not call that denial; I call it facing up to the past.

Of course, inspection is not the only answer, but the reason it was so wrong to abolish the expert-led inspections we used to have in social care is that the first step, if we are trying to improve standards, is at least to know where the problems are. Until we have those expert-led inspections, we will not know that. The next step is to work out how to solve the problems. We will be doing both.

Mr Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): The Queen Elizabeth hospital in King's Lynn serves my constituency and that of the Secretary of State's deputy, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). Will the Secretary of State pay tribute to the superb acting chief executive, Manjit Ohrai, and the former acting chairman, David Dean, who have done a sterling job, along with the hard-working staff, on the hospital's comprehensive improvement plan? When will that hospital come out of special measures, and will he pay tribute to the excellent work that has been done in the past few months?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do so. The hospital has recruited 95 more nurses and nursing support staff since last July. It has appointed a director of nursing and a medical director and lead for patient safety, which strengthens clinical leadership. Some very important changes have been made, and I pay tribute to the

hospital's leadership for making that possible. I hope my hon. Friend understands that, under the new system we have set up, it is not for the Secretary of State or any Minister to say when a trust is ready to come out of special measures. We have deliberately given that judgment to an independent chief inspector, so that no one who has a vested interest or a hope that a hospital will come out of special measures, and no one who is involved in turning around a trust, is responsible for that important independent judgment. However, that means that, when hospitals come out of special measures, people can have confidence that the judgment has been correctly made.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): This is an important statement, but it is regrettable that the Health Secretary is implying that the care failures were all the fault of the previous Government. Will he confirm that Sir Bruce Keogh, who gave evidence to the Select Committee on Health yesterday, and not the Secretary of State, decided which hospitals would be placed in special measures? I understand that Sir Bruce's decision was based on those hospitals being outliers for two consecutive years. According to my maths, that means that the failures described by the Secretary of State occurred on this Government's watch. If he is apologising and feeling contrite, would he like to own up to that failure?

Mr Hunt: The examples of poor care I gave happened under this Government. I am therefore being absolutely clear that failures in care happened under both the previous Government and this one. The difference is that this Government are doing something about it. We are taking action and taking the difficult steps to get those trusts out of special measures. The public are beginning to have confidence that, when there are problems, they are not being swept under the carpet but being dealt with.

Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con): Bad care is unacceptable, but what turns bad care toxic is covering it up and denying that it is happening. I am pleased that we are beginning to get a consensus across the House that transparency and unearthing problems is the beginning of solving them. On that note, will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State work on a cross-party basis with the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and the Labour party on Wales, which was also targeted by Bruce Keogh's expertise. He has suggested that it would be sensible to have a Keogh-style investigation in Wales, not only because of mortality statistics and diagnostic waiting times, but because tales coming to me and the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) are raising the alarm. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House who are worried about patients in Wales to urge such an investigation there, because the investigation here unearthed problems.

Mr Hunt: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. It is an absolute tragedy for people who use the NHS in Wales and Welsh NHS workers that they are not getting the support that people in England get to deal with poor care. For some reason, the Labour Administration in Wales believe that it would be incredibly embarrassing to find problems, but that is what hospitals and hospital staff are crying out for. The staff did not go into those jobs to deliver poor care. They want the support to

[*Mr Jeremy Hunt*]

deliver the best care. It is time that Labour in Wales understood that and got the support of Labour in England to do so.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that the local MPs covering Tameside hospital have never pulled their punches in calling for the need to improve our local hospital. He may recall that we publicly called for the previous leadership of our hospital to be removed even before the Keogh review process began. Speaking on behalf of my hon. Friend the Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who sits on the Opposition Front Bench, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (David Heyes), we are disappointed that Tameside remains in special measures, but we believe that progress has been made, particularly in A and E and with regard to mortality rates. We believe that the new management team, who have brought about those changes, deserve our support. We will never accept anything but the very best care in Tameside, and we agree that there is more to do, but we believe we are on a journey of improvement and that our hospital is in a different place from where it was 12 months ago.

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the tone of his comments and totally agree with his sentiments. Tameside has recruited 70 new nurses and nursing staff. To take one important indicator—it is only one—the number of falls has decreased by 18%. The staff definitely feel more supported by the management. However, he is right that this is a long process—the trust has been troubled for many years—and we are absolutely determined to back the staff and get them over the line.

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Mortality rates at Medway are not as elevated as they were in 2005, but does the Secretary of State believe that the astonishingly well paid interim managers have made any sustainable improvements, and will he expand on how University Hospitals Birmingham will help us to drive improvements at Medway?

Mr Hunt: To be frank with my hon. Friend, the situation at Medway is still troubling. It has made some improvements to maternity services and has about 100 more nurses, and the dementia unit has made progress, but we have not had the stability of management and leadership that will be necessary to sustain improvement. It always takes a very long time to make such improvements. We will therefore work hard to do that. I hope that the partnership with UHB will be a part of that change, because Julie Moore is one of the best chief executives we have in the NHS. I will work closely with my hon. Friend, because I know he takes a great interest, to ensure that we get the lasting changes we need at Medway.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Sir Bruce Keogh focused on the A and E at Royal Blackburn, which I have had the privilege of visiting. However, Hyndburn faces significant NHS cuts, such as cuts to the walk-in centre, which 36,000 people have been through; cuts to the NHS GP practice in Accrington Victoria; and cuts to personal medical services GP contracts, which GPs

are deeply concerned about, and which will lead to a reduction in hours. GPs tell me that that will impact on A and E. Is the shadow Secretary of State right to say that we should look not only at hospitals, but at the broader picture, if we are not to neglect patients and let them down?

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman is worried about cuts, perhaps he might talk to the shadow Secretary of State and ask him why he said it was irresponsible for us to increase the NHS budget as we did.

On the particular issue the hon. Gentleman raises, I actually agree with the shadow Secretary of State. It is not always possible to solve these problems simply by reference to the institution. Sometimes we have to look at the broader health economy. That is particularly true of A and E, but it is true for many other parts of the NHS too. Where there is a broader health economy issue we must look at that as well, but this process means that Ministers are held to account for finding a solution, whatever that solution is.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in his tribute to the front-line and managerial staff at North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust. My constituents will particularly welcome the increase in staffing levels and the improvements in the stroke unit, which has been a particular concern. He will be aware of recent public criticism of the hospital trust by North Lincolnshire clinical commissioning group. Can he assure my constituents that the continuing help and support will focus on the aspects of its criticism?

Mr Hunt: That certainly needs to happen. I visited my hon. Friend's trust and saw a knee operation. I talked to the staff about the special measures regime, and they said that they thought important changes were happening, so I was delighted too when they came out of special measures. We will certainly give all the support they need, and I thank him for the support he is giving his local hospital.

David Heyes (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that possibly the single most important factor in turning these hospitals around is the quality of the leadership? He has referred already to Tameside hospital, where the report talks of the staff reporting a better leadership culture. This hospital has suffered for far too long from inadequate leadership. I am confident that good leadership is in place now. The change in the hospital is palpable. I am confident that, given a fair wind, it can be out of special measures within the six months referred to, despite the severe underfunding with which the hospital management is grappling daily.

Mr Hunt: Funding pressures are everywhere in the NHS, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments that this is largely about leadership. As well as this work, we are working with Sir Stuart Rose to try to understand what we can better do to sustain and support the highest quality leadership. We have some great leaders in the NHS, but we probably do not have enough of them. I think there has been an improvement at Tameside. I strongly welcome that and we will certainly be supporting the leadership and the staff in that hospital every step of the way.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. I, too, congratulate Clare Panniker on her inspirational leadership at Basildon hospital. She informs me that rather than cutting 345 nurses between 2010 and 2013, there were 1,908 in 2010, 2,000 in 2013 and that that number is now up by 241. Does he agree that to tackle problems in the NHS we need honesty and accuracy when discussing these issues?

Mr Hunt: We do. I think it is time that those on the Opposition Front Bench, in particular, recognised that they were wrong to oppose so bitterly the move to get rid of 19,000 administrators in the NHS, so that we can afford 7,000 more doctors and 4,000 more nurses across the whole NHS. That has made a huge difference to the statement we are making today.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The Secretary of State is right to say that abuse should never be tolerated, but does he not also accept that many of the problems in residential care for the elderly stem from a system that is trying to make profits out of the running of homes that are grossly underfunded because of the cuts his Government have imposed, and which, despite having some excellent staff who do their best, rely largely on untrained and underpaid staff? When is he going to tackle the real problems at the heart of the system, as well as announcing inspection regimes?

Mr Hunt: I do not accept that all profit-making organisations are going to deliver poor care. There are some excellent ones and some bad ones. Poor care is poor care wherever it exists. The hon. Lady is right to say that we need to value more the staff who work in residential care homes and domiciliary care services. They do a fantastic job that is often not well paid. The best thing we can do for them is to make sure that, where they are in an organisation that delivers poor care, we shout about it and talk about it, so that people find out about it and something gets done.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): More nursing staff and a rigorous focus on care for the person, as well as an improved inspections regime, are very welcome, but does the Secretary of State agree that we also need to focus on sharing best practice and innovative approaches to care, such as those being pioneered at the Association for Dementia Studies at the university of Worcester?

Mr Hunt: We absolutely do need to do that. Dementia care is an area where there needs to be lots more work and innovation. There is huge variation and even some very caring places could try new ideas. There are some very interesting ideas about dementia care in Holland, too. I absolutely welcome that work.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State think that standards could be improved further by having minimum levels of staffing in care homes, and does he think that more can and should be done to improve pay and rewards for care workers?

Mr Hunt: We have recommended levels of staffing, but in the NHS we have decided not to have minimum levels of staffing. We were worried that that would be seen as a hurdle where, once achieved, nothing more would need to be done about staffing levels. The real issue about staffing levels and mandating numbers from

the centre is that care needs change on a daily basis depending on how complex the needs are of the patients in a particular ward or home. That is why it is difficult to do it from the centre. We want to make sure that everywhere has the right numbers of staff. That is why I hope the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that we have so many more nurses.

Dame Angela Watkinson (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust is working really hard to get out of special measures. We have a new chief executive and a new chairman who are paying particular attention to the recruitment of nurses and improving the efficiency of the appointment system. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Barking, Havering and Redbridge Trust on improving the level of patient satisfaction by four points?

Mr Hunt: I am very happy to do that, and I pay tribute to the leadership of the trust. There is a new chief executive and, as I have said, I have met the chief nurse. It is a very large trust with two big hospital sites. There are some very big challenges to tackle, but they are making important progress, and, like my hon. Friend, I am keen to get them out of special measures as soon as we can.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Having read the Care Quality Commission annual report and met the CQC, and seen in the report that in Stoke-on-Trent more than 20% of care homes have not been fit for purpose for a period of more than three and four quarters, may I welcome the inspection regime of care homes? Training and enforcement will be important.

May I refer back to the comments made by the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) in respect of Mid Staffordshire Trust and Stafford hospital, and to previous meetings we have had with the Secretary of State, his colleague in the House of Lords and the Prime Minister and say that, between now and September, we need to know categorically from the Treasury whether the Government are going to fund in full what the University Hospital of North Staffordshire trust says it will cost to run the new configured hospital services across the whole of north Staffordshire? Only when that happens can the Government say that they have solved the issues relating to Mid Staffordshire.

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her support for the new special measures inspection regime for care homes. With respect to the merger of UHNS and Mid Staffs, we will make sure that the funding is available that is necessary for that merger to happen. Money is not the issue. The issue is doing what the TSA asked to be done quickly and in full, and making sure that we have the right leadership across both hospitals on a long-term sustainable basis. I do not think it is about money; it is about taking rapid action to make sure there are stable services and that there is continuity of care.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the staff at George Eliot hospital on their hard work in the past year and on the excellent result they achieved in the CQC review? Does he acknowledge that we need to do more at

[Mr Marcus Jones]

George Eliot to keep that improvement going and agree that we have now built a very strong platform on which to build the future of George Eliot as an important district general hospital in my constituency?

Mr Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend on both points. We have seen 31 more doctors there since special measures, 52 more nurses, a new acute medical admissions unit and better flow throughout the hospital, reducing the number of moves that patients make between wards during their stay, so lots has been done. When I did a stint in the A and E department at George Eliot, I was very well looked after by the nurses there, but they told me how bad the IT systems were—I think they said there were 16 different IT systems in the hospital—and how they were constantly filling out new forms. I therefore hope that the partnership with University Hospitals Birmingham, which has one of the best hospital IT systems in the country—a fantastic system, developed by the trust itself—will mean that George Eliot can move to having really good IT, so that nurses have more time with patients, which is what they want.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State spoke earlier about the need to value staff who work in residential homes. I presume he meant by that people who care for vulnerable, elderly and disabled people in their own homes as well. I completely agree with that, and he knows that we have discussed many times in the House issues such as the 15-minute time slots and the lack of reimbursement for the travel costs that people who care for elderly or disabled people have to bear. Does he agree, therefore, that unless we address issues such as the pay and conditions of staff, whether in residential homes or in people's own homes, we will struggle to recruit and retain the very best staff, whom we desperately need to look after our vulnerable people?

Mr Hunt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to value staff who work in the social care sector much, much better. I think they do a fantastic and very difficult job for what is not high pay at all, so I recognise that issue. I also agree with his concern about 15-minute slots. I find it hard to believe that anyone can really do everything they need to when visiting someone who is frail or vulnerable in their own home in just a 15-minute slot. The new inspection regime will look at that and if it is unsatisfactory, it will say so.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am very keen to accommodate the interest of colleagues who are still waiting to question the Secretary of State. I should just remind the House that we have quite a substantial load of business today, and I know that the main debate is very heavily subscribed, so if I am to accommodate all remaining colleagues, there is a premium upon brevity—a seminar in which I think can most appropriately be conducted by a member of the Procedure Committee. I call Mr David Nuttall.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The families of elderly people in care are often those best placed to spot the early warning signs of poor care. To what extent will reports from families be used to determine and prioritise where inspections take place?

Mr Hunt: Such reports will be used. Members of the public will be involved in the inspection regime and the way that care homes respond to complaints and concerns raised by families will be an important part of what the new chief inspector looks at.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): We all hope that the special measures regime speeds up the improvements that are needed in Morecambe Bay hospitals, but does the Secretary of State accept that the turmoil that those hospitals have been in for years now will never properly end until the Government recognise that the trust simply cannot deliver services with the same level of funding, given the almost unique challenges of rural isolation, severe deprivation and health need in the area?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the work he has done with James Titcombe on the tragedy that happened at Morecambe Bay. I think there are particular issues in that trust owing to the fact that it is on two sites that take a long time to travel between geographically. The point of the new regime is to ensure that those issues get surfaced and that Ministers and the system have to address them. I hope that that is what will happen.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): We await the report from Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust with interest. Improvements have been made there, certainly in staffing levels, with the number of nursing staff rising significantly since the hospital trust went into special measures. However, one of the impediments to change at the trust is the terrible legacy of the private finance initiative, which is taking up 15% to 20% of the trust's annual budget—something like £45 million. Is there anything more we can do to assist trusts in special measures that have a crippling legacy of PFI?

Mr Hunt: That is certainly something we keep under constant review, because it is a particular issue in some trusts. I would like to pay tribute to the progress made in Sherwood Forest trust—and in Newark hospital, which I know my hon. Friend has campaigned for—and to mention that it has an excellent chief executive, who has done a very good job in challenging circumstances.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I would like to pay tribute to the staff team at Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals Trust for the progress they have made, which has resulted in the trust moving out of special measures, but there is still much more to do. How will the Secretary of State ensure that the funding challenges faced by the local health service do not get in the way of making the further progress that is necessary?

Mr Hunt: Good progress has indeed been there, including centralising stroke services in Scunthorpe. There are funding pressures everywhere. What I would say about funding is that I do not want to run away from the fact that money is tight throughout the NHS, but lots of places are delivering safe, compassionate care even with those funding constraints. In fact, when we look in detail, we see that less safe care is the most expensive, so what we are doing should help trusts such as the hon. Gentleman's to deliver safer care.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): May I reiterate my support for my right hon. Friend's policy of putting patients at the centre of the NHS? Clearly I am disappointed that North Cumbria Trust continues to remain in special measures, particularly given the hard work of the staff and management there. However, will the Secretary of State assure me that if the trust, with the support of Northumbria, produces a robust action plan to address the issues that have been raised, a re-inspection by the CQC can happen sooner rather than later?

Mr Hunt: No one is keener than my hon. Friend and I are to get the trust out of special measures as quickly as possible, and I thank him for the many representations he has made with respect to North Cumbria. I know that the trust is disappointed not to come out of special measures, but it is now rated good in terms of being caring, and the CQC said in July that the staff were supportive to patients and those close to them, so some encouraging things are happening at the trust, and we will do everything we can to help it to go the final furlong.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): I very much welcome the progress that has been made at East Lancashire hospitals. Following action by the Secretary of State last year, the trust has now recruited more than 200 new nurses, nurse support staff and consultants. In March, a new state-of-the-art £9 million urgent care centre at Burnley was officially opened to the public, replacing the old A and E department, which was downgraded under Labour in 2007. Given that poor performance at the trust was established back in 2005 and that the last Government failed to act on it, how can we ensure that future problems are addressed speedily, rather than being hushed up?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his interest in his local hospital and I agree with him that the trust has made good progress. There is a simple way to ensure that these things get acted on quickly and that is to make sure they are public. When things are public—when they are transparent and everyone knows about them—the NHS and Ministers have to act, and that is the purpose of this system.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if someone dies or is hurt in a residential care home, the directors of that home will also be held culpable under law?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely, and I think we have legislated to make that the case.

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): With reference to University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, which has just gone into special measures, may I reassure the Secretary of State that the CQC has seen some improvements there delivered by front-line staff, particularly at Royal Lancaster infirmary? However, I want to underline what the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) said about the unique geographical problems facing a trust with four hospitals separated by hundreds of miles of sea, mountains and valleys.

Mr Hunt: I absolutely recognise that issue, which is something we will have to think about in terms of the long-term sustainability of the trust. Let me reassure my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness that the CQC chief inspector will not say that a trust can come out of special measures unless he can see a long-term sustainable future for that trust, so part of the purpose of the regime is to force everyone in the system to confront those issues so that we bite the bullet quickly.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The positive progress of the Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust is to be welcomed and is a direct result of the work of health care assistants, nurses and doctors. On the issue of social care, may I commend North Lincolnshire to the Secretary of State and ask him perhaps to visit again? The local council has not only refused the request by the Labour opposition on the council to cut social care in the budget, but has actually increased funding for elderly and disabled people by £1 million in this year's budget and is opening up a network of well-being centres to support older people in their own homes, as well as constructing a £3.2 million intermediate care facility, so that a lot of our residents do not have to go into hospital in the first place.

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for the warm welcome he gave me when I visited the trust—including the visit to a not particularly healthy, but delicious bakery as part of the trip. I welcome what is happening in social care, and I think it is something on which we can agree at the national level across the House—that cuts in social care can be very counter-productive, leading to more pressure on the social care system and more pressure on the NHS.

Point of Order

1.30 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Prime Minister's questions, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Mr Kennedy) referred to "President Juncker, who yesterday called for more European reform and warned that applicant states who want to join the European Union face a complex, difficult and drawn-out period of up to, perhaps, five years." The right hon. Gentleman went on to say, "As we do not meet before the Scottish referendum, barring a recall, should not the Scots voters bear those words in mind?" The Prime Minister then said that he "wholeheartedly" agreed with Mr Juncker's comments, which he said were "very important in the context of the Scottish referendum".

Since yesterday, the BBC has been running the following report:

"Scottish independence: Jean-Claude Juncker 'not referring to Scotland'. New European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker was not referring to Scotland when he said there would be no new members of the EU in the next five years, BBC Scotland has learned...a spokeswoman confirmed that he was talking about countries outside the EU."

I know you are not in a position, Mr Speaker, to explain why the Prime Minister or the former leader of the Liberal Democrats would falsely attribute comments to the Commission President about Scotland. However, how can both the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber and the Prime Minister correct the record, withdraw the bogus assertions and apologise in the Chamber?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman both for the fact of his point of order and for his courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to

raise it. The hon. Gentleman will be aware, as all Members will surely be conscious, that there are means by which people can correct the record if they think that they have inadvertently erred. It is open to any Member, including the two Members to whom the hon. Gentleman has just referred, to do so. I think it would be fair to say, however, that such matters are way beyond the pay grade of the Speaker. Suffice it to say, I do not think the question of attribution was specifically in the forefront of the minds of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Mr Kennedy) or of the Prime Minister. I think they were probably thinking in terms of what they judged to be a read-across between Mr Juncker's observations on the one hand and the situation appertaining to Scotland on the other. In that sense, it seems to me that it is a matter of debate, but the hon. Gentleman has made his point with his usual alacrity, and he looks satisfied to have done so. We shall leave it there.

BILL PRESENTED

COUNSELLORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS (REGULATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Geraint Davies, supported by Dr Julian Lewis, Jonathan Edwards, Mrs Siân C James, Jessica Morden, Chris Evans, Mr Mark Williams and Jim Shannon presented a Bill to provide that the Health and Care Professionals Council be the regulatory body for counsellors and psychotherapists; to prohibit gay to straight conversion therapy; to make consequential provision for the protection of children and adults; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 November, and to be printed (Bill 78).

Political Party Policy Costings (Office for Budget Responsibility)

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

1.33 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011 to allow the Office for Budget Responsibility to scrutinise and certificate the policy costings of political parties represented in the House of Commons.

This Bill would allow the Office for Budget Responsibility independently to audit tax and spending measures in the manifestos of the main political parties. I think that would provide tough and serious scrutiny for all political parties. Although the Bill is not specifically about forecasting, I remind Members of the comments of the American economist J. K. Galbraith:

“The function of economic forecasting is to make astrology look respectable.”

That is a little joke for economists, but perhaps in years gone by economic forecasting owed more to it being an art than a science. The innovation of the OBR, however, has done much to improve transparency and the manner in which economics is discussed and debated in this place. The Bill would build on that reform and improve the way in which the OBR is able to contribute to democratic debate about the economy.

If I may, I shall provide three short reasons to explain why I think the Bill is a good idea. First, it would not introduce a particularly large change; it is rather modest. The OBR’s current purpose is to provide independent scrutiny of the Government’s policy proposals. Providing scrutiny of those seeking Government office is, in fact, a relatively small change, as it is already central to the OBR’s mission and a natural extension to what it does. It is neither complicated nor difficult for us to decide to accept the Bill, which would require just a few clauses. It would not introduce a wholesale change or invent any new bodies; it would merely extend existing responsibilities. It would introduce a moderate change to what the OBR already does.

Despite it introducing a small change, I think the Bill could make a huge difference to the quality of economic debate. In a good year, the spending of public money should always be done carefully. Even when times are better than they have been recently, we should think hard about each pound spent in the public’s name. At times like the present, however, when all our constituents have had to face four very difficult years, scrutiny of the spending of public money and taxation becomes all the more important, particularly to those who are the hardest up in our society, who have often worked hard to pay the taxes we collect.

At the end of this Parliament, we know that the Chancellor will leave any future Government with very serious challenges, both on the deficit and on borrowing. Any future Government would need to be careful and cautious. Without being too party political at this point, the Chancellor has failed the test he set for himself. We will still have a significant deficit, and the value to political parties of the OBR performing this function would be significant at a time when we need to be so careful about the spending of public money.

Proper scrutiny and transparency will help political parties to get it right and help the public to choose in a well informed way. In fact, Robert Chote of the OBR said that

“independent scrutiny of pre-election policy proposals could contribute to better policy making, to a more informed public debate.”

I think he is right. Our experience tells us that where scrutiny and transparency are carried out in a considered and well resourced way, we get better policies in the end. The academic literature is absolutely clear on this point— independence and transparency are crucial to the political process, generating good economic results. That is almost certainly why other countries—the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and even the US Congressional Budget Office— already do this and have similar functions to help political parties and, more importantly, the public to see what is going on in manifestos by independently auditing tax and spend measures.

For those three reasons—this would be a relatively small change; despite its modest nature, it would have significant impact on assisting the public and our democratic process; and various countries whose economies and democracies are similar to ours already carry this out—the Bill provides a straightforward way to use the powers of this House to help the public to understand our economy a little better, to choose in a democratic way which of the political parties they want to vote for, and to understand what is going on in manifestos at election time. I can think of very few reasons why we would not want to proceed, and I have provided three very good reasons why we should.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23).

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 16.

Division No. 41]

[1.40 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Connarty, Michael
Abrahams, Debbie	Cooper, rh Yvette
Alexander, Heidi	Crausby, Mr David
Ali, Rushanara	Cryer, John
Allen, Mr Graham	Cunningham, Alex
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Austin, Ian	Dakin, Nic
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Danczuk, Simon
Bain, Mr William	David, Wayne
Balls, rh Ed	Davidson, Mr Ian
Banks, Gordon	Davies, Geraint
Bayley, Hugh	De Piero, Gloria
Beckett, rh Margaret	Denham, rh Mr John
Beith, rh Sir Alan	Dobbin, Jim
Benn, rh Hilary	Docherty, Thomas
Benton, Mr Joe	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Berger, Luciana	Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Blackman-Woods, Roberta	Dowd, Jim
Blears, rh Hazel	Doyle, Gemma
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Dromey, Jack
Brown, Lyn	Durkan, Mark
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brown, Mr Russell	Eagle, Maria
Buck, Ms Karen	Edwards, Jonathan
Burden, Richard	Elliott, Julie
Burnham, rh Andy	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Byrne, rh Mr Liam	Esterson, Bill
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Evans, Chris
Champion, Sarah	Field, rh Mr Frank
Clarke, rh Mr Tom	Fitzpatrick, Jim

Flelo, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Heyes, David
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian
 Mactaggart, Fiona

Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCabe, Steve
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCartney, Karl
 McClymont, Gregg
 McCrea, Dr William
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGovern, Jim
 McKechin, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mudie, Mr George
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nash, Pamela
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Onwurah, Chi
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Rotheram, Steve

Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sarwar, Anas
 Sawford, Andy
 Seabeck, Alison
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stevenson, John
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily

Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vickers, Martin
 Walley, Joan
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, David
 Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Seema Malhotra and
Stephen Doughty

NOES

Bone, Mr Peter
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Kelly, Chris
 McCartney, Karl
 Mills, Nigel
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Reckless, Mark

Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Smith, Henry
 Stevenson, John
 Thornton, Mike
 Vickers, Martin

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Blenkinsop and
Graham Jones

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That Alison McGovern, Ian Murray, John Woodcock, Bill Esterson, Gregg McClymont and Barbara Keeley present the Bill.

Alison McGovern accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 January 2015 and to be printed (Bill 79).

Retirement of the Clerk of the House

1.52 pm

The First Secretary of State and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr William Hague): I beg to move,

That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to Sir Robert Rogers KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of the House, this House's gratitude for his long and distinguished service, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House and to public understanding and appreciation of its work, for his leadership and professionalism in the discharge of his duties as chief executive of the House Service, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

It is a great pleasure, as my first duty as Leader of the House on the Floor of the House, to move the motion on the Order Paper and to lead the tributes to a highly respected Clerk of the House, Sir Robert Rogers, who is to retire at the end of August. He has been a distinguished presence at the Table for 10 years, the last three as Clerk, itself the culmination of an eminent career of 42 years in the service of the House.

Expertise, intelligence and authority are the essentials of a successful Clerk. Robert has these in full measure and combines them with an abundance of good humour, which at times he has certainly needed.

He is both our Clerk and the chief executive of the House, and he has fulfilled each of those responsibilities with great assurance and imagination, for which we salute him. The two roles involve ensuring the highest quality of service to Members at the minimum cost to the taxpayer, and perhaps the greatest testament to his success in combining those goals is his stewardship of a challenging savings programme without detriment to the front-line services provided to Members.

Some might think from his dignified bearing and the immaculate performance of his constitutional duties that he represents only the formal, traditional nature of the House and, of course, he is, indeed, a doughty defender of the interests and traditions of the House, and few, if any, of his 48 predecessors have sported such a fine and constitutionally correct beard. This beard is beyond criticism, since he maintains he wears it by royal command, having been told many years ago to keep it by the Queen of Denmark. But it would be a great mistake to think this means in any way that he is wedded to outdated customs or averse to reform—in fact, quite the opposite, and I hope and believe it is true that the scale, scope and success of the House in scrutiny of the Executive and the relevance of the Chamber to those who elect us to represent them have increased in this Parliament, and his role in fashioning the ideas for this and steering reform has been instrumental to that success.

Throughout a career in which he has discharged all the principal Clerks' roles, Sir Robert has demonstrated a readiness to enable positive change. Over a decade ago, he supported the Liaison Committee by drafting its report, "Shifting the Balance", which set out its goal to disprove the notion that the House of Commons was nothing more than a

"toothless adjunct of an all-powerful Executive".

Looking at the range and prominence of Select Committee activities today, a great deal has been achieved in that regard.

As Clerk of Legislation from 2006 to 2009, Sir Robert implemented the changes in the legislative process agreed by the Modernisation Committee. In 2009 he drew up a 75-point menu of potential changes to the procedures and practices of the House, some of which, such as the appearances by the Prime Minister before the Liaison Committee and the more active use of urgent questions, have come to fruition and have improved the accountability of Ministers to this House.

As Secretary to the Commission and in his present role, he has supported the House's adoption of new technology. Parliament is continuing to adapt to the digital era, including by the establishment of a Digital Office. Written questions are about to become fully electronic, and many Select Committees now operate on a paperless basis.

Sir Robert has embraced such changes himself. I understand that 1972, the year Robert joined the House services, was the last year in which quill pens could be seen on the desks of the Clerks. The current Clerk, we have all observed, by contrast taps away on a tablet at the Table, and I am assured it is not only to keep abreast of the cricket scores.

It is a further tribute to him that he has been an ardent and very visible ambassador for the House. He has also promoted the explanation of some of the mysteries of the House to the outside world. He has been a great supporter of the outreach service, which you, Mr Speaker, have also championed. He has laid on briefings for the media on complex procedural issues. He has given a large number of lectures and presentations each year. Behind the scenes, he has forged stronger links with both the Executive and the judiciary. He has also seen and embraced the hinterland of Parliament. Many hon. Members will have got to know him while singing in the parliamentary choir or participating in the armed forces parliamentary scheme. Still more will have enjoyed coming across him indirectly, through his two books on Parliamentary miscellany, which must have helped lighten many a constituency speech, and the more cerebral book he co-authored, "How Parliament Works", which I suspect is not yet read as widely as it should be, even in this House.

He has also led his staff well. His loyalty, leadership and support to them have earned him the admiration and affection of his colleagues, as has his unstinting generosity, in which the distillation of the fruits of his knowledge has apparently often been joined by regular baskets of apples from his orchard.

Members, too, have benefited from this largesse in many other ways, such as those on the Defence Committee, which Robert clerked in the mid-1980s. Prior to one visit to British forces in Germany, the Committee insisted they would rough it with the troops in "field conditions" rather than stay in a hotel. They arrived on a wet and windswept night, and found that their enthusiasm had evaporated. They discovered that the Minister for the Armed Forces was staying in a nearby castle with the local baron, and that the standard issue sleeping bags were not built for their bulk. Dealing with this mutinous Committee, Sir Robert apparently produced from somewhere about his person a bottle of fine malt whisky and plastic cups, and restored good order and temper all round. This is a very splendid Clerk indeed.

[*Mr William Hague*]

Members will be familiar with his gift for anecdote and laughter. For every problem or predicament, he has an historical equivalent or amusing anecdote, or a few apposite lines from “Blackadder”. His customary response to any office disaster is a twinkling, “So that went well then.”

In retirement, our loss will be Herefordshire’s gain, where he plays the organ at his local church, is active in the local community and will find more time to indulge in sailing, shooting and watching the cricket.

So I believe I can speak on behalf of the whole House in saying that in all these things, from offering us his excellent advice to cheering us with his good humour, Sir Robert has been unfailingly helpful, patient and courteous, showing admirable and calm authority and finely honed diplomatic skills. In short, he has been an exemplary servant of the House, and I want to thank him, on behalf of us all, for his loyal service to this House and I wish him, his wife Jane, and their family all our very best wishes for the future.

1.59 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): First, I would like to welcome the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) to his new role as Leader of the House. There will be time on Thursday to pay proper tribute to his predecessor, who is in his new place, but I just wanted to acknowledge that this is his first outing in the House since the reshuffle and wish him well in his new role.

It is with great pleasure that I rise to support the motion in the name of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other right hon. Members to mark the retirement of Sir Robert Rogers as Clerk of the House. Sir Robert has been in the service of the House for more than 42 years, for the past three serving with great distinction as our 49th Clerk—and as chief executive. Since becoming a junior Clerk in 1972, Sir Robert has served in all of the most important roles. He has been Clerk of Private Members’ Bills, Clerk of the Defence Committee, Clerk of the European Legislation Committee, Principal Clerk of the Table Office, Clerk of the Journals and Clerk of Legislation. To all those important roles he has brought his formidable intellect, his insight and, as the Leader of the House has pointed out, his great sense of humour.

I think all Members will agree that Sir Robert has left his mark on this place. He has delivered a savings programme that has ensured that services to Members are protected and value for money is much improved. I know some of his proudest achievements are improving the outreach programme, expanding Parliament week and increasing efficiency by creating a single commercial division. He has also improved diversity by ensuring that the management board of the House contains a 50:50 ratio of women and men. He would be the first to admit that there is more to do on diversity, but he has certainly made a difference.

To serve as Clerk of the House is to occupy a position at the very heart of our democracy. The job description for his successor includes a recommendation from Sir Robert saying that the position is “the best job in the world”.

Perhaps that explains why in 1748, Jeremiah Dyson, who was to become the 25th Clerk, bought the role for a whopping £6,000 in old—very old—money. I would like to reassure the House that there will be no “Cash for Clerks” scandal to mar the recruitment of the 50th Clerk, which will be done strictly on merit.

While reading Sir Robert’s book “Order! Order!”, I discovered that in 1854 an exam was introduced as part of the selection for employment in the House service. Among the prerequisites were good handwriting and spelling; good knowledge of the history of England from 1603 onwards; and fluency in French, German and Greek. This long-standing requirement to be fluent in several languages stood Sir Robert in good stead when in 1977 he did three weeks on a Royal Navy fishery protection vessel as part of a Committee investigation into the fishing industry. During that stint of practical research, he was part of a boarding party on to a 1,300-tonne Russian trawler caught fishing illegally. Rather than be impounded, the Russians set course for Murmansk, with the boarding party kidnapped—cue international incident and the scrambling of quite a few of our military assets. When the Russians finally agreed to go into Plymouth late at night their officers refused to navigate the ship and so Sir Robert, who is an amateur sailor, took orders from the accompanying warship and translated them into German for the helmsman, who understood no English. The fact that Sir Robert has been with us for the rest of the time demonstrated how successful he was at steering the ship safely into port.

While at Oxford Sir Robert captained Lincoln college’s team on “University Challenge”, when it was presented by Bamber Gascoigne—I say that for hon. Members who remember as far back as I do. Having got in touch with the producers, I can reveal that, unfortunately, no TV footage survived, but with his typical flair Sir Robert led his team to the semi-finals. Over the past 10 years Sir Robert has managed to write three books—“Order! Order!”, “Who Goes Home?” and “How Parliament Works”, which is now in its sixth edition. I should tell the House that a parliamentary question from last year revealed that “How Parliament Works” is the most requested book in the Library—apparently, just ahead of Tony Blair’s autobiography.

Many Members will be aware that Sir Robert read old Norse, mediaeval Welsh and Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. So accomplished was he at his studies that he was offered a scholarship to study “Anglo-Saxon colour words”, but he clearly decided that he would pursue a study of modern rowdy behaviour in the Commons Chamber rather than waste his talents studying ancient swear words and their uses—Mr Speaker, we have reason to be very grateful that he did.

Sir Robert will be remembered as one of the most forthright defenders of this place and the work we all do here making democracy survive and thrive. His letter of resignation offered a typically eloquent case for Parliament’s role as the fulcrum of our democracy, which I know was greatly appreciated by many Members on all sides of this House. I know Sir Robert is a huge cricket fan, although age has dictated that spectating is all that is now left for either of us to do if we are to avoid the possibility of sustaining serious injury. So I hope he will follow the example of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who entered

government in the same year that Sir Robert joined the House, and leave office to spend more time at the test match.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, I would like to extend our sincerest gratitude for 42 years of the most distinguished public service. May I add my thanks and best wishes to Sir Robert, and wish him, his wife, Jane, and their family all the best for the future?

2.6 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): There can be few public offices with an unbroken history of over half a millennium, but the office of Clerk of the House of Commons is one of them. If Sir Robert Rogers had taken the Clerk's traditional place at the Table at any time over the past 626 years, he would always have looked perfect for the role. I am also confident that had Sir Robert been there when King Charles I burst into the Chamber, with his troops in the Members Lobby behind him, he would have coped with the situation with as great aplomb as did John Rushworth at the time.

We went to the same school—I refer to Sir Robert, not the King. It was not a four-letter school calculated to cause concern; it was Tonbridge school. We were not contemporaries at Tonbridge. I am 20 years older than Sir Robert, as I seem to be of almost everyone nowadays, except of course our Sovereign. But what our school lives had in common was that at our time of leaving, the Worshipful Company of Skinners, who owns the school, bestowed on both of us an Andrew Judde Exhibition to Oxford—the school's top academic honour—together with a golden quill pen, which both of us, in different ways, have put to good use.

At Oxford, Sir Robert was an all-round athlete at university level. As the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) has told us, for his degree he studied old Norse, mediaeval Welsh and Anglo-Saxon, an almost uniquely challenging trilogy of academic disciplines. I am told that on the rare occasions he loses his temper, he breaks into incomprehensible old Norse—although its meaning is clear to the dimmest recipient.

To new Members this House may sometimes seem crowded, but after serving in a few Parliaments those of them who retain an inclination to think for themselves may find that the House of Commons can be the loneliest place in the world. Asquith said that Parliament is an institution that eventually destroys all friendships. He was thinking of Haldane and Grey, his closest friends, both of whom he sacked in reshuffles forced upon him—plus ça change. Harold Macmillan, in his old age, told me that, even after his four years in the trenches and his two serious wounds, there were times in the 1930s when he had to summon up all his courage to go into the Smoking Room or the Carlton club. The fact is that any worthwhile parliamentarian must be able to stand with a tiny minority, or alone if necessary, in the defence of their conviction of the national interest.

When friends are in short supply, I strongly advise a visit to the Clerk of the House of the day. There will be found kindness, comprehension, wise and disinterested advice and absolute discretion. That is part of the fine tradition of the clerkship. No one has been better equipped by temperament and experience to discharge it than Sir Robert Rogers. His countenance at the Table

is of a granite detachment, unmoved by the funniest of jokes or by the most tedious misbehaviour. In private, he sparkles with vivacity and wit. He is, of course, a man of immense scholarship, steeped in a life dedicated to the rules, practices and conventions of this House. Any Clerk of the House who was not so equipped would leave the Speaker of the day hopelessly floundering in a crisis.

The Clerk is not a civil servant. He is appointed by the Sovereign on advice and owes his loyalty to this House and to none other. However, Sir Robert has not confined his energies to this place and its staff of 2,000—the size of three infantry battalions. He has always been passionate about getting people to understand the great contribution that Parliament makes to our national life. He has, as the Leader of the House told us, given many lectures around the country, not only about the history and procedures of Parliament, but over a wide range of legal and constitutional issues. Last year, when he addressed a seminar in the Lord Chief Justice's court, he attracted an audience of 70 High Court judges and Lord Justices of Appeal.

I was shocked when I heard that he had decided to retire early. He has been an adornment to his historic office.

2.13 pm

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): If I may, I will begin by paying tribute to the Leader of the House for his work as Foreign Secretary. The right hon. Gentleman will know from my interventions in the House that I have great admiration for the way in which he conducted that office and for his indefatigable energy. Few who have not held the office—still more who have not been married to one who has—appreciate its pressures. The Foreign Secretary—still more than, say, the Home Secretary—is never off duty and it can feel as though sleep is not allowed. There will be other occasions to pay such tributes at greater length, but I say to the right hon. Gentleman that the path from King Charles street to the office of the Leader of the House is now a well-trodden and, some may say, a distinguished one. It was begun by Geoffrey Howe, it was followed by Robin Cook, and is now taken—someone whose name I forget came in between—by the right hon. Gentleman. I wish the new Leader of the House very well.

The right hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell) referred to Macmillan's nervousness about going into the Smoking Room. I regret to say that in the bad old days when the hours were long, the collegiality was great and the Smoking Room did what it said on the door, I had no nervousness about entering that room to drink and smoke—not a huge amount, of course, just like the rest of the House. I remember being offered for the first time, by one of my smoking mates, a cigar from a packet. I looked at the pack and thought, "I recognise that man. He is in the Clerk's Office." It was only on further examination, when I discovered the name of the cigars, that I found that the fine portrait on the front of the pack was not of Sir Robert Rogers but was in fact of Edward VII, whose name was given to the cigars.

As the Leader of the House said, Sir Robert has a distinguished bearing, which I am sure is designed to give the appearance—and indeed does—that he is a 24-carat gold, wholly signed-up member of the British

[*Mr Jack Straw*]

establishment who takes a similar view to the Duke of Wellington that the British constitution is perfect and needs no alteration—[*Interruption.*] I remind hon. Gentlemen on the Conservative Benches that the duke said that in the face of the Reform Act of 1832, in case they now propose to repeal what turned out to be a modest Act and return to rotten boroughs and much else besides.

However, Sir Robert's appearance belies an intellectually adventurous mind and considerable radicalism—meaning not rampant, mad modernisation, but sensible reform—with regard to this place. As Leader of the House for a year, I saw his work and the careful advice that he gave to the Clerk of the Modernisation Committee when I chaired it and how he was able to steer the Committee's bright ideas for timed speeches in the Chamber and topical questions and turn them into a reality that would work. It is never quite as easy as it would seem.

The Leader of the House spoke of the stronger links that Sir Robert forged behind the scenes with the Executive and the judiciary. It is worth saying a word about those, because from the feedback that I received from senior members of the judiciary I know just how valued they were. Previously, there had been an astonishing absence of real engagement by the Clerks responsible for legislation with those who had to form the legislation and those who had to interpret it—one of the hardest tasks in the world. Sir Robert put that right, and that demands great commendation.

In a country of which we are all immensely proud, with a vibrant democracy that still manages not to have a formal written constitution, there are some individuals on whom rests the working of our democratic arrangements and the responsibility for ensuring the proper balancing of the power of the state and the rights of elected Members and of the public. In that regard, there is no greater responsibility than that which rests on the Clerk of the House, who in many respects is the keeper of our constitution. No one has better met that role than Sir Robert Rogers.

2.19 pm

Sir George Young (North West Hampshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw). One advantage of no longer being Chief Whip is that one can take part in debates rather than moving, from the Dispatch Box, that they be curtailed. I can think of no better way of resuming an innings on the Back Benches than by adding a brief and well-deserved footnote to the generous tributes that have been paid to Robert Rogers, who holds a post that 100 years ago was held by my great-grandfather, Sir Courtenay Ilbert.

Sir Robert joined the House at about the same time as I did and, as we have heard, he helped to guide the House through the changes that were necessary if we were to continue to do our job properly. He was on my radar in the 1990s when I was shadow Leader of the House, when he was secretary to the Braithwaite committee—one of many committees set up to consider the administration of the House—which considered the vexed question of whether the job of the Clerk should be split into two, a Clerk and a CEO. He navigated his way around those rocky waters with dexterity.

That debate is for another time, but I endorse what the Leader of the House has just said: in my view, Sir Robert has all the qualities necessary to perform the job of both Clerk and chief executive and he has the energy to do both at the same time. His knowledge of procedure is legendary, but is backed up with some sensitive antennae that can assess the mood of the House, steer it through “Erskine May” and arrive at the destination that the House needs to reach. He has been a fantastic chief executive, which requires a totally different portfolio of skills from that of the Clerk. He has pioneered the introduction of new technology into this place and has been the accounting officer for a huge budget. He has taken his HR responsibilities very seriously and has helped to shape the debate about the long-term future of the building.

He has always been totally impartial. As Leader of the House and as Chief Whip, I have had frequent occasions to ask his advice and he always put the interests and reputation of the House at the heart of any advice. The Deputy Leader of the House at the time has asked me to say how grateful he was to the Clerk for his advice on the highly complex issue of privilege.

Sir Robert has been a great servant of Parliament. He is a civilised man, a successful author, a man with a mischievous sense of humour, legible handwriting and a delightful turn of phrase. He is excellent company, and he is a man with interests outside this place. We wish him and Jane all the best as he pursues those interests with the same commitment and enthusiasm with which he pursued the interests of the House, its staff and its Members.

2.22 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, happily and heartily endorse everything that has been said so eloquently by previous speakers during this short tribute debate. In expressing our gratitude to Sir Robert for his decades of service to this House, I particularly thank him for the courteous, professional and ever helpful way in which he treated smaller parties such as ourselves and individual Members. I extend to him, his wife Jane and his family every best wish and blessing for a long and happy retirement.

2.23 pm

Mr Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I am very glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to Robert Rogers, with whom it has been my pleasure to work during the last two years as Leader of the House. I heartily endorse everything that has been said and, in particular, what the Leader of the House said in tribute. I welcome him to his responsibilities. I know from personal experience that he will start out, as a previous Leader of the House advised me, not knowing precisely what his tasks will entail, but he will find that he enjoys it far more than he perhaps anticipates. One of the things that I have most enjoyed has been having the ability to work with Robert Rogers, the Clerks and the administration of the House. Many Members might not understand the complexity and demands of the tasks they have to undertake, and I was one of them before I was Leader of the House. I now appreciate the skill with which not only the Clerks but the whole House service manage to achieve that.

I completely agree with all that has been said. Robert's scholarship and knowledge are legendary and I have had the benefit of them. From my point of view, one of the things I most appreciated was his ability to take on problems, often of a complex procedural kind. I must say that I did not lack advice, often expert advice, but the problems with which one must deal as a business manager are sometimes deep. The quality of the advice one receives is not just the product of time spent in this House. It often depends on the quality of the intellect and the judgment that goes with it, and Robert has brought to the House in an exemplary fashion not only expertise and authority but the judgment and intellect needed to advise on how such problems might be solved. Just because things sometimes look easy does not mean that they are, and the nature of what the Clerk—and especially Robert over his career—can achieve involves making people believe that procedure can be dealt with readily whereas in truth it is the product of immense expertise and effort. He has demonstrated that to a remarkable and exemplary degree.

Let me add just a couple of points. From a personal point of view, many of the tributes illustrate that the relationship between Members and Clerks, particularly on the Committees on which we serve, is often a close one. At the heart of it—this has been the case for me over the past two years—is trust. Trust is a very precious commodity and I could trust Robert with every question, every issue and every problem that might arise, knowing that he would address it utterly impartially. I know that that was the experience of Government, Opposition and other parties in this House. He was utterly impartial among Members and parties, in a way that enabled one to have absolute trust in the integrity and authority with which he applied himself to issues. That has been tremendously important and I have greatly appreciated it.

I also appreciate, as I think we all do in the House, the ability to have such personal relationships, and the fun that we have had together. Over the past two years, I have particularly enjoyed many humour-laden conversations about issues that might not otherwise have been regarded as being that funny.

I share the Father of the House's regret that Robert Rogers was not able to be persuaded to continue in post for longer. We have benefited immensely from his expertise, authority, integrity and honesty, and the trust we can place in him, which has been discharged so wonderfully over these past three years. I join others in wishing Robert, Jane and his family fun, enjoyment, humour and a very full life in Herefordshire and elsewhere in the years to come.

2.28 pm

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): First, may I add my welcome to the Leader of the House and wish him well?

I endorse everything that everybody has said in the past half-hour or so, but I rise principally to speak on behalf of Plaid Cymru Members past and present and Scottish National party Members past and present who, as one, are very grateful to Sir Robert for all the years of assistance he has given us as minority parties—I echo what the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) has said—without fear or favour, always being fair and always doing his best.

I am standing down from the House myself next year after what I feel has been a rather lengthy 23 years. The fact that Sir Robert has been here for 42 years should humble us all and bears testament to his wisdom, leadership and guidance, all provided to Members in an unfailingly courteous and helpful way. It also, incidentally, speaks to his stamina and his great patience.

I was recently reminded of his great humour and his kindly ways when at Christmas time, in the lead up to the festive period, he had on a red and white hat and was serving food to the masses of Westminster in Portcullis House. He looked not too unlike a certain other Christmas figure and was in a similarly jovial mood.

Aside from his duties in the Chamber, it is a continual wonder that Sir Robert is also chief executive of the House of Commons service, meaning that he is responsible for a budget of £220 million and a work force of more than 1,850. From a bit of reading that I did when I was considering this tribute, I understand that he put in action the decision to move Select Committees to paperless briefings. As someone who is still coming to terms with my iPad, I have to thank him for dragging me into the electronic age, much to the amusement of my staff, members of the Justice Committee and everybody who knows me. I am conscious that the aim is to save the House money and cut down on some of the 8.5 million pages printed annually.

Sir Robert is a moderniser, despite what has been said about his stately appearance, and he has always been keen to use technology and to bring in all kinds of people to ensure that the Commons really does represent the times we live in. As he has said,

“My aim is to enthuse people who would be put off by the look of the building and think they will never have the privilege of working for Parliament.”

That sums up much of his thinking.

On Sir Robert's educational background, I was very pleased to find out that he had studied mediaeval Welsh at Oxford university, along with old Norse and Anglo-Saxon, as has been said. Therefore I consider it appropriate to quote from the laws of Hywel Dda, Hywel the Good, from the manuscripts of Jesus college. This section sets out the treatment of thieves in medieval Wales:

“Cynnen a Rhaith yn Erbyn Lleidr.

Ny dily Kynnen vot ar leidy a berthyno y werthu nny vo manac arnaw yn gyntaf (trwy twg) yn tri lle, megys y mae racydwededic kyn no hynn.

Ny dily bot reith ar leidy kysswyn nny vo manac ar(n)aw yn gyntaf yn llys.”

I had the privilege of studying mediaeval Welsh laws, and it is entirely possible that within the confines of this building only Sir Robert and I understood what I have just said. I hope I pronounced it correctly.

Mr Straw: What did you say?

Mr Llwyd: I quoted a passage about the treatment of thieves in mediaeval Wales, who were treated with a great deal more compassion than by some Ministers I could think of.

If I had known of his background before, I would no doubt have approached Sir Robert to discuss the golden period of Welsh literature—greats such as Taliesin and Aneirin, and the Mabinogi. I am sure he and his family will be very welcome at the National Eisteddfod or

[Mr Llwyd]

anywhere in Wales whenever he wishes to rekindle his interest in the field. I look forward to seeing him there if he does. I wish him a fond farewell and the best of luck to himself and his family for the future.

2.33 pm

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): I am grateful to have the opportunity to make a short appreciation of Sir Robert's service to the House, although I am conscious that it may lack the erudition and eloquence that we have heard so far. However, compared with the speech of the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd), *Hansard* may have less trouble with it.

When one enters the House, the clerkship is held in great awe. I remember the fear, almost, of going into the Table Office to put down a question, seeing one's English mangled into proper form and leaving somewhat chastised. It is part of the tribute to Sir Robert over the years that it is a far less daunting experience now to go to the Table Office and generally to deal with Clerks who serve us.

It is a bit of a shock to me to realise that I entered the service of the House before Sir Robert, and I have had the opportunity to see him in many different guises. I suppose our relationship was closest first of all when he was Clerk of the European Legislation Committee. That is when I became aware of his scholarship, his organisational skills and his great good humour, particularly when having to shepherd a group of lively and not all like-minded colleagues to Brussels for the annual interrogation of UKRep. Then, perhaps his greater difficulty was to settle where we might all have dinner together.

On becoming the Chairman of Ways and Means, I developed regular contact with Sir Robert as he then occupied a series of posts which related to matters on which I had to adjudicate. That is when I became fully appreciative of the clarity and impartiality of the advice which our Clerks provide and of which Sir Robert was an outstanding exemplar. As Clerk Assistant it was part of his responsibility to liaise closely with the Chairman of Ways and Means. Within the bounds of propriety, I think I can say that that is when we became very good friends. Perhaps our shared love of cricket helped. I remember walking along the corridor, and from his door, which was ever open, I was beckoned. He proceeded to show me his smartphone which had all the details and scoreboard of every cricket match being played. My Nokia was dispatched very soon afterwards.

Mr Speaker, you will recognise as well as any that the performance in the Chair of those who are privileged to occupy it is dependent to a great extent on the instant availability of advice, particularly at tricky moments. These can occur at the time of handover from one occupant of the Chair to another. Just as I thought I might have developed some reputation for capability in that role, it took a severe knock when I took over from Sir Michael Lord at a moment when we were dealing with Lords amendments. The House will not necessarily appreciate that the documentation for that is particularly complicated, including paper A and paper B. It just so happened that we were proceeding to a question not on

one matter, but on a whole series of matters, which I was unable to grasp as readily as I should have done. So I was conducted through that by Sir Robert sotto voce, which possibly helped to save my reputation on that occasion.

Since 2010 I have been Chairman of the Administration Committee, which has brought me closer to management and to understanding the responsibilities that Sir Robert has held so effectively as our chief executive. I have begun to understand some of the barriers which are in the way of decision making. The joy of dealing with Sir Robert—apart from delving into his rich experience of “How Parliament Works”, to give an extra plug to one of his publications—was his can-do approach in surmounting those barriers, and a determination to see that we could cut through some of the difficulties for the benefit of Members and the wider public that we serve.

Finally, during this last period, I have had the honour to be Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Sir Robert is by no means the first Clerk of the House with a love of the Commonwealth and its parliamentary network, but Sir Robert again and again in my experience has demonstrated his support and understanding. There will be many other Commonwealth Parliaments, I believe—Parliaments, Clerks and parliamentarians across the Commonwealth—who will echo the sentiments being expressed in this House today. In the line of distinguished people who have served us as Clerk, I have no doubt whatsoever that Sir Robert will stand extremely tall.

2.38 pm

Mr Jim Hood (Lanark and Hamilton East) (Lab): I welcome the new Leader of the House to his place. I am delighted to support the motion that he moved, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), the shadow Leader of the House, to say thank you to a very remarkable servant of this House.

I was the Chairman of the European Legislation Committee and its successor, the European Scrutiny Committee, for 14 years. For almost five of those years Sir Robert was the Clerk to the Committee. That is when I got to know Robert Rogers and value him as a Back Bencher. We have heard many tributes to him today, but I shall offer my experience as a Back Bencher of this remarkable man. As the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) said when he was talking about the trips to Brussels, Robert would have been with us when I was the Chairman of that very interesting Committee. I truly appreciate how he guided that Committee through difficult times and how he guided me as its Chairman.

When Robert first came to the Committee, I had one difficulty: I had word blindness to his name. I started off calling him Roger Roberts. Robert, being the man that he is, just ignored it. I am sure he would say that he never noticed. It was one of those moments where, if you ever have such moments of word blindness, you say to yourself, “I shouldn't have done that,” and the more you concentrate on that, the more you do it. For the first few meetings, I was getting his name wrong, but I soon got to know how to work with Robert Rogers, and I enjoyed the four years that he was Clerk to our Committee.

Robert has written two books. I could write a book on my experiences during those four years with Robert. I was just thinking of what wonderful memories I have, but I will give you one. Just remember what the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden said about the Committee that we were with. When we went to Luxembourg to meet the Court of Justice, seven judges had agreed to meet the Committee and give us 45 minutes. It was a tribute to the Committee that seven of them accommodated us. We met the judges and one particular Member, who will be nameless, for good taste, was going on a bit, longer and longer, and taking up the time of the Committee and the judges who had kindly agreed to listen to us. Robert, who was famous for his post-notes—he would write a little post-note and pass it to you—sent one to me saying, “Chairman, you may wish to ask the hon. Member to ask his question.” At which, I turned round and said to the Member, “Shut up,” then I asked, “Is that okay, Robert?” He blushed, and he knew he had got his point across.

As well as understanding the fantastic service that this man gave to the House, we have to remember his expertise and the way it was given to us. Robert Rogers taught me to value the Clerks of this House. I am sure that any Select Committee Chairman will tell you, that the quality of the service that the Clerks give to the House is absolutely outstanding, and I am sure is incomparable with anywhere else in Europe or even in the world. It is excellent. I often say that there is no such thing as a bad Clerk; they are just better than others. Their service is immense, and Robert was rightly given the top accolades that could be given to them.

I want to finish by saying thank you to Sir Robert for all that he taught me about what goes on in this place. I have been a Select Committee Chairman for 14 years and I have had the honour to be on the Speaker's Chairmen's Panel for almost 17 years, and I know the value of the Clerks in general, and I know the value of the Clerk of the House to whom we are paying tribute today in particular. He was an outstanding public servant, and all the voluminous tributes that we will hear today could not give adequate compliment to what he has been able to do for us and for the House during his 42 years in the House. I say a personal thank you to him for his help and friendship, and I wish him and his wife, Jane, and his family all the best for the future.

2.44 pm

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): It is an unusual retirement occasion when the man we are honouring hears tributes from two of those who have worked most closely with him who have demitted office in the preceding 24 hours. I pay tribute to both the former Leader of the House and the former Chief Whip. It has been a pleasure to do business with them, as it is sometimes said. I look forward with the same pleasure to doing business on behalf of Select Committees with the new Leader of the House, following his distinguished service as Foreign Secretary.

When I came to the House in 1973, Robert Rogers was already here, and it would come as no surprise to any of those who knew him then that he would emerge as being a particularly distinguished Clerk of the House. The fact that he had those qualities of leadership was obvious to many people even then.

Reference has been made to the way in which the post of Clerk of the House combines that of being the chief procedural adviser to the House and to you, Mr Speaker, with that of chief executive, and it is not necessarily an easy match. But some people can do it, and Robert Rogers could do it very well. He led the House service very well, saw through changes—I will refer in particular to those that affect Select Committees—but continued to speak with authority on procedural matters and when giving procedural advice. It was very much easier to take his advice because it was rooted in such considerable knowledge and such wise judgment.

But it is particularly Sir Robert's work in relation to Select Committees that, as Chairman of the Liaison Committee, I want to mention. He served in the Select Committee role extensively from its earliest days. He was Clerk of the Trade and Industry sub-committee of the Estimates Committee, which was the nearest thing we had to a departmental Select Committee—or the House had, because it started even before my time. He was Clerk of the Defence Committee during the storm over the Westland affair. A colleague recalls that

“his efforts at this time kept the Committee on an even keel despite the political storms which threatened to capsize it”.

Some of us remember that well. He was Principal Clerk of Select Committees when the Liaison Committee produced the report “Shifting the Balance”, of which he wrote the first draft. That work began the process of strengthening Committees and foresaw the outcome—things that we have come to take for granted: pre-legislative scrutiny of draft Bills; confirmation hearings for major public appointments; an enhanced role for Chairs recognised by an additional salary; a more open system for choosing Committee members; and the creation of the extremely valuable Scrutiny Unit to support Select Committees. All these were envisaged in his earlier work, and he has led the House service during their implementation.

As several hon. Members have mentioned, Sir Robert has a hinterland both of academic knowledge and, over many performances, a formidable contribution to the bass section of the Parliament choir.

In his valedictory letter, Sir Robert referred to the House as

“the precious centre of our Parliamentary democracy”,

and, he said,

“with all my heart I wish it well”.

Promoting the work of the House, and making its work known to the public, has been part of the mission of a distinguished career. To the extent that we have been able to be successful in making the Commons more effective in its scrutiny of the Executive, we have built on the foundations that he put down, and we have enjoyed his continuing support and encouragement while we have done so. Those who follow him in this role, and those who follow us as Select Committee Chairs, will need to maintain that same determination to make this House effective. We thank Sir Robert, and as he has wished us well, we wish him well.

2.48 pm

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a great pleasure to rise to support the motion and add my voice to those who have already expressed appreciation for the dedicated and superb service that Sir Robert has given over so many years. His knowledge

[John Thurso]

of the House, its procedures, its tradition, its history, is without peer, whether as an author of both amusing and serious volumes, or in the advice that he has given from the Table or to us privately. If I may just mention one small personal example, we now regularly debate on a substantive and amendable motion our finances and financial plan. It was an idea that was conceived by the Finance and Services Committee, but we could not find a procedural way of doing it. It was Sir Robert who found the way through, and therefore has, through his advice, enabled a valuable tool to come to the House's management that we would not otherwise have had.

Others have paid tribute to his skill in the procedural areas and I wanted rather to record my appreciation for his work as Chair of the Management Board and leader of the House service and Accounting Officer, a less seen but none the less vital part of what he has done. This has been a quite extraordinary Parliament for innovation and change. There has been a wellspring of renewal that has come from a number of sources. It has come from ourselves through the Wright report, it is has come from the Chair, through the Chair of the Commission and other areas, and it has come from the House service.

Let us consider what is now happening in Parliament: the election of Select Committee members and Chairs; the revitalised opportunities for scrutiny; the new rules of governance in the House service, which many Members might not be aware of; the savings programme and its successor, continuous improvement; the diversity challenge; and the education and outreach programmes. Any one of those taken on its own would be a substantive management challenge, but taken together they represent a comprehensive management challenge that has required leadership demonstrating integrity, skill and competence. That is precisely what we have had from the Clerk.

I have had the opportunity to observe at first hand, at meetings of the Commission and of the Audit Commission of the House and at staff gatherings, how Sir Robert has sought to lead by example and from the front, but using a collegiate and collaborative style. He offers both challenge and support. He has been open to new ideas and has sought to mesh those new ideas with tradition and innovation, to give the best to the House service. He is the diversity champion on the Management Board, and as such he sought to widen access to the House service. He said at the last Commission meeting that he was particularly proud of the fact that all the apprentices in the scheme had found full-time work in the House service.

It is not easy to change a culture or to adapt to new ways, just as it is not easy to adapt to stricter financial times. Similarly, it is always a challenge to keep the customers happy, and if there is a bunch of customers who are more difficult to keep happy than us, I don't know who they are. Sir Robert has managed to do all those things with singular success. He has led a transformation in the governance and financial management of the House service, which has moved from what could be described as an era of gifted amateurism to one of thoroughly competent professionalism. That is no mean feat, and I add my thanks to those of other Members for all that he has done. I wish his wife and family the very best in his retirement.

2.52 pm

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): When I first met Robert Rogers, when I first came into the House, I assumed that he was a 19th century duke, simply because he looked like one. He assured me that he was not, however. Since then, I have got to know him very well indeed, not least because his sister-in-law is my son's godmother. Robert Rogers has led by example. He has shown himself to be a learned man, a kind man and a very great man. We will miss him terribly.

2.53 pm

Mr Andrew Robathan (South Leicestershire) (Con): I rise briefly to support the motion. It is about someone with whom I overlapped at university, although he is self-evidently a great deal older than me.

Mr Speaker: Seventeen months, to be precise.

Mr Robathan: As always, Mr Speaker, you are a mine of information.

I just want to share a little story with the House. Hon. Members might not be aware that, at one stage, Sir Robert was thinking of joining the Army. I think that he wanted to join the Welsh Guards, but instead he decided to come and serve this House. I think we would all agree that the Army's loss has very much been Parliament's gain. However, he did not lose his interest in shooting, as we have heard. One day, when he was Clerk Assistant and I was the Opposition Chief Whip, I was walking past his office and I heard the sound of muted explosions. I went in and he showed me what he was doing. As we have heard, he embraced modern technology with great fervour, and he showed me something that one could play on the internet, which was a grouse shooting practice game, produced by Purdey. I am sure that he was not wasting his time doing that, and it was extremely helpful of him to show it to me. I have tried it since then, although only very occasionally. I remain a poor practitioner of the game and of shooting on grouse moors, but he is a fine practitioner of the game and of shooting in general.

When I was doing my job with defence personnel, Sir Robert decided in a sensible, pragmatic and compassionate way that he wanted to bring disabled service personnel—particularly those who had recently been injured in Afghanistan—to work in the House, especially in security. I do not think that the programme came to much in the end, but it was a really good idea. That was Sir Robert showing his compassionate side to people who might not have seen it before.

Not every Member of the House has brought it into good repute; indeed, some have behaved very badly. However, the Clerks' department has been a rock and, in Sir Robert Rogers, we have had a fantastic exemplar of someone who can uphold the dignity of the House. For that, we should all thank him.

2.55 pm

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I hope that the House will forgive me for following the line of distinguished right hon. and hon. Members who have just been speaking, but I thought that a Member from the 2010 intake might say a few words. Before this debate, I consulted the Clerk to the House to find out

whether I could amend the motion. I thought it might be sensible to table an amendment to say that Sir Robert could not retire until he had exceeded the length of service achieved by one Paul Jodrell, who managed 43 years in the post. I am sure that everyone in the House would have wanted that, as his retirement is a matter of great sadness and regret. It is a loss to us.

Sir Robert is a walking “Erskine May”. He is “Erskine May” made flesh. He understands and appreciates every bit of that great document and gives us the benefit of his wisdom. As a new Member, I came into the House and saw this splendidly bewigged figure. There is a lot to be said for wigs, as I am sure you will agree, Mr Speaker. I found him to be a gentle, amiable and knowledgeable person who was willing to help Members to find their way around procedures and help them to use those procedures to achieve their ends, rather than saying that precedent did not allow things to be done. When I asked him about a particular motion that I was thinking of tabling, he told me that it had not been used recently, by which he meant that it had not been used since 1751.

That is exactly what we want from a Clerk to the House. We want someone who is so steeped in the history that he understands where things have come from, and therefore how they can be used. When Sir Robert appeared before the Procedure Committee recently to discuss the concept of renewing petitioning and introducing e-petitions—a very modern idea—he took us back to 1305 and the origins of petitioning. Indeed, petitioning predates 1305. He explained how powerful petitioning had been in the earliest days of Parliament, and we drew the interesting conclusion that e-petitioning could be equally powerful in the new Parliament. That is where precedent can take us. It does not show us what cannot be done; it shows us what can be done. It is more a living aspect of this Parliament than a dead hand that does not allow change. Sir Robert saw that clearly; he got that right.

Sir Robert therefore enabled us to do things in a better way by ensuring that the powers of the House were there to be used, ideally, to keep a check on the Executive, which is what we are here to do. I am sorry that quill pens went out when he came in. Modernisation can sometimes come in too quickly and be taken too far. Finding that there is a precedent for exercising our power is at the heart of what we do, and the precedent of this House, which is vested in the Clerk, is the way in which we stop arbitrary uses of power. In Sir Robert, we had a man who was able to help us to hold the Executive to account, to stop arbitrary uses of power and to preserve democracy in this country. Whoever succeeds him will have a very hard act to follow. His departure represents an enormous loss, and I am very sad that he is not going to exceed the length of service achieved by Paul Jodrell. As a cricketing man, he will know that, although 42 is not a bad average, one will always want to carry on a bit longer in any individual innings.

2.59 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg) and I agree on most things, but not on everything, and perhaps I am a bit more in favour of modernisation than he is. However, I certainly agree with him when he says that this particular Clerk will be a very hard act to

follow. The Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and others have rightly pointed out the great attributes of this Clerk. The motion also talks about his “professionalism in the discharge of his duties as chief executive of the House Service”.

What it does not talk about, and perhaps what no one has mentioned up to now, is the deep affection that many of us feel for this particular Clerk. It is for that reason, and not just for his competence, that he will be greatly missed.

My first dealings with Sir Robert were on the Administration Committee—I was on the Committee when Stuart Bell was Chairman. I remember a particularly difficult issue to do with whether we should have straight or crinkly chips. Those chips were discussed in some detail and indeed it got quite stressful in the Committee. But, as ever, Robert Rogers was able to calm things down. A resolution was made and we decided on straight chips, and, as everybody knows, I support everything that is straight in so many ways.

As people have pointed out, Sir Robert is a moderniser and open to new ideas. If I can boast, I came up with an idea a short while ago, suggested it to the Clerk and it has now been incorporated in our practice. I do not see it on the Order Paper today, because it is not relevant. My suggestion was to do with the notes at the bottom of each motion where it makes it clear not just that something might be subject to a Standing Order, such as Standing Order No. 52(1)A, but that it is something that is not votable on when we reach the 7 o'clock or 10 o'clock finish time. He has not just been helpful to me in that way. When I, like my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset, appeared on “Have I Got News For You”, he was instrumental in lending me a wig—in fact it might have been your wig, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: Well it wasn't that one.

Michael Fabricant: I was able to demonstrate very clearly what a wig should indeed look like.

I have already said that our Clerk is one of the most popular Clerks that we have had in this House—that is certainly the case in the 23 years that I have been here. His cheerful disposition, often under difficult circumstances, has been an illumination to many of us. As people have already said, his detailed knowledge of procedure is important. So this Clerk will be sorely missed by the House and by me personally. I wish him and his family well in retirement. Now, we do not know why he has chosen to retire early, though his working environment, behind closed doors, has not always been easy, as those in the know have already alluded to. In that respect, despite Sir Robert having studied Anglo Saxon at Oxford, being told at least once in front of others to f-u-c-k off by you, Mr Speaker, would not have encouraged him to stay.

Mr Speaker: I will ignore the last observation, which suffered from the disadvantage of being wrong.

May I thank the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and all who have contributed to the exchanges on this motion for what they have said? Just before I put the question, let me record, for the benefit of the House, two experiences of my own. Within a small number of weeks of my election to this office, I had raised with me in correspondence by a

[Mr Speaker]

constituent a knotty constitutional issue, the details of which I will not belabour the House. It seemed proper to mention it to Robert, as I happened to be seeing him on unrelated matters. I was immediately impressed by his response. He said, “Yes, Mr Speaker, the thesis that your constituent advances is interesting, but if I may say so it is not original. Moreover, it is open to quite straightforward rebuttal. You will recall that a fortnight ago, when you were elected the Speaker of the House, I presented to you a signed copy of the sixth edition of my book ‘How Parliament Works’ co-authored with Rhodri Walters. The matter in question is treated on page 46.” I checked, and sure enough it was on page 46.

Secondly, reference has been made by several people to the hinterland of the retiring Clerk. Robert has many interests, cultural and sporting alike, and several colleagues have referenced his interest in cricket. Unlike the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), I cannot claim to share that interest, but colleagues will know that I happen to be passionate about tennis. We discussed this question of our sporting interests, and I said, “I am afraid that I can’t play cricket with you, Robert, because I simply cannot play.” He said, “Mr Speaker, I am afraid that I am unable to play tennis with you, because it is not a sport that I can play. However, may I suggest a compromise?” I said that I was all ears. He said, “I am myself a past practitioner of real tennis, which has a considerable lineage in this place.” He would be prepared, he said, to play me at real tennis. I confess that I thought it prudent to allow a lengthy period of practice before subjecting myself to such a difficult task, and that period of practice is ongoing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, nemine contradicente,

That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to Sir Robert Rogers KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of the House, this House’s gratitude for his long and distinguished service, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House and to public understanding and appreciation of its work, for his leadership and professionalism in the discharge of his duties as chief executive of the House Service, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill

Second Reading

3.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill has two fundamental purposes, one of which is to help small businesses grow and succeed, and the other is to ensure that the UK continues to be regarded as a trusted and fair place in which to do business. It is an extensive Bill, and I fear that if I talked through the 12 parts, 149 clauses and 10 schedules, we would have a speech of Fidel Castro-like proportions from me now, and I do not want to stray in that direction. I apologise to the House in advance that I may therefore have to gloss rather superficially over what are some very complex and meaty issues. There will, as a consequence, be many happy hours spent in Committee. I am pleased to say that the Minister for Business, Energy and Enterprise, my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who has just enjoyed a welcome and deserved promotion, will be leading our team in Committee.

I thought that the most useful way of introducing the Bill is not to follow through the mechanics of the Bill itself, but to dwell on four big themes that flow through it in different ways. The first relates to employment. We want to make changes to the legislation in a way that benefits both employees and employers to ensure that employees are not disadvantaged by unacceptable practices, be they exclusivity clauses in zero-hours contracts or underpayment of the national minimum wage.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC) *rose*—

Vince Cable: I am coming on to that matter in detail. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman will be happy to wait until we get to that section.

Secondly, I want to ensure that our companies are trusted and transparent, so that they cannot conceal ownership or control and that they engage in good corporate behaviour. Thirdly, I want to help our small businesses get access to the finance they need to grow and export, compete in public sector procurement and address some of the issues around late payment. Fourthly, I want to support the Government’s regulatory reform agenda, ensuring that ineffective, out-of-date and burdensome regulation does not hold back our businesses. Those are the four basic themes of the Bill.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): There is so much in this Bill that many of us interested in small business welcome. However, there is an undercurrent of people saying, “Has it got enough teeth?” What is the right hon. Gentleman’s response to that allegation, which is being heard from all parts of the House?

Vince Cable: Many provisions that we will discuss are about enforcement, which in everyday language is what we mean by having teeth. When we get to the relevant

sections, the hon. Gentleman will see that much of this Bill is about tough enforcement of regulation, not simply about creating rules for their own sake.

Let me just deal with the issues around employment. I think we saw today some of the remarkable and positive developments that are taking place in the labour market. We now have unemployment down to 6.5%, which is one of the lowest rates in the developed world. More than a million jobs were created in the past year, which is a record. That is an extremely positive outcome of the recovery, which is now clear and well-established.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): Although it is welcome that those jobs have been created, will the Secretary of State accept that many of them are insecure and low paid? If people do not have money in their pockets because they are working on zero-hours contracts, that will have a negative impact on the long-term economic recovery of our country—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We do not need Back Benchers to join in at this stage. We are all right; I am sure the Secretary of State can handle it himself.

Vince Cable: Indeed, I believe that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency unemployment has fallen by 46%, and he is gracious enough to have acknowledged that. We are in the first stage of the long-term recovery. There are, of course, issues around low pay and low productivity that will require investment, and that is where our long-term commitment to growth and industrial strategy is important. We want employment that is high-quality and secure, and all the evidence suggests that, compared with most parts of Europe, British employment in this recovery is more permanent and secure than elsewhere, although clearly there is more to be done.

That leads us to zero-hours contracts, which as far as we can establish apply to around 2% to 4% of jobs. The issue has aroused a great deal of concern because of its implication that many people are insecure in their work, and on the back of those concerns I initiated a call for evidence and a consultation on how we should deal with the problem. Two contrasting views came to light. There were indeed shocking examples of abuse, many of which are captured in the problem of exclusivity clauses that we have now committed to end. At the same time, it was clear that zero-hours contracts have a genuine positive role in the labour market and are appreciated by many individuals because of the opportunity they provide, as well as the advantages to employers. Indeed, recent research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, which has done much of the authoritative work in this field, contrasts satisfaction levels in zero-hours contracts with other work, and whether people are treated with respect by their senior management. It shows that zero-hours contracts are marginally better in both those criteria than other forms of employment.

Jonathan Edwards: The measures in the Bill to prohibit exclusivity in zero-hours contracts are to be welcomed, but why not just ban zero-hours contracts? Is the Secretary of State seriously saying that the only way to have a flexible labour market is to have zero-hours contracts?

Vince Cable: Absolutely not. That is merely one aspect of a positive feature of the UK and a reason why companies wish to invest here. As I said, we want to maintain the best of flexibility while dealing with abuses. The evidence that we gathered led us to reject calls for an outright ban on zero-hours contracts, which some campaigning groups have argued for. Where we deal with abuse, we want effectively to ban exclusivity contracts when those do not guarantee any hours. There are two reasons for doing that. First, it is unfair to the individual that they are prevented from earning, but it also makes a nonsense of flexibility if employers prevent workers from migrating to work. Those are two good and powerful reasons for rejecting exclusivity arrangements, and they came through quite unambiguously in the consultation. Some 83% of 36,000 responses—a large number of responses—argued that such a ban should take place, and we will consult during the passage of the Bill on how we make that effective. Banning zero-hours contracts of any form is not straightforward, and some unscrupulous employers could simply shift to one-hour, two-hour, or three-hour contracts. We want to ensure that whatever we introduce is absolutely guaranteed.

Chris Williamson: The Secretary of State has addressed one of the points that I was going to make about the penalties associated with employers who exploit their employees and try to get round the restriction on zero-hours contracts by migrating people on to a one-hour or two-hour contract. He seems to be moving in that direction, so will he give a commitment that meaningful penalties will be imposed on employers who seek to exploit and get round the measures that he is bringing in, so that a financial penalty is imposed on employers if they step outside the law?

Vince Cable: If the hon. Gentleman reflects on this matter, he will see that it is not about penalties. If the exclusivity ban is made effective—as we are determined it will be—the simple remedy for somebody who is affected is to go somewhere else. The issue of penalties is not relevant; we want to ensure that the ban is effective, which is why we are consulting on the best mechanism for making that happen.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): One of the most significant issues in employment is the massive amount of corporate welfare in the form of tax credits for people on low incomes. A move to promote the living wage across a wide range of industries would have a positive impact on employment. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what thoughts he had in this Bill for promoting the living wage, and say why he did not include those in the provisions under debate?

Vince Cable: Anything that raises wages takes people out of the tax credit net. There are, of course, other ways of dealing with this problem, one of which is taking people out of tax, and that is what the Government have been doing through their tax threshold. This Bill builds on the minimum wage system—I will say a few words about that in a moment—and does not relate to the living wage. The living wage presents all kinds of practical problems, not merely that it is way in excess of the current minimum wage and therefore presents problems for employment levels. There is a perverse feature that the recommended level of the London living wage,

[*Vince Cable*]

which would introduce a regional differential, is highest in London, which is an area with the highest levels of unemployment. If we are concerned with maximising employment, pursuing the living wage may not be the best of way of doing that. None the less, I have given guidance to the Low Pay Commission on how we increase real wages, and that is a major policy objective. I think we are better doing that by strengthening the minimum wage regime.

I assure the House that the Government are taking a series of steps to ensure proper penalties for employers who fail to comply with the minimum wage. In 2013-14, 650 employers received penalties totalling £815,000 for failure to comply with minimum wage law, and we have increased the penalty percentage from 50% to 100% of underpayment. A naming and shaming regime has come in since the new year, and we have increased the maximum penalty from £5,000 to £20,000, which came into effect in March. The Bill goes one step further. The maximum penalty will now apply on a per worker basis, rather than per notice. As a result, in future overall penalties will be substantially higher for employers that owe high arrears to multiple workers.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I appreciate the points that the Business Secretary is making, but is he aware just how vulnerable some of the workers affected by these arrangements are? Constituents have come to me who dare not go to an employment tribunal. They are already in a vulnerable position because of their employment and dare not pay the costs of that tribunal in case they are unsuccessful. Has the Business Secretary really considered the reality for workers affected by the policies he is introducing today?

Vince Cable: The point of access for people who have such concerns is the pay and work rights helpline, which is free, so the first stage of remedying those faults and getting an investigation into illegal activity does not cost anything. The tribunal is a different process as that involves dismissal, but if we are concerned with remedying abuses of the minimum wage, we have a system in which complaints can be made free of charge—there is access to the system—and in which there is effective and prompt enforcement.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Is the Business Secretary aware, though, that the number of employment tribunals has decreased by 80% since the introduction of these charges?

Vince Cable: Yes, I am aware of a substantial fall in numbers. There are several reasons, which we are currently investigating, one of which could be connected with fees. Another reason is that earlier legislation sought to introduce an arbitration mechanism through ACAS as a first port of call. As I am sure that the hon. Lady will realise when she studies the figures, there has been a very big increase in the number of cases going through ACAS, as I recently discussed with its chair. That is exactly as we wished; to ensure that we headed off a legalistic process and that people were able to remedy their disputes in a more successful way.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): I totally applaud clause 136, which will penalise people who do not pay what they are due when they lose a case at an employment tribunal. One of my concerns, though, is that it is not clear that the employer pays the penalty to the employee who won the case before going to the state. I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend clarified that.

Vince Cable: Perhaps I can correct a matter of fact. There is a penalty, and that is absolutely right: it is outrageous when somebody who has had a tribunal award made against them simply does not pay it. There will be a penalty, but it will go to the Government, not to the individual.

Stephen Lloyd: My concern is that given how the provision is framed, it is possible that the recalcitrant employer could pay the penalty to the Government and not pay the employee what they should have received.

Vince Cable: Any employer foolish enough to go down that route would find themselves subject to multiple penalties and, eventually, to contempt of court if they were clearly malicious in their intention. I understand where my hon. Friend is going with this, and he might wish to pursue it in more detail in Committee.

The final employment aspect of the Bill relates to whistleblowing. If something is amiss in a company, those who step forward and blow the whistle take risks by doing so, and they want an assurance that action will be taken. Last year, a report by the university of Greenwich and Public Concern at Work found that 75% of whistleblowers expressed frustration that nothing was being done about the wrongdoing they reported. This is clearly unacceptable. The Bill will require “prescribed persons”—usually regulators—who deal with whistleblowing to report annually on reports received and actions taken, while maintaining confidentiality obligations for the whistleblower. In that way, we want to improve the general standard of best practice around whistleblowing procedures.

Company transparency has been one of the key themes of our work in Government over the past few years, including in relation to reforms of narrative reporting, reporting on executive pay, and, more recently, the directive relating to the declarations on natural resource payments. I now want to introduce measures that strengthen the provisions on corporate transparency. I will start with an area for which we have not previously had an opportunity to prepare the House. We have discussed the Bill with Opposition Front Benchers and with others, but this issue will be new to them, and it is important that we show them that courtesy. The issue relates to takeovers. I have made it clear publicly that we need to take action in this area that may well—not certainly, but very probably—involve legislation for which this Bill would be the vehicle. The approach we are adopting is that we continue to welcome inward investment as being good for the country.

We also continue to welcome merger activity as a normal part of market processes, although I have to say that the evidence on the benefits of mergers is somewhat ambiguous. What emerged as a result of the recent high-profile case of AstraZeneca and Pfizer was a lack of clarity around the enforcement of assurances. The approach we adopted in Government was to talk to the

company where issues of wider public interest were involved—it was clearly involved in extensive research and development activity—to seek assurances. That is what should happen, but then the issue arises of how we make sure that any commitments given are clear and, absolutely crucially, binding. In order to ensure that that aim is realised, we are currently talking to the Takeover Panel. Legislation may well also be necessary to underpin cases where a commitment is not honoured. I will bring these proposals back to the House in due course.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for expressing his views on this important subject. Does he agree that although Pfizer did put forward commitments that it regarded as unprecedented, it was by no means explicit about the number of employees it would have taken on should the takeover have gone forward? This sort of legislative approach—or at least a tightening of the takeover code—would help to improve the situation in future.

Vince Cable: I recall the major role that the hon. Gentleman played in trying to obtain commitments in relation to the north-west and, in particular, his constituency. The same issue will arise in other cases. He is right. Although commitments were made, there is an issue of enforceability. That is what we now wish to address by strengthening the rules.

Let me move on to company transparency. The OECD has reported that

“almost every economic crime involves the misuse of corporate vehicles”.

There are staggering sums of money involved. Organised crime costs the UK alone about £24 billion a year. The European Commission estimates that global criminal proceeds are in the order of \$2 trillion. Of course, not all crime flows through companies, but much does. More specifically, in 2011 the World Bank carried out an exercise that suggested that 70% of grand corruption cases involved at least one corporate vehicle to hide beneficial ownership and the true source of funds. Very often, criminals create complex corporate structures spanning multiple jurisdictions to hide the involvement of a company. That is why the UK pushed the agenda for greater corporate transparency during our G8 presidency last year. We obtained agreement from G8 members that all would take action to increase corporate transparency. That is what we are now doing, thus demonstrating our commitment.

We wish to help to deter, identify and sanction those who hide their interest in UK companies to facilitate illegal activities, as well as generally creating a more trusted business environment. That is why we are going to require companies to keep a register of the people who have significant control over that company—their beneficial owners—and provide this information to Companies House, where it will be publicly available. We will lead the way within the developed economies in having an open register. Alongside that, the Bill abolishes the use of bearer shares, which can change hands without any record and have been open to abuse for tax evasion and money laundering purposes.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the vast majority of beneficial owners are absolutely legitimate and are

not involved in crime, and that his regulatory proposals will significantly attack privacy and reduce the amount of investment going into British companies?

Vince Cable: I do not accept any of those propositions. It will be possible to devise a register—we have devoted a great deal of thought to this—to ensure that individual privacy is respected. We do not want the kind of invasion of privacy that occurred, for example, with life sciences companies in respect of animal testing. That is exactly the kind of problem we wish to avoid. We have discussed this extensively with business groups. We do not believe that it will have a negative effect on investment; we think that the opposite is the case, because honest, transparent transactions will be acknowledged.

Indeed, moving to an open register is a process that many organisations, including business organisations, welcome. The hon. Gentleman’s starting point is quite right: the vast majority of companies are completely honest and therefore have absolutely nothing to fear from an open register.

Sir Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) (LD): Somewhat contrary to the previous intervention, I strongly welcome the proposition, which includes a provision for exemptions in certain circumstances. That is no doubt a desirable legal provision, but will my right hon. Friend assure that House that it will not simply be the gateway for mass exemptions, particularly of the kinds of apparatus and companies to which he has referred?

Vince Cable: Yes, I give that assurance. We have thought hard about the balance that must be struck between the protection of privacy and openness. Many of us have had examples in our constituencies—I certainly have—of individuals who were shareholders in companies that were targeted because of animal rights issues and suffered enormously. Naturally, we wish to protect people’s individual addresses, for example, and we will take steps to ensure that the exemptions are carefully thought through and are of that kind. In general, however, the principle of openness is absolutely right.

The final element in the transparency agenda will be to prohibit companies from acting as directors—again, with exemptions—because in the past that was often used to conceal illegitimate transactions.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the Secretary of State for the work that has been done in this area, but one concern that has been raised is that, although the penalties in relation to maintaining the records of the person of significant control are relatively high at a maximum of two years’ imprisonment, the sanctions for not providing that information to the public register are relatively low at £250 a day, given, as the Secretary of State has said, the staggeringly high amounts of money that are potentially involved. Has he considered whether the deterrent is sufficient?

Vince Cable: We will obviously consider the hon. Lady’s points, but it is worth bearing in mind that the vast majority of companies that register are extremely small and that sums of money that may seem trivial for a big international company may be quite onerous for a small company. We need to keep that proportionality in mind.

[*Vince Cable*]

Before I leave the issue of transparency, let me deal with two other issues dealt with in the Bill, the first of which relates to director disqualification. We want to modernise and strengthen the disqualification regime, giving the business community and consumers confidence that wrongdoers will be barred as directors. To give an example of the kind of problem that currently arises, it is very difficult in disqualification proceedings at present to take into account serious abuses that have occurred overseas when individuals have been directors of companies abroad. In other cases, directors have often had multiple failures, which is perfectly reasonable in entrepreneurial culture, but some have done it with bad intent. We are familiar with the problem of phoenix companies, which deliberately fail in order to be reborn and exploit consumers. We want to make sure that those considerations are borne in mind in the director disqualification regime.

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): I have had a lot of involvement with companies that have suffered at the hands of such directors, who subsequently set up again, perhaps by using a pre-pack or some other way. The unsecured creditors are the people who suffer and they may have to absolve their company. One suggestion is that we should have a register to track the record of a company's directors so that any company wishing to supply could look it up and see what is going on.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Twenty-four Members want to speak, but the Front Benchers have already taken 30 minutes and we have only just begun. We want to get everybody in. I am sure that interventions are helpful, but they may be holding up the end of the speech.

Vince Cable: I was trying to be helpful to Back Benchers by taking their points, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I do not mind the Secretary of State taking interventions, but he will understand that, if Back Benchers cannot get in, it will be because of the amount of time the Front Benchers have taken. He must choose which he prefers—interventions or Back-Bench speeches.

Vince Cable: That is a choice I would rather not have to make.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Lorely Burt), who makes a useful point and we will reflect on its practicality. She also mentioned pre-packs. She will have noticed that there are measures in the Bill to deal with bad pre-packs. Of course, many of them provide satisfactory outcomes, but some do not. We are going to try to differentiate them in a more structured way.

The final issue in relation to transparency is the insolvency regime. We are going to introduce measures to give greater confidence to the regime when companies enter insolvency. We will remove administrative burdens, which I hope will save creditors substantial amounts of money. We are talking about having a less complex system of regulation. I think there are eight or nine

separate regulatory bodies in the insolvency area, and there are issues regarding insolvency fees and fairness. It is a complex bit of legislation, but an important one.

Moving on to help for small business, I will start with an area that has preoccupied a lot of people in the House, namely pubs. There are 20,000 or so sole traders and small businesses that run tied pubs across England and Wales. In recent research, the Campaign for Real Ale found that 57% of tenants who are tied to large pub companies earn less than £10,000 a year, compared with just 25% of tenants who are free of tie, and 80% of them earn less than £15,000 a year. In other words, a very large number are taking home less than the minimum wage. Through the Bill, we want to address the imbalance in bargaining power between pub companies and their tied tenants, to ensure they are treated fairly by their pub-owning companies.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab) *rose*—

Vince Cable: Bearing in mind Mr Deputy Speaker's comments, I will take a limited number of interventions, although I am sure there will be a lot of interest in this particular issue.

Grahame M. Morris: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way and I will be brief. Although many of the proposals are welcome, may I ask him a simple question? Why does the Bill not give the tenants of large pub companies the right to a fair, independently assessed rent-only option? That was the recommendation of the cross-party Select Committee and it was the outcome of the consultation. Why is it not being offered by the Bill?

Vince Cable: I will explain in a moment our proposal in relation to rents. The hon. Gentleman will know that a considerable variety of views emerged from the consultation. I know there are strong views that we should perhaps have done more—there will be plenty of opportunity to air them—but we have taken a big step forward. Let me briefly describe what it is.

The Bill will introduce a statutory code of practice, which I think has been the House's basic demand over the years, to govern the relationship between companies and tied tenants. It will establish an independent adjudicator to enforce the code that will build on the experience of the groceries code adjudicator, which is building a track record in addressing similar problems. That should result—this is our objective—in getting transparency, fair treatment and the right to request a rent review for all tied tenants if they have not had one for five years, and the right to take a dispute to an independent adjudicator under the enhanced code.

Richard Fuller: Why did my right hon. Friend not exempt small pub companies, given that the problem is with large pub companies?

Vince Cable: As the hon. Gentleman will now have realised, we envisage a two-tier code system. There will be an enhanced code, with more demands on the bigger pubcos. Of course, other people are concerned that the provisions are not extensive enough. We have tried to distinguish the problems presented by the large pubcos, where we fully accept the major problems lie.

Let me give an example of a case that was drawn to our attention recently that in many ways exemplifies the issues. After seven years with a large pub company and a personal investment of £50,000, a tied tenant was renewing his agreement. His pub company presented him with a rent increase and reduced discounts on the price of beer. That means that, in effect, he will be paying £60,000 to his pub company for a year. Under our measures he would expect a detailed justification for the rent and, if he thinks it unfair, he will be able to go to the adjudicator for independent arbitration.

From the submissions that I have received, I am already aware that there are many concerns about the details, including of how the code will be formulated once the Bill goes through Parliament, as we hope it will. I am certainly very happy to receive any representations that Members want to make about those crucial details.

Another provision affecting small business is the public sector procurement market, which is worth £230 billion. Many small businesses have found it very hard going in the past, with bureaucratic and time-consuming processes. Under this Government, we have attempted to make the burdens less onerous—for example, by lifting the need for pre-qualification questionnaires—and, as a result, we managed to increase the direct spend in central Government procurement from about 6.5% to 10.5% between 2009-10 and 2012-13. It is our firm intention to lift that figure to 25% of central Government procurement next year.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way in the short time he has available. He will know that I welcome the measures, to which I contributed during my time at the Cabinet Office. Is it not a shame that Labour Members left no clear data on such procurement when they vacated office, and does he agree with the journal of *Spend Matters*, which has said that their proposals are “meaningless manifesto fodder”?

Vince Cable: We started small business procurement in central Government from a very low base, which I guess reflects the previous Government’s lack of attention to the problem.

The Bill will provide the Government with a series of measures to help us remove the barriers for small business across the entire public sector—pre-qualification questionnaires in bits of the public sector, such as foundation hospitals, and so on—and it will now be possible to open up procurement much more widely. Moreover, we want to increase the power of the public procurement mystery shopper, by giving it more teeth and ensuring that it has the capability to identify and address poor business contracts.

Another set of critical issues for small business that the Bill deals with involve access to finance. There has of course been an enormous problem of small business access since the banking crisis. We are now beginning to see really positive changes, including the emergence of challenger banks and crowdfunding, and the business bank, which we operate, is making a significant difference, but it is a slow process.

Some things can be helped through legislation. For example, all businesses depend on cash flow, and even successful businesses can run into trouble if there is a long gap between completing a job and receiving payment.

Small and medium-sized businesses are currently owed about £40 billion in late payments, and there is a lot of evidence that it is a particular problem for the small business sector. More than 50% of companies experience late payments, but the figure for big companies is much lower. That distinction is not completely clear, but the preponderance is obvious. We will enable a requirement to be placed on large businesses and quoted businesses to report on their business payment practices, thereby giving greater confidence to small businesses entering into new contracts and providing a boost to larger businesses that pay on time by attracting the best suppliers.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): When I met small businesses in Longton a couple of days ago, one point that they made was that whenever they did not pay money to the Inland Revenue on time, there was a penalty, and they asked whether they might please have the same arrangement whenever people do not pay them on time.

Vince Cable: We have looked at the idea of penalties. Certainly one country in Europe—Sweden—applies a penalty system. The problem is that it is often difficult to distinguish between those who “can’t pay” and those who “won’t pay”. Sometimes a large company is in arrears of payments because it is itself struggling, and we need to be careful to distinguish such matters. We therefore judge a penalty regime to be inappropriate, but greater transparency will certainly help.

There are issues concerning the banks. Despite the emergence of competitors, the four large banks still account for 80% of lending to UK small and medium-sized businesses. To try to broaden competition and choice, we will require larger banks to share data on their small and medium-sized business customers with credit reference agencies, and we will require the credit reference agencies to provide equal access to those data for challenger banks and alternative finance providers, which will make it much easier for businesses to seek loans. We are also looking at the possibility of mandatory referral, whereby banks who pass over a customer must refer them to others, including challenger banks.

Sir Andrew Stunell: I very much applaud what the Government have done with funding for lending, but will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that the banks have reduced their lending to small businesses while sucking up all the Government money to support that lending?

Vince Cable: The issue is complex. Some banks are now undertaking substantial net lending—that is certainly true of Lloyds and Santander. RBS is the big contributor to net lending being negative, and there are specific issues in relation to the deleveraging that is taking place there. I think that my right hon. Friend is referring to the fact that, as a result of the guarantees we have given, we are now managing to encourage an emerging crowdfunding sector, which is expanding rapidly and replacing the banks.

There are specific issues for export finance. A survey suggests that about 80% of small businesses find it very difficult to get export finance from the banks. For that reason, I introduced some time ago a whole tranche of trade finance provisions for UK Export Finance, which

[*Vince Cable*]

hon. Members may recall as the Export Credits Guarantee Department. As a result, 130 exporters won overseas contracts worth £2 billion last year. Most of them are small enterprises, and we want to go further. Provisions in the Bill will give UK Export Finance broader powers to support small business, react more quickly to changes in the market and offer a suite of products comparable with those on offer overseas.

Lastly in this category, there are two very specific but important provisions. One will remove the legal barriers to invoice finance, which is important for small businesses wanting finance for their cash-flow demands. The other will make it easier to clear cheques. Nine out of 10 businesses still extensively use cheques—I recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull fought a battle to keep cheques—with sole traders and small and micro-businesses. The Bill will make provision for cheque imaging, so that cheques can be paid more quickly and easily, reducing the clearing time from six days to two days or less.

Finally—I apologise for the Castro-like length of my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker—I will deal with the issues of regulatory reform. We want to ensure that businesses no longer have to wade through ineffective and burdensome regulation, and a series of specific provisions will help to guarantee that. Since the Government introduced the one-in, one-out rule, which we strengthened to become the one-in, two-out rule, we have reduced the net burden of regulation by £1.5 billion, while safeguarding the essential protections for consumers, workers and the environment. We have aggressively tackled ineffective and out-of-date regulation, and have scrapped more than 1,000 regulations.

That work must continue. That is why, under the Bill, we will set a deregulation target for each parliamentary term, with transparent reporting against that target. The Bill will also ensure that new regulations that affect business contain a review provision. Finally, some businesses are subject to poor regulatory decisions, such as those that we have discovered through the focus on enforcement reviews. There have been some really shocking examples of regulators giving rise to problems for which there is no satisfactory complaint. For example, a blue cheese maker was told that they could have absolutely no mould on their cheese. There are numerous examples of that kind. The Bill will require non-economic regulators to have a small business appeals champion to ensure that complaints and appeal processes are fair and accessible for all businesses.

There is a variety of other measures, which I will not go into, on child care registration, the work of employment tribunals, which has been mentioned, and education evaluation to provide better information about skills training.

To summarise the provisional reaction to the Bill, the national chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses has said that it

“reflects the growing recognition of the role small businesses have to play in driving forward the economy and the need to do all we can to support them”.

The Bill will make the UK a much better place for business and, therefore, I commend it to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I warn Members that the time limit is now down to five minutes.

I now have to announce the result of the deferred Division on the question relating to the draft Gangmasters (Licensing Authority) Regulations 2014. The Ayes were 294 and the Noes were 200, so the Ayes have it.

[*The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the right hon. Chuka Umunna.

3.50 pm

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Minister for Business and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): Have you been to see the Queen?

Mr Umunna: No, I have not been to see the Queen yet.

I will be as quick as I can, Mr Deputy Speaker.

It is good to see the Secretary of State back in his place after the reshuffle, leading this debate. I note that he has acquired some new Conservative minders. He no longer has three, but five. [*Interruption.*] Somebody behind him says that he needs them.

Vince Cable: I've got seven.

Mr Umunna: For the record, the Business Secretary says that he has seven minders. I am sure that he will not let them get him down.

It is also good to see the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) back in her place. I know that her shadow, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), has missed their exchanges and looks forward to the lengthy exchanges that they will have in Committee.

The Bill is a long one and comes in 11 parts. The House will be glad to know that I will not go through all 11 of them, but I will deal with the key parts in turn as quickly as possible to allow the maximum time for other Members to get in. First, I will address the purported purpose of the Bill, which was set out by the Secretary of State.

Our wealth creators—our entrepreneurs and particularly our small businesses—are fundamental to growth in this country and create almost two thirds of private sector jobs. They are crucial to the success of large firms and vice versa—the relationship between the two is symbiotic. We recognised that in government and were determined to build an environment in which business could flourish. I am proud to say that by the time we left office, the World Bank ranked the UK the best country in Europe for the ease of doing business and the fourth best in the world, ahead of the US. I am glad to see that where we led, this Government seek to follow with this Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill.

We are told that the Bill is designed to reduce the barriers that hamper the ability of small businesses to innovate, grow and compete, and that it seeks to pave

the way for the Government to be more supportive of small business. After four years of this Government, it is about time too. We support the purported general purposes and principles of the Bill—how could one not?—but the detail is everything and we will scrutinise it.

However, the Bill and the Government's policy more broadly do not resolve the underlying structural issues, which I have discussed on many occasions with the Secretary of State, that hold businesses and employment back in our economy. He and I agree that we need a different model of capitalism—one that is more inclusive, productive, responsible and long-term in outlook. The fact is that our economy is still grossly unbalanced by sector and region; short-termism is still endemic in business and government; we still have a dysfunctional finance system; and we have a stubborn and increasing trade deficit. Meanwhile, the use of food banks has soared and many people still struggle. In some wards of my constituency, one in three children is living in poverty.

The recovery is not what we would want it to be, and it looks a lot like the model of growth that we need to get away from. It is a business-as-usual recovery, based on a rising housing market and consumer spending; it is not the export and business investment-led recovery we were promised. Therefore, now is the time to intensify the pace of reform of the economy to build a better-balanced, sustainable economy. It should also be said that the Bill is not just about building an economy with flourishing businesses. We must remember that, if we want to be pro-business, we cannot continually beat up on the rights of the people who work in businesses. I will return to that later.

The first key element is access to finance. Any scheme that helps small businesses to access finance is welcome, but the Government's record in getting the banks to lend to small businesses is lamentable. Flagship scheme after flagship scheme, from Project Merlin to funding for lending, has failed to deliver. Net lending to businesses is down by £14.2 billion in the past 12 months. In fact, net lending to businesses by banks participating in the funding for lending scheme fell by £2.7 billion in the first quarter of this year.

If part 1 of the Bill does anything to help affairs, for example by making it easier for businesses to seek loans from challenger banks, and lenders other than high street banks and by opening up access to credit data, such measures will have the Opposition's support. Equally, the measures to ensure that support is available for those who wish to export are welcome, particularly given our need to get more of our small businesses exporting—it looks like the Government are nowhere near reaching the target of getting 100,000 more companies exporting by 2020.

However, we know that increasing late payment, to which the Secretary of State referred, is becoming a more significant challenge than access to finance. In a recent Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales survey, almost twice as many businesses cited late payment as a bigger challenge in managing their cash flow than access to finance. We must end the national scandal of small businesses being effectively forced to bankroll large customers that persist in refusing to pay them on time. According to the Federation of Small Businesses, 51% of the invoices of its members are persistently paid late by large companies. That is

wholly unacceptable. The Forum of Private Business has cited the example of Marks & Spencer, which extended payment terms to some suppliers to 75 days, for no apparent defensible reason.

In 1998, the Labour Government responded to that growing problem by introducing the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. Towards the end of our time in government, we worked with the British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Credit Management and others to get FTSE 100 companies signed up to the then new prompt payment code, but we need to go further, because for all our hard work, we were not successful in fixing the problem, and this Government have also not been successful. At this juncture, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), who is in the Chamber, on her work as chair of the all-party parliamentary inquiry on late payments, along with other members of the group. The two measures in part 1 of the Bill are good, but the problem is that, when there is late payment, it is still for the business to pursue and have a row with its customer for payment, potentially losing the customer in the process. We must square that circle. We will return to that provision in more detail in Committee.

I will not say much about the regulatory reform in part 2. Of course, the Opposition support the general principle that we need to be mindful of the quantity of regulation we impose on business, but equally important is ensuring that the quality of the regulation is up to scratch, and that it is written with the small guy in mind, so that they do not need to employ an army of accountants, lawyers and risk managers to tell them what they need to do to comply. We support the publication of a target for the removal of regulatory burdens in each Parliament, which is provided for in part 2. We also support the proposed statutory review provision for new regulations that affect businesses. However, unless the Secretary of State addresses the way in which the Department for Work and Pensions—I spoke to him about this the last time we were in the House—is massively increasing the burden on people in receipt of benefit who wish to start a business, the Government's credibility will be sorely lacking.

We were told that part 3 aims to remove barriers and help small businesses to gain fair access to the £230 billion of Government procurement contracts through a more efficient process that is more small business friendly. We are broadly supportive of these measures. It is a shame that the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) is not in her place. It is deeply disappointing, and she might recognise this as a former Treasury Minister, that one of the worst offenders in ensuring that small businesses get a look-in on Government contracts is the very Department she used to work in. Just 5% of the Treasury's direct procurement spend is with small business. If this measure kicks the Treasury into touch, then good.

Before turning to part 4 and measures relating to pubs, I would like to pay tribute to the shadow small business Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), and the coalition of people, including Government Members—the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) is in his

[*Mr Umunna*]

place—who have worked on this too. It has to be said that I can think of no better day for a pint in a pub beer garden, given the hot weather.

The Opposition have had to force three votes on this issue in the House since 2012, demanding a statutory pub code to put the relationship, between tied pub licensees in England and Wales and the large pub companies, on a fairer statutory footing. Every time we did this most, though not all, Government Members voted against, and in the meantime 28 pubs a week have closed. We are pleased that the Government have finally accepted the need to legislate for a statutory code. We will work with them to help to protect our community pubs, which are national institutions, but we are far from convinced that what they propose goes far enough. We are not convinced that the limited transparency envisaged by the Bill will deliver the Government's own principle that no publican should be worse off than if they were free of tie. We will also seek to ensure that the Secretary of State gets the right to introduce the mandatory rent-only option for tied tenants in the near future, if these reforms do not deliver.

Part 7—I am trying to go as fast as possible—seeks to increase transparency on who owns and controls UK companies. I very much welcome the measures to create a public register of beneficial owners of companies. A prerequisite to maintaining a register of beneficial owners, of course, is knowing in the first place that companies exist. The Business Secretary and I have had exchanges on this. Never mind the new measures that are envisaged, it is very important that we ensure compliance with existing requirements, for example on disclosing overseas subsidiaries. The Secretary of State kindly wrote to me last year, outlining how 40% of the FTSE 350 had failed to disclose overseas subsidiaries in the first instance. Enforcement is therefore key to ensuring that data are accurate and up to date, and that sanctions of sufficient gravity can be applied to ensure that people comply in the first instance. We must do all we can to persuade others around the globe to comply and adopt public registers too, particularly UK overseas territories and Crown dependencies. Let us send a clear message: what our overseas territories and Crown dependencies do in this area affects the UK's reputation as a whole, and we will not sit idly by while our reputation is damaged.

Part 9 seeks to strengthen the rules of disqualification for directors, and we have no problems with the measures suggested here. As I think the CBI has said, they will help to boost the UK's internationally recognised company law regime and promote even higher standards of corporate governance.

That brings me—it is connected—to the measures the Secretary of State mentioned on streamlining insolvency law. Among the changes the Government intend to implement is a measure to abolish the requirement to hold physical creditor meetings in an insolvency situation. I have to say that R3, which represents insolvency practitioners, and a number of creditor representative groups have very serious concerns that this will reduce creditor engagement and undermine the insolvency regime.

Creditor meetings serve an important function, as I know from my professional experience. For example, the insolvency practitioner engaged may have limited knowledge of the company's history at the outset, but

in a creditor meeting they can get useful information about the company and its financial affairs that it might otherwise not have occurred to them to think about. We are therefore not convinced that the proposal to do away with creditor meetings is at all sensible, so in Committee we will carefully scrutinise these proposals and the others on insolvency.

Before I finish up by looking at the employment law reforms in part 11, I want to turn to the measures on public sector workers receiving large pay-outs if they go on to work in other parts of the public sector. Let us be clear what has prompted the inclusion of that measure in the Bill. The Prime Minister promised that there would be no top-down reorganisation of the NHS and then he broke that promise. When the Government embarked on that top-down reorganisation, we warned them about the huge amount of taxpayers' money that would be wasted, but we were told that our claims were unfounded. What happened? More than 4,000 have been made redundant and then rehired in the NHS since 2010. As the shadow Health Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), has said, that has meant the Government handing out cheques like confetti to people who were rehired. Some £1.4 billion has been spent on redundancies in the NHS alone, at a time when NHS budgets are stretched. That is a complete disgrace. Pay-offs for managers and pay cuts for nurses—that is what we are seeing.

The Secretary of State will no doubt say, "This has got nothing to do with me, gov. It's not my brief; it's those terrible Tories sat behind me." Well he can say what he likes, but everyone knows that he voted for all the changes in the Health and Social Care Act 2012—in fact, he was a sponsor of it—when it was going through Parliament, and now he is having to clear up the mess in this small business and enterprise Bill. What a total and complete shambles.

That brings me to the employment aspects of the Bill, covering employment tribunals, the national minimum wage and zero-hours contracts. If anything demonstrates that this Government have run their course and are running out of steam, it is the employment provisions in part 11. The Government have done the minimum in this part that they thought they could get away with or that they could reach agreement on. I will deal with the points of agreement first. There are measures in the Bill seeking to limit the number of postponements that parties can be granted in a case, with judges being given the power to make cost orders where late applications for postponements are made. Based on my experience of practising as an employment lawyer, I think those measures are sensible, as do others, such as the TUC, which points to the difficulties that witnesses face in getting time off work to attend hearings.

However, improving the process once people get to tribunal will be no more than an academic exercise for those claimants who frankly cannot afford to pay the tribunal fees instituted by this Government. What the Government have done with those fees is erect a barrier to justice for some of the lowest-paid people in the country. They have simply priced them out of the system. That is the reason for the 79% drop in employment tribunal claims that was referred to earlier. It is women and low-paid workers in particular who seem to be the principal losers.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. Further to the Secretary of State's response to my inquiry about a constituent who came to me, I just want to clarify that she had already gone to the helpline and been told that she had to go to tribunal, but she did not want to do that because she was frightened of the costs.

Mr Umunna: That is an example of the effects of what this Government are doing, which I think is truly reprehensible.

The other issue about tribunals is that there is a serious problem of non-payment of employment tribunal awards. We therefore welcome clause 136, which will allow for the imposition of financial penalties on employers who fail to pay the compensation that is awarded at tribunal. Indeed, the Department's own research indicates that in 2013 just 49% of people successful at tribunal were paid all the compensation due to them, with 35% receiving none of their compensation at all. However, I am not too sure how these provisions are intended to be enforced or what will happen to those seeking redress from a company that has gone insolvent, for example. That is another issue for Committee.

Let me move on to where I believe there will be real disappointment at the modesty of the Government's proposals, starting with the national minimum wage. We know what the Conservative party's argument is going to be at the next general election—all this nonsense about Labour ruining the country. Let me remind Conservative Members that, when we entered government in 1997, some people in this country were earning as little as £1 an hour. We are proud to be the party, along with an entire labour movement, that saw to it that a national minimum wage was introduced. For that reason and many others, I am more than happy to debate our record and the real difference we made to the country when we were in office. We left it in an immeasurably better situation in 2010 than we found it in 1997. *[Interruption.]* As I said to the new Minister for Business and Enterprise, I am happy to debate these matters with him in future.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): My hon. Friend speaks of people earning as little as £1 an hour. I wonder whether he can recall that at the Conservative party conference before the 1997 election, a prospective Conservative party candidate stood up and boasted that in Conservative Britain, he could get away with paying 74p an hour.

Mr Umunna: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution, which is a reminder of the huge difference our Government made during our time in office and of why we should be very proud of what we achieved.

The Bill will increase the fines for employers who fail to pay the minimum wage and amend the maximum penalty, as I think the Secretary of State mentioned, so that it can be calculated on a per worker basis. We have been calling for that for some time, so of course we support it. The fact is, however, that the Government should be going much, much further as it is estimated that more than 250,000 people who should be in receipt of it, still do not receive the minimum wage. It is disappointing that the Government have refused to

match our plans for more robust enforcement, including by giving local authorities new enforcement powers and increasing maximum fines—not to £20,000 but to £50,000.

Robert Ffello: We should also bear in mind those people on zero-hours contracts, who do not get paid for travelling between care jobs, for example, which means that their wages are effectively below the minimum wage.

Mr Umunna: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I shall quickly be coming on to zero-hours contracts.

In the context of the national minimum wage having become disconnected from levels of growth and productivity, there is a wider problem, because it has led to a squeeze on wages and a fall in the real value of the minimum wage. That is why we would set a long-term ambitious target for the Low Pay Commission to increase the minimum wage to a more stretching proportion of median earnings over the next Parliament. It is a shame that the Secretary of State has set his face against that. We also want to promote—I think the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) mentioned it—the payment of a living wage through “Make Work Pay” contracts, but there are no provisions at all that touch on the living wage, which is disappointing once again.

Let me turn to zero-hours contracts, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) mentioned. There are 1.4 million such contracts in use in the UK at present.

Richard Fuller: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on from the living wage and in the context of the important issue of Government contracting, will the Labour party table amendments to ensure that, when local authorities contract, there is the potential for companies to pay the living wage?

Mr Umunna: I may have the figures wrong, but I think that at least 29 Labour-run local authorities have become living wage employers, and I think we should absolutely do all we can to encourage them to pay the living wage. That may take time because current contracts are left to run, but the more who sign up to become living wage employers, the better.

On zero-hours contracts, it is worth reminding Members what we are talking about. Let me quickly tell the story of a lady I met last year who was on such a contract—I have, of course, met many others, including my own constituents, since. She worked in the care sector and had to be available to visit clients in their homes on at least six days a week, including evenings. Her rota could change in a flash. If visits were cancelled at short notice, she would often not be paid. If visits were added at the last minute, she would have to manage her child care commitments as best she could. That was because she had a zero-hours contract which did not oblige her employer to offer guaranteed hours of work.

Thankfully, that lady has managed to find a permanent job, but she has left behind several hundreds of thousands of other care workers who are still on zero-hours contracts in England. She featured in an excellent report produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), and my hon. Friend the Member

[*Mr Umunna*]

for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). Her experience illustrates the reality of life on zero-hours contracts for many people. Such contracts put a strain on families who cannot plan and do not know when the next pay cheque is coming. They create a huge obstacle for people who aspire, for example, to obtain mortgages so that they can own their homes and do things that many others take for granted. And what is the Government's answer to all that, in the Bill? To ban exclusivity clauses.

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Umunna: I will give way shortly.

The Government's answer is simply not good enough. Do they really think that, on its own, that will stop the exploitative use of such arrangements?

As well as ensuring that the terms and conditions of employees on zero-hours were made clearer and that they were free to work for other employers, we would give employees the right to demand regular contracts if they were, in practice, working regular hours for a certain period, with an automatic right to a fixed-hours contract after a year. We would also ensure that employees on zero-hours contracts were not obliged to make themselves available outside contracted hours, and that they had a right to compensation if shifts were cancelled at short notice. That is what the Government should be doing. If they did what we are proposing to do, they would be able to clamp down on these exploitative practices.

Jonathan Edwards: I am heartened by some of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but can he explain why, during recent deliberations in the Welsh Assembly on the Bill that is now the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Labour Government voted down my party's proposals to ban zero-hours contracts in the social care sector in Wales?

Mr Umunna: We, as a party, have made it very clear that we want to end the exploitative use of zero-hours contracts.

Stephen Mosley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Umunna: No. I must make a little progress, because otherwise the hon. Gentleman's speaking time will be reduced to three and a half minutes, and he will blame me.

Let me now say something about takeovers, which I had absolutely no idea would feature in the Secretary of State's speech. He made two announcements on the BBC's "The Andrew Marr Show" over the weekend. First, he said that he wished to introduce measures that would ensure that commitments given by bidders for British companies had some teeth, and that a sanction could be applied if those commitments were reneged on. Secondly, he said he believed that the Government should have a backstop power to strengthen the existing public interest tests if that proved necessary.

I support the thrust of the Secretary of State's proposal in relation to commitments given by bidders in takeover circumstances. As I said earlier, I suggested at the

weekend that he should include such measures in the Bill. According to the legal advice that I have received, primary legislation would be required; simply amending the City code would be insufficient. I think that that is sensible, and I am happy to work on it with the Secretary of State in the context of this Bill.

As for the proposal to strengthen the public interest test, my own view—based on the legal advice that I have received—is that, if the Secretary of State wishes to change the current set of criteria, there will be no need for primary legislation. He has expressed concern—as did we, some months ago—about the need to protect our science and research and development bases in the national interest. Obviously, the way in which any provisions were crafted would be important—in particular, we would need to ensure that there was clearance from the European Commission—but, as I have already said on several occasions, we are happy to work with the Secretary of State on that.

I think that I have gone on for long enough. The Bill contains other measures—relating to company filing requirements, child care and schools, and education—with which we have no major issues, and the details of which we will examine in Committee.

This is not a terrible Bill but, to refer to what the Secretary of State has said about the Government's economic policies before, it is all rather piecemeal. Given the challenges we face as a country—a country with huge potential—our constituents were entitled to expect a bit more from this Government in this Bill. The only way to get that is to change the Government and vote Labour next year.

4.20 pm

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): I declare my interests as they appear in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and I shall be using my precious five minutes to discuss the clause 70 proposals for a register of people with significant control.

The Government have spoken about anonymously owned companies having connections with terrorist groups and being used to hide shadowy funds, and they suggest that transparency of ownership is the best cure for that. These proposals are, of course, a departure from current English law, where transparency of ownership relates to whether a company is public or private. If it is public, there are various disclosures that have to be made as to ownership—for instance, once a shareholder owns 3% or more of a company's shares. However, in situations where the public are not involved—say, a family company or a private equity company—privacy can be maintained.

There are four issues at stake here: the first is fighting crime; the second is the right to privacy; the third is the increasing regulation; and the fourth is encouraging investment in British private companies. I doubt that the first ambition will be much satisfied through this measure, while I do have significant concern about the loss of privacy and investment that could result and the increased regulation. Moreover, if criminals have concerns that this legislation will stop their money laundering potential, they will simply buy other assets. There is no beneficial register of stamp collections, for instance, or blood diamonds, but the family business that legitimately wants privacy of ownership will suffer as a result. We need to know how many of these private companies are

being used for crime, compared with the hundreds of thousands that are legitimate—in effect, are these provisions worth it?

The provisions apply to those with more than 25% ownership or control, and I foresee many court cases arising over whether someone actually exercises significant influence or control over a company. Shady players will give stakes in companies to third parties to go beneath 25%—that is, of course, if they ever own any of the shares at all. Families, likewise, will split shareholdings between them, often making it impossible to determine control. Should we not be concentrating on the legitimacy of the money going into and out of companies, rather than the shares being held?

I know that the finance industry also has concerns. The problem here is that fund structures will often mean that those who are defined by the legislation as having significant control over a UK company may, in fact, have delegated management to a fund manager. It will be important for the legislation to navigate the complexity of private fund structures to arrive at an appropriate result.

If the impact of these regulations is to put off institutional or angel private equity investment, this would be a case of throwing the baby out with the bath water, but I think from my own practice experience that there are also some serious privacy issues here. People have a right not to show their wealth, and if they cannot do that by buying shares, they will buy gold or art or put their money abroad. Some people do not want their shareholdings to be known to other people with whom they work or live. Many foreigners want anonymity for legitimate reasons, and we should not just assume that their private companies are fronts for dirty money laundering. Some have ethical issues; Muslims come to mind in respect of investing in companies that may conduct lending or brewing.

During the passage of the Companies Act 2006, I presented amendments aimed at protecting legal, rather than beneficial, shareholders who were under threat from animal rights terrorists, who were taking their names and addresses off the share register and persecuting them. The fear of this will only increase with these proposals and broad exclusions are going to be needed.

I see from the House Library that significant concerns have been raised by the Association of Pension Lawyers, the British Bankers Association and the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association. Let me add my concerns on behalf of the thousands of family businesses that are going to be affected by this. I think we should remove these clauses, but if we go ahead, I would suggest some system whereby people could avoid the register and maintain their right to privacy if they show the authorities that they are legitimate and of previous good character.

With my remaining time, I shall turn to director disqualification. I understand the need to have overseas offences included in the grounds for disqualification, although the technicalities of this could be very complicated. However, I have concerns about the proposal to increase the time limit for starting disqualification proceedings from two to three years. Sometimes the investigation will indeed require more time, but I do not think we should be giving the authorities more time to delay their processes and so it may be better if the extra year were to be provided for upon application to the court.

As for striking off a company by the registrar, I note that the proposal in clause 91 is to reduce the notice period from six months to as little as two months. Given that that will give creditors less time to make their objections, will the Minister please explain his thinking here? On the clause 73 proposal to abolish bearer shares, the notes say that only 900 companies using them are still trading, but getting rid of them will be inconvenient and a cost to business. Why can we not make these proposals retrospective? I also note that British companies that trade their shares in the US financial markets use American depository receipts, which are presumably bearer stocks. Will those also be excluded? Could the Minister please explain?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo): Order. I am sorry but there is huge pressure on time and the time limit may have to go down. I call Mr Adrian Bailey.

4.25 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State described his 50-minute speech as “Castroesque”, whereas I shall describe my five-minute speech as highly castrated. But, in the limited time available, I wish to concentrate on an issue that has long exercised the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills and its predecessors: pub companies and their regulation. Let me say to the Minister that although I may appear critical, I recognise that, having wavered and gone down the voluntary route, he has tried to rescue this and put regulation on the statute book. That has long been the position of the Committee, but grave flaws remain with the proposals before us.

The Minister outlined the problems of low incomes among tenants and mentioned the attrition rate of 28 pubs being closed every week. Our basic model of tenant and pub company is not viable and is in long-term decline. Worse still, the low incomes of tenants mean that many have to resort to state benefits to prop up their income. Under the current model, the pub companies take substantial profits from an unfair relationship with the tenants; the number of pubs is declining, with a consequent impact on the community; and many pubs that do survive have tenants on low incomes, which generates personal problems and the taxpayer liability. So that issue needs to be addressed.

Having the statutory code and adjudicator, which the Government are supporting, is a step forward, but it does not address the issue of the free-of-tie option. The Minister said that the Government were not going to introduce that because of the potential impact on the pub industry. It is difficult to see how, in the long term, we are going to affect the balance of risk and reward between the pub companies and the tenants without introducing a mechanism that will strengthen the hand of the pub tenants. The proposals for parallel rent assessments, which would enable the tenant, in certain circumstances, to apply to have a rent assessment, suffer from a number of difficulties, not least that it has to be after a five-year review or after protracted negotiations have failed. In some cases, they can last two or three years and drive the tenant into bankruptcy long before they reach the assessment point. It is difficult to say how such a time-consuming and complex procedure

[Mr Adrian Bailey]

can substantially alter this balance of risk and reward. Indeed, under the existing system there is a voluntary arrangement whereby tenants can go to an adjudicator and, although that has addressed certain problems, it certainly has not changed the overall balance of risk and reward in the industry.

The argument against that is that pub companies will abandon their tied tenants and become real estate investment trusts and that others may step in and try to reproduce the model to the detriment of the existing variety of agreements and range of beers. That is a hollow threat, because under real estate investment trust legislation, 95% of rental income must go to shareholders, which would render that impossible for pub companies, and 75% of income must come from rents, which would also be a barrier. Therefore, the threat of an alternative model is hollow.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work and the fantastic work of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills over the years, including the four crucial reports that have finally led us to legislation. Does he share my bewilderment that the Government did not listen properly to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and have not introduced the market-rent-only option that he proposed? A clear two thirds—67%—of all respondents to the Government's consultation said that it was the right way to deal with the problem.

Mr Bailey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and pay tribute to his contribution to the ongoing political pressure. I do find it mystifying. At the end of the day, the Government have fudged the issue and have bought some of the pub companies' arguments. They are being more protective of pub companies than of tenants, which is to the potential detriment of the industry.

The free-of-tie option would lead to considerable changes in the industry, but such changes would be difficult to quantify. The survey by the Federation of Small Businesses found that 75% of tied tenants would take on more staff and increase staff hours, 78% would increase investment, 73% would invest in modernisation and 91% would deal with microbreweries. It therefore seems that the alternative model has the potential to strengthen the industry while the present proposals will only lock it into a long-term, terminal decline.

4.32 pm

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): As someone who ran a small business before being elected to Parliament and who is a director of two others, I know that small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. They account for 99% of all businesses in the UK. They employ over 15 million people and account for half of our GDP. Small businesses play such an important role that if each small business took on just one new employee, we would eliminate unemployment overnight. As our economy moves forwards, grows and evolves, so do small businesses.

In my constituency of Chester, we have recently seen a record number of small businesses starting up—an increase of over 300% over the past two or three years. It is not just in Chester that records are being broken;

record numbers of new businesses are being created across the country. We want that to continue and the Bill is all about encouraging and allowing that to happen. The Bill will make it easier than ever before to set up a new business, streamlining the process, cutting down on the paperwork required and unleashing ever greater entrepreneurial spirit and an ever greater number of new small businesses. Such businesses have great potential.

Last year, I was delighted to organise and run Chester's first ever small business awards, which allowed local customers to nominate and vote for their favourite local shops. Local people recognise the difference that such businesses make.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I am sure that small businesses tell the hon. Gentleman, as they do me, that one of the biggest barriers to growing, expanding and taking on more people is that the banks—regardless of what they tell us—are still reluctant to lend businesses money or constantly change the arrangements placed on them.

Stephen Mosley: I agree and a big section of my speech dealt with that, but as time is very limited I think I might move on and stick to what I want to say, highlighting some of the businesses in Chester that are doing exceedingly well.

In my small business awards, more than 1,000 people nominated more than 150 different businesses, such as G and M Gould funeral directors in Vicars Cross and Monogram dry-cleaners in Newton, which were winners of the awards. Next year we hope to have even more people nominate small businesses and even more people entering and backing those local businesses.

As well as receiving support from the public, more and more small businesses are accessing Government help, advice and funding. Last year, I ran a small business fair in my constituency and I know that small businesses benefit from the advice and funding that is available. More than 100 small businesses and entrepreneurs attended the small business fair at the university of Chester's Riverside innovation centre. The feedback we received was fantastic. By bringing together the private sector, public sector and third sector bodies we can give these businesses the boost they need.

One scheme that I have been particularly impressed by is the new enterprise allowance. In Chester, more than 100 people have taken advantage of the scheme to set up their own small business. They are not just statistics. They are people like Lois Lee of Kitsch Krafts who, after finding herself unemployed, was determined to get off welfare and back into work. Today, Lois is running a successful, popular and expanding craft boutique. A year after she first set up in a corner of Saltney post office, I was delighted to be able officially to open her new larger premises on Chester street in Saltney. It is another great small business success story, and Kitsch Krafts is not alone. Oil Monster, which started in my constituency, recently received a best start-up business award. It too is growing and that benefits everyone. Indeed, the company has recently taken on three new apprentices, helping young people into work and teaching them vital skills for the future.

As the economy improves and as Bills such as this give more and more support to our small businesses, more and more people will have confidence in our

long-term economic plan and will want to set up and expand their own small businesses. That is fantastic news, and the Bill shows that the Government welcome that and that we are not complacent. We want to see even more small businesses start up, we want to see more and more jobs and we want to see more and more apprenticeships and training schemes. The measures in the Bill will make it easier than ever to start up a business and for a small business to expand. It will reduce the burden of bureaucracy and red tape on our businesses, allowing them to concentrate on growth and innovation. It will help to ensure that Britain is the best place in the world to start and grow a business.

4.37 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Many people in my constituency do not see a recovery in the economy and they are yet to experience the benefits of the recovery talked about by the Government. We have more than 15,000 people in work who earn less than a living wage. Many people in work up and down the country are using food banks and many others rely on extortionate payday loans just to survive and get through the month. For my constituents and many others, the reality is falling living standards and rising costs. The Bill contains some welcome measures, which could help address some of the reasons that many people, such as those on zero-hours contract and the minimum wage, are struggling to make ends meet, but I wonder whether they will go far enough.

Others Members have mentioned the care sector. I met the wonderful carers who looked after my mum at weekends before she died earlier this year, and they were paid for 10 hours out of the 25 they worked in a weekend shift. They were not paid for transport or given money for travel costs, but were paid just for the 15 minutes for which they were expected to be with somebody like my mum, who desperately needed their care. That is the scandal of low pay and it is a combination of zero-hours contracts and the minimum wage not being properly enforced. The effective pay rate is way below the minimum wage, let alone the living wage. We need to deal with that scandal in our society if we are to see rising prosperity for many people, not just in the care sector but elsewhere. We all benefit: it is good for the economy, good for businesses, which benefit from prosperity as people spend their money, and good for the taxpayer because there is less need to subsidise low pay from employers.

Like the hon. Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley), I used to run a small business and I enthusiastically encourage people to shop locally to support the businesses in my constituency. The hon. Gentleman claimed that it is easy to start up a business, but the rules that the DWP enforce make it difficult at times. The requirements on monthly reporting go way beyond what any established business has to do and create difficulties for new businesses. It is about time that BIS worked more closely with DWP to make it a lot easier for people to start and to grow their small businesses.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) said, it is getting harder, not easier, for people starting or running a small business to borrow money. That is the case not just for start-ups, but for existing businesses that want to buy equipment or expand. That is where the growth comes from that creates the

jobs that the hon. Member for City of Chester rightly said will come from the small business sector—4.7 million businesses employ fewer than 10 people. There is significant upside in the opportunity for jobs to come from small businesses.

Late payment is the No. 1 issue cited by the Federation of Small Businesses from a survey of its members, as we have heard. The unequal relationship between large and small business needs attention as we debate the Bill further. Small businesses should not be afraid to take on their large business partners for fear of loss of future business, but that situation is all too common at present.

On borrowing, we need better signposting so that small businesses know where to go if the banks will not lend. I hope the measures on credit scoring that we heard about earlier will help, as few small businesses are aware of the alternatives. On Merseyside we have the Merseyside special investment fund and in the north-west we have the Cumberland building society, which offers a full range of banking services. Those are two examples that I have come across which show that there are good lenders out there, and there is hope. We can learn a lot from them, which is why I hope Labour's proposals for a proper system of regional banks will come to fruition when we get into government next year. We will then be in a position to support small businesses and make sure that they can borrow the money they need to develop their business, ensure growth and create the jobs that we have been talking about.

4.42 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): In the limited time available to me, I shall, as chair of the all-party save the pub group, restrict my comments to the pubs section of the Bill. That is not to say that there are not many excellent measures in the Bill, but I want to concentrate on those relating to pubs. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is no longer in his place, as I wanted to put on the record my thanks to him for listening, doing what was clearly needed and legislating to deal with the flawed and discredited business model that has done so much damage to the valued institution of the great British pub.

I have said very vocally that BIS and the Government got it badly wrong in 2011 when they decided to go down the self-regulatory route yet again, even though it had clearly failed, as was shown by the Select Committee. I give every credit to my right hon. Friend and to Ministers for looking at the issue again, listening, acknowledging that the problems were still there and in many cases getting worse, and finally acting. I pay tribute to my colleagues in the all-party group and to the Fair Deal for your Local campaign, which was formed in April last year, bringing together the Federation of Small Businesses, the Forum for Private Business, the Guild of Master Victuallers, the GMB, Fair Pint, the Pubs Advisory Service, Licensees Supporting Licensees, Justice for Licensees, the Campaign for Real Ale, and Licensees Unite, part of Unite the union, which represents more than 2 million members and many, many licensees up and down the country as a strong voice for the pub sector.

We in the campaign and the all-party save the pub group warmly welcome the fact that we will have legislation; that we will finally have a statutory code of practice. I

[Greg Mulholland]

and the two vice-chairs of the all-party group have written to the Secretary of State—which is a good job because I will not get the chance to outline my position in the limited time available now—to make clear the Bill’s flaws as we see them.

First, there is no apparent mechanism by which the Government will deliver their clear commitments to fair and lawful dealing and—crucially, to pubs in companies that have 500 pubs or more—to a tied licensee not being worse off than a free-of-tie licensee. It is not clear how the parallel rent assessment can do that or how the adjudicator would enforce that.

Secondly, it is a huge flaw that the enhanced code will apply to companies with 500 tied pubs. That makes no sense at all. This is about market share, as with the beer orders. As we have said clearly and consistently, it must apply to companies with 500 pubs or more of any kind, but within that it must apply only to leased and tenanted or franchised pubs, not tied pubs. That is crucial; otherwise, as we have seen, the large pub companies will simply put people on free-of-tie agreements, or so-called free-of-tie pricing, and put their rent through the roof, even further above market level. Clearly, that will take more money, and the problem will not be solved.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I add my congratulations to the hon. Gentleman on the work that he has done on this issue. Does he agree that in some ways what is proposed misses the mark, because not only does it expect too much of the small family brewers, for which we have such high regard, but it expects too little of the pub companies that many of us have considerable concerns about?

Greg Mulholland: The Fair Deal for your Local campaign clearly campaigned for a statutory code to include the all-important market rent only option—the Select Committee solution—for companies with 500 pubs or more. We did not envisage or call for a code for companies smaller than that. It is interesting that we have ended up here because the so-called British Beer and Pub Association, which is the mouthpiece for the pubcos, decided that it was a clever tactic to try to deflect any legislation by saying, “Oh no, we mustn’t have a two-tier system,” which has backfired terribly. Once again, the BBPA has badly let down the family brewers, who should seriously consider whether to continue to remain part of an organisation that lets them down and is increasingly discredited.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) *rose*—

Greg Mulholland: I give way to the vice-chair of the all-party save the pub group.

Caroline Nokes: Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the pessimism that we have heard about the market rent only option is unwarranted in the case of family brewers?

Greg Mulholland: Of course, the market rent only option would not apply to family brewers. They would be excluded even in the current proposals, because the

enhanced code is only for companies with more pubs. But a lot of myths have been circulated and there is a lot of scaremongering. The all-party group has done a good job with other campaign groups in debunking that. We were told that free houses used to close in greater numbers than pubs—absolute nonsense, and we have proved that. We are now being told that somehow this would close breweries. That is complete and utter scaremongering. It is nonsense. Only 14% of Marston’s revenue is even from its tied estate. It makes huge amounts of money—I am glad to say—from selling its beer to supermarkets and to the free trade from its managed pubs. It is scaremongering without evidence, and the Government must deal with that. It is also why the Treasury must finally answer the freedom of information request and tell us what evidence it has been sent. There is no credible evidence to back up the claims of the BBPA and the big pub companies, which are simply trying to defend the indefensible and to prop up what has been a disastrous business model, which made a few people very rich and has destroyed pubs, and is continuing to make perfectly viable pubs close because of the huge debts they are paying.

In the limited time that I have I must challenge the Minister. This will be a conversation that will be had between now and Committee stage when it will be explored. As set out, the adjudicator will deal with breaches of the code, yet the fundamental problem is that the pub companies are taking too much in the form of excessive tie prices and inflated rents from pubs. How will the adjudicator deal with that? How will the parallel rent assessment deliver that? The adjudicator must have the power to impose a new, fair tied rent. That is the only way in which the Government will be able to deliver their commitment, but it is not clear that the adjudicator will have that power.

Also, I can see no specification of the level of fines. The only arrangement that would make any sense would be one that enabled the adjudicator to say, “Yes, you have been considerably overcharged for this period, and the fine will be set at a level that will allow the pub-owning company to pay you back the entire amount by which you were overcharged through unfairly tied prices and excessive rents.”

The Government have not explained why they have not adopted the simple solution. Their current plans will result in a huge work load for the adjudicator, but there is a simple solution. It was put forward by the Select Committee and backed by 10 organisations including the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business, and it is now time to look seriously at improving the situation with a market rent only option.

4.50 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I welcome the general intention of the Bill to support small businesses, but I worry that it does not go far enough. In Northern Ireland, small businesses form the heart and the backbone of our local economy, and they have faced an extremely challenging economic environment over the past six years. I agree with those right hon. and hon. Members who have said that the unwillingness of banks to lend to individuals has resulted in many of those people’s businesses going to the wall. I recall hearing about conversations between a bank and a local farmer who lost his business, and between a bank and a local shop owner who sadly

had to close his business. In both cases, this was a result of the banks' unwillingness to show a level of mercy and compassion.

I hope that the measures in the Bill will go some way towards helping businesses to compete and grow and, in doing so, to create jobs. I know that the Federation of Small Businesses is encouraged by the measures to strengthen the prompt payment code and to force larger businesses to publish their payment terms. Today, however, I would like to take this opportunity to focus on another element of the legislation: the issue of zero-hours contracts contained in part 11 of the Bill.

The Bill at least acknowledges that the wide-scale use of zero-hours contracts can present a problem, but I fear that it will do little to seriously reform the practice. It is predominant in the lower-skilled sectors of the economy and in manual work, but just yesterday I heard reports of a university lecturer post being advertised on a zero-hours basis. The practice has become more and more common, and it represents a gradual erosion of the important connection—and the concept of a fair settlement—between an employer and an employee.

This is not some abstract problem on the fringes of the economy; it is becoming increasingly prevalent. Last year's excellent "Channel 4 News" report on care home staff showed the reality for people on such contracts. My hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) has already referred to this issue. Those people have no economic power; they live day to day with little ability to manage their own finances or plan for the future. They have their hours texted to them, often with little notice, and they have no flexibility or rights. They have little possibility of negotiating any form of pay rise because they have minimal employment rights and there is always someone else ready to do their job.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech about the individuals who face those challenges. Is she also aware of constituents like mine who even have trouble accessing housing benefit and other forms of support because their hours fluctuate so much from one week to the next? That makes it very difficult for them to access the state support that should be there for them.

Ms Ritchie: I agree with my hon. Friend's fine intervention and compelling point. I have had similar instances of people who, because of the fluctuating nature of their contracts and their lack of access to money on a continuous basis, have found themselves outside the housing benefit bracket and in trouble, so to speak. The nature of zero-hours contracts removes any sense of stability from people's personal or family life, and leaves them on a treadmill with no hope of promotion, a pay rise or progress. How can people be expected to manage a tight family budget on such a basis?

I welcome the fact that the Bill will ban exclusivity clauses for zero-hours contracts, which prevent people working for another employer even when no work is guaranteed. I issue a caution, however, as that is only a start and does not get at the underlying problem represented by the low-wage, temporary and fragmented nature of large parts of the economy. Retail prices index inflation has tracked above wage growth for five years, and more and more people are being pushed into shadow jobs that offer no security and leave them precariously perched

on the bottom rung of the employment ladder. Is that correct? Is that proper? Is it fair? More concrete measures must be put in place to change those practices and re-establish the connection and fair agreement between an employer and employee. I hope that progress made during the Bill's passage through this House will enable that to happen, and that the Minister will provide us with some solace in that regard this evening.

4.56 pm

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): My constituency was built on small businesses and the ingenuity of those who run them, but I must express some concerns that I discussed with one of my constituents, James Staughton, who owns St Austell brewery, when he invited me to a dinner recently. St Austell brewery has about 170 pubs, and although I welcome the protections afforded in the Bill to hard-working pub tenants, I wish to mention the concerns that James raised.

Smaller organisations would find it more difficult to operate under a new statutory code. There is little doubt that gaming machines are an important revenue source, and to not allow smaller companies that important revenue stream would simply put costs elsewhere—the last thing we want is a rise in rent that those hard-working tenants have to compensate for. Having the fixed cost of a compliance officer is unfair on smaller companies that have a much smaller base to cover the additional burden. The same can be said of the necessity to have a valuer qualified by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors to sign-off rent assessments and a number of other compliance requirements.

It is clear to me that the small businesses that run fewer than 500 pubs need to be excluded from most, if not all, these regulatory changes. After all, I fought the last election on removing Labour's red tape not adding to it, and I remind the Secretary of State—unfortunately he is not in his place—of his words:

"In order to place the most proportionate burden on business, the Government is proposing that this new regulatory regime should apply to all pub companies with more than 500 pubs."

There was no mention of these measures applying to smaller pub companies.

Further concerns are short-term agreements and tenancies-at-will, which are often used to assist when a business is in crisis. Because of the short-term nature of those tenancies, I ask the Government to consider the regulations carefully, as short-term emergency measures, by their very nature, need more flexibility than longer-term tenancies. Tied pubs are a tradition. A tenant should not be able to come in and change all the beers, losing the landlord much of the revenue and possibly changing the whole nature of the pub—which, if successful, will go through many tenants in the period of its life.

I welcome the Bill, but I want to ensure that we have got it right. I want to save the British pub, not punish it.

4.59 pm

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray), who made some excellent points, particularly about the pub trade.

As many hon. Members will know, I am a small business owner myself, so I begin my speech by declaring an interest through Danczuk's Deli in Rochdale. I extend an invitation to hon. Members to pay a visit whenever

[*Simon Danczuk*]

the opportunity arises. It is also important to say that today I was unanimously elected chairman of the all-party group on small shops—a position I am very pleased to be able to take up.

As a Member of Parliament and as a small business owner, I welcome this Bill. Before I discuss it in detail, I want to make a couple of brief but important points. First, we often talk about social mobility, but usually in relation to schools and university. It is my strong view that small business can be a very powerful tool for social mobility and vital in helping individuals to achieve their potential. That is worth remembering.

Toby Perkins: On social mobility and the roles of schools and small businesses, I am sure my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the Labour party recently announced that we are going to make it easier for small business owners to get involved in being school governors so that they can make sure that schools are turning out people who are work-ready and that schools and business have closer links.

Simon Danczuk: I thank my hon. Friend. I am pleased to hear that, because the link between education and business and enterprise is very important.

Secondly, small business is important to communities. Small businesses have helped to keep Rochdale going during very tough times, and they have formed the building blocks on which the future success of the town will be based. For example, Hanson Springs in Rochdale has developed from being a very small business into a major employer providing secure jobs for local people, creating skilled occupations, and providing many exports for the country.

Let me turn to the Bill. I welcome the commitment to tackling issues such as late payment and procurement. Small businesses, especially new ones, often operate on very tight time scales with very small margins of error. When invoices are not paid on time, that can have a huge impact on a business. It is not simply a case of having to wait for money; it can hold back investment and cause small businesses to lose important contracts. Late payment also has a domino effect that flows along the supply chain, affecting many businesses and harming business relationships. It is shocking that 51% of invoices paid by large businesses are paid late. Something really needs to be done to tackle this. The problem does not relate only to large businesses. We know from research by the Federation of Small Businesses that central Government pay 29% of their invoices late. That is clearly unacceptable. I would hope that the Bill could do more to tackle the issue of Government and large businesses not paying on time.

I recently wrote an article for a new think-tank called The Entrepreneurs Network in which I suggested the idea of a small business kitemark for local government that would assess whether a local authority was fulfilling its obligations to small business and help to share best practice. There are many such ideas that could improve the relationship between Government and small business. I hope that that can be considered as part of the Bill.

That brings me to procurement. According to FSB figures, every £1 spent by local authorities with small local firms generates 63p of economic benefit for the

local economy. Given that local authorities spend literally billions of pounds on procurement every year, there is a lot of potential benefit for local areas.

On the scope of the Bill, the section that deals with access to finance is mainly limited to late payments and does not deal with the more tricky issue of getting banks lending to businesses again. There are some great companies out there, such as Octopus Investments that are helping innovative new businesses get off the ground, but Government could still do much more. I would like to see—and this is a Labour proposal—more regional investment banks such as those in Germany that are investing in small and medium-sized enterprises and helping them to grow their businesses and to export.

I also want to address business rates, which are still the No. 1 issue among small businesses. The current business rate system is completely out of touch with reality and needs fundamental reform. The British Retail Consortium is looking at the issue and I think we should consider its interesting proposals.

In conclusion, this Bill is a step forward, but it is not a step change. It tinkers where it should transform. It does not show the ambition that our small businesses need and deserve. After this Bill, there will still be much more to do.

5.6 pm

Mr Brian Binley (Northampton South) (Con): I wholeheartedly welcome the Bill. I have been an advocate in this place of small business since I came here, having founded two small businesses that have grown to employ almost 300 people. That underlines the power of small businesses in our business sector. I am vice-chairman of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and am proud of the work we have done, particularly in advocating the pub code. I am also the chairman of the second largest all-party group after that on beer, namely the all-party group on small business. It has been one of the major themes I have pursued since I came to this place.

I want to concentrate on clauses relating to the pub code. When the BIS Committee took evidence, we found that many tenants had been attracted to pub tenancies by misleading information given by pubcos—I am excluding small and sizeable family breweries—that turned out to be untrue. The Committee proved that estimated profits were often overstated and that the effect of estimated costs relating to a combination of dry and wet rent was often understated. The result was tenants investing money on a fake premise. They lost that investment over time by supporting an ever-more costly business which eventually failed. What happened then? Similar tenants came in to support a pubco financial model that is heavily laden with debt and that simply does not work without that sort of subsidy—but it is a criminal sort of subsidy, and I say that without fear or favour.

I am for a pub code, but I do not think it goes far enough with regard to those particular pubs and companies. We need to do more. The Federation of Small Businesses survey found that almost 90% of tied tenants would take a free-of-tie option with an independently fair-rent option, and 51% confirmed that the rent paid to a pubco is higher than in the open market—a crazy situation—while 98% would have more confidence in the future of their business if they were free of tie, 78% would invest in pub maintenance and 73% would invest in modernisation. The figures are meaningful.

Greg Mulholland: My hon. Friend forgot to mention in his long list of titles his elevation earlier this year to president of the save the pub group. It has been a pleasure working with him. As well as the figures he has—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo): Order. Sit down. We are really pressed for time and Members need to be disciplined. We did not need the introductory remarks, so you have lost the opportunity to make your point. I call Brian Binley.

Mr Binley: President Brian Bingley. [*Laughter.*] I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Bill proposes a mechanism called a parallel rent assessment. From a tenant's point of view, such a mechanism is time consuming, and it will allow a pubco to run a tied tenant into financial collapse long before they receive an adjudication determination. It is potentially expensive for tenants, requiring them to employ professionals to represent their case, and it is complex. It is also totally unsupported: no organisation, pubco, brewer, tenant or consumer supports the parallel rent assessment mechanism. I am therefore surprised that the Government have recommended a mechanism with so little backing.

I appeal to the Minister to reconsider the proposals on pubcos, especially as they relate to the tie, and to consider the opportunity for a fair rent option without a tie. I am happy that the breweries are excluded from that particular element—the Select Committee in fact asked for that—but pubcos should be willing to face up to their responsibility in relation to encouraging tenants to take their pubs on false pretences. If hon. Members have, like me, seen a woman in their office in tears because she owes £94,000, having taken on a pub on a false premise, or seen a husband trying to comfort his wife because they know they are going bust, having sold their house to invest in a pub—there are many examples of that kind—they would recognise that reality.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating all those organisations and individuals in constituencies up and down the country, such as Paul Naylor of the Legh Arms in my constituency, who campaign tirelessly for community pubs?

Mr Binley: I am delighted to help the hon. Gentleman with his press release. I of course congratulate the gentleman concerned.

Pubs are a social institution of massive worth: their value to our community is as great as almost any other institution that we might name. The pub landlord often acts as an adviser to people on everything from legal matters right through to how to get their car repaired. His wife often helps with the charity work undertaken in pubs, including by creating refreshments for pub teams when they return from playing a game. The whole institution of pubs cannot be overestimated for our local communities.

I want to emphasise that pubs are, however, under serious threat, especially from the large pubcos. I want to ensure that our local and regional breweries, which have brave defenders, are also protected, because they also play an important role.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Binley: I had better not, or Madam Deputy Speaker will have words with me privately later.

I conclude simply by urging the Minister to reconsider the option proposed by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee in its report. The Secretary of State initially seemed to accept it, but I fear that the Treasury oar then had an impact, smacking him—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo): Order.

Mr Binley: Pity.

5.14 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Speaking in my capacity as co-founder and co-chair of the all-party group on anti-corruption, I welcome the proposals in the Bill to create a public register of beneficial owners known as the register of people with significant control. That move will mean that the UK is the first major economy to have a public register providing details of who really owns and controls what are currently anonymous shell companies. That is important because, although businesses play an important role in developing thriving societies around the world, some companies abuse global corporate structures. Secret ownership structures allow wealth to be hidden away. Many companies and individuals avoid or evade tax by keeping their money in a complex network of trusts and shell firms, which are often based in secretive tax havens. That deprives developing countries of much needed tax revenue that could be invested in public services and infrastructure.

It is secret company ownership that makes most cases of large-scale corruption, criminal money laundering and terrorist financing possible. A World Bank review of 213 big corruption cases between 1980 and 2010 found that more than 70% of them relied on anonymous shell entities. Many of the company service providers were registered in the UK or in our Crown dependencies and overseas territories.

The cost of this activity to developing countries is vast. The best recent estimates suggest that between \$21 trillion and \$31 trillion in private financial assets is held in tax havens, which is greater than the entire global aid budget.

That is why the all-party parliamentary group has been lobbying hard and speaking to Ministers about how we can ensure that the public register does the job that it sets out to do. We want to ensure that a number of issues are taken into consideration. We want to ensure that the information on beneficial ownership is available to the public as open data, that it is machine-readable and that it conforms to the Open Knowledge definition. We want to ensure that the information can be verified and that there is sufficient information to distinguish one individual from another. For example, a date of birth might be necessary. We want to ensure that there is a legal responsibility for companies to acquire and declare information on the identities of beneficial owners, as well as a legal requirement on beneficial owners to declare to companies that they are the ultimate owner. As I said to the Secretary of State, we want to ensure that there are significant penalties for failure to

[Catherine McKinnell]

comply to ensure that everybody complies with the requirements. People must not think that it is worth while ignoring the requirements and they must not get away with doing so.

I want briefly to raise the concerns of Public Concern at Work about whistleblowing. The proposals go some way towards addressing those concerns, but do not go far enough. There are still concerns about gagging clauses. Many people who receive severance payments believe that they are gagged, but in law they are not. There are concerns about blacklisting and job applications. There is no cause of action in law if somebody who has blown the whistle and has been put on a blacklist is not recruited on that basis. There is currently no protection for armed forces and national security whistleblowers who raise concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice. We need greater protection for individuals who seek advice from trade unions. For example, people who raise concerns but do not take the matter forward still need protection under the law. We all welcome greater support for whistleblowers, so I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on the concerns that have been raised.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to touch on the proposals in the Bill on pub company regulation, particularly as I am due to meet members of the Tyneside branch of CAMRA at the Millstone pub in South Gosforth on Friday. Many of the issues have been discussed by hon. Members, but Tyneside CAMRA believes that the Government need to go further in protecting community pubs. Its members are particularly disappointed that the Bill does not include market rent only and guest beer options, because it believes that requiring the big pubcos to provide tied licensees with those options would be the simplest means of ensuring fair play. Those options would support not only community pubs, but microbreweries across the country, such as the excellent Big Lamp brewery in Newburn in my constituency.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Catherine McKinnell: I will give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo): No you will not, because your time is up. You just missed it by a second, I am afraid.

5.19 pm

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): I rise with some trepidation to speak on Second Reading, because it is such an enormous Bill and contains so many interesting measures. I am well aware that speaking on Second Reading sometimes marks Members out as candidates for the Bill Committee. I envisage that it will be a very long but fascinating Committee. The Bill contains many disparate measures. Some are not eye-catching or glamorous, but they will do a good deal to support small businesses in practical ways. They demonstrate that the Government take their commitment to make life easier for small firms very seriously. I like the Bill so much that I think we should have a small business Bill at the beginning of every parliamentary Session.

I am especially interested in the new measures on prompt payment, which is a big issue in my constituency—a lot of construction firms in my constituency are often troubled by the late payment of fees. The requirement for certain companies to supply details of payment times and for them to be published is welcome. I have sympathy with the views of the Federation of Small Businesses, which says that records of payments to sub-contractors should be taken into account when companies bid for Government contracts. I would be tempted to go further than that—all of a private company's businesses arrangements, including how well it pays its suppliers in private business dealings, should be taken into account when it bids for a Government contract—because we need to foster a culture in which not paying promptly results in reputational damage to firms. About £40 billion is owed to SMEs in contract payments. It is not acceptable for firms to enjoy the Government's prompt payment policy if they do not share it with their supply chains.

It is brilliant that the Government's mystery shopper scheme is being made statutory. It is a fantastic scheme. I am pleased that about 80% of the cases referred to the mystery shopper scheme have resulted in a positive outcome and improvements to procurement practices to improve small firms' access to public sector contracts. I am a big fan of that initiative, but it needs to be used more widely. I have been given many examples of SMEs that have gone through the time-consuming process of bidding for a significant public sector contract. They hear that they have submitted the most competitive, best-value bid, only to find that a major firm has secured the contract. The major firm then asks the SME to be its sub-contractor to do the work in any case.

The suspicion is that, often, public sector procurers use excessively high requirements when they are not relevant to the contract—for example, on financial track records—as a means of simplifying their work load and of letting the bigger corporations manage multiple contracts for the public sector. At the same time, the bigger corporations take a sizeable top slice of the cost to the taxpayer. I have found the mystery shopper scheme to be a useful tool in my arsenal to assist businesses that approach me when they are based in my constituency or are seeking to invest in it. However, the scheme needs wider publicity—more businesses need to know about it—and I am encouraged that things are taken forward in the Bill.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree with banning exclusivity clauses in zero-hours contracts. Many workers, and especially many women in my constituency with whom I have discussed the matter, say that they like the flexibility, but when things go wrong, and the employer abuses the system, the problems start. They can cause serious hardship. Strictly speaking, banning exclusivity clauses will not entirely end the abuses of zero-hours contracts. The Government clearly recognise that, which is why clause 139 gives scope for further reform.

I praise the Department and the work of UK Trade & Investment on exports. UKTI is undoubtedly the driving force behind some of the measures in this huge Bill. As a member of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, I consider it my implicit duty every time I meet a business owner who exports to ask whether

they are getting support from UKTI and how they rate it. The feedback has recently been 100% positive, from tiny, niche luxury food exporters to big bespoke boat builders such as Blyth Workcats, which manufactures catamarans on Canvey Island. Businesses have great confidence in UKTI and increasingly value its work and approach. I am happy to take this opportunity to say so.

I commend the numerous common-sense measures in the Bill, which will do a great deal to support business growth and small businesses as the engine of our long-term economic plan. I am very proud to commend—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo): Order.

5.24 pm

Mr William Bain (Glasgow North East) (Lab): Small business needs a Bill that unlocks new finance to help businesses grow, gives new impetus to business investment, boosts science and research, and provides fairness and clarity on rights at work, while removing the worst abuses of zero-hours contracts. Sadly, judging by the Bill before the House today, the real radicalism of this Government is expended on the frenzy of briefing against each other, rather than on dealing with the underlying problems that affect the sustainability of the recovery and small businesses: a serious skills shortage, a growing trade deficit, still modest business investment, stagnant productivity threatening permanently lower living standards, short-termism on infrastructure, and chronic insecurity at work.

The Bill falls short on the challenge of putting optimism back into business in Britain for several key reasons. First, it fails to address the crisis of young people, work and skills identified by the OECD in its study last autumn. Small businesses are struggling to find employees with the required skills in our weakened labour market. In the production sector alone, 25% find the availability of workers with non-management skills worse than the year before. A third of small firms say skill shortages are stifling growth. When four out of five manufacturers in this country say that they are finding it difficult to find employees with the right skill set, and two thirds of those go on to say that that is because of a lack of technical skills, we in this House should listen.

Stephen Metcalfe: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the skills shortage cannot possibly have happened in the past four years alone? There must have been a deficit going back to the previous Government for there not to be any skilled employees around now.

Mr Bain: That is an interesting point, but to answer it I advise the hon. Gentleman to listen to what businesses are actually saying, which is that the problem is getting worse on this Government's watch. What are the Government doing to deal with it and what will the Bill do to deal with it? Precious little.

The Government should be doing more to support small businesses to improve the technical skills of their staff. They should be looking at the idea the Opposition proposed to introduce technical degrees, which would give hundreds of thousands of people the opportunity to get the degree-level skills that small businesses are looking for while they are still in work.

Secondly, the Bill fails the test of promoting small businesses because of a lack of any substantial measures to improve access to finance. The £1.5 billion direct lending scheme, launched by the Government in autumn 2013, received only 15 inquiries by April 2014; just one firm applied for support under a scheme first announced in the previous year's autumn statement. The £5 billion export refinancing scheme was launched in July 2012 as part of the Treasury's UK guarantees scheme. As of April this year, not a single business has been helped by that scheme. As welcome as clause 4 is on the sharing of data on small and medium-sized businesses between challenger banks, the Bill does nothing to create additional competition in the banking system to repair broken financial pipelines that would mean that corporate surpluses can find a home in productive investment in our economy. Just one third of SMEs are using external finance and only a third of applications for first-time loans are being accepted.

Thirdly, on access to broadband, the Bill fails to remove some of the practical barriers many firms suffer from, particularly in remote areas, and fails to promote competition in ways recommended by the recent report on broadband by the Federation of Small Businesses.

Fourthly, on zero-hours contracts, as many as 1.4 million people, plus those who work in agencies, will still have insecure working hours despite the provisions in the Bill. There is no commitment that people who have been consistently employed for a year or more will receive guaranteed hours at work. I recently met a constituent in Blackhill in my constituency who has worked for 15 months with the same employer. He can see his weekly hours fluctuate from zero to as many as 74 hours via text and with minimal notice. The provisions in this Bill will not help him. They are weak and easy to evade.

Some of the faces on the Treasury Bench may be different, but it appears that the mindset of this Government remains closed to new ideas. There may be new voices at the Dispatch Box, but on policy this is a no-change Government, dominated by the same old Tories. For a lasting recovery that will genuinely benefit ordinary people and small businesses alike, next May's general election and a Labour Government cannot come soon enough.

5.30 pm

Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): It is a great pleasure to take part in this debate and I warmly welcome the Bill.

Like many other Members who have spoken today, I come from a small business background. I started my own company at the age of 19—it is still going, which is good news—so I understand very well that small businesses are indeed the engine of our economy. The unemployment figures that we have seen in Gosport and other parts of the country this week are testament to the incredible role of small businesses in driving employment and growth. Small businesses make up more than half of the UK's jobs and GDP. They are absolutely essentially to the UK economy and it is important that we do not fail them. That is why I am so pleased that we have a Government who actually get it and are firmly backing small business, with the first ever Bill that genuinely reflects the role that small businesses play in our economy.

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

I like to think of small businesses as the ideal romantic partner. They are quite low maintenance and do not really expect grand gestures from Government. What they really want is to be allowed to keep their heads down and focus on the job of running their businesses, generating growth and jobs. However, there are a few things that the Government need to put in place to allow small businesses to flourish and grow, and they certainly should not put obstacles in their way. Some of those things are covered in this Bill, which is why I welcome it.

The skills issue is incredibly important. We are all aware of the OECD report that showed that under the last Government, 16 to 24-year-olds in this country were likely to have lower skills than their grandparents, and we are the only country in the developed world to which that applies.

Mr Binley: I have already said that I founded two companies, which now employ 300 people. Labour Members have to recognise that one of the problems is that their policy on literacy and numeracy education in schools has been a total disaster, with many young people seeking jobs who cannot properly express themselves and certainly cannot add up properly. Does my hon. Friend think that that is one of the problems with skills training now?

Caroline Dinenage: I am pleased that the whole issue of adult literacy and numeracy will come before us on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee shortly. I feel that we are in a global race. Every era has its valuable commodities and the most valuable commodity of this era is an educated work force. It is what our international competitors most understand. The measures in the Bill to provide us with a deeper understanding of the impact of education choices on labour market outcomes are therefore welcome.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I want to emphasise my support for the Government's measures to ensure that outcomes from the education system are properly tracked into business and employment, because that is the essence of our training and school reforms.

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. For too long under the last Government we saw a proliferation of courses that were not valued by employers, and young people paid the price. Better information will help to cut out courses that employers do not value, making sure that our young people get the skills they need.

Another important pillar for business is of course access to finance, which is also covered in this Bill. There were more new businesses last year than ever, but businesses still identify access to finance as a problem for them. The measures in the Bill will help business to get the funding they need, as well as helping to ease the problem of late payments, which has been the downfall—in fact, sometimes the death knell—of so many fledgling companies.

Another big issue is red tape and bureaucracy, which is covered widely in the Bill. Any business owner will tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the burden of pointless

regulation and paperwork, which spiralled out of control under the last Labour Government. Important steps have already been taken to address that, including the red tape challenge, which has seen at least 3,000 regulations scrapped so far, and the one-in, two-out rule.

There is still so much to do, however. I sent a survey to SMEs in my constituency, and over half of those that responded said that, despite the Government's efforts, regulation was still a problem for their business. So measures that will help reduce the costs of company registration and make Companies House more efficient, along with the introduction of e-registration, are all really welcome. I welcome, too, the five-year review of secondary legislation, including laws that come from the EU. It is important to review laws after a reasonable amount of time, but could we not go further and apply this provision retrospectively to existing legislation?

Access to markets is, of course, absolutely fundamental to business, both domestic and overseas. The public procurement market is worth £230 billion, and I welcome the Government's commitment to simplify Government contracts, giving small businesses better access to this marketplace. This must go hand in hand with a Government approach that sees us as early adopters of innovation. Too often we see our great British invention and innovation adopted first by overseas Governments, particularly the US and Germany. Where the marketplace goes, the jobs and prosperity follow. I would like to see all Government Departments encouraged to welcome British innovation and to adopt it early.

On overseas opportunities, it is estimated that if SMEs could raise their export performance to the EU average—if the one in five British SMEs that exports could now be raised to one in four—it would wipe out the trade deficit overnight. We have seen steady growth in this area, with our exports to Brazil, India and China rising faster than those of our competitors, but we still have a lot of catching up to do, so I am pleased that the measures in the Bill will make it easier for small businesses to expand overseas.

The challenge now is twofold: making sure that businesses are fully aware of all the support that is available, so that they can get maximum use out of it; and making sure that UK Export Finance has the resources to deliver this wide range of support. In addition, we need to make sure that support is tailored to the needs of individual businesses. Exporting can be a daunting prospect for a small business, so first-time exporters should be given both up-to-the-minute information about emerging markets, and as much assistance as possible in finding new customers.

Tomorrow, I welcome the business woman Karren Brady to a school in my Gosport constituency, where a programme of events will be run to help inspire the entrepreneurs, business people and innovators of the future. These young people hold the key to our nation's future economic prosperity. It is up to the Government to deliver them an environment that ensures that they can work in the most competitive, business-friendly country in the world. All in all, I feel that this Bill is another step in the right direction from a Government who have consistently backed small businesses to deliver that.

5.37 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It is indeed a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage). It is a great thing that we are debating small businesses, which are at the heart of British life. From the corner shop to the village pub, business and free enterprise are at the heart of the British way of life. From the Marks & Spencer penny bazaar, we have seen so many businesses grow from small roots. I am concerned, however, that there are still several anti-small business practices and broken markets where an active Government taking the side of small business could make a real difference and a real change.

If I were to open up my postbag and draw out the top three things that small businesses write to me about, the first would be procurement. Smaller firms find it difficult to procure larger contracts that could be vital to the future of their business. The second and perhaps the most important and the most dangerous is tackling the scourge of late payments. Finally, many of my constituents love their pub and are afraid that it is disappearing off the high street.

Speaking as someone who comes from the betting industry, I can say that we have seen the decimation of small, independent betting shops. They were once a common sight on the high streets of Britain, but they have all but disappeared as a result of massive change. I am fearful that the same thing is happening to the pubs. There is no sadder sight than seeing boarded up a pub in which people enjoyed their youth and perhaps their first pint, or where they joined their first football or pool team. It is sad when such a pub has no future. We must address this real problem now. Some 27 pubs a week have been closed since 2010. Many people are not interested in the big pub companies, but they like their local, along with their local landlord or landlady. These are the ones that keep the sports teams going, whether it be pool, darts, football, rugby or cricket. They are often places where people meet, discuss tactics and enjoy a pint afterwards.

I am not going to make sweeping statements about pubcos. That is sometimes a problem with us politicians: we have a habit of making sweeping statements. However, I am deeply concerned about the position of pubs. Many industry stakeholders are not profiteering from the opportunities made available by the terms of tied pub contracts, and I welcome the introduction of regulation in principle as a platform for meaningful and material reforms. However, I have grave concerns about the weakness of the Government's proposals. I fear that they will cause further detriment to the nation's pubs by encouraging pub companies to accelerate what many consider to be their asset-stripping programme of disposal of pubs for alternative use.

The fundamental problem faced by tenants is the charging of excessive rents that do not reflect the over-inflated prices of tied products. I urge the Government to accept that, if we are to have meaningful reforms, a market-rent-only option would offer a genuine remedy should a pub-owning company act inappropriately, and a clear, tangible power for the adjudicator for whom the Bill provides would render unfair lease or tenancy provisions unenforceable.

I also want to say something about late payments in the short time that is available to me. The Bill empowers the Secretary of State to require businesses to publish

their payment records in order to increase transparency, but gives no indication of when that will be done. It does nothing to shift the burden from small businesses which have to complain about their large-scale customers. The Bill also provides for action to make public sector bodies pay more quickly. I welcome that, but, according to statistics that I have seen, 77% of members of the Federation of Small Businesses have said that private sector organisations are more likely to make late payments. Late payments are a moral issue. What is lacking is an unambiguous statement from the Government that this is an anti-business practice which must be stamped out. I call on them to take strict action.

I should have liked to develop my argument further, but perhaps I talked about pubs too much. Let me end by drawing attention to the difficulty that small businesses experience with procurement. Many complain to me that the process is unfair, time-consuming and costly. I think that there should be a way of simplifying it so that businesses can compete for both Government and private sector procurement contracts.

As I have said, I should have liked to develop my argument further, but I look forward to the Government's response.

5.42 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I welcome the Bill. I think it significant that we are debating a small business Bill, because I know that, for far too long, many people who run small businesses and many of the organisations that represent them have felt that they are "out of the tent" when the Government make decisions and produce legislation that affect businesses. They feel that they are the Cinderella of the business world when it comes to Government engagement.

Today, we should welcome the fact that small business has a voice. Organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses certainly have a voice: many of their recommendations appear in the Bill. We should listen to those organisations, because small businesses are extremely important. They have created 2 million private sector jobs in the last four years, 2,000 of them in my constituency, and have driven down the unemployment rate. Unemployment has fallen by 26% in my constituency in the last 12 months, and youth unemployment has fallen by 38% during the same period. We need to engage with small businesses and listen to what they say in order to find out what they want us to do to enable them to create the jobs that we need.

The Bill comes off the back of a number of other measures that the Government have taken to help small business. They have, for instance, extended small business rate relief, introduced the employment allowance, frozen fuel duty, cut beer duty, and reduced corporation tax to the lowest rate in the G20.

In the short time that I have, I want to say a few words about specific parts of the Bill. Many businesses come to me with problems caused by late payments, which are dealt with in part 1. In the last week alone two people who run small businesses in my constituency have mentioned the issue of late payment to me. It is extremely important at the moment when a lot of businesses are expanding. Often when businesses try to expand after a recession, they hit cash flow issues, and the Bill's measures on late payment will be extremely important in assisting them.

[*Mr Marcus Jones*]

Turning to part 3 on public sector procurement, many of my constituents would probably also like to see something in the Bill about prequalification questionnaires and reducing the burden of them for small businesses. It would be a good signal from Government if there were something in the Bill about late payment from Government organisations and local authorities, too. When I was a local authority leader in the depths of the great Labour recession in 2008–09, we made our payment terms 10 days and many local small businesses benefited from that.

Many of my pub landlords who are pubco lessees will welcome part 4, but we need to be careful to avoid unintended consequences, particularly in terms of the effect on family brewers and their cost base. We must also properly recognise the role of franchises, which now seem to be coming to the fore. I have at least one pub in my constituency that is owned by Marston's and is franchised, and it is important that that is recognised as well in this Bill.

Finally, I want to talk about part 9 of the Bill. Many small businesses in my constituency have fallen foul of rogue directors, some of whom seem to have the habit of setting up businesses, failing them and abandoning all their creditors, and then starting up businesses again very soon afterwards. We need to have a culture where we do not think it is completely awful to fail, and we need to make sure our entrepreneurs feel that they can fail at times. However, people who habitually cause major distress in this way to other businesses—many of them small businesses, some of which then go out of business—need to be dealt with, and I hope the provisions in part 9 will go some way towards doing that.

I am pleased with this Bill. I am extremely pleased that it is a Bill for small business, and I am very enthusiastic about seeing it pass through the House. I hope I will be able to say a little more on Report.

5.47 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Small businesses are the powerhouse of the economy, contributing 46% of the UK's annual income in the private sector. If we are to have a sustained economic recovery, it will be built on the backs of small businesses. I support the principles of the Bill, although it has been late in coming, but I have some concerns about the detail.

I want to refer in particular to the late payments provisions. As has been mentioned, I have had a campaign on this, stemming from a local issue, for the last three years. A local haulier came to me and said his business was going out of business as a result of late payments. That opened a whole can of worms. Small businesses do not want to go public about late payments because of the possibility of retribution. This all culminated in a Radio 5 Live phone-in programme on late payments last November, which had the highest ever recorded response.

That shows the scale of the issue, and it is hardly surprising. We know from BACS—bankers automated clearing services—data that £46.1 billion is currently owed in late payments. That affects not only productivity—158 million hours have been spent chasing overdue bills—but also access to finance and the terms of that

finance. The Forum of Private Business estimates that in 2012 it put out of business 124,000 businesses, so it is a huge issue, not just in the private sector, although it is more predominant there, but in the public sector, as was reported on the “File on 4” programme last week.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) mentioned the inquiry I held last year, involving people from across the House. Its fundamental finding was that late payments reflect the culture of a company, which is ultimately down to the company's leadership. Late payments are a form of corporate bullying, because large companies are able to exert their power over small companies.

Chris Evans: I am listening to what my hon. Friend has to say, because she speaks from a position of great knowledge. What advice would she give small companies that find themselves in an unequal position where they cannot get the payment out of a larger company, which can bully them? What would she say to them?

Debbie Abrahams: I would say that the measures in the Bill are not enough. There is a power imbalance between the large companies and the small companies, and late payment needs to be seen as being as unacceptable as tax evasion.

The Government's proposals to remedy the situation are disappointing. They have taken up a number of recommendations from my inquiry, but those have been very watered down. For example, clause 1 fails to describe how the prompt payment code will be updated. As we have heard, the code is already being abused by a number of prominent large companies, so, without that detail, it is legless. Similarly, the Government have reneged on their promise made last December to introduce 30-day payment terms throughout the public procurement supply chain. Instead, clause 3 states that regulations “may” be introduced to require large companies regularly to publish information about their payment practices. That is very disappointing indeed.

Another example is the Government's failure to reform the pre-qualification procedures for public sector contracts, which have been estimated to cost the construction industry alone more than £1 billion annually. One of my recommendations on the pre-qualification questionnaire was that there should be regular updates on the past payment performance of such companies, but such a provision has been omitted. Article 7 of the EU directive on late payment, which protects small businesses and allows them to maintain their anonymity when challenging grossly unfair practices, has still not been implemented. The mystery shopper scheme in clause 34, which allows small businesses to complain about poor practices, including late payments, does nothing to address the climate of fear in reporting these events. This is not good enough; it really does not go far enough. The fundamental point I made earlier about the bullying culture and the power imbalance has not been addressed at all in the Bill.

Toby Perkins: I wish to place on the record my admiration for the work that my hon. Friend has done on late payments, but may I assure her that—

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Opposition Front-Bench team have intervened on four separate

occasions on Back Benchers. Is it in order for the Front-Bench team, who are about to have 10 minutes at the end of the debate, to intervene on four separate occasions, meaning that colleagues are having their chance even to speak limited?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): It is, of course, in order, because the person who has the Floor can take an intervention whenever she wishes to do so. But one would expect discretion from the Front Benchers. Now, we were halfway through a very short intervention—

Toby Perkins: I am willing to show discretion.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said. The Bill does not go far enough on addressing the cultural issue that underpins and drives late payment, and we need to make sure that it does. The Bill fails to stand up to powerful vested interests on behalf of small businesses and the people they employ. The business associations I have spoken to see the Bill as a “massive disappointment” on late payments, and I will be tabling amendments to address these issues.

5.54 pm

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise to support the Bill today. We are unashamedly pro-business. We have already created 1.8 million jobs and 400,000 new businesses, and business is delivering jobs, growth and opportunity. I want to cheer up the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Bain), who was scrabbling around looking for doom. Unemployment has fallen by 45% in my constituency. Apprenticeships have increased by 66%, equipping apprentices with the real-life, tangible skills that our growing economy needs. We saw the terrible OECD reports about young people not being equipped with basic skills, but I know from my 10 years running my own business and employing people that we are making important education reforms to ensure that every young person is not robbed of opportunities and is equipped to make a positive contribution in their lives and to the economy.

In the brief time available, I want to comment on a few parts of the Bill. The first part is about access to finance and I welcome the measures to improve opportunities for businesses to access different types of finance, because it is vital that we recognise that the world is changing, technology is becoming far more important and businesses are increasingly operating 24/7. We should do all that we can to encourage innovation to match that. Long gone are the days when business owners would wait several days and put on a suit for an appointment with a bank manager who does not understand their business. The world is changing and we should encourage new technologies to ensure that businesses can access finance as quickly as possible and recognise new opportunities.

I attended a business lunch organised by *Total Politics* and the Asset Based Finance Association at which different types of finance were mentioned. A clear message was that many businesses, which are often too busy to sit down and study the things that we deem to be important in Parliament, are not aware of the available options. I appeal that we should include in the annual business rates mailer, for which the taxpayer has already

paid, helpful information to update busy businesses about such opportunities. I would also encourage teaching business students, whether in school or university, about the different types of finance now available beyond core banking.

On regulatory reform, I welcome the fact that we now recognise micro-businesses, which, as we should always remember, are significantly different from small businesses. Too many speeches often call for further regulation, forgetting that micro-businesses simply do not have the time to conform.

The most popular subject today seems to be the important issue of the pubs code. My constituency has 1,400 connected to the industry. I supported much of what my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray) said, because we must be careful about what we ask for. There is a massive difference between pub companies with over 500 pubs and traditional family brewers, including Arkell's in my constituency, which has just over 100. Piling extra regulation on such brewers would be a major problem and would impact on their ability to employ people and to support our local economy. I am probably in a minority here, but the idea of a guest beer is crazy. It would be like going to McDonald's and saying, “Okay McDonald's franchisee, you are allowed to host one Burger King burger or one KFC sandwich.” The Society of Independent Brewers is also totally opposed to the proposal. We do, however, need to go further to ensure that the terms that tenants sign up to are absolutely crystal clear, so that they understand, as should be the case for any business signing up to something, exactly what it is that they are signing. We should also do more to train the future generation of landlords, because companies tell us about a real shortage of people. A lot more could be tied in with hospitality management courses, particularly now that food has become so important in many pubs.

On education evaluation, I welcome the fact that further information will be provided about what happens after students leave school, which will encourage education facilities to arrange partnerships, involve mentors and even embrace the opportunities of Young Enterprise. Schools should encourage their students to sign up to schemes such as the National Citizen Service or the Duke of Edinburgh's award, which can build up CVs and improve the chances of getting work.

Finally, on employment, I am a big advocate of pushing hard on enforcing the minimum wage. It is unfair on the staff who are exploited, often akin to slave labour, and on the competition which cannot compete on price, and it encourages the economy to become a race to the bottom.

5.59 pm

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I shall try to keep my remarks as brief as I can.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley) laid out much of what I wanted to say about the importance of small businesses as a sector. We ignore them at our peril as they are, as we have heard, the backbone of our economy and have, I think, played a vital part in driving down the claimant count in my constituency by nearly 36%, driving youth unemployment down by nearly 45% and upping the

[Stephen Metcalfe]

number of apprenticeships by nearly 60%. They play an important part and we must do all we can to support them.

Although perhaps not everything we have done as a Government has been helpful to small businesses, I truly believe that the Bill is. It takes steps towards helping secure their future and addressing the challenges they face. We could go one step further, perhaps, by creating a US-style small business administration unit within the heart of Government to ensure that the impact on small businesses of every piece of legislation that goes through this House is taken into account.

There is one issue in particular that I want to speak about that might not be covered elsewhere, and that is clause 117. It relates to the Government's proposal to create a reserve power to prohibit pre-pack administration sales to connected parties if certain criteria are not met. I want to talk about that in the context of the printing industry. I should declare an interest and refer people to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, where they will find that I am a shareholder in a small family printing business.

The printing industry is particularly vulnerable to the impact of pre-packaged sales in administration. Printing is an over-capacity industry dominated by small companies. Consequently, the incidence of pre-pack administrations in the industry has been relatively high and the damage caused to creditors and competitors alike has been significant. Those controversial business rescue arrangements enable the debts of previous owners to be written off and have attracted criticism from creditors and competitors. When there is a connected party—that is, when the owners of the new company are the same as those who ran the old company—creditors are aggrieved because they have lost money owed to them and competitors are aggrieved because they face a rival who now has an unfair trading advantage.

The British Printing Industries Federation believes that an insolvency practitioner, or IP, who has previously provided advice to a company on the potential for a pre-packaged sale in administration has an inherent conflict of interest should they later accept a formal appointment as administrator with a view subsequently to execute a pre-pack sale. The BPIF therefore considers that an IP advising a company prior to a pre-pack sale should be precluded from becoming the administrator for the company concerned, to curb the incidence of cases where an IP attempts to secure new business by inviting distressed businesses to enter a pre-pack before other options, such as seeking an alternative operator for the business or a potential sale, are properly explored.

The introduction of a requirement for a different IP to accept appointment as administrator would improve confidence that pre-packs are used only in appropriate circumstances by ensuring that conflicts of interest were avoided. That would enhance the confidence of creditors in the insolvency practitioner's handling of the administration. I realise that this is a technical issue, but it is a big issue for the printing industry and, I suspect, other industries, too. I have no pecuniary interest in the business any more as I am no longer a director and no longer receive any payment from it. I would like the Minister to look hard at this issue and ensure that

we have covered every option in the clause to ensure that it works the way we think that it does.

I would have liked to have said much more, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am sure that it will all be covered elsewhere or can wait until another day.

6.3 pm

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I welcome both the intention behind the Bill and much of its content. Over the past four years, we have been able to foster a genuine entrepreneurial spirit across the country and, in particular, we have seen participation rates among women and young people rise year on year. There are now 15% more women-led businesses than there were just four years ago. I am proud to have been the Minister who began the reform of support for SMEs, put in play the 27,000 mentors for start-ups, and enabled the entrepreneurship growth that we are seeing on our university and colleges campuses, but there is more to be done. That is why I think the Bill is excellent in seeking to support the extension of export finance support to companies, not just to individual transactions. The Germans have done this for years, and I am glad we are catching up. I am also pleased, although I am a keen supporter of flexible labour markets, to see that the Government are looking to get rid of exclusivity clauses within certain contracts. They are right to do so and have my strong support.

In the time I have, I want to touch on two topics—deregulation and the long-term challenges in the employment market. On deregulation, good progress has been made. We have seen, for example, the annual flow of new regulations fall by 70%, and the stock of existing regulations cut by £250 million. That has been achieved principally by making the process of regulation more difficult for officials—making it the last resort for Whitehall, rather than the default first option. But the measures in the Bill need to be strengthened and I hope Ministers will respond to these points.

First, the Bill allows the Ministers of the day to define what is in scope and what is not, what is measured and what is not measured. All Government burdens on SMEs should be measured and the costs published. I have no problem if the Chancellor of the day wishes to count, shall we say, the administrative costs of the tax system separately from other regulatory burdens. Fine, but they should be measured and they should be published. The Bill currently fails to commit to this.

Secondly, we need a truly independent overseer. Clause 22(5) states that an independent body means

“a body which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, is independent of the Secretary of State.”

That is not good enough. What the House will look for is an open process whereby we can see an independent body established and its membership chosen.

Thirdly, as has been mentioned, the Government should commit—I hope those on both Front Benches will think about this—to an annual debate in Government time on progress in reducing the burden.

My second issue revolves around longer-term changes in the world of work. Since 2000 here and in the United States we have seen a 38% and a 50% rise in self-employment, but conventional jobs have risen by

percentages in just single figures. So this is not a cyclical change. It is a long-term structural change in the labour market. Over the next 20 years the concept of a conventional job as we now understand it will be just one form of work for most people. Young people coming into the workplace now will be in and out of employment, self-employment and contracts right the way through their careers, yet we in politics still argue about the previous century's form of labour markets and terminology. We use terms that do not relate to the lives of many people.

So what is to be done? First, I hope Ministers will think carefully about getting the right information and terminology. We should instruct the statistics authorities, including the Office for National Statistics, to overhaul how we measure what we call work—both the way in which those definitions are made and the way in which the data are collected. At present they are incomplete and out of date.

Secondly, we need to make sure that our taxation and our employment law are overhauled. What we currently call IR35, or what I like to think of as a complete mess, is one example that we need to change. It is an example of the past. What is needed instead is a system that is clear to the individual, consistent for the working individual, and above all neutral as to how people earn their living. At present we are obsessed with which particular box to put them in. That is a mistake and it is out of date.

I welcome the Bill, which makes important contributions to an important issue, but I hope that in the long term we will get these issues right for all of us.

6.9 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): It is a delight to take part in the debate, albeit with a shortened contribution, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), who did such a fantastic job when he was a Minister.

I wholeheartedly support the Bill, which will be welcomed by businesses in my constituency. They will benefit from the red tape that is to be cut, the help to export, the support that they will be given to access finance, and the ability to be paid more quickly. It will be welcomed by the workers who are on the minimum wage, who will see that enforced, and by those on zero-hours contracts, who as a result of the safeguards will no longer be victimised.

Obviously, as the Member of Parliament for the home of British brewing, and the chairman of the all-party parliamentary beer group, I want to speak on the issues that relate to pubcos. I can honestly say that this is the most pub and beer friendly Government that we have seen in generations. It was this Government who scrapped Labour's hated beer duty escalator, which saw beer duty increase by 48%. It was this Government who had the historic two successive cuts in beer duty, which have seen a growth in our beer market—two successive quarters of beer growth for the first time in 10 years and sales up in our pubs.

I had concerns about the consultation, but I strongly believe that this is a good compromise and a workable solution to draw a line in this long-running sore that we have seen for too long in the debate over the tie. It works because it introduces a tough statutory code that clearly demonstrates how pubcos and breweries should operate,

and offers proper protection to tenants. They can see in this code the help that they deserve and the requirements on those pubcos. With an adjudicator with real teeth they will have protection. They will have somewhere to go quickly to get proper redress. The adjudicator can say if a tenant is paying too much in rent or for their beer, and can fine those pubcos if they act irresponsibly. That is the perfect protection.

Intervening in the marketplace, such as scrapping the tie, would have had disastrous effects. No one today has mentioned the BIS report by London Economics, which showed that 1,600 pubs would close almost overnight if the tie was scrapped. No one wants to see that. We need evolution. We need this to work for our tenants and for our pubs.

There are things that we can do. I draw attention to a number of speeches, such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) in particular, and the issue of the smaller family brewers—the 500 mark. No one is suggesting that they have acted irresponsibly. No one is suggesting that the legislation is to catch them. One solution would be to move some of the more prescriptive and expensive regulatory issues from the basic code to the enhanced code—things such as the RICS requirements and the need for a compliance officer. Those sorts of things could be moved into the enhanced code, freeing up the smaller family brewers from being dealt with by the legislation.

There is a need to look at the tenancies at will, which are covered by the legislation. They are basically quick tenancies. If a pub is closing, if a tenant leaves or dies, the pubcos have two choices. Either they close the pub, board it up and wait until they have a tenant to take over or they have a tenancy at will. The suggestion of a tenancy at will not being encompassed in the legislation, up to a point of say 12 months, would allow that flexibility in the marketplace.

I urge the Minister to consider the franchise issue. Marston's in my constituency has a number of franchise pubs. Franchises are very different from tenancies. There is no rent review or wet rent. They are covered by the British Franchise Association code of ethics. There is an argument that they should not be covered. I am glad that we do not have free of tie in relation to the guest beer. The Society of Independent Brewers, which one would think would be most in favour of this, has warned that it would be damaging, and we would just see foreign fizzy lagers, not British cask ale.

I commend the Government on the Bill. It offers help to our pubs and I hope it works.

6.14 pm

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I want to follow on from some of the issues that have been raised, not least by the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), although I take a rather different view. I am speaking not for the brewers, but rather for my own union, Unite, and for Save the Pub, CAMRA and Fair Pint. I want to make a couple of brief points, having listened to some of the earlier contributions, particularly in relation to the levels of unemployment and the triumphalist claims from Government Members about how wonderful the situation is. I emphasise that the recovery—such as it is—is uneven, and there are huge regional disparities. I advise the Minister and Government

[Grahame M. Morris]

Members that in my region unemployment is 129,000, and rose by 5,000 between last December and May this year. That needs addressing, and I was hoping for rather more practical measures to deal with those problems.

The main point I want to raise is about pubs, and I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who are also officers of the all-party save the pub group. Pubs, and indeed working men's clubs, are vital community hubs, but they are closing at an alarming rate—10,000 pubs in 10 years, which is 26 a week. I fear that the measures in the Bill will not adequately address the problems faced by our pubs.

I welcome the introduction of a statutory code of practice for large pub owning companies, and we have already rehearsed the arguments about the difference between those large pub companies and smaller regional brewers. Such a code is long overdue and much needed to address the fundamental problems created by pubcos, which I believe have done so much damage to pubs.

I do not believe that the current problems properly address that matter, and neither do they deliver on the Government's commitment to the two core principles that the Secretary of State told us about in his opening remarks: a fair and lawful deal to ensure that the tied licensee is not worse off than the free-of-tie licensee. We know how many pubs are closing—26 a week—and for too long, large pub company chains have been giving landlords a raw deal. It is clear that large companies take too much profit from pubs—profit that would go into expanding those small businesses, employing more staff, offering longer hours, and boosting the local economy. That fundamental problem is acknowledged by the industry, and I hope that the Government will address it in Committee.

The Government have said that they will not introduce the market rents only option, and instead they have the principle that no landlord should be worse off than if they were free of tie. The reforms in the Bill aim to ensure that the tied licensee is not worse off than the free-of-tie licensee, but as the hon. Member for Leeds North West indicated, there is no effective mechanism to deliver that.

There is a strong economic argument to end the abuse by pubcos which unfairly exploit tied tenants, and there is lots of survey evidence that 90% of tied tenants would take a free-of-tie option with an independently assessed—that is important—fair rent, if that were on offer. More than half confirm that the rent they pay to pub owning companies is higher than the open market rent. I find it strange when some hon. Members say that such a measure would be a backward step and lead to wholesale pub closures, as I do not think that is the case. I have indicated where I think the extra profit would go in terms of additional staff, and under the proposed scheme licensees would be granted the right to ask their pubco to show them how much their rent would be under a free-of-tie scheme. Those calculations would be made by the pubcos, however, which obviously have an interest in providing the highest possible estimates. There are some problems with the Bill, and I hope we can explore them in more detail in Committee.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Since all Members have taken the full five minutes, and some longer because of interventions, I must reduce the time limit to four minutes to allow everybody the chance to speak.

6.19 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Is that for speakers after me, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): No, sir.

Chris White: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am sure that hon. Members will be relieved to know that my speech is not about pubs, which were very well covered by the previous two speakers. My hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) put the case very well.

I thank small businesses in my constituency for their role in reducing unemployment and jobseeker's allowance claimants by 63.5% since 2010. One of the biggest issues that businesses face is the financial hurdles they come across. In giving better access to finance and improving cash flow for small businesses, the Bill will go a long way towards addressing some of these problems. Small and micro-businesses, in particular, face issues with excessively long payment terms imposed on them by large companies. I am pleased that the Government are going to tackle this head on.

In relation to employment, I particularly welcome the provisions in the Bill to clamp down on employers who are not paying their employees the national minimum wage. I hope that increasing the maximum penalty that can be imposed on employers will be a significant deterrent to those who continue to avoid their obligations. I have supported the campaign to widen the uptake of the living wage, and I hope that encouraging business to do this will also be one of the Government's top priorities.

The Bill makes important provision regarding procurement. I am particularly interested to see the extension of the Cabinet Office's mystery shopper scheme, which a number of Members have mentioned. The scheme has been used successfully to monitor the implementation of social value. I have no doubt that giving it additional powers will provide more opportunity for the Government to improve procurement practices.

Small businesses are thriving in my constituency. I particularly commend the Leamington business improvement district for the work it has done to promote business in our area. That is a fantastic example of the results that can be achieved when business is able to work collaboratively to achieve the common goal of regenerating and supporting local business. Nationally, BIDs across the country are generating £100 million per year of investment in town centres. I also pay tribute to the local chamber of commerce and organisations such as Leamington Business Forum, which do so much to support the sector.

Small business is fundamental to our economy. I am pleased that measures in the Bill will free companies from unnecessary burdens and support them to make the day-to-day running of their work more successful and free from regulation.

6.22 pm

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): People who start or run their own small businesses are heroes. Every day, they take the risks, they work the extra hours, they manage the anxieties, and they go the extra mile to create employment and wealth in constituencies across the country. They are people like Amy Taylor and Zak Resinato. Amy Taylor started her beauty business very early in her teenage years and is now at the stage of putting it on a solid and sound foundation for future growth. Zak Resinato is a person I see every week who is not only inspiring in running his own business but inspiring others who work with him to have the vision that they too can start their own business. Beth and Mahmood, through their dedication and hard work, have created a café that is working in a location where it never worked before—an environment that local people want to spend time in. Maria has battled a council that does not understand the role of business rates in suppressing entrepreneurship. Year after year, she carries on in business because that is the core of her passion.

We live in the age of the entrepreneurs, and those people in my constituency are some of the leaders in that age. They look to this Bill and this Government for inspiration. There is indeed much in the Bill that can inspire them, but, alas, too much in the way of intervention and regulation. It is as if the Secretary of State sees himself as a real-world version of Saruman, the character who came down to Middle-earth with the best of intentions but unfortunately took the power to himself and believed that he alone was benign enough and so all-seeing that he could create a wonderful environment in which all would be good. Alas, the Secretary of State has not read his Hayek. He does not understand that it is a far better solution for our country's economy to leave these decisions and powers in the hands of the entrepreneurs—the people who make these decisions and take these risks every day. The shadow Secretary of State noted that the Secretary of State had Conservative minders. It is important that he has Conservative minders, and I am delighted that the Minister for Business and Enterprise will be a strong, solid Conservative voice in getting this Bill through Parliament.

Part 4 is where some aspects of intervention and regulation fall down. It was never the intention that family-owned breweries would be impacted by the regulations, yet the Bill has measures that will do so. That should not happen in a Bill that is supposed to support small businesses. It also provides for an adjudicator whose role is flawed, and for a publican code that, as many hon. Members have already said, lacks some of the necessary details to be able to support small businesses. The Government's own impact assessment states that there are additional costs on a brewing and pub industry that is already reeling from the cost competition provided by supermarkets and other places where people can buy alcoholic beverages. Those things should be looked at by the Minister and given a Conservative slant, to make sure that we support not only our publicans who want a fair deal, but our family brewers who also deserve a fair deal.

Let us hope that, through this Bill, people such as Zak, Amy, Beth, Mahmood and Maria can say that the Conservative Government stand, in the age of the entrepreneurs, on the side of our small business leaders.

6.26 pm

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), whose enthusiasm for small business I fully share.

Macclesfield has a great tradition of enterprise, from silk in the Georgian and Victorian days to pharmaceuticals today, with AstraZeneca producing 1% of UK exports, which is an incredible statistic. I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today that he will tighten up the takeover rules and ensure that any entity wanting to make a major acquisition in the UK makes stronger commitments and that penalties are enforceable. The company is a national asset that is vital to our local economy and science base.

I want to focus primarily on not just the major businesses in Macclesfield and north-east Cheshire, but the many small and micro-businesses that are the lifeblood of our community—those entrepreneurs who are helping to continue our rich tradition of enterprise. The Minister for Business and Enterprise is doing a tremendous job in taking the Bill forward and initiating all the work that it pulls together. Small business makes a big impact and the Bill acknowledges just how big that impact is. The Government have a long-term economic plan that is working—Government Members often mention it—and Ministers are right to use the Bill to roll out further measures in support of that plan. It is absolutely critical that we take away the barriers to success, create a level playing field for small businesses, promote exports and help employment growth. This is an unashamedly pro-small business Bill, which is what we would expect from this Government.

I am passionate that what we do in this place has to help the four Es of sustainable economic success: entrepreneurs, employers, exporters and, of course, employees. The vital measures in the Bill will help all of them. Part 1 will lower the cost of access to finance, which is absolutely critical not just to existing businesses, but to businesses that people hope to set up—Government Members are passionate about helping people who want to set up businesses. We are going to ensure an increase in competition in that marketplace as well. Clause 4 in particular will encourage new entrants by removing the barriers to knowledge. The situation has been too imperfect for too long. That knowledge has been available only to big lenders, so now it will be shared with a wider group of potential lenders.

Part 3 will make more available in terms of public procurement. A £250 billion market of public expenditure will be made available to smaller businesses. That will help to break down the tangible and psychological barriers that are holding too many businesses back from getting started in the first place.

It is incredible. We have received feedback from different outside enterprises and organisations and they are heralding the Bill. The Federation of Small Businesses, for example, has called it a landmark Bill, and it is—it is both symbolically and actually important for small businesses.

We need to help first-time employers in their work. We have done so with the employment allowance, but we can now go further. We must make sure that we can de-risk by enhancing what goes on in the tribunal system and by taking deregulation to a higher and more statutory level, which will ensure that such businesses

[David Rutley]

are supported over the lifetime of the next Parliament. I wholeheartedly support the vital steps that are being taken, as I hope all hon. Members will this evening.

6.30 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), I hope that this debate sets a precedent for more discussions and legislation on supporting small businesses, but like my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), I hope that we will free entrepreneurs from the shackles of intervention, rather than encourage more of it.

The Bill's aim is to make the UK the best place in the world to start, finance and grow a small business. The Government are already helping to achieve that admirable aim by backing small businesses through scrapping the jobs tax, extending small business rate relief, introducing the employment allowance, cutting fuel duty and reducing the rate of corporation tax for small businesses, which, under the previous Government, was higher than the rate paid by some large corporations.

That is why employment has risen by 250,000 in a single quarter, with new business creations at record levels. In Worcester, I have seen how start-up loans and the new enterprise allowance have helped new entrepreneurs to come into the market, and how youth unemployment has been halved since the general election, while apprenticeships have more than doubled. Like the FSB, the CBI and the British Chambers of Commerce, I support a Bill that will extend that progress.

The Secretary of State said that the Bill is complex, and it certainly is. There is far too much to address in a four-minute speech, but I want to speak about a few of the things it gets right and about one big omission. The Bill is right to address access to finance, which is clearly a concern for all small businesses in our constituencies. Data sharing is a very important way of doing that—for example, organisations such as Impetus, which helps many businesses in my neck of the woods, should get access to a list of businesses that have been refused finance by banks and get more of the data that the banks at the moment keep to themselves.

Supporting small businesses and exporting is great. We are all in favour of that, and I agree with the many hon. Members who have praised UKTI's work and the extension of UK Export Finance to more small businesses. However, I want to sound one note of caution. A business in my constituency that exports to more than 20 countries has contacted me to say that it has lost access to passport to export funding, because that has been refocused on larger employers. I hope that we can support small businesses to get bigger as well as support bigger and more established businesses.

The Bill is right to extend the red tape challenge, which has already saved more than £1 billion, and to replace one in, one out with one in, two out. It is also right to help small and medium-sized enterprises to access more Government procurement. In my view, it is much better to do so by removing barriers and simplifying the application process than by some kind of central business administration, as the FSB has suggested. We need to learn from the US model. The Government

have increased small business procurement from 6.5% to 10.5%, but there is still a long way to go to reach the target of 25%. I hope that the Bill will help us to reach it.

It is right to address the pubs code and to create an adjudicator, but I share some of the concerns of my colleagues on the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills in that the Bill could go further and that more could be done to protect some of the smaller family brewers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) said, the Bill will do important work on the skills agenda, including by improving access to destination and training data. It was great that the Minister for Business and Enterprise recently visited Worcestershire Business Central in my constituency, which is linking employers and schools in Worcestershire. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), who said that a fundamental reform of business rates is missing from the Bill. When the Select Committee looked at the future of the high street and the retail sector, it recognised that there is a need to reform the business rates system to make it deliver for small businesses that are growing, to remove some of the shelves in the system and to update it for the 21st century. That will be challenge for all the parties in their manifestos for the next general election.

I commend the Bill. It is great to see the Government really striving to help small business.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Today's prize for patience goes to Anne Marie Morris.

6.34 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I congratulate the Government on the Bill, which is an excellent piece of work. Having been a champion of small businesses and particularly micro-businesses for many years, I am very pleased to see it making its way on to the statute book. Small businesses represent 96% of businesses as a whole, and they provide 50% of the jobs in this country and 30% of private sector turnover. In my four minutes, I clearly cannot deal with the whole content of the Bill, but given that so much has already been said, I will make a few comments.

On late payment, the Government's suggestion of a reporting requirement on payment performance is a good first step. However, we all feel a little frustrated and feel that there needs to be a bit more stick. The prompt payment code has inevitably had a very good start. The challenge is that, because compliance is not mandated, it has not delivered all the results that we want. Perhaps listed companies—whether fully listed or listed on the alternative investment market—could be required to comply.

We might also consider having an adjudicator, as with the pubs. If there is a persistent defaulter who breaches the prompt payment code five or six times, that could be brought to the attention of the adjudicator. An adjudicator could also look at the public sector. Although central Government have done a good job of reducing payment periods, local government has not been quite so good. An adjudicator might be able to improve that situation.

The Government have done a grand job on regulatory reform. One-click incorporation is being pushed forward. I suggest that, although incorporation is the goal for many organisations, limited liability is often what they seek. We should consider having limited liability for sole traders. That has been looked at before, but I suspect that the people who were consulted were those with, might I say, a prejudicial interest.

The defining of micro-businesses and small businesses is long overdue. I commend the Government for doing that, but would issue a note of caution. In my view, the EU definition is not the right definition. The all-party parliamentary group for micro-businesses produced a report in 2012 that showed that research from America, Australia and other parts of Europe suggested that many countries had moved the definition of micros from 10 or fewer employees to five or fewer. That must be reviewed carefully.

The steps that the Government are taking on public procurement are first-class. However, the problem has not been fully addressed. The problem for small businesses, on top of the administrative burden and the red tape, is that those who are seeking to procure often look for an organisation that can supply five, six or 10 different products. Many small businesses provide only one product, which shuts them out of the opportunity altogether. That needs to be looked at.

I will not comment on the pub code, because the Government have done a first-class job with their proposals. Many of the proposals on employment law are also well drafted, particularly the changes to zero-hours contracts.

I would like to know where we have got to with the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, which also looked at tribunals. It tried to minimise the number of people who go through the tribunal system by requiring people who want to go to tribunal to talk to ACAS as a first step or say that they are not interested. It also introduced settlement agreements. We must ask how successful those have been, because this is the last opportunity for the Government to fix anything that has not quite worked in that piece of legislation.

This is an excellent Bill and I commend it to the House. As a champion of all micro-businesses, I am sure that they will be very pleased about what the Government are endeavouring to do.

6.37 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Some of my colleagues are at the memorial service for Paul Goggins and so are unable to be here, even though they contributed to the debate. I ask for the forbearance of the House for that.

We have had a fascinating and excellent debate that has demonstrated the passion that the House has for small businesses. In the four years since my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) first set out his determination to make his one nation Labour party the party of small business, there has been a welcome change across the political spectrum in the recognition of the importance of small businesses.

Like my hon. Friends the Members for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) and for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) and the hon. Members for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley) and for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), I am a former small business owner. We were described as

heroes by the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller). I therefore know that although the Government's words have been warm and welcoming, they have not always materialised into action for small businesses. Small business Saturday, which is a significant cross-party initiative, originated with my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna).

Matthew Hancock: It was Barack Obama!

Toby Perkins: The Minister is not the first to confuse the two.

We welcome the fact that this is the first of the Government's Bills to have small business in its title, and it contains a number of measures that we will support. Indeed, on pub companies, late payments, zero-hours contracts and takeovers, the Bill demonstrates the extent to which the Labour party has set the political agenda. However, in the final analysis, the Bill is a metaphor for the entire Government. They know that there are important things to do, they hear what some of the key issues are, but they cannot agree on what to do, so they deliver a Bill that fails fully to grasp the nature of the challenge that faces Britain if we are genuinely to rebalance the country's economy, support more small business growth, and create an economy that works for the many and not just the few. Members on both sides of the House are pleased that there is a small business Bill, but the sense of a missed opportunity was widely articulated by them.

On access to finance, we are four years into this Government, but net lending is still falling year on year. The right hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir Andrew Stunell) said that banks have sucked up Government money and reduced lending to small firms. That view was also articulated by the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami). Labour's plans for local lending, a beefed-up British investment bank and support for alternative sources of finances have the potential to be truly transformative for Britain's small businesses, which have been struggling for access to finance for far too long.

On pub companies, Labour Members have argued on Opposition days and in Back-Bench debates since 2011 that the Government were wrong not to introduce an independent adjudicator, and not to put the pub code on a statutory footing. We welcome the fact that they are doing so today. On three occasions, they voted against the measures they now propose. However, the parallel rent assessment process lacks credibility, as was reflected in the comments of the hon. Member for Northampton South (Mr Binley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris). The impact on small family brewers—no one suggests that they are the cause of the problems facing the industry—was mentioned by the hon. Members for Bedford, for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray) and for North Swindon. The measure means that those family brewers face costly and incoherent plans that could be damaging for them.

Unless strengthened, the Bill will not deliver the change we need for Britain's pubs. It was hard to find an hon. Member who was fully in favour of the proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), who has done fantastic work on the issue

[Toby Perkins]

through the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, said that the pub company model had failed. He gave the Committee's support for a mandatory rent-only option. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) is bewildered as to why the Government did not follow the recommendation of the Committee or of Her Majesty's Opposition. To demonstrate the extent to which the Bill falls short of expectation, it was welcomed by the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths). If there is a clearer definition of why the Bill fails to stand up to the test we should set for it, I do not know what it is.

The Government are taking sensible steps on strengthening late payments provisions down the line with respect to public procurement, but they are leaving the onus on the public sector and small businesses to avail themselves of data to discover whether or not they are likely to be ripped off if they sell to a company. Action on public sector late payment is fine, but it does not tackle the lion's share of the problem. Seventy-five per cent. of businesses that cite late payment as a problem are talking about corporate late payment. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), who has a fantastic pedigree on the issue, spoke powerfully on the importance of tackling private sector late payment as well as public sector late payment. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale described the measure as a step forward and not a step change, which was a neat way of putting it. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) said that we need action on corporate late payers. My hon. Friends will be pleased to know that Labour will propose serious steps during the passage of the Bill that will shift the burden of responsibility off small firms that wait and on to the large firms that pay late. We will truly stand up for small businesses. Those small firms want an end to being used as a cash cow by their large counterparts.

On zero-hours contracts, the Government have done the least they possibly could. I suspect the Secretary of State recognises that the steps in the Bill offer little to employees who face a choice between the insecurity of zero-hours contracts or going back on the dole. As my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham laid out, Labour will take serious steps to recognise that the benefits of a flexible work force should not come at the expense of basic security for long-term employees.

We recognise that there will always be a need for temporary work. There will always be seasonal variations. Any sensible regime will allow for that, but the Government's policy is all about political presentation—they want to be seen to be doing something about an issue they recognise is toxic on the doorsteps—and is not serious action to end the misery of life on zero-hours contracts for workers in Cameron's Britain. Those whose working day is spent picking vegetables, working in a call centre, caring for the elderly or plucking a chicken deserve the right to be represented by this House. The House will speak up for them on zero-hours contracts.

The measures on public sector exit payments, as my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham said, are a bit rich coming from the Government who, in the biggest ever NHS reorganisation, sacked hundreds of senior managers, paid them off, and then discovered that they

still needed them to do their jobs. I think the sense of frustration was felt on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Bedford, who I have to say was in mid-season form and speaking very well—it is clear why he was not promoted; he is far too sensible—asked why there are no steps towards legislation on the living wage. That is a valid point, which was not properly answered.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) exposed the fact that Government proposals on minimum wage fines will not deliver for workers, as the money will simply go back to the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) said that the Secretary of State did not understand what life was like for people in her constituency struggling to get by on low incomes. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Bain) said that the Government were closed to new ideas.

There were contributions from the hon. Members for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) and for Nuneaton (Mr Jones). The hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage) criticised Labour's record on education. It was almost as though she did not represent a party that sacked their Education Secretary yesterday. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) welcomed the takeover plan, which, I have to say, on first hearing sounded very much like what my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham and my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North proposed just a few months ago.

What is clear is that small businesses are very important, and they are respected and admired by Members across the House. However, this is a Bill that misses an opportunity to take some of the steps that really could make a very significant difference. I welcome some measures, but we feel that the Bill demonstrates a series of compromises from a Government who have run out of ideas. They have lost a sense of central purpose and are trapped in their own contradictions. They are frightened to ask the electorate for their verdict and so they stagger on unloved even by those who are in it. It is time for a Government with a fresh agenda. A Labour small business Bill would have delivered real opportunity. This is a Bill that speaks of a Government who are approaching the end. We will give Members the opportunity in Committee to turn it into a Bill that really means something: a Bill that delivers for workers on zero-hours contracts, a Bill that protects publicans, pubs and family brewers, a Bill that empowers small businesses waiting for money they are owed, that boosts our world-class insolvency regime and protects Britain's manufacturing pedigree. That is what the Bill should be about and that is what the Bill still can be about. Let us strengthen it so that it really delivers, or admit that this Government never will deliver and let us have a general election.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Business and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): It is a huge privilege to respond to this debate on the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill. This is the first ever small business Bill and it demonstrates the wholehearted, full-throated and determined support of this Government for business. We give this support for a reason. We are building a recovery in which all can share, where the principle of fair exchange builds prosperity and creates jobs, with the financial security and peace of mind that they bring. Business is a force for good in society and we will

do everything we can to support it. In the passion my hon. Friend, the Member for Northampton South (Mr Binley) showed in his remarks, and in the service he has given in support of business in his time in this House, he demonstrated what it means to say, “We support small businesses and we will help them to expand and grow.”

We welcome the broad support for the Bill from the Opposition. I had an inkling, from the suggestion that they want to improve it in Committee, that they will not vote against the Bill on Second Reading. I would welcome that. They made some constructive remarks, but occasionally I thought we heard a tone that was just a little bit shrill and did not quite make up for 13 years of failure to support small businesses and of burdening them with more borrowing, more regulation and more taxation. The small business men and women of this country will not forget how much more difficult it got to do business under Labour. They will not forget that every Labour Government have left office with unemployment higher than when they started. This Bill is part of our long-term economic plan and it takes steps to help to put that right.

Let me go through the parts of the Bill in turn. Many Members contributed to the discussion on access to finance. The hon. Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), for South Down (Ms Ritchie), for Islwyn (Chris Evans)—he called late payment a moral issue and he is right—and for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) all contributed, alongside Government Members, supporting the progress being made on access to finance in the Bill. Of course, recovering from the biggest banking crash in the history of this country takes time and is difficult. This Bill contains measures that will help us to travel further on that journey.

Many supported the proposal on regulatory reform, and I welcome the support from the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) for putting the one-in, two-out rule into law. Underneath the bluster, I think the Opposition supported the proposal on public sector procurement—I am not quite sure—but ending the revolving door of pay-outs in the public sector will certainly help.

There was a huge amount of discussion about pubcos and strong support for that part of the Bill. The crucial action we are trying to take is to bring the balance—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says, “Three years,” but Labour did nothing in 13 years. The key is to balance the need for changes and the need not to undermine the tied model as a whole, because we do not want the unintended consequence of large-scale closures. We will work to ensure we get the details right. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), who is surely the strongest supporter of pubs and beer that this Parliament has known—and my goodness, that is an accolade. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) has rarely risen in this House to speak of anything but the need for action on pubcos. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray), the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Mr Binley)—or should we call him President Binley?—and the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris).

Several points of detail need to be addressed. The first is the issue of smaller pubs. There are, of course, two levels to the pub code, but it is important to make

sure it works for smaller pub companies and the smaller brewers, as well as the big pubcos. On the issue of franchises, most also have ties, particularly for the beer arrangements, and that is why we have included them. Several Members asked for more details. We are consulting on the level of the fines and will bring forward more details in due course.

Another important part of the Bill concerns child care—and improvements to ease access to it—and schools. Then there is the issue of education data, in part 6. Those provisions will have one of the biggest impacts on the long-term efficacy of our education system, because if we can see what earnings people take home several years later, we can know which courses work. My hon. Friends the Members for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) and for Worcester (Mr Walker) spoke passionately in support of that.

Company transparency is an issue that the Prime Minister has pushed hard in the G8. We heard cautionary words from my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly), as well as strong and passionate support from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). There are important measures on company filing and one-click—I will mention that now because nobody else did—that will make it easier to start a business. There was broad support on director disqualification. On the insolvency measures, I thought my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) made a strong speech about his personal experience in the printing industry and the importance of ensuring that pre-pack works properly and is not abused.

Finally, let me turn to the part of the Bill that deals with employment law. There was strong support, particularly from the Opposition Front Bench, as well as from my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) and for North Swindon, for the measures to ensure that the national minimum wage works properly, with proper penalties for those who breach it. I am a strong supporter of the national minimum wage, and this Government support it strongly. We are putting it up in relation to average earnings. The hon. Member for Streatham mentioned the policy of putting it up relative to average earnings, but it is at record highs relative to average earnings and has gone up relative to average earnings under this Government, so I do not know what exactly he is looking for.

Many Members mentioned employment, particularly youth employment. One reason why we love small businesses so much is that they create so much employment. We heard, however, an unfortunately partisan tone from a couple of Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) launched into an argument about how things were not getting better in his constituency, but youth unemployment in Sefton has fallen by 52% over the last year. In Easington, it is down by more than a third, so I think that the complaints from the hon. Member for Easington were overdone. In Glasgow North East, youth unemployment is down by 42%, and in Newcastle upon Tyne North—I see that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North has just left—it is down by 37%. The same issue was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), where youth unemployment is down by 63% over last year, which is extraordinary.

[Matthew Hancock]

That amounts to huge progress, and it matters to each and every young person whose whole life chances are benefited from having a job early on. We have not one ounce of complacency on this issue, however, and every young person not in education, employment or training is one too many. We will not rest until we eliminate this problem through our drive on youth unemployment.

In my last couple of minutes, I want to pay tribute to a couple of Members who spoke particularly strongly and passionately. My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) leads the all-party group with verve and determination. I always listen carefully to all her points, and always try to go back and read the *Hansard* because she gets so much into her four minutes that I want to be able to reflect on every single point. I pay huge tribute to the work she has done to add to and strengthen the Bill: engaging early, getting measures in and making changes to ensure that we have a legal definition of what a small business is—much of that came from her work. I will look further at her point about the definition. She made the point that more people going to arbitration instead of tribunals is a good thing. The Opposition's employment lawyers need to learn that.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), who is still in his place, said that small business is an agent for social mobility, and I agree wholeheartedly. That is why we Government Members love small businesses so much. I would like to let the hon. Gentleman know that 20 new banks have come into existence since 2010. I agree with him that the Leader of the Opposition is past his sell-by date—and for a man who runs a deli, I guess he knows what he means. I also agree with him on his point about small business being an agent for social mobility.

Finally, I mention my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), the previous Minister, who kicked off the measures introduced by this Government to support small business. He argued for the importance of cutting the stock of regulation and improving the quality, as well as reducing the quantity, of regulation. Of course, he is right that this is part of a plan, but only part of our long-term economic plan, albeit an important one.

The Bill rises to the challenge of trying to make this country the best place in the world to start and grow a small business and to employ more people. For the first time in our history, we have a Bill with small businesses at its heart. They are a driving force of our economy. I want the UK to be the best place in the world to start, to thrive and to scale up a business. We have made a contribution today—a crucial part of our long-term economic plan—and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

SMALL BUSINESS, ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill:

Committal

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

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 6 November 2014.

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

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

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

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

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(Gavin Barwell.)

The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 127.

Division No. 42]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam	Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Aldous, Peter	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Amess, Mr David	Carmichael, Neil
Andrew, Stuart	Carswell, Mr Douglas
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James	Chope, Mr Christopher
Bacon, Mr Richard	Clark, rh Greg
Baker, Norman	Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Baker, Steve	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Baldry, rh Sir Tony	Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Barclay, Stephen	Collins, Damian
Barker, rh Gregory	Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Barwell, Gavin	Crockart, Mike
Bebb, Guto	Crouch, Tracey
Beith, rh Sir Alan	Davies, David T. C.
Bellingham, Mr Henry	(<i>Monmouth</i>)
Benyon, Richard	Davies, Glyn
Beresford, Sir Paul	Davies, Philip
Berry, Jake	Davis, rh Mr David
Bingham, Andrew	de Bois, Nick
Binley, Mr Brian	Dinenage, Caroline
Birtwistle, Gordon	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Blackman, Bob	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Blackwood, Nicola	Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Blunt, Crispin	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Boles, Nick	Drax, Richard
Bone, Mr Peter	Duddridge, James
Bradley, Karen	Duncan, rh Mr Alan
Brake, rh Tom	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Bray, Angie	Dunne, Mr Philip
Bridgen, Andrew	Ellis, Michael
Brine, Steve	Ellison, Jane
Brokenshire, James	Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Bruce, Fiona	Elphicke, Charlie
Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm	Eustice, George
Buckland, Mr Robert	Evans, Jonathan
Burns, Conor	Evennett, Mr David
Burrowes, Mr David	Fabricant, Michael
Burstow, rh Paul	Field, Mark
Burt, Lorely	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Byles, Dan	Freeman, George
Cable, rh Vince	Freer, Mike
Cairns, Alun	Fuller, Richard
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilbert, Stephen
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Halfon, Robert
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Harvey, Sir Nick
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendry, Charles
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Horwood, Martin
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kelly, Chris
 Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 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, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Sir Peter
 Lumley, Karen
 Macleod, Mary
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McCrea, Dr William
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mowat, David
 Mulholland, Greg
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Ottaway, rh Sir Richard
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pugh, John
 Randall, rh Sir John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soubry, Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
 Thornton, Mike
 Thurso, John
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew

Uppal, Paul
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Ward, Mr David
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Weatherley, Mike
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, Jeremy
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

**John Penrose and
 Jenny Willott**

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Alexander, Heidi
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bain, Mr William
 Banks, Gordon
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Clark, Katy
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Rosie
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creasy, Stella
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Doran, Mr Frank
 Doyle, Gemma
 Eagle, Ms Angela

Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Farrelly, Paul
 Field, rh Mr Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Green, Kate
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Havard, Mr Dai
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Heyes, David
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hoey, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Llwyd, rh Mr Eifryn
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian

Mactaggart, Fiona	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Sheridan, Jim
Mann, John	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Marsden, Mr Gordon	Slaughter, Mr Andy
McCann, Mr Michael	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
McCarthy, Kerry	Smith, Nick
McClymont, Gregg	Smith, Owen
McGovern, Alison	Spellar, rh Mr John
McKenzie, Mr Iain	Tami, Mark
McKinnell, Catherine	Thomas, Mr Gareth
Meacher, rh Mr Michael	Turner, Karl
Mearns, Ian	Twigg, Derek
Mitchell, Austin	Umunna, Mr Chuka
Morris, Grahame M. (Easington)	Vaz, rh Keith
Murray, Ian	Walley, Joan
Nash, Pamela	Watson, Mr Tom
O'Donnell, Fiona	Watts, Mr Dave
Owen, Albert	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Perkins, Toby	Williams, Hywel
Phillipson, Bridget	Williamson, Chris
Reed, Mr Jamie	Wilson, Phil
Reed, Mr Steve	Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Robertson, John	Woodcock, John
Rotheram, Steve	Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
Roy, Lindsay	Wright, Mr Iain
Ruane, Chris	
Sawford, Andy	Tellers for the Noes:
Seabeck, Alison	Stephen Doughty and Nic Dakin

Question accordingly agreed to.

SMALL BUSINESS, ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT BILL (MONEY)

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

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by a Minister of the Crown, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(Gavin Barwell.)

Question agreed to.

SMALL BUSINESS, ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

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

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the imposition of a levy on pub-owning businesses to fund the Pubs Code Adjudicator,

(2) fees, and

(3) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(Gavin Barwell.)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Proposed airspace changes at Birmingham Airport

7.14 pm

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I present a petition on behalf of my constituents regarding the proposed flight path changes at Birmingham airport in

my constituency, which has been signed by more than 2,000 residents in the community at the southerly end of the runway. When a planning application was submitted in 2008—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Lady, but will hon. Members who are leaving please do so swiftly and quietly? There is business going on in the Chamber.

Mrs Spelman: When a planning application was submitted in 2008 for a runway extension, it was not clear to me, local councillors or residents that it might require a flight path change. Otherwise, opposition would have been greater. Aircraft are finding it impossible to stick to the route that was consulted on, and we urge the Transport Secretary to intervene and find a better solution for the community.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Humble Petition of Communities Affected by the Proposed Airspace Changes at Birmingham Airport Limited.

Sheweth,

That we wish to bring to the attention of the Secretary of State that local communities in the vicinity of Birmingham Airport Runway 15 have been significantly affected by the noise and disturbance of aircraft flying departure routes established by Birmingham Airport Ltd (BAL) as part of their air space change proposal. BAL is conducting trial flights in relation to their preferred route options as submitted to the CAA (Options 5 & 6 of BAL's proposal). During the public consultation process the community raised significant concerns about the loss of the existing Noise Preferential Route, and accurately predicted a significant increase in noise disturbance. Members of the community made detailed submissions to BAL highlighting how a departure that included a turn at altitude could closely replicate the existing Noise Preferential Route and accommodate the extended runway. This is an option that gained a great deal of community support but was rejected by BAL without any meaningful qualification. Additionally the CAA has confirmed that two of the departure routes from Runway 15 are not producing the intended flight paths. We should also like to bring to the Secretary of State's attention that BAL has no mechanism for gathering community feedback on the trial routes being flown. Given that a technically valid alternative exists, which would substantially accommodate the noise preferential routing, but was not included in BAL's submission to the CAA, we have no other recourse but to submit this petition to The Honourable House of Commons.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urgently review the proposed flight path changes at Birmingham Airport in view of the sharp increase in noise nuisance to the communities living at the southerly end of the extended runway and the failure of the trial to ensure aircrafts follow the new flight path options accurately and to explore an alternative option which was previously submitted to BAL by the community itself and which would substantially minimise noise nuisance.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.]

Sentence of Dennis Igo

7.15 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I present a petition on behalf of the residents of Clywd South concerning the sentence of Dennis Igo.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Clwyd South,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that the two year suspended sentence and three hundred hours of community service handed down to Dennis Igo was far too low; further that Mr Igo possessed more than 250,000 indecent images of children; further that the Petitioners believe that Mr Igo used his wife's illness as an excuse for his behaviour; further that the Petitioners believe that Mr Igo's wife's illness should not have been used as a mitigating factor; further that the Petitioners believe that the low sentence handed down to Mr Igo sends the wrong message to other people committing similar offences; and further that a local Petition on this subject has received over 100 signatures.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requests that the Attorney General review the sentence given to Dennis Igo.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001371]

Development proposals on land off Lightwood Road (Stoke on Trent)

7.17 pm

Robert Fello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I present a petition on behalf of residents of Lightwood in Stoke-on-Trent and those in the wider area. I have a small bundle in front of me, but the petition has many hundreds of signatures, with David Evans being the first named petitioner.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Lightwood, in Stoke on Trent,

Declares that the Petitioners are deeply concerned by proposals for a residential development on land off Lightwood Road, which the Petitioners believe the infrastructure of the local area cannot support and would destroy a large area of green-belt land, despite more appropriate areas of land being available in the city.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department for Communities and Local Government to intervene in this matter at an early stage to ensure a more suitable site is found for any development and any application submitted for a development on this particular piece of land is rejected.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001372]

Rail Services (Northern Lincolnshire)

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

7.18 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My first duty is to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), to her new place on the Front Bench. I wish her well. I know that she will not want to let her colleagues down—no pressure. Madam Deputy Speaker, with your permission, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) will also contribute to the debate. The Minister has given her consent.

My constituency, despite having 10 railway stations, the largest port complex in the country and an international airport, does not have the best transport links and certainly needs improved rail connections if it is to maximise the potential for economic growth. The Government have indicated on many occasions the importance they place on northern Lincolnshire and the wider Humber area. It has been acknowledged that the area has great economic potential. Siemens has already confirmed its investment on the north bank. The massive development by Able UK is going through its final planning stages. I hope that that major scheme will start in the not too distant future. It has the potential to create thousands of jobs and no one, least of all the Government, would want to put those jobs at risk.

As I have pointed out, northern Lincolnshire does not have good rail connections. We have had no through services to London since 1992, although the open-access operator Alliance Rail Holdings has an application with the rail regulator at the moment. The proposal is for four services each day in both directions and I urge the Minister to consider the proposal carefully with a view to doing all she can to allow it to go ahead as quickly as possible.

Our main link to the rest of the network is provided by First TransPennine Express, which operates an hourly service between Cleethorpes and Manchester 15 times a day, plus an additional one that finishes its journey in Sheffield. It is those services that are central to this debate as one of the proposals is to end the through service and to replace it with services all of which will terminate in either Sheffield or, more likely, Doncaster.

The argument is that not enough people travel the full length of the route. If that is what the Department of Transport is to hang its proposal on, it must come clean. How many passengers travel the full distance between Euston and Glasgow: 20%, or perhaps 40%? How many travel the full distance between King's Cross and Edinburgh? Many will get off at York or Newcastle, or indeed at Doncaster because they want to get to Cleethorpes. The Department cannot hide behind the phrase "commercial confidentiality". It cannot release just the figures that support its argument, but must release all of them. Will the Minister agree to release the figures—yes or no?

I also draw the Minister's attention to the role in the process of Rail North, a consortium of local authorities across the north of England with the aim of devolving decision making. That sounds fine and like something we could all agree with until we look at the make-up of

[*Martin Vickers*]

Rail North, which is dominated by the big cities and passenger transport executives. Councils such as North East Lincolnshire might have signed up to the broad principles, but I am sure that they did not intend that their voice in determining the services that serve their area should be silenced or ignored. What they have at the moment is the equivalent of a vote at the annual general meeting.

I do not want to be too hard on Rail North, as we can all sign up to its key objectives as outlined in the consultation, in particular paragraph 12, which outlines the three key points. The first is to support economic growth by delivering more rail capacity and better rail connectivity. The second is to improve the quality of the railways in the north, with a better offer for passengers to encourage more use.

Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this issue, which is uniting the whole of south Humberside and north Lincolnshire, or northern Lincolnshire, whichever we care to call it. Its political forces are all here; our mighty forces in flesh assembled to oppose this consultation proposal. I hope that I can encourage him to criticise Rail North, but I want to express my support for the view that the direct service from Cleethorpes to Manchester airport should not be cut off in the way that the consultation paper proposes. The transfer of the modern class 170 units to Chilern to give southerners a more comfortable ride while we are put in cattle transport should be opposed. It is quite right to raise the question of the direct service to London and the electrification of the line, but the main thing now is to stop a service that is bad being made worse by this consultation document.

Martin Vickers: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. As he points out, we are, as northern Lincolnshire, united in our opposition to the proposal to withdraw the Manchester services.

Let me return to Rail North's objectives. Its third is to deliver a more efficient railway and to secure greater value for money for the support from the public purse. I point out that the north does not just mean the major centres of population in Leeds, Sheffield and the north-west. I support the Government's policies to strengthen and expand the economies of the north based on city regions, but there is a danger that the focus can too often be on Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and so on. That is all very well, but if northern Lincolnshire is to receive maximum benefit from the investment in the renewables sector, and much of that is taxpayers' money, we need good rail connections to a growing number of major centres.

I was pleased that the senior civil servant from the Department for Transport confirmed to the Select Committee on 30 June that the Secretary of State would make the final decision, although at this week's meeting of the Committee, Passenger Focus was clearly concerned that this might be a ritual signing-off. As far as I am concerned, if the Secretary of State has to sign it, the Secretary of State is responsible, and I will continue to bombard him and my hon. Friend the Minister with questions and correspondence at every opportunity to stress the importance of this vital service to Cleethorpes

and northern Lincolnshire. What I and my constituents want is for this proposal to be killed off quickly. I recognise that the Department must consider all options, but some can quickly be consigned to the waste bin.

Paragraph 2 on page 6 of the consultation refers to the importance of

"views from passengers who travel on the Northern and TPE"—that is, TransPennine Express—

"franchises, as well as from other members of the public".

I can assure the Minister that she will be hearing from the travelling public in great numbers, thanks to the campaign being run by the *Grimsby Telegraph* and the *Scunthorpe Telegraph*, which have been inviting readers to complete a petition form and to date have received over 4,000 completed forms.

I put on record my thanks to the Secretary of State, who will be meeting me and the editor of the *Grimsby Telegraph* tomorrow morning to receive the petition forms. This, though, will not end the campaign as I will deliver further petitions in the weeks to come and urge local residents and businesses to continue completing them and to submit their own response to the consultation, highlighting the impact on their own circumstances.

The consultation document repeatedly draws attention to the potential for economic growth and the need to use rail services to drive that growth. Table 1.1 on page 11 states that one of the objectives of the franchise is to "help the economy of the north of England to thrive by offering competitive inter-regional rail services between urban centres, providing sufficient passenger capacity and expanding rail's mode share."

It goes on to state that a further objective is to

"realise the benefits from rail investment in the north of England, ensuring the successful delivery of journey time, frequency, reliability and connectivity benefits for passengers."

These statements are, of course, motherhood and apple pie—we can all sign up to them. Can the Minister explain how, if inter-regional rail services are essential for the northern economy to thrive, the Government intend to achieve this by proposing an end to the one inter-regional service that northern Lincolnshire has?

I draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 2.19 which states:

"The growing demand for air travel will also drive increases in the number of rail journeys. In particular, by 2020 passenger numbers are expected to increase by 5 million at Manchester Airport compared with 2010, an important destination for rail travellers in the North."

Manchester has become the airport of choice for many of my constituents simply because of the direct through trains. How can the Minister square that statement with the proposal to end through services to that very airport?

Paragraph 2.27 states that TransPennine Express has one of the newest fleets of any train operator. Can the Minister assure the House that, whatever the configuration of services and whichever company provides services to Cleethorpes, the new franchise will specify that the quality of rolling stock will be at least equivalent to the class 185 units currently in use? If the proposal that trains start and terminate at Doncaster is introduced, it is suggested that the Northern service from Sheffield to Scunthorpe be extended to Cleethorpes. That service stops at all stations. It would be totally unsatisfactory and would have to be more regular than the current hourly service, alternating fast and stopping services.

Having spoken to many involved in the rail industry, I recognise some of the difficulties. Indeed, some result from the success of this Government's massive investment in the rail network. As more and more of the network is electrified, there is a temptation to treat the more peripheral areas as mere feeder services into the core electric network, but that is no help to the economy of those areas. More electrification means there are fewer diesel units both on the existing network and being manufactured. How best to make use of the available units is a conundrum for the Department, but not one to be resolved at the expense of my constituents.

I have referred to the Government's repeated statements that economic growth is increased where good rail connectivity exists. This was again acknowledged by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his northern powerhouse speech only two or three weeks ago. It may be opportune at this point to emphasise the importance of the area now, even before potential expansion is considered. That is why, I am pleased to say, that both North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire councils will be fighting this proposal vigorously, and Councillor Liz Redfern, the leader of North Lincolnshire, contacted me this morning to report that the council has agreed to a joint campaign with North East Lincolnshire and that they have committed to a feasibility study on the potential to electrify the 50 miles of track between Cleethorpes and Doncaster—something the Government ought to be supporting. Perhaps they would like to contribute.

Twenty-five per cent. of the freight tonnage moved by rail starts or ends in Immingham. The Humber local enterprise partnership predicts that investment linked to renewables and regeneration could result in up to £7 billion of further investment across the Humber. More than 30% of the UK's coal and an increasing amount of the biomass to fuel power stations passes through Immingham, and approximately 27% of UK oil refining capacity is provided by refineries at Immingham. The port handles 10% of the UK's seaborne trade amounting to 50 million tonnes annually, including 30 million tonnes of coal and petroleum. I recognise that rail freight companies, because they move goods to so many different locations, do not always benefit as much from electrification, but with more and more of the network now electrified the case for electrification into Immingham and the remaining few miles to Grimsby and Cleethorpes is more compelling.

To return to the Chancellor's powerhouse speech, he pointed out that the Yorkshire and Humberside region was where construction is strongest. He also spoke of the economic advantages of developing clusters and, as the Government have previously acknowledged, northern Lincolnshire and the Humber is where the renewables cluster is taking place.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will have noticed one very important passage in the Chancellor's speech when he said that

"we cleaned polluted rivers like the Mersey and the Humber. Now we should take the next steps in improving them and making them great places for leisure and tourism and natural beauty."

As I have said on more than one occasion in this Chamber, Cleethorpes is the premier resort of the east coast. No one has ever contradicted that statement and I am sure they will not this evening. I suspect that the Chancellor was unaware of the existence of this consultation document when he delivered his speech, but I hope he

has had his attention drawn to the letter from me and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole pointing out the inherent contradictions of developing an area for tourism and withdrawing its main rail service.

I appreciate that the Minister will be in a difficult position in replying to this debate because she will not want to pre-empt the outcome of the consultation, but she can give an absolute reassurance that the essential points from this debate will be considered in detail by all the relevant Departments involved in the development and regeneration of the northern economies, and if she will emphasise the unique circumstances that prevail in northern Lincolnshire the debate will have been worth while.

There are other issues to be considered. The Cleethorpes to Barton service, one that is essential to the outlying areas, is something of an anomaly. It is part of the existing Northern franchise but entirely cut off from the rest of its network and is crewed by TransPennine. Yes, it could be operated by East Midlands, which currently operates between Grimsby and Newark via Lincoln. All I will say is that I and my constituents will want an assurance that it will not be treated as an inconvenient Cinderella service but as an essential part of the network.

We do not want a return to the days of British Rail when we had a slow, stopping service to Doncaster with a few trains that continued beyond that. It was intermittent, slow and uncomfortable. The arrival of TransPennine transformed the situation. In May, I was invited to a photo-shoot at Cleethorpes station to celebrate the improved services and the provision of an extra 90,000 seats in the summer timetable. If we lose our Manchester service, the economy of the area will suffer, not just new burgeoning businesses but traditional ones in Cleethorpes that serve the tourist trade. We need as many services from as many different locations as possible.

I know that the Minister shares my passion for providing good rail services because the edition of "Marlborough News Online" on 27 June—just three weeks ago—said that she had written to the then rail Minister, telling him that she and her constituents were "horrified" by the options offered in his Department's consultation on services to her constituency. She continued:

"I cannot stress enough, the importance of fast and frequent rail links to my Constituents",

and rounded off her comments by stating that the two options would almost certainly mean people leaving the area

"with catastrophic effects on the local economy."

With an ally like my hon. Friend in the Department, I am sure all will be well.

It seems that the rail industry is like politics. Change can come quickly. Someone wakes up as a Whip and goes to bed as the rail Minister, with the ability not only to save their own constituents from a decline in services, but those in northern Lincolnshire as well. My hon. Friend has come along at just the right time; the Government have a good record on rail investment, allowing train operators to provide improved services, and they now have a chance to prove that to the people I represent. I urge the Minister to visit North East Lincolnshire on 18 October—that is what her predecessor had agreed to do—and act quickly to remove this threat, recognise the strength of feeling in the House

[*Martin Vickers*]

and in northern Lincolnshire, and announce, if not tonight then very soon, that this particular proposal has hit the buffers.

7.36 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (*Martin Vickers*) has proved by his speech what a better friend he is than enemy. He has done a great deal of local research on the new rail Minister, and her words could also be applied to our situation. I will make a short contribution, and begin by welcoming the new Minister. I am genuinely delighted that she has been promoted to this position. She was kind to me when I was first elected and we were new boys and girls, and she has been extremely kind and pleasant ever since.

I agree entirely with the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes, and wish to make a couple of additional points. My constituency is the most western part of northern Lincolnshire, and the area closest to Manchester, so connectivity west is as important as connectivity east. It is not far to Manchester from that area, and retaining that link west is important, not least because Manchester airport is our regional airport. We might prefer to have a bigger regional airport, but Manchester is our biggest and very much our local airport.

When I talk to businesses, there is genuine concern that losing that connectivity west could be damaging to local businesses. One business said to me recently that it really struggles to convince people that our area is not the end of the line, and that it is a place where people should and can live because of that connectivity. The proposal is potentially very damaging to that.

I will not say much more, other than to do a quick name check for my local newspapers, thereby assuring me of getting in them next week. The *Grimsby Telegraph* and the *Scunthorpe Telegraph* are doing an excellent job on this matter, as is *The Epworth Bells*. This is an important issue, and the Chancellor's words about east-west connectivity were important. We could not put a fag paper between his words and our aspirations for our area. The proposal, however, goes in the opposite direction and I know that the rail Minister takes such matters seriously. I implore her to look at the proposals again and ensure that when the franchise tender comes out, we keep our direct rail services.

7.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (*Martin Vickers*) for initiating this debate. He is a northern powerhouse in his own right, and has been an ardent campaigner on this issue, as have colleagues from across the House who represent constituencies in that area. He has impressed on my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (*Stephen Hammond*)—who I believe did a sterling job in this role—and on the Department, the importance that his constituents place on rail services in northern Lincolnshire. I am happy to say that the Government recognise the importance of rail services in the north of England, and also in my fine constituency which, as my hon. Friend knows, I am proud to represent.

Rail services are vital nationally. As hon. Members will be aware, since privatisation the number of passengers on our rail network has doubled, with record numbers of people choosing to travel by train. Indeed, the rail network has not been this busy since the 1920s. This is particularly obvious in the north of England, where the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises have far exceeded the original expectations of passenger growth. We are now dealing with the challenges of success, with the increase in passenger numbers meaning that we need to provide capacity where it is most needed. That is a key concern.

Capacity constraints in the whole region have driven the Government to invest a very welcome £1 billion in electrification projects and the northern hub, which my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes mentioned. This programme will see improved services, increased capacity and reduced overcrowding across the north of England over the next five years, allowing for faster trains between the major northern cities and also benefiting freight, which he name-checked as being incredibly important. This investment will bring enormous benefits to the area and will complement the £104 million investment specifically for the Humber region that was announced as part of the local growth deal. In researching this today, I was particularly delighted to see that that money includes funding for a number of transport schemes, including funding for the Humber local enterprise partnership to further develop proposals for electrification between Hull and Selby.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (*Austin Mitchell*) alluded to the rolling stock transfer. My hon. Friend and hon. Members across the House will be pleased to hear that the Department has been working very closely with the train operating companies and the train leasing companies on the move of nine class 170 trains from TransPennine Express to Chiltern railways that is scheduled for April 2015. I am confident that we have developed a solution that will ensure that current capacity is maintained and that suitable and appropriate rolling stock will be provided for passengers in north Lincolnshire. I hope to make an announcement to that effect in due course.

As we heard, the lines in this area provide an incredibly important rail freight link, especially to and from the major port of Immingham. As my hon. Friend said, he estimates that 25% of all rail freight starts or ends his journey in his constituency. Recognising this, the Government have recently invested £45 million in the new Doncaster North chord. That will remove a significant bottleneck between the port and the power stations in the region, providing capacity and performance improvements for passenger and freight services and relieving pressure on the all-important east coast main line.

As we know, the Government have big ambitions for rail travel in the north. The prospectuses for the TransPennine Express and Northern franchises set out the transformation that we want to see. We are encouraging ambitious bids, and we want partners for the new franchises that have vision and the capability to deliver on that vision. They will need long-term plans for franchises that truly place passengers at the heart of their operation.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: It would be a pleasure.

Nic Dakin: I fully associate myself with the comments by the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), who set out the position very well. I congratulate him on securing the debate. The Minister will have noted the consternation of businesses and domestic users across northern Lincolnshire regarding this issue. I very much congratulate her on taking on this role, which is a well-deserved promotion. She will have been listening to the debate carefully and will want to reflect on it. I ask her, after that reflection, to meet the four MPs from northern Lincolnshire to consider the matter further so that we can properly represent the concerns that have been very fully expressed tonight.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman, who I would like to call my hon. Friend given the nights we have spent counting votes together, raises the important issue of the representation of business and passengers. It would be a pleasure to meet the hon. Members representing this important area to discuss this further.

We need to ask not just Members here but all users of rail services in the region what they need and what matters to them. The consultation document launched last month does just that by inviting MPs, councils and all rail users—indeed, all interested parties—to tell us what matters to them. The questions raised in the consultation cover a large number of areas and set out some of the options we are considering for services on the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises. It is important to remember, however, that the consultation is a genuine one. We are a Government who believe in listening. No decisions have been made and there have been no backroom dealings, so the document is what it says on the tin—a consultation document. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in a recent interview in that estimable publication, the *Grimsby Telegraph*, there is nothing sinister at all about the proposals. It is important that we are able to ask all sorts of questions and listen to the answers that people provide. As he said:

“Quite often we’re accused of not asking and just acting. Now we’re asking, we’re getting into trouble for that as well.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby asked about Rail

North, which is an important partner both in the consultation process and in the long-term future of the operation of the franchises. I commend the local councils of the Members in the Chamber. The councils have been assiduous in campaigning for the rail links and will work hard throughout the consultation process. However, I emphasise that there is nothing to stop those councils, or indeed anybody, from putting their own consultation directly to the Department.

I appreciate that some of the questions we have asked, particularly those in relation to service changes from Cleethorpes to Manchester airport, have raised concerns and strong feelings from, I imagine, many of the 400,000 people who use Cleethorpes station every year, and who are represented well in the Chamber, but I believe it is a good thing to engender such reactions, because it shows the importance that people place on their rail services and that we are asking the right questions.

As we have said throughout the consultation document, we place a great deal of importance on the evidence and value the submissions. I encourage all hon. Members and their constituents, and anyone else with a strong view, to make it known before the consultation closes on 18 August.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes asked specifically about passenger loading figures and the drop-off ratio between stations. I am happy to consider releasing such information to him. Perhaps he would be kind enough to drop me a note on specifically what he would like, and we will get to work on it.

It is clear from this evening’s debate that there is a great strength of feeling about rail services throughout the north of England and the country. I should take this opportunity to recognise again my hon. Friend’s assiduous campaign on behalf his constituents. I am sure I will discuss the subject with him on many other occasions and that I will receive many more submissions from him. I hope that strength of feeling translates into a large number of responses, which will allow the Government to deliver the improvements people want.

Question put and agreed to.

7.47 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Division

EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Gangmasters (Licensing Authority) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 9 June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 200.

Division No. 40]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Amess, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Arbutnot, rh Mr James
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Steve
 Baldry, rh Sir Tony
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brake, rh Tom
 Bray, Angie
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, James
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, Fiona
 Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burns, rh Mr Simon
 Burstow, rh Paul
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Burt, Lorely
 Byles, Dan
 Cable, rh Vince
 Cairns, Alun
 Cameron, rh Mr David
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cash, Sir William
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Crabb, Stephen
 Crockart, Mike
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Glyn

Davies, Philip
 de Bois, Nick
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 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
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Field, Mark
 Foster, rh Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilbert, Stephen
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Halfon, Robert
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John

Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Horwood, Martin
 Howell, John
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kelly, Chris
 Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Leech, Mr John
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Long, Naomi
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McCrea, Dr William
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mowat, David
 Mulholland, Greg
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Sheryll
 Morrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 O'Brien, rh Mr Stephen
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Ollershaw, Eric
 Opperman, Guy
 Ottaway, rh Sir Richard
 Paice, rh Sir James
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Pery, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pugh, John
 Randall, rh Sir John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reevell, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Robertson, rh Hugh
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Shepherd, Sir Richard
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soubry, Anna
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
 Teather, Sarah
 Thornton, Mike
 Thurso, John
 Tomlinson, Justin
 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, Dame Angela
 Weatherley, Mike
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris

Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Gavin
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, Jeremy
 Wright, Simon
 Young, rh Sir George
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs
 E mma
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Hendrick, Mark
 Heyes, David
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret

Onwurah, Chi
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Sarwar, Anas
 Sawford, Andy
 Seabeck, Alison
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 McDonnell, John
 McMadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McKechin, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miller, Andrew
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mudie, Mr George
 Munn, Meg
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Murray, Ian
 O'Donnell, Fiona

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bain, Mr William
 Balls, rh Ed
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begg, Dame Anne
 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
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Caton, Martin
 Champion, Sarah
 Clarke, rh Mr Tom
 Coffey, Ann
 Connarty, Michael
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Crausby, Mr David
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Curran, Margaret
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne

Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Dobbin, Jim
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donohoe, Mr Brian
 H.
 Doran, Mr Frank
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Hendrick, Mark
 Heyes, David
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 July 2014

[MARTIN CATON *in the Chair*]

Ofsted (14 to 17-year-olds)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Mark Lancaster.)

9.30 am

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Caton. It is also a pleasure to welcome the new Minister of State for Skills, Enterprise and Equalities on his first full day at work. I hope this debate will be a memorable start to his tenure. He and I have worked closely together on various issues over the years, and I hope he brings the same sort of energy, commitment and good humour to this important subject. I hope we can work together to do everything we can for the 14 to 17-year-old group that we call pre-NEETs—for those unfamiliar with the acronym, it stands for: not in employment, education or training. The idea is to catch those young people before they become proper NEETs and long-term youth unemployed, so I have called the debate to bring to the attention of the House some of the ideas we are developing in Nottingham to pre-empt the creation of those NEETs and long-term youth unemployed.

I have about 300 NEETs in my constituency. I will refer later to the fact that getting one of those young people into work will save the taxpayer an estimated £160,000. Imagine the benefits if we could get 300 of them into work; imagine the benefits if we could get my 1,200 or so long-term youth unemployed into work. So there is a human tale that I want to tell, but also a story that I hope will make the Chancellor salivate in terms of the savings we could afford the taxpayer and recycle some of that money into helping those young people make the best of themselves. We have a fair amount of time this morning. I will outline the positive ideas that we have in Nottingham and hope to get the support and encouragement of the Minister.

Ofsted is due to publish new guidance on that 14 to 17-year-old group this autumn, but it will be on inspecting the school provision for pre-NEETs. If we can follow it through locally with Ofsted, it should make it easier for schools to give this group of young people the structure that they need to thrive. I intend to bring lots of resources to bear on the pre-NEETs problem: first, the energy of the Rebalancing the outer estates project in Nottingham North, of which I am the chairman-designate; secondly, our project bid for the youth engagement fund; and thirdly, a positive and productive relationship with all of those who are involved in educating these young people, especially Ofsted. I want to touch on each of those three resources that I think we need to direct at this problem.

I am leading the rebalancing the outer estates project with partners in my constituency of Nottingham North, and helping the 14 to 17-year-old pre-NEETs is one of our work streams. Rebalancing the outer city estates is a

concept that local partners have developed over the past year in conjunction with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Lord Heseltine, my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), the Big Lottery Fund, and lots of other partners, especially our superb local enterprise partnership, D2N2. We are putting that forward as part of the growth fund bid through the LEP.

I hope that, ultimately, the lessons learnt in Nottingham North can be taken to scale to help dozens of neglected and forgotten outer city estate-based constituencies throughout the UK. The Minister will know my record of starting things in Nottingham, trialling them, testing them and taking them to national scale, and this is no different. There are lessons, good and bad, from which we can hope to learn if we use the Nottingham North experience effectively, and it can work to the benefit of any Government that comes to power in the near future.

There are nine former council estates in my constituency. They illustrate the social and economic imbalance in the modern UK economy. They were visionary in their design—as in the garden city concept, there are no high rises or towers blocks. They were built to house those who worked in manufacturing, but those people have now lost their work-related identity following the loss of key employers. I am something of a microcosm: my father was a miner, but the mines have now gone; my mother was textile worker, but the factories have closed; my grandfather did 50 years at Raleigh bicycles, which has relocated to China; and some family members worked at Imperial Tobacco—John Player's—which, sadly, has announced in the past few weeks that it too is closing.

One in five of the people in my constituency claim an out-of-work benefit, four out of six of my secondary schools are in special measures, and we have the lowest number of people going to university of any constituency in the United Kingdom. Our number of single parent households and free school meals is double the national average. However, I want to focus on employment and skills this morning. The number of unemployed claimants in Nottingham North is the ninth worst out of 650 constituencies in the UK. One in eight young people aged 18 to 24 are unemployed—1,190 on the last total. Nottingham North also has low levels of skills and qualifications. That is a poisonous combination. It is one of only 20 parliamentary constituencies in the UK that has more people with no qualifications than it has people with a degree level qualification. There seem to be particularly low levels of skill among the 25 to 29 age group. That is why there is merit in early intervention, going right back to the 14-year-olds and younger children to try to give them the skill base that is essential to their future development.

Using the evidence-based principles of the What Works centres, as well as Nottingham's early intervention model, which has now been taken to scale in 20 different places with more to come across the UK, we are working closely with Government Departments to form a broad-based local partnership to develop and implement a rebalancing outer estates action plan. We have done a business plan, which has been submitted to the LEP and has got through all the hurdles so far, and we are looking for good news from it towards the end of the month. We believe that that can be taken to scale from the initial work that we do in Nottingham North.

[*Mr Graham Allen*]

We are also working closely with central and local government to propose and trial flexibilities, discretions, innovations and freedoms. Note, Minister: I am not putting in a bid for money and asking, “Please can you help us out with some more dosh?” This is all about letting us get on and do what we know we can do best in our constituency, and tailoring the one-size-fits-all regulations that governments inevitably need to put forward at national level. We are seeking that local discretion and some discretion to use existing moneys—not additional moneys—in a more single pot concept so that we can spend it how we feel is appropriate, which I think will deliver greater value for money.

We have very good relationships with officials and Ministers not only in the Department for Education, but in the Cabinet Office, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Ministry of Justice. The Department for Communities and Local Government troubled families scheme is working with the Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing, which has been set up by DWP to facilitate data-sharing agreements between the local DWP, skills agencies and others, such as public health. That is quite central, because it will allow us to collect robust data, facilitate proper sharing between agencies and ultimately allow us to measure the impact of what we do. That is so important, because much of what we want to do in the longer term is about payment by results and social investment. Consequently, measuring outcomes so that they can be effectively monetised is a key part of this process.

Our aspiration is in our business plan and has the agreement of the LEP and others. It is that, emerging from this process, perhaps Nottingham North could help Her Majesty’s Government to explore the potential of our approach. We have suggested that it could be adopted in 12 cities within about three years, and perhaps in 24 cities during the next Parliament.

It is appropriate that I put on record my thanks to the Minister’s predecessor, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who took a great interest in what we are trying to do in Nottingham North. He was especially helpful in progressing the development of a new campus on our further education campus, which is part of New College Nottingham and is called the Basford Hall site. Anyone driving by there today will see builders demolishing the old campus and building the new campus in a £27 million development. We do not have many physical assets in the constituency, which consists of nine enormous council estates, but the catalyst in the middle is this redevelopment of the Basford Hall site, because we think it can be the hub for our local skills, including entrepreneurial skills, which we can use with our partners, community groups and social enterprises. Hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, we will be able to go to a second phase of development. There is enough land on the site that we can dream about starter units for the young people who go to the FE college. Much of the current activity there is construction, plumbing, painting and decorating, but green technology and many other things will go on that site, and there is the potential to put in starter units, low-rental units and lots of other things, one of which I will go on to talk about.

Our key ambition for our project is summed up as making every four-year-old school-ready and every teenager work-ready, and then carefully to craft a Nottingham North job offer for every individual on jobseeker’s allowance or employment and support allowance. We will continue to explore with the DWP the possibility of a Nottingham North social investment bond because, as I mentioned earlier, just one NEET going back into productive life will save us £160,000. Given the number of NEETs and people in long-term unemployment that we have, that is a very large pot of money that we could bring to bear if we do this work properly.

Having talked about the rebalancing project, the second area to discuss is a slightly more specific one around the youth engagement fund. I do not want this to sound too much like a funeral, but I will put on record the support and assistance that I have received from the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd). I regret very much that he is no longer in the Government, given the work that he has done; it has been a pleasure working with him. He has encouraged people locally to apply for the youth engagement fund, so we have put a bid together. We really want to initiate a 20-year behaviour change programme—it is pointless doing starburst, flash-in-the-pan, one or two-year projects, thinking, “Let’s throw some money at it.” We have to set out our stall. That programme would go alongside our 20-year early intervention work plan, which we have in our city of Nottingham.

In making the bid, we have put together a package that we hope will reduce the flow rather than the stock—I will use those economic terms. We need to use our existing providers to do what we can with the existing individuals, but we want to turn the tap off and start a process that will feed through and produce an intergenerational change by giving these young people what they need far earlier and way more upstream than is the case now. At the moment, we are firefighting and throwing money at a problem that is deep-rooted. I suppose that our bid and our objective could be summed up as, “Every young person work-ready in Nottingham North.” We will work with all the people locally, including some brilliant partners, to complete an individual pathway for every young person. That is perfectly possible. I said that the number of young people involved is high—it is way too high—but it is not so high that it is not manageable to produce a personal programme for each one.

We will do two main things in our package. The first one, which I am trying to do, is have a work-readiness coach for every child in secondary school. I am up with the jargon, so I use that term rather than being old-fashioned and saying, “careers adviser”—I was familiar with careers advisers when I was at school, but you certainly would not be, Mr Caton, as you are too young. In the six secondary schools in my constituency, current provision is lumpy—let me put it that way—but a work-readiness coach could give training skills and work advice throughout an individual’s school life, but with a focus on the period from 14 to 17. There would be professional, human and proper guidance delivered by a trusted and committed friend at the correct age, and tailored to the individual and their background; in addition, it would be given face-to-face. Time and again in the project and throughout this debate, the need for a known individual has come up: having all sorts of stuff on tap or accessible

via a computer is not enough; for this group of young people, a face and personal contact is needed. They need to be able to pick up the phone and speak to a person, or to go and see them, in order to develop a relationship that literally lasts for years, so that that person gets to know them and can guide them in the right way. I understand from the experts that the best time to start this process is at the age of 13, or at key stage 3, because that is when these young people are at their most open, and supportive one-to-one interviews can make a huge difference, not least if they are supplemented by work experience that is not hindered by health and safety red tape. In that way, we can get these young people to raise their aspirations and focus their academic progression.

That is the first thing—having a careers or work-readiness coach in every school, who is dedicated to this group of young people and known to them. The second is to create a state-of-the-art Nottingham North work-readiness centre for those 14 to 17-year-olds who are least likely to go on to education or training from school, to build their social and emotional skills to work-readiness standard, and taking them out of school between one and three days a week. We are lucky to be rich in excellent social enterprises and local providers, including Building Engineering Services Training Ltd or BEST, Right Track, Groundwork, Futures, Futures, Aspley community centre and New College Nottingham. Using high-quality new premises in the brand new Basford Hall further education redevelopment that I mentioned earlier, we will show that we value these youngsters as much as those who are studying full time in our smart rebuilt schools across the constituency.

As one of the national advocates of social investment, I strongly welcome that our bid has to take the form of a social impact bond. I am asking my council and my LEP to guarantee the required 20% local participation, but I will try to ensure that we bring in a wide range of partners, including our excellent police and crime commissioner, our clinical commissioning group and schools themselves, which are able to use the pupil premium, so that they can all take a stake in what we are trying to do, even if they are providing only a tiny amount of money. That way, they will have a financial stake as well as an educational or social stake in our bid.

We are partnering Social Finance, Ltd, which I know very well, in order to raise the initial investment that is required to pay for the delivery of the programme, and we are engaging with a range of social investors, including the Private Equity Foundation, Big Society Capital and many others.

I think we are doing more than our bit and now I need the Minister to try to encourage Ofsted, which has done a lot of good work, to come to the party. Ofsted can become a tremendous power for good for the 14 to 17-year-old pre-NEETs. There are lots of well intentioned sentiments in Ofsted's school inspection handbook about pre-NEETs. It talks about

“the next stage of their education and training”

and employment; about

“an appropriate balance between academic and vocational courses”;

about

“timely independent information, advice and guidance to assist pupils on their next steps in training, education or employment”;

and about lots of other good things. If Ofsted works with what we have done in Nottingham, as an exemplar of what can be done, I believe that we can turn those words into action. It is no good just having a framework and then not helping schools and young people through, and following through. That thread runs through this final passage of my speech.

The truth is that many heads of schools in disadvantaged areas with poor demographics will say privately that the education and inspection systems incentivise schools to place greater emphasis on those capable of getting five A to Cs than on those who cannot. The pre-NEETs group is often packaged and parked, destined to become expensive NEETs and long-term unemployed, although that is wasteful. With Ofsted, we can change that by attacking a number of issues together. I shall list a few.

First, there should be clarity about targets for pre-NEETs. We know that for a generation schools have been programmed to focus on their target of five A to Cs. There is a message sent strongly from the ground, including from my patch, from the people who are there. These people do not lack leadership and are not lazy; they get out of bed every morning to go to a difficult educational environment and are among some of the most courageous, capable people to be found in education. They deliver in all sorts of ways. Their strong message is that any additional activities relating to work-readiness for supporting the 14 to 17-year-olds need to be rigorously tested, inspected and, above all, targeted or that provision will be an afterthought.

Schools need to be targeted on where their pupils progress to: carrots for good progression to FE, work and apprenticeships and sticks for bad progression—NEETs, prison, etc. Then schools will not be penalised, but motivated, as they wish to be, to invest energy into work-readiness provision. Otherwise they will pay lip service or just will not be able to do it, however much they want to, given all the other pressures. We have to help them by setting that framework and letting them do what they know they would like to do anyway—to help that group rather than park it, sometimes, in training that is not as good as we would like. That will require Ofsted not merely to pronounce and inspect, but to encourage and guide—to be a bit more proactive—in a willing local partnership. That can be pioneered in Nottingham, if people are up for that and willing to do it.

Secondly, we need the right type of qualifications for demographics such as mine, which exist in dozens of constituencies. The DFE and Ofsted rightly acted to remove the over-reliance on equivalency qualifications, as they were called, that were seen as being used to boost overall GCSE figures. What was lost in that change was the fact that many pupils were following credible, well regulated courses that served their needs and aspirations. The pendulum has swung too far the other way, because by forcing schools down a more academic route, the needs of the 14-to-17 pre-NEETs are not being met.

Employers in the locality tell me that many of these pupils fundamentally lack employability skills: social and emotional capability; functional literacy and numeracy; a sense of responsibility about such issues as punctuality and attendance; and the chance to develop self-discipline, resilience and respect for authority. They lack achievable goals in relation to their aspirations and, most importantly,

[*Mr Graham Allen*]

a sense of direction and progression that will give them life skills that will turn them into active, engaged citizens for life.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, not just for securing this debate but for the work that he has been doing in this area for some time. His list of issues affecting young people, particularly in hard-to-reach areas such as working class estates, resonates, I am sure, with a number of hon. Members. Does he believe, as I do, that we need to ensure that best practice is replicated? Has he considered a template to be used throughout the United Kingdom, so that a new generation does not suffer the problems suffered by the generation that is out there now?

Mr Allen: I fully agree. If we can do this, even in one place, we can see what fails and what works. If we can have all the institutions working together in that one, tiny place—I do not want the Government to pass legislation and do something across the whole country—and prove, in the engineering sense, what can work, that will benefit everybody.

On the subject of capabilities, when I took Lord Heseltine to my constituency, we went to Right Track and met its chief executive, Stuart Bell, who said, “I’ve got 80 jobs available for any kid that walks through the door.” We both looked at each other and said, “No, don’t you mean you’ve got a job available and 80 kids are looking for it?” He said, “No, I’ve got the kids, but they haven’t got the wherewithal—the social and emotional capability—to work in retail and say, ‘Welcome, sir. Do you want a jacket or a tie today?’, ‘How are you?’ or ‘The weather’s nice’, or whatever.” That is the sort of basic capability and interaction they lacked. The vacancies were on the wall and Mr Bell was working with the kids to give them some of the basics that we would give our children, probably before the age of eight, at home in a normal environment, completely unconsciously.

That is what I mean when I say that measuring those kids on a five A to C basis is irrelevant. Measuring them on the demanding basis of what they should be attaining in terms of their own functional literacy and so on—a tough challenge—is exactly where they need to be. They will then attain and get self-respect and will, hopefully, spread that to their own children and raise good families of their own.

This is a complicated area—having looked at it for some time, I do not pretend to be an expert—and I certainly do not expect the Minister to be able to answer some of these questions on his first day. However, I hope that, when he has had a chance to get his feet under the table, he will consider whether he can work with us and Ofsted to review the balance on qualifications. Has the pendulum swung too far? Will he consider that, because it is quite urgent now? We need to get that balance right as this new Ofsted inspection comes in and, if we have the right qualifications going with it, the two things will be greater than the sum of the parts. We should ensure that there is a proper range on offer for demographics such as mine.

Thirdly, we should consider which roll children are on—the school roll or the FE roll—and all the complications that come with that. Schools are judged

on how many pupils meet the requirement to achieve five A to Cs, including English and maths, and that judgment is based on all pupils in the year 11 cohort at census time. That means that pre-NEETS are in danger of becoming victims of that system. Schools need flexible arrangements for these pupils, so they are able to develop through transitional arrangements to work and training.

Most of all, schools need to be freed somehow from the need to count all pupils in league tables as if they were all the same, because they are not. This means students at 14 onwards having a more sophisticated school roll-non-school roll allocation, so that they can benefit from a personally tailored vocational and functional skills programme. As schools receive funding for each student, there is an initial reluctance to have any more than a handful of their most difficult students offsite. I am not talking about the most difficult students, such as the young lads who might end up in a pupil referral unit; I am talking about the big chunk of those who will not get five A to Cs, who are not the really bad lads. That is a big chunk of the population.

As a result of the disincentive, every school tries to develop some sort of partial vocational provision or units on their campus and, for that reason, they cannot then work out block timetabling. Such timetabling would mean, for example, that my six schools could have a given period when those young people could go somewhere else together, forming a critical mass to make it work economically. With absolutely stringent, tested criteria, so that the system cannot be abused, schools need to be legally entitled to remove from their league table accountability pupils who are following certified programmes. By doing so, we will find meaningful progression for such pupils, many of whom could be characterised as white, working class young people from former council estates.

At the moment, some of the provision is done under the table or with sleight of hand. We need to smoke the issue out, make it transparent and take action to make it clear that we are all working together. I do not pretend to have the issue buttoned down; I do not have a little policy document that I can hand to the Minister and say, “It has all been thought out and here it is”, but I know we can work together and find a much better way, so that we have a system that works for the kids I am talking about as well.

There are challenges. How can such kids be kept on the school roll, yet have a range of options externally? Who would be accountable for their outcomes, attendance, exam results and so on? Would the home school have to pay a premium for sending them to a further education institution? Many schools in special measures are facing financial difficulties. Would the student be removed from the home school roll? Many schools are struggling with falling rolls. If the Minister asks us to, we, working with Ofsted, would like to confront those challenges. With some flexibility and a little brainpower, we could trial that in my constituency, if the Minister felt it appropriate, as part of our rebalancing project.

“Destination outcomes” is a new phrase that we are using a lot these days. Post-16 progression routes need to be mapped for these learners, and we should aspire to put an offer in place for them to work towards at the start of a programme. A lot of the time, there is a sense of things being a package for a 14-year-old, moving on to a package for a 15-year-old, moving on to one for a

16-year-old and then one for a 17-year-old, rather than a sense of, “You should be working towards this end goal.” The goal might change, but if there is a sense of direction on roughly where someone wants to go, that can be set out at the start; the sense of “pass the parcel”, which a lot of these kids and a lot of the people involved with them feel, would diminish.

What a young person does in the September after leaving school is important, but we should be even more interested in what happens six months after that. It is okay saying, “We have pushed our pre-NEETs levels down and everyone is properly accommodated”, but then it is, “Oh my goodness, look at the NEET figure! We do not know where that came from. It has just shot up suddenly.” We need to measure where those kids are six months after they leave. That test must be on whether they have managed to stick with their college course, apprenticeship or whatever. That is a much more accurate measure. Working together, we should be able to organise a watertight data track for those kids.

Destinations need to be better factored into Ofsted’s inspections, so that efforts with the group are acknowledged and rewarded. Schools in my constituency are buying in external services to support the career progression of their students. Ofsted needs to acknowledge the exceedingly low “not known” numbers, which are being forced down due to the innovation fund, the good links between employers and schools and the role of the voluntary sector in supporting young people. Ofsted needs to work with that and make it even more standard in what it does. If we can pilot these ideas, we could help create an ever more demanding, but ever more helpful, Ofsted regime, which gets head teachers and principals to where they want to be.

Relevant inspections are at the heart of these ideas. This is a plea, on the Minister’s first day, to track us on progress over the next 290 days before the election, and to track Ofsted and our partners on how we can innovate to build a more effective inspection service, for the benefit of our 14 to 17-year-olds, by pre-empting NEETs and youth unemployment. A smarter system for measuring young people with complex needs is required, rather than their being measured against a “norm” group. I repeat: alternative provision for work-readiness is fine, but if a school is then faced with the consequences of that in the exam profile on their cohort, it is self-defeating, because heads will not do that. We need to facilitate heads and principals to do what they know to be right. They know what they can deliver. This is not rocket science—they know they can help those kids, but we have to reduce the disincentives in that.

To their credit, the Government have recognised the problem and have scrapped the five A to C measure for summer 2015 onwards in favour of the new “Progress 8” measure, which gives a much more rounded picture of every child’s progress in a school. That significant breakthrough having been made, however, it has to be followed through by the Department and, above all, by the inspection regime.

Ofsted, too, deserves commendation for recognising the need to address the issues. It says it wishes to go further than it did last year. The progress last year was great, but it has now told the House of Commons Library, which asked it a question on my behalf:

“We are adding some increased reference to advice and guidance into the school inspection handbook for Sept 2014”—

that is a couple of months away—

“which should increase the focus on the quality of advice offered to young people and their careers education. Schools will be assessed on whether they ‘provide timely independent information, advice and guidance to assist pupils on their next steps in training, education or employment.’ Inspectors will explore the extent to which the school has developed and implemented an effective strategy for ensuring that all pupils in years 8 to 13 receive career guidance; the impact of this guidance in helping young people to make informed choices about their next steps and how well what is provided is meeting the needs of all vulnerable groups of students, including reducing the numbers who do not continue to education, employment or training.”

There is more:

“There will also be references to destination measures as one of the factors for inspectors to consider. The extent of any NEETs will be taken into account, depending on the structure of education in a specific area.”

All those things are incredibly welcome, as are the drive, sentiment and good intentions behind them. I have publicly put on record, and repeat again, how good and positive that is from Ofsted’s point of view, but we now have to make it happen on the ground—in reality—so that it is more than just a question asked at an inspection that then disappears. If we are to tackle 14 to 17-year-old pre-NEETs, we have to have Ofsted as part of that team following through, encouraging and ensuring that the guidance is implemented, as well as inspecting.

One quibble is that the schools are about to break up for the summer holidays, and the new handbook, which I have just quoted parts from, courtesy of the Library, is not yet published. Will schools in my constituency or that of any Member have the time to take advantage of the good things in the new guidance and get them up and running for September, when the kids come back? I doubt very much that they will. I hope the Minister will facilitate getting that handbook, if only by a question, to Ofsted and into the hands of the heads and principals who can use it and put it to work. They can then talk to their local Ofsted inspectors to make it a reality.

I hope that the Minister has a little more success in reaching the Ofsted HQ team than I have had, although I must immediately say what wonderful people we have in local and regional Ofsted; they have been very supportive and encouraging. Given the chance in my area to co-operate with Ofsted and to demonstrate how we can help the inspection regime, we could make a real difference. I am thinking of our youth engagement fund, the rebalancing project, our schools and Ofsted working together, and great guidance. Let us make it work. We can do that.

I have a number of other issues to touch on briefly, because I consulted with people in my area and a number of suggestions were made. I want to put them on the record. First, family support, because we are not talking only about what happens at the school; the issue is about bringing all the other services together and ensuring early intervention with families and others to ensure that we support the child outside school as well. Secondly, schools staying open, so we need to ensure that in high-NEET areas they have the funding to operate on a 46-week year, not a 39-week year, to reinforce continuity and positive learning. Thirdly, employers—local chambers of commerce, local small and medium-sized enterprises and LEPs—should come to the party, bringing their capabilities to speak not simply formulaically because there is a little money in

[Mr Allen]

training, but with real passion: to get involved, to take on individuals and to work very closely with what we are trying to achieve.

Finally, there are a number of things around technology. Sometimes we look for new technology to be a shortcut and a cheaper way to get information to people, but that does not always work in a demography such as that in my constituency. We may be piloting particular proposals and schemes, but many young people in my area do not have access to iPhones or the internet. Moreover, they cannot use phones for conversations; many of the students in my area cannot be accessed when they run out of credit. Ofsted, the Department, the National Careers Service and others come forward with apparently great things that might work in other constituencies, but they need to have an eye to what will actually help NEETs and pre-NEETs.

To sum up, I am making an offer to the Minister and, through him, to Ofsted that Nottingham North's rebalancing the outer estates project will work hand in hand with schools, Ofsted and all our local partners to pilot an exemplar of the new Ofsted framework. We will try to make that work, to show how far the envelope can be pushed and, I hope, to be an example to others. The project will be backed up by work-readiness coaches in every school, a work-readiness, purpose-built college funded by us through the youth engagement fund and, perhaps above all, an in-depth and wholehearted collaboration and partnership.

In that way, we can demonstrate how the pre-NEETs group can be removed from the bureaucratic, one-way conveyor belt to NEETs and long-term unemployment and on to a genuine pathway to work and self-motivation. It is a great prize, which will save the taxpayer millions of pounds otherwise spent on the costs of failure. More importantly, it will turn wasted lives into productive and happy citizens. The Minister has not had long in his new role, but if he works with me, as I hope he will, he will have long enough to make a real difference for the young people I have been discussing.

10.13 am

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen). That was an extremely constructive, thorough and positive speech, and it boded well that he made no request for extra money—had he been part of the reshuffle yesterday, I am sure he would have done well. Furthermore, he recognised that one size does not fit all. Every single town and community has different challenges and different opportunities, and that shone through.

I was not intending to speak, but I was disappointed that the Chamber is not packed with lots of eager Members. We are debating a challenge in all of our communities, and yet there are so many opportunities to shape ways in which we can make a real difference, so I am cobbling together some of my suggestions and will then be supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who has a huge amount of experience in this area. I want to concentrate on how Ofsted can focus on engagement, but not at the cost of the academic pursuit of the five A to C grades.

Between us all, we are not asking for money or for huge amounts of change; we are only looking for some extras.

I welcome the new Minister of State for Skills, Enterprise and Equalities, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles). I hope he is “planning”—boom, boom!—a bright future for the development of young people; it is early in the morning, so apologies for that.

My interest arises because I went to a school at the bottom of the league tables. Many of my friends failed to engage and they took a very different path from me. Two of them spent time at Her Majesty's pleasure, although it is fair to say that, when I phoned up my old headmaster to say, “I have made it into Parliament”, he suggested that that was possibly worse. Also, in Swindon we are proud that we will have one of the first university technical colleges opening in September. The UTC will focus on real, tangible skills and working with local employers. I am envious of that, because it was not something I had when I was growing up.

The crux of what I am asking for concerns utilising our fantastic school and community facilities. We have spent huge amounts of taxpayers' money, rightly, on building brilliant schools, but right up and down the country, as soon as it gets to 4 o'clock, for use of the facilities we slap on a huge hire fee for community and sports groups and groups that want to engage constructively and positively. In a world of extremely busy families, it is incredibly difficult to find volunteers to contribute to society and to make a difference. Where we find them, however, we then say, “By the way, if you want to put on a football or street dance club or to provide scouts activities, we will charge you”—what a huge disincentive. We have already paid for the schools, they already exist, so it is simply a question of getting a caretaker to open them up.

I was a councillor for 10 years and we had precious little open space in my area, apart from in the schools, separated from us by huge fences. No wonder we have childhood obesity and children stood on street corners, not being engaged. I encourage, where possible, opening up those schools for sport, not only for the next potential draft for the World cup, after our disappointing performance this summer, but for the future coaches, treasurers and club secretaries, because the opportunity is for all to engage constructively. A huge number of careers can come about through sport, other than by being top-notch athletes.

Other obvious groups who might use the facilities include the St John Ambulance or the scouts. I have to pay credit to some of their work in the most challenging communities. Such groups have been given extra money to engage in those communities, and they have adapted their models. What might be offered in one community can be very different in another. Any group of parents who wish to engage with young people constructively should have access to our fantastic facilities without price being a barrier.

I also want to touch on the opportunity for young entrepreneurs. Many of the brightest entrepreneurs in this country, such as Lord Sugar and Richard Branson, left school without a single qualification between them. They found, however, that entrepreneurship engaged them. We already have fantastic organisations such as Young Entrepreneur, but we can go further.

I organised a session with one of my local colleges, Swindon college. Rather than running something for a week, based in the main foyer and selling to their friends, the students were dispatched to Blunsdon market. For those who do not shop there regularly, I should point out that it is a really tough environment, where the customers are price sensitive and trade is hard to come by. The students were given a stall on a wet Wednesday afternoon, but all seven teams engaged positively. The best team set up a 1950s cake stall, after visiting the week before and recognising that the clientele was older. They tried to match the market and took £120. What happened after that session is key—the landlords and local business entrepreneurs offered to mentor one of the young entrepreneurs to take things forward. After she left, she set up her own bakery, which is doing well, and the good people of Swindon enjoy her produce. There is real opportunity in such engagement, whether after school or in the school holidays.

I am also a big fan of the National Citizen Service programme. I make six or seven visits to each of the processes in the summer holidays—it is the highlight of the summer recess. The key is the absolute transformation of the children. As it stands, we wait for children to engage proactively—generally, these schemes are advertised and it is the most proactive children who sign up. I would like the NCS programme to be expanded far more, using the long summer break to get children to do good things. For those not familiar with the NCS programme, aptly, there is a debate on it following this one. It involves sport, team work and charity and community work and places a huge emphasis on carrying on beyond the initial programme during the summer.

My final request concerns the battle in this country of youth services versus sport—the two, it seems, will never meet. Actually, those budgets should be merged. Again, if leisure centres are not being used in the evenings, let us open them up and use the facilities. Sport often captures the imagination. When I was a councillor I was the lead member for leisure, and I remember the lead member for youth saying it was their job to engage with the youth. I said, “Well, I’m beating you, because on a Friday evening when we put the ice-skating disco on, I have 600 young people enjoying themselves. You should be parking your youth facilities outside our ice-skating disco and then you will actually engage with the public.”

When I first got elected, I tried to get in touch with young people by asking them whether we should expand youth clubs. They looked at me as if I was something from the ’80s—I probably was. We therefore need to merge youth and sport programmes and use them better. As with schools, we are not using our leisure centres on a Friday night at 10 o’clock, so let us open them up for constructive engagement if local parents want to put something on.

We have an extremely enthusiastic Minister. I would like every effort to be made to engage and inspire young people. They have only one opportunity. We cannot deliver one size fits all, but we can open up and provide fantastic facilities for positive and constructive engagement, and that will make a real difference.

10.21 am

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) and to almost follow the hon. Member

for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who, as my hon. Friend said, made a thoughtful and in-depth speech. I share my hon. Friend’s concern that there are not more people here. This is an important subject and should concern every Member of Parliament. I know that not every Member can attend every important debate, but it is sad that there are not more of us here today.

I will speak briefly about my own experience growing up, attending a proper comprehensive school and my time in the classroom as a schoolteacher, and then talk about some of the positive things that are happening in one of the local authorities in my constituency, North Lincolnshire.

I do not want to outdo my hon. Friend but I went to the worst performing comprehensive in the worst performing local education authority in the country. Like him, I went to school with people who went down a range of different routes. Some of them unfortunately went to prison on more than one occasion—that was just from my class, and we were the top set. Some went into good old proper, traditional apprenticeships, which I am pleased to see this Government have reinvigorated and restored. A small number of us went on to university. It saddened me that in the years after we left, that route to university was taken less and less by those from my school. In the end, our school was closed down on two occasions—it was a cycle of decline. Unfortunately, a lot of this happened before we had the term “NEETs” and before anybody really seemed overly concerned about disengagement.

By the time I started teaching, there was a lot more emphasis on the issue, I am pleased to say, and there has since been a lot more emphasis on different ways of engaging young people. The point the hon. Member for Nottingham North was making throughout his speech is that we need not only a co-ordinated solution—and not a one-size-fits-all solution—but early intervention. We hear about that all the time. The statistics are quite appalling: if we cannot get to a kid by the time they have started school, it is often too late to recover them.

I saw that both as a secondary schoolteacher and then, up to the day I was elected to this place, as a primary schoolteacher. They are very different jobs, but doing both really convinced me of the case for early intervention. When I was a secondary schoolteacher, we would sometimes be thinking, “What have they done to them in primary school to result in us ending up with this?” I realised as a year 1 teacher that unfortunately the battle was often lost before children even got into primary school. I would strongly endorse any strategy that identifies—as indeed the troubled families initiative and others do—families whose children are at risk of failing pre-school.

In my own area, we have tried to address some of the problems connected to literacy and to get kids to sit down with their parents through launching a project called the imagination library. That project was started some time ago by Dolly Parton, who comes from a family in which illiteracy was normal. It was first launched in the UK in Rotherham; the Labour leader of Rotherham council, Roger—unfortunately I have forgotten his last name—was the first man to bring it here. I took the project to North Lincolnshire council, which agreed to fund it.

Every child under the age of five receives a book in the post every month, and the scheme is properly integrated into the children’s centres in the local authority—an

[*Andrew Percy*]

excellent local authority that has not closed a single children's centre and indeed has expanded some services such as library services. Everything, including the children's services and library services, is tied in together. Every child is now getting a book in the post every month and getting support from the children's centres, so that by the time children get to school they have some of the basics. That is really important for their progress through school, but more important is that parents are tied into their child's educational attainment in literacy very early on.

In the part of my constituency covered by a different local authority, East Riding of Yorkshire council, we have unfortunately not been able to secure council funding, but I run the scheme in Goole myself and raise the money for it. In North Lincolnshire, over 7,000 kids are signed up now, but the number in Goole is unfortunately a bit smaller. After the scheme had been running for a year, we did a feedback survey; I got a letter from a parent of one of the children saying that having the books in the post every month was really great because there was a focused thing every month when the family sat down and talked about books. She also said that her own reading had been pretty poor, but the scheme had really helped her and she felt confident that she could help her own children. That is just one example of how we can engage with families early on to ensure that they buy in properly to their children's education. When I was teacher, we always used to say that the one thing worse than the children was the parents, but the saddest thing I used to see was the parents who never engaged.

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend is as ever delivering a powerful speech. When I visited some of the more challenging schools in my constituency, they echoed that comment about parents not wishing to engage. That is a further reason for using school facilities during the summer, as it would allow children to be in a constructive environment rather than one in which they are simply abandoned in front of the television.

Andrew Percy: Absolutely—I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend says. There are some parents who, if they have not achieved at school or school was a particularly bad place for them, remain intimidated by teachers or by school. In some cases, there is a sort of embarrassment—I have seen this myself—because they feel as if they are going to be tested and they know their own reading and literacy skills are really poor. Consequently there are some who are almost embarrassed if their children do better than them and so are disengaged from their children's education. That is one of the saddest things to see. I entirely endorse anything that means we can bring parents in so that the school buildings become their buildings—for example, by putting on adult literacy and numeracy courses, as happens in a lot of places. Whatever, it is all for the better.

Moving up to secondary school, I agree entirely with the comments of the hon. Member for Nottingham North on the changes around equivalency. I taught in a really tough school in Hull, and I was appalled that, despite my protestations, which saw me dragged into the head teacher's office, we went down the route that I call the GNVQ fiddle. That is exactly what it is. I had

children who wanted to do my subject, history, at GCSE but were told they could not because they were not going to achieve a C, and consequently they were forced on to GNVQ media studies. Now, I do not disparage GNVQs at all, and perhaps GNVQ media studies was an entirely appropriate course for some young people, but when it was not their course of choice, and these things were done purely to get the figures up, something is seriously wrong with the system.

What happened when we started allowing the GNVQ fiddle? The school's figures went through the roof, but as soon as the measure changed again, they plummeted—I think we recorded a pass rate of about 60% one year, but that plummeted to 15% or 16% when the measure changed. We were therefore absolutely right to remove what was clearly a way of fiddling the league tables. However, I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that the pendulum should not swing too far the other way so that we concentrate only on traditional academic subjects. That was my concern about the EBacc when it was first introduced—that it would become the primary measure, whatever statements were made at the time.

This is not about not having aspirations for young people, but about what is best for their futures. I always give the example of foreign languages in the school I taught in. When I taught at Kingswood, in Bransholme, in Hull, the French department was above my classroom—I certainly knew it was, because of the way my projector used to shake. A lot of people could not engage in French language classes because they lacked the basic literacy skills to engage in English, let alone a foreign language. Often, the message that came back from home was, "Why do you need to learn French? It's no use round here. Everyone should speak English." Unfortunately, those children were instantly set up to fail. It would be lovely if they could all achieve at Latin, but unfortunately some of the changes we have seen set some young people up to fail. We need flexibility so that we have proper child-centred education—I know that is a bit of a cliché—and a curriculum that is appropriate for every child.

We are quite right to change how we measure achievement in schools—equivalence and the rest of it—and to want the best for every child. However, what I also saw in my school was that children were written off if they were going to deliver more than five GCSEs at grade C or above for the school. There is a balance to be struck, and something needs to be done to push those children too. There were problems at both ends, and we need to make sure that we do not, as the hon. Gentleman said, allow the pendulum to swing too far.

I want to talk now about a couple of things happening in north Lincolnshire. I am pleased the NEETs figure has been going in the right direction for the past few years. Obviously, north Lincolnshire forms part of the Humber region, which unfortunately has a very low skills base. That is one of the biggest risk factors on the local enterprise partnership's risk register in terms of bringing in new investment. New investment is coming from Siemens, and one of the company's big concerns has been about the local skills base. The Humber has some wealthy areas, but also some very challenging areas in places such as Hull, Scunthorpe, Goole and Grimsby. There is a job of work to be done in north Lincolnshire, and I want to talk about a couple of projects.

One thing the local authority has done, which I am very pleased about, is to completely reform and reinvest in youth services. It is not often that local authorities spend more on youth services. It was a painful process to go through, and the Labour opposition was, unfortunately, very anti the proposal to spend more money. The Conservative council reversed the previous council's cuts of £137,000 to youth services and has actually increased the youth service budget by £200,000.

We also moved away from the traditional in-house model. One of the biggest opponents of the changes said that that model had worked for 40 years, but that defence tells us everything we need to know about why the system was not working—it had not changed for 40 years. It was bizarre that people protested at the council spending more on something, but we got through that. We now have a range of different providers, targeted at every young person but especially trying to engage those who are most at risk of becoming NEETs. We have got Streetbeat in, we have street sport and we have theatre groups. We still have all our youth centres, and not a single one will be closed, because they still have a role to play. We need fixed places, but we need something flexible too. The number of young people engaging with the youth service has increased substantially. The change may not have been popular with the youth workers we had at the time, but the proof of the pudding is always in the eating.

In north Lincolnshire, the employability skills framework has been launched. The scheme targets young people to make sure that they have the CBI's seven essential skills. There is also the raising aspirations project—it is in the Barton area for now—under which primary schools develop their curriculum to include a real focus on enterprise. We also have the September guarantee and the engagement panel, and business links are improving. The local authority is also providing free careers advice and guidance to most vulnerable young people, which chimes with what the hon. Gentleman said. Most schools buy in additional services.

There is plenty more I could say, but I am aware of the pressure on time. I would just add that external careers guidance is really important, and we need to look at how we require schools—or do not require them—to buy it in. There is a risk of conflict where schools expand to include sixth forms, as is happening in my area. I entirely agree with such moves, because it is important that young people can continue their education in the place most appropriate to them, but there is a risk that too many young people will be pushed in a particular direction, so we must have a real emphasis on proper external careers advice that gives young people a full range of options.

I should add that people in my area are delighted to have a university technical college coming to Scunthorpe. We hope that that will not only regenerate the town centre, but transform the choices available locally for young people.

Finally, I welcome the Minister to his post. I forgot to do so at the beginning, which was terribly rude of me.

10.37 am

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Caton. I welcome the Skills Minister to his new role. This is a

vital debate, and I hope it will inspire him to charge ahead and make the difference. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) so powerfully highlighted, that is desperately needed by young people who fall into the NEET category, which has rapidly come to be talked about very pejoratively.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he has been doing for many years. About seven or eight years ago, when I worked at the Young Foundation, he came to pitch his ideas. His work was inspirational then, and it remains inspirational now. The need to tackle the challenges he highlighted is something we should all identify with if we want to create a socially mobile, highly skilled, strong economy and to maximise the economic potential of all young people, and especially NEETs.

My hon. Friend identified the need for pre-emptive, targeted intervention. As his work has shown, that needs to happen not only in education, but from the very early years—from early childhood. That should be done by supporting child care and through interventions inside and outside school. Other hon. Members have mentioned that issue, which I will come to later.

The latest figures show that 975,000 young people fall into the NEETs category. Although there has been some progress in getting some of them back into training and employment, that is not enough, and the situation is not satisfactory for any of us, whichever side of the House we are on. If we look at European comparisons, we find that about 14% of young people in the UK are classified as NEETs, but the proportion is as low as 4% in the Netherlands and 7% in Denmark. That shows that we should aim much higher, because we can achieve similar figures. We should aim to beat those countries and be a leader in tackling such youth inactivity and unemployment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North talked about early intervention and powerfully highlighted the possible economic gains. I was struck by research that found that if we fail to engage 120,000 young people who are aged 13 today and who are at risk of becoming NEETs, they will collectively lose £6.4 billion in lifetime earnings. The argument is not only about fairness; it is about economic benefits, as has been noted.

Clearly, we need to identify and improve mechanisms to find out who is likely to fall into the categories in question, and track them. More work needs to be done through the agencies, including schools and further education colleges, as well as charitable organisations, which play a vital role, as hon. Members have said, in supporting those who are at risk. Youth offending teams are also among those whose work is relevant. We need more collective working across Departments to address the challenges for young people who are likely to be at risk, who could be diverted through the interventions—in school or as part of the work readiness or other programmes—discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North.

I was encouraged by the remarks of the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) about the need for pre-school support. My party supports an increase in child care hours and I hope that the Government will match that. The hon. Gentleman also talked about troubled families. The previous Labour Government introduced the relevant programme and I am glad that

[Rushanara Ali]

he supports it. He mentioned pupil referral units. They are important, and successive Governments have at best done minimal work on them, and at worst neglected them. Often, talented young people are excluded; I saw that in my work, before I was elected to Parliament. We need to do more to make sure that they can get access to the sorts of opportunities that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North described, in programmes such as those he is developing in Nottingham, which I hope could be scaled up for other parts of the country.

We need to consider suggestions such as those that my hon. Friend made about work-readiness. There are great examples around the country involving many organisations, including City Gateway in London. I was involved in setting up a programme called Fastlaners, which works with 16 to 18-year-olds and is currently working with Jobcentre Plus and JP Morgan. Another programme supports graduates who lack employability skills; that is a lack that exists throughout the system and it is significantly related to disadvantage, social class differences and the lack of social capital. The Minister has done a great deal of work on those issues in his previous life, and I know that he will understand how serious they are, particularly for young people who get free school meals and who are disadvantaged by lack of connections, whether to employers or to people with a professional background who could mentor and support them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North talked about the importance of careers information and guidance. We have made it clear how damaging the situation is, and I hope that the Minister, in his new role, will address some of the major concerns of the CBI, which described careers information guidance and advice as being on “life support”.

Concerns were also raised by the Select Committee on Education, as well as by Ofsted, about the need to deal quickly with the situation. I hope that the Minister will make it an urgent priority that schools should provide proper guidance and advice, which should be independent. It should also be much more creative, as hon. Members have discussed—linking with employers but not expecting them to be a substitute for independent guidance and support. The work should also involve the further education sector, among the other institutions that can play a vital role in careers guidance.

A related issue is work experience. Since it was, in effect, scrapped, 15% of young people cannot obtain a placement. There is a social class effect, in that the families of well connected young people can arrange work experience for them, while the rest are left high and dry. I hope that the Minister will attend to that, because there is a link to the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North made about indirect disadvantage and discrimination, which kick in, often, on the basis of class. I know that the Minister will be concerned about that and want to rectify it.

I was particularly struck by something that the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) said about taking over school and other public buildings to provide facilities, which resonates with programmes introduced by my party through extended schools. He made a powerful point about the need to make sure that those facilities are available without charge. I hope that

the Minister will look into that, because there are huge gains to be made if we can open those facilities up and maximise the potential for work with the group that we are now considering, in particular—but also with young people more generally.

That is very much what has been done by programmes such as Futureversity—a national charity that I was involved in setting up. It worked with universities and schools, and took over the facilities, helping to raise aspiration. It also worked with young people at risk, and a famous alumnus is Dizzee Rascal, who was excluded from a school in Bow. His tutor identified that he had musical talent and put him in touch with the organisation; he could then develop his talents. That goes to show what is possible for young people who are totally at risk. Dizzee Rascal has said that he could have ended up in the criminal justice system. With early intervention, and if there are facilities, and mentors and inspirational people available to give support, someone's life can be transformed. That is what we are interested in; that is what we are in the business of.

I hope that the Minister will consider the key issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North raised and the innovative projects and programmes, in Nottingham in particular, but also in other constituencies, where many in Parliament do impressive hands-on work on improving the life chances of young people—both in the category we are considering and more generally. I hope that the Government will listen, and learn from those examples, and consider how they can use their influence, power and resources. I do not necessarily mean, as others have said, investing more; I hope that they will use resources effectively to address the challenge of getting young people who do not now receive the support they need into work and meaningful activity, and into making a contribution to society.

If we pull together and organise our resources—our connections with the world of work—and leverage our support with Government resources and local employment partnerships, as my hon. Friend powerfully described, there is no reason why this country cannot compete with other countries that have reduced the number of people who fall into the appalling category that we should all, whatever party we belong to, be ashamed to have in our country.

We should make a united, collective effort to agree on interventions that work, and make sure that the Government can scale them up. I know that the Minister will be interested in new ideas as part of his new brief. I look forward to working with him and my hon. Friends to make sure, once and for all, that we have a long-term plan that is rapid and immediate in ensuring that we can abolish the terrible category of young people defined as NEETs. It is degrading and demeaning, and not fit for a society that is one of the largest economies in the world. We can do better if we work together on that important issue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North said.

10.49 am

The Minister of State for Skills, Enterprise and Equalities (Nick Boles): It is a great pleasure, Mr Caton, to serve under your chairmanship in this first debate to which I have been invited to respond in my new job. I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen)—he

is an old friend only because we have been friends for a long time and not for any other reason—on securing this debate and bringing to it his customary insight, passion and wisdom.

We have heard from three Members who are the very models of modern Members of Parliament and are not content just to respond to casework and to make speeches in Parliament, but seek a deep understanding of the issues affecting their constituents and think creatively about long-term solutions to those problems. They do not stop there, but devise programmes and initiatives in their constituencies to bring partners, businesses, charities and public sector agencies together. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) said, they even raise money personally to fund some projects. That is what being a Member of Parliament is about, and I wish I could claim to be nearly as good a one as my hon. Friends.

There are many phrases and much jargon that a newly appointed Minister must get to grips with. We have heard some jargon this morning—work readiness—which I do not like any more than I like any other jargon. I feel peculiarly un-work ready this morning, having had less than 24 hours to get my head around the issues. Nevertheless, I have the advantage of the superb work of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who properly earned the respect of colleagues in the House for his indefatigable energy, enthusiasm and drive.

I join hon. Members in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), the former Minister for Civil Society, who is one of the most decent and honourable men in politics. I regret that he is no longer in his role, but I know that he will continue to work hard to support the charitable sector and to help turn society around through the good work of people in that sector.

My understanding, which is high level and brief, is that when the Government came to office in 2010, we inherited a system in which there were brave intentions, but fundamental dishonesty. The fundamental dishonesty lay in the fact that we said to many young people that if they studied a range of courses and collected qualification confetti, they too would be able to share in the benefits of our growing economy. That was not true. It was not true in 2010 when the economy was not growing and it was not even true in 2007, 2006 and 2005, when our economy had been growing for a very long time, but a huge number of people—for all their GNVQs and other qualifications—were not able to share fully in the benefits of it. That fundamental dishonesty is the key challenge that we have tried to face with the help of the fantastic Alison Wolf and others. We have tried to identify the core skills that are essential for every young person to acquire if they are to have a chance to share in that economic prosperity.

In my previous job, my simple mission was to get more houses built so that young people could have a chance to own their own home, as my generation and previous ones have done. In this job I have an equally simple mission to ensure that every young person acquires the skills they will need to share in our economic recovery. We have made substantial progress even while coming out of one of the deepest recessions for several generations, but we have not made enough and we are

not satisfied. We will not rest, and the work will continue right up to election day and long afterwards to ensure that that mission is fulfilled.

I believe we were right, as hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise, to scrap some of what my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole described as the GNVQ fiddle and some of the qualifications that purported to give people the equipment to get a job, but did not. We were perpetrating a fraud and it was entirely right that we got rid of that fraud. However, I have heard clearly from the hon. Member for Nottingham North and my hon. Friend that perhaps that reform has gone too far. I am not saying yet whether I agree with them, but I promise to talk to them and other hon. Members—and to the Chairman of the Select Committee, who may have similar concerns—and to understand where that concern lies and consider how we can preserve the massive gains we have made while dealing with any issues.

The other important thing we have done is to revive, restore and re-inspire the apprenticeship concept. It had become a low currency in our education and training system and I am glad to say that that is no longer the case. We are on track to deliver 2 million apprenticeships over this Parliament—not just 2 million in number, but 2 million high-quality, long-term apprenticeships that people who run businesses and other organisations value, and that provide real ways of getting young people into good, long-term employment.

In the few minutes remaining, I want to deal with some of the specific points raised by the hon. Member for Nottingham North and others. On performance measures, the hon. Gentleman was good enough, as he always is, to acknowledge that the progress 8 measure is an important step forward in addressing some of his concerns. I will be very happy to explore with him whether that measure is absolutely the best answer, the only answer and the complete answer. I am glad that he welcomes it and I look forward to talking to him further about that.

The hon. Gentleman talked about a desire to engage with Ofsted at national level, having rightly and properly praised Ofsted in his own area. I will be straightforward with him. I will secure him a meeting with officials at national level at Ofsted and I hope he will then meet me to discuss the outcome. I cannot promise always to agree with him, but I promise to engage with him and to talk to him as he makes progress.

I want to refer to a couple of the programmes to which my hon. Friends the Members for Brigg and Goole and for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) referred because they are tremendously important. They have new university technical colleges opening in their constituencies, and that is a superb initiative. Like most good Government initiatives, it was invented by a previous Government, developed by a later Government and is now being further developed by the present Government. I strongly welcome it and I am delighted that those two communities have benefited from it.

The National Citizen Service initiative is important, and I am proud to claim a small portion of the authorship. In opposition, I was responsible for developing that policy and for creating Charity Challenge, which is now the leading provider of the National Citizen Service. I am particularly delighted that the Labour party is an enthusiastic supporter of the National Citizen Service

[Nick Boles]

and look forward to it being developed and offered to all teenagers as they reach the appropriate stage, whoever is in Government.

I acknowledge the important work of the Imagination Library. I did not know about it, but I am even more keen on it now that I know that Dolly Parton had something to do with it. It is a fantastic project, and it is fantastic that my hon. Friends are being so constructive in supporting it and ensuring that they can offer it to their constituents.

I am tremendously privileged, lucky and happy to have been given this job. Like poor Manuel, I know nothing at the moment, but I am keen to learn and this debate has been the most fantastic tutorial that a new Minister could possibly have. It would be hard to find four Members of Parliament with more passion, commitment and knowledge. I look forward to learning from them and working with them. I hope that together, we will ensure that young people have the skills they need to share in our economic recovery.

Mr Allen: Will the Minister come to Nottingham to see the work we are doing?

Nick Boles: I will be delighted to do so.

Martin Caton (in the Chair): We will now move on to our next debate, which happens to be on the National Citizen Service.

National Citizen Service

11 am

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Caton, just as it was to hear part of the last exchange between hon. Members and the new Minister of State for Skills, Enterprise and Equalities, whom I know well. He knows that I know him well, and I hope we will be working more closely together in future, given my interest in skills and through my chairmanship of the Skills Commission. Of course, I must also welcome the Minister for Civil Society, the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr Newmark), who will be replying to this short debate of ours. I know him well, as do most of us in the House, and we are delighted to see him in his new position.

Anything that I say today about the National Citizen Service is not a criticism of what we have; it is an appeal to do more and to make it more thoroughgoing and rigorous. In a recent question to the Prime Minister, followed up by an article published last Saturday in the *Yorkshire Post*, I argued for people to realise that 100 years ago this August, a war started that led to the deaths of 16 million mainly young men, all over the world.

I was recently in France, overlooking a hill where 300,000 young men died during the first world war. Seventy hectares are still in a red zone and no one can go there. Any of us who think this year about that war and the casualties do not want that ever to happen again. We had a second world war, with—not many people know this—even more casualties worldwide, because of the sophistication of the weaponry used. We perhaps take it a bit for granted that there has not been a conflagration of that size since, although there have been, and still are, conflagrations, wars, and dreadful civil unrest and unhappiness across the world; I am thinking this morning about Gaza, Israel, Syria and so on. There is an extensive list.

I suppose I sound a bit like Colonel Blimp when I say that probably the best trainers ever in this country were the armed services. I have done a lot of work looking at the history of training in this country. The armed services, when we had national conscription and national service, took every young man who could see and walk into national service and made something of them. All the research shows that the experience was dramatic, certainly for young men in our inner cities and in our big towns, who would rarely move off their local estate or out of their local neighbourhood. National service took those young men and not only gave them a skill, a trade, a routine and much else, but sent them all over the world and all over the United Kingdom. They met people whom they would not otherwise have met, and many of them married them, so we had a real opportunity for mobility and change.

It is interesting that the young people who are able to travel, to see the world and to meet other people from other places are the sort of children who most of us in this room have—who I have. I have four children who have done their gap years in exotic places, some of which I have never been to. These young people have travelled and gone to university, well away from home, so there is mobility for them, but that mobility is not shared, particularly in the most deprived communities in our land.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): May I be the first Member on this side of the House to congratulate the Minister on his new role? I look forward to working with him. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing the debate. I particularly enjoy working with him on a cross-party basis, as we are both co-chairs of the Associate Parliamentary Manufacturing Group. I welcome how he is framing his remarks.

Martin Caton (in the Chair): Order. This is an intervention, not a speech.

Chris White: As chair of the all-party group on the National Citizen Service and volunteering, I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's support. Does he not think that this issue would also benefit from cross-party consensus?

Mr Sheerman: As the hon. Gentleman said, he works well with me and I hope he can work with me on the much more ambitious programme that I am going to talk about today. Nothing I am going to say today is negative about the existing National Citizen Service programme, but I want to finish my analysis. I believe that we have become a very different country. More and more people are living in cities and towns, with fewer people living in the countryside. There are real problems with the mobility of young people—getting off their estates, travelling, and getting away from their sometimes troubled environments.

I would like to see an open discussion about the possibility of having a much more powerful National Citizen Service, because we are in a time when democracy is under threat. When I asked that particular question of the Prime Minister, the other thing I said was that, 10 days before, only 36% of people voted in the European elections and even fewer voted in the local elections. Interestingly, if we look at Europe, even countries that are so keen on getting democracy had levels of involvement of 19%.

It is worrying for Europe and for our country that there is a disengagement from politics. All of us, when we are out canvassing, or in different parts of the country—in my case, trying to persuade the people of Scotland to stay in the Union—hear too often that the perception is that democracy does not make any difference because we are all the same. I think we need citizenship, because it will get to the root of that kind of attitude.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has my absolute support for his passion on the subject, and I have seen the complete transformation of young people who engage in the NCS programme. They all go on to become constructive and proud members of our local communities.

Mr Sheerman: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I shall point us to the direction I want to go in. There is complacency about our democracy. From studying history, we know that when we become complacent about our history and learning its lessons, problems emerge—extremist politics of various kinds. If there is a vacuum, there is a danger, historically, that something will fill it.

Perhaps we do not have anything like the extremes of left or right that we had in the Europe in the 1930s, which Michael Oakeshott wrote so vividly about at that time, but we have a serious problem of engagement, and

we also have a much higher level of migration than we used to. It is true—it would be nonsense for Opposition Members to deny and not address this fact—that many people come to this country. They want to learn about the country, be good citizens and be absorbed into the culture of this country, and they get very few opportunities to learn.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I absolutely share the hon. Gentleman's ambition. As one of the architects of the National Citizen Service, which I thought he was talking about, I wonder whether he acknowledges that the NCS, which this year will, hopefully, take 90,000 kids through its programme, has a much higher proportion of children from free school meals and deprived backgrounds, and from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and is providing just that degree of social mix? There can be a kid from Eton on one end of a rope and a kid from the youth justice system, from east London, on the other end, and, as I have seen with my own eyes, they are entirely reliant on each other. In other circumstances, they would never have come together, and that is what is being achieved.

Mr Sheerman: This is becoming embarrassing, Mr Caton. There are all these Members from across the House whom I have become accustomed to working with closely on various issues. I agree with that point, too.

I come to the nub of what I am saying. I am not criticising the existing service, but we are a bit complacent, in that we think it is enough. I do not think that it is enough. I go to many university campuses and talk to students. Everyone thinks that if people enter higher education, if they go to college, they learn something about this country, but all the evidence is that very often they do not. They might go to study physics, architecture, design or foreign languages, but my experience is that, even in the higher education sector, very little time is spent talking about the culture and nature of this country, the nature of democracy and the nature of a parliamentary democracy in particular.

What also worries me is that when, as Chair of the former Select Committee on Education and Skills, I looked at the way in which citizenship was taught in schools, I found that it was not very good at all. We visited many schools, and too often that was the situation with citizenship, despite all the brave efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) and all the other efforts that were made. What we found on the ground was the old story of the PE teacher who does not have a heavy timetable being asked to teach citizenship. There was no training, no back-up and no real curriculum. We found that it was very lacking.

The one exception—the one bright star—was the Blue school in Bath and Wells. It had innovated and created the Learning to Lead campaign. We were so keen on the Learning to Lead campaign that I persuaded the Edge Foundation to give it £100,000, and I believe that it is now in nearly 150 schools. It really works, because it changes and suffuses the nature of the school and teaches people about how democracy works.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): The view expressed at the start of the hon. Gentleman's speech was so traditional that I thought he might be crossing the

[Karl McCartney]

Floor to join all his positive colleagues on the Government side of the House. If he would like reassurance about how widely drawn and diverse the youngsters are who take part in the National Citizen Service, he should please come and see Lincolnshire and Rutland's, which is most professionally run by Elaine Lilley and her colleagues.

Mr Sheerman: I appreciate that intervention as well, but I am not going to be doing what the hon. Gentleman thought; let me just finish now. I believe that there is a complacency outside the House about citizenship. I believe that citizenship teaching should be much more rigorous. I believe that it would fit into another radical scheme that I propose, because I do not believe that anyone under the age of 25 in this country should be unemployed. We looked at that in the former Select Committee.

The fact is that it is a terrible waste of talent, money and everything else if a young person becomes unemployed before the age of 25. In my view—I have said this very clearly in the House many times—every young person should be in employment with training, in education, in training or getting high-quality job experience. The leader of the Labour party was misquoted recently on this. No young person should be allowed to be living on the margins of society on a little bit of benefit, a little bit of housing benefit and so on. Too many lives are destroyed by that dependency that develops up to the age of 25—

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Sheerman: No. My citizenship programme would build on the excellent citizenship programme that has been so innovative and has grown. I have looked at the current programme and I think that it is good, but it is still small. I believe that there is a cost of £50; it certainly was that the last time I looked. As I said, the programme is small. It will have engaged 100,000 people this year, but I want to build on that experience. It has been a good learning process, but I want my hon. Friends on my side of the House and my friends of a different type on the other side of the House to come together on this. I do not think that there should be a political—

Jason McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way to one of his friends?

Mr Sheerman: Very quickly.

Jason McCartney: I thank the hon. Gentleman, my near constituency neighbour, for giving way and I welcome the Minister to his post. May I clarify what the hon. Gentleman is saying? I get where he is coming from. Attending National Citizen Service events at the John Smith's stadium in Huddersfield and at Huddersfield town hall, we saw the wonder of the teamwork. People were away from home and working together in self-reliance. Is there not a fear that burdening the scheme with the citizenship training provided by local colleges, such as Huddersfield New college and Kirklees college, could

take away the sense of adventure, self-reliance and teamwork that our young people are getting from this fantastic scheme?

Mr Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, but that is not what I am saying. I do not want to touch that scheme. It can carry on—it can improve and we can learn from it. However, I think that there is a deeper lesson: that we need a more thoroughgoing programme of inducting people into our society.

Personally, I do not believe that such a programme should be voluntary. I think that every young person in this country should do it. It should be equivalent to a year's commitment; they should be able to do it full-time or part-time over a longer period. It should be applicable to the college and university student, as well as the young person coming out of school who does not yet have a job. It is a radical programme that I want and it builds on what already exists.

I have found that certain Conservative Ministers are rather jealous of me, because I studied at the London School of Economics with the well known Conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott, who believed in the pursuit of intimations—not picking up wonderful policies of the left or right, which was the cure-all for everything, but learning from experience and edging forward. I have become much fonder of that kind of attitude as I have got older.

What we can learn from what we have done in the citizenship programme is that there is a real need. Disturbingly, we have found in Birmingham schools and in some in Bradford that there are things going on that we need to find a positive alternative to, rather than just getting into a frenzy when we pick up on something like that. There is also the very worrying experience that I had when I was Chair of the Select Committee of increasingly seeing people withdrawing children from school and saying that they were being home educated. We then lost track of them.

There are some real problems in our society. It would be silly of any political party to sweep them under the carpet. I think that a thoroughgoing one-year commitment to a national citizenship service, learning from the excellent work being done in the voluntary programme, is the way forward. I will continue pressing for that with the new Minister and with my colleagues on the Opposition and Government sides.

11.17 am

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Brooks Newmark): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Caton. I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing this important debate and I thank all hon. Members for their extremely constructive contributions. There are lessons that we can learn. Individuals and Members from both sides of the House have come to the realisation that this is something that it is extremely important to do. The hon. Gentleman, in looking back to national service—those of us who had parents who did national service have heard the stories of that and what they got from it—brings us forward to what the National Citizen Service is really about.

The issue of citizenship goes to the heart of my values and beliefs as a father, as a politician, and now as the Minister for Civil Society. Just last month, I visited

a project in Peckham called Leaders of Tomorrow, which to me was an exemplar of what national citizen service is about. When I was invited by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday to take on this role, I was thrilled by the opportunity, because it gives me the chance to pursue an interest of mine—something that I have taken outside the realm of being a Member of Parliament. It is the bread and butter of what I do every week, not just as a Member of Parliament but as someone who has a huge interest in the importance of social action. I have spent the past eight years going to Rwanda on something called Project Umubano, which is a social action project. We in the Conservative party take a group of 50, 60 or sometimes 70 people to Rwanda to work on five or so different social action projects.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I am glad to have the opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. On that point, does he agree that the citizenship programme is a key part of social action? Just this weekend, I saw some fantastic work being done by Cornwall college, which is really engaging young people in social action this, and I am sure there will be a legacy for the rest of their lives.

Mr Newmark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. From a standing start, the programme of national citizenship now engages 10% of young people in the relevant age bracket. As someone who has five children between the ages of 16 and 25, I know that engaging young people for three weeks of their summer is a challenge. Most have the attention span of what they see on their iPhones or whatever digital devices they play with. The fact that the Government are now engaging 10% of our young people every summer represents a huge success.

I saw at first hand the value of bringing together young people from different backgrounds and supporting them in giving back to their communities. Each and every one of us sees many examples in our constituencies of youth organisations that bring together groups of young kids from different backgrounds to work together. It is vital that we encourage all our young people to participate. That is why His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was right to create the “Step Up to Serve” campaign, which is supported by all three main party leaders, with the ambition of increasing the proportion of young people taking part in social action in our country to 50% by the end of the decade. That is a tremendous ambition, and as Minister I am committed to working as hard as I can with community groups to try to engage our young boys and girls. It is right that the National Citizen Service, which is delivered by the independent NCS Trust, should be part of that vital cross-party campaign.

The NCS grew out of the recognition of a need to equip our young people with the skills and confidence they require to transition into adulthood, to re-engage them into a cohesive society and to utilise their energy and passion to improve their local communities. NCS is delivering against each of those needs. The 2012 independent evaluation of the programme found that 92% of participants thought that NCS gave them the chance to develop skills that would be useful in the future, and 95% said that NCS gave them a chance to

get to know people with whom they would not normally mix. Two or three Government Members made that point.

NCS participants so far have given some 2 million hours to serving their communities, taken part in more than 50,000 social action projects and raised almost £750,000 for charities around the country. That is a tremendous achievement for the initiative from a standing start. Since 2011, nearly 80,000 young people have benefited from their involvement in NCS, and the programme is on track to have its 100,000th graduate this summer. The NCS started in England and spread to Northern Ireland, and I am delighted that it will soon be launched in Wales as well.

NCS is a special opportunity for our young people at a critical point in their lives, but social action is a habit that evolves over a lifetime. Across our country, there are many fantastic examples of organisations helping our young people to give something back. The Government have granted up to £11 million through two youth social action funds to encourage more young people to take part in social action and support high-quality programmes across England. A further £3 million will be granted through the vulnerable and disengaged young people fund for social action programmes working with vulnerable young people, including those in care and young offenders. As a result of our support and the efforts of charities and community groups across the country, 2012-13 saw the highest levels of informal and formal volunteering in England among 16 to 25-year-olds since 2008-09.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his new position. I know that some work has been done on this, but is he aware of any further work on progression routes for those who graduate from the NCS? That is an area that could benefit from his attention in his new brief.

Mr Newmark: I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome. She is exactly right, and I have been talking about precisely that topic this morning. How can we engage local businesses? If someone gets a certificate to state that they have graduated from the NCS, will local businesses in our communities recognise the certificate and say, “I will give this person a job opportunity,” whether that be a summer job, a temporary job or a full-time job? The hon. Lady makes an excellent point.

Karl McCartney: I welcome the Minister to his new post. I assure the hon. Member for Huddersfield that Government Members were not ganging up on him earlier; we were very supportive. On the point that the Minister just mentioned, career academies offer some business engagement with young people at the ages of 15, 16 and 17. I recently set one up in Lincoln, which is a good model. The Minister, in his new role, might like to look at such academies.

On the NCS, the hon. Member for Huddersfield made a point towards the end of his speech that needs to be looked at. He mentioned those who are home educated, who might miss out on the opportunities that the NCS offers. When I was out with my NCS team in Boutham park recently doing some clean-ups, one home educating mother came up to us and asked whether her nine-year-old daughter could join in. Her daughter

[Karl McCartney]

was a little bit too young for the NCS, but there is a need and a desire among parents for their children to be included.

Mr Newmark: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We want to get more people involved, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield urged us to. That means committing resources to engage positively with parents, and I will be using part of our resources to do just that. Many people still do not know about the programme, so it is important that we try to market this great opportunity to young people.

The hon. Gentleman talked about national service and the skills that young people learned there. I remember hearing when I was younger from my stepfather, who went through national service, about the mix of people he encountered. All sorts of people from all sorts of background got together, and many people found when they left national service that they had a greater sense of social mobility than they had had when they entered.

We are not simply talking about skills. The hon. Gentleman described engaging with people, trying to create a cohesive society, encouraging individual responsibility and developing a responsible society. Those are all the hallmarks of NCS. He said that not enough is being done, and I am sympathetic to that. Like him, I would love every young person to be engaged in some form of community work or social action. I would draw the line—he did not really cross this line—at making such work compulsory, because I do not think that it is necessary to do so. If people engage with us voluntarily, they will be engaged with their communities for life. That is the sort of sense of social responsibility that we want to create from the NCS programme.

I conclude by returning to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He talked about Professor Oakeshott, and about the concept of learning from our experience. We are engaged in an iterative process, and we will continue to learn from it, continue to grow and continue to engage people, particularly young people. I am told that nearly 300 young people are expected to take part in the NCS in Huddersfield and the surrounding area this summer. I was pleased to note the hon. Gentleman's tweet on meeting some of the NCS participants last September:

"Inspirational young people @NationalCitizensService in Huddersfield Town Hall if these guys are the future were OK!"

I could not agree more.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Relocation Scheme (Syrians)

[JIM DOBBIN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sarah Teather (Brent Central) (LD): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dobbin.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak about the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme. Like many others in Britain, I have watched with horror as the situation in Syria has developed. I have friends with relatives trapped in Syria, and the pictures of people streaming out of that country have been almost too shocking for me to watch.

Last November, in my capacity as chair of the all-party group on refugees, I travelled to Jordan to witness for myself the conditions in which Syrian refugees are living, to hear their stories and to see first hand the strain that supporting more than half a million extra people is putting on local communities in countries across the region. The details of that visit are, of course, recorded in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Jordan is a relatively small country with a population, before the refugee crisis, of some 6.5 million people, but that figure includes more than 2 million registered Palestinian refugees and tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees, all in what is considered to be one of the world's 10 most water scarce countries—a country with an economy that has struggled greatly in recent years.

On my first day in Jordan, I visited the Zaatari refugee camp with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which I thank for organising the visit. The Zaatari refugee camp is just a few miles from the Syrian border. At the time of my visit, the camp had a population of around 100,000 Syrians, which made it one of the largest settlements in Jordan.

The UNHCR showed me the route that newly arrived refugees from Syria take when they arrive at the camp, and we began by going to a large tent in which several families were gathered. The families were still recovering from their overnight journey and were yet to go through the formal process for registering as a refugee. Via an interpreter, they told about the journeys they had taken to get to the camp. If they were lucky, the journey had taken several days, but in most cases the journey had taken weeks—weeks across desert, weeks of having to find food and shelter where they could. For much of the journey, they were terrified that the planes they could hear overhead would spot them en route.

When I visited the region, the Jordanian Government had all but closed the border crossing closest to the camp. Most of the families I met at Zaatari had come from Daraa in the south of Syria, not far from the camp itself. The closing of the border crossing forced people to cross hundreds of miles of desert. At best, it took two weeks to reach the only open crossing, which is up in the corner with the Iraqi border.

We heard about families who had endured days out in the rain without shelter, with freezing conditions at night. They were finally picked up in no man's land between the Syrian and Jordanian borders by the Jordanian army and driven through the night back to Zaatari camp, arriving in the early hours of the morning. Most arrived at Zaatari with very little, perhaps only the

clothes on their backs, having fled their farms and villages with what they could carry and having discarded belongings along the route. They were all tired, hungry and covered in dust from the journey.

A short sleep and a shower awaited them on arrival at the camp before they began the registration process with the UNHCR, which entitles refugees to a mattress, some emergency provisions and a tent that will be their home during their time in the camp. It is a meagre existence for families who have typically spent their lives living in first-world conditions not dissimilar to our own, with all the luxuries that we would expect. When we see pictures on the television, it is worth reminding ourselves that most of the people we see have been living in conditions not dissimilar to what we consider to be normal.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. She has outlined some of the horrific and awful conditions that face those 500,000 people. Does she agree that we need a strategic international resolution to the issue before those people are affected not only by the oncoming winter but the regional problems that will emerge if the situation is not resolved?

Sarah Teather: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The situation in Iraq is only making the plight of people in Syria worse, because many of them have fled into Iraq. As it happens, many of those people are travelling up to Kurdistan. Even so, the sheer movement of people in the region is worrying, and it puts extra strain on the countries that are taking the bulk of the refugees. I will return to that point in a moment.

During my visit to Zaatari camp, I met Doctors of the World and Save the Children to see their work supporting refugees. I pay tribute to their work, and I place on the record my admiration for the many people who support those very vulnerable people—they are usually separated from their own family and friends, living a long way away. Despite the hard work of many, conditions in the camp are extremely difficult due to the lack of privacy, the cold of living in a tent and the shared toilet facilities, which have provoked persistent allegations of sexual harassment. That makes it a difficult life for anyone to bear.

Overall, it is the children who stay most in my mind. I was shown some of the provision in the camp, including a football pitch built with funding from South Korea, a playground with swings and a slide, and a project run by Save the Children that does excellent work giving the camp's children space to learn, play and speak about their traumas, but that is not what stays most in my mind. What stays most in my mind is the sight of children working, as I saw most children doing.

Refugees are not allowed to work in Jordan, yet many are desperate to supplement the small levels of support they receive, so their children work. Children digging are a common sight in the camp, and it took me a minute to notice what they were doing, as at first sight I thought they were playing. When I looked a bit closer and talked to staff in the camp, I realised that they were actually making cement. The Jordanian authorities have banned cement from being brought into Zaatari, so instead the residents of the camp make their own.

Groups of children dig through sand and dirt for many hours in the sun to get at the finer material needed to make cement.

Conditions in the camp are so difficult that many choose to leave and take their chances living in neighbouring villages or, if they are lucky, Amman, where they may have friends and relatives. They get more privacy that way, but the conditions for those living outside the camp are also terrible, and it requires raising further funds to support housing costs. That means that child labour is endemic. In Jordan's capital, Amman, I visited a team from the Jesuit Refugee Service, which goes out to visit families that are almost invariably living in cold, damp and unfurnished apartments.

None of the children from those families is in school. Instead, many of them are out working to pay the rent for the property in which they live, including a 10-year-old boy I met called Bashir. He is the sole bread winner for his family of six, whose lives are particularly difficult because two of the children have severe disabilities. Bashir sells vegetables on the streets from 8 am until 10 pm. He has no time for school or play, and he is not the only child I saw on that street doing exactly the same thing. That is the reality for refugees in Jordan, and it is a reality mirrored in Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I visited Lebanon with the support of World Vision, as I have declared in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The difference there is that there are no established camps in Lebanon and the nearly 1 million people are dispersed. Only 23% of the international community's funding commitment has been delivered in 2014, which makes it difficult for the agencies to provide support to register people quickly. That is often a huge blockage.

Has the hon. Lady observed similar problems? Does she agree that our Government need to take a stronger line on encouraging our international partners to ensure that the funding commitment is honoured urgently?

Sarah Teather: I did see similar things. There is one set of difficulties for refugees living in camps and another for refugees living in communities. The thing that really bothers refugees living in camps is the lack of privacy and the shared toilet facilities. Most of them are living in tents, although the UNHCR has gradually been trying to replace the tents with more permanent caravans. The lives of people living in camps are extremely hard, and many get to a point at which they can no longer cope. That is when they move out into the community. However, in the community, they are not having their housing costs paid, so they find that they run out of money. Some people cycle between one and the other as they try desperately to find a bearable situation. It is quite obvious that a lot of agencies are not reaching people living in communities. Those who are living in the cities and have been picked up by an agency are luckier than others.

I do not want to go too far into the question of aid, because I am trying to outline some of the conditions before moving on to talk about the relocation scheme, but I hope that the hon. Lady finds the opportunity for a detailed debate on the issues relating to aid in Lebanon and other countries, because they are very important.

[Sarah Teather]

I was talking about the five countries—Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt—that currently host 2.8 million refugees. I am going to say that figure again because it is really important: when we talk about the numbers in this country, it is worth bearing in mind that there are 2.8 million refugees, half of whom are children. Of those children, six in 10 are not enrolled in school. Of all households, one in four is headed by women, who face a lone fight for survival. It is extremely difficult for them.

Despite the conditions I saw, nearly every refugee I spoke to was desperate to return home. They consider the phase they are in to be temporary and are desperate for peace to begin so that they can start their lives all over again. However, with no end in sight to the conflict in Syria and with the crisis in Iraq growing bloodier by the day, as we discussed a moment ago, the pressure on neighbouring countries to cope with the constant influx of refugees continues to mount and the prospects for safe return to Syria continue to diminish.

In contrast to Syria's neighbours, Europe has been relatively unaffected by the refugee crisis. Excluding Turkey from the figures, only 4% of all Syrians who have fled their homeland have sought asylum in Europe. That is a total of 123,600, of whom a mere 4,084 have applied for asylum in the UK. I am going to repeat the number I cited a minute ago: 2.8 million. Of 2.8 million refugees, 4,084 have applied for asylum in the UK. That is a drop in the ocean.

Last September, the UNHCR called on countries to admit 30,000 Syrian refugees on resettlement, humanitarian admission or other programmes by the end of 2014. That 30,000 sounds like a big number, unless we keep repeating 2.8 million. We then remember that it is a really small number. In February, with the refugee crisis growing by the day, the UNHCR expanded its call, seeking an extra 100,000 places in 2015 and 2016. So far, 31,817 resettlement places have been offered by European countries, including Germany offering 20,000, Austria 1,500, Sweden 1,000 and Norway 1,000. The USA has an open-ended number of available places.

What about the UK? The British Government have been among the most generous donors to the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis, and I want to place on the record my congratulations to them on their strong leadership. However, they have been much slower to move on resettlement issues. In the words of the UNHCR representative to the UK, Roland Schilling:

“this is an extraordinary crisis requiring extraordinary measures”.

He also said:

“International solidarity and burden sharing is now an imperative if we want to ease the suffering of Syrian refugees, assist the neighbouring countries and avoid further destabilization of the region.”

Back in January, I was delighted that the Government announced that the UK would set up the vulnerable persons relocation scheme, which would run in parallel to the UNHCR's resettlement scheme. The Government were late to make that decision, and it took concerted effort and leadership from the UNHCR, the Refugee Council and Amnesty International, among many others, to persuade them to make it, along with strong advocacy from MPs from across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, the Government did make that very welcome announcement.

I was not concerned that the Government were running their own scheme in co-operation with the UNHCR rather than as part of the UNHCR scheme; what is important is that those vulnerable refugees for whom returning home is nigh on impossible—for example, those who have suffered sexual violence, or who would face persecution or need specialised medical care—are offered resettlement in the UK. However, I am extremely concerned that, six months on, very little seems to have come of that announcement.

Answers to parliamentary questions show that so far only 50 refugees have been resettled through the Government's scheme, although perhaps the Minister will correct me if I have the wrong figure; if it is out of date, he can update us. When the scheme was announced, the Government said that there would be no quota but that those who were deemed the most vulnerable would be prioritised. However, despite the Government's not providing a quota, it was suggested that the scheme would support

“several hundred people over the next three years”.

Will the Minister explain why the number of people who have managed to come here has so far been so very low? Assurances were given to the House that the Government were committed to the scheme. What has happened to delay the resettlement of refugees? Why has the take-up been so slow?

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate and on her outstanding work as chairman of the all-party group on refugees. We will miss her hugely when she leaves the House next May.

One important element might be the involvement of the diaspora community in this country. I have been approached by so many members of the Arab diaspora, including Syrians who have been settled here for many years, who want to help the Government and to assist in bringing more people over. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is important to include members of the diaspora? They might be able to help to increase the numbers from the very low figures we currently have.

Sarah Teather: The right hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. There are obviously going to be some sensitivities relating to why a person is so vulnerable that they need to be resettled, but there are certainly areas of the country with a significant Syrian diaspora population and the Government should encourage councils in those areas to work to ensure that support systems are in place. I encourage the diaspora to pressure the Government and councils to take part in the scheme and try to increase the number of people we are able to resettle.

I return to the questions I was asking a moment ago. Will the Minister comment on how the figure of “several hundred people” was reached? The VPR scheme appears to be based on need, and that need is obviously increasing, as shown by the UNHCR's call for more resettlement places. Has the Minister considered re-evaluating that “several hundred” figure upwards? If not, why not? What are the Government doing to ensure that their commitment is delivered and is not just an announcement?

It is worth re-rehearsing the reasons for beginning the scheme in the first place. In the run-up to agreeing to the VPR scheme, Ministers argued that it was more

favourable for Syrian refugees to remain in the region and for us to supply aid rather than resettlement places. I and many others made the point that it was not an either/or but a both/and situation; doing one does not preclude the possibility of doing the other well in a targeted and effective way. Both are necessary to cope with the ongoing crisis and to support those countries in the region that are supporting by far the brunt of the refugee population.

The scheme was necessary for the following reasons: first, because some refugees simply cannot adequately be resettled in the region because of their particular vulnerability, as recognised by the name of the scheme; secondly, because, as Roland Schilling hinted at in the quote I read out, there is an acute need to show political solidarity with the countries most affected by the refugee crisis—if we are going to argue that they must keep open their borders so that refugees have a chance at life, we must do something to demonstrate our equal commitment; and thirdly, because if we do not provide safe routes for refugees to travel, they will find unsafe routes, as we are already seeing.

Neighbouring countries are struggling to cope with the numbers, resulting in increased numbers of refugees making dangerous journeys to Europe to seek safety. In 2013, the number of people who arrived in Europe by crossing the Mediterranean sea reached nearly 60,000—almost three times the number who arrived the previous year. That increase has been driven at least in part by the ever increasing numbers of Syrians taking to boats in the Mediterranean, mostly departing from Libya, Egypt and Turkey. For example, last year Syrians were the No. 1 nationality arriving by sea, with one in four arrivals being Syrian or Palestinians from Syria. Many of them were children, with more than 3,600 Syrian children arriving in Italy last year alone, including 1,224 who were unaccompanied.

This year, the trend has continued. During the first six months of the year, 60,000 people arrived by sea in Italy alone: a fourfold increase on the same period in 2013. Those are not journeys that people choose to take lightly. They are the actions of people who are desperate and see no other option.

In December, some parliamentary colleagues and I boarded a migrant boat on the Thames outside Parliament for international migrants day. It was a tiny boat that had brought around 30 migrants into Lampedusa from Libya. We were given permission to have just eight on board after modifications for safety, and on a fine day on the Thames the boat rocked in ways that gave me a real insight into the dangers that people face travelling on an ocean in an overcrowded boat.

Resettlement programmes offer safe and legal routes for refugees to find safety in Europe. Each year the UK takes around 750 resettled refugees through the gateway protection programme, something that we as a country should rightly be proud of. We cannot watch the tragedies happening in the ocean around Lampedusa and pretend that it does not have any relevance to us and that we bear no responsibility. Unless we are prepared to offer safe routes into Europe, we bear responsibility for some of those people who drown in the Mediterranean.

I want the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme to be something we can be proud of, like the gateway protection programme. For that to be the case, the Government need to be bolder and more ambitious.

The UNHCR now predicts there will be 4.1 million Syrian refugees by the end of this year. Through the vulnerable persons relocation scheme we are on course to have offered only 100 resettlement places by the end of this year. That is 0.002% of all Syrian refugees. We have to do better than that.

We have a proud history of offering sanctuary to those fleeing violence, and we have shown real leadership on humanitarian aid. It is time we lived up to that reputation here and resettled more refugees.

2.51 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather) and thank her for all the hard work she does. I also thank her for her presentation to Westminster Hall today and for setting the scene for all of us here. No one present today will not support the hon. Lady's argument; I am convinced of that. All of us have compassion and interest in others, and that is why we are here—to convey that through this debate. I was disappointed when the debate was postponed from last week, but at least we can revisit it today. Given the continuing violence in Syria, it is a matter of the highest importance, and it is good to make a contribution.

Each day we read of the atrocities taking place in Syria, and a particular concern of mine is the despicable persecution of Christians in particular that is being carried out by ISIS. Syria continues to rise in the world watch list. The civil war has seen an increase in violence in general across the whole of Syria, but a rise in Islamist extremism is putting even greater pressure on Christians in Syria at the present time. Syria's Christian minority, which primarily resides in the capital city, Damascus, is generally respected. That has been the case for many years. Christians make up 6.3% of the population, and they enjoy freedom and stability—at least they did—unparalleled throughout the middle east. Although there is freedom to worship, if Christians evangelise Muslims and share their faith openly, overt persecution is a possibility, but since the conflict began three years ago, the freedoms that Christians enjoyed have ceased to exist, and with increasing Islamising, Christians have faced some of the worst persecution.

I want to put the issue into perspective, because it very much ties in with the vulnerable persons relocation scheme. Killing of Christians in Syria more than doubled in 2013, with the charity group Open Doors confirming the figures as 2,123 compared with 1,201 in 2012. The head of research for Open Doors claimed that this was a minimum number, confirmed by media reports and its own research. The thought that that is just the minimum number of people who have been murdered because of what they believe is truly horrifying. The murder and killing of those in Syria who would benefit from the relocation scheme is something I want to highlight. The figures are testament to the need for us—I use “us” in the general sense, as the UK Government—to act.

It therefore should not come as a surprise that I welcome the relocation scheme and wish to see it extended and promoted, with more people getting the advantage of it. With sky-rocketing food prices and a shortage of water and other essentials, many Christians are facing malnutrition, as are others in Syria. Access to water, electricity and communications is very limited. It is

[*Jim Shannon*]

perhaps the traumatised children of Christian families who suffer the greatest hardships. The hon. Member for Brent Central referred to the children in her speech, and we always see the children's faces in any conflict. Whatever the war and whatever the reasons for it might be, it is the children, the women and mothers who suffer the most, and that is of great concern to all of us. Many face great danger, since rebel forces have even targeted Christian schools.

Terrorist groups have focused on people with Christian beliefs. They believe that Christians are westernised and are therefore supported by the United Kingdom and the USA, which is not the case. They are simply following their faith, as they should. An estimated 600,000 Christians have fled the country or lost their lives as a result of the civil war, and there are fears that Christianity will soon cease to exist in Syria. That is the magnitude of what has taken place. There is a massive humanitarian crisis taking place. The hon. Lady referred to the countries around Syria that are taking many of the refugees. That is having an impact upon those countries' ability to look after not only their own people, but those who come to the country. That must be addressed. Although it might not be his direct responsibility, I am sure the Minister can indicate what help can be given in relation to health and hygiene and the prevailing issues of fresh water and sanitation.

For those reasons I fully support the scheme, although I recognise the importance of conducting appropriate and necessary checks to identify those who are most at risk, as well as working alongside migration and local authorities to ensure that our border control remains a priority. We understand the need for border control, but there is also a need to be compassionate and understanding towards those who are under direct pressure and who need help now. Again, I hope the Minister will be able to address the issue. I have no doubt that he will, but I would like to hear a wee bit more about what the Government are doing.

The UNHCR representative to the UK, Roland Schilling, stated:

"Humanitarian admissions and resettlement are part of our protection strategy for Syrian refugees."

There is a clear role being played.

"As much as they provide solutions for vulnerable individuals and families, these efforts are also a concrete gesture of solidarity and burden sharing with countries in the region currently hosting more than two and a half million Syrian refugees."

It is important that we all take a direct interest in how we can help the Syrian refugees. Any man of a compassionate hue recognises those who are less well off and in need of help, and, without a doubt, our country, the United Kingdom, is one of the most generous countries in the world in terms of both the aid and support that it provides to those in need around the world. It is always good to know that we have kept our commitment. The Government and the Department for International Development have kept their commitments and sent aid to other countries. Christian Aid is grateful and supportive of that as well.

The first group of Syrians have arrived in the United Kingdom, and I trust that the Government and local authorities will do all that they can to integrate them into the community. I am pleased that the families who

have suffered so greatly will now experience both peace and the freedoms that they have been denied. It is important that we as a country help those people to integrate into society here. I know that MPs will always support that, but I urge everyone, including our constituents, to support those people and make sure they are made very much at home.

Critics of the scheme—and there are critics—need not fear that the UK will be inundated with Syrian migrants, because the latest figures have proved that that is not the case. If the figures in *The Guardian* are correct—the Minister will confirm the figures or not—only 24 Syrians have come to the UK under the vulnerable persons scheme. Many of the critics are simply trying to spread fear in the same way they did when we opened our borders to Romanians earlier this year. There is no comparison between the two countries. I always despair when people do not see the real issues of those who most need help.

Latest figures suggest that Sweden and Germany have received the highest number of asylum applications, with just over 24,000 and 23,000 applications respectively, compared to the figure for the UK that the hon. Lady referred to—3,947 applications. Given that 2.8 million Syrians have fled the country since the war began three years ago, these numbers are small indeed and it is time that we as a country helped more, or at least considered the need to increase the number of applications to the UK. I know that both Opposition Members and Government Members are keen to see the Government expand that number, and I would also like to see it expanded.

The Minister himself has noted previously that our country has a proud history of granting protection to those who need it; he is on record as saying that and I support his comments entirely. We in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have provided nearly £600 million in relief efforts, and to conclude today I will say that the greatest contribution that we can now make is to provide safe homes and environments for those who are most at risk. I am delighted to support this scheme and I commend the hon. Lady for securing this debate on it and giving us a chance to contribute. I look forward to the responses of both the shadow Minister and the Minister. Like others in this House, I will continue to seek assurances about the protection of Christians and those who are most at risk in Syria, and indeed across the whole world.

3.1 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I do not want to bring a discordant note to the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather) on all the superb work that she has done for refugees; she will be a loss to this House when she goes. However, she mentioned the proud tradition of this country in rising to the challenge of refugees, and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has just echoed her. To be frank, there is not a proud tradition; I do not accept the claim that there is. The one time that this country was asked to respond to the biggest refugee crisis in Europe was in 1939-40 and we failed to respond. As a result, large numbers of Jewish families, including their children, went to the gas chambers. I thought we had learned the lesson then; I thought that we had learned that when there is an international crisis such as

this one in Syria, our response is not only about providing financial help but about providing refuge. And to be frank, it is shaming of this country that among the European countries our performance is possibly the worst.

Here are the numbers. First, 50 families have been received here. And the other figures from the House of Commons Library that have been quoted today are absolutely staggering. The figures that the hon. Lady set out are just horrendous. Also, we can look at what the countries surrounding Syria have to face. There are 1 million Syrian refugees in Turkey; 400,000 in Iraq, which itself is in crisis; and 800,000 in Jordan, which has a population of 6.3 million, so a sixth of the country's population now are refugees; and in Lebanon, there are 1.6 million refugees in a population of 4.5 million.

Here we are, a country of 60 or 65 million people, and we accept 50 refugees. That is shaming—absolutely shaming. Providing financial assistance of £600 million is welcome, but what people are desperate for—we are talking about the most vulnerable groups within this category of those seeking asylum—is safety, and it is clearly not being provided, either within Syria or outside it. There are now 6.5 million Syrians who are internally displaced, and there were 2.4 million Syrians who had fled abroad but we think that the figure is now 2.8 million, of whom 2 million are children who cannot even go to school as a result of their displacement.

What those people want is somewhere to be safe and in many ways that means leaving the region, because it looks as though the accommodation and provisions within the surrounding countries are so overwhelmed that those countries cannot even provide basic shelter, education and—in some instances—supplies of food. So it is no wonder that people are desperately trying to get across the Mediterranean, risking their own lives and those of their family and children in boats. And yes, I was there on that boat that the hon. Lady referred to. In fact, it was relatively seaworthy in comparison with what we know of the boats that have been used to try and cross the Mediterranean.

It is no wonder that these people are desperate, yet we provide—so far—50 places. Some of the people who have already applied and who are being considered in the figures up to 4,000 are people who are already here and who cannot return to Syria, so that is not exactly “receiving” people either. I do not understand why we have responded in so small a way. I just wonder: is there a figure that the Government are willing to go to? Antonio Guterres set the goal at 30,000. Is the figure that we are going to accept 10,000? Or is it our objective to accept a higher goal? And have we taken only 50 people because of processing issues, or are there other obstacles that have so far restricted the number of people who can take up the opportunity to come to this country? What is the problem? Is there a target figure? If there is, let us hear it, and if there is not, what is preventing us from receiving more people? This situation is a disgrace. When people are absolutely desperate, this is a disgrace and we need to look at the system that is failing to enable people to come here and find the refuge that they seek.

As I say, our performance is absolutely shaming. This is not a party political point; this is a point that, as the hon. Member for Strangford said, has been made across the House in previous debates. We have been willing to

say that we want to do more. If there is an administrative problem let us sort it out, but if it is a policy issue then let us have that out in a debate out in the open. At least let us confront the issue rather than letting the situation drag on, because these people are absolutely desperate and this level of refuge and support that we, the sixth or seventh richest country in the world, are providing by way of direct assistance and by allowing people to come here, is just not acceptable. It is not civilised behaviour. As a result of the performance of these particular programmes that we are considering, we are not meeting our obligations to fellow human beings.

I would welcome hearing the Government's response to the question: “What are we going to do about it?” What sort of numbers do we aim to achieve by the end of this year? What emergency measures need to be put in place to improve our performance on this matter, because we are letting down not only the Syrians but our other European partners? And we will look back on this period and wish that we had done more, done it more effectively and done it much more speedily.

3.6 pm

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Dobbin.

I begin by thanking the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather) for raising this issue. It is an important one, and we need to focus on the Government's response to what is an extremely serious crisis in the middle east. I listened with great interest to her account of her visit to the region. I have not been there in the current circumstances, but she painted a very clear picture of the pressures that exist.

Nevertheless, I genuinely cannot begin to understand what it means to be lifted out of a city such as Aleppo, where I may have lived a perfectly normal and busy working life, and to be removed from my country in circumstances of civil war before being placed in a foreign country, where all elements of humanity have gone and where there is a major humanitarian effort just to maintain a basic standard of living. Even in my constituency, which is in the far-flung regions of north Wales, there are people who have been in touch with me to tell me about the circumstances of their relatives in Syria who have been displaced in cities such as Aleppo. The hon. Lady has therefore done a service in bringing this issue to the House today.

I also took on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said about his understanding of the experience of people in Syria. And the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised the issue of persecution, particularly of Christians, which is an important one that we need to reflect upon and consider in the context of today's debate. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said that a wider issue—the political situation in Syria—needs to be resolved. It does, in order to stop the haemorrhaging of refugees from Syria in the first place.

I pay tribute to the Government for their humanitarian response in-region. I think that the Department for International Development is the second biggest donor in the world in terms of in-region activity, which is extremely good and positive. However, I go back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington and others have said: that people are leaving the region

[*Mr David Hanson*]

because they cannot live there. They do not wish to leave; they want to be back in the region where they have lived, grown up and made their lives and careers. For them to do that, we have to respond in a helpful way and achieve the humanitarian aims we have set.

Since the conflict in Syria began more than three years ago, some 2.8 million people have fled the country. The vast majority are being sheltered by a small number of neighbouring countries, and although the international effort is helping, those countries are now struggling to cope. Lebanon, which has been mentioned, is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It is now sheltering more than 1.1 million refugees from the Syrian conflict. The hon. Member for Brent Central mentioned Jordan, which was sheltering about 500,000 people in September 2013.

More than 50% of Syrian refugees are children. Last year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Antonio Guterres, said:

“Syria has become the great tragedy of this century—a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history.”

Earlier this year, I met Roland Schilling, the UNHCR’s UK representative, and I have met the Refugee Council, to see what we can do to take matters forward.

Members will know that there was pressure for us to adopt a scheme to allow refugees to come to the UK. Last Christmas, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (*Yvette Cooper*) called publicly for Ministers to accept up to 500 Syrian refugees who met strict criteria—that they were torture victims, people with family connections in Britain or women and girls at high risk. She did that in response to the UN call for assistance, and we have been given the figures for other countries, but they are worth repeating. Some 21 countries have responded to the UN call for refugees to be accepted. Some 20,000 have been accepted by Germany, 1,500 by Austria, 1,200 by Sweden and 1,000 by Norway. The United States has given an open-ended commitment on resettlement. The many other countries that have taken refugees under the UN scheme include Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, France, Finland, Denmark, Canada, Belgium and Belarus. We have to respond, and I hope the Government will, to ensure we play our role in meeting those international obligations.

The Government did not initially warm to my right hon. Friend’s call for 500 refugees to be accepted. We had a statement in the Commons, Home Office questions and an Opposition day debate calling for the matter to be addressed. We had pressure from Government Back Benchers during the statement and the Opposition day debate. During Prime Minister’s questions, pressure was put on the Prime Minister by not only my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, but Members on both sides of the House.

There was concerted pressure, but the former Immigration Minister, the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (*Mr Harper*), said any proposals would be a “token” gesture—that was the word that appeared in *Hansard*. However, the Government ultimately announced in a statement that they would accept refugees, reflecting UN proposals. As my hon. Friend the Member for

Hayes and Harlington said, therefore, there is not a proud tradition on this issue. As a result of pressure from outside and inside the House, the Government accepted the need to act, and I was pleased when they did act.

I want to help the Minister, but my concern is that, as a result of the statement in January about accepting refugees, we have not seen materialise the sort of numbers—I am waiting for more information later—that would meet even the obligations my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford spoke of last Christmas.

Jim Shannon: I think there is a willingness in the nation we represent—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—to see greater numbers coming here from Syria. If that is what I and other Members feel, it is up to the Government, and the Minister in particular, to respond with the numbers we wish to see coming. That is the issue: if people want this, the Government should reflect that.

Mr Hanson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—I hope I can call him that—for raising that issue. We need to put on record the fact that refugee status is not the same as immigration. There is general concern about immigration, but these people would, I believe, ultimately want to return to their home nation when the situation there was settled and the conflict that drove them out of their home nation in the first place was resolved. There is a willingness to help, and there has been historically.

Sarah Teather: Members may not be aware of this, but a poll was done of first-time voters during refugee week. It showed that 70% supported the Government’s decision to resettle in the UK some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. I just want to give the Government some confidence that this proposal is popular; they are not working against a tide of popular opinion—people genuinely want this to happen.

Mr Hanson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I appreciate the way in which she has phrased her remarks, although Governments sometimes have to do things that are unpopular, even if those are the right things to do. That aside, this is the right thing to do.

In the short time I have, I want to test the Minister on a number of the practicalities of the vulnerable persons relocation scheme. First, I would genuinely welcome an update on how many people have arrived under the scheme, which was announced in January. The last answer to a parliamentary question on this issue was on 24 June—three weeks ago—and it indicated that 50 individuals had arrived as part of the scheme. I would welcome confirmation of how many have arrived as of 16 July. Like other hon. Members, I would also welcome an assessment of how many people are in the pipeline and may arrive in the next six months.

I accept, although I may not agree it was justified, that there were difficulties in establishing the Government’s scheme, rather than using the UN’s existing scheme. I would welcome an update from the Minister on whether proper assessments are in place to deliver a number of individuals. I would also welcome his assessment of how many people will go through the system and arrive

in the UK in not only the next six months, but up to the general election next May, although we cannot commit beyond that.

I would welcome the Minister's assessment of how many local authorities have signed up to assist with the Government's scheme. I asked the Minister that question earlier this year, but he was unable to give an indication. He may not want to name the local authorities, but it would be helpful if he said that there was a certain number, that they were in London, that they were metropolitan or regional authorities, or that they were in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, just so that we can get some flavour of how the scheme will progress downstream. When people arrive, they have to be dispersed and to have accommodation.

I would welcome an assessment of whether there are problems with local authorities. I have picked up that they may be worried about their ongoing costs and whether the Government will commit to meet those costs beyond a particular time. I would also welcome the Minister's comments on what he regards as the minimum standard of support for those who arrive. The scheme is different from the UN one, and I would welcome his outlining the support he anticipates those arriving in the UK will receive from the Government.

In a further answer to a parliamentary question from me, the Minister said:

"Costs will be recovered wherever possible, including from the EU."—[*Official Report*, 28 April 2014; Vol. 579, c. 427W.]

I would welcome an indication from the Minister of how much resource the Government have spent to date on the vulnerable persons relocation scheme, what he expects to spend by the end of the first full financial year, which started in April, and whether he expects to recoup any or all of that money from the EU.

I would also welcome an overall assessment of the longer-term picture. We do not know who will be in government post-May 2015, but does the Minister believe, on the basis of the position today, that the scheme will progress after that time? If so, how will it progress and for how long, given the still devastating political instability in the region? I believe that we need to respond in a positive way, as Opposition Members and the hon. Member for Brent Central have said. She has performed a service in bringing the matter before the House today. The House has been pressing the Government to say how their aspirations are being met on the ground and what support—when, where, how and for how many—they are giving through the scheme. I look forward with interest to hearing the Minister's response.

3.20 pm

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather) on securing a debate on such an important matter. We have benefited from her direct testimony of visits to refugee camps, in which she explained the conditions and the situation. I recognise the passion, commitment and focus that she has brought to the issue, not just in the past few months but for a considerable time. She is committed to dealing with the refugee issue, which has motivated her to obtain this afternoon's debate.

My hon. Friend made important points about the crisis in Syria, together with the continuing instability in Iraq, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim

Shannon) also pointed out. It is right that the question of what support we provide to those in need provokes passion, and that was exemplified by the speech of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) about the contribution that this country should make to supporting people who are vulnerable and in need, and who are suffering during a huge humanitarian crisis.

I am sure that all hon. Members share our deep concern about the appalling violence in Syria, and the suffering and hardship that that has caused for millions of people. Nearly 3 million refugees have now been displaced into surrounding countries and 6.4 million people are internally displaced inside Syria; 10.8 million require humanitarian aid. The scale of that tragedy caused the hon. Member for Brent Central to pause in her speech, and it is worth pausing and reflecting on how staggering the figures are. The Government have always been clear that the crisis is of international proportions and that it needs a fitting response from the UK and the international community.

The Government have three clear priorities in Syria: supporting efforts to find a political solution to the conflict; alleviating suffering; and protecting UK security by tackling extremism and getting rid of Assad's chemical weapons. I strongly believe that only a political settlement will ensure that Syrian families who have fled the crisis can return to their homes and livelihoods in peace. In the meantime, only humanitarian aid can help the majority of those in the region who so desperately need our help. Aid is also the best way to ease the enormous burden on Syria's neighbours, and I think that was clear from what the hon. Member for Brent Central said about her visit to Jordan and the pressure that the situation is causing in the countries that are most generously hosting and supporting refugees.

That is why the UK has pledged £600 million to the regional relief effort, making us the largest bilateral donor after the USA. The right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) acknowledged and appraised that fact fairly. UK funding is helping to support hundreds of thousands of refugees in Syria and neighbouring countries. The hon. Member for Strangford was seeking detail about that in some of his questions. For example, the UK provides food for up to 535,000 people a month, drinking water for more than 1.5 million, and funding for more than 300,000 medical consultations. I think that that is the largest humanitarian aid effort that the UK Government have ever attempted, which shows the huge scale of the tragedy that has unfolded before us.

It is important to recognise the way in which aid can be focused on some of the most vulnerable people. The hon. Member for Brent Central highlighted the situation of children, and their lack of education. The UK helped to launch and mobilise international support for UNICEF's "no lost generation" initiative, which provides education, psycho-social support and protection for Syrian children.

Humanitarian aid is the best way to ensure that the UK's help has the greatest impact for Syrian refugees and their host countries. Compared with aid, resettlement can only ever support a comparatively small number of people in need. However, we recognise that there are some particularly vulnerable people who cannot be supported effectively in the region. That is why, in January, the Home Secretary launched the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme to provide sanctuary in the UK for displaced Syrians who are most at risk.

[*James Brokenshire*]

We are working closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to identify the people who need our help most. In particular, the scheme prioritises support for those with serious medical needs, survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk. Beneficiaries of the scheme are granted five years' humanitarian protection, with all the rights and benefits that go with that status, including access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of family reunion. All people who arrive under the scheme also receive a 12-month package of integration support to help them to start to build a new life in the UK.

I announced the scheme in January and am pleased to say that the first group arrived at the end of March, just eight weeks after that announcement. Groups are now arriving in the UK on a monthly basis. We expect more arrivals in July and August and we intend to relocate two or three families a month. The figure of 50 people that has been cited is the number who had come by the end of June. We intend to provide the House with quarterly updates; as we publish transparency data in the Home Office, we intend to provide an update on the numbers who have benefited from the scheme, to keep the House and the public updated. Those who have benefited include a number of adults and children with severe medical needs, who could not get the treatment they desperately needed in the region.

The right hon. Member for Delyn asked me to provide estimates of future cost, but that is difficult, given that the needs will relate to particular families' and individuals' specific circumstances. We are not working on a quota at all. Rather, we are working on the basis of need with the UNHCR. Given the severe vulnerabilities of the beneficiaries, it is important that we ensure that the support and accommodation they need is in place before they arrive. As I said, we are working closely with UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration and local authority partners to achieve that.

Mr Hanson: Will the Minister say when the first quarterly update is due, from today?

James Brokenshire: Yes, the first update is due in August. We are providing quarterly updates on that basis, in that regular pattern. The right hon. Gentleman will be able to see, quarterly, on our transparency release, the numbers of people who have benefited from the scheme. The intent is to provide a regular update in that way and that is fair and appropriate.

Jim Shannon: The shadow Minister mentioned regional variations. Has there been any discussion with the devolved Assemblies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to see whether they can contribute to the resettlement of the refugees, at least in the short term? I am keen to know whether that is so. If there has not been such a discussion, I am keen that there should be.

James Brokenshire: Of course. I am keen to support more local authorities signing up to the scheme. Across the UK, a number of local authorities have already indicated their willingness and we are in discussions with others that have expressed an interest. Obviously,

the scheme is based on vulnerability, including women and children at risk, medical needs and survivors of torture and violence.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I apologise, Mr Dobbin; I could not be here at the beginning of the debate due to a constituency commitment.

Will the Minister say a bit more about the process and the criteria by which the number of vulnerable cases is identified? It is difficult to imagine that there are not very many more who would fit the criteria, but who we are not taking. I am interested in liaison with the UN and how the numbers are determined.

James Brokenshire: In respect of liaison, we are working with the UN to identify families and then to ensure that the support that they need is there before they arrive. As I said, two to three families are arriving steadily each month, under the regular plan for continuation of the scheme that we have in place. I will come to the overall numbers and reaffirm the commitment made by the Home Secretary in that regard.

The scheme is to ensure that families receive the support that they need in local areas, given their vulnerability, and central Government are responsible for its overall funding. However, as was mentioned, we will recover costs, if possible, from the EU and other funding sources, and work and discussions continue in that regard.

The Government have delivered what we promised in January: a bespoke scheme to complement the UK's humanitarian aid, focused on giving sanctuary to the most vulnerable refugees and ensuring they get all the care and support they need in the UK.

Sarah Teather: I want to press the Minister a little further, because there is concern about numbers. I want to get from him a sense of whether this scheme is proceeding at the pace he expected. Was the Government's initial ambition simply that we would only resettle two or three a month or was it higher? Has there been a problem and, if there has, what is it and what are the Government doing to try to resolve it? Two to three families a month is a small number; even my own council manages to move more people into accommodation per month, and this is across the whole of Britain. What is the problem?

James Brokenshire: To respond directly to the hon. Lady, we said we would support several hundred of the most vulnerable Syrians over the next three years. It was always envisaged that there would be a focus on a steady process of identifying families and seeing that they have the support that they need to be settled, working with the UNCHR, delivering the commitment to taking several hundred over the next three years. I believe that we remain on course to deliver on the commitment as a result of the excellent collaboration with the UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration.

John McDonnell: I calculate that there will not be several hundred if we are taking only two to three a month, but never mind. How did we arrive at several hundred? What assessment was made about only several hundred wanting to come here or whether we would cope with that demand?

James Brokenshire: That was the basis of the statement made by the Home Secretary in January, on assessing specific needs and the ability to ensure that resources and capabilities could be in place to see that some challenged family groups—it is groups that will see this continued roll-out through the coming months—are supported, to ensure that there is appropriate integration.

I believe that we remain on track to meet the commitments that we stated to the House at the beginning of January. That is obviously in addition to the places available to refugees of other nationalities under our established programmes, which offer the opportunity of a new life in the UK for those in long-term, protracted refugee situations, for whom the only viable long-term solution is resettlement.

Sarah Teather: The Minister did not quite answer the question put by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), which I also asked. The Minister mentioned the basis of the Government's statement, but did not explain how we arrived at the position of saying that we would support several hundred, as opposed to several thousand or tens of thousands. Why that particular figure?

James Brokenshire: Clearly, the Government considered what would be a suitable figure, to ensure that the scheme could deliver on its aims and ambitions to meet the needs of some of the most challenged and vulnerable, including some who need specific medical care and assistance, and ensure that they could be resettled within the UK with that support and that package. It was on that basis that the assessment and the programme was drawn up.

Given their vulnerabilities, it is essential that we give beneficiaries of the scheme the specific care they need as soon as they arrive in the UK. We have therefore had to ensure that the support and accommodation they need is properly in place before arrival, and we have been liaising, in the way I mentioned, to achieve this. Successful delivery of the scheme depends on the capacity of local authorities and health bodies to provide the high level of support required by beneficiaries of the scheme. Our emphasis is therefore on quality, not quantity. We are extraordinarily grateful to local authorities and health and education partners who have supported the scheme; they have played a vital role in helping those arriving under the scheme settle into a new, safe life in the UK.

We are, of course, continuing to consider Syrian asylum claims under our normal rules. Since the crisis began in 2011, we have received over 4,000 Syrian asylum claims. During the same time we have granted asylum or other forms of leave to more than 2,700 Syrian nationals and dependants. We also operate an immigration concession for Syrian nationals who are already legally present in the UK, to enable them to extend their stay or switch immigration category without leaving the UK.

Sarah Teather: I should like to take the Minister back a little and question him on local authorities and health services. What is his Department doing to encourage local authorities to take more people? Is he having difficulty persuading them? If so, are there any particular barriers? Knowing that would help those of us who are

interested in this issue, partly to see whether there might be anything we can do to help encourage local authorities increase interest. Will he give a bit more information on his discussions in that regard?

James Brokenshire: There have been discussions with local authorities, a number of which have been extraordinarily generous and positive in taking part in the scheme. As I said, other local authorities are expressing an interest in joining the scheme. Hon. Members have commented on individuals who have volunteered their homes and their personal support.

Having seen correspondence on my ministerial desk, I am struck by the generosity and desire of so many people wanting personally to see what they can do to provide support and assist in this appalling crisis. There have been ongoing conversations. I am confident that more authorities are coming forward, that we are able to house vulnerable Syrians fleeing the conflict and that we will provide support for them in different parts of the country.

We are, of course, aware that the international community has responded to the crisis in different ways. In the face of such an enormous challenge, it is right that the international community should use all means to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people. It is ultimately for individual states to decide for themselves how they help those displaced by the crisis, but we would not want to see a strengthened focus on resettlement detract from the international community's continued relief effort to support the majority of refugees who remain in the region and their host countries. I do not see that it has detracted from that, but we need to retain focus on that.

I am conscious that the hon. Member for Strangford is no longer in his place, but I wanted to respond to the point he raised about protecting Christians in Syria. I share his concerns about those who are at risk due to the crisis, including Syrian Christians. There are a growing number of reports of Christians and other minority groups being targeted in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has responded to those reports, emphasising that they are contrary to the coalition's vision of a future Syria that protects pluralism and the rights of all its citizens. In that context, it is important to note that it is not only Christians who are being identified, brutalised and murdered as a consequence of their faith; we are aware of other minority communities that are also being targeted on that basis.

It is important to recognise that a brutalising group such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant does not seek to concern itself in virtually anything. ISIL is a brutal organisation that kills those who do not hold the perverse beliefs that it puts forward. That means killing Muslims, whether Shi'a or Sunni, and other minority groups. That is why it is so important that we support the international efforts to resolve the crisis in Syria and that we support the Government of Iraq in finding a solution for that country that brings together all faiths and confronts the challenge that ISIL has brought forward.

To come back to the focus of the debate secured by the hon. Member for Brent Central, we believe that the vulnerable peoples relocation scheme will make a real difference to the lives of the most vulnerable refugees, who can only be supported in countries such as the UK. I am delighted to see those who have arrived so far

[James Brokenshire]

settling into their new homes and receiving the care they need, and I look forward to us welcoming further families to the UK as the scheme progresses. We must not, however, lose sight of the majority, who remain in the region. Continuing our efforts to help them must remain our highest priority, along with providing a long-term political solution for Syria.

3.42 pm

Sitting suspended.

Welfare Reform (Cumbria)

4.30 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Dobbin, in this brief debate. The social cost of the current Government's welfare reforms is extremely high and is being keenly felt in west Cumbria. The Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent in March 2012 and has now been in force for more than a year. This debate, however brief, is crucial in assessing some of the devastating consequences of that Act on the people and communities of west Cumbria.

Before I begin, I would like to express my thanks to the Right Rev. James Newcome, the Bishop of Carlisle, to Willie Slavin, an incredible community champion in my constituency, and for the work of the Cumbria Welfare Reform Commission. The report that it has produced forensically details the impact of the Government's reforms and informs much of what I wish to say. If the Minister has not had the opportunity to read that report, I hope that she will.

In the introduction to the commission's report, the Bishop of Carlisle makes it clear that it is not a party political report. He states:

"We hope that our findings and recommendations will be of general use to politicians, civil servants, volunteers and benefit claimants alike. We also believe that, if implemented, those recommendations would ultimately help to save money rather than costing the Exchequer more."

That is a crucial point in the entire debate.

I also thank the many people in west Cumbria and, indeed, throughout the country who do so much to help those in need. Staff in support roles and the many volunteers who do their best to ensure that those who need support get it deserve the highest praise. I dread to think how much worse the situation would be if we were left without their compassion and commitment.

The reforms seen in the past two years have been all-encompassing. There have been changes to support for in-work benefits and unemployed adults, changes to support for adults with disabilities, the introduction of the bedroom tax and more. The impact of these on individuals and families has been extremely tough, and I will touch on each of them in the debate. But that is not all; the impact on households resonates throughout the entire community and beyond.

The cumulative impact on individual families in a community can have major consequences for local esteem, pride, self-worth and, of course, the local economy. To understand fully the ramifications of what are ham-fisted reforms, we must examine not only the financial hardship that they are causing, but the damage done to communities such as mine and to the people who live in them. The harrowing testimonies of my constituents and the work done by the Cumbria Welfare Reform Commission are tangible evidence that families and communities in west Cumbria are feeling the painful brunt of the Government's reforms.

The Opposition have consistently supported the principle of universal credit. That has the potential to simplify the working age benefits system and to make it much clearer to people how their financial position would change on moving from unemployment into work. That is right and proper, and we completely welcome it.

However, that will be possible only if it is implemented properly and if there is a significant improvement in the relationship between the Department for Work and Pensions and claimants. The Cumbria Welfare Reform Commission highlighted serious concerns on how that has been done to date.

The Government's welfare reforms will require enormous local capacity to ensure that changes are delivered with minimal disruption, but the Cumbria Welfare Reform Commission report details a truly worrying situation that will inevitably lead to many serious problems when universal credit is eventually rolled out in late 2014 or early next year. The commission states that locally

"Commissioners heard of significant capacity problems within DWP, and many current cases of delays in deciding claims. DWP have recently reduced staffing levels in Cumbria and Commissioners were told that while many back to work advisers genuinely wanted to help, claimants felt they were 'overwhelmed'. One adviser said he had 400 cases per fortnight; one client said he had not seen an adviser in a year."

The situation will only get worse. The success of any reforms will live or die by the ease—or, in this case, the difficulty—of getting access to services, advice and support. It is clear that before universal credit is even rolled out, the Government are failing my constituents.

One jobseeker's allowance claimant told the commission that

"the system is in meltdown...I am no longer able to contact local jobcentre. There is a national helpline but it has long delays. I can't afford to stay on the phone for hours".

A young mother who had previously claimed JSA commented:

"I hate the way it's"—

she was referring to the DWP—

"run...they don't care...you phone the call centre and they say 'it's not our fault...the computer's not working'...I hate being on benefits".

A welfare adviser in Whitehaven slammed access to over-the-phone advice, saying:

"DWP call centre—it's the most expensive way I know to listen to Vivaldi."

The situation cannot be allowed to continue. The Minister must address these points in her response. I hope that if she cannot, she will commit to writing to me to detail the steps that she will take to improve the situation.

A breakdown in the relationship between claimants and clients and the DWP can have dire consequences. When people find themselves in times of hardship, additional stress and worry can cause significant additional distress. That brings me to an issue that has had an impact on many of my constituents: sanctions. The chief executive of Citizens Advice, Gillian Guy, when describing the current system of sanctions, said:

"The regime is not only self-defeating, it is also poorly administered."

The evidence just does not exist to support the imposition of disproportionately heavy sanctions. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation international review shows the limited benefits of that, and the Cumbria commission found that research conducted in the United States that suggests some success from sanctions in getting people off benefits is down to claimants dropping out of the system altogether, rather than going into paid employment of any kind. Studies from Europe also show that the use of sanctions is likely to lead to worse employment outcomes, such as lower pay for benefit claimants when they do eventually get into work. The Cumbria commission argues:

"This is because the threat or use of sanctions makes people take lower-quality jobs than if they had been allowed to wait for a better opportunity."

With regard to zero-hours contracts, the commission states:

"At present their wages plus benefits still leave many unable to pay the basics such as food and shelter. In particular there is a risk of a vicious circle whereby people on a zero hours contract can have their benefits cut if they can't demonstrate that they can look for other work, but not only does uncertainty about hours required to work in these contracts make this availability difficult, but some employers use exclusivity clauses in their own contracts preventing employees from taking on other work in the rest of their time."

That paints a desperate picture of the working poor.

In a damning indictment of Government policy, the Department told the Cumbria commission that sanctions "make the vulnerable more vulnerable".

How can the Minister allow that to continue? What will the Government do to address it? The Government definition of "vulnerable" is:

"An individual who is identified as having complex needs and/or requires additional support to enable them to access DWP benefits and use our services".

That is too narrow a definition and will result in many people needing additional support falling through the cracks. The commission found that

"many people sanctioned in recent months have been sanctioned despite exhibiting vulnerability—indeed the sanctioning is often a result of such an expression."

The impact of welfare reforms on Cumbria's adults with disabilities is profound, too. Disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to live in poverty; that is well understood and accepted across the House. Those unable to work are disproportionately dependent on benefit rates and therefore, obviously—QED—feel the changes to benefits more acutely than any other section of society. The Government have estimated that, through the introduction of the personal independence payment, the claimant count will fall by 23% compared with the number on disability living allowance. In Cumbria, there are 4,300 DLA claimants, so that means that at least 1,000 individuals will lose their support.

The inquiry by Baroness Grey-Thompson found that severely disabled people living alone or with only a young carer will lose between £28 and £58 a week. One hundred thousand disabled children stand to lose £28 a week, and 116,000 disabled people who work will lose about £40 a week. Those are significant sums, and losing those amounts will have serious consequences on claimants and their families. They are outside this detached, self-obsessed, increasingly weird Westminster club. Let us not forget what is happening to people out there in the real world.

The commission reports:

"Where there are delays and stoppage of benefits, some families also face financial meltdown, leaning on family and friends for money and often becoming dependent on doorstep lenders."

That has the potential to create a perfect storm of financial hardship, no support and mounting debt. It is a scenario that the Government's reforms are actively facilitating.

That brings me to the impact of changes to housing benefit. The biggest reform in this field is clearly the Government's bedroom tax, which affects approximately 4,750 households across Cumbria. It is simply an ill thought out policy. The unintended and far-reaching

[Mr Jamie Reed]

consequences of the bedroom tax are well known. The commission undertook to find out why people “under-occupy”. The vast majority of people do not under-occupy consciously; they do not choose to do it. They find themselves in that position usually as a result of family breakdown, children leaving home or the death of a family member. The Government should realise that after such events, most people would prefer to remain in their own homes close to neighbours, their family and the familiar support networks on which they rely.

Government figures show that two thirds of those who are affected are disabled. When the cumulative impact of the welfare reforms is assessed, it becomes crystal clear why so many of those people are facing serious financial hardship. For many, a spare room is not a luxury that they do not want to sacrifice, but an absolute necessity. I have heard reports of a recently separated father having to sleep on his sofa so that his children can have a bed to sleep in when they visit, and of returning university students who cannot remain in halls of residence outside term time but who cannot move back in with their parents because there is no longer a room for them. I have heard in my constituency offices about young soldiers returning home from conflicts in the middle east and having nowhere to stay.

The Government’s bedroom tax is a blunt and ineffective tool. Families who are forced to move out of social housing into the private rented sector will cost the taxpayer more in higher rents, and more will be lost as a result of arrears and evictions. The National Housing Federation states that two thirds of those who are hit by the bedroom tax cannot find the money to pay their rent, and one in seven are at risk of eviction. Consider that for a moment. That is the clear effect of Government policy. This has been said by many of my colleagues over recent years, but it is worth repeating: let there be no doubt that the next Labour Government will repeal the bedroom tax. As I have said, there is not only a financial cost to the families who are affected, but a cost to our local communities, as I see in my own community.

The report by the Cumbria welfare commission highlights a deliberate policy to reduce child density in areas of concentrated social housing, to reduce and manage antisocial behaviour and to create more constructive living environments. The bedroom tax completely undermines those efforts. I am sure the Minister will claim that it is not a tax, but it is. What else could it be? People are forced to pay. They cannot move to a smaller property because there are no smaller properties. In Cumbria, for housing associations to house all under-occupying residents correctly and appropriately, it would be necessary to rebuild the equivalent of 7.5% of our total rented stock as one-bedroom properties.

The Department for Work and Pensions report “Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy”, which was published yesterday, shows that only 4.6% of claimants affected have moved to a smaller home in the social sector. The report contains some startling statistics. For example, 80% of affected claimants say that it is difficult to afford the amount of rent they pay. More than half of claimants report that they often run out of money before the end of the week or month. I sincerely hope the Minister can offer some meaningful advice to people who cannot afford the bedroom tax but cannot move because there is no other housing available.

The impact of the reforms can be seen clearly in my constituency and elsewhere across the communities of Cumbria. There are wards in Copeland in which almost a third of children live in poverty, and in Sandwith the rate is even higher. Food bank use continues to rise and shows no sign of slowing. In the last year, it was up by a third, and now almost 2,000 people rely on food banks. There is a clear correlation between the areas with the highest rates of child poverty and those with the highest prevalence of food bank usage. In Harbour ward almost 400 people, including more than 70 children, used the food bank in the last financial year. We used to believe that to be born British was to have won the lottery of life, but I am afraid those figures paint a very different picture. We repeatedly warned the Government that the effect of their policies would be most keenly felt by the most vulnerable in our society and by the most vulnerable peripheral economies, and so it has proven. Almost one in three referrals to a food bank has been the result of a delay in benefit payments, and a further 17% of referrals are the result of benefit changes. Together, they add up to almost half of all referrals.

The final verdict on any Government is based on how they treat the poorest and most vulnerable in society during the hardest times. The rise in the use of food banks, the reliance on payday lenders and the financial hardship faced by many, which have been brought on or at least significantly exacerbated by some of the Government’s most pernicious welfare reforms, are a damning indictment of their time in office. The Government’s legacy, the legacy of the Secretary of State, the legacy of Ministers and the Prime Minister is one of a growing class of working poor, of disabled people in hardship and of too many people living in turmoil and anguish caused by uncertainty, inflexibility and instability.

The Government should heed the advice of the Cumbria welfare reform commission and the stakeholders who contributed to the report, and review their policies to secure successful implementation of universal credit, ensure that sanctions are not unfairly applied, reduce the complexity and delays in personal independence payments and work capability assessments, and stop pushing families into hardship as a result of their hated bedroom tax. I look forward to the Minister’s response.

4.44 pm

The Minister for Employment (Esther McVey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dobbin, and to reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed). I congratulate him on securing the debate. I have listened closely to all that he has said, so I will answer all the points he has raised.

It is important to put the situation into context. When the Government came into office, it was clear that the welfare system we inherited was in need of reform and was not working. For far too long, Governments had shied away from making any significant reform, and we had ended up with a complex system that had numerous add-ons. It was complicated for all concerned. The benefit system frequently locked people into benefits rather than liberating them and allowing them to get into work. We had to look at that and think about how we could best sort out a complex system that had grown exponentially under Labour.

If we look at the costs, Labour spent £170 billion on tax credits between 2003-04 and 2010, and contributed to a 60% rise in the welfare bill. Supporting that bill was

costing every individual an extra £3,000 a year, and 1.4 million people spent most of the past decade trapped on out-of-work benefits. Around 2.8 million people spent at least five years on some sort of out-of-work benefit. Youth unemployment rose by 45% and long-term unemployment doubled under Labour. Those were the things we had to tackle. The explosion in those numbers came during what some might have called a boom period, between 1997 and 2005.

It is worth noting that at the 2010 election, when we took over, there were 600,000 more people in relative poverty than there are today. There were 300,000 more children and 200,000 more pensioners in relative poverty. There were 400,000 more workless households and 50,000 more households in which no member of the household had ever worked. The hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate did not relate to the reality of those facts and figures.

Mr Reed: I am grateful to the Minister for her response so far, but she has not yet touched on a single issue that I raised about my constituents and the county of Cumbria.

Esther McVey: I am putting the situation in context and showing how many of the figures that the hon. Gentleman cited were inaccurate. I am putting into context why and how we are doing things. Today, the most recent employment statistics have been published. The aim of all our benefit changes has been to liberate people and help them to get into work, and today we have seen a record rate of people getting into work—a rate matched only pre-recession, in 2005. That is nearly 1 million extra people in work this year, and nearly 1.8 million people in work since 2010.

Mr Reed *rose*—

Esther McVey: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will provide some facts rather than fantasy.

Mr Reed: Fantasy is the Minister's exclusive preserve. We clearly disagree over the figures, so will she come to my constituency? Will she come and do a tour of Cumbria, meet people and speak to them about the realities of their lives and the effects of her policies? Yes or no?

Esther McVey: I was in Cumbria only a week or two ago, discussing those things. I get out regularly and speak to people right across the country, many of whom have told me how they had been abandoned on long-term unemployment, but not any more. Many of them have been on the Work programme and they have now got a job. About 5 million people have been through the Work programme and 300,000 have got sustained work.

Looking specifically at unemployment in Copeland, the hon. Gentleman will be delighted that unemployment has come down by 25%, long-term unemployment is down 30%, youth unemployment is down 36% and long-term youth unemployment is down 40%. That is specifically in his constituency, and those figures are not mine or the Government's; they are the latest independent, verified figures. I would like the hon. Gentleman to apologise for what he said.

Mr Reed: Of course there is no apology to be offered, because none is deserved. Does the Minister recognise the phenomenon of in-work poverty?

Esther McVey: There have always been people in work who find things hard. The figures I read out have significantly reduced under this Government. The process, ideology and thought behind universal credit is to ensure that work pays and that every extra hour worked pays, rather than having cliff edges as we had under the old system with which the hon. Gentleman was happy to live. People did not know whether it was right to get a job. They could be locked into benefits because there was a cliff edge at 16 hours a week. We have sought to remove all those things.

Cumbria county council has set up a county welfare reform group to keep a keen eye on the delivery and administration of welfare reform. A Jobcentre Plus manager is part of that group, enabling us to ensure that all concerns and worries are heard and addressed. I understand there is a good, close working relationship, so if anyone has any specific issues or concerns, they can go through Jobcentre Plus, and that is reflected in the survey of what goes on in the area. All of that is key.

There are nearly 24,000 Jobcentre Plus staff across the country. Their main aim is to support people by helping them with the benefits they need when they come through the door and by helping them into work. The Government have ensured that that relationship is more personal than ever before. We have introduced a claimant commitment, so that when someone comes in they can say, "This is what I hope to do," and we will say, "Okay. How do we get you on that journey?" There has been a significant shift in the approach and in what people do. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to visit his Jobcentre Plus and see that transformation in everything that happens.

Mr Reed: The Minister will appreciate that I have done that many times. The report makes it clear that there is an obvious competence deficit in the roll-out of these policies by the Department and Ministers. It is not only claimants who are saying that; people who work in jobcentres and non-party political figures such as the Bishop of Carlisle are saying it, too. Does the Minister regret the lack of competence in the entire policy platform?

Esther McVey: The chap obviously wants to write a press release—he wants to write something that is not true—to put in his local papers. Competence is not an issue. We have introduced some of the biggest ever welfare changes. We know they are working, because the things that the hon. Gentleman and his party talked about, such as double-dip and triple-dip recessions, never happened. They talked about an extra 1 million people being unemployed. It was wrong—it did not happen. He and his party put across terrible scare stories, but they did not happen. In fact, the total reverse happened. Nearly 2 million extra people are now in work, and they are predominantly full-time, permanent jobs. That is wonderful news. There are record rates of women in employment. Youth unemployment has fallen for 10 consecutive months, and it is now 127,000 lower than at the general election. Long-term youth unemployment is also lower than at the general election. I gave him the unemployment figures for his specific area, and they are all significantly down.

Mr Reed: I am uncertain whether the Minister is disputing the figures in the independent report. Will she be categorically clear about that? Does she accept the figures and the findings of the report? The Bishop of Carlisle and an independent group of people assessed the impact of welfare reform on Cumbria, not just my constituency. Are they wrong? Are their figures wrong? If they are, what is their motivation?

Esther McVey: Most people's motivation is for the best and is to support people—

Mr Reed: Are the figures right or wrong?

Esther McVey: Hang on a second. People produce figures that have not been fully authorised, cleared or passed off. Our figures have to go through the National Audit Office and independent bodies such as the International Labour Organisation because their estimation of what has happened are much more thorough and valid. Estimates based on very small samples may be right, but they can be distorted by the smallness of the sample.

I will now make a little headway, as I believe I have been generous in giving way. The hon. Gentleman has made many points that, as I have pointed out, are not particularly accurate or are distorted by the prism through which he wants to see things.

Mr Reed: Will the Minister give way?

Esther McVey: No, I will not give way at the moment. We have talked about why the spare room subsidy was introduced—

Mr Reed: Bedroom tax.

Esther McVey: The hon. Gentleman wants to call it by another name. I am happy to call it by either name, but in statute it is the removal of the spare room subsidy. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman is smiling, so he obviously realises that his own party introduced it for the private rented sector in 2008. Indeed, his party was going to introduce it for the social rented sector, as we have read in *Hansard*. He is smiling and pretending that it is something that he might or might not do, but in reality it came from his party. Why did that come about? Because the housing bill had doubled in 10 years, reaching £26 billion, which we all know was a bill that we could not afford after the financial crash and after the biggest ever recession in peacetime since 1930.

Mr Reed: On a point of order, Mr Dobbin. The Minister is refusing to talk about the issue at hand. There is a blanket refusal to talk about the impact of welfare reform in Cumbria and west Cumbria in particular. How can that be in order?

Jim Dobbin (in the Chair): I cannot take that decision. I am chairing this debate, that is all, so it is not a matter for me.

Esther McVey: I am in order. I have given the employment stats for what is going on in the constituency of the hon. Member for Copeland, and I have spoken clearly about what is happening in his jobcentres. We are now talking clearly about what is going on in his constituency with the spare room subsidy. I am saying why those decisions were taken, because I cannot give a specific answer unless people know the generality.

What happened with the spare room subsidy? We could not afford it. Labour had already introduced the measure. We have to consider the 2 million people on the housing waiting list and the 400,000 people in overcrowded accommodation. We have to ask how we will support the taxpayers paying for it, who might not have spare bedrooms themselves, as well as the people on waiting lists and the people in overcrowded accommodation. We took a decision, which had to be that people with a spare bedroom who are more than happy to stay would now have to pay for that spare bedroom. We also said that we would treble discretionary housing payments for affected areas to allow people to move if they wanted.

Discretionary housing payments were given to six different areas in Cumbria, but interestingly, although councils that needed more money for discretionary housing payments applied for money from a £20 million pot shared across the country, Cumbria did not do that. There was not one bid. There could have been—if Cumbria had thought that it needed more money to help more people in the area, there was an extra pot of £20 million. Unfortunately, only £13 million was deployed to the various places that made requests, and £7 million went back to central Government. Places such as Copeland did not ask for that money, so it must have been deduced that they did not need the money. If the local MP would have liked to have helped his local council and constituents by doing a bit more prep and homework—rather than arguing afterwards, once he had missed the money and once the money had been spent—he could have got some of that money and helped the constituents he is talking about. Unfortunately, he chose not to do that.

We were talking about how PIP is being introduced and why. DLA spending had increased considerably, and there is still an increase in expenditure. DLA has not been cut—it has been increased; it is just not growing as rapidly as in the past. What we had seen under DLA, which is why we are changing it, was that people did not have additional corroborating medical evidence. More than half of DLA claims do not have such evidence, so we are saying, “Under this Government, and in this Parliament, we will give out this money and we will support people as best we can, but we need to focus that money on those who need it the most. It is therefore vital that we have that corroborating medical evidence.” That is what we are doing.

Mr Reed: The Minister should be embarrassed by her response to this debate. She has refused to accept—

5 pm

Sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(13)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 16 July 2014

EDUCATION

Qualifications and Curriculum Reform

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan):

I am today announcing next steps on reform of the national curriculum, and consultations on new GCSEs and A levels. We want these reforms to ensure that all young people can achieve their potential, by studying a curriculum and qualifications that support them in progressing into further study and employment, and set expectations which match those of the highest performing countries.

GCSE and A level subject content to be taught from 2016

The Government have already published subject content for GCSEs in English baccalaureate subjects and for the first group of A levels to be reformed.

Today, I am publishing, for consultation, new subject content for a further set of GCSEs and A levels. These subjects will be first taught in 2016. The content for these subjects will prepare students better for further and higher education and employment. GCSE content will provide young people with more fulfilling and demanding courses of study; new A level content will encourage development of the skills and knowledge needed for progression to undergraduate study.

There are two parts to the consultation. The first part seeks views on content which awarding organisations have developed, working with subject associations and other stakeholders. At GCSE these subjects are art and design, computer science, dance, music and physical education. At AS and A level, the subjects are dance, music and physical education.

The second part of the consultation seeks views on content for AS and A levels in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography. The proposed content reflects the recommendations of the A level content advisory board, which is publishing its reports to me today. Ofqual is consulting in parallel on the assessment arrangements for all these subjects.

This consultation is an opportunity for teachers, further and higher education, employers and all those with an interest in these important subjects to provide their views. We intend to listen to those views in shaping our final proposals.

In September, we will consult on content for the remaining subjects to be taught from 2016, citizenship studies, design and technology, drama and religious studies.

We want the reformed content for the subjects I am consulting on today to lead to more ambitious qualifications with more stimulating courses of study.

In art and design, there is a greater focus on creativity and new emphasis on drawing.

In computer science, students will be expected to develop deep knowledge and understanding of key principles and concepts including data representation, Boolean logic and different data types.

In dance, there is new theoretical content including critical appreciation, knowledge and understanding of professional works.

In music, there are new expectations for performing and composing and for students to apply knowledge and understanding in making critical judgments. At GCSE, students will need to write (as well as read) staff notation and understand chord symbols.

In physical education, rigour has been increased by sharpening the definition of what is expected of students and emphasising the theoretical knowledge needed to underpin physical activity and practical performance.

In modern languages, there is more stimulating A level content with new requirements to engage critically with literary works and carry out independent research, presenting findings.

In ancient languages, the new A level content has increased focus on developing strong interest in the literature, history and culture of the ancient world. Students will be required to read and understand in depth literary texts in the original language.

In mathematics, requirements are specified in more detail and the A level has new emphasis on problem solving, interpretation and testing so that students' deep understanding of mathematical concepts is strengthened.

In further mathematics, A level content provides greater specification of the areas which need to be covered and new minimum requirements for matrices and complex numbers within the AS.

In geography, A level content provides a better balance between physical and human geography, with new emphasis on fieldwork and geographical skills needed at this level.

The consultation on reformed subject content for these GCSEs and A levels will be available later today at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>. Ofqual's consultation on assessment arrangements will be available on its website at: <http://ofqual.gov.uk>.

Publication of key stage 4 English and mathematics national curriculum programmes of study

On 11 September 2013, the Government published the new national curriculum for all subjects except for English, mathematics and science at key stage 4. The Department consulted on the draft programmes of study for key stage 4 English and mathematics from 2 December 2013 to 3 February 2014 and, from 14 May until 13 June this year, on the draft order and regulations that will give effect to the new programmes of study.

I am publishing the final programmes of study for English and mathematics at key stage 4, which will be taught in schools from September 2015 alongside the new English and mathematics GCSEs. Last year, the Government published the new GCSE subject content for English language, English literature and mathematics. It is important to consider these programmes of study in tandem with the GCSE subject content to ensure that the curriculum and qualifications are fully coherent.

We are currently consulting on the key stage 4 science programme of study which will be introduced from September 2016, alongside first teaching of the new science GCSEs.

Copies of the new programmes of study for key stage 4 English and mathematics will be placed in both House Libraries.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Wood Review (Government Response)

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey): The UK should be proud of its world-class oil and gas industry. It makes a substantial contribution to the economy, supporting around 450,000 jobs and supplying the UK with around half of the oil and gas we use, reducing our reliance on imports. It is vital therefore both for Britain's energy security and long-term economic outlook that we take positive steps to maximise the economic recovery of our indigenous hydrocarbon reserves. As our carbon plan has shown, Britain will still need significant oil and gas supplies over the next decades, while we decarbonise our economy and transition to a low-carbon economy.

As the North sea enters the next phase of its development, Government have a critical role to play in ensuring the stewardship and regulation of such an important national asset evolves with it. The outlook is bright and investment levels have risen in recent years. However there remain challenges. As stated in my June 2013 statement to Parliament when I commissioned Sir Ian to conduct the review, the UK continental shelf (UKCS) has faced steeply falling levels of production and exploration in recent years as well as declining production efficiency.

Sir Ian reported his findings earlier this year and it is clear that the size of the prize on offer is considerable. The review estimated that full and rapid implementation could deliver 3 to 4 billion barrels of oil equivalent more than would otherwise be recovered over the next 20 years, worth over £200 billion. It is for this reason that I am committed to fully implementing his recommendations as quickly as possible.

Sir Ian made recommendations for both industry and Government and the full impact of his report will not be realised unless industry take up his challenge in equal measure. In particular it will be vital for companies to change the way they work together within fields and between fields to maximise economic recovery. Also in support of this is the need to curb the over-zealous legal and commercial activity which can often increase cost and make co-operation more difficult.

The key policy decisions we have taken are summarised in this statement.

The four main recommendations from Sir Ian's report are as follows:

That Government and industry should develop and commit to a new strategy for maximising economic recovery from the UK continental shelf (MER UK)

That stewardship of the UK continental shelf (UKCS) should move to a new arm's length body that is better resourced, and funded by industry

That additional powers should be secured to implement MER UK

The new regulator should work with industry to develop and implement new industry strategies, such as on exploration and decommissioning cost reduction.

A phased approach to implementation

In order to make swift progress, we are taking a phased approach to implementation and we have already achieved a great deal. It has only been a year since I commissioned the review and less than six months since

Sir Ian published his recommendations. In that time we have announced that the new oversight body will be called the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA); have determined its structure and that it will be headquartered in Aberdeen; begun recruitment of a world-class CEO to lead and shape the OGA; and have tabled clauses for introduction into the Infrastructure Bill in order to enshrine the MER UK principles into law and provide for a levy-making power to fund the body.

These steps will allow the OGA to operate effectively in shadow form, which could begin as early as autumn 2014. We will continue this momentum to build the OGA so it has the right skills, resources and powers to deal with the challenges facing the UKCS.

Maximising economic recovery from the UKCS (MER UK) principles

Government have tabled amendments to the Infrastructure Bill to place the MER UK principles into statute. Our proposals will ensure that we maximise the economic recovery of petroleum, and licence holders will be required to act in a manner best calculated to give rise to maximising the economic recovery of petroleum from UK waters as a whole, not just that recoverable under their own licences. The clauses also place a requirement on the authority to produce a strategy for enabling the principle objective to be met along with a corresponding duty for the authority, licence holders, owners and operators of production infrastructure to act in accordance with the strategy. The strategy, developed in collaboration between Government, the OGA and industry must be produced within a year of these provisions coming into force and can be updated as necessary.

Initially, the principles will apply to offshore activity, however Government intend that the OGA's remit should extend to onshore—as well as to the licensing activity for natural gas storage and unloading and carbon dioxide storage—and so, working with the respective industry stakeholders and trade groups, we will look to extend the principles accordingly.

Establishing the Oil and Gas Authority

The establishment of the additional powers the OGA will need to perform its MER UK obligations will require primary legislation which cannot be delivered in the remainder of the current Parliament. The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) will, therefore, in the first instance, and in order to demonstrate pace and its strong commitment to implementing Sir Ian's recommendations, establish the authority in shadow form as an Executive agency. Our intention is for this to be operational in autumn 2014.

However, Government do not believe that an Executive agency provides an optimum long-term solution. It is our intention therefore to establish the OGA in its final form as a Government company. This will give the authority greater operational independence from Government. As such it will provide a more suitable platform to provide the arm's length regulatory certainty the industry requires to invest in exploration and production activity to maximise economic recovery from the UK's oil and gas resources.

DECC will develop the plans for establishing the OGA further in the coming months, working closely with industry and other partners to get the substance and the detail right. We will work both through the

interim advisory panel, chaired by Sir Ian Wood and in wider fora, including the industry's principal trade association, Oil and Gas UK.

Funding the Oil and Gas Authority

Government agree with Sir Ian that the challenge of delivering MER UK requires the OGA to be significantly better resourced than the current equivalent team in DECC. In line with the long-established practice across regulation and service delivery, and to ensure the OGA is not restricted by any future Government funding constraints, the Government consider that, in the long-term, the body should recover its costs from the companies who will benefit from the services of the authority. However, to demonstrate their commitment to the tripartite approach recommended in the review, and help realise the benefits outlined in Sir Ian's report, Government have committed to contribute £3 million per year for five years beginning in 2016-17 to the running costs of the OGA.

Additional powers and strategies

The Government are committed to ensuring the new authority makes effective use of its existing powers, which in many respects are not inconsiderable, and they will therefore review the full range of current powers to see whether, and if so how, they could be deployed more effectively by a better-resourced regulator. As recommended, the Government will also equip the authority with additional powers to enhance its ability to maximise economic recovery by encouraging and facilitating collaboration and dispute resolution without compromising the incentives for efficiency and innovation achieved by healthy competition.

Government will work closely with industry and other interested parties in the months ahead to undertake this work and ensure we are ready to put legislation on the additional powers before the House in the first Session of the new Parliament.

Once it is established, the OGA will work with industry and Government to develop the sector strategies detailed in the Wood review. As outlined in the 2014 Budget, the Government will task the new authority to review how best to encourage exploration and reduce decommissioning costs as a priority with a view to reporting back its initial findings and recommendations at Budget 2015.

This Government's commitment to change is clear. We also need an equally strong commitment to change from industry and, from my own contacts with the industry during the Wood review and since, I am very confident indeed that it will pull together and play its part fully in the spirit that Sir Ian has set out.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

NATO Wales Summit

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I wish to update the House on preparations for the NATO summit in Wales on 4 to 5 September, 50 days from now. Our theme for this summit is building stability in an unpredictable world.

This will be the largest gathering of international leaders ever to take place in the UK. It requires us to accommodate, move, feed and protect up to 185 VIPs, around 4,000 delegates and 1,500 media representatives.

We have reserved over 24,000 room nights in 80 hotels in Newport, Cardiff and Bristol. It is a huge undertaking and preparations are on track.

The Wales summit will be one of the most important in NATO's history, and comes at a key moment for the alliance. NATO's combat mission in Afghanistan is drawing to a close and, as events in Ukraine and Iraq have shown, the world faces more complex threats than ever before. This summit will show that NATO, the most successful military alliance in the world, remains strong, united and ready to meet and defeat any threat.

NATO is the bedrock of the UK's defence and security. As a leading player in NATO over the last 65 years, the UK continues to contribute to alliance operations around the world today. Beyond Afghanistan, there are British personnel serving in the Baltic air policing mission and counter-piracy missions. The UK is also home to NATO's Maritime Component Command and the headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps.

In today's unpredictable world, familiar threats remain, but new challenges are appearing alongside them. At the summit, we will therefore focus on three key themes.

First, we will discuss the situation in Afghanistan as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission draws to an end, and decide how we will continue to support the Afghan Government. We must sustain Afghan confidence in their resourcing as we make this transition. And we should take the opportunity to recognise the sacrifices made by the alliance's armed forces, and commit to safeguarding the welfare of our veterans and their families. In this context, we want to build on the Government's work on the UK military covenant, by persuading all allies to articulate shared values on the importance of supporting our armed forces and their families, during and after their service, and by sharing best practice on supporting service personnel, supporting transitions into civilian life and supporting the wounded, injured and sick.

Second, we need to agree on the long-term implications of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and how the alliance will continue to provide for the collective security of all allies. We must take the necessary decisions to strengthen NATO's ability to respond quickly to threats, including new ones, to reassure those who fear for their security, and to deter further aggression from Russia.

Third, we must agree how NATO will adapt itself to address the new risks and challenges from an unstable world of failed states, regional conflicts, terrorism and cyber-attacks. In particular, we should show alliance unity through a commitment to invest in our defence sectors and agree how NATO can provide practical support to countries that need to strengthen their security sector by launching specific NATO defence capacity building missions. It also means building the broadest global security network ever by strengthening NATO's relationship with partners elsewhere in the world, ensuring that we have the relationships necessary to tackle threats wherever they emanate from.

The then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had a productive meeting with NATO Foreign Ministers at the end of June—the last major milestone before the summit—where they agreed some key deliverables for the summit. Foreign Ministers endorsed a package of support measures to strengthen Ukraine's ability to defend itself and agreed on plans to

develop a robust readiness action plan for the summit in September. They also reaffirmed NATO's commitment to an "open door" policy and agreed continued support for the aspirant countries who hope to join the alliance in due course.

Parliament has an important role to play in preparing for the Wales summit. Portcullis House recently hosted an exhibition on the past "65 years of NATO" and I welcome the fact that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly will meet in London on 2 September to discuss these issues before NATO leaders meet in Wales. This summit also offers an unrivalled opportunity for all of us to shine the spotlight on Wales. In advance of the summit, we are highlighting Wales' strong commercial sector and encouraging the world to visit Wales by showcasing the tremendous potential in Wales for investment and business, tourism and higher education.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Council

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Informal Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council was held on 8 and 9 July in Milan. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara), and a senior Home Office official attended on behalf of the United Kingdom. The following items were discussed.

The interior day began with a discussion of the strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning in JHA that were agreed at the June European Council. The discussion focused on the migration aspects, and on the proposed replacement of the EU's internal security strategy.

On migration, the Commission highlighted the progress being made on the EU's legal migration policy and called for full implementation of the common European asylum system, for action against the smuggling of migrants and for enhanced regional protection efforts.

A number of member states said that limited migration from outside the EU was necessary to address skill shortages, though stressing that it needed to be balanced with action against illegal migration. Others emphasised that policy on legal migration should be primarily for member states to determine—legislation in this area only applies to the UK if we opt in to it. Some called for more action to address migration problems at their source and a more effective returns policy. The UK argued for effective action to tackle abuse of free movement.

The presidency concluded by calling for a balanced approach to migration addressing both legal and illegal aspects.

The Commission announced that it will issue a communication on the internal security strategy in early 2015, and hold a conference in Brussels on 29 September. Many member states intervened calling, variously, for a short and focused strategy and for the strategy to cover the organised crime policy cycle, cyber-security, counter radicalisation, data exchange and environmental crimes.

The UK called for the new strategy to cover modern slavery, foreign fighters and the exchange of passenger name records. The presidency agreed that foreign fighters were a top priority and also emphasised the need to agree the draft passenger name records directive.

The Council then discussed the implementation of Task Force Mediterranean, its agreed programme of actions to deal with illegal migration in the Mediterranean region.

The presidency called for FRONTEX to step up its activity in the region so the Italian "Mare Nostrum" search and rescue operation could be scaled back. The Commission called for a single, coherent operational structure to co-ordinate Mare Nostrum with Frontex's operations. It also called for more efforts to persuade Tunisia to address the problem of its boats being used to pick up migrants in Libya, for the EU border assistance mission to Libya to be reinforced and for member states to resettle more refugees from outside the EU. The UK emphasised the importance of concerted action at the regional level and welcomed the involvement of the European external action service in working with countries of origin.

On justice day the Council discussed whether there should be greater flexibility within the proposed general data protection regulation for member states to provide a higher standard of data protection for the public sector at national level. Various approaches were discussed, including providing for specific exemptions throughout the text of the proposed regulation. The UK argued that the best way to achieve the desired flexibility was to legislate by way of a directive rather than a regulation as this already provides sufficient flexibility under the current framework. Member states in general believed that flexibility at national level for the public sector was necessary but further discussion on how this would be best achieved was required in the Council's technical working group.

The second session was an exchange of views on the proposal to establish a European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). The presidency asked whether the proposal provided for an appropriate system of judicial review and, in particular, whether certain decisions by it to dismiss cases should be subject to judicial review.

The majority of member states agreed that some form of judicial review before national courts was necessary, although there was no consensus over which decisions should be subject to review. The UK is not participating in the proposal to establish an EPPO and did not take part in the discussion. The presidency concluded that further discussion was needed at expert level.

Over lunch, there was a discussion on the justice aspects of the strategic guidelines agreed by the European Council, especially developments regarding mutual recognition of judgments, and freezing and confiscation orders. Member states, including the UK, reinforced the message in the JHA strategic guidelines that the priority is now to implement and consolidate the EU *acquis* in the justice area rather than bring forward new legislation. The main feature of the discussion was the importance of judicial training to support implementation. Most member states wanted to see further EU support for judicial training, although some including the UK, cautioned about the need to ensure that judicial training remained primarily a matter of national competence.

During the final session, the presidency introduced its paper on the Commission's proposal to abolish legalisation—a formality to confirm the authenticity of a public document—and reduce the need for certified copies and translations. Member states were invited to

give views on the scope of the proposal and on the need for new information technology to support cross-border co-operation in this area.

Almost all member states who intervened believed that the scope should be limited only to civil status documents—that is, birth, marriage, death—in the first instance. The UK agreed that the scope should be limited in this way, and set out the reasons why the inclusion of educational certificates, intellectual property documents, and court judgments should not fall within the scope of the proposal. The UK also argued that the proposal should provide a common format for translations of civil status documents rather than creating a legal status for common format multilingual forms. This would avoid legal uncertainty and respect the sovereignty of member states in issuing the documents.

The Commission proposed to use the existing internal market IT system for a cross-border verification mechanism, but was willing if necessary to consider a feasibility study for a new IT system. The UK opposed this on cost grounds. The presidency concluded that there was strong preference for a step-by-step approach with the initial scope limited to civil status document and further work was required on the most appropriate IT system to use.

TRANSPORT

Rail Franchising

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): On 27 June 2014, my Department announced its intention to award the Essex Thameside franchise to

NXET Trains Ltd (National Express), pending the successful completion of a standstill period. I am happy to confirm to the House that this standstill period has ended and we completed the contract after the markets closed on 15 July. This means that NXET Trains Ltd (under their brand name c2c) can begin the mobilisation process that will mean the new franchise will begin in November this year.

The contract will run for 15 years and will allow the company to build on the impressive performance of the franchise and deliver a host of passenger benefits, worth around £160 million. The Essex Thameside franchise provides vital commuter services to millions of passengers every year travelling between London and the commuter hubs of Barking, Basildon, Southend. The new franchise will see c2c provide more capacity and a new fleet of trains during the franchise. The 17 new trains will provide almost 4,800 extra seats, on top of the 25,000 additional seats for morning peak-time passengers c2c has committed to provide every week by the end of the contract.

More than £30 million will be invested in improving stations during the franchise, including at the major hubs of Fenchurch Street and Barking. The operator will also provide free wi-fi, smart ticketing and better customer information that will all improve the experience for passengers on the busy route. This franchise will also see an enhanced delay repay scheme including automatic repayment for passengers with smart tickets, a first for the railway in Great Britain.

The successful award of this contract shows the continuing success of my franchising programme. A programme that is seeing real benefits for passengers and taxpayers.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 16 July 2014

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Children: Prosecutions

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Attorney-General how many children with mental health difficulties have been prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales in each year since 2010. [R] [205395]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain a central record of the number of defendants, including those identified as children, with mental health difficulties who have been prosecuted. To obtain details of the number of cases where such circumstances apply would require a manual exercise of reviewing individual case files to be undertaken at a disproportionate cost.

Chris Huhne and Vicky Pryce

Philip Davies: To ask the Attorney-General what costs his Department has incurred in prosecuting the

case of (a) Christopher Huhne and (b) Vasiliki Pryce. [204655]

The Attorney-General: The total cost the CPS incurred in prosecuting the case was £150,710.88. The cost incurred in relation to each defendant individually is not available, as some of the costs were recorded for both defendants collectively.

Crown Courts

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General how many and what proportion of cases at the Crown Court in (a) 2013-14 and (b) each of the previous five financial years were subject to (i) a decision by the prosecution to offer no evidence, (ii) a judge-ordered acquittal, (iii) a judge-directed acquittal and (iv) an acquittal after trial. [205186]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) maintains a central record of the outcomes of prosecutions, on a defendant basis, at the Crown court. Prosecution outcomes comprise convictions; guilty pleas and convictions after trial. Unsuccessful outcomes represent all other outcomes and include judge ordered acquittals (discontinuances, indictment stayed, charges left on file and no evidence offered), judge directed acquittals, acquittals after trial and administrative finalisations.

The following table shows the volume and proportion of defendants as a total of the 13 CPS Areas, where the CPS offered no evidence, where a judge ordered or directed an acquittal and where the defendant was acquitted after trial, in each of the last six years.

	(i) Offer no evidence		(ii) Judge ordered acquittal		(iii) Judge directed acquittal		(iv) Acquittal after trial		Total prosecuted
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
2008-09	9,734	9.4	12,198	11.7	990	1.0	5,703	5.5	103,890
2009-10	10,537	9.6	12,930	11.7	1,048	1.0	6,316	5.7	110,146
2010-11	12,433	10.6	14,958	12.8	1,101	0.9	6,810	5.8	116,898
2011-12	10,543	9.8	12,527	11.7	857	0.8	6,290	5.9	107,244
2012-13	9,106	9.5	11,099	11.6	774	0.8	5,998	6.3	95,862
2013-14	7,795	8.3	10,714	11.5	620	0.7	5,584	6.0	93,446

Data Source:

CPS Case Management Information System

Crown Prosecution Service

Keith Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the answer of 16 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 389W, on the legal profession, what proportion of the money spent on consultancy fees by the Crown Prosecution Service was paid to which companies for what services in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012, (d) 2013 and (e) 2014 to date. [203402]

The Attorney-General: A table setting out the proportion of the money spent on consultancy fees by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) paid to companies for services in financial years from 2010-11 to 2013-14 has been placed in the Library of the House, together with the corresponding expenditure. The CPS financial reporting systems are configured to provide information based on financial rather than calendar years.

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he plans to take in response to the funding of HM Chief Inspectorate of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in his Annual Report 2013-14, page 4 that the background of continuing resource reductions is now having an impact on the ability of the CPS to deliver effectively across the whole range of its activity. [205211]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has a comprehensive cost reduction strategy to 2015-16 that is fully aligned to, and supports, CPS priorities and objectives. The strategy will ensure that the department meets the SR2013 savings targets.

In their annual report for 2013-14 the Inspectorate acknowledged that CPS had improved its performance on serious and complex cases and also highlighted CPS success in hate crime cases and those involving violence against women and girls. The report was largely based on cases completed more than a year ago and more recent data shows performance improvements across

the board since then. For example, magistrates courts are seeing more guilty pleas and fewer cases dropped while the Crown courts are showing increasing conviction rates—now at 81% across England and Wales. The challenges mentioned in the report are being addressed but they should be seen in the context of an improving prosecution service across the country.

Magistrates' Courts

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General how many and what proportion of cases at the magistrates' court in (a) 2013-14 and (b) each of the previous five financial years were subject to a (i) decision by the prosecution to discontinue the case, (ii) decision in committal proceedings to discharge the defendant, (iii) decision by the magistrate to dismiss the case on grounds of no case to answer and (iv) dismissal after trial. [205185]

	<i>(i) Discontinued</i>		<i>(ii) Discharged committal</i>		<i>(iii) Dismissed no case to answer</i>		<i>(iv) Dismissed after full trial</i>		<i>Total prosecuted</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
2008-09	30,226	3.3	1,984	0.2	1,707	0.2	18,682	2.0	928,708
2009-10	30,665	3.5	2,252	0.3	1,605	0.2	20,322	2.3	872,585
2010-11	32,532	3.9	1,690	0.2	1,525	0.2	19,517	2.3	840,983
2011-12	30,217	3.8	1,308	0.2	1,362	0.2	17,681	2.2	787,547
2012-13	26,600	3.8	1,270	0.2	1,224	0.2	17,168	2.5	700,423
2013-14	23,083	3.6	308	0.0	1,433	0.2	17,805	2.8	633,306

Data Source:

CPS Case Management Information System

Pay

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Attorney-General how many officials in the Law Officers' Departments, of each grade, have remained at that grade since 2010 but received a pay rise; and how much of a rise each such person at each such grade has received. [204761]

The Attorney-General: Tables containing the information requested plus accompanying notes have been placed in the Library of the House.

<i>Building</i>	<i>Works</i>	<i>Cost (£)</i>
1 Victoria St	Redecoration of walls and ladies cubicle shower in sub-basement	663.46
1 Victoria St	New showers in basement	989.33
1 Victoria St	Painting of walls in meeting rooms	756.03
1 Victoria St	Repainting in the lower ground changing room	639.06
10 Victoria St	Decoration of 7 th floor office and installation of secondary double glazing	3,487.97
10 Victoria St	Re-decoration and re-carpeting works on 3 rd floor	29,256.61
Total year 2013-14		35,792.46

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Buildings

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much has been spent on refurbishing (a) gymnasium and leisure facilities, (b) cafeteria and (c) interior decoration in (i) his Department and (ii) buildings owned by his Department in (A) 2013 and (B) 2014 to date. [205351]

Jo Swinson: The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has spent a total of £45,368.90 on refurbishment works since 2013.

BIS spent the following on refurbishment during 2013-14.

BIS spent the following on refurbishment so far during 2014-2015.

<i>Building</i>	<i>Works</i>	<i>Cost (£)</i>
1 Victoria St	Restaurant decoration works	9,576.44
Total year 2013-14		9,576.44

Directors

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many directors have been disqualified in the first quarter of the current financial year. [205080]

Jo Swinson: A total of 341 directors were disqualified during the first quarter of this financial year.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) maintains a central record of the outcomes of prosecutions, on a defendant basis, at magistrates' courts. Prosecution outcomes comprise convictions; guilty pleas, convictions after trial and cases proved in the absence of the defendant. Unsuccessful outcomes represent all other outcomes and include prosecutions dropped (discontinuances, withdrawals, prosecutions stayed and no evidence offered), discharged committals, dismissals and administrative finalisations.

The following table shows the volume and proportion of defendants whose proceedings were discontinued by way of a written notice under Section 23 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, discharged at committal, dismissed no case to answer by magistrates and dismissed after a full trial, in each of the last six years.

Grant Thornton

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 9 April 2014, *Official Report*, columns 286-87W, on Grant Thornton, how many of the 70 recorded complaints about insolvency practitioners from Grant Thornton in respect to formal insolvency procedures were successful. [205256]

Jo Swinson: According to information provided by the recognised professional bodies, 18 of the 70 complaints recorded about insolvency practitioners from Grant Thornton between June 2013 and March 2014 and which were passed to a recognised professional body for consideration have been closed with no further action taken. The remainder are ongoing.

Insolvency Service

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to which offices in the Insolvency Service he plans to recruit administrative staff over the next 18 months. [205082]

Jo Swinson: The Insolvency Service reviews its staffing requirements on a regular basis and responds to local needs as and when they arise. There are plans to recruit administrative staff in the following locations: Plymouth and/or Exeter; London; and Birmingham. This includes apprenticeships recruited in accordance with Civil Service Employee Policy guidance and through the Civil Service Fast Track Apprenticeship Scheme.

Overall work force plans will be reviewed in the autumn, once the outcome of the current voluntary redundancy scheme is known and a better assessment of the agency's work load can be made in the light of the number of insolvency cases in the first five months of the year.

Minimum Wage

Mr Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will take steps to increase the national minimum wage so that its real terms value is equal to that of January 2010. [205379]

Jo Swinson: This Government is fully committed to the national minimum wage (NMW) set by the independent Low Pay Commission (LPC) at a level that maximises the wages of the low paid without damaging their employment prospects by setting it too high.

We welcome the LPC's 2014 assessment that marks the start of a new phase of bigger, real increases in the minimum wage, provided economic conditions continue to improve. In our recent 2015 remit we have asked the LPC to think ahead and build on the forward guidance that sets out our ambition to see real increases in the NMW.

Furthermore, since its introduction the NMW has increased faster than average earnings and inflation without an adverse effect on employment. From October this year the 3% rise of the adult rate means full time workers on national minimum wage will receive an additional £355 a year. This is the biggest cash increase since 2008.

Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will estimate how much money his Department has spent in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since May 2010. [204769]

Jo Swinson: The Department does not keep records of how much money has been or will be spent in individual constituencies. To provide an answer for a particular area would require significant analysis and incur disproportionate cost.

Official Receiver

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many disqualification reports were submitted by the Leeds, Sheffield and Hull Official Receiver's offices in the year ending 31 March 2014; and what the target is for the combined Leeds office for the year ending 31 March 2015. [205079]

Jo Swinson: The Service records disqualification report submissions by Official Receiver Command and not by location. A Command is overseen by a single Official Receiver and, currently, the Service has 18 Commands based over between one and three geographic locations.

Successful submissions for the year ended 31 March 2014

	<i>Reports authorised to proceed</i>
Humber and East Yorkshire Command (Hull)	18
Northern Command (Leeds)	4
East Midlands and South Yorkshire Command (Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield)	27

From 1 April 2014, the East Midlands and South Yorkshire Command became East Midlands Command; with Sheffield transferred into the Northern Command. Northern Command has a target of 12 disqualification reports submitted and authorised to proceed in the year ending 31 March 2015.

In November 2014, with the closure of the Hull office, the Humber and East Yorkshire Command will be amalgamated with the Northern Command. A revised target for successful disqualification submissions for the combined Command has not yet been set and will be established as part of routine planning later in the year.

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many disqualification reports have been submitted by Official Receiver's offices in the first quarter of the current financial year. [205081]

Jo Swinson: A total of 76 disqualification reports were submitted by Official Receivers' offices in the first quarter of this financial year.

Official Receiver: Leeds

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many desks there were in the Leeds Official Receiver's office on 30 June 2014; and how many such desks were unoccupied. [205077]

Jo Swinson: As of 30 June 2014, the total number of desks in the Leeds Official Receiver's office is 124. The total number of unoccupied desks is 52.

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how long the lease for the Leeds Official Receiver's office has left to run; and when it was signed. [205078]

Jo Swinson: The lease for the Leeds Official Receiver's office started on 28 August 2003 and will end on 27 August 2018.

Skilled Workers

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what action his Department is taking to address the exploitation of low-skilled workers. [204527]

Jo Swinson: In order to protect the rights of workers, this Department is taking a tougher approach on all employers that break minimum wage law. We have already made it simpler to name and shame employers that break the law in this area. The revised Naming and Shaming scheme came into effect on 1 October 2013. The new rules are part of Government efforts to toughen up enforcement of the National Minimum Wage and increase compliance.

The Government has already publicly named 30 employers. Between them they owe workers a total of over £50,000 in arrears and have been charged financial penalties totalling over £24,000. By naming and shaming employers it is hoped that bad publicity will be an additional deterrent to employers who would otherwise be tempted not to pay the National Minimum Wage.

The Government has also doubled the financial penalty percentage that employers pay for breaking minimum wage law from 50% to 100% of the unpaid wages owed to workers and quadrupled the maximum penalty from £5,000 to £20,000. The Government will now introduce primary legislation so that a maximum penalty of up to £20,000 can be applied on a per worker basis—significantly increasing the maximum penalty employers can face.

In addition, through the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill the Government is bringing forward measures to ban exclusivity clauses in zero-hours contracts and through secondary legislation to ban employment agencies using an 'overseas only' approach to filling posts. Both measures will further enhance the opportunities for workers, especially in low-skilled professions.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts: Primary Education

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 7 July, *Official Report*, columns 143-44W on Arts: Primary Education, what data are collected by his Department as part of the Taking Part survey. [205449]

Mr Vaizey: A copy of this data has been placed in the House of Commons Library system on 19 June (ref: DEP2014/0898).

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what data his Department has collected from the Taking Part Survey on the primary school pupils from each region who have engaged with (a) theatre activities, (b) music activities, (c) dance and (d) other arts in each year since 2009-10. [205450]

Mrs Grant: Child data from the Taking Part survey for 5-10 year olds relates to out of school activity only. A table detailing 5-10 year olds out of school participation in individual art forms broken down by region will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It should be noted that the confidence intervals around the point estimates are large meaning that in most instances robust comparisons between regions and time periods cannot be made.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport with reference to the Taking Part Survey, what proportion of primary pupils from (a) disadvantaged backgrounds and (b) non-disadvantaged backgrounds have engaged with (i) theatre activities, (ii) music activities, (iii) dance and (iv) other arts in each year since 2009-10. [205452]

Mrs Grant: Child data from the Taking Part survey for 5-10 year olds relates to out of school activity only. Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) groupings have been used as a proxy for advantaged/disadvantaged backgrounds. To enable sufficient sample size to allow for robust comparisons to be made these have been combined into the lower five groups and the upper five groups. A table detailing 5-10 year olds out of school participation in individual art forms broken down by lower and upper IMD will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

ICT: East Yorkshire

Sir Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what analysis his Department has carried out of (a) mobile telephone network coverage and (b) high speed broadband coverage in east Yorkshire; and what steps his Department is taking and on what timescale to improve that coverage. [204982]

Mr Vaizey: Ofcom monitors and publishes broadband coverage data and it currently reports that superfast broadband coverage in the East Riding of Yorkshire stands at 21.6%. The Government has allocated over £10 million to support improvements to broadband infrastructure in East Riding, with phase 1 of the project scheduled for completion toward the end of 2015 and phase 2 scheduled to enter procurement in late summer of 2014. Ofcom also report that mobile voice coverage in the East Riding (2G) is available from at least one operator to over 99% of premises. Government is working to improve mobile voice coverage in poorly served areas through its £150 million Mobile Infrastructure Project.

Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will estimate how much money his Department has spent in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since May 2010. [204772]

Mrs Grant: Our records show that from May 2010 to date, for the “Superfast Lancashire project” within which the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency falls, Broadband Delivery UK, which is part of the department, has provided £980,000 in grant funding. In addition we can identify that £21,875 of grants from the Listed Place of Worship Scheme have been awarded in the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency. However as the department’s financial systems do not routinely record expenditure by constituency or similar geographical areas, a more detailed analysis of spending in the Department could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pay

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many officials in his Department, of each grade, have remained at that grade since 2010 but received a pay rise; and how much of a rise each such person at each such grade has received. [204765]

Mrs Grant: The Department’s database management system does not record this information in a way that can extract the information asked for. To identify this information for each employee would incur disproportionate cost. Pay awards for civil service departments are limited to an average of up to one percent of overall pay bill costs.

Public Libraries: West Midlands

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many public libraries have closed in (a) Birmingham and (b) the West Midlands in each of the last five years; [204447]

(2) how many new build libraries have opened in (a) England, (b) the West Midlands and (c) Birmingham in each of the last five years; [204461]

(3) how many public libraries there were in each region and constituent part of the UK in each of the last five years. [204510]

Mr Vaizey: The detail requested is not held centrally by this Department. However the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) collect, annually, from the individual library authorities comprehensive information relating library service provision in the United Kingdom. This data includes detail relating to the number of service points open to the public 10 hours or more per week, but does not include information on the number of closures or how many new build libraries have opened. The CIPFA data reflects the net figure of public libraries open in each year. Copies of CIPFA statistics are available in the House Library.

Sports: Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding his Department has made available for community sports facilities in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency. [204819]

Mrs Grant: The information is as follows:

Sport England’s direct investment in facilities in Morecambe and Lunesdale since 2009

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Programme Name</i>	<i>Award</i>
Lancaster John O’Gaunt Rowing Club	Inspired Facilities	42,521
Morecambe Cricket Club	Protecting Play Fields	49,350
Vale of Lune RUFC	Inspired Facilities	50,000
Morecambe and Heysham Yacht Club	Inspired Facilities	50,000
Lancaster City Council	Sports Lighting	150,000
Silverdale Cricket Club	Small Grants	9,344
Heysham Cricket Club	Small Grants	7,315
City of Lancaster Gymnastics and Trampoline Club	Small Grants	10,000
—	—	368,530

Sport England also invested £1.9 million in 1994 in the development of the Salt Ayre Sports Centre.

Sport England has number of funding programmes for sports facilities projects open throughout the year. Local sports clubs can check

<http://www.sportengland.org/funding>

to see which funding programmes they could apply to.

Sports: Northern Ireland

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what work UK Sport is undertaking to help attract major sporting events to Northern Ireland. [204836]

Mrs Grant: With its successful hosting of the start of this year’s Giro d’Italia, Northern Ireland has demonstrated its ability to stage major sporting events. UK Sport recently met with the Northern Ireland Tourism Board (NITB) to explain its support to major events and has committed to meet with the NITB every six months. UK Sport is finalising dates for an additional meeting with Sport NI and the NITB to discuss this area further. UK Sport has established a major events agency co-ordination group, including Northern Ireland, which met for the first time this month. UK Sport works with national governing bodies to identify the UK’s major event hosting targets and this is regularly shared with Northern Ireland colleagues.

DEFENCE

Army: Recruitment

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the National Audit Office report, Army 2020, HC 263, published on 11 June 2014, page five, if he will provide a breakdown of the £5.3 billion savings that reductions in the army would save from 2012-13 to 2021-22. [200572]

Mr Francois: The vast majority—approximately 85%—of the savings referred to in the National Audit Office report, Army 2020, are the direct result of the reduction in the size of the Regular Army from 94,000 to 82,500.

The remaining savings arise from associated cost reductions, such as the reduced requirement for civilian support.

NATO

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his priorities are for the forthcoming NATO summit in Newport, Wales. [204612]

Mr Brazier: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), gave on 14 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 564, to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (John Robertson).

Tornado Aircraft

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what risk rating was placed on a collision involving a Tornado and another aircraft in (a) 1991, (b) 1998 and (c) 2010. [202364]

Mr Dunne: The risk rating placed on a collision involving a Tornado for the years 1991 and 1998 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For 2010 the risk placed on a collision involving a Tornado classifies the severity of Mid Air Collision as 'Catastrophic', and the likelihood as 'Remote'. Nevertheless, we have initiated a programme to fit Tornado aircraft with a collision warning system, which is currently being trialed on two aircraft and a third has been fitted for further development. On current planning, we intend to introduce this capability in stages from later this year.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantitative criteria have been used to set to remote the risk probability of a collision involving a Tornado aircraft. [202641]

Mr Dunne: Military Aviation Authority Regulatory Article 1210 defines categories for quantifying the likelihood of a risk as follows:

"Likelihood is assessed with respect to the likelihood of the assessed consequence of a hazard. This is based on the likelihood of a single accident resulting in harm for a particular fleet. The appropriate category listed as follows must be used:

- Frequent: Likely to occur at least several times a year.
- Occasional: Likely to occur one or more times per year.
- Remote: Likely to occur one or more times in 10 years.
- Improbable: Unlikely to occur in 10 years."

A panel of suitably qualified and experienced persons from the Tornado Force calculated the risk likelihood for the Tornado risk register based on this definition.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado aircrew were actively involved in flying during (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013. [204981]

Mr Francois: I am withholding the information requested as its disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 30 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 354W, on Afghanistan, how many evidence-based assessments have been carried out by his Department

on the effects of lethal targeting; and if his Department will carry out or commission further assessment on use of remotely piloted air systems in Afghanistan in carrying out a post-campaign strategic review. [R] [204047]

Mr Francois: All weapons released by UK Combat aircraft in Afghanistan, be that Fast Jet, Remotely Piloted Air System or Rotary Wing platforms, are done so under the command of a pilot bound by UK Rules of Engagement. Following each release of a weapon by a UK platform, post mission analysis and a battle damage assessment is completed in theatre. I am withholding further details as their disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces.

The Secretary of State for Defence has previously said that there will be a need to review the strategic lessons from the Afghanistan campaign, but that time will be when combat operations are complete and all relevant information is available.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture: Technology

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage investment in agricultural technologies to increase the efficiency of food production. [204794]

George Eustice: DEFRA is working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for International Development to implement the Government's Agri-Tech Strategy. The Strategy is investing £160 million in projects and industry-led Centres of Agricultural Innovation to support an increase in agricultural productivity. In addition, a dedicated UKTI Unit has been established to increase the volume and value of overseas investment in the UK Agri-Tech sector.

The Strategy is industry-led. It is driven forward by a Leadership Council which brings together representatives of research bodies and the sector to identify and advise on industry priorities and to promote the Strategy within the sector.

Fishing Catches

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what proportion of commercial landings of fish and shellfish from UK-registered fishing vessels were taken from a depth below 800 metres in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013; [204911]

(2) how many UK-registered fishing vessels practise bottom trawling below a depth of 600 metres; and for what proportion of time spent at sea those bottom trawlers trawl below (a) 600 metres and (b) 800 metres; [204910]

(3) what tonnage of fish and shellfish quota was allocated to the UK under the Deep Sea Access Regime in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013; [204912]

(4) what proportion of the total commercial landings of fish and shellfish from UK registered fishing vessels was taken from a depth below 600 metres in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013. [204919]

George Eustice: Determination of catches according to depth criteria and the time vessels fish at particular depths is labour intensive and requires extensive spatial analysis of catch records and vessel activity within a geographical information system. From analysis related to the EU deep sea access regime update discussions, we have provisional catch and vessel data available covering 2006-12 (see tables). This covers total annual catches (all species) and the proportion of these caught below 600 m, and vessels targeting deep sea species at depths greater than 600 m. We have not carried out similar analysis related to depths greater than 800 m or covering 2013. Quota is not allocated to member states under the EU deep sea access regime.

EU Deep Sea Access regime proposal: UK vessel fishing activities at >600 m—provisional data

<i>All vessels in data set (all species)</i>					
	<i>Total number of vessels</i>	<i>Vessels fishing > 600 m</i>	<i>Total landings</i>	<i>Total landings > 600 m</i>	<i>Percentage landings > 600 m</i>
2006	1,212	92	138,457	20,501	14.81
2007	1,357	76	146,949	17,867	12.16
2008	1,329	76	174,491	18,499	10.60
2009	1,389	90	158,394	17,612	11.12
2010	1,298	81	171,867	18,020	10.48
2011	1,258	56	149,626	11,766	7.86
2012	1,252	58	165,404	13,098	7.92

	<i>Total vessels targeting deep sea species (at 10% of catch) excluding ling and conger</i>	<i>Total vessels targeting deep sea species (at 10% of catch) excluding ling and conger > 600 m</i>	<i>Total landings</i>	<i>Total landings > 600 m</i>	<i>Percentage landings > 600 m</i>
2006	81	44	46,868	17,550	37.44
2007	70	44	39,587	15,394	38.89
2008	78	45	48,941	15,981	32.65
2009	93	49	45,801	15,566	33.99
2010	59	40	42,064	13,893	33.03
2011	59	30	32,706	9,251	28.29
2012	45	25	34,882	10,980	31.48

ICT

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and laptops were lost by her Department in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [204471]

Dan Rogerson: The table below shows losses of official equipment in core DEFRA for calendar year 2013 and 2014.

	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014¹</i>
Laptops	14	2
BlackBerrys	6	5
Mobile phones	1	0

¹ 1 January to 8 July 2014.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Albania

Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of progress made by Albania towards EU accession candidate status. [204916]

Mr Lidington: The General Affairs Council agreed on 24 June to grant Albania EU candidate status, but with tough conditions for the next stage of the process.

We recognise the progress Albania has made, including in tackling organised crime and corruption, but believe significant additional reforms are required before further steps can be taken towards EU accession. Particular areas of concern include reform of public administration; independence, efficiency and accountability of judicial institutions; the fight against corruption; the fight against organised crime; action to tackle illegal migration; protection of human rights, anti-discrimination policies and property rights.

Marketing

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent on the GREAT campaign in each country in each year since the campaign's launch. [204736]

Mr Swire: From February 2012 to March 2013 the total budget for the GREAT Britain Campaign was £37 million. This was split predominantly between the following 10 markets. Brazil, India, China, Hong Kong, US, Australia, Canada, Japan, France and Germany

For April 2013 to March 2014 the total budget was £30 million across 12 markets:—China, Hong Kong, India, Brazil, France, Germany, Turkey, South Korea, US, Mexico, Russia, Indonesia.

April 2014 to March 2015 the total budget will be £46.5 million across 13 markets:—China, Hong Kong, India, Brazil, US, Gulf, France, Germany, Turkey, South Korea, Indonesia, Mexico, Emerging Europe (Poland/Czech Republic/Hungary/Romania/Slovakia).

Because of the way the campaign's finances were organised, a breakdown of expenditure by country is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rendition

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Chichester, *Official Report*, column 172W, on 8 July 2014, on Diego Garcia, for what reason records of flight occurrence logs were water damaged; in what format the records are kept; and whether that format has been changed since the damage. [204744]

Mr Ellwood: During routine work to add existing records to the store in Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT) immigration officials noted water damage to a small number of records, caused by a leaking roof. This is believed to have resulted from extremely heavy weather in June 2014. Although the extent of the damage was not clear on initial inspection at the time, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mark Simmonds) on 8 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 172W.

However, since 8 July, BIOT immigration officials have conducted a fuller inspection, and previously wet paper records have been dried out. They report that no flight records have been lost as a result of the water damage. A small number of immigration arrival cards from 2004 have been damaged, but that information about those flights is still available in the daily occurrence logs and monthly statistics. These records provide dates of aircraft movements in the territory, and passenger and crew numbers.

Following the incident, all hard copy records from the affected location are being transferred from the airport to a new location, and will be digitalised over the coming months.

Sexual Harassment

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many complaints of sexual harassment in his Department have been (a) formally reported and (b) upheld in each year since 2010. [204735]

Mr Ellwood: Bullying or harassment is never tolerated in the Department and any reported incidents are investigated as a priority. There have been three sexual harassment complaints made by FCO employees against other employees since 2010. Of these, two complaints have been upheld. The breakdown of cases by year is as follows:

2010—0
2011—0
2012—one (not upheld)
2013—two
2014—0 </form>

Sri Lanka

Mr Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Sri Lankan counterparts on protecting the rights of religious minorities in that country. [205273]

Mr Swire: We continue to raise our concerns about attacks against religious minorities in Sri Lanka with the Sri Lankan Government, including the most recent violence in Aluthgama and Beruwala. Through our High Commissioner in Colombo, we have urged the Sri Lankan Government to take early action to promote peaceful co-existence between all communities, noting the importance of ensuring any acts of violence, intimidation or threats are thoroughly investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

The Head of the EU Delegation has raised recent developments with the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary on behalf of EU Heads of Mission. The EU delegation has also released a statement in agreement with EU Heads of Mission in Sri Lanka condemning the violence and has called on the Sri Lankan Government to uphold law and order. On 7 July, I met members of the Sri Lankan Muslim community resident in the UK whose family and friends were directly affected by recent violence in order to hear their concerns.

Mr Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department intends to take to support the investigation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights into alleged abuses in Sri Lanka. [205274]

Mr Swire: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I have given to question 194376, 3 Apr 2014, *Official Report*, column 742W.

HEALTH

Cancer

David Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor the standard of care received by cancer patients and to reduce regional variations in the standard of such care. [204712]

Jane Ellison: The latest Cancer Patient Experience Survey results, from 2013, shows that whilst variations between trusts still exist, the overall range of variation for many indicators has narrowed.

For example, in 2010 the proportion of patients saying that they had been given the name of a Clinical Nurse Specialist ranged from 92% in the highest performing trust to 59% in the poorest performing trust (33 points); by 2013 this had reduced to 97% to 76% (21 points).

NHS England is working with NHS Improving Quality to develop better ways of using the Cancer Patient Experience Survey (CPES) data within the national health service in order to maximise the impact of the survey, to be able to work with successful and struggling organisations to spread best practice for example. NHS Improving Quality will be doing a suite of work across all surveys to understand what the barriers are to implementing change and to showcase best practice where real improvements can be demonstrated.

The CPES survey results are delivered to every organisation so each can see how they compare to other organisations. Currently, the action plans are taken into account as part of peer reviews. NHS England would expect that every trust board should know its own survey results and take account of them.

Clinical commissioning groups are currently in the process of finalising measurable levels of ambition to improve patient experience and will be holding providers to account. These are based on NHS England's new measure for poor inpatient experience which includes dignity and respect and communication.

Dementia

David Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to support the carers of people who have dementia. [204715]

Norman Lamb: On 28 February 2014, the Department set out an ambition for people with dementia and their carers to have high-quality care and support, which includes timely access to support for carers. The Department is supporting the Dementia Action Alliance's carers call to action, which sets out a shared vision and four actions to improve quality of life for carers of people with dementia.

In its Commitment to Carers, published on 7 May 2014, NHS England confirmed it will support timely diagnosis of dementia and support for carers. The revised Dementia Enhanced Service, which will be introduced from March 2015, will include an offer of a health check for carers and signposting to relevant information, advice and support. In 2013-14, the dementia Commissioning for Quality and Innovation goal was extended to include support for carers of people with dementia.

Carers are central to the Government's reform of care and support, with significant improvements in the Care Act which extend carers' rights to an assessment which will be based on the appearance of a need for support. For the first time, local authorities will be required to meet carers' eligible needs for support. The Act also creates a new statutory principle to promote an individual's well-being, including health and emotional well-being, which will apply equally to carers. We have provided £400 million to the national health service over four years from 2011 for carers to have breaks from their caring responsibilities. The £3.8 billion Better Care Fund includes £130 million funding for carers' breaks from 2015-16.

Dentistry

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for the NHS of the decision by the General Dental Council to raise their compulsory statutory annual retention fee from £576 per annum to £945 per annum. [204838]

Dr Poulter: No assessment has been made of the implications for the national health service of the decision by the General Dental Council (GDC) on their proposal to increase the annual retention fee.

The GDC is an independent body and it is therefore for the GDC Council to determine the level of the annual fee it charges for registration. The proposed fee increase is subject to public consultation where the GDC's case will be scrutinised. The Department does not usually contribute to such consultations but all professional regulators, including the GDC, are aware of the Department's position on registration fees. In February 2011, the Government published Enabling Excellence, which states that we would not expect registration fees to increase beyond their current levels, unless there is a clear and robust business case that any increase is essential to ensure the exercise of statutory duties.

Disability Aids

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will lay before Parliament the 2013-14 report on research and development work relating to assistive technology; [204719]

(2) what discussions his Department had in advance of the decision to end the independent production of the annual report to Parliament on research and development work relating to assistive technology and to reduce the scope of that report. [204749]

Dr Poulter: Section 22 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 sets out the following requirement:

"The Secretary of State shall as respects each year lay before Parliament a report on the progress made during that year in research and development work carried out by or on behalf of any Minister of the Crown in relation to equipment that might increase the range of activities and independence or well-being of disabled persons, and in particular such equipment that might improve the indoor and outdoor mobility of such persons."

In recent years the report has been produced by the Foundation for Assistive Technology, and this contract with the Department expired in June 2014.

The Department plans to lay the 2013-14 report before Parliament before the summer recess.

The Department has to deliver change in a climate of continuing fiscal challenge and constraint on public spending, and the approach to reporting on assistive technology research and development is aligned with this. The Department does not therefore plan to invite tenders for production of section 22 reports from 2014-15 and will produce future reports on a smaller scale and of sufficient quality to meet the statutory requirement. This will be done in-house at no additional cost.

As the Government will continue to meet the statutory requirement, no specific discussions have taken place about production of reports from 2014-15.

General Practitioners

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from doctors on the reforms in GP contracts needed to increase the number of GPs. [204730]

Dr Poulter: The Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), regularly meets with representatives of the

medical profession, including British Medical Association and Royal College of General Practitioners, to discuss a variety of issues, including recruitment.

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase GP numbers. [204731]

Dr Poulter: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave him on 23 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 20W.

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of GPs needed to eliminate any shortfall in primary health care. [204732]

Dr Poulter: The Department set up Health Education England (HEE) to deliver a better health and healthcare work force for England. HEE is responsible for ensuring a secure work force supply for the future balancing need against demand, taking into account factors such as the age profile of the existing workforce, the impact of technology, and new drugs.

The Department has recognised the need to increase the general practitioner (GP) work force and between September 2010 and September 2013, the number of full time equivalent GPs has risen by 1,051. Additionally, the Department has included in the HEE mandate a requirement that

“HEE will ensure that 50% of trainees completing foundation level training enter GP training programmes by 2016”.

This will support future growth in GP numbers.

Further work is being undertaken by HEE to improve applications and fill rate in to GP training to support the mandate target of 3,250 appointments into GP training by 2016 in England. This includes a review of the GP recruitment process, developing a pre-GP year to give exposure to prospective GP applicants of the speciality and careers advice for foundation doctors and medical students.

In recognition of the contribution the GP work force makes in the national health service, HEE will also undertake additional work on GP recruitment and retention, return to practice and reducing attrition rates, all of which will play a part in increasing the GP work force.

Additionally, the Department commissioned the Centre for Workforce Intelligence to conduct an in-depth review of the GP work force. The report will be published shortly and will build on the preliminary findings published in March 2013.

The review will assess:

- current work force numbers to forecast supply;
- key drivers affecting work force demand; and
- regional variations in demand.

The review will make recommendations for future work force planning. It will also address issues such as GP workload and the 2016 recruitment target and beyond, as well as wider issues around primary care delivery.

Transforming Primary Care, which was published in April 2014 by the Department and NHS England and set out actions being taken towards the vision of personalised, proactive care. Transforming Primary Care made the following commitment;

‘To ensure that we have a workforce ready to meet the challenges of the future, we are planning to make available around 10,000 primary and community health and care professionals by 2020, in support of the shift in how care will be provided’.

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the targets are on waiting times for appointments within the latest GP contract; [204796]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect on overall satisfaction levels of waiting times for GP appointments; and if he will make a statement. [204832]

Dr Poulter: The general practitioner (GP) contract does not include any targets regarding waiting times for appointments. Under the terms of their contracts, GPs are required to provide primary medical services between 8am to 6.30pm from Monday to Friday to meet the reasonable needs of their patients.

The latest GP patient survey results, published this month, found that 74.6%-of patients rate their overall experience of making an appointment as good.

The Prime Minister’s £50 million Challenge Fund will help over 1,100 practices, covering 7.5 million people, to develop new ways of improving GP access, including better access to GPs in evenings and at weekends and greater use of telephone, email and skype consultations.

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of GPs work taken up by administration; and what changes there have been in that proportion in the last five years. [204797]

Dr Poulter: There is no official survey of the proportion of general practitioners (GPs) workload taken up by administration. However, the Department and NHS England take account of feedback from a range of sources including the GP worklife survey, feedback from individual GPs and also from their professional representatives.

There were important changes to the GP contract this year to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. More than a third of indicators were removed from the Quality and Outcomes Framework in order to free up time to allow GPs to provide more proactive, holistic care, particularly for older people and those with more complex needs.

Mr Jamie Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to GPs on the use of telephone diagnosis. [205393]

Dr Poulter: The means by which a general practitioner (GP) consultation is conducted is entirely a matter for the practice and for the GP’s clinical judgement. NHS England do not advise practices on the best means of diagnosis. However they would support the use of telephone consultation as it is a service that is valued by many patients and for some patients it would be their preferred method of receiving a service from the GP.

The Prime Minister’s £50 million Challenge Fund will help over 1,100 practices, covering 7.5 million people, to develop new ways of improving GP access. This includes better access to GPs in evenings and at weekends and greater use of telephone, email and video consultations.

Ministers: Official Cars

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many journeys Ministers of his Department have made using the Government Car Service; and how many such journeys were for the transportation of a red box. [204939]

Dr Poulter: The information cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how much money his Department has spent in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since May 2010. [204777]

Dr Poulter: In general, the Department allocates funding to NHS England, which both allocates funding in turn to clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and commissions certain services directly itself. The Department also makes allocations to local authorities for public health functions.

The Government has protected the overall health budget for the national health service in England. Every CCG in England will continue to benefit from stable real terms funding over the next two years. In 2014-15 every CCG's funding has increased by a minimum of 2.14% and will increase by a minimum of 1.7% in 2015-16. This includes the Lancashire North CCG which covers the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency.

NHS: Innovation

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the performance of the Innovation, Health and Wealth programme; and what the costs of the programme to date have been in respect of (a) the NHS and (b) external consultancies. [204839]

Dr Poulter: The Innovation, Health and Wealth programme is a 10-year strategy, launched in December 2011, alongside the Government's Strategy for the UK Life Sciences.

NHS England has advised that considerable progress has already been made, with the vast majority of actions now complete and showing positive early signs of improvement in uptake and utility of new medicines and technologies in the national health service. NHS England, along with key stakeholders from the NHS, industry and representative bodies, has recently completed a refresh of the programme. This reviewed progress to date and identified areas where further action is needed. NHS England plans to publish the results of that review later this year.

NHS England has advised that information on expenditure on the Innovation, Health and Wealth programme is not available. Funding for the programme is shown in the table:

	£000	
<i>Innovation Health and Wealth programme</i>	<i>2013-14 budget</i>	<i>2014-15 budget</i>
Academic Health Science Networks (AHSNs)	56,400	53,600

	£000	
<i>Innovation Health and Wealth programme</i>	<i>2013-14 budget</i>	<i>2014-15 budget</i>
Innovation scorecard	100	100
Healthcare UK	1,000	615
Innovation challenge prizes	1,100	676
Regional Innovation Fund	5,000	3,000
Small Business Research Initiative(through AHSNs)	10,000	20,000
NICE Implementation Collaborative	5	15
Industry council	5	15
Exchange	50	60
EXPO	53	50
Exchange communications	0	50
Fellowship	100	50
Patient pull	20 (not spent)	20
Wheelchair tariff	167	0

Source:

Information provided by NHS England

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to his Department's publication, *The NHS as an Innovative Organisation: A Framework and Guidance on the Management of Intellectual Property in the NHS*, published in 2002, which of the conclusions of that report have been adopted; and what assessment he has made of the effect on the NHS of their adoption. [204840]

Dr Poulter: The Department has made no recent assessment of the effect of this framework and guidance on the management of intellectual property in the national health service.

Pancreatic Cancer

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase research funding for pancreatic cancer treatments. [204844]

Dr Poulter: The usual practice of the Department's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is not to ring-fence funds for expenditure on particular topics: research proposals in all areas compete for the funding available. The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including pancreatic cancer treatment. These applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and the national health service, value for money and scientific quality.

In August 2011, the Government announced £800 million investment over five years in a series of NIHR Biomedical Research Centres and Units, including £61.5 million funding for the Royal Marsden/Institute of Cancer Research Biomedical Research Centre, and £6.5 million funding for the Liverpool Biomedical Research Unit in gastrointestinal disease (which has a major focus on pancreatic cancer treatment). Some research they conduct is relevant to multiple cancer sites.

Pharmaceutical companies work in partnership with NIHR research infrastructure. The NIHR Clinical Research Network is currently hosting six pancreatic cancer treatment

studies that are recruiting patients and have commercial funders. Commercial partners also work with the NIHR Biomedical Research Centres and Units, and with the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (jointly funded by NIHR and Cancer Research UK).

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure earlier diagnosis of pancreatic cancer; [204845]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that GPs make earlier referrals in cases of possible pancreatic cancer; [204846]

(3) what steps he is taking to improve pancreatic cancer survival rates. [204847]

Jane Ellison: Achieving earlier diagnosis of cancer is key to our ambition to save an additional 5,000 lives per year by 2014-15. However, we know that early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer can be very difficult as the symptoms are shared with a wide range of benign conditions.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Referral Guidelines for Suspected Cancer (2005) are available to help general practitioners (GPs) assess when it is appropriate to refer patients for suspected cancer, including pancreatic cancer. NICE is in the process of updating the guidelines to ensure that these reflect latest evidence and can continue to support GPs to identify patients with suspected cancer symptoms and urgently refer them as appropriate. NICE's anticipated publication date for the revised guidelines is May 2015.

The cancer waiting times two week urgent suspected cancer standard-which is included in the NHS Constitution-ensures that, where GPs are concerned that a patient might have cancer, they are seen quickly by secondary care.

In 2013, Macmillan Cancer Support, partly funded by the Department, piloted an electronic cancer decision support tool for GPs to use in their routine practice.

The tool covered pancreatic cancers and was designed to help GPs identify patients whom they might not otherwise refer urgently for suspected cancer. Over 400 GP practices across England participated in the pilot. A full evaluation of the pilot is currently being undertaken by Cancer Research UK and the Department's Policy Research Unit and Macmillan Cancer Support is working with GP IT software companies to further develop, promote and disseminate the tool.

At a local level, it is for individual clinical commissioning groups to promote and enhance the diagnostic capability to deliver better outcomes. Surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments that may be used for pancreatic cancer are commissioned at the moment by NHS England. NHS England's pancreatic cancer service specification clearly defines what it expects to be in place for providers to offer evidence-based, safe and effective pancreatic cancer services.

NHS England has recently asked NICE to develop a clinical guideline and quality standard on pancreatic cancer. These will complement the existing Improving Outcomes for Upper Gastro-Intestinal Cancers guidance that describes best practice in the delivery of services for patients with all types of upper gastro-intestinal cancer, including pancreatic cancer.

Primary Health Care

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve out-of-hours primary care provision and to minimise dependence on accident and emergency facilities to provide primary care. [204729]

Dr Poulter: The NHS 111 service is becoming a core part of local urgent care systems and provides a vital service, directing patients to the right place including out of hours general practitioner (GP) services. Recent changes to the General Medical Services (GMS) contract mean GPs have to oversee the out of hours care their patients get and report any concerns they have. This is intended to drive up the quality of out of hours services.

Through the 2014-15 GMS contract the Government is promoting more personalised and proactive care management. It is intended that, by providing more personalised and proactive care for high risk patients, the number of patients that need to be admitted to hospital and the number of unplanned emergency admissions will be reduced.

Prisons: Mental Health Services

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of the potential use of mindfulness in prisons to (a) reduce violence in prisons, (b) improve the mental health of prisoners and (c) reduce reoffending. [204828]

Norman Lamb: The Department has no current plans to assess the potential use of mindfulness in prisons. Assessing the potential use of mindfulness therapies in prisons in reducing violence, improving prisoners' mental health or reducing reoffending are matters for other organisations including the Ministry of Justice, the National Offender Management Service and NHS England to consider.

Radiography

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) radiographers and (b) radiologists were in practice in each of the last five years. [204908]

Dr Poulter: The latest annual workforce census data, published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre, provides information on the numbers of radiographers and radiologists working in the national health service in England as at 30 September each year. The numbers of full-time equivalent radiographers and radiologists working in the NHS in England in each of the last five years are shown in the table. The latest available statistics are as at 30 September 2013 and were published on 25 March 2014.

Radiographers and radiologists also work in the private and independent sectors but the numbers are not collected centrally. The Society of Radiographers may be able to supply more information on radiographers. Their website is available at:

www.sor.org/

NHS hospital and community health services: medical and dental staff for the radiology specialty group, and non-medical qualified radiography staff in England by area of work, as at 30 September each year, England

	Full-time equivalents				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Radiology group	3,439	3,492	3,563	3,648	3,729
All qualified radiography staff	14,064	14,389	14,702	15,109	15,461
Diagnostic radiography	11,967	12,212	12,476	12,792	13,089
Therapeutic radiography	2,177	2,097	2,226	2,317	2,372

Notes:

1. Full-time equivalent figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. These statistics relate to the contracted positions within English NHS organisations and may include those where the person assigned to the position is temporarily absent, for example on maternity leave.

Sources:

1. Health and Social Care Information Centre Non-Medical Workforce Census
2. Health and Social Care Information Centre Medical and Dental Workforce Census

Surgery

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with NHS England on Specialised Services Circular 1407 and its potential effect on the use of robotic assisted surgery; and if he will make a statement. [204682]

Jane Ellison: There have been no discussions between the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), and NHS England regarding Circular 1407.

NHS England is currently developing a commissioning policy for Robotic Assisted Surgery (RAS). The national commissioning policy on RAS will ensure that patients have access to procedures and technology that will benefit them, based on a robust evidence review. Until the policy is available NHS England have not requested the cessation or reduction of any existing services but rather a pause on the introduction of any new services or on expansion of current services.

Terminal Illnesses

Liz Kendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many working-age people in England were diagnosed with a terminal illness in each of the last five years; [204906]

(2) how many people in England on end-of-life registers were in work for each of the last five years. [204905]

Norman Lamb: Data on the number of people diagnosed with a terminal illness is not collected centrally.

Information recorded in Electronic Palliative Care Co-ordination Systems (EPaCCs), also known as 'locality registers' or 'end of life care registers' is not collected centrally. EPaCCs are implemented locally and are the responsibility of local commissioners. The core data set for EPaCCs does not include information about a dying person's employment status.

Ulipristal Acetate

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take to ensure that women are made aware of the abortifacient nature of the drug ulipristal acetate; and if he will make a statement. [204752]

Jane Ellison: Ulipristal Acetate, known as EllaOne, is an emergency contraceptive not an abortifacient. The information provided in each pack of EllaOne clearly states that it should not be taken by a woman who knows or suspects she is pregnant.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Detention Centres

Andy Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the Gold Suite has been opened at each immigration removal centre in England and Wales in the last year; and what the nature was of each incident that caused it to be opened. [202820]

Karen Bradley: The Home Office command suite structure for the management of serious incidents is based on the model operated by the Prison Service. Silver Command Suites are opened in the establishment where the incident occurred.

A Gold Command Suite is opened in Prison Service headquarters for incidents where the Home Office requests mutual assistance from the Prison Service and is attended by a Home Office senior manager.

Any other serious incident, which does not require mutual assistance but requires ongoing management, is dealt with by opening a Gold Command Suite at Detention Operations headquarters.

The number of times Silver Suites have been opened in the past year in immigration removal centres is detailed in the following table for January 2013 to March 2014 and is provided in line with the data periods for published statistics.

Silver Suites opened in IRCs for January 2013 to March 2014

IRC	Number of incidents	Date	Incident
Morton Hall	1	7 April 2013	Concerted indiscipline
Haslar	1	22 July 2013	Barricade
Dungavel	1	10 March 2013	Escape
Campsfield House	2	20 August 2013	Incident at height
		18 October 2013	Fire
Dover	2	18 October 2013	Incident at height
		9 August 2013	Barricade
Brook House	2	15 May 2013	Tool loss
		9 September 2013	External protest
Yarl's Wood	2	5 March 2014	Bomb threat

Silver Suites opened in IRCs for January 2013 to March 2014

<i>IRC</i>	<i>Number of incidents</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Incident</i>
Harmondsworth	6	30 March 2014	Death in detention
		30 April 2012	Concerted indiscipline, passive.
		1 January 2013	External protest
		18 July 2013	Concerted indiscipline, passive
		6 August 2013	Concerted indiscipline, passive
		22 November 2013	External protest
Colnbrook	0	29 November 2013	External protest
Tinsley House	0		

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Clerk of the House

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, what funding the Commission allocated for payment of travel, hotel and subsistence expenses of candidates interviewed for the role of Clerk of the House and Chief Executive; what the actual cost was of paying those expenses; and from which budget those expenses will be paid. [205043]

John Thurso: No specific budget has been allocated for the payment of travel, hotel or subsistence expenses for candidates interviewed for the role of Clerk of the House and Chief Executive. The cost incurred to 14 July is £2,702.31. The costs are met from the House Service's general recruitment budget.

Data Protection

Thomas Docherty: To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, who within the House is accountable for data security. [204883]

John Thurso: The Clerk of the House is responsible for data security for the House of Commons Service. As Data Controller, the Clerk is obliged by law to process personal data fairly, lawfully and in accordance with the data protection principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Clerk of the House delegates actions relating to data security as follows:

The Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO), the Director General, Human Resources and Change, is the member of the House of Commons Management Board responsible for managing information risk. He oversees information security policy for the House of Commons.

The Director of Parliamentary Information and Communications Technology (D/PICT) has overall Management Board-level responsibility in both Houses for implementing the ICT strategy for Parliament and for providing both Boards with technical security advice. She is responsible for the specification, procurement, operation, security and maintenance of the electronic systems on which the great majority of Parliament's information is communicated, stored and handled and for providing officials and staff with training and support on their use.

The Parliamentary Security Director advises the SIROs in both Houses and gives strategic and policy direction to D/PICT on cyber security.

Members are the data controllers for all personal data that is handled by their offices and they have responsibility for ensuring that this is done in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

JUSTICE

Government Departments: Freedom of Information

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will place in the Library (a) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by each Government Department in each of the last four years, (b) the number and proportion of such requests that received a full answer from each Department and (c) the number and proportion of such requests which did not receive a full answer in each category of reason for refusal in each Department. [204955]

Simon Hughes: The Government publishes detailed statistics on freedom of information requests received by central Government Departments quarterly and annually. These include the number of requests received by Government Departments, the number of requests which received a full answer and the number which did not receive a full answer. The statistics for the last four years can be found on the following web addresses:

For 2013 Annual:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-of-information-statistics-October-December-2013-and-annual>

For 2012 Annual:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-of-information-statistics-October-December-2012-and-annual>

For 2011 Annual and 2010 Annual:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/earlier-editions-statistics-on-implementation-in-central-government-earlier-editions-in-the-series>

Prison Accommodation

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many extra places will be created in public sector prisons; from what date; and for how long. [204721]

Mr Vara: Prison numbers fluctuate throughout the year and we have sufficient accommodation for the current and expected population.

Sensible measures have been taken to ensure that we will have sufficient capacity to deal with the projected level of the population. These measures include identifying

additional places in prisons that can provide safe and decent conditions, if required. This is a proportionate measure to ensure that we are able to hold all of those committed to custody by the courts.

Decisions on the number of such spaces required and their duration of use will depend on the current and projected prison population, including an assessment of the necessary margin to manage population fluctuations.

We will end this Parliament with more adult male prison places than we inherited, more hours of work in prisons than we inherited, more education for young detainees than we inherited and a more modern, cost-effective prison estate than we inherited.

Prison Service

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what budget has been set aside for funding HM Prison Service Reserve. [204746]

Mr Vara: The running of the Reserve is within headcount and no additional budget has been allocated to it. Reserve officers will be used to fill vacant posts on a temporary basis; these posts, including support costs, are already funded.

Prisoners' Release

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many and what proportion of prisoners who were given a life sentence (*a*) applied for and (*b*) were refused a resettlement licence in each of the last five years; [204726]

(2) how many and what proportion of prisoners who were given an indeterminate sentence for public protection (*a*) applied for and (*b*) were refused a resettlement licence in each of the last five years. [204754]

Mr Vara: Temporary release can be a valuable tool in the resettlement of prisoners in the community but it must never take place at the expense of public safety. We conducted a fundamental review of the policy and practice of release on temporary licence (ROTL) after serious failures last year. We are introducing a system that enhances the assessment of serious offenders and restricts access to ROTL to cases where there is a clear, legitimate reason for the release. We have already introduced some of these changes and have additionally introduced a restriction on prisoners transferring to open conditions and having ROTL if they have previously absconded from open prisons; or if they have failed to return or reoffended while released on temporary licence.

Data on temporary release applications and the outcomes of such applications is not collected centrally and could not be provided except at disproportionate cost. Data on releases on temporary licence are published at the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-december-2013-and-annual>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statistical-notice-releases-on-temporary-licence-2012>

Prisoners: Gender Recognition

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many prisoners have self-certified gender recognition certificates; and how many such prisoners were born (*a*) male and (*b*) female; [205389]

(2) how many prisoners who were born as female but now live as men, have been moved to men's prisons; and how many such prisoners have self-certified gender recognition certificates; [205390]

(3) how many prisoners who were born as men have been issued self-certificated gender recognition certificates; and how many such prisoners have been transferred to women's prisons; [205391]

(4) how many prisoners who were born male but now live as a women have been moved to a women's prison in each of the last 10 years. [205412]

Simon Hughes: It is not possible to report on the number of prisoners with Gender Recognition Certificates or on the number who were born male but now live as female. Section 22 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 prohibits disclosure of the fact that someone has applied for a Gender Recognition Certificate or disclosure of someone's gender prior to the acquisition of the Gender Recognition Certificate.

Individuals with a gender recognition certificate are recorded on administrative systems as their legal gender, and are not identifiable as having changed gender. To use any other source of information to identify such individuals would not be appropriate.

In accordance of the Equality Act 2010 and the Gender Equality Duty, NOMS is committed to paying due regard to the need to address and eliminate the unlawful discrimination and harassment of transgender individuals.

Procurement

Mr Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what discussions took place between officials in his Department, the Home Office and STERIA before the decision to privatise Ministry of Justice shared services was taken. [204926]

Simon Hughes: Prior to entering these detailed discussions with Shared Services Connected Limited (a joint venture between STERIA and the Cabinet Office) all options were fully evaluated. A business case was developed to evaluate the two Independent Shared Service Centre (ISSC) options, alongside the option to remain a standalone organisation.

The business case was informed by proposals from both ISSC framework providers, which included SSCL. In order to complete these proposals, both providers learned about the existing MOJ Shared Services organisation through visits to our sites and through the information that was provided to them about:

How Shared Services fitted in to the MOJ organisation.

What services they provided and who their customers were.

How many transactions were processed in a typical day.

Who their partners were and what systems they used.

The projects that were currently under way.

The evaluation criteria in the business case included people impact, services delivery, cost and IT. Overall the SSCL proposal was the strongest, in part due to the investment that they were already making in a new IT platform and the fact that the costs of this could be shared across multiple Government Departments.

The Ministry of Justice is now entering into detailed discussions with Shared Services Connected Limited (SSCL) regarding the future delivery of their back office services, with the intention of awarding a contract in August 2014.

The Home Office have also been considering their options at the same time as the Ministry of Justice but the two Departments have completed their evaluations as separate and independent exercises. The Home Office have reached the same conclusion and assessed SSCL to be its preferred option. The two Departments have started contract negotiations at the same time but each will have a separate contract with SSCL. It is intended that MOJ and Home Office follow the same process going forward and will make changes within the same time scales.

Both of these evaluations followed the publication of the Government's Next Generation Shared Services Strategy in December 2012 and a rigorous procurement exercise completed by Cabinet Office to select the providers of the two Independent Shared Service Centres.

Mr Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the potential effect of the privatisation of Ministry of Justice shared services on jobs in Bootle constituency. [204927]

Simon Hughes: The Ministry of Justice is entering into detailed discussions with Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL) regarding the future delivery of their back office services with the intention of awarding a contract in August 2014. We expect this to bring increased savings and efficiency in back-office functions, provide further benefits across wider Government and offer better value for money to the tax payer.

SSCL have stated their intention of providing 12 months job protection for all transferring staff from the point of transfer in October 2014. This means that there will be no compulsory redundancies during this period. No decisions have been made to close buildings and we expect all sites to remain open during this period.

Following the transfer of staff, services and IT, there will be a stabilisation stage during which SSCL will look at how the service is currently delivered. No decisions will be made until SSCL has had the opportunity to fully understand the operation.

We will continue to work with staff, trade unions and other stakeholders to assess any impacts on staff.

Mr Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice for what reason his Department did not consult the Public and Commercial Services Union on an in-house bid for the Ministry of Justice shared services contract. [204928]

Simon Hughes: The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is entering into detailed discussions with Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL) regarding the future delivery of their back office services with the intention of awarding a contract in August 2014.

Prior to entering these detailed discussions with SSCL, all options were fully evaluated. A business case was developed to evaluate both Independent Shared Service Centre (ISSC) options as well as the option for back office to remain a standalone organisation.

Detailed information was put together on the in-house option, which reflected our existing organisation and also any known plans for the coming years, including those for growth in our customer numbers. This information was prepared in parallel with the proposals from the two ISSC framework providers. The costs and benefits of all three options between now and 2021-22 were assessed and this informed the business case, which was approved by the MOJ departmental board.

The MOJ has been meeting regularly with trade union representatives since we started considering the options in December 2013 prior to any decisions being made and also prior to taking the outcome of the evaluation to the MOJ departmental board. Trade Union representation includes representatives from Public and Commercial Services (PCS).

Once we knew the decision had been taken to enter into detailed discussions with Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL). We informed trade union representatives. Formal consultation is now taking place about the transfer of MOJ staff to SSCL under TUPE. We have been working with these staff and keeping them informed of developments. This will continue throughout the transition process.

SSCL recognise our existing unions, including PCS, and will continue to consult with them after the staff transfer has taken place.

Mr Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to protect personal data held by Ministry of Justice Shared Services when that data is off-shored to countries with less robust data protection than the UK. [204929]

Simon Hughes: The Ministry of Justice is entering into detailed discussions with Shared Services Connected Limited (SSCL) regarding the future delivery of their back office services with the intention of awarding a contract in August 2014. We expect this to bring increased savings and efficiency in back-office functions, provide further benefits across wider Government and offer better value for money to the tax payer.

It is a part of Shared Services Connected Limited's business strategy to move some of its work offshore. However, no decision has been taken to move any of the work of MOJ Shared Services offshore. Should there be any proposals to offshore MOJ work in the future, specific agreement would be needed from the MOJ. This would also include the need to make sure that the right level of data security was in place.

Terminal Illnesses

Liz Kendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many employment tribunals in which the appellant had a terminal condition and was contesting a dismissal that occurred because of their diagnosis took place in each of the last five years. [204907]

Mr Vara: Data on the number of claims made by appellants with a terminal condition on the grounds of unfair dismissal is not collated centrally by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). This information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost by manually checking hard copy tribunal files or judgments.

Terrorism: Northern Ireland

Kate Hoey: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what support the Government provides to victims and survivors of Northern Ireland-related acts of terrorism in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement; [204449]

(2) if he will replicate for victims and survivors of Northern Ireland-related acts of terrorism in Great Britain the support services available in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [204452]

Simon Hughes: I can confirm that in 2013 the Government published a revised Code of Practice for Victims of Crime which sets out the entitlements of victims to support including enhanced support for victims of more serious crime including families bereaved by crime.

The Government is making available more funding than ever before to support all victims of crime, almost doubling current funding with a potential budget of up to £100 million to help them cope and where possible recover from the impact that crime has had on their lives.

Since 2010, the Ministry of Justice has provided funding to Victim Support to run the national Homicide Service which provides tailored and intensive support to families bereaved by homicide after 2010 based on need. This includes practical support such as help funeral arrangements, bank accounts, forming employers and schools, preparing bereaved families to attend court and the provision of legal services. From October 2014, Victim Support will run a newly enhanced national Homicide Service for those bereaved after 2010 which in addition to providing of existing services will incorporate specialist trauma and bereavement counselling for both adults and children and for the first time peer support.

The Ministry of Justice also provides separate funding to a number of peer support and specialist therapy organisations which can support those bereaved by homicide.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2012 is available to compensate blameless victims of violent crime. The Scheme is available for people injured in Great Britain and focuses on paying compensation to direct victims of a crime of violence. Northern Ireland has its own scheme, as do many other countries.

From 1 October 2014, the majority of support services for victims of crime will be locally commissioned by Police and Crime Commissioners. With their knowledge of local victims' needs and priorities, PCCs are uniquely placed to ensure that funding is targeted according to need.

Individual victims and survivors of Northern-Ireland related acts of terrorism who are resident in England and Wales are able to apply for funding from the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) in Northern Ireland. The VSS is the main funder of victims' groups in Northern Ireland and provides a tailored package to

meet the individual needs of victims and survivors including counselling, physiotherapy and the purchase of equipment such as wheelchairs.

Training

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much has been spent on what (a) media training and (b) social media training for (i) him and (ii) Ministers in his Department since May 2010. [205385]

Mr Vara: Three Ministers received media training from an external provider in July 2010, at a total cost of £3,000. The training was designed to assist them in clearly communicating the work of the Ministry of Justice to the public. There has been no further spending on such training.

No Minister has received social media training.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Youth Unemployment

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government is taking to tackle youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. [904828]

Dr Murrison: Tackling youth unemployment remains a critical issue but specific measures to address it in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Executive.

The Government is reducing the largest structural deficit in UK peacetime history and this more than anything will help deliver a sustainable economic recovery and so directly assist young people get into employment.

ICT

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and laptops were lost by her Department in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [204801]

Dr Murrison: In the period requested, one mobile telephone was reported stolen in December 2013. No BlackBerry devices or laptops have been reported lost from 2013 to date.

PRIME MINISTER

Unemployment: Young People

Stephen Timms: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made in the review of assistance to young unemployed people, led by Sir Jeremy Heywood; and if he will make a statement. [205451]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) on 14 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 548W.

SCOTLAND

ICT

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and laptops were lost by his Department in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [204803]

David Mundell: In 2013 and 2014 to date, no mobile telephones or laptops were reported lost by the Scotland Office. Two BlackBerrys were reported lost in 2013, and one in 2014 to date.

Ministers: Official Cars

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many journeys Ministers of his Department have made using the Government Car Service; and how many such journeys were for the transportation of a red box. [204944]

David Mundell: The information cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

A64

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what central funds are available for the maintenance of the A64; and if he will make a statement. [204993]

Mr Goodwill: In the current 2014-15 financial year, the Highways Agency has an allocation of £11.25 million for maintenance of the A64.

In addition, the Agency's Managing Agent Contractors are paid a "lump sum" for a wide range of general maintenance duties, which includes works on the A64. The proportion of the costs that is spent on the A64 cannot be specified as the Agency does not disaggregate this "lump sum" budget.

Carnforth Station

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on services to Carnforth Station when High Speed 2 is completed. [204817]

Mr Goodwill: No assessment has been made of the effect of HS2 on services to Carnforth Station. However, a significant amount of capacity will be released on existing lines as a result of HS2, which creates a huge opportunity for the reconfiguration and improvement of services. Network Rail has begun thinking about how to make use of the opportunities that High Speed Rail brings to the rail network as a whole, and you can read more about this in their Better Connections report. Network Rail estimate that over 100 towns and cities could benefit from quicker, more frequent journeys and better connections when HS2 phase two is complete.

An illustrative timetable has been developed in order to allow us to assess the likely costs and benefits of HS2, and this factors in some changes to train services

as a result of released capacity on existing lines. However, this illustrative timetable was created for modelling purposes and more work needs to take place through open consultation to determine what actual services would look like.

Ferries

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vessels with valid licences to operate from the UK in the short sea passenger ferry sector are registered under (a) the UK flag or (b) Red Ensign Group registries; and what proportion of those vessels are qualifying vessels under the Tonnage Tax scheme. [204842]

Mr Goodwill: There is no general requirement for ships to be licensed to operate on any routes either within the UK or plying internationally to and from UK ports. There are no requirements for ships which ply solely within UK waters to be registered. Ships that ply internationally need to be registered although choice of register is for the owner's consideration.

The Department does not hold information in relation to the areas of operation of vessels which are entered into the tonnage tax regime. The identity of tonnage tax companies and groups is tax confidential, and so we would not in any case be able to release information which might make it possible to identify individual companies and groups.

ICT

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and laptops were lost by his Department in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [204804]

Mr Goodwill: The number of mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and laptops that were reported as lost in 2013 and 2014 to date is set out in the tables. The figures provided are for the entire Department including its executive agencies.

2013	
Item	Lost
Mobile telephones	22
BlackBerrys	33
Laptops	6
Total	61
2014	
Item	Lost
Mobile telephones	12
BlackBerrys	13
Laptops	1
Total	26

Ministers: Official Cars

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many journeys Ministers of his Department have made using the Government Car Service; and how many such journeys were for the transportation of a red box. [204945]

Mr Goodwill: The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate how much money his Department has spent in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since May 2010. [204780]

Mr Goodwill: The most recent data available for total public expenditure on transport are given in HM Treasury's Country and Regional Analysis: 2013. Identifiable expenditure on transport for the North West was £1,876 million in 2012-13, £1,939 million in 2011-12, £2,099 million in 2010-11 and £2,337 million in 2009-10. Equivalent data are not available below regional level.

The Country and Regional analysis covers Department for Transport-managed spending combined with other transport-related expenditure elsewhere (e.g. transport expenditure by local government bodies, which are covered by CLG).

Roads: North West

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which governmental body will make funds available for a feasibility study on developing a highway road tunnel under Morcambe Bay from Heysham M6 Link Road to Barrow-in-Furness. [204818]

Mr Goodwill: This is a local issue and it would be for Lancashire and Cumbria county councils as the local highways authorities to consider whether to take forward such a study in consultation with the local enterprise partnerships for their areas.

Shipping: Freight

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vessels with valid licences to operate from the UK in the short sea freight sector are registered under (a) the UK flag or (b) Red Ensign Group registries; and what proportion of those are qualifying vessels under the Tonnage Tax scheme. [204833]

Mr Goodwill: There is no general requirement for ships to be licensed to operate on any routes either within the UK or plying internationally to and from UK ports.

The Department does not hold information in relation to the areas of operation of vessels which are entered into the tonnage tax regime. The identity of tonnage tax companies and groups is tax confidential, and so we would not in any case be able to release information which might make it possible to identify individual companies and groups.

Tonnage Tax

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new training roles for UK seafarers were created under the approved core training commitments submitted by company groups that qualified for the Tonnage Tax scheme between October 2012 and September 2013; how many such roles he expects to be created

between October 2013 and September 2014; and what the cumulative training commitment is of companies qualifying for that scheme in 2013-14. [204843]

Mr Goodwill: Approved core training commitments for the 2012-13 training commitment year were for around 600 new first year officer trainees; the comparable figure for the 2013-14 training commitment year is around 550. Additionally, company groups are required to provide second and third year training for trainees taken on during the previous two years when they were in the tonnage tax. For 2013-14, this cumulative training commitment, including first, second and third year trainees, is for over 1,700 officer trainees.

TREASURY

Freedom of Information

John Woodcock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on legal fees in cases relating to the release of information requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in each of the last five years. [204285]

Andrea Leadsom: In common with other Departments, the Treasury pays fees to the Treasury Solicitor's Department for legal advice on a range of issues. The proportion of those fees which relate to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is not recorded.

Housing: Scotland

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the effect on the Scottish economy of house prices in Scotland. [204501]

Danny Alexander: Scotland's economy has performed well within the UK and the Scottish housing market is recovering alongside the rest of the UK's housing market. As in previous recoveries house prices have risen but still remain below their pre-crisis peak in real terms in Scotland. As a result of increased confidence in the housing market, property transactions in Scotland were 21% higher in 2013 than the lows seen in 2011. With the creation of the Financial Policy Committee, we now have the tools to guard against risks in the housing market.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for the differences in the level of change in house prices in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK in the second quarter of 2014. [204544]

Danny Alexander: The Scottish housing market is recovering alongside the rest of the Scottish economy. Changes in regional house prices will partly depend on regional factors supporting supply and demand. House prices in Scotland rose 4.8% in the 12 months to April. In the same period, house prices across the UK rose by 9.9%, and excluding London house prices in the UK rose 7%. In real terms house prices remain well below their peak, and the Office for Budget Responsibility noted in March that they will still remain below this

peak at the end of their forecast in 2018/19. With the creation of the Financial Policy Committee, we can ensure emerging risks and vulnerabilities across the financial system as a whole are identified, monitored and effectively addressed.

Infrastructure

Chris Leslie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Government has spent per capita on infrastructure in each region and constituent part of the UK in each of the last five years. [204876]

Danny Alexander: The information is as follows:

Table 1: Total identifiable expenditure on capital services by country and region, per head 2008-09 to 2012-13

	National Statistics				
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
	£ per head				
North East	785	892	758	604	607
North West	843	860	799	638	702
Yorkshire and the Humber	675	752	669	584	567
East Midlands	582	684	570	464	446
West Midlands	663	731	614	510	507
East of England	607	728	660	529	493
London	1,215	1,403	1,203	959	860
South East	657	689	594	435	437
South West	609	672	578	458	481
England	758	843	736	589	578
Scotland	1,042	1,091	979	980	1,035
Wales	754	801	775	709	727
Northern Ireland	1,030	988	892	793	775
UK	790	866	763	633	629
identifiable expenditure					

Sources:

Expenditure data is taken from the Country and Regional Analyses 2013. In order to calculate per head figures the latest mid-year population estimates; for England and Wales from the ONS; for Scotland from the GRO and; for Northern Ireland from the NISRA.

Mapeley

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Mapeley STEPS Contractor Limited notified HM Revenue and Customs of the opportunity to generate income by the use of the Priority Court (Dover) site for purposes other than the provision of facilities at the same time as the site remains subject to a STEPS lease under paragraph 19.2 of the private finance initiative contract between HM Revenue and Customs and Mapeley STEPS Contractor Limited. [205416]

Mr Gauke: Mapeley STEPS Contractor Ltd has not notified HM Revenue and Customs of any opportunity to generate additional income at the Priory Court site under the clause 19.2 provisions of the STEPS contract.

Meningitis: Vaccination

Sir Tony Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department received the business case for the meningococcal B vaccine; and when he

expects to make a decision whether or not to approve the business case. [204485]

Danny Alexander: On 21 March 2014, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommended that there should be a national Meningococcal B immunisation programme for infants, if the vaccine, Bexsero®, could be purchased at a cost-effective price. The Treasury is working closely with the Department of Health on this business case. The Government would like to secure the vaccine from the supplier at the cost-effective price recommended by the JCVI.

Money Advice Service

Philip Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress the Money Advice Service has made on launching a price comparison website for short term loans. [204984]

Andrea Leadsom: The Money Advice Service (MAS) is an independent non-governmental public body set up with a statutory objective to raise public understanding and knowledge of financial matters and the ability of people to manage their own financial affairs.

The Government is not aware that MAS has any imminent plans to launch a price comparison website for short-term loans.

Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much money his Department has spent in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since May 2010. [204781]

Andrea Leadsom: Data on expenditure by HM Treasury in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency is not centrally available. The Department for Communities and Local Government collects information on local authority expenditure however this is not collected by constituency and is just a part of total public expenditure.

Training

John Woodcock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what professional development courses are made available to staff of his Department; and what the cost to the public purse is of each such course. [204352]

Andrea Leadsom: HM Treasury sponsors professional development courses for staff to gain a professional qualification and for continuing professional development. There is not a fixed set of courses and options can include both those available through civil service professions curricula and academic or accredited professional institutions and associations. A rigorous approvals process is in place to ensure that attendance on professional development courses meets the needs of the job, the Department and the profession. Costs will vary because requirements and suppliers vary. The information on actual costs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost as many courses fall within the scope of this question, and the information is not all held in one place.

UK Trade With EU: Germany

Mr Carswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the number of jobs in Germany associated with trade with the UK. [204733]

Andrea Leadsom: The Treasury has made no such assessment.

The Treasury continues to monitor developments in Germany and other major economies on an ongoing basis as part of the normal process of policy development.

WALES

Ministers: Official Cars

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many journeys Ministers of his Department have made using the Government Car Service; and how many such journeys were for the transportation of a red box. [204947]

Stephen Crabb: The information cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Training

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent on what (a) media training and (b) social media training for (i) him and (ii) Ministers in his Department since May 2010. [205317]

Stephen Crabb: None.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Ministers: Official Cars

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many journeys Ministers of his Department have made using the Government Car Service; and how many such journeys were for the transportation of a red box. [204948]

Esther McVey: The information cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Pensioners: Means-tested Benefits

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of pensioners that would be lifted out of poverty if take-up of means-tested benefits was 100 per cent. [205396]

Steve Webb: An up-to-date estimate of the number of pensioners that would be lifted out of poverty if take-up of means-tested benefits was 100 per cent is not available. The latest estimate available, published in 2011 (PQ 33325, 13 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 429W), showed that an estimated 600,000 pensioners would be lifted out of poverty if take-up of means-tested benefits was 100%. It should be noted, however, that given that there have been changes to the policy context, the level

of pensioner poverty, and in the wider economy over the period, this figure is likely to have changed since then.

Schools: Asbestos

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 7 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 112W, on Schools: Asbestos, what system is in place to inspect schools under (a) local authority control and (b) outside local authority control, to assess their standard of asbestos management. [205442]

Mr Harper: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has no specific system in place to inspect schools to assess their standard of asbestos management.

HSE's work planning systems focuses its inspection priorities on the major hazard industries and comparatively high risks sectors (such as construction, waste and recycling, and some types of manufacturing), but can also involve targeted initiatives elsewhere. In recent years this approach has resulted in discrete inspection programmes to assess asbestos management by:

- local authorities with responsibility for system built schools; and
- schools outside local authority control on a sample basis.

Universal Credit

Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households with children are claiming universal credit. [205392]

Esther McVey: The information requested is not currently available.

The latest official experimental statistics on UC can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/universal-credit-statistics>

EDUCATION

16-19 Bursary Fund

Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many young people who (a) had recently left local authority care, (b) were in receipt of income support or universal credit in their name, (c) were disabled and in receipt of both employment and support allowance and either disability living allowance or personal independence payment in their name qualified for the 16 to 19 bursary scheme in each year since its introduction;. [204853]

(2) how many young people aged between 16 and 19 have received the maximum bursary available under the 16 to 19 bursary scheme in each year since 2011. [204855]

Mr Timpson: The 16-19 Bursary fund is separated into discretionary and vulnerable bursaries. Schools and colleges received allocations of discretionary bursary funding and make awards to individual students whom they have assessed against their own criteria. As a result it is not possible to provide numbers that have received

the bursary in 2011/12 and 2012/13. It is now retained centrally (this 2013/14 academic year) and institutions claim funds for any students who are eligible.

A full year's data for 2013/14 will be available from January 2015.

Academies

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many oral complaints have been made to her Department about academy brokers (*a*) in the last 12 months and (*b*) since 2010; [205445]

(2) how many formal written complaints have been made to her Department about academy brokers (*a*) in the last 12 months and (*b*) since 2010. [205448]

Mr Timpson: If the Department for Education receives a verbal complaint against a broker, the complainant is requested to put the concern in writing to the project lead, who then follows the appropriate complaints procedure. As such, only written complaints are logged.

The Department has received two written complaints about academy brokers in the last 12 months and 11 in total since centralised recording began in June 2011.

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many academies are part of (*a*) a multi-academy trust, (*b*) a collaborative partnership and (*c*) an umbrella trust. [205447]

Mr Timpson: As of 1 July 2014 there are 2,167 academies in multi-academy trusts and there are 36 academies in umbrella trusts.

Academies are not required to provide the Department for Education with information about collaborative partnerships. However, research published by the Department for Education in July showed that 87% of academies are supporting other schools. The research can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/do-academies-make-use-of-their-autonomy

Carers

Dame Anne Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will take steps to ensure that children kinship carers are caring for are considered as children in need and prioritised accordingly. [205229]

Mr Timpson: The Government has taken a number of actions to improve the quality of support provided to children being brought up in kinship care arrangements. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 gives local authorities powers to provide services to support the upbringing of children in need by their families. Local authorities should act on their powers under section 17 to assess the needs of children living with kinship carers, which should lead to appropriate support to families regardless of whether or not children in their care are looked after.

In March 2011, the Government issued Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance for local authorities where it is made clear, every authority, in England should have a policy describing how it will promote and support the needs of children living with kinship carers. This policy should be widely available and publicised, using media such as websites and leaflets.

In October and November last year the Department for Education held two national learning days for senior managers and for local authority staff directly involved in supporting family and friends carers. These events raised awareness of legal requirements and encouraged the spread of good professional practice in this important area of work.

In February 2014 the Department set up a working group with local authorities to look at practice issues and best practice with the intention of using these findings in peer to peer support and learning in order to increase the quality of practice across the country.

In May 2014 the Department for Education issued an information leaflet for family and friend carers which explained their legal entitlements for support from local authorities, including under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

I wrote to all local authorities in July 2013 to remind them of their statutory duty to hold a family and friends policy and now 140 have published policies.

Children: Abuse

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether any files on child abuse have been passed to her Department by (*a*) other parts of the Government or (*b*) hon. Members; and in what year such files were so passed. [205425]

Mr Timpson: In 2013 the Department for Education received information from the Department of Health which referred to 21 children's homes and schools in England. This information had been uncovered as part of a document review process undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service in the context of Operation Yewtree. The Secretary of State for Education gave details of this information in a written ministerial statement on 27 March 2014:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140327/wmstext/140327m0001.htm#14032769000005

More generally, hon. and right hon. Members and concerned members of the public regularly write to the Department with concerns about child abuse or neglect, sometimes enclosing supporting documents. Such letters are dealt with as appropriate on a case by case basis.

Education: Brighton

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much (*a*) revenue and (*b*) capital funding has been provided to each pupil in state (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in Brighton and Hove (A) in cash terms and (B) at 2014 prices in each year since 2010. [205044]

Mr Laws: Average per pupil funding figures for Brighton and Hove local authority (LA) are in the following table. With the introduction of the dedicated schools grant (DSG) in 2006-07, the changes to the funding mechanism meant figures were no longer available to be shown split by phase of education.

Figures for financial years 2010 to 2013 are in the following table. These are in cash terms:

Brighton and Hove LA	Average revenue per pupil funding (cash)
2010-11	5,100
2011-12	5,020
2012-13	5,020

These are in real terms using June 2014 GDP deflators in 2013-14 prices:

Brighton and Hove LA	Average revenue per pupil funding (real)
2010-11	5,360
2011-12	5,160
2012-13	5,100

Per pupil figures are using DSG allocations plus other schools related grants, e.g. school standards grant, school standards grant (personalisation), standards fund etc. and pupils aged three-15 rounded to the nearest £10. Most of the additional grants were mainstreamed into DSG in 2011-12. These figures do not include the pupil premium.

With the changes to DSG funding in financial year 2013-14, i.e. funding allocated through three blocks, namely schools, early years and high needs, there is no longer a comparable overall figure with previous years. The following table shows the DSG schools block unit funding figures in cash and real terms for Brighton and Hove LA.

	DSG schools block per pupil funding	
	2013-14	2014-15
Brighton and Hove LA (cash)	4,458	4,458
Brighton and Hove LA (real) ¹	4,458	4,362

¹ Real terms figures shown in 2013-14 prices using GDP deflators at 27 June 2014.

Since 2011-12 schools have received the pupil premium, which targets funding at pupils from the most deprived backgrounds to help them achieve their full potential. In 2011-12, the pupil premium was allocated for each pupil known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of parents in the armed services. In 2012-13 coverage was expanded to include pupils known to have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years. The amounts per pupil amounts for each type of pupil are shown in following table in cash terms:

	Pupil premium per pupil (£)			
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Free school meal pupil primary	488	623	953	1,300
Free school meal pupil secondary	488	623	900	935
Service children	200	250	300	300
Looked after children	488	623	900	¹ 1,900

¹ Also includes children adopted from care.

Total pupil premium allocations for Brighton and Hove local authority for each year are shown in the following table in cash terms:

Brighton and Hove pupil premium allocations	
	(£ million)
2011-12	2.588
2012-13	4.880
2013-14	7.423
2014-15	9.618

These figures in real terms:

Brighton and Hove pupil premium allocations	(£ millions)
2011-2012	2.661
2012-2013	4.964
2013-2014	7.423
2014-2015	9.411

Price Base:

Real terms at 2013-14 prices, based on GDP deflators as at 27 June 2014

Capital funding:

The following table shows capital funding for the financial years that are available. The data is in cash terms as allocations are phased across more than one year making real terms calculations meaningless. Complete information on the split of capital between phases of education is not held centrally.

	Brighton and Hove	
	Capital allocations ¹	£ million Of which: Building Schools for the Future ²
2010-11	45.3	0.0
2011-12	16.1	0.3
2012-13	23.1	8.8
2013-14	16.7	3.5

¹ Capital allocations includes capital grant and supported borrowing allocations.

² BSF includes one school pathfinders.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest £100,000.

Education: Standards

David Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps her Department is taking to reduce regional variations in standards of education. [204711]

Mr Laws: We are improving the accountability framework to improve standards across the country. In addition, Ofsted has implemented a more rigorous inspection framework, with performance data being used to target inspections on the weakest schools and a recognition that any school less than 'good' is not performing well enough.

From 2016 we will introduce new measures that focus on the progress made by every child aged between 4 and 19. By focusing on progress, we will be able to identify high- and low-performing schools more accurately. Primary schools will report pupils' progress between the age of 4 and 11 and the proportion reaching the demanding new standard at age 11. Secondary schools will be judged on pupils' attainment and progress between the age of 11 and 16 across 8 subjects, as well as the proportion of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate, English and maths qualifications.

Some schools are still not performing well enough. We issued revised statutory guidance¹ to local authorities in May that makes very clear our expectations that they should take swift and robust action when maintained schools are performing poorly. This includes our expectation that their assessment should include the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that poorly performing schools should become sponsored academies.

Finally, to address the unfair distribution of funding between local authorities, we propose to allocate an additional £350 million to the least fairly funded local authorities in 2015-16. This is the biggest step towards fairer schools funding in over a decade, and we will be able to confirm how much each local authority will receive once we publish our final allocations later this summer.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-causing-concern--2>

Employment Schemes: Young People

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many payments she estimates will be taken up under the youth contract for 16 and 17 year olds; [205413]

(2) how her Department will spend any underspend from the youth contract in financial year 2013-14; [205414]

(3) how much of the overall budget the youth contract for 16 and 17 year olds had been spent at the end of 2013-14. [205415]

Mr Timpson: Delivery of the Youth Contract programme for 16- and 17-year-olds began in September 2012. For the period from September 2012 to the end of March 2014, the Department for Education has spent a total of £18.4 million in delivering the programme. Any underspend identified in the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2014 for the Education Funding Agency-managed strand of the programme was transferred to the Exchequer as part of the budget exchange scheme.

A budget of £2.9 million is assigned to the Core Cities strand of the programme for each financial year. This funding is devolved to the respective local authorities.

For the EFA-managed strand of the programme, payments are made on a 'payment by results' basis. A contractor can receive three outcome-related payments: an initial payment, a re-engagement payment and a sustained engagement payment. Delivery data for the EFA-managed strand of the programme for the period September 2012 to the end of March 2014 was published on 26 June 2014 and is published online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-contract-delivery-data>.

This shows contractors delivering the EFA-managed strand of the Youth Contract achieved 18,570 enrolments, 9,949 re-engagements and 3,445 sustained engagements. The contracted profile for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2016 shows: 21,500 participant enrolments; 23,000 participant re-engagements into positive outcomes of education, training or employment with training; and 23,500 participants to sustain in a positive outcome of education, training or employment with training for five out of six months.

Free School Meals: Brighton

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children in (a) Brighton and Hove and (b) Brighton, Kemptown constituency have received free school meals in each year since 2010. [205137]

Mr Laws: Information on the number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals is published in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2014' Statistical First Release¹.

Tables 8a-d show local authority level information. Parliamentary constituency level information is not published. Information for 2010 to 2013 can be found in previous versions of this release².

¹ Available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2014

² Available at:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers

Free School Meals: Westmorland

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many infant school children in Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency were eligible for free school meals during the 2010-11 school year. [205049]

Mr Laws: Information on the number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in maintained nursery and primary schools is published in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2011' Statistical First Release¹.

Table 11a shows local authority level information. Parliamentary constituency level information is not published.

¹ Available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2011

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many more infant school children in Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency will be eligible for free school meals as a result of the extension of free school meals to all infant school children. [205051]

Mr Laws: From September 2014 all infant pupils in state-funded schools in England will be eligible for a free, healthy school meal. Across England, we estimate that this means that 1.5 million additional pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 will become eligible for a free school meal. We do not hold estimates of the numbers that will become newly eligible at constituency level.

Free Schools

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which free schools are planned to open in September 2014; and how many students each such school plans to admit in September 2014. [205443]

Mr Timpson: To date, the Secretary of State for Education has agreed to enter into funding agreements for 62 schools due to open in September 2014. In

addition, the Department for Education is working with proposer groups to open around 20 further schools where the funding agreement has not yet been agreed. In total, these schools will provide about 10,000 new school places this academic year and around 44,000 places when they have reached their intended capacity.

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many free schools that are planned to open in September 2014 are (a) temporarily and (b) permanently located in office buildings. [205444]

Mr Timpson: Of the free schools planning to open in September, four will be temporarily located in former office buildings and 15 permanently.

Local Government Services: Children

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 1 July 2014, *Official Report*, columns 550-1W, on local government services: children, (1) in which meetings of the Social Care Innovation Programme at which Ministers were present; how many such meetings involved people other than staff of her Department; and if she will list those people; [205099]

(2) how many meetings on the Social Care Innovation Programme at which Ministers were present have taken place since May 2010. [205100]

Mr Timpson: As the Minister with responsibility for the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, I have attended the majority of meetings on the Innovation Programme at which Ministers have been present. These meetings have covered a wide range of issues in relation to the programme.

The first meeting about the Innovation Programme was held with my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Schools, in May 2013. The majority of meetings on the Innovation Programme since then have been the regular internal meetings I have with the programme team-to date, we have had over 10 such meetings.

Meetings about the Innovation Programme at which Ministers have been present which involved people other than staff of this Department include, for example, a

workshop I held with senior officials from across Whitehall to make the best of their experience and encourage coherence in terms of government programmes; several meetings with Councillor David Simmonds, Chair of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People Board; a meeting between my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and a meeting with young people and staff from Daybreak Family Group Conferences.

There have been a number of meetings on other topics at which I, and other Ministers in this Department, have taken the opportunity to discuss the Innovation Programme.

Morecambe

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will estimate how much money her Department has spent in Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since May 2010. [204774]

Mr Laws: The Department for Education does not allocate or record spending at a parliamentary constituency level. The majority of funding provided by the Department for Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency is allocated indirectly via Lancashire local authority.¹

Therefore, we have shown total allocations to Lancashire local authority, and to free schools, non-recoupment academies and music education hubs within Lancashire, with revenue and capital spending in separate tables. We do allocate funding directly to providers of 16-19 education, so we have separately shown total allocations for 16-19 education within the constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale.

Table A shows the total revenue allocations made by the Department to Lancashire local authority, and to free schools, non-recoupment academies and music education hubs within Lancashire, in each of the financial years 2010-11 to 2013-14. This funding includes: the Dedicated Schools Grant (including two-, three- and four-year-old education); non-recoupment academies and free schools funding; Pupil Premium; music and sport grants; SEND and adoption reform grants; the Early Intervention Grant before 2013-14; and, from 2013-14, the Education Services Grant. The figures provided are in cash terms.

Table A: Revenue funding

Financial year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	£ million	
					Total funding since the start of 2010-11 financial year	
Total revenue funding-Lancashire	860	865	883	898	3,506	

The figures in Table A are not comparable year-on-year for the reasons given as follows:

1. Since May 2010, there have been transfers of funding between DFE and other Government Departments. These were mainly small amounts but the most significant were the Education Services Grant (national total of £1.03 billion), which transferred from DCLG to DFE in 2013-14, and the Early Intervention Grant (national total of £2.3 billion), which transferred from DFE to DCLG in 2013-14, with only a topslice remaining in DFE budgets.

2. DFE has also provided some funding to other Government departments to contribute to programmes that were jointly funded and managed, such as the Child Poverty Programme, administered by DWP.

Table B shows the total capital allocations to Lancashire schools from 2010-11 to 2013-14. Complete information on the Department's capital spending by constituency is not held centrally. The figures provided are in cash terms.

Table B: Capital funding

Financial year						£ million
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Total funding since the start of 2010-11 financial year	
Total capital funding-Lancashire	89	71	68	50		278

The Department provides funding directly to providers of 16-19 education on an academic year basis. Table C shows the total allocations made to post-16 institutions within the constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale during the academic years 2010/11 to 2013/14 by the

DFE and its agencies. 2013/14 was the first year of funding under a new 16-19 funding formula, so figures are not directly comparable to those of previous years. The figures provided are in cash terms.

Table C: 16-19 education

Academic year					£ million
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total funding since the start of 2010-11 academic year
Total 16-19 funding-Morecambe and Lunesdale	11	12	10	11	44

¹ We provide funding for free schools, non-recoupment academies and 16-19 institutions directly and provide funding for music education hubs via Arts Council England.

Pay

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many officials in her Department, of each grade, have remained at that grade since 2010 but received a pay rise; and how much of a rise each such person at each such grade has received. [204768]

Mr Timpson: The following table sets out the number of staff at each grade who have remained at that grade since 2010 and have received a pay rise.

Grade	Number
EA AO	55
EO	197
HEO	211
SEO	214
GRADE 7	227
GRADE 6	83
SCS	36
Total	1,023

The Government announced a pay freeze in 2010 which meant that pay for all Department for Education staff was frozen for two years (2011 and 2012 pay awards) except for those earning less than the full-time equivalent of £21,000. In 2013 and 2014, all staff achieving their objectives have received pay rises averaging 1%. Staff not achieving their objectives and those being managed under formal poor performance measures received no pay rise.

Procurement

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much and what proportion of her Department's budget was spent on activities which were contracted out in (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12, (d) 2012-13 and (e) 2013-14; and how much and what proportion of her Department's budget she expects to be contracted out in 2014-15. [204889]

Mr Timpson: The Department for Education does not hold this information centrally.

School Leaving

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to ensure that young people leave school with a good level of English and mathematics; and if she will make a statement. [205285]

Mr Laws: We are reforming the mathematics and English curriculum and qualifications, raising expectations so that they match the best worldwide. The new national curriculum will match those in the highest-performing education jurisdictions in the world, challenging pupils to realise their potential in an increasingly competitive global market.

At primary level, we have published a more rigorous curriculum with a greater level of demand. In mathematics, children will know their times tables by age nine and calculators will be removed from the test for 11 year olds to ensure that children get a rigorous grounding in mental and written arithmetic. To support schools, we will continue to fund the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics. We also recently announced the establishment of 32 new Maths Hubs, supported with £11 million of funding over the next two years, which will drive up the quality of mathematics education from the early years to age 19.

In the new English national curriculum we have placed a greater focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation, with a new test for 11 year olds. We have strengthened the requirements on learning to read through systematic synthetic phonics, and we have introduced a phonics screening check at age six so that teachers can intervene early to help children catch up.

At secondary level, GCSEs in mathematics and English are also being reformed to be more challenging and give stronger guarantees of numeracy and literacy. We expect schools will increase time spent teaching mathematics—bringing us in line with our international competitors. The recently announced “Progress 8” measure gives double weighting to mathematics and English in performance tables for the first time. For year 7 pupils who have not achieved level 4 at key stage 2 in reading and/or mathematics we will continue to fund the catch-up

premium worth £500 per pupil. This enables secondary schools to deliver additional support, such as individual tuition or intensive support in small groups, for those pupils that most need it.

We are also reforming post-16 education, including A levels in English and mathematics, and have set out our ambition for the majority of young people in England to study mathematics at least to age 18 by 2020. Students without at least a grade C at GCSE in mathematics or English are now required to continue to study the subject. In addition, new core mathematics qualifications are being developed for those students with GCSE grade C or above who do not go on to study A or AS level mathematics.

In addition, we have invested in and reformed initial teacher training to focus on attracting the very best graduates with the right qualities for teaching into the profession through scholarships and bursaries of up to £25,000 in key subjects such as mathematics, and supporting the expansion of the highly-successful Teach First programme.

Schools: Standards

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of primary and secondary schools have had their Ofsted rating lowered since the last assessment in (a) Ashfield constituency, (b) Nottinghamshire and (c) the UK. [205146]

Mr Laws: This question is a matter for Ofsted. I have asked Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, to write to the hon. Member. A copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Teachers: North West

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what changes to the numbers of teachers and teaching assistants there have been in (a) Westmorland and Lonsdale, (b) South Lakeland, (c) Cumbria and (d) the North West (i) since 2010 and (ii) between 2005 and 2010. [204795]

Mr Laws: The information requested for full-time equivalent teachers and teaching assistants in Cumbria and the North West in 2005 to 2010 is published in tables 19 and 26 of the Statistical First Release 'School Workforce In England (including Local Authority level figures) January 2010 (Revised)'. This is published online:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218925/local_20authority_20tables_20sfr112010.xls

The information requested for full-time equivalent teachers, teaching assistants and support staff in 2010 is published in the underlying data file of the Statistical First Release 'School Workforce In England, November 2010 (Provisional)'. This is published online:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-workforce-in-england-november-2010-provisional

The information requested for full-time equivalent teachers, teaching assistants and support staff in 2011 is published in the underlying data file of the Statistical First Release 'School Workforce In England, November 2011'. This is published online:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-workforce-in-england-november-2011

The information requested for full-time equivalent teachers, teaching assistants and support staff in 2012 is published in the underlying data file of the Statistical First Release 'School Workforce In England, November 2012'. This is published online:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-workforce-in-england-november-2012

The information for November 2013 will be published in late July in the underlying data file of the Statistical First Release 'School Workforce In England, November 2013'. This will be published online:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-workforce-in-england-november-2013

District and parliamentary constituency level school workforce numbers are not routinely published. The information requested for Westmorland and Lonsdale and South Lakeland between January 2005 and 2010 and since 2010 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Teachers: Training

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to ensure that skilled mathematics and science graduates are attracted to careers in teaching; and if she will make a statement. [205284]

Mr Laws: The Government is committed to supporting schools in recruiting specialist teachers in mathematics and science. Specific support is provided for individuals interested in teaching these subjects through targeted marketing, personal advisors and securing school experience.

To attract graduates to teaching these subjects, we have significantly increased tax-free bursaries for mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing trainee teachers from £9,000 in 2012/13 to up to £20,000 in 2014/15. In addition, we continue to work jointly with the Institute for Mathematics and its Applications, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics and BCS, the chartered institute for IT, to offer scholarship awards of £25,000 in order to attract the most talented graduates into initial teacher training.

For the academic year 2014/15, we have extended our salaried School Direct training programme to encourage more experienced graduates to enter teacher training across a range of subjects, including mathematics and science. School Direct (salaried) is an employment-based route for high-quality, experienced graduates who earn a salary whilst training.

We are also continuing to fund subject knowledge enhancement courses, which are an important tool to ensure trainee teachers without a first class degree in the subject they will teach have sufficient specialist subject knowledge.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Boilers

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will take steps to encourage the upgrading of (a) oil and (b) liquefied petroleum gas boilers in off-gas grid areas. [204405]

Mr Davey [*holding answer 14 July 2014*]: The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) will continue to fund upgrades of oil and LPG condensing boilers along with other energy efficiency measures for low income and vulnerable households.

DECC has also introduced the domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) to support renewable heating systems, offering off-gas households a way of choosing affordable heating alternatives. The domestic RHI compensates for the additional costs faced when replacing an oil boiler with a renewable heating system.

Training

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many awaydays his Department has held for officials in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date; and what the cost was of each such event. [205292]

Amber Rudd: DECC does not hold central records of away-days and obtaining this information would incur disproportionate cost.

INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY COMMITTEE

ICT

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority how many mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and laptops were lost by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [204809]

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. I have asked IPSA to reply.

Letter from Marcial Boo, July 2014:

As Chief Executive of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking about the loss of IT equipment.

In 2013 and 2014 to date, no mobile telephones, BlackBerrys or laptops were lost by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department will review its decision in 2012 to end its involvement in the Bost Agri project; and if she will make an assessment of any lessons to be learned from that decision and its consequences. [204834]

Justine Greening: There are no plans to review the decision to end DFID's involvement in the Bost Agricultural Park project.

The Bost industrial business park proposal was originally approved by officials in 2009 at a time when Ministers did not approve spend under £40 million.

In 2012 it became clear that the project could no longer be completed within the original timeframe and in good order. To avoid wasting taxpayers' money I decided that UK funding for the project should be cancelled. Ministerial oversight has since been strengthened and all programmes worth over £5 million are signed off by Ministers.

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 11 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 181W, on Afghanistan, on what date in November 2013 her Department completed its move at Bost airfield; and under whose control that airfield now is. [204879]

Justine Greening: DFID's construction work at Bost Airfield was completed in the second half of November 2013.

Bost Airfield is operated by Afghanistan ministries and municipal government.

Commonwealth

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of which Commonwealth countries are most at risk from rising sea levels. [204923]

Lynne Featherstone: Sea level rise assessments are undertaken at a global and regional level by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The 2014 Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) provides the most authoritative recent evidence. It reports with 'high confidence' rises of mean sea-levels of between 0.32m and 0.98m and an increased frequency of storm surges by 2100. AR5 also assesses the impacts of these changes, highlighting the vulnerability of Small Island States and low lying coastal countries, a number of which are Commonwealth countries.

DFID is supporting assessments and programmes in some low income Commonwealth countries to help them prepare for sea-level rise. These include Commonwealth countries such as Samoa, Kiribati, Vanuatu and Tuvalu where over £20 million of UK support is being provided through multilateral funds; and Bangladesh where over £120 million of UK bilateral climate support is being used to help the estimated 78 million people vulnerable to sea-level rise and other impacts of climate change.

Developing Countries: Forests

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding the Government is providing to the World Bank to prevent deforestation; over what period such funding will be provided; and how many hectares of rainforest are being protected from such deforestation. [204921]

Lynne Featherstone: The UK Government is providing £215 million through the World Bank to support a number of interventions that collectively address the drivers of deforestation. These comprise a range of medium to long term initiatives, starting between 2009 and 2013 and due to end between 2020 and 2028.

A number of the programmes are still being established. However, from projects approved so far, 2.5m hectares of forest have been targeted for protection. Some of the projects will also support the livelihoods of those that depend on forests as well as addressing forest protection.

Developing Countries: Private Finance Initiative

Fiona O'Donnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on advising other countries on the use of private finance initiative-type financing models to low-income countries either directly or through the International Finance Corporation. [204825]

Justine Greening: DFID does not have a policy either directly or indirectly of advising countries on the use of private finance initiative-type financing models.

Iraq

Mr Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent steps her Department has made in providing humanitarian aid to the Kurdistan Regional Government in response to the influx of refugees to that area. [204720]

Justine Greening: We are deeply concerned by the escalating humanitarian crisis in Iraq. The UK was the first country to send a team to the region, deploying three DFID experts to Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. DFID announced a package of emergency humanitarian assistance totalling £5 million, which will reach over 140,000 displaced people, or 28% of those affected, with life-saving assistance. We have also offered to provide technical humanitarian assistance to the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what conditions her Department has imposed on the release of development aid for Iraq; and what arrangements she has made for oversight of the distribution of such aid. [204880]

Justine Greening: All UK assistance for Iraq is channelled through organisations that have experience of delivering humanitarian aid in difficult and dangerous places. All partners that receive UK funding must also demonstrate full compliance with humanitarian principles. NGO partners have to be pre-qualified to apply for funding under DFID's Rapid Response Facility, which is the mechanism that we are currently using in Iraq. This process applies a rigorous process of due diligence, where organisations must demonstrate clear and accountable governance structures, with transparent and accountable financial procedures. UN agencies are assured through the Multilateral Aid Review (MAR).

Ministers: Official Cars

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many journeys Ministers of her Department have made using the Government Car Service; and how many such journeys were for the transportation of a red box. [204941]

Lynne Featherstone: The information cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

CABINET OFFICE

Children: Cancer

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the child cancer rate is in each English parliamentary constituency. [205446]

Mr Newmark: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated July 2014:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the child cancer rate is in each English parliamentary constituency. [205446]

Table 1 provides the rate of cancers diagnosed per 100,000 children, for each parliamentary constituency in England. Figures are based on cancers diagnosed from 2002 to 2012 (the latest year available) combined, to provide statistically robust rates.

In line with national and international conventions, children have been defined as persons under the age of 15 at diagnosis. This is consistent with the definition used in ONS cancer survival publications, in which estimates are consistently presented for children (aged 0-14 years) and adults (aged 15-99 years) separately.

A copy of Table 1 has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The latest published figures on cancer incidence in England are available on the National Statistics website at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-302299>

Electronic Government

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the number of copycat websites which charge fees for free Government services. [204723]

Mr Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), gave on 10 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 361W, to the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher).

Pay

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many officials in his Department, of each grade, have remained at that grade since 2010 but received a pay rise; and how much of a rise each such person at each such grade has received; [204762]

(2) how many officials of each grade in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, have remained at that grade since 2010 but received a pay rise; and how much of a rise each such person at each such grade has received. [204767]

Mr Maude: The Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons are integral parts of the Cabinet Office and are included in this reply.

Information about payroll costs and non-consolidated pay awards in the Cabinet Office are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/payroll-costs-and-non-consolidated-pay-data>

Further information about pay costs is also available in the Cabinet Office Annual Report and Accounts and are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/cabinet-office-annual-reports-and-accounts#>

Procurement

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how much and what proportion of (a) his Department's budget and (b) the budget of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was spent for activities which were contracted out in (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12, (d) 2012-13 and (e) 2013-14; and how much and what proportion of his Department's budget he expects to be contracted out in 2014-15; [204983]

(2) how much and what proportion of No. 10 Downing Street's budget was spent on activities which were contracted out in (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12, (d) 2012-13 and (e) 2013-14; and how much and what proportion of No. 10 Downing Street's budget he expects to be contracted out in 2014-15. [205224]

Mr Maude: My Department outsources with Bouygues, Fujitsu (contracts signed under the previous

Administration), with the mutual joint venture MyCSP (signed in 2012) and Shared Services Connected Limited (signed in 2013).

As breakdown by year is:

	£
2009-10	10,370,213
2010-11	12,567,173
2011-12	18,417,184
2012-13	54,189
2013-14	832,189

Departmental resource and capital budgets are published online.

Terminal Illnesses

Liz Kendall: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people were dismissed from employment on incapacity grounds following diagnosis of a terminal health condition in each of the last five years. [204904]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office has no central record of any dismissals from the Department on incapacity grounds following diagnosis of a terminal health condition in the last five years.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 16 July 2014

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
NORTHERN IRELAND	843	NORTHERN IRELAND—continued	
Economy	844	Shared Education.....	850
First World War (Commemorations)	852	Youth Unemployment.....	851
Inward Investment	849		
Saville Inquiry.....	843	PRIME MINISTER	852
Security Situation.....	846	Engagements.....	852

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 16 July 2014

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	71WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	77WS
Qualifications and Curriculum Reform.....	71WS	Justice and Home Affairs Council.....	77WS
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	73WS		
Wood Review (Government Response)	73WS		
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	75WS	TRANSPORT	79WS
NATO Wales Summit	75WS	Rail Franchising.....	79WS

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Wednesday 16 July 2014

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ATTORNEY-GENERAL	677W	DEFENCE—continued	
Children: Prosecutions	677W	Tornado Aircraft.....	687W
Chris Huhne and Vicky Pryce	677W	Unmanned Air Vehicles	687W
Crown Courts	678W		
Crown Prosecution Service.....	677W	EDUCATION	718W
Magistrates' Courts.....	679W	16-19 Bursary Fund	718W
Pay.....	679W	Academies.....	719W
		Carers	719W
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	679W	Children: Abuse	720W
Buildings	679W	Education: Brighton	720W
Directors	680W	Education: Standards.....	722W
Grant Thornton	681W	Employment Schemes: Young People.....	723W
Insolvency Service.....	681W	Free School Meals: Brighton.....	724W
Minimum Wage	681W	Free School Meals: Westmorland.....	724W
Morecambe.....	682W	Free Schools.....	724W
Official Receiver	682W	Local Government Services: Children	725W
Official Receiver: Leeds.....	682W	Morecambe.....	726W
Skilled Workers	683W	Pay.....	727W
		Procurement.....	727W
CABINET OFFICE	734W	School Leaving.....	728W
Children: Cancer	734W	Schools: Standards.....	729W
Electronic Government	734W	Teachers: North West.....	729W
Pay	734W	Teachers: Training.....	730W
Procurement.....	735W		
Terminal Illnesses.....	736W	ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	730W
		Boilers.....	730W
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	683W	Training	731W
Arts: Primary Education	683W		
ICT: East Yorkshire	684W	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL	
Morecambe.....	684W	AFFAIRS	688W
Pay	685W	Agriculture: Technology.....	688W
Public Libraries: West Midlands	685W	Fishing Catches.....	688W
Sports: Morecambe.....	685W	ICT	689W
Sports: Northern Ireland	686W		
		FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	689W
DEFENCE	686W	Albania	689W
Army: Recruitment	686W	Marketing	690W
NATO.....	687W	Rendition	691W

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE—		JUSTICE—continued	
<i>continued</i>		Procurement.....	706W
Sexual Harassment.....	691W	Terminal Illnesses.....	708W
Sri Lanka	692W	Terrorism: Northern Ireland	709W
		Training	710W
HEALTH	692W	NORTHERN IRELAND	710W
Cancer	692W	ICT	710W
Dementia	693W	Youth Unemployment.....	710W
Dentistry.....	693W	PRIME MINISTER	710W
Disability Aids	694W	Unemployment: Young People.....	710W
General Practitioners	694W	SCOTLAND	711W
Ministers: Official Cars	697W	ICT	711W
Morecambe.....	697W	Ministers: Official Cars	711W
NHS: Innovation	697W	TRANSPORT	711W
Pancreatic Cancer	698W	A64	711W
Primary Health Care.....	700W	Carnforth Station.....	711W
Prisons: Mental Health Services.....	700W	Ferries.....	712W
Radiography	700W	ICT	712W
Surgery.....	701W	Ministers: Official Cars	712W
Terminal Illnesses.....	701W	Morecambe.....	713W
Ulipristal Acetate.....	702W	Roads: North West.....	713W
HOME DEPARTMENT	702W	Shipping: Freight	713W
Detention Centres	702W	Tonnage Tax	713W
HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	703W	TREASURY	714W
Clerk of the House.....	703W	Freedom of Information	714W
Data Protection.....	703W	Housing: Scotland	714W
INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY		Infrastructure.....	715W
STANDARDS AUTHORITY COMMITTEE	731W	Mapeley	715W
ICT	731W	Meningitis: Vaccination	715W
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	731W	Money Advice Service.....	716W
Afghanistan	731W	Morecambe.....	716W
Commonwealth	732W	Training	716W
Developing Countries: Forests	732W	UK Trade With EU: Germany.....	717W
Developing Countries: Private Finance Initiative ...	733W	WALES	717W
Iraq.....	733W	Ministers: Official Cars	717W
Ministers: Official Cars	733W	Training	717W
JUSTICE	704W	WORK AND PENSIONS	717W
Government Departments: Freedom of		Ministers: Official Cars	717W
Information	704W	Pensioners: Means-tested Benefits	717W
Prison Accommodation	704W	Schools: Asbestos.....	718W
Prison Service	705W	Universal Credit.....	718W
Prisoners: Gender Recognition	706W		
Prisoners' Release.....	705W		

Members who wish to have the Daily Report of the Debates forwarded to them should give notice at the Vote Office.

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Wednesday 23 July 2014**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

Single copies:

Commons, £5; Lords, £4.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £865; Lords, £600.

LORDS VOLUME INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies:

Commons, £105; Lords, £60 (£100 for a two-volume edition).

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

All prices are inclusive of postage

CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 July 2014

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 843] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Prime Minister

Special Measures Regime [Col. 863]

Statement—(Mr Jeremy Hunt)

Counsellors and Psychotherapists (Regulation) [Col. 882]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Political Party Policy Costings (Office for Budget Responsibility) [Col. 883]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Alison McGovern)—on a Division, agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Retirement of the Clerk of the House [Col. 887]

Motion—(Mr Hague)—agreed to

Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill [Col. 906]

Motion for Second Reading—(Vince Cable)—agreed to
Programme motion—(Gavin Barwell)—on a Division, agreed to

Petitions [Col. 973]

Rail Services (Northern Lincolnshire) [Col. 976]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Employment [Col. 985]

Motion, on a deferred Division, agreed to

Westminster Hall

Ofsted (14 and 17-year-olds) [Col. 257WH]

National Citizen Service [Col. 280WH]

Relocation Scheme (Syrians) [Col. 288WH]

Welfare Reform (Cumbria) [Col. 308WH]

Debates on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 71WS]

Written Answers to Questions [Col. 677W] [see index inside back page]
