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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 21 May 2013

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

HUMBER BRIDGE BILL

Bill read the Third time and passed.

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND TRANSPORT FOR
LONDON (No. 2) BILL [*LORDS*]

Motion made, That the Bill be now considered.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be considered on Tuesday 4 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Judicial Review (Reforms)

1. **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): What recent discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues on the costs and benefits of his reforms to judicial review. [156173]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mrs Helen Grant): The impact assessment of 23 April and the Government response to the consultation clarify the costs and benefits of our reforms, which are intended to tackle delays and reduce the burden, while upholding access to justice.

Caroline Lucas: Figures published by the Minister's Department confirm that the proportion of judicial review applications for planning and environmental cases has remained unchanged since 2005. Does she agree that, rather than facing a culture of so-called meritless judicial review applications, what we actually face is a meritless attack on people's fundamental constitutional rights to challenge unlawful behaviour by public bodies and protect their environment, without a shred of evidence to substantiate the changes she is rolling out?

Mrs Grant: I do not agree with the hon. Lady. Judicial review is a critical check on the power of the state—and it will remain so—but it is also subject to abuse, stifling innovation, frustrating reforms and imposing unnecessary costs on individuals, business and the economy. Our reforms will tackle the burden while maintaining the benefits of the rule of law, access to justice and the right to a fair hearing.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): In welcoming my hon. Friend's remarks, may I urge her to look at other, wider areas where judicial review might be considered to some extent to be supplanting Parliament by interfering with the answerability of Government? I am thinking of some immigration tribunals and areas of the benefits system, where judicial review has been misused.

Mrs Grant: This is an area that we will keep under review. I am very happy to take sensible suggestions from my hon. Friend.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): How can the Minister possibly claim that these changes are not damaging access to justice, when she knows full well that by reducing the possibility of taking cases to judicial review, public authorities and the Executive cannot be held to account by ordinary citizens? Why is she destroying what is so important in our justice system in this country?

Mrs Grant: We believe our proposals strike the right balance. They are proportionate and targeted, and do not restrict access to justice, the rule of law or the right to a fair hearing. Our proposals also encompass a number of safeguards to help vulnerable people.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree with the principle that public power should not be exercised to abrogate fundamental common-law values, at least unless abrogation is required or those concerned are empowered by clear primary legislation? If we have better and clearer primary legislation, we are likely to have less judicial review.

Mrs Grant: I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes an astute and sensible point.

Offending by Probationers

2. **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What steps he plans to take to reduce the number of offences committed by people on probation. [156174]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): On 9 May, I announced "Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform", which sets out how we will transform the way in which we rehabilitate offenders to make progress in driving down reoffending rates. Under our proposals, for the first time in recent history, every offender sentenced to less than 12 months in prison will receive statutory supervision and rehabilitation in the community when they are released from custody. Alongside that, we will open up the market to a diverse mix of providers, freeing them to innovate and paying them by results, so that they focus relentlessly on reducing reoffending.

Jason McCartney: I would like to take this opportunity to praise the innovative work that my local Kirklees probation service is doing to bring down offending rates. Rates in West Yorkshire are down by 10% and in Kirklees the reduction is nearly 17%. I spent time with my local service over the Easter recess. What effect will the extension to a minimum of 12 months' supervision in the community now have?

Chris Grayling: Good work is being done in many parts of our probation service, but overall, rehabilitation is not delivering what we expected it to, and reoffending rates are rising. However, I expect the teams that are delivering excellent work on the ground in our probation service to play an important part in the future that we have unveiled. In many areas, we will see those probation officers forming their own social enterprises and partnerships to deliver a high-quality service to us.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): When I visited the Kirklees probation service, which is based in Huddersfield, I found people who were very demoralised by some of the Government's proposals. They feel that they are undervalued, and I agree with them. The probation service is probably the most effective and efficient part of the criminal justice system. Are not the Government undermining its morale?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is simply not right. The Select Committee found recently that only 25% of the time probation staff spent at work was spent working with offenders—the Committee's Chairman is here today and he will recall this—yet the biggest block of offenders who are likely to reoffend get no support at all. That is why change is necessary.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): We very much support the Government's moves to extend supervision, but they also want private security firms to take responsibility for supervising medium-risk offenders in the community. That would include people who have committed violent and sexual offences. How do the Government plan to ensure that those private security firms have the appropriate skills and training to protect the public?

Chris Grayling: It is a pleasure to see the hon. Lady in her place today. I have begun to forget what the shadow Secretary of State looks like. His team regularly attends these events, but there are some faces missing.

The whole point of what we are trying to do is to address the glaring gap in the system that is leading to reoffending rates that are simply unacceptable. The mechanisms that we are putting in place to manage risk will provide a simple means of transferring offenders from a medium-risk category to a high-risk category if their situation changes and if a risk assessment carried out by the public probation service requires such a transfer. The public probation service will always remain responsible for dealing with the highest-risk offenders.

Mr Speaker: I think that the Secretary of State has ambitions to deliver a public lecture on this subject, but he should preferably not do so in the Chamber today.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that one way of maintaining continuity in the records of ex-offenders under his new regime would be to welcome in-house spin-offs such as those being proposed in Wiltshire? These would involve the existing probation service becoming a separate and private individual organisation.

Chris Grayling: I very much welcome the discussions that are taking place. Support is being provided by the Cabinet Office, including financial support, for those

members of our probation teams who want to set up their own spin-offs, and I would positively encourage them to do so.

Employment and Support Allowance (Appeals)

3. **Sheila Gilmore** (Edinburgh East) (Lab): What progress he has made on improving the feedback from tribunal judges to the Department for Work and Pensions on the reasons for overturning employment and support allowance refusal decisions. [156175]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mrs Helen Grant): The provision of feedback on reasons for tribunals' decisions is always a matter for the judiciary. As the hon. Lady will be aware, new arrangements for this were put in place in July 2012. Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service is continuing to work with the judiciary, the Department for Work and Pensions and the other organisations involved to find ways of improving feedback.

Sheila Gilmore: The problem is that the feedback mechanism, which involves the use of a drop-down menu, is very brief. For example, the reason given for 40% of the overturned decisions was "cogent oral evidence". That does not give decision makers in the DWP any real help in understanding how they can make changes that would result in fewer appeals. Surely it is necessary for the Department, which bears the cost of the appeals, to do something about this.

Mrs Grant: We are continuing to work hard across Government to improve initial decision making, with the ultimate aim of reducing the number of appeals. A new pilot is being considered, and I will be happy to write to the hon. Lady with details of that.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The waiting times for appeal hearings for employment and support allowance claims are far too long. The waiting time at the Leicester venue is now 40 weeks, which is a complete disgrace. What is the Minister going to do to sort this out?

Mrs Grant: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important to deal with these cases in a timely manner. National waiting times for ESA appeals are actually down, from 21.5 weeks in December 2011 to 16.7 weeks in December 2012. The figures are even better in Scotland, but of course more needs to be done.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): That is a very good tie, by the way, Mr Speaker.

Does the Minister agree that so many incorrect first decisions having to be overturned by judges not only causes massive grief for the families concerned but incurs significant additional cost to the taxpayer? That is a double whammy. Surely it is time we got this right.

Mrs Grant: The judiciary provides feedback, which is being considered. In November 2012, over 60% of appeals allowed by tribunals had reasons for the decisions attached. As I indicated in response to the question before last, we are looking at a new pilot, and I will write to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) about it.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The Minister told us earlier about what she views—wrongly in my view—as the exploitation of judicial review. Is it not the case here that poor decisions by Atos are piling work on the tribunals service and therefore costing the public more money? Why does her Department not liaise properly with the Department for Work and Pensions, or is this another case of one arm of the Government not knowing what the other is doing?

Mrs Grant: It is the DWP decision makers who make decisions, but I can tell the hon. Lady that many measures are being put in place to increase capacity and reduce waiting times—

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Such as?

Mrs Grant: The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) says “such as” from a sedentary position. Those measures include recruiting more judges, securing additional venues and more Saturday sittings in addition to striving continually to improve original decision making.

Probation Service

4. **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What the Government’s strategy is on the future of the probation service. [156176]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): As part of our transforming rehabilitation strategy, we will create a new public sector national probation service, which will work to protect the public and build upon the expertise and professionalism already in place. The national probation service will work alongside new contracted rehabilitation providers and, in the future, the skills and expertise of probation professionals will be utilised across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Kate Green: The Government say that private providers will support lower-risk offenders and will be paid by results, but private providers are already saying that they will accept only a small proportion of their fees from the results that they achieve. What is the real risk that providers will take and what proportion of their fee will genuinely be payment by results?

Jeremy Wright: The hon. Lady will understand that in respect of these contracts there will be a requirement for providers to meet the expectations of the courts, so in relation to court orders there will be limited room for manoeuvre as to what is done, and offenders on licence will be expected to meet the requirements of those licences. These contracts could never be 100% payment by results. We will determine the percentage they will put at risk—they will put their own money at risk in this—by consulting all those involved in this business and all those involved in rehabilitation in the future. We will reach the right conclusions; we will work through this with all those involved.

18. [156192] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on his proposals to change the way in which the probation service works, particularly in respect of short-term prisoners. Will he

clarify what the criteria will be to determine whether someone has successfully completed that period of probation?

Jeremy Wright: My hon. Friend puts his finger on one of the big design challenges with which we have had to wrestle in designing this system. It is, of course, important that those providing rehabilitation services should be rewarded for a complete stop in someone’s offending. That is what the public are looking for here. However, we also want to make sure that there are no perverse incentives and that providers will continue to work with those who are difficult to manage and those whose lives are difficult to turn around. We will have a mechanism for payment by results that reflects not just a binary “did they stop offending altogether or did they not” measurement, but one of progress in respect of the number of times someone offends. By combining those two, we think we will get to the right measurement.

Employment of Ex-offenders

5. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What plans he has to assist ex-offenders into employment. [156178]

8. **Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): What plans he has to assist ex-offenders into employment. [156181]

12. **Chris Heaton-Harris** (Daventry) (Con): What plans he has to assist ex-offenders into employment. [156185]

14. **Mary Macleod** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): What plans he has to assist ex-offenders into employment. [156187]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): We have already ensured that prison leavers aged over 18 who claim jobseeker’s allowance on release or shortly afterwards are referred to the Work programme immediately. We have also introduced work in prisons on a much larger scale than before, providing offenders with the real work experiences. Our transforming rehabilitation reforms will see new rehabilitation providers working to tackle the root causes of offending by using innovative approaches such as mentoring and by helping ex-offenders to find housing, training and employment.

Oliver Colvile: Will my hon. Friend tell me what happens to those offenders who are foreign nationals once they have completed their period in prison? Do we deport them and, if not, why not?

Jeremy Wright: We most certainly do seek to deport foreign national offenders, and my hon. Friend will be encouraged to learn that 4,500 or so were deported during the last year for which we have figures. However, we also think it important to remove such offenders while they are still serving their sentences if that is possible, which is why we seek to negotiate compulsory prisoner transfer agreements such as the one that we signed with Albania in January. We are working towards a similar arrangement with Nigeria. We want offenders to leave our shores, during the currency of their sentences

if possible but otherwise immediately thereafter, because the right place for foreign criminals is not in our country but back in their own.

Steve Brine: What involvement does the Minister expect the voluntary and community sector to have, and how does he expect it to dovetail with the Work programme in helping ex-offenders to find stable jobs? More importantly, how does he expect it to work for the purpose of resettlement, which, as we know and as the Select Committee said in its report, plays a major role in diverting people from reoffending?

Jeremy Wright: As my hon. Friend says, and as the Select Committee has made clear, resettlement is hugely important. We agree that the voluntary and community sector can play a major role, and we think it important for that role to begin while offenders are still serving the custodial part of their sentences. The reforms that we have in mind will enable those who are dealing with rehabilitation to make contact with offenders early, and to see them through the prison gates and out into the community. One of the main ways in which we expect them to help offenders to go straight and stay straight is by finding jobs for them to do, for, as we know, keeping a job is one of the best ways of keeping out of crime.

Chris Heaton-Harris: The Minister is doubtless aware of National Grid's young offender programme, under which 80 companies are now delivering training and jobs to those who are heading towards release. Does not a reoffending rate of less than 7% suggest that private providers can play a big part in the rehabilitation revolution?

Jeremy Wright: I certainly think that it demonstrates that a range of different organisations have a significant part to play. I am familiar with what National Grid does, and I know that it does an extremely good job. One of the questions that it has raised with me is whether there are better ways of enabling it to work with offenders in a limited number of prisons. I think that the restructuring of the prison estate that we have in mind, which will ensure that prisoners can be released into the community from only a certain number of prisons, will help it to do even more good work along the lines that my hon. Friend has described.

Mary Macleod: How will the Minister engage ex-offenders in his plans for long-term mentoring even after they have found work? I believe that keeping a job and breaking the cycle of crime is essential to successful rehabilitation.

Jeremy Wright: I agree that mentoring is likely to play a significant part in what providers choose to do in order to turn lives around. I also agree that involving ex-offenders is a good way to start to find the mentors whom we will need. A great deal of very effective mentoring already takes place in prisons, with older and more established prisoners mentoring younger and newer ones. We want that to continue outside the prison gates, so that we can provide the kind of support that my hon. Friend has described.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Dealing with alcohol misuse and dependency is a major problem for many ex-offenders who need to find work.

What discussions is the Minister having with the Department of Health, and indeed with those who are likely to provide probation services in the future, about improving alcohol treatment in prisons and after prisoners have been released?

Jeremy Wright: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that this is a hugely important issue. Given his knowledge of the subject, he will recognise that a consistent approach is also important. As I said a moment ago, the work should start while prisoners are in custody and continue as they go through the prison gates and out into the community, so that supervision and support for those with drug or alcohol problems can be maintained throughout the process to ensure that they do not relapse and go back to their old ways. We will certainly think about how we can engage with not just health service providers but rehabilitation providers, and do so over a longer period.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): Offenders with drug addictions often lead very chaotic lives, and often relapse several times before they secure the help that will enable them to embark on the path towards more a normal lifestyle. They need a great deal of work over a long period, and they are often not directly ready even to start looking for a job. How will the Minister's system of payment by results, and his efforts to get more offenders into work, take account of the work that will need to be done over, perhaps, a number of years?

Jeremy Wright: As the hon. Lady says, this is a difficult and faltering path for many people with serious drug addiction problems. The system that we are designing, however, is based on the central tenet that people should do what works to reduce reoffending, and that those who do so will be rewarded for it. If someone has a major drug problem, it will be necessary for providers to address that in order to ensure that that person does not reoffend. I am confident that they will focus on those issues, and will do what is necessary to turn people's lives around. If what is necessary in the case of a particular individual is getting him off drugs and keeping him off them, I am sure that that is what they will do, but we will need to bring in a number of agencies to work with them.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): In Magilligan prison in my constituency there is a very good scheme preparing prisoners for the outside world and employment, and reducing reoffending rates. What measures can the Minister implement in conjunction with the devolved structures to ensure that such best practice is replicated across the entire United Kingdom?

Jeremy Wright: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question. He will know that I do not have direct responsibility for the prisons in Northern Ireland, but he makes a good point. There will be examples of good practice across other Administrations from which we can learn, and we will certainly seek to do so.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Unfortunately, there is scant evidence in the recent inspection report on Serco and HMP Thameside of rehabilitation. Instead we hear of bad management, gang-related violence, and

prisoners sleeping away the day spending up to 23 hours locked in their cells. We also now have irregularities in the tagging contracts and the sudden resignation of the G4S chief executive. Does the Minister not agree that this is more evidence of why we should be wary of rushing headlong into handing over our probation service to these same companies? A failure repeated outside the relative safety of prison walls would see dangerous offenders walking our streets completely unsupervised.

Jeremy Wright: I think that what there is good evidence of is the need for reform. We need to make sure more work on rehabilitation is going on within prisons, as well as more work through the gate and out into the community. As the hon. Lady well knows, the truth is that there are good and bad reports on private prisons, just as there are good and bad reports on public prisons. We will want to make sure that we do everything we can to engage in rehabilitation while people are in prison. More work in prison will certainly help: 800,000 more hours were worked in prisons last year than the year before. Progress is being made, but there is certainly more to do, hence our reforms, which I hope the hon. Lady will support.

Mr Speaker: We are immensely grateful to the Minister. I feel sure that the Government could with great advantage schedule at some point a full day's debate on the subject.

Youth Justice and Criminal Justice Act 1999

6. **Ann Coffey** (Stockport) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on the implementation of section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Justice Act 1999. [156179]

The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice (Damian Green): The Ministry of Justice is actively looking at the practical issues around implementing section 28 of that Act. Putting victims and witnesses first must be a common goal for everyone working in the criminal justice system. That is why this work has involved us working closely with the judiciary, the police, the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service, and it should be completed shortly.

Ann Coffey: I thank the Minister for his response. One victim of child sexual exploitation was aggressively cross-examined by seven barristers for three weeks in the Telford trial. Another was repeatedly called a liar until she broke down. Justice is not served by bullying vulnerable witnesses already scarred by their experiences. When does the Minister expect to be able to report further on the implementation of section 28, which allows pre-recorded witness evidence and cross-examination outside court, making the trial process less of an ordeal for victims?

Damian Green: I know that the hon. Lady has a long and distinguished record of activity in this area, and I am not asking her to be patient for much longer. As I said in my initial answer, we should come to a decision shortly. This is the last of the Act's measures to protect particularly vulnerable witnesses to be implemented. I entirely share her concern that, within the confines of having trials conducted properly, vulnerable witnesses should receive proper protection.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): We accept that section 28 is not easy to implement, but given the many recent appalling cases involving character assassination and the bullying of vulnerable witnesses, is it not now time to implement, as one measure, the approach proposed by many, including the Advocacy Training Council in its report "Raising the Bar", of introducing compulsory training and certification for barristers in cases of this kind?

Damian Green: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying there are practical difficulties in implementing this. We are looking at a range of measures. He will be aware that our consultation on the victims' code closed only a few days ago, and the Minister for victims, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), will be publishing a response this summer. Obviously, that must align with the witness charter as well. I hope all these things will come to fruition shortly.

Legal Aid

7. **Mrs Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): What the Government's plans are for the future of legal aid. [156180]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): We are consulting on proposed reforms of the legal aid system, as set out in our consultation document, "Transforming Legal Aid", which was published on 9 April. We are seeking views on proposals to ensure that the criminal legal aid system in this country operates more efficiently, that we live within our means, and that we have a system in which the public can have confidence.

Mrs Glendon: What steps is the Minister taking to make publicly available details of the amounts paid by the legal aid authorities to counsel and solicitors and the costs for the preparation of cases prosecuted each year?

Chris Grayling: That information is already available to a degree. It is available to hon. Members and has been published under the Freedom of Information Act. It is very important that at the same time as ensuring we have a proper legal aid system that provides access to justice to all, we ensure that the payments we make are payments we can afford.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): How can Ministers be confident that under their proposals there will be a genuine market and not just a few very large businesses that would have no great incentive to maintain quality once they got a fixed proportion of the business?

Chris Grayling: That is a very important point. First, I have absolutely no intention of ending up with a legal aid market dominated by a small number of very large firms. A central part of the tendering process will involve a quality threshold that ensures that we have the quality of advocacy and litigation support in this country that we need and expect.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State talked about the quality threshold, but his own Department's consultation document

warns against the danger that some advice might go above the quality threshold and therefore be too expensive. What does he have to say to that and how will he ensure that criminals get a proper defence?

Chris Grayling: We must ensure that every defendant, innocent or guilty, has access to a proper defence. We also need a system that is affordable at a time of great financial stringency. Our proposals are designed to find the right balance between those two things.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): The current graduated fee system is clearly broken and is costing a huge amount of money to administer. Will my right hon. Friend look carefully at constructive proposals to streamline the system and improve the system of criminal fees?

Chris Grayling: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. I have been very clear in saying to both barristers and solicitors—to the whole legal profession—that this is a consultation. I have challenges to meet financially, but I am very open to means of improving the current system in a way that makes it affordable while maintaining the quality and effectiveness of provision.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Is it not the case that the Secretary of State intends to award legal aid franchises on the basis of price and not on anything else? That means that the lowest common denominator will prevail and one of the basic founding tenets of the legal aid system, equal access to justice, will be at an end.

Chris Grayling: No, it is not. I have no intention whatsoever of awarding contracts on the basis of price alone.

Sarah Teather (Brent Central) (LD): How will the Government ensure that the proposed residence test does not leave many victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied child immigrants and victims of domestic violence with no access to justice? Is there not a real danger that our attempts to look tough on immigration will leave many vulnerable people without the justice they deserve?

Chris Grayling: Under the new systems we have put in place, the Legal Aid Agency has discretionary funding to deal with the very unexpected cases. However, I do not think that it is unreasonable to say that if someone is going to come to this country and access public support, they should have been here for a period of time and paid taxes before they do so.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): More than 70% of the public, according to a poll in today's papers, think that the Secretary of State's cuts to criminal legal aid will lead to innocent people being convicted. Does he really think that miscarriages of justice are a price worth paying for his mismanagement of the justice budget?

Chris Grayling: I still do not think that the Opposition understand the nature of the financial mess they left behind and what we have to do to balance the books. I also think that the public would expect me to do what I

can to maintain a strong prison system and a strong court system at the same time as having a legal aid system that provides justice while being affordable. That is what we are doing.

Firearms Offences

9. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): How many prison staff have current unspent convictions for firearms offences. [156182]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that over 45,000 personnel records are held by the National Offender Management Service and to determine firearms offences for all staff would involve extracting information from those files at disproportionate cost, but I can reassure him that all new recruits to the service undergo security vetting, and as part of this procedure, checks are made on criminal convictions. Any criminal conviction or caution received by staff or recruits is assessed carefully before a decision on recruitment or continued employment is made.

John Mann: Rebecca Knighton was sacked using fabricated evidence, Steve Casey resigned following the illegal use of CCTV, and now, I understand, a senior manager has been convicted of a firearms offence but not sacked. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the managerial chaos at Ranby prison?

Jeremy Wright: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on the basis of what I know at present about the cases that he has raised, but I will certainly look into them and come back to him as to what we think can best be done.

Ex-service Personnel

10. **Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): What support he provides for ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system. [156183]

The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice (Damian Green): Depending on their individual risks and needs, offenders with a military history are eligible for the full range of NOMS interventions and offender services. Many prisons have a designated support officer for veterans in custody. Often these officers have served in the forces themselves, and they provide support tailored to the experiences that veterans may have had while on active service. Several probation trusts have an equivalent role for support in the community. The MOD has also made its veterans mental health services available to ex-service men and women in custody.

Mr Anderson: Since 2008, 300 veterans have gone through the veterans treatment court system in Buffalo, New York state. Not one has reoffended. That has been so successful that 103 similar courts have been set up across the USA. Will the Minister agree to meet me and others who support this process to see whether there are lessons that we can learn from the USA and adapt for this country?

Damian Green: I would be happy to do that. As I hope the hon. Gentleman will have seen this morning, we are very open to new ideas throughout the criminal justice system, and spreading best practice is the way to reduce reoffending and in this case to help veterans.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Minister, sadly, missed out on an excellent visit that the Secretary of State paid to my constituency recently, when he met offenders who were on the Royal British Legion Industries scheme; they had been through the criminal justice system and are now in work. Although it is essential that a cross-departmental approach is taken to help ex-service personnel re-integrate into society to stop them entering the criminal justice system, it is even more important to do so after they have been through it. What are the Government doing to raise awareness of the schemes that are out there to provide support and help?

Damian Green: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a good point. As I said, spreading information about best practice is extremely important. That is the basis of many of the reforms that we are introducing through the criminal justice system. If she perceives an information gap somewhere, I will be happy to discuss this with the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), who is the Minister with responsibility for veterans and who has significant overall responsibility in this area.

Reoffending

11. **Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce reoffending. [156184]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): We have heard a lot this afternoon about our plans for transforming rehabilitation. It is worth restating to the House what I believe is a crucial part of those reforms: the alignment of the prison service geographically to areas into which people are going to be released, through the creation of a network of resettlement prisons. I think that will make as big a difference to the process as any other part of our reforms.

Yvonne Fovargue: A recent report from the Charities Aid Foundation welcomed the opportunities that payment by results will create for the voluntary sector, but it also warned that many organisations will need support to ensure that they can become credible providers of services on a much larger scale. What help is the Minister putting in place to ease this transition?

Chris Grayling: We are doing two things. First, through the Cabinet Office, which has responsibility for liaison with the voluntary sector, we are putting in place widespread support to help the voluntary sector prepare for this process. We have also put in place a justice data lab, which is designed to allow smaller voluntary sector organisations that have a track record in working with offenders to quantify the impact of their work on rehabilitation so that they can sell a story about what they can do to partners in the bidding process.

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): As one would expect, getting more work into prisons will make a considerable contribution to reducing reoffending. Can the Secretary of State update the House on the progress being made by one3one Solutions?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he did as Justice Minister on improving the availability of work in prisons. It is to his credit that we saw an increase of 800,000 in the number of hours worked in our prisons last year. My hon. Friend the Prisons Minister is building on that work and it is my hope and expectation that we will see that increase continue.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Will there be resettlement prisons for women?

Chris Grayling: There are of course a smaller number of women's prisons, but it is our intention to have the same geographic links between detention and release for women as well.

Probation System

13. **Laura Sandys** (South Thanet) (Con): What recent progress he has made on reform of the probation system. [156186]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): As my hon. Friend knows, on 9 May we published our strategy for transforming rehabilitation. The reforms we set out in that strategy will see new market providers delivering rehabilitation services alongside a single national probation service from autumn 2014.

Laura Sandys: As the Minister knows, there is great concern in the North Thanet and South Thanet constituencies about people on probation being located next door to vulnerable people, and also people with criminal backgrounds. Is this the right location? Should there be more risk assessment of where people on probation are relocated with their rehabilitation programmes?

Jeremy Wright: My hon. Friend knows that risk assessment is always taking place, and it is important that it does so. She knows also that we are looking carefully at the specific circumstances that she raises in the area that she represents, and we will come back to her as soon as we can draw some firmer conclusions.

Legal Aid

15. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What recent representations he has received on the reform of legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [156188]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): My ministerial team and I have met with a number of stakeholders since the launch of our consultation on legal aid reform. Among others, I have met the chair of the Bar Council, the president of the Law Society, members of the senior judiciary, the circuit leaders and a number of solicitors representing Law Society members.

Miss McIntosh: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have heard the same concerns that I have about restricted access to justice. Having started out as a young advocate a number of years ago, may I say that

there is real concern that there will be less access to the profession, particularly for young barristers, with lower fees while they are trying to pay off their student loans?

Chris Grayling: We have taken care with these proposals to put together a package based on our statistical analysis which we think will protect incomes at the lower end of the Bar particularly. It is my intention that where we have to impose changes on the profession, they come through either the reorganisation of businesses or income changes at the top end of the income scale.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): The Justice Secretary knows full well that his plans for price competitive tendering in criminal legal aid are completely opposed by the profession. They are unworkable. Will he now sit down with the chairman of the Criminal Bar Association and discuss a way forward out of this mess?

Chris Grayling: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the principle of price competitive tendering was first proposed in a report commissioned by the last Government eight years ago. We have looked carefully at the best way in which we can deliver better value in our legal aid system, which we have to do to meet financial targets. We will do so in a way that protects the interests of the justice system, but no change is simply not an option.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): I understand the drive to try to save money in this area, but the Justice Secretary will be aware of many of the concerns. Will he look carefully at ideas that have been raised with him such as making more use of frozen assets to pay for cases or dealing with fraud cases more efficiently, to try to reduce the legal aid bill in that way?

Chris Grayling: I have a lot of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says on frozen assets. Of course, they are already used to fund police, the Crown Prosecution Service and victims' services, so this is not an untouched resource. In the Crime and Courts Act 2013, we have taken powers to extend the use of frozen assets, but I do not believe that the amounts of money available are sufficient to make a material difference to our proposals.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): What recent representations has the Secretary of State had from the Department and Minister of Justice in the Northern Ireland Assembly concerning the reform of legal aid?

Chris Grayling: I am not aware that I have received a letter concerning that. I obviously have regular meetings and exchanges with the Northern Ireland Minister. I will come back to the hon. Gentleman if I have received such a representation; I am not aware of having seen it.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Is not a defendant's freedom and ability to instruct a solicitor of their own choosing the fundamental basis of our criminal justice system? Will not these proposals restrict the numbers of corporate entities, with vested interests and conflicts of interests, running prisons, probation services and representing defendants? And if Eddie Stobart gets a contract, why do not the Government go the whole hog, put the magistrates court in the back of the wagon and be done with it?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that that contribution is what I would expect from the Labour party. This is not about creating an opportunity for giant firms. It is about saying to small and medium-sized firms, "You will need to change the way you do things to bring down costs, to share back offices, in a way that enables us to get better value for money for the taxpayer." If Opposition Members really want me to place financial constraints elsewhere in the system, to close courts and to have fewer probation officers, rather than having a more efficient criminal justice system in the legal aid arena, that is their choice. I know which route I am taking.

Drug Addiction in Prisons

16. **Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce drug addiction in prisons. [156189]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): The Government are committed to helping prisoners with a drug dependency to live drug-free lives. We are working with health services to reshape drug treatment in prisons, establish wings in prisons that focus on recovery and abstinence, and connect offenders with community drug recovery services in custody and on release. We are also keen to use our new reforms, particularly the through-the-gate provision and the reconfiguration of the prison estate, to build on that collaboration.

Mr Raab: I thank the Minister for that answer. The Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust estimates that if just 10% of drug-addicted prisoners received abstinence-based rehabilitation, we might be able to save almost half a billion pounds a year. What progress has been made on replacing methadone prescriptions with abstinence programmes in our jails?

Jeremy Wright: I entirely agree that we need to see more abstinence from drugs. My hon. Friend will know that one of the obstacles to proceeding down that path with many drug-addicted offenders is that they stay in prison for a very short period and there is no confidence about what happens when they leave custody. [Interruption.] Our through-the-gate reforms mean that we will be able to move more offenders on to that pathway much more quickly and be confident that they will be supported when they leave custody.

Mr Speaker: We all heard the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) say, "Lock 'em up for longer". If he was worried that his tone was untypically muted, his worry was groundless.

Victims of Crime

20. **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): What the Government's strategy is for victims of crime. [156194]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mrs Helen Grant): For many years victims have felt overlooked and completely unsupported by the criminal justice system. The Government are determined to put that right, which is why we are implementing a range of

reforms that will put victims at the very heart of the criminal justice system, which we say is where they belong.

Stella Creasy: Today we will hear more about the tragic case of Maria Stubbings and how she was dealt with as a victim of domestic violence. Ministers have acknowledged that delays in our courts system disproportionately affect victims of sexual violence. Will they acknowledge that too many female victims in Britain get a raw deal in our criminal justice system, and what do they intend to do about it?

Mrs Grant: I categorically do not agree with what the hon. Lady has said. The Government are absolutely committed to tackling domestic violence and violence against women and girls. We have set up a national taskforce, led by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, to protect children and vulnerable people from sexual violence. We have also opted into the EU directive on combating child sexual exploitation and will continue to do everything we possibly can to ensure that vulnerable people are protected from the devastating crimes that can do serious long-term harm.

Topical Questions

T1. [156198] **Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): I would like briefly to update the House on our proposed changes to the regime in our prisons. I think that the public rightly expect that prisons should be a place of punishment and rehabilitation. For too long prisoners have been handed privileges such as in-cell television, DVDs and association time as a reward for simply keeping out of trouble. That is not just unfair at a time when the rest of the country is doing without; it is a shamefully wasted opportunity. That is why we have announced a major overhaul of our incentives and earned privileges schemes in prisons. We want to see prisoners earning their privileges by working hard to turn their lives around. We have banned certificate-18 DVDs, subscription TV will be removed by the summer, prisoners will in future have a longer working day, and if they behave badly or do not engage with rehabilitation activities they will be stripped of their privileges. That is designed to improve confidence in our prison regime and to encourage positive rehabilitation activities within our prisons.

Grahame M. Morris: I would like to ask the Secretary of State about his plans to privatise the probation service. Following the Olympics security debacle, why does he believe that companies such as G4S are suitable providers to manage low and medium-risk offenders, including prolific burglars, drug-users and those convicted for domestic violence, if they could not manage Olympic security? How will he guarantee public safety?

Chris Grayling: What I want for our probation service is the best of the public, private and voluntary sectors: the public sector has high-quality skills in managing the risk of harm; the private sector can deliver a more

efficient system, so that we can release funds to support those offenders who get no support at the moment; and the voluntary sector has the kind of mentoring skills we so desperately need to help people turn their lives around.

T4. [156201] **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): Our criminal justice system may be the most expensive in the world, perhaps by a factor of two or three times, and yet we continue, as a state, to pay many practitioners several hundreds of thousand pounds a year more than we pay surgeons or scientists. This practice is of course enthusiastically supported by the Bar Council, and apparently by Opposition Front Benchers. Can the Secretary of State confirm that his consultation will at last bring to bear competition and market forces?

Chris Grayling: It certainly brings competition to bear. We are trying to take tough decisions on legal aid in a way that, where possible, impacts on the top end, not the bottom end, of the income scale. That is what we believe in, and I am surprised that Labour Members appear to disagree with us.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State read his interview with the *Law Society Gazette* this week? I would not blame him if he had not, because it is a bit of a car crash. Does he stand by the passages where he says that he has no evidence of a lack of public support for legal aid but has received "lots of letters", where he is "unsure" where £160 million of Department spending has gone, and where he defends taking away a choice of solicitor because "people in our prisons and...courts come from the most difficult and challenged backgrounds" and are not "great connoisseurs of legal skills"?

Chris Grayling: Not surprisingly, I do stand by interviews I give. We are now three years into this Government and Labour Members have no answers to any of the challenges we face. We have big financial issues to deal with and we need to create a system that is affordable. They have no alternative suggestions about how to do that.

Mr Slaughter: The Justice Secretary has one answer: payment by results.

Last Friday, the Justice Secretary was forced to investigate alleged overpayment to G4S and Serco on the tagging contracts. Today the *Financial Times* is reporting that he has suspended outsourcing prison contracts to Serco, Sodexo and Amec. Should not he review all current contracts with the chumocracy of private firms who get the MOJ's shilling, including Capita's disastrous running of the interpreters contract, and should not he suspend plans to hand out another £500 million of probation contracts to more of the cosy cartel?

Chris Grayling: Sometimes Labour Members are breathtaking. I am not going to say much to the House today about the investigation that we are carrying out into the tagging contracts; I will provide that information in due course. I simply say to Opposition Front Benchers that the contracts we are investigating date back to 2005 and were signed and put together by the previous Government.

T9. [156206] **Mr Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): . What can the Secretary of State do the reverse the increase in the compensation culture in the UK?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mrs Helen Grant): Our whiplash consultation closed on 8 March. We looked into the use of independent medical review panels and increasing the small claims compensation threshold. A response to the Government's consultation will be published in autumn this year after the Transport Committee's inquiry into whiplash.

T2. [156199] **Mrs Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): What plans does the Minister have to monitor the banning of referral fees in personal injury matters and to review the payment of referral fees in conveyancing?

Chris Grayling: We have already introduced changes that ban referral fees, and we are looking at other reforms that will tighten up the whole culture that exists around personal injury and similar claims. There is good work in parts of the legal profession in doing genuine work on behalf of genuine claims. However, there are too many question marks in the system. Now that we have made those changes, the challenge is for the insurance industry to bring down policy prices. If it does not do that, we will not hesitate to take action in the other direction.

T10. [156207] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I strongly back the Government's plans to get prisoners to do a full day's work, but how can we make sure that they do not undercut the jobs of other UK workers whose businesses have higher costs than businesses in prisons?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): My hon. Friend is absolutely right; there is a balance to be struck in this respect. We want more prisoners to be working, but we also want to make sure that jobs outside prisons are not unfairly undercut. That is why, as he knows, we have a code of practice that we have recently strengthened to ensure that that does not happen and that, where we can, we bring work in from abroad to be done in our prisons or use work in prison to support contracts that provide work outside the prison gate.

T5. [156202] **Mr William Bain** (Glasgow North East) (Lab): Our criminal justice system is strengthened in its ability to deal with international crime through our co-operation in the EU's justice and home affairs policies. Does the Secretary of State agree that this is another powerful reason why we should remain a full member state of the EU?

Chris Grayling: I believe that we should co-operate fully internationally, not simply in the European Union, but elsewhere, to combat international crime. I do not want this country to become part of a European justice system. That is what divides us.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Chris Huhne and his former wife were released from prison recently after serving just two months of an eight-month sentence. In surveys that I have conducted, an overwhelming majority

of my constituents believe that prisoners should serve their sentences in full. Aside from locking them up for longer, Mr Speaker, will the Secretary of State say how long he thinks people should serve in prison before they are released?

Chris Grayling: On this matter, I have a lot of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. He may have sensed from my recent comments that I am looking closely at this area. I hope to be able to provide further reassurances to him in due course.

T6. [156203] **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he and the Government have no plans to withdraw from the European convention on human rights?

Chris Grayling: It is not the policy of the coalition Government to withdraw from the European convention on human rights. My party is looking at what proposals we want to put to the country at the next general election. The vast majority of the population want changes to our human rights framework. If the Labour party disagrees, I look forward to having that debate.

Mr Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): Further to the Secretary of State's statement about prisons at the start of topical questions, does he agree that far too many drugs are still circulating in prisons? How far is he getting with his zero-tolerance policy, which is aimed at staff and visitors because the drugs are not coming into prisons with the prisoners?

Jeremy Wright: My hon. Friend is right that too many drugs are still coming into prisons, but he will be reassured to know that the rate of positive drug tests is coming down. As he will know, we must also tackle the misuse of prescription medication in jails. We are addressing all those problems to the best of our ability and will continue to do so.

T7. [156204] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): There are some excellent local voluntary sector organisations that have valuable experience of working with offenders. How will Ministers ensure that small organisations with expertise are not shut out from rehabilitation work, while a handful of large private sector companies with little experience but deep pockets stitch it up?

Jeremy Wright: The answer to the hon. Lady's question has two parts. First, when we assess the bids for rehabilitation work, the bidders must demonstrate that they will support smaller organisations to carry out the work with them. Secondly, there must be contract management to ensure that as the contracts proceed, the smaller organisations are looked after and have a sustainable future. We will do both those things.

Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con): In common, I am sure, with colleagues across the House, I am dealing with the case of a chaotic, long-term drug addicted prisoner who has been in and out of the revolving door of prison. I could not be more supportive of the Government's rehabilitation revolution. However, before anybody will take that person on, he has to demonstrate behaviour that, being chaotic and addicted, it is very

hard for him to demonstrate. It seems to me that that is a small gap in the new arrangements. Will the Minister meet me to talk about how we can bridge that gap and get people to the stage where they can take advantage of the new arrangements?

Jeremy Wright: I am very happy to discuss that matter further with my hon. Friend. I hope that she will be reassured that all offenders who leave custody or receive a community order will be allocated to a provider and will be expected to undergo whatever rehabilitation is appropriate.

T8. [156205] **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I welcome the extension of supervision to short-term prisoners, but I am concerned that Ministers continue to refuse to give an estimated additional cost for that provision, claiming that it depends on competition. Ministers must have made an estimate for the fixed fee that will be paid up front before any bonus for success. Will the Minister say what the fixed fee is likely to cost?

Jeremy Wright: I understand why the right hon. Gentleman finds our position frustrating, but we cannot give a specific figure because it depends entirely on what price the bidders tell us they can do it for. I can tell him that the cost of providing for the additional 50,000 offenders will be covered by the savings that we make through competition. Opposition Members who dislike the idea of competition in this field must tell us whether they support the extension of the provision to short-term offenders. If they would not pay for it through competition, how would they pay for it?

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what he considers to be the most intolerable aspects of the United Kingdom's current relationship with the European Union?

Chris Grayling *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I remind the Secretary of State that answers to topical questions must be brief?

Chris Grayling: Given that I do not have the time at the Dispatch Box that I might choose to discuss the matter, I would simply say that the European Commission's recent decision to publish a justice scorecard assessing justice systems across Europe, and making recommendations for their improvement, is one that this country neither welcomes nor intends to co-operate with.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact on miscarriages of justice of his proposals on criminal legal aid?

Chris Grayling: I am very confident that what we are doing, which involves encouraging the litigation part of our system to operate more efficiently and making changes to the top end of the income scale for the Bar, but also protecting incomes for the junior Bar, will be the best way of delivering an effective balance between proper justice and something that is affordable to the taxpayer.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is the latest number of foreign national offenders in our prisons, and what progress is being made on sending them back to secure detention in their own countries?

Jeremy Wright: Off the top of my head I think there are about 10,300 in our prisons at the moment. We are making progress, as I explained earlier, not only with individual compulsory prisoner transfer agreements such as the one that we have already negotiated with Albania, but with more effective use of the European Union prisoner transfer agreement. Something like 200 cases under that agreement are currently being considered for deportation by the Home Office.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): A Bar Council and ComRes poll published this morning shows that more than 70% of the British public are concerned that the legal aid cuts will result in injustice, and lawyers in Newcastle believe that they will increase costs to the taxpayer. Will the Secretary of State meet me and a delegation from Newcastle to listen to concerns on that vital issue?

Chris Grayling: I have already met a number of lawyers from the north-east and Newcastle, and I will listen to all the representations that I receive to try to get this as right as I possibly can. However, the hon. Lady should not believe, and no one in the House should believe, that the Administration can avoid difficult financial decisions. I am trying to take those decisions in the way that provides the best balance between justice and value for the taxpayer, and that is what I will continue to do.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): There seem to be ways of both making substantial savings and providing a better service and improving the way in which the courts operate, particularly by using more digital information so that documents do not get lost and fail to arrive in court at the correct time. What work has the Ministry of Justice been doing to try to achieve that?

The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice (Damian Green): I completely agree with my hon. Friend that the digitisation of the whole criminal justice process, not just in the courts but including the police, is absolutely essential to ensuring not only that we continue to provide proper justice but that we do so more speedily and efficiently. A huge amount of work is going on inside the Department, and announcements will be made.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Ministry of Justice estimates that approximately 60% to 90% of young offenders have communication needs. What is it doing to increase speech and language therapy services in young offenders institutions?

Jeremy Wright: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that that is a significant problem among young offenders both inside and outside custody. She may know that the comprehensive health assessment tool is currently used to identify those problems as early as we can, so that we can do something about them. As she knows, we believe that it is important to have a greater focus on education for all young offenders in how we structure the secure

custodial estate for young offenders, and we are looking at that carefully having just closed a consultation on it.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on progress towards criminalising squatting in commercial premises?

Chris Grayling: We are looking seriously at the matter, which is one for Members of all parties to consider. If any hon. Member has experience of it in their constituency, we would like to hear about it, including the impact that it has had on businesses. We in the House have perhaps more awareness than anybody else about what is happening on the ground, and I would like to hear from hon. Members about it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I was going to call the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), but she has been perambulating around the Chamber and I had lost sight of her. If she wishes to ask a question, her time is now.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. I was going to ask the Secretary of State about legal aid. A vulnerable constituent of mine was charged on four separate occasions, and her solicitor, whom she appointed, was able to

support her throughout. That ability is under threat from the legal aid proposals. Why is the Secretary of State proposing restrictions on access to legal aid for the vulnerable and those who cannot afford to pay?

Chris Grayling: I am not proposing that access to legal aid for the vulnerable be removed. Every person brought before a court or into a police station, and every person charged with an offence, will have access to legal aid for a defence unless they have sufficient means to pay for it themselves.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Given that a third of prison suicides take place in the first week, what risk assessment have the Government made of the changes to the regime in the first two weeks?

Jeremy Wright: As the right hon. Gentleman knows from his previous ministerial experience, risk assessments are made for every prisoner when they arrive in prison. The changes we have announced to the prison regime are about ensuring that prisoners understand at the earliest possible stage that if they comply with the regime and engage with rehabilitation, they will be able to earn privileges. If they do not, they will not, but that does not affect the risk assessment process. I also point out that where there are exceptional reasons due to a particular vulnerability, governors have discretion not to apply those provisions.

A and E Departments

12.35 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on what evidence he has to show how his plans to change GP services will solve the current crisis in accident and emergency departments.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): A and E departments are under great pressure, and the whole House will want to pay tribute to the thousands of doctors, nurses and health care assistants who work extraordinary hours in very challenging conditions. They are there for us when we need them, and we owe them a great debt.

More than 1 million more people visit A and E every year compared with just three years ago—those are additional numbers—and the simple fact is that if growth continues at that rate it will be unsustainable. It also means that when there are short-term pressures on the system, such as a very cold winter, teething problems with NHS 111 or bank holidays, the system cannot cope as well as it needs to and the quality of care is affected.

Let us be clear: A and Es are currently hitting the 95% target. The latest figures show that 96.3% of patients are seen within four hours, and people are waiting on average 55 minutes for treatment. However, if A and E services are to be sustainable, we need both short-term and long-term measures to address the underlying causes of the pressure they are under.

Last week, NHS England announced that it would change the basis on which tariff money for certain A and E cases is spent. For the first time, hospitals will have a say in how money is spent to alleviate demand when that money is withheld for numbers exceeding the 2009 baseline. We also need to address more fundamental issues, which is why I announced to the House on 13 May that the Government will publish in the autumn a vulnerable older people's plan that will tackle those long-term underlying causes of pressure in our A and Es, particularly for the frail elderly who are the heart of many of the issues we face in both quality of care and service performance.

The changes the Labour Government made to the GP contract took responsibility for out-of-hours care away from GPs. [*Interruption.*] Labour Members may not like to hear the facts about the consequences of those changes, but let us go through them—they asked the question. Since those changes, 90% of GPs have opted out of providing out-of-hours care, and they got a pay rise in addition. As a result of those disastrous changes to the GP contract, we have seen a significant rise in attendances at A and E—4 million more people are using A and E every year than when the contract was changed. As researchers from the university of Nottingham found, to give just one example, a reduction in out-of-hours services provided by patients' usual family doctors is a direct cause of increased A and E attendance by children.

There are other issues too, including the lack of integration with social care, and vulnerable patients being discharged from hospital with no one co-ordinating proper health and social care to support them in their own homes.

That lack of integration was something else that the previous Government failed to address over 13 long years.

Then there are the problems inside A and E departments caused by the disastrous failure of Labour's IT contract. When people are admitted to A and E departments, the departments are unable to see their medical records, which could have an enormous impact—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. First of all, the Secretary of State should not have to shout to be heard. Secondly, the more heckling there is, the slower progress tends to be. I want to accommodate colleagues, but as a matter both of courtesy and of practicality the Secretary of State should be heard in silence.

Mr Hunt: We will address those problems inside A and Es and the system-wide issues. It is not all about the GP contract, but that is a significant part of it, because confidence in primary care alternatives is a key driver in decisions on whether to go to A and E. We will take responsibility for sorting out those problems, but the Labour party must take responsibility for creating a number of them.

Andy Burnham: The Secretary of State could brief the newspapers last night, but he could not give a straight answer to my question today. He has not outlined his plans to change GP services.

The facts are that A and Es are under severe pressure and people are waiting hours on trolleys in corridors or in the back of queuing ambulances to be seen. Last week, a third of major A and Es missed the Government's lowered targets—some were seriously adrift. At University Hospitals of Leicester, 78% of patients were seen within four hours. Seventy-nine per cent. of patients were seen within four hours in Portsmouth. Things have taken a more serious turn today, with news that 20 senior A and E doctors say they are unable to guarantee patient safety.

For weeks, the Opposition have warned the Secretary of State to get a grip. His only substantive response was to tour the TV studios to blame the 2004 GP contract. We today read that his answer is yet another costly NHS reorganisation, this time of GP services. Where is the evidence to support his contention that that will solve the A and E crisis? Why did he not outline his plans to the House—he has already given the news to newspapers?

This morning, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation told the Select Committee on Health that there is no link between today's pressures on A and E and the 2004 contract, echoing expert analysis from the King's Fund. If the GP contract is the root cause, as the Secretary of State claims, will he explain why 98% of people were seen within four hours in 2009, five years after the contract was signed? That figure has deteriorated sharply under his Government, and mainly on his watch. Major A and Es have missed the target in 33 of the 35 weeks when he has been Health Secretary. His complacency is dangerous. Is it not time he stopped blaming GPs to divert attention from a mess of the Government's own making and addressed the real causes?

Two weeks ago, NHS England told the Secretary of State what those causes were. He needs to provide convincing answers on each. What steps is he taking to

[*Andy Burnham*]

prevent the collapse of adult social care in England? What is he doing to ensure that all A and Es in England have enough doctors and nurses to provide safe care? Will he update the House on the status of his plans to cobble together a £400 million A and E crisis fund, news of which was leaked a fortnight ago? Will he halt the closure of NHS walk-in centres and personally review all planned A and E closures? What is he doing to sort of the failing 111 service? Did he not speed up implementation against official advice?

The truth is that this is a mess of the Government's own making. It will not be solved by the Secretary of State's spin or by blaming GPs. He has been found playing politics when he should be dealing with the real causes of today's chaos. Faced with a real crisis, he has been found wanting. He needs to cut the spin and get a grip.

Mr Hunt: What the right hon. Gentleman says would have some credibility if he looked at the facts. Fact: under this Government, we hit the A and E target for last year. Fact: Wales, where Labour is in control, has not hit the A and E target since 2009.

Andy Burnham: Forget Wales!

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman says, "Forget Wales," but why has he never once been prepared to condemn the appalling failures in A and E in Wales, caused by the Welsh Labour Government's decision to cut NHS spending by 8%? What he says would have some credibility were he at least prepared to condemn what has happened in Wales, but he never does.

The right hon. Gentleman asks for the evidence, and I will tell him. Patrick Cadigan of the Royal College of Physicians says that the pressures on A and E are caused because many people assume that, after 5 pm, the lights in the NHS go out everywhere except A and E departments—a direct consequence of those disastrous 2004 changes to the contract. Nottingham university conducted an independent study, and last year's GP patient survey found that only 58% of patients know how to contact their local out-of-hours service, 20% find it difficult to contact their out-of-hours service, and 37% feel that the service is too slow—problems that we are trying to address. Perhaps he should visit some A and E departments and talk to consultants, doctors and nurses, because they will tell him that the changes to the GP contract, which he says have nothing to do with the pressures on A and E, have had a huge and devastating impact.

He talks about taking responsibility for these problems. Let us see if he is prepared to take responsibility. Is he prepared to take responsibility for the target-at-any-cost culture in some parts of the NHS under Labour, which led to the disaster of Mid-Staffs? Is he prepared to take responsibility for the IT failures that mean that A and E departments cannot access GP records? Will he nod his head if he is prepared to take responsibility? [*Interruption.*] He is not prepared. Is he prepared to take responsibility—

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us get this back on track. There are two very simple points: first, those on the Opposition Front Bench should not be yelling at the

Secretary of State; secondly, for the avoidance of doubt, the responsibility of the Secretary of State is to answer questions, not ask them.

Mr Hunt: I was answering, in a questioning way, the issue of—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have told the Secretary of State what the position is. It is not for argument or debate. His responsibility is to get on with answering in the way the House of Commons expects.

Mr Hunt: And I would always seek to do so, Mr Speaker.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman constantly seeks to run down the performance of the NHS. Where is the recognition of the outstanding performance of the NHS under this Government: the fact that under this Government 400,000 more operations are happening every year than under Labour; the fact that the number of people waiting for more than a year for an operation has gone down from 18,000 under Labour to less than 1,000 under this Government; the fact that MSRA rates have been halved; and the fact that mixed-sex wards have nearly been eliminated? We will stick up for the great achievements of our NHS and we will not allow people to run it down. However, we will also tackle problems honestly and ensure that we address crises, many of which were caused by the previous Government.

Mr Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that patients seeking urgent care will go to that part of the health service where the lights are on, and that the failure of the Opposition, over 13 years, to create genuinely integrated emergency care is the fruit we are now harvesting?

Mr Hunt: As ever, my right hon. Friend speaks with great wisdom. When it comes to the frail elderly, the key is to have a system that heads off problems before they arrive so that people do not find that they end up having to be rushed into A and E in the middle of the night. That can often be the very worst place for someone with advanced dementia or any condition that makes them extremely fragile and vulnerable. We need to integrate systems properly, and that did not happen under the previous Government. One of the key work streams of the vulnerable older people's plan will be to look at barriers to integration, particularly the barriers to joint commissioning of social care and health. We intend to make good progress on that front.

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that when NHS Direct was operating, nurses had the professional competence to decide not to refer people to A and E, and to provide reassuring advice? They have been replaced by call handlers who, understandably, opt to send people to A and E because they have neither the professional competence nor the professional confidence to do anything else?

Mr Hunt: I agree that there have been teething problems with 111 and we are addressing those problems. [*HON. MEMBERS:* "Teething problems?"] There is laughter on the Opposition Benches. We are hitting our A and E targets at the moment, and 111 is available in more than

90% of the country. We are dealing with those teething issues, but I take on board the right hon. Gentleman's point. The 111 service needs to be quicker at getting advice to people from a GP or a nurse. The fundamental issue with 111 is that giving the public an easy number to remember has highlighted how inaccessible GP out-of-hours services have become. We have to address that if we are to restore public confidence in 111.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): If someone cannot get an appointment with their family doctor, they are undoubtedly more likely to end up in A and E, but does the Secretary of State agree that we will not increase capacity in primary care unless we address the work force shortage in general practice and broaden the skill mix of those who can see people in primary care?

Mr Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. Under this Government, we have 6,000 more doctors than we had under Labour, but we need more people going into general practice as well. *[Interruption.]* Yes, the training might have started under the Labour Government, but the funding happened under this Government, and it would not be possible if we cut the budget, which is what the Labour party still wants to do. She is right to point out those issues, however. One way of making general practice more attractive is to restore the personal link between GPs and the people on their list and a sense of personal responsibility and accountability. We need to find the right way of doing that, given the pressures on general practice at the moment, and I hope to work with her and many others to do that.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): May I tell this complacent Secretary of State that in 28 out of the last 30 weeks Southampton general hospital has missed the waiting time A and E target? In the week beginning 7 April, only six out of 10 patients were seen within four hours. It is clear that this is a crisis of the whole health system. Given that in the last six months his own specialist advisers have praised the Southampton health economy for the role that primary care has played in reducing pressures on A and E, will he think again before simply blaming one group of doctors for a problem that runs right through the health system and into social care?

Mr Hunt: I am not blaming any doctors; I am blaming the Labour party for making disastrous decisions in office. We are addressing the issues that his party failed to address. If Southampton is not meeting its A and E targets, that is unacceptable. We are talking to all the hospitals struggling to meet those targets, but they all say—I am sure that people in Southampton would say this as well—that we need to look at the fundamental issues, which are barriers between the health and social care systems, poor primary care alternatives and problems inside hospitals with how A and E is handled. We are addressing all those issues.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Better co-ordination of ambulance trusts and A and E departments is essential, but it will not happen by accident. Are we not now missing the strategic health authorities, given that ambulances are being sent to units already working at full capacity?

Mr Hunt: By getting rid of the layers of bureaucracy we had with strategic health authorities and primary care trusts—a brave and important decision made by my predecessor—we have been able to invest in more front-line staff. The NHS is doing much more, in terms of the number of operations, outpatient appointments and people being seen by A and E, because we are investing in the front line, but it is the responsibility of the new clinical commissioning groups to ensure proper co-ordination, and I would expect them to do that.

Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): The Secretary of State attributes the current crisis in A and E in part to a contract that doctors signed back in 2004 and the fact that large parts of the NHS turn off the lights at 5 pm or 6 pm, which they have done for 60 years. Is there anything for which this Government have been responsible in the NHS since 2010?

Mr Hunt: Yes, we have been responsible for a huge increase in performance, many more people being operated on, the virtual elimination of mixed-sex wards, MRSA rates being halved, more operations than ever before, more outpatient operations than ever before and more GP appointments than ever before.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): I am struck by the fact that no mention has yet been made of the drivers of the reported chaos in A and E and the pressures on primary care out of hours. What of ageing? What of obesity? What of the changes in behaviour, the absence of stoicism, the increase in medical technology costs? Whatever the system that either the Government or the Opposition talk about, it will come under pressure. When will we have some reality in this Chamber about the causes of this problem, because the sooner we have, the better we will all be?

Mr Hunt: I recognise my hon. Friend's clinical background. When I talk to clinicians in A and E wards, they tell me that the long-term drivers of the pressures they are under are an increase in the number of older people and an increase in the acuteness of the conditions of people coming through the doors. That is why at the heart of our long-term solution is a vulnerable older people's plan that ensures we look after them with the dignity, compassion and respect they deserve.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): Why does the Secretary of State not increase access to primary care during normal working hours by reintroducing the requirement on primary care services to see patients within 48 hours, as happened under the Labour Government?

Mr Hunt: That target led to many problems, as the hon. Lady well knows. She might remember, from the 2005 general election campaign, the issues of people being denied appointments for three, four or five days because GP surgeries were being paid to meet specific 48-hour appointments. That is one issue. Too often, if people call GPs for an appointment, they are told that the earliest they can have one is in two, three or four weeks, which makes them think, "What are my alternatives?" and leads them into A and E. We must

[*Mr Jeremy Hunt*]

think about how we can change that and alter the incentives in GP contracts so that they can give the kind of service to their lists they would like to.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Do I need to remind my right hon. Friend that the outgoing Labour Government in 2010 left a note on the desk of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury saying, “There’s no money left”? Is not the challenge the need to make the NHS work on more or less flat funding—though we are doing our best to increase it—while dealing with huge increases in demand? Is not the only answer to do more in the general practice setting, where it can be done more responsibly, more local to patients’ needs and more cheaply, in order to take the pressure off A and E services?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks extremely wisely. We must do just that, particularly for the frail elderly, people with long-term complex conditions, because they are the people for whom an A and E department can be a bewildering place, especially if it knows nothing about them and cannot access their medical records. Prevention is far better than cure, and I agree that that is one way of doing it.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): The Secretary of State advises us to visit A and E departments. Were he to visit the one in the excellent Ealing hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), he would see the grotesque, confusing and expensive sight of a spatchcocked urgent care centre next to an A and E department, one acting as a gateway for the other. It is confusing, divisive and expensive. Is he entirely comfortable with this concept?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We have failed as an NHS to give the public confidence in there being anything between an A and E department and a GP surgery. Whether they are urgent care centres or other centres, the public do not have that confidence and do not understand their role. We need other things, besides those two extremes, and to do a better job of informing the public about how they work. That is part of the reason for reforming primary care.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): May I invite my right hon. Friend to visit Frimley Park hospital, which serves his constituents and mine? I went there on Friday and saw the magnificent new A and E facilities in which it has invested. Yes, it has been under pressure in the past year or so, but it has managed and the out-of-hours service is being provided by GPs. I encourage him to come and see what a magnificent service is provided. Its excellent chief executive, Andrew Morris, raised with me the question of the tariff. Will my right hon. Friend explain a bit more his proposals to recompense hospitals such as Frimley Park, which are doing a fantastic job in A and E, for the additional burden they have had to assume?

Mr Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend: Frimley Park is a terrific hospital and Andrew Morris a first-class chief executive. In fact, I am visiting Frimley Park in the next month and I will certainly have that discussion

with him. My hon. Friend is right that one issue that A and E departments frequently raise is the tariff and the fact that they get paid only 30% of it for any A and E admissions over the 2009 baseline. That was why NHS England announced an important change a few weeks ago. Previously, hospitals had no say over how the money that is withheld from them is spent—it is meant to be used to reduce demand. We are now setting up urgent care boards, and hospitals will have a seat round the table to ensure that the money is spent in a way that reduces pressures on their A and E departments.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State say how the numbers attending A and E in south-west London will be reduced by the closure of St Helier hospital’s A and E department, which saw 80,000 people last year?

Mr Hunt: I have not seen any plans for the closure of St Helier. I know that NHS London is looking at possibilities to improve services in those areas, but, as the hon. Lady will know and should take comfort from, if a major reconfiguration is proposed and then referred to the Secretary of State by the local overview and scrutiny committee, I will not approve the change unless I am convinced that it will improve patient care.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we could make better use of the ambulance service and that if we had more fully trained ambulance men who could assess whether a patient needed to go to hospital, we could reduce A and E admissions that way?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the importance of the ambulance service, which is also feeling the pressure on A and E departments. We need to help the ambulance service to do its job better too. One thing that it always strikes me would make a huge difference to ambulance services is if staff could access the GP records of someone they were picking up on a 999 call, so that they would know that the patient was a diabetic with mild dementia and a heart condition, for instance. That kind of information can be incredibly helpful. I hope that by sorting out the IT issues with which the last Government struggled, we can help ambulance services to do that.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The Select Committee on Health heard evidence today from the College of Emergency Medicine about a 50% shortfall in trainee doctors and consultants. On average, trusts—I was going to say PCTs—spend £500,000 on locums. What does the Secretary of State intend to do about that?

Mr Hunt: We certainly intend to address A and E departments’ recruitment issues, which I recognise are one of the causes of the pressure. Over-reliance on locum doctors is not a long-term solution to improving the performance of A and E departments either, so those are both areas that we will be looking at.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The Government—Governments generally—cannot legislate to predict or control accidents or genuine emergencies, but they can direct resources. Hospital bed numbers have been cut by about 30% in the last 10 years. Does my right hon.

Friend agree that it is difficult for A and E departments to function effectively if they do not have adequate bed capacity behind them?

Mr Hunt: I do agree, but what hospitals say is that the issue is not the number of beds, but the people in them who are not being properly discharged into the social care system. I was at King's College hospital last week, where I was told that the hospital had probably two wards full of people who could be discharged into the social care system but had not been. Breaking down those barriers—something that I am afraid the last Government did not get round to doing in 13 years—will be an important priority.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The A and E department at Wolverhampton's New Cross hospital recently saw a record 365 patients in one day. Those pressures will increase with the downgrading of Mid Staffordshire hospital. Does the Secretary of State agree that it will be deeply unfair to patients in both Wolverhampton and Staffordshire if the added burden on Wolverhampton's New Cross A and E department is not met with increased resources from him, in terms of size and staff, to cope with the increased pressures?

Mr Hunt: We have not had the final recommendation from the special administrator appointed by Monitor for what will happen at Mid Staffordshire hospital, but we will make absolutely sure that any changes made improve patient safety and care.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the new role that GPs will play in commissioning will greatly assist the production of better community services and more integration with social care, all of which has been championed so frequently by the King's Fund?

Mr Hunt: I completely agree with that. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley) for piloting those important reforms through the health service. I just hope that the Labour party, which claimed to support practice-based, clinically led commissioning, will see the error of its ways and understand that proper clinical commissioning holds the key to solving many of these problems.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): One of the concerns raised with me is about the lack of commissioning of community services to help patients to be discharged from hospital, which has a knock-on effect on A and E and queuing ambulances. Is not the reality that, as health professionals tell me, the lack of community services, which is what causes the problem in A and E, is a direct result of this Government's reorganisation?

Mr Hunt: Quite the opposite: the changes introduced by my predecessor make it possible to have truly joint commissioning between clinical commissioning groups and local authorities, which are responsible for social care. I hope that will deal precisely with the problems the hon. Gentleman talks about. That is what we have to encourage and facilitate in every way we can.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): One million more patients a year are going through A and E departments and an increasing number of family doctors are progressively opting out of out-of-hours care. Why does the Secretary of State think that the King's Fund can see the correlation but the Labour party cannot?

Mr Hunt: Because, I am afraid, the Labour party is completely failing to take responsibility for some catastrophically bad decisions that it made when it was in power. Labour Members might want to talk not only to people such as the King's Fund, but to their own constituents, who say that traditional family doctoring is something they would like to see return.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): How does the decision to close the A and E unit at King George hospital in Ilford, which was taken by the Secretary of State's predecessor, who is sitting next to him, and confirmed by him recently, help to take the pressure off Queen's hospital in Romford?

Mr Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the decision has been taken, but the A and E department has not been closed and will not be closed until it is clinically safe to do so.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): The last Labour Government closed accident and emergency at Crawley hospital, but in the last few years the urgent treatment centre has been able to see more and more patients. Does my right hon. Friend agree that upskilling urgent treatment centres is part of the answer to the problem?

Mr Hunt: I do, and my hon. Friend is right to point out that the last Labour Government closed or downgraded 12 A and E departments. The Opposition have criticised us in the press—indeed, the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed), who is sitting on the Front Bench, has criticised me for not getting on and closing more A and E departments, which is what he seems to want to happen. Every time there has been a controversial reconfiguration, Labour has opposed it all the way. I think we could expect a bit more consistency from a shadow Secretary of State who was once a Health Secretary.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): About eight weeks ago, the Secretary of State made a commitment to refer the decision to close four out of nine A and E departments in north-west London. Can he tell the House why he has not kept his word?

Mr Hunt: It is a very important, complex and difficult decision, so I thought it was right to get independent advice from the Independent Reconfiguration Panel, and that is what I have done.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): There is a general acknowledgement and recognition that one of the problems for A and E departments, particularly at night and on weekends and bank holidays, is people going to them who do not need to. Does my right hon. Friend think there is scope for the new clinical commissioning groups to commission primary triage at the entrance of A and E departments, so that those who need only primary care treatment are directed towards to it, and those who need A and E treatment go through to A and E?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that that actually happens in many places throughout the country, but we need to go even further. When it comes to the most frail, vulnerable older people, we need to commission services in a way that ensures that someone outside hospital knows what is happening with them the whole time, is accountable for their care and treatment, and can pre-empt the need to seek emergency care in the middle of the night. That will be the key to ensuring that the pressures on A and E are sustainable.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Today, the Health Committee today heard that this Government's cuts to social care were a direct cause of increased A and E attendances: patients cannot be returned home on time, and all the services that used to keep people well have been cut. This Government cut local authority budgets, resulting in £2 billion going out of adult social care. Will the Health Secretary now accept what the experts are telling us on the Health Committee: that that is the direct cause of the increased A and E attendances?

Mr Hunt: Once again, the Labour party opposes every single cut made by this Government then tries to pretend that it is serious about getting the deficit under control. On this point, I remind the hon. Lady that the NHS is giving £7.2 billion of support to the social care system for health-related needs, precisely in order to ensure that services are not compromised. Where they have been compromised, we are looking into it and we are disappointed about it, but we continue to monitor the situation and to urge local authorities to ensure that they discharge their responsibilities properly.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) said, we cannot divorce emergency care from the provision of acute beds. The Secretary of State mentioned the fact that an increasing number of patients with acute illnesses are going into hospital. May I urge him to look carefully at any proposals to reduce the number of acute beds anywhere in the country, because I believe that we shall need them all?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I commend him for the extremely responsible and committed way in which he has been keeping an eye on what is happening in his local hospital. He is absolutely right to suggest that, before implementing any big reconfiguration, we need to be certain that what we are doing will improve patient care and not damage it. I will continue to ensure that that is the case.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): We know that walk-in centres alleviate the pressure on A and Es. How many walk-in centres have shut since May 2010?

Mr Hunt: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that many more walk-in centres would be shut if we had to cut the NHS budget, which is what the Labour party wants to do.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): The issue of out-of-hours care and the additional pressure on A and E has been present in Suffolk since before the election. Just last Friday, I was in Felixstowe to meet the

four patient participation groups there, and yet again out-of-hours care was identified as a real problem. I welcome the reforms that might be announced later this week, but can we ensure that patients realise that we are on their side and that we want them to be back with their family doctor?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. It is extraordinary that in this debate in Parliament today, Labour Members have their heads in the sand about the low public confidence in out-of-hours GP care, which is a major driver of the problems in A and E departments. We are going to sort out that problem—[*Interruption.*] If they do not want us to, they are just going to have to watch while we do it.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I ask the Secretary of State to deplore the personal attacks that are being made on Julie Bailey, who was responsible for drawing attention to the many deficiencies in Mid Staffordshire hospital. She has suffered personal attacks in the street and has had faeces pushed through her letterbox. We should all deplore the fact that that is happening to such an important and brave whistleblower.

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Lady speaks wisely, and I completely concur with her comments. Those attacks are totally reprehensible and I condemn them utterly. Julie Bailey is a remarkable lady, and it is thanks to her that the standard of compassionate care in hospitals across the country is going to improve dramatically. We all owe her a huge debt.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Thanks must go to all the staff at Kettering general hospital's A and E for doing their best to cope with a 12% year-on-year rise in A and E admissions, which is being driven by one of the fastest household growth rates in the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), the hon. Member for Corby (Andy Sawford) and I have written to the Minister responsible for A and E services, as part of a cross-party campaign, to request a meeting to discuss the special circumstances that Kettering's A and E faces. Does the Secretary of State agree that that meeting should take place at the earliest opportunity?

Mr Hunt: Of course. I have visited Kettering hospital myself and seen just how hard people are working there. They are doing a terrific job. My hon. Friend is right to say that the significant increase in attendance has been driven by changes in the local population.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The basic problem with the 111 service is the national specification of the triage system. The ambulance drivers in my constituency warned of this two years ago when the service was trialled, and last year the north-east local medical committee also told the Department of Health that the system was not working. It is the Secretary of State who has his head in the sand. Why does he not listen to the professionals on the ground?

Mr Hunt: I am listening. I have said that we have teething problems and that we want to sort them out. I am prepared to look at the whole of the 111 service to see whether it is delivering the service that the public need. However, I would say to the hon. Lady that the issues with 111 have focused public attention on the

poor standard of out-of-hours care in many parts of the country. There is a particular issue of enabling people to speak out of hours to a GP who can, with their permission, look at their medical record, which is a pretty basic starting point. Until we sort that out, we will not be able to sort out the wider issue of confidence in 111.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Despite my warnings in the Chamber, this Government closed the Newark accident and emergency department, as a consequence of which there has been a 37% increase in deaths. I know that the Secretary of State is too much of a survivor ever to dare to mess with Bassetlaw A and E, but does he agree that the reconfiguration of services in London has absolutely nothing to do with the reconfiguration of services in north Nottinghamshire?

Mr Hunt: All decisions on reconfigurations have to be taken on a case-by-case basis. The really important thing is to ensure that, when we reconfigure services, we have a good alternative in place and we are able to give the public the confidence that it is in place. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we follow the four tests before any ministerial approval is given for a reconfiguration to go ahead.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Tomorrow is the 40th anniversary of the opening of the present Charing Cross hospital. The Secretary of State is welcome to come to the party, although he might be unpopular, as the A and E department there is one of the four in west London that he wishes to close. Three months ago, at Health questions, he told me that he would refer those decisions to the IRP, but he now appears to be telling my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) that he is taking advice on whether to do that. Will he stick to his promise and make that referral for a full review?

Mr Hunt: Yes, I will.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): In 2009, long after the GP contract was introduced, accident and emergency units were hitting their 98% target. The Secretary of State has reduced that target to 95%, but we are now hearing that units around the country are not even achieving that. How can that possibly be? What steps is he going to take to deal with the situation?

Mr Speaker: The Secretary of State appears to have managed to make the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) smile. The occasion should be noted.

Mr Hunt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is probably the nicest thing you have ever said to me. I shall dine out on it.

The answer to the question from the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr Love) is that the changes in the 2004 GP contract are not the only cause of pressure on A and Es, but they are a significant cause. They set in train a process of declining public confidence in GP out-of-hours care, which has fuelled the growth in A and E attendances, and that growth has continued so that in the three years since 2009, attendances have gone up by more than 1 million. That is why those changes are having a significant impact on A and E services.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I recently visited the London ambulance service. When ambulance staff cannot hand over a patient to A and E, the patient is kept waiting in the ambulance. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the number of handover delays lasting more than 30 minutes has doubled to 200,000 in the past three years? Will he also update the House on when he expects that trend to be reversed?

Mr Hunt: Handover delays are unacceptable, and the short-term and longer-term measures that I am putting in place will, I hope, help to reduce them. The hon. Lady might want to talk to her own Front Benchers about this, however, because they seem to be setting their face against improving primary care as a way of reducing the pressures on A and E departments, even though that goes against the grain of what the public and the NHS want.

Andy Sawford (Corby) (Lab/Co-op): I support the request from the hon. Members for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) and for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) for a meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss resources for Kettering general hospital, which is in a fast-growing area. Corby has the highest birth rate in England and is one of the fastest growing towns in Europe. I urge the Secretary of State also to recognise that the issues with the 111 service are rather more than "teething problems". Twice this year, Kettering general hospital's A and E has had to close its doors to all patients other than those arriving by ambulance and to notify the public not to come to the unit. That is extremely worrying for my constituents.

Mr Hunt: As I said, we need address all the problems with 111. The lack of confidence in GP out-of-hours care is one of the contributing factors to a lack of public confidence. The meeting that the hon. Gentleman mentions will be going ahead.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Eighteen months ago, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust experienced a sustained increase in visits to A and E and hospital admissions, resulting in thousands of cancelled operations. The trust conducted an independent investigation to help it to understand and respond to the crisis, which had multiple causes. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the study did not conclude that poor provision by GPs or the out-of-hours service was to blame?

Mr Hunt: If I recall correctly, the study said that there were multiple causes, but it was Nottingham university that said that poor out-of-hours GP provision was responsible for an increase in paediatric A and E admissions, so Nottingham university understands this issue.

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): On Sunday, some of my constituents dialled 999 for an ambulance for an 83-year-old woman who had fallen in the street. They were told to ring 111, but after 15 minutes, with the operator saying he was still assessing needs and the lady still lying in the street, they abandoned the call and rang 999, when an ambulance was dispatched. Is that the norm for this service?

Mr Hunt: No, it is not the norm; it is totally unacceptable. That is why the changes we are introducing will hopefully eliminate the vast majority of those kinds of issues. No, we are not going to stand by failures such as that when they happen.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State seems to have decided that changing GP out-of-hours services is part of the solution to the A and E crisis. In the Public Accounts Committee a few weeks ago, we heard from clinical commissioning groups that they fear a single tender just to GPs because of the threat of legal action. We have seen that played out in Hackney, where GPs have been knocked back by the clinical commissioning group. When will the right hon. Gentleman get a grip on his Department and let the CCGs have the freedom to commission local GPs rather than fear the legal action that prevents them from doing so?

Mr Hunt: I want them to have that freedom, but they are operating under the same constraints as primary care trusts, which means having to abide by European procurement law. It is the Labour party that is against any changes in our relationship with the European Union.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Secretary of State confirm how many walk-in centres have closed since May 2010? Will he accept that those closures are linked to the rise in A and E attendance?

Mr Hunt: We absolutely need better alternatives to A and E, but let me remind the hon. Lady that if we followed her party's Front-Bench policy of cutting the NHS budget from its current levels, many more urgent and walk-in centres would have to be closed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Northern Ireland as in England there have been lots of problems with increasing numbers presenting at A and E. The Northern Ireland Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety introduced the triage system, which enabled more effective processing of patients and allowed people to get the level of care and medical attention they needed. Will the Secretary of State agree to discussions with that Northern Ireland Minister to see what can be learned from what has been done in Northern Ireland?

Mr Hunt: I always welcome discussions with the devolved Administrations to see what we can learn. Better triaging at the point of entry to A and E is certainly one of the things that makes a difference between A and E trusts that are managing to meet their targets despite very high pressures and those that are not.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, the shadow Secretary of State and the 40 Back Benchers who contributed to the debate on the urgent question.

Point of Order

1.23 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I trust that this will be a point of order rather than a continuation of the argument.

Andy Burnham: I am sorry to test your patience, Mr Speaker, but I want to ask you whether it is in order for the Government to brief newspapers about a major change of policy, to bring it before this House so that questions can be asked about that major change of policy, and then to fail to provide any details to hon. Members about the changes they have in mind. Is that acceptable behaviour, Mr Speaker, or is it indeed a major discourtesy to this House?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As he knows, I attach great importance, as have all previous Speakers, to the timely announcement of Government policies in the House first and not to the media. I made a judgment that this matter warranted the urgent attention of the House. The right hon. Gentleman will also have noticed that the level of interest in the subject was such that I thought it appropriate to run the urgent question very fully. As to what has or has not been disclosed elsewhere, I do not feel able on this occasion to say, but I would like to thank the Secretary of State, the shadow Secretary of State and all colleagues for their participation. We will leave it there for today.

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]

Further consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee.

New Clause 15

MARRIAGES ACCORDING TO USAGES OF APPROVED ORGANISATIONS

(1) In the Marriage Act 1949, insert the following section—

“47A Marriages according to usages of approved organisations

(1) The Registrar General may by certificate approve organisations to solemnize marriages according to their usages provided that any such organisation—

- (a) is a registered charity principally concerned with advancing or practising the non-religious belief known as humanism;
- (b) has been in continuous existence for five years; and
- (c) appears to the Registrar General to be of good repute.

(2) In the certificate referred to in subsection (1) the Registrar General shall designate an officer of the organisation (“the principal officer”) to appoint persons for stated periods of time to act as registering officers on behalf of the organisation, and may impose such conditions as seem to him or her to be desirable relative to the conduct of marriages by the organisation and to the safe custody of marriage register books.

(3) The principal officer shall, within the prescribed time and in the prescribed manner, certify the names and addresses of the persons so appointed to the Registrar General and to the superintendent registrars of the registration districts in which such persons live, together with such other details as the Registrar General shall require.

(4) A marriage shall not be solemnized according to the usages of an approved organisation until duplicate marriage register books have been supplied by the Registrar General under Part IV of this Act to the registering officers appointed to act on behalf of the organisation.

(5) If the Registrar General is not satisfied with respect to any registering officer of the approved organisation that sufficient security exists for the safe custody of marriage register books, he or she may in his or her discretion suspend the appointment of that registering officer.

(6) A marriage to which this section applies shall be solemnized with open doors in the presence of either—

- (a) a registrar of the registration district in which the marriage takes place; or
- (b) a registering officer appointed under subsection (2) whose name and address have been certified in accordance with subsection (3) and of two witnesses; and the persons to be married shall make the declarations and use the form of words set out in subsection (3) or (3A) of section 44.

(7) A marriage solemnized according to the usages of an approved organisation shall not be valid unless there is produced to the superintendent registrar, at the time when notice of marriage is given, a certificate purporting to be signed by the principal officer or a registering officer of the approved organisation to the effect that each person giving notice of marriage is either a member of the said organisation or is authorised to be married according to the said usages under or in pursuance of a general rule of the said approved organisation.

(8) A certificate under subsection (7) shall be for all purposes conclusive evidence that any person to whom it relates is authorised to be married according to the usages of the said organisation and the entry of the marriage in a marriage register

book under Part IV of this Act, or a certified copy thereof made under the said Part IV, shall be conclusive evidence of the production of such a certificate.

(9) A copy of any general rule of the said organisation purporting to be signed by the principal officer for the time being of the said organisation shall be admitted as evidence of the general rule in all proceedings touching the validity of any marriage solemnized according to the usages of the said organisation.”

(2) Schedule [Consequential amendments—Marriage according to usages of approved organisations] has effect.—
(*Kate Green.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.25 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New schedule 1—‘*Consequential amendments—Marriage according to usages of approved organisations*—

The following amendments are made to the Marriage Act 1949—

(1) In section 26 (marriages which may be solemnized on authority of superintendent registrar’s certificate) in subsection (1) after paragraph (c) there is inserted—

(ca) a marriage conducted under the auspices of an approved organisation;”.

(2) In section 35 (marriages in registration district in which neither party resides) after “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”.

(3) In section 43 (appointment of authorised persons) in subsection (3) after “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation authorised by the Registrar General under section 47A”.

(4) In section 50 (person to whom certificate to be delivered), in subsection (1) after paragraph (d) there is inserted—

(da) if the marriage is to be solemnized according to the usages of an approved organisation, a registering officer of that organisation”.

(5) After section 52, the following section is inserted—

“52A Interpretation

In this Part of this Act “approved organisation” has the meaning given to it in section 67.”.

(6) In section 53 (persons by whom marriages are to be registered), after paragraph (b) there is inserted—

(ba) in the case of a marriage solemnized according to the usages of an approved organisation, a registered officer of that organisation;”.

(7) In section 54 (provision of marriage register books by Registrar General), in subsection (1) after the words “the Society of Friends,” there is inserted “registering officer of an approved organisation”.

(8) In section 55 (manner of registration of marriages)—

(a) in subsection (1) after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”; and

(b) in subsection (1)(b) after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation” and after the words “the said Society” there is inserted “or organisation”.

(9) In section 57 (quarterly returns to be made to superintendent registrar), in subsection (1) after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”.

[Mr Speaker]

(10) In section 59 (custody of register books) after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”.

(11) In section 60 (filled register books) in subsection (1), paragraph (b), after the words “registering officer of the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”; after the words “members of the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of the said organisation”, and after the words “the said Society” there is inserted “or organisation”.

(12) In section 63 (searches in register books) after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”.

(13) In section 67 (interpretation of Part IV), there are inserted in the list of definitions the following—

““approved organisation” means an organisation approved by the Registrar General under section 47A of this Act;” and

““registering officer of an approved organisation” means a person whom the principal officer of the said organisation certifies in writing under his or her hand to the Registrar General to be a registering officer in England or Wales of that organisation;”;

and in the definition of “superintendent registrar” after paragraph (b) there is inserted—

(ba) in the case of a marriage registered by a registering officer of an approved organisation, the superintendent registrar of the registration district which is assigned by the Registrar General to that registering officer;”.

(14) In section 75 (offences relating to solemnization of marriages) in subsection (1), paragraph (a), after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation”; and in subsection (2), paragraph (a), after the words “the Society of Friends” there is inserted “or of an approved organisation.”.

Amendment 19, in clause 2, page 3, line 28, at end insert—

(iA) section 47A (marriage according to the usages of approved organisations).’.

Amendment 20, in clause 5, page 6, line 29, after ‘solemnized’, insert

‘and includes an organisation approved under section 47A(1).’.

Amendment 21, schedule 7, page 49, line 16, after ‘celebrated’, insert

‘and includes an organisation approved under section 47A(1).’.

New clause 14—*Civil union*—

‘(1) Two people, whether they are of different or the same sex, may enter into a civil union if—

- (a) they are both aged 18 or over;
- (b) they are not within prohibited degrees of relationship;
- (c) they are not currently in a civil union with someone else.

(2) A civil union must be solemnized by a Registrar.

(3) No religious service is to be used while the civil union registrar is officiating at the signing of a civil union document.

(4) A civil union ends only on death, dissolution or annulment.

(5) The Marriage Act 1949 is repealed.’.

New clause 18—*Marriage solemnized other than at a religious ceremony to be termed Civil Marriage*—

‘(1) Any marriage solemnized (whether before or after the passing of this Act) under Part 3 of the Marriage Act 1949 (Marriage under Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate), the Marriage (Registrar General’s Licence) Act 1970 or an Order in

Council made under Part 1 or 3 of Schedule 6 (other than a marriage according to religious rites and usages) shall be termed a Civil Marriage.

(2) The Secretary of State or Lord Chancellor may, by order, make such provision (including provision amending UK legislation) as the Secretary of State or Lord Chancellor considers appropriate in consequence of this section.’.

Amendment 58, in clause 9, page 9, line 5, at end insert

‘and such a marriage shall be a civil marriage’.

Amendment 59, in clause 15, page 12, line 15, at end insert—

‘(ba) an order under section (Marriage solemnized other than at a religious ceremony to be termed Civil Marriage).

Kate Green: I am moving new clause 15 to introduce humanist marriage, along with new schedule 1 and amendments 19, 20 and 21 that are consequential to new clause 15. May I start by paying tribute—

Mr Speaker: Order. I will not say that I was heckled by the Clerk of the House from a sedentary position, as he was rather helpfully advising me from his usual position on a point on which we need to be clear. I am sorry if the hon. Lady thinks this is a pedantic point, but it is quite important procedurally. The hon. Lady can speak to the other amendments in the group, but the only item she is moving at this stage is new clause 15. We anoraks like to get these things right.

Kate Green: Thank you for that exceptionally helpful advice, Mr Speaker. I am, of course, moving new clause 15 and speaking to new schedule 1 and amendments 19, 20 and 21.

I should like to pay tribute to the British Humanist Association for its support with drafting and its general and wider advice. This proposal seeks to put right a long-standing injustice in a simple and uncontroversial way.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: I would like to make a little more progress and then take some interventions. Let us start by establishing the ground on which I shall make my case and I will accept interventions later.

Whereas Christians and most other believers have a choice when they marry of a civil ceremony in front of a registrar, or a religious ceremony that reflects their beliefs, non-religious people have no choice: it is the local registrar at a register office or in a so-called approved place or nothing.

The Government have objections to my proposals. It is important to say this afternoon that we are absolutely crystal clear about what those objections are. If there are problems with the way in which the new clause seeks to achieve its objective, we stand ready to work with the Government to address those concerns. There is a very strong wish for humanist weddings to be recognised and for any perceived problems to be overcome.

It has been suggested that the proposals before us are in some way a wholesale departure from what has been described as fundamental English marriage law. I question whether any such fundamental law in fact exists. Our

marriage laws are an accretion of changes and legislative and social developments over many centuries, but I accept that the broad framework in which our English marriage system operates goes back in many regards to the 18th century when Lord Hardwicke introduced his Marriage Act 1753, which required all marriages to be conducted in parish churches and after due notice had been given.

1.30 pm

The privilege was later extended to other churches, not just parish churches, and indeed to other religions, but only to those places of worship registered under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855. Before it is argued that that excludes the basis of the new clause, let me point out that there are two exceptions: from the start, Jews and the Quakers have been allowed to continue to marry according to their own rites. The new clause is in keeping with that approach of designating exceptions, in this instance for humanists. It introduces a third exception, but one that is very much on all fours with the exceptions made for those two other groups.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: Of course I will.

Sir Peter Bottomley: What about me?

Dr Coffey: Does the hon. Lady not recognise that the principle in England and Wales is that the premises are registered, and that if she pursues her agenda, she will be in danger of unpicking the quadruple lock that has been successfully negotiated?

Kate Green: The hon. Lady is right to highlight the general importance of the premises in English law in relation to most faiths, but I think she should bear in mind that in the Church of England the clergy are registered, that registrars are registered in our civil system and that, as I have said, Jews and Quakers already operate in a different legislative framework from that governing religions as a whole.

Sir Peter Bottomley *rose*—

Kate Green: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I promised that I would.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I know my place.

When I first received communications from humanists supporting this approach, I looked up “humanist weddings”, and discovered from the humanism.org.uk website that there are wedding celebrants who can take services now. It is recommended that people obtain a civil marriage certificate at the register office and then hold the ceremony wherever they want, perhaps in the open air: they are not limited by buildings in any way. I understand that that applies to a number of religions, as well as to humanists. I am therefore wondering whether we need to have this debate.

Kate Green: What the hon. Gentleman says about other religions may be correct, but it is not the case that all religions are required to go through a dual process.

Jews and Quakers are not. My contention is that we should recognise the strong popular support for humanism, just as we recognise popular support for other forms of marriage. Many organisations can perform legal marriages in their own right, and do so for smaller numbers than the humanists would and, indeed, than the humanists do now. While I would not for one minute suggest that our marriage laws should be based on some sort of numbers game—although I believe that some Members sought to suggest as much in Committee, an approach that I found somewhat offensive and regrettable—my contention is supported, in this context, by the fact that not only is practice in relation to humanist marriages already fairly widespread, but the numbers are increasing. The popularity is growing.

The Attorney-General (Mr Dominic Grieve) *rose*—

Kate Green: I will of course give way to the Attorney-General.

The Attorney-General: I hope the hon. Lady will accept that I make my comments in a completely neutral way and that I appreciate what she is trying to achieve, but I have absolutely no doubt that the new clause, if passed, would render the Bill incompatible with the provisions of the European convention on human rights, because it identifies a group that is not a religious group and gives it a special status. The first thing that would happen is that all sorts of other secular groups would claim non-discrimination rights under article 14. I realise that that may be capable of being cured, but I can only say to the hon. Lady that the new clause would make it impossible for the Minister to sign a certificate under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998, enabling the Bill to proceed to the other place.

Kate Green: First, although of course I respect the Attorney-General’s expert advice, I must point out that the narrow drafting of the new clause follows advice from the Government’s own officials. We had been given to understand that it would be possible to prescribe, very tightly, a mode of marriage for humanists, legally recognised, and we are surprised that human rights objections are being raised now.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kate Green: I will give way in a moment, but I have not quite finished dealing with the points raised by the Attorney-General.

Secondly, although I am encouraged to learn that the Attorney-General believes that there is potential for some of the objections to be “cured”—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kate Green: I must say, with respect to Government Members, that I need to respond to the first point before I can respond to points two, three and four.

I understand that the possibility of challenge on the grounds suggested by the Attorney-General exists, broadly, in England and in Scotland, where humanist marriages are already being conducted. While I accept that there is one significant difference between humanist marriage and the religious forms of marriage that are recognised

[Kate Green]

in English law—namely, that they are not religious forms of marriage—they are none the less a belief form of marriage.

I venture to suggest that if we could have the benefit of a fully worked and argued opinion from the Attorney-General, I might be able to take on board his complaint, but, having engaged in a series of discussions with Government officials to reach this point, I am very disappointed to find that we are now being presented with what appears to be one potentially significant legal objection that has not been properly raised with us until now.

Stephen Williams (Bristol West) (LD) *rose*—

Kate Green: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who, I believe, first proposed this measure as an amendment in Committee.

Stephen Williams: Mine will be a triangular intervention, inviting the Attorney-General to intervene on the hon. Lady again. Given that humanist weddings have taken place in Scotland since 2005, and given that the United Kingdom, rather than England and Wales, is the signatory to the European convention on human rights, why has the Registrar General for Scotland not been subject to a legal challenge under the convention? Perhaps the Attorney-General can explain. [*Interruption.*]

Kate Green: My hon. Friend—if I may call him that in this context—has raised an excellent point. I hear mutterings from Government Members, who are suggesting that the answer to his question is that in Scotland it is the person who is registered. Let me say, with the greatest respect, that I do not see how that can possibly deal with the human rights point.

The Attorney-General: I do my best to provide advice on the law of England and Wales—Scottish law is unquestionably different historically—but, according to my limited understanding of the position, in Scotland it is not just humanists who may be registered for this purpose; pagans and all sorts of other groups may also qualify. I simply make the point that the context of the Bill as drafted and as proposed today—I realise that the hon. Lady may be upset about this, but I have no role in it—the new clause undoubtedly introduces a serious human rights problem, which I think is obvious because of its discriminatory nature. That is really all that I can say on the matter.

Kate Green: I make no great claims for my understanding of Scots law, despite having a rather elderly and unused degree in it, but—

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Maria Miller) *rose*—

Kate Green: I really cannot take an intervention before I have dealt with the preceding one. I will give way to the Secretary of State in just a moment.

Although I understand the premise of the Attorney-General's concern, I think that there are arguments to be advanced on the other side. The Equality Act 2010

provides for the recognition of “religion or belief”, and we strongly contend that our approach falls within the same legal territory. We are also mindful of the fact that in Scotland, where such challenges have also been possible—I recognise that Scotland has a different legal system, but in this context I do not think that that is an issue—registrars have been able to prevent organisations with no apparent legitimacy or justification from being registered to undertake weddings. I should be grateful if it could be explained to me why, given the tight drafting of the new clause, that could not be the case here.

Maria Miller *rose*—

Kate Green: I should love to hear from the Secretary of State.

Maria Miller: I would not normally intervene on the hon. Lady, but she said that Government officials had advised her in a certain way, and I wanted to make clear that they did not advise the narrowing of the new clause. They drew attention to the problems with the earlier amendment, which—I say this for the benefit of Members who may not have had an opportunity to read the report of the Committee's proceedings—covered both religious and non-religious organisations, and created real and unnecessary uncertainty about who would actually be covered. I think that the hon. Lady is aware of the genuine problems raised by amendments tabled in Committee. They confused the distinction in marriage law between religious and civil ceremonies, and it was therefore unclear how the religious protections in the Bill would work within such a system.

Kate Green: I do not accept that. I do not wish for one second to impugn the messages received from officials. It is quite possible that there was some gulf in understanding between those who delivered the message and those who heard it. I was not present at the conversations myself, and the Secretary of State is, of course, right to put forward her description of what took place, but my understanding is that the way that they concluded led the British Humanist Association, which is advising me, to understand that a more tightly worded proposal, such as the one that I have put before the House this afternoon, would meet the concerns. Although that may not have been the intention intended to be conveyed, it was certainly the intention that it came away with.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): The hon. Lady is making an extremely strong and compelling case, and I look forward to expressing my support for it in more detail later. I have here a letter from the Culture Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities, saying:

“I note the changes that have been made to narrow the scope of the amendments to cover the humanist organisations only, as we discussed.”

Does the hon. Lady agree that that strongly suggests the Government supported this change?

Kate Green: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention.

Dame Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): I was at a wedding on Sunday. I only attended the evening part, but during the day there was a humanist ceremony, and everyone said it was a wonderful occasion. It was held

in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. Does my hon. Friend agree that humanists in Scotland cannot understand why their fellow humanists in England might not enjoy the same rights as they do and feel very disappointed about that?

Kate Green: I, too, have attended humanist weddings in Scotland, including that of my niece last October, which was an incredibly special occasion. I can fully understand what my hon. Friend says about the concern and hurt humanists across the UK will feel that these ceremonies that have worked so successfully in Scotland since 2005 have not been replicated here in England.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making a powerful case. There are 2,500 humanist weddings in Scotland a year now. It is now the third most popular form of marriage that we have in Scotland, yet the Attorney-General has suggested that these weddings are somehow illegal under European law. However, the UK is the signatory to European human rights treaties, so what he says is a lot of nonsense. Will the hon. Lady confirm that the UK is the signatory to the European human rights treaties and that, if these weddings are illegal in England, they must also be illegal in Scotland?

Kate Green: Obviously, I do not answer for the Government, and I will not respond to any specific interventions on that point. The hon. Gentleman may wish to make a speech later.

The Attorney-General *rose*—

Kate Green: I will take one more intervention, and then I am going to develop the compelling case for why we want humanist weddings in this country, not why there are apparently so many legal objections to be overcome.

The Attorney-General: The last thing that I want to do is interrupt the hon. Lady's flow, but I want to reply very briefly to what was just said. I am not suggesting in any way that what is happening in Scotland is unlawful. Instead, I am highlighting that there is a serious defect in the amendment. Given the discriminatory nature of the favour it gives to humanists as opposed to other secular organisations, it would have the consequence of making the measure incompatible with the convention rights. I think that that is obvious when we examine the amendment.

Kate Green: It may be challengeable under the convention, but I do not think we know at all whether such a challenge would be successful.

Let me develop some aspects of the case for humanist weddings. So far this has been a rather unpleasant and legalistic debate, and in the same spirit as our debates on same-sex marriage, I want to make the case that the House should feel joyful about humanist weddings and celebrate them.

For those who are concerned about protections, the new clause provides that the Registrar General could issue a certificate to any organisation that

“(a) is a registered charity principally concerned with advancing or practising the non-religious belief known as humanism;

(b) has been in continuous existence for five years; and

(c) appears to the Registrar General to be of good repute.”

That provision addresses some of the wilder claims that unlikely organisations would or could either qualify or mount a human rights challenge.

The details are closely modelled on the existing law, and they were drafted following conversations with the Government—although perhaps not conversations in which both sides fully understood each other—and address the specific points rightly raised by Ministers in Committee, when the hon. Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams) first proposed the amendment. We have taken as much account as possible of the concerns that we believe the Government have about this proposition, and we are therefore disappointed and startled to see a whole new front of opposition opened up this afternoon.

1.45 pm

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): For my own information really, can the hon. Lady say how much consultation she has had with the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches on this amendment and its possible implications?

Kate Green: I think that it is fair to say that the Churches are not displaying tremendous enthusiasm for this proposal. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is not easy for the official Opposition to carry out extensive consultations, but the issue was raised in Committee, when we took evidence from some of the Churches, and I detected no great appetite or enthusiasm from them for further discussion of this kind of proposal.

Of course, we would like the Government to adopt this proposal and take it forward wholeheartedly and in a way that delivers a robust and settled legal right to humanist weddings. In the absence of that, we simply need to take the evidence of the number of people who are coming forward asking for a humanist ceremony, the number of humanist ceremonies that are taking place and the very high popularity they enjoy both among those who participate in them and those who attend them.

Let me read the remarks of one couple:

“A humanist wedding offered us the chance to make the wedding ‘ours’, it enabled us to construct our own vows and create a ceremony that felt immediately very personal to both us and our guests, it also portrayed exactly what marriage meant to us and how we see our marriage growing in the future.”

We should be celebrating that in the context of this Bill, and I greatly regret that a sense of celebration is being lost as a result of the way that this afternoon's debate is proceeding.

Ian Swales (Redcar) (LD): I should declare an interest: I am a member of the BHA. Is the hon. Lady aware that civil registrars are increasingly offering full ceremonies, so we already have a secular alternative, and this proposal does not make a new one but just adds one that a lot of people want?

Kate Green: I am disappointed in that question. Secular and humanist are not the same. I am not a humanist. I would want a purely secular ceremony were I to be marrying, but others want a ceremony that reflects their beliefs. Humanism is recognised as a strand

[*Kate Green*]

of belief. A ceremony to accommodate that deep-held feeling has to be organised and provided if we are to meet the legitimate desires of our humanist friends and neighbours.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady will be well aware of my opinions and views on this matter. In Committee evidence, there was among the Churches and other religious organisations an overwhelming majority opposed to humanist weddings. Is she saying we should ignore that vast strand of public opinion—the many millions of people who oppose this—in favour of a small minority?

Kate Green: With the greatest respect, I do not think the hon. Gentleman has any evidence whatever that millions of people are opposed to this proposal.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: No, not until I have dealt with the question fully. I do not believe the hon. Gentleman has evidence of millions of Church members opposing this proposal. I fully accept that there is quite likely to be a lack of enthusiasm among those at the top of the Church hierarchy, but I would not necessarily take even that for granted in all cases. Many people, including people of faith, attend humanist weddings, and value and celebrate their participation, either as family or friends, in them.

Mike Thornton (Eastleigh) (LD): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman; he is next.

Many people of faith—I think this is the position of Ministers—who believe marriage itself to be a ceremony of huge social value and importance would welcome a humanist marriage ceremony founded on belief and commitment in preference to a secular ceremony or to no ceremony at all.

Mike Thornton: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, and I must point out that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ian Swales) was supporting humanist marriage. As a churchgoer and a Christian, I was privileged to be able to have a ceremony that I believed reflected my faith and my beliefs. I think it is vital that people with humanist beliefs who are not Christian and not churchgoers have the opportunity to have a celebration that reflects their beliefs. It is extraordinary that anyone of faith should oppose someone else having such a ceremony, and I do not understand such objections.

Kate Green: I am grateful for that welcome and helpful intervention and for the intervention from the hon. Member for Redcar (Ian Swales).

Concerns and doubts have been expressed about the quality of the service, if I may call it that, that humanists would offer, but the British Humanist Association runs a long-established ceremony service. We have already identified that many people, including many of us, have

already attended humanist weddings and some of us might have attended humanist funerals or baby-naming ceremonies. There is a very long and extensive experience in this country of participation in such ceremonies and to my knowledge no adverse comment or criticism of them has been made at all—indeed, quite the reverse.

It is also important to note that the British Humanist Association is extremely concerned about maintaining the highest quality. It trains, accredits, insures and provides a form of continuing professional education for its hundreds of celebrants throughout the country. Perhaps we should therefore not be surprised that the ceremonies attract high satisfaction as a result; more than 95% of clients, if I may call them that, give them a five-out-of-five rating. That is not an experience that all people report from their registry office or other wedding.

Humanist weddings, in particular—this is based on the testimony of those couples who have had one—are greatly valued as reflecting those couples' beliefs and allowing the ceremony to be devised, in collaboration with the celebrant, in a way that meets their own wishes. I have read some letters over the course of the past few weeks from couples who write eloquently about how much the ceremony has meant not only to them but to their relatives and friends. I am sure that over the past week or so, many right hon. and hon. Members will also have heard from the 3,000-plus humanists in this country, including many couples who have had a humanist wedding, about the importance of the ceremony to them. It is clear that we already have in this country a precious form of ceremony that is highly valued by many couples, and my new clause would simply seek to recognise and acknowledge that in law.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I have one fairly fundamental disagreement with the British Humanist Association, which is that I think they are wrong about God, but I fully believe that we need to acknowledge humanist weddings. Two generations ago, the established Church did not allow nonconformist Churches to hold burial rites in their churchyards. This is a dangerous precedent. As an Anglican, I do not feel in any way offended in my faith by knowing that humanists can celebrate weddings in such a way.

Kate Green: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. The Secretary of State has been extremely eloquent throughout the passage of the Bill about the importance that she personally attaches to marriage, so I say to her that my proposal goes with the grain of her position by seeking to extend marriage to more couples precisely because they share that sense of its importance and want to value it.

The whole Bill is about equality, although I recognise that it is predominantly about equal marriage for lesbian, gay, transsexual and, indeed, bisexual people. My new clause is also about equality; it is about the equal recognition of humanist marriages. We should remember that they are already legal in many countries, where they contribute to an increase in the number of marriages, going with the grain of the Secretary of State's ambitions to strengthen and extend marriage in our society. In Scotland, for example, the number of marriages has been rising in recent years, with an increase of more than 1,500 between 2009 and 2011, more than half of which are accounted for by humanist marriages.

There is plenty of evidence of public demand for reform. I believe that this proposal is a reform that disadvantages no one and costs the public purse close to zero. In an age of equality, it removes an unnecessary injustice based on religion or belief, and it will strengthen the institution of marriage, going with the grain of Ministers' intentions for the Bill. I believe that today we need to move forward to introduce legal humanist marriages in our country, as they have been successfully introduced in other countries across a range of legal jurisdictions. If the Government have concerns, we need to see a written view from the Attorney-General about those objections, so that they can be scrutinised not just by amateur Scottish lawyers such as me, but by properly qualified expert human rights lawyers and others. That would allow us to see in detail the reasoning behind the view that he has expressed at the Dispatch Box.

Dame Angela Watkinson (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: I will not, as I am just coming to a conclusion.

If during this afternoon's debate the Government can provide undertakings that they will put before us that full, reasoned legal opinion and give us the time properly to test and explore it, so that the concerns can be taken forward appropriately when the Bill reaches the House of Lords, we will of course be happy to take that time to ensure that the legislation is wholly fit for purpose. Without those detailed explanations, it is difficult for us to accept that there is some endemic objection in principle to introducing humanist marriage into English law, and that I is why I have tabled new clause 15.

Sir Tony Baldry: Let me start by saying that I have great admiration for humanists. My mother was a Quaker and I was brought up and educated at a Quaker school. I often think that Quakers are simply humanists who believe in God—[*Interruption.*] If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is going to heckle throughout my speech, he will just indicate the discourtesy he shows for the views of anyone who disagrees with him. If we heard a little less from him, we would all do a lot better.

As the House will know, when the Bill was introduced the Church of England and other faith groups did not greet it with unalloyed joy. However, we sought to engage constructively with Ministers and officials and they constructively engaged with us. Ministers and the Government made it clear at the outset that they wanted to ensure that faith groups that did not wish to perform same-sex marriages would not be obliged to do so. The legislation therefore has at its heart protections for faith groups such as the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, Muslims and others who do not wish to perform or celebrate same-sex marriages. That is enshrined in the quadruple lock for the Church of England, because of canon law, and in the other locks for other faith groups. Those locks are essential to ensuring the freedoms that the Government made clear at the outset would be there to protect faith groups.

Kate Green: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Tony Baldry: Of course I will give way to the hon. Lady, but may I finish the point?

Those locks are based on the assumption enshrined in English marriage law: English marriage law is based on buildings and not on celebrants.

Dr Huppert: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Tony Baldry: I am going to give way to the hon. Lady, but let me finish the point because it is important.

In Scotland, there is celebrant-based marriage, whereas the protections in marriage in England are based on buildings. If new clause 15 is passed, it will in effect unpick all the protections in the Bill that relate to the locks and to the protections for other faith groups.

The Speaker acknowledged earlier that he was an anorak. There are degrees of anorakism in the House, and I too am a bit of an anorak, in the sense that I believe that if public Bills that will make substantial changes to public law are to be introduced, there should be proper consultation. As the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) honestly and properly acknowledged, there has been no consultation with faith groups on the proposed provisions, which would completely unpick the protections in the Bill that Parliament has sought to give to faith groups.

Kate Green: I do not see why faith groups should be singled out for consultation. If there is to be consultation, it should include those of no faith, and other organisations too. I do not understand at all how this proposition unpicks locks which are intended to protect religious institutions and individual celebrants within those institutions. I simply do not understand that, and I do not accept that marriage under English law is confined to religious institutions that have premises. As I say, English law also provides for Jews and Quakers to conduct marriages according to their own rites.

2 pm

Sir Tony Baldry: My point is that no one has been consulted. I was not praying in aid just faith groups. The hon. Lady has not consulted anyone, but she might at least seek to consult those faith groups for which there are protections enshrined in the Bill—unless she is saying that she is not impressed by the protections to ensure that faith groups are not compelled to perform same-sex marriages if they do not wish to do so. When the debate first started, many of the representations that I received were from people of faith who were concerned that this was a slippery road which would lead to their being obliged at some time in the future to undertake same-sex marriages in churches even if they did not want to do so, and I do not think it helps if the hon. Lady gives even a scintilla of a suggestion that that might be the direction of travel.

The protections are very important. There are historic reasons why Quakers and Jews are treated differently, but they are faith groups. Indeed, Quaker marriages are not celebrant-based, because there are no celebrants in the society of friends. In a sense, the hon. Lady wants to have it both ways. The new clause relates to non-religious organisations, yet it seeks to apply the protections that refer to religious organisations. We therefore have a sort of bolt-on, whereby the hon. Lady is claiming for the humanists, who are clearly not in a religious organisation, the protections in the legislation for religious organisations.

Dr Huppert: I think that the hon. Gentleman has now accepted that he was not correct to say that all marriage in this country is tied to place, because as has been discussed, that is not the case for Jews and for Quakers. He has consistently made the case that the Church of England and other groups should be able to produce ceremonies in their way. Can he explain why, while believing that the Church of England should be protected and allowed to have its ceremonies in its way, humanists should not be allowed to have their ceremonies their way? I can assure him that humanists—the British Humanist Association—are not seeking protection from same-sex marriage; they very much welcome it.

Sir Tony Baldry: My hon. Friend is wrong. I have made it quite clear throughout that English marriage law is buildings-related, except, for historic reasons, where it relates to Quakers and Jews; it has never been celebrant-related.

Let us consider the Scottish example. In Scotland we have seen pagan weddings celebrated, spiritualist weddings celebrated, and weddings celebrated by the White Eagle Lodge. That is a question on which our constituents should properly be consulted. I cannot speak for other Members of the House, but I have had enough problems in my constituency with same-sex marriage. If I go back to the shires of Oxfordshire and tell constituents that Parliament is about to endorse pagan marriage in England, they will think that we have lost the plot completely. If they think that the Opposition support pagan marriage and masonic marriage, they really will think we have lost the plot.

Kate Green: The new clause would not allow pagan marriage to take place. It would allow humanist marriage to take place, and the Bishop of Chester supports it.

Sir Tony Baldry: The hon. Lady is a lawyer so, with the greatest respect, she has no excuse for not listening to the advice of the Attorney-General. He made it clear to the House—any hon. Member would follow the logic very straightforwardly—that it would not be possible in the Bill to give privileges to one non-faith organisation, the humanists, without its being challenged by other similar non-faith groups, such as the pagans or the secularists, who have had weddings celebrated in Scotland. Pagans would say, “We are allowed to have marriages north of Hadrian’s wall. Why cannot we have marriages south of Hadrian’s wall?”

Pete Wishart: I strongly object to what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting—that we in Scotland could not care less about marriage. We have had 2,500 humanist weddings per year. Marriage is important to people in Scotland. The only thing we want to do is extend it to people who love each other.

Sir Tony Baldry: Nothing that I have said could possibly be construed as implying that Scotland is not concerned about marriage. The fact is that under a celebrant-based system, pagan marriages take place in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) asks what is wrong with that. There has been no consultation in England as to whether or not the people of England would wish to have pagan marriages celebrated in England. I am afraid that, if he cannot understand that, there is a great deficit in democracy so far as he is concerned.

Stephen Williams: The new clause as drafted, which has been exhaustively considered by the advisers of the British Humanist Association and passed by the Department, has its own version of a triple lock, one part of which states that the organisation in question, such as humanism, must be registered as a charity. I do not believe that the charity commissioners of England and Wales would register as a charity Jedi knights, white knights, druids, pagans or anyone else whom the hon. Gentleman wishes to conjure up, so they would not come under the provisions of the new clause.

Sir Tony Baldry: The House will know, because it is a matter of record, that I am a freemason. Freemasons are registered as a charity. I do not know whether people in England want to see the introduction of masonic weddings. As the new clause has not been properly consulted on, and there has not been time for proper consideration of all its ramifications, it leads the hon. Gentleman into all sorts of areas that have not been properly construed. There has been no proper opportunity for the House to take the advice of the Attorney-General.

I say to the hon. Member for Rhondda that during the past couple of days I have been a bit confused as to which are wrecking amendments and which are not. I am still trying to work out whether the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) was a genuine amendment or a wrecking amendment. I am really not quite sure whether this new clause is a genuine amendment or a wrecking amendment, because it is difficult to see how Parliament, and certainly the other place, could allow the Bill as amended by the new clause to go forward without a serious delay while there was proper consultation to think through the ramifications.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I think the hon. Gentleman united the House in confirming that he is confused. We all agree with him; he is clearly confused. If he thinks that the new clause would lead to pagan weddings, can he explain why the Bishop the Chester—the Anglican, Church of England, Bishop of Chester—supports it? Would it not make sense for us to allow this to go forward to the House of Lords so that the Bishop of Chester can speak on the matter?

Sir Tony Baldry: First, the only point that I am confused about is whether this is a wrecking amendment. Secondly, in this House I speak for the Church of England, not the Bishop of Chester, and as the hon. Gentleman knows, with 44 diocesan Bishops, it is usually possible to find at least one Bishop who will have a view contrary to the other 43. Let me put it on record, lest there is any scintilla of doubt, that the Church of England is strongly opposed to the new clause, not because we do not love or like humanists, but simply because it would unpick the locks in the Bill, which, when we started, were important to ensuring the protections of faith groups in the context of this legislation.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Notwithstanding the Bishop of Chester, does my hon. Friend agree that some very clear problems arise from the new clause, which could indeed turn out to be a wrecking amendment? Is it not therefore inconsistent for the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen yesterday to

have promoted a review on extending civil partnerships, but on an apparently similarly problematic amendment such as the new clause before us not to mention such a review? Surely on that score it is a wrecking amendment.

Sir Tony Baldry: I want to conclude by making a further and serious point.

Those of us who were opponents of the Bill and who voted against it on Second Reading have taken on good faith—and it has been delivered in good faith by the Government and the proponents of the Bill—that there would be protections for faith groups and that they would not be compelled to carry out same-sex marriages if they did not wish to do so. My understanding was that that approach was supported by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen as well. With legislation of this kind it is important that people feel confident that it will not in some way be unpicked in the future, and that the protections for faith groups will endure, irrespective of any change of Government.

The Opposition Front Bench's approach this afternoon causes me concern. I point out that the Church of England has been wholly approachable to the Opposition—of course it would be—throughout the Bill's passage. It is a matter of some concern that at no time have the official Opposition, who have adopted the new clause—it has not been moved by a Back Bencher; it has been proposed by a member of the shadow Front-Bench team—sought to consult the Church of England or other faith groups, as the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston has acknowledged and admitted, on the import or impact of the new clause.

In every way, this is a bad new clause. It is bad because it has not been properly consulted on; it is bad because it will unpick the protections—

Dr Huppert *rose*—

Sir Tony Baldry: No, I am about to finish. [*Interruption.*] I have given way to the hon. Gentleman on a number of occasions. I am sure that he can make his own speech in his own time.

The new clause is bad, because it will unpick the protections enshrined in the Bill, and it is bad because it will lead to unforeseen consequences, upon which no one in this country has been consulted. If Opposition Front Benchers really believe that the new clause is tenable, I challenge them to consult their constituents and ours on whether people in England want to see the prospect or possibility of pagan marriages taking place in England.

2.15 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I welcome the debate. I strongly support new clause 15 and the associated amendments, and believe that it would be a massive, progressive step if the provisions were enacted. I declare an interest as vice-chair since 1997 of the all-party parliamentary humanist group, and as an active member of the British Humanist Association. In that sense, I have a vested interest, but even if I were not a humanist, I would passionately support the proposal to permit humanist weddings.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I have been searching for information but cannot find it on how many humanist weddings there are in England each year on average at the moment. Does the hon. Gentleman have that information?

Dr Huppert: Six hundred.

Pete Wishart: Two thousand five hundred a year.

Kelvin Hopkins: Hon. Members are calling out numbers to me—600 in England and 2,500 in Scotland. Why something is so easy in Scotland and so difficult in England is beyond me to imagine.

One point that the hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) made quite strongly concerned democracy. Democracy is not dictatorship of the majority. Our kind of democracy accepts freedoms for minorities as well. The humanists are a substantial and significant minority, of whom I am proud to be one. Over the past decade, between the past two censuses, there has been a substantial increase in those professing no religion, and a significant proportion of those people have become humanists. If a number of those professing no faith understood that there was an alternative way of living according to some strong ethical beliefs, they could become humanists themselves. They would only need to find out more about humanism, and they might well become humanists and want a humanist marriage.

Ian Swales: In the 2011 census, 25% professed no religion. That is more than 14 million people. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that they should have the opportunity to celebrate their marriages?

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those figures, which had escaped me for the moment. Indeed, 25% is a substantial number. I do not want to oppress any minorities, or majorities, but I do not want my minority to be oppressed by anyone else.

Dame Angela Watkinson: I do not think there is any question about the desirability of humanist marriages. The issue is that if we embark at this moment on the complexities that others have referred to, it will cause an unacceptable delay in the passage of this Bill.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but I suspect that similar arguments were displayed when Catholics became emancipated in 1829. It was argued that it would undermine the constitution, that we have an established religion, and so on—all sorts of arguments against. When progressive changes are made, a year later such pettifogging arguments are forgotten.

Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con): To reinforce the point made in the earlier intervention, there is a great deal of sympathy for the proposed provisions. I went recently to a humanist funeral and it was a marvellous ceremony. I do not think that Government Members would argue otherwise. As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, protecting minorities is important, and a great deal of care and thought has gone into the locks in this Bill to protect people of faith and to give them reassurance. The concern is that this Bill is the wrong vehicle in which to make this change, because by implementing a change for the humanist minority, one unpicks the protections in the Bill for people of faith.

Kelvin Hopkins: At some time, somebody can explain to me the difficulties. I just do not accept those difficulties. It is a simple thing to allow a significant proportion of

[*Kelvin Hopkins*]

our population to be married according to their own beliefs, in the same way that other people are married according to their beliefs. I cannot see that it threatens anyone else in so doing.

Dr Huppert: A couple of hon. Members have said that the new clause would unpick the locks, but they have so far failed to say in what way—I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees—because we already have exemptions for Jews and Quakers, who are not tied to a place. Does he also agree that if Members are to claim that, they should do more than simply asserting it to be true? They should try to provide some sort of evidence and reason why they think it is true.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Those Members sitting on the Government side of the Chamber will no doubt explain that in their speeches, and I will listen with interest.

I like to equate humanism with other belief systems, some religious and some non-religious. It is interesting that in France, a strictly secular country with a strong separation of the state and religion, humanists are treated in the same way as religious organisations. Humanists cannot attain any kind of support at all from the state, in the same way that Churches cannot, because if they did so the Churches might try to claim it as well; so they are treated in the same way.

In my constituency, which has many religions and strong support for them, we have a council of faiths that does wonderful work in bringing people together. It has produced a colourful pamphlet showing a rainbow spectrum of different beliefs and belief systems, including humanism, so it treats humanism on a par with other belief systems. I think that we should do the same by allowing humanists to be married.

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I want to intervene while the Attorney-General is in the Chamber. Was the hon. Gentleman, like me, astonished when the Attorney-General advised at the Dispatch Box that extending rights to a particular group of people could somehow fall foul of the Human Rights Act?

Kelvin Hopkins: It is bizarre, but I must say that I am not a lawyer—I am only a humble economist—so these things escape me. Perhaps I can look forward to legal explanations later in the debate.

The Attorney-General: I will say this one last time. It has nothing to do with the merits or otherwise of wanting to extend marriage to humanist or secular groups. The way the amendment has been drafted confined it to groups promoting humanism, but there are many other secular groups. The local tiddlywinks club might wish to become a registered charity and to conduct weddings, so by its very nature, and for that reason, it is discriminatory, and by being discriminatory it is in serious danger, I suggest, of violating article 14 of the European convention on human rights. I can only say that. It might be curable, and there might be all sorts of other things that can be done—[*Interruption.*] Well, not in this House. As matters stand, the amendment is in that condition. I made that point simply to help the House.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the Attorney-General for that intervention. No doubt Scotland will be drummed out of the convention for what it has done.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) on her powerful speech, which I think she made extremely well. I only wish that she had been given more time to go through all the detailed objections, which the British Humanist Association has answered at length, but of course there is not always time in debates to answer every question. I assure hon. Members that the BHA has dealt with all the objections it has heard so far. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. There are too many private conversations going on and I am struggling to hear—[*Interruption.*] Mr Blunt, order, please.

Kelvin Hopkins: In conclusion, I want to put it on the record that I strongly support new clause 15 and very much hope that it will eventually lead to humanists being allowed to marry in the way they wish and not to be required to get married in any other way.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I want first to speak to new clause 15 and to express my full support for it. After doing so, I will link that with new clause 14, which stands in my name, and the comments I made yesterday on amendment 10 and why it could and should have been dealt with separately.

In expressing my support for new clause 15, I remind the House of my early-day motion 667, tabled in September 2010, which called for humanist marriages to be allowed in England and Wales in exactly the same way as in Scotland. That is something I believe as a liberal, and also because I was extremely fortunate in having the honour of being best man at the wedding of two humanist friends, Derek and Louise, in September 2007. It was an honour to play a role in that ceremony. I was moved by what an appropriate, fitting and solemn ceremony it was. They were married exactly the way they wanted it to be, according to their beliefs. They were equally happy to participate in my Catholic wedding a few years before.

As a liberal, I believe that each and every one of us has the right to marry according to our own beliefs. The problem with how the Bill is currently drafted is that we are allowing a situation to continue in which some religions—to be more precise, some sects of some religions—have access to a civil marriage ceremony while other religions, sects of religions and belief-based systems do not. To me, as a liberal, that is simply not justifiable. My opinion is simply that each and every citizen of this country, of all belief systems and religions and none, should have the same right to equal recognition of their relationship.

New clause 14 stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie), whose support and common-sense approach on this I appreciate. The simple reality is that if the Government had approached this matter in a more rational and common-sense way, the debate we are having now would be entirely unnecessary. Many Members on both sides of the House—interestingly, they include many who have concerns about the Bill and many who fully support it—believe that we should be making a proper separation

of the belief-based recognition of a relationship, whether humanist or religious, from the state's right to confer legal rights and legal recognition on individuals. The trouble is that the Bill, as drafted, conflates and confuses the two. Even worse, it enshrines the confusion we have heard about, such as the various marriage Acts replacing each other, and adds even more layers of complexity, which means legal confusion. At the same time, there is the absurd situation in which the Bill is having to specify in law that some Churches may not marry certain people and having to put in place protections for other Churches so that they do not have to do so. Of course, if we had a proper separation of civil and marriage, those things would simply not be necessary.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I commend my hon. Friend for tabling new clause 14 and for advancing the argument that I hope to make later in relation to new clause 18, if you call me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. One of the Bill's real failings is that it does not address the need to separate, for the purposes of marriage, the secular and the religious. Had we gone down that road, there would have been a much better resolution and many more people would have found it far less difficult to deal with this legislation.

Greg Mulholland: I thank my right hon. Friend for that pertinent contribution. I support his new clause 18 and the similar way in which he is trying to deal with this issue. It cannot be right that certain people of some religions and, in the case of humanism, belief systems, have the right to access a civil marriage ceremony according to their beliefs while others do not. The Bill, as drafted, will continue to allow that. I am afraid that, as with civil partnerships, it will enshrine the existing inequality in the law, and that cannot be right in something that is supposed to be about equality.

2.30 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Would the new clause, in essence, abolish marriage and civil partnerships and replace it with civil union? If so, what would be the status of someone who is currently married? Would they become unmarried and move into a civil union?

Greg Mulholland: Technically, in terms of the law, absolutely. As I said yesterday, the new clause cannot be seen in isolation; it has to be seen with amendment 10, which sought the repeal of the Marriage Act 1949. It must also be linked with the amendment that I tabled to remove clauses in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 and to repeal the Civil Partnership Act 2004. The point is that there would be one single definition of a legal recognition for relationships.

I am not necessarily dictating whether this should be called a union, a marriage, or, as Peter Tatchell suggests, a civil commitment pact. I am not particularly interested in the language. Some people feel very strongly that we should call it marriage; others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), do not like the word "marriage". That is a debate to be had. The point is that what we need to do, and what the Bill should have sought to do, is give all citizens of this country the right to one single recognition by the state of their union. Of course, that would apply to everyone

in an existing marriage or an existing civil partnership. Everyone would have the one single recognition through the state, and the legislation would have been drafted to achieve that. That answers the hon. Gentleman's question very simply, but we are now moving into technical legal questions. In reality, this change would require a separate Bill, but it is currently proposed as a new clause.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Would my hon. Friend's proposals mean that Methodists, Catholics and others who fought for many years for the right to conduct a marriage ceremony that was valid in law would lose that right and have to go along to the town hall to get validation for the marriage that they had conducted?

Greg Mulholland: I believe that Methodists and Catholics should have exactly the same rights as humanists, Baptists, Jews and Quakers. That is my whole point. I do not accept that some religions should have the right to access a civil marriage ceremony but not others; as a liberal, I find that indefensible. My right hon. Friend has to accept, as do I and all right hon. and hon. Members, that marriage is being redefined; the state has chosen, through its Parliament, to do that. Therefore, now is the time to deal with the complex, multi-faceted and, indeed, confusing and discriminatory current marriage laws and to carry out the reform properly, which is not happening.

I suspect that there is also a practical dimension to my right hon. Friend's question, and I am happy to address that. In order to have the necessary separation between civil and religious ceremonies, we would need to ensure that no religious minister was able to convey the rights of legal marriage. Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible, either through the presence of a registrar at a belief-based or religious marriage ceremony, or by another process, to have that conveyed at the same time. If my right hon. Friend is arguing against that separation, he is defending the situation that the Government are proposing, which will mean having to legislate on what certain Churches may or may not do and needing a complex system of law to ensure that other Churches, including the one he belongs to, are not then forced to do things they do not want to do. If we have a proper separation, none of those things is necessary, and surely that is the sensible way to proceed.

I have had support from all sorts of different sources, including ministers from Churches of various denominations and other religions who are saying that this is indeed a sensible way to proceed. On the Gay Leeds website there is an article by Colin Ross in which he says:

"This seems a very sensible approach to me, I am a gay man and not religious. If I wanted to spend my life in a loving relationship recognised by the state I want to be able to do that—without any religion having their opinion on it—but what is more I want to have the same rights as everyone else. The current Marriage (same sex couples) Bill does not offer equality, the legislation is flawed it still doesn't provide equality especially in respect of pension rights when one partner dies and issues affecting the Trans community, likewise the Civil Partnership legislation was not about equality—as it neither gave equality to marriage and also did not allow opposite-sex partners to have Civil Partnership as well."

Similarly, in the release that he put out today under the headline, "Gay marriage bill is not full equality", Peter Tatchell says:

[Greg Mulholland]

“Instead of bringing same-sex couples fully within the ambit of existing marriage law, the bill leaves some aspects of marriage law different for gay and straight married couples. Although these are relatively minor, they violate the fundamental principle of marriage equality for all.”

He goes on to say:

“While this may be a progressive reform of marriage legislation, it makes the law unequal. If we want marriage equality, that’s what the bill should give.”

We should also have equality of religions and belief systems, and the Bill does not achieve that either.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I welcome the debate on this subject; we had a shorter debate in the Bill Committee. The hon. Gentleman is clearly explaining that redefining marriage raises lots of complications. Perhaps if we had gone back to first base and had a longer, more considered consultation about the redefinition of marriage, although perhaps not quite as long as the one we are about to have on civil partnerships, we could have reached a more consensual view about the state’s involvement in unions. Has he made any representations to the Church of England? Would not his new clause have an impact on the relationship between Church and state, particularly with regard to the right of every parishioner to get married at their local church?

Greg Mulholland: My hon. Friend is touching on the elephant in the room, which is the establishment of the Church of England. That is another matter that is worthy of debate. There will be different views, and I hope that he is prepared to take part in that debate. I am trying to show that it is possible to separate civil marriage and religious and belief-based ceremonies without necessarily having the effect that he suggests. This involves the constitution as well as the Church of England. I suggest to him—I do not know if he would agree—that the Church of England is now in a most odd and uncomfortable position as a result of the way in which the Bill has been drafted. Similarly, it is not a particularly happy situation for other Churches. That would not necessarily be the case if we had the separation that I propose.

I will continue to pursue this matter beyond the passage of the Bill, which will of course receive its Third Reading tonight. I share my hon. Friend’s view that had we had a proper and fuller consultation—this is not so much about the time period as about the intent and scope of the Bill—we could perhaps have looked seriously at sweeping away the current framework and coming up with one that is properly radical and fit for purpose, and gives all our citizens the same rights whether they are religious, humanist, or of no belief.

If we want true and exact legal recognition of all adult couples and to convey the same rights to them all, we will not achieve that as things stand this evening. If we want to have clear and proper respect for freedom of conscience, we will not achieve that this evening. Those things are still possible if amendments are made. I ask hon. Members to consider the amendments. I do not intend to press new clause 14 to a vote, but I hope that the views that I have expressed have been heard and that

the Secretary of State and her colleagues will note the support that they receive from all parts of the spectrum on this issue.

Geraint Davies: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and his interesting comments.

I rise primarily to support new clause 15, which would allow people to have humanist marriages if they so choose. Members will know that that is an established option in Scotland, chosen by about 2,500 couples a year. About 600 couples in Wales and England choose to have a humanist wedding without it becoming a legal marriage.

Religions do not have a moral monopoly on marriage. Different religions have different moral views linked to their faith, and the humanist tradition has its own secular but moral conception of what is right. The members of the humanist community want to be able to join in moral partnerships in which they may express and celebrate their personal ethics, and for those bonds to be recognised in law. There is nothing wrong with that. Like many Members, I have been lobbied by people in my constituency on this matter. Brian Cainen, who conducts various humanist ceremonies, including funerals, is very concerned and passionate about this, as are many people who approach him to ask about the options that are available.

I was drawn into this debate by my interest in the issue, but I was disappointed by the level of emotion expressed by the hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry), who seemed to suggest that humanist ceremonies were some sort of pagan ritual, whereas we are talking about moral, ethical people who want to pursue their own ethics.

Sir Tony Baldry: I did not say that. Those of us who oppose the Bill have tried hard, so far as is possible, to make it work within the context of the protections that we have sought. When the Bill was introduced, faith groups were promised protections. It seems to me that we should finish the passage of the Bill where we started and ensure that those protections are still in place. That is all that I am asking for, no more and no less.

Geraint Davies: I accept that the assurances that have been offered to faith groups should be delivered and guaranteed, but what we are talking about is widening the franchise of equality so that people can be married whether they are of different sexes or the same sex and whether they are humanists or people of faith. As I said, faith groups do not have a moral monopoly. A quarter of people say that they have no religion—obviously, the situation is changing over time—and there is no reason why such people should not be embraced within the fraternity of marriage.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am much taken with the idea of having some form of humanist marriage, but I am worried that by agreeing to such marriages, we would cause problems for religious marriage. That makes me think that perhaps we are rushing the proposals through too quickly and that we should perhaps slow down or stop and think again.

Geraint Davies: Clearly, we are here to debate the Bill. The people who push for delays and referendums tend to be those who oppose the Bill in any case. The debate

on same-sex marriage has been going on for a long period, and not just in this House at this time. In the run-up to the Bill, there has been an enormous amount of discussion in faith communities, among people of no faith and in political communities. Internationally, we have seen equal marriage proposals move forward in a number of developed countries. I think that we have a role to play in providing leadership.

2.45 pm

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that although the concerns that are being raised about process may be quite legitimate, many of us are concerned that it might be many years before we have another opportunity to debate and vote on this issue?

Geraint Davies: I very much agree with that important point. We are all aware of the political difficulties in the Conservative party and the differences within the coalition and across the House. Same-sex marriage is an important measure and it is imperative that we deal with it now. If it does not happen now, political complexions may change as we approach the 2015 election and we might miss the opportunity. People may make the calculated gamble that if the issue is pushed into the long grass, it will stay there. Thousands of people want us to move forward on same-sex marriage, a large and growing community of people want us to move forward on humanist marriage and, as we have heard Government Members say, there are people who want us to move forward on civil partnerships. I hope that the review on that matter makes rapid progress and that the options are provided in a fully informed way.

I was very surprised by the Attorney-General's intervention in which he seemed to say that new clause 15 would be in breach of article 14 of the European convention on human rights and would open the door for people who wanted to marry in the name of tiddlywinks. That was very peculiar. I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, to which the European Court of Human Rights has regard. I have not heard it suggested in any serious chamber that there ought to be parity between the rights of those who want humanist weddings, which are already an option in Scotland, and those who demand tiddlywinks marriages.

Dr Huppert: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Geraint Davies: I did not know that the hon. Gentleman was a tiddlywinks fanatic.

Dr Huppert: I am not a tiddlywinks expert, but I am a humanist. I am a member of the British Humanist Association and the all-party humanist group. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that there has been a judgment on the what test should be for serious beliefs in such cases. The judgment in *Grainger plc v. Nicholson* states:

“The belief must be genuinely held, must be a belief and not an opinion based on present available information and a weighty or substantial aspect of human life and behaviour”.

None of that could really apply to tiddlywinks.

Geraint Davies: I am grateful for that intervention. It elaborates the point that we should not spend too much time talking about tiddlywinks. However, it was brought

up by the Attorney-General and I thought that I had better deal with the matter because he said that his best criticism of new clause 15 was that it would be in breach of article 14 of the European convention on human rights. That seems very unlikely, to put it mildly. It is scraping the barrel and was a bizarre thing for the Attorney-General to say.

I realise that the intention behind new clause 14 was to start a discussion, but it would abolish marriage and civil partnership and replace them with civil union. People who had been married in good faith would wake up one day and find that they were no longer married. That is not something that we should seriously consider. In the cut and thrust of political dialogue, it was famously said that people who went to bed with Nick Clegg might wake up with David Cameron. This proposal is akin to that idea. One day people would be married and suddenly, after a change in the legislation, they would no longer be married.

Greg Mulholland: After a reasonably intelligent start, it is disappointing that the hon. Gentleman is making silly, petty party political comments. I say again that there should be and would be one way of recognising all adult couples, including those who are already married or civil partnered. He is being slightly mischievous in another way, because those who believe themselves to be married in the eyes of one religion, Church or belief system would continue to do so, as happens now, regardless of whether the state regards them as married or not.

Geraint Davies: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is slightly lacking in a sense of humour. My point about waking up with David Cameron was not meant as a sharp political point. I am sure a lot of his colleagues would be very happy to wake up with David Cameron.

On the serious point—there is a serious point—I realise that the hon. Gentleman is making a genuine point about the need for absolute equality in marriage and civil partnership and asking why, if that is not happening, we do not have civil union. I see the logic of that, but I was simply making the case that in practice, if that came in now and we essentially abolished marriage, people would wake up in a slightly different relationship from the one they anticipated when they made their vows. In parallel, I was making a perhaps not very funny joke about people voting Liberal and ending up with a coalition Government.

This Friday is the 25th anniversary of section 28, which gives us a stark reminder that time has moved forward but we still have not made all that much progress. Gay people are still abused at school, for instance—where my children go to school, the word “gay” is used in an abusive way. We need to move forward and provide equality before the law. I appreciate that we are going to end up with equality for same-sex marriage and that there will still be work to do on civil partnerships, but in the meantime we need to move forward on the humanist agenda, whose delivery is already established in Scotland.

Jane Ellison: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiment that we need to make progress, but speaking as a supporter of the Bill, I am concerned about the advice that we have received that it may not be the right vehicle to meet humanists' desires on marriage, even though many Members on both sides of the House wish to do

[Jane Ellison]

so. The problem is not opposition to that aim, but the risk that the Bill is not the right vehicle and that by including such a provision, we would unpick the locks carefully assembled to protect religious minorities.

Geraint Davies: It is important that we have this debate. My view comes from looking at the detail of the Bill and from the fact that humanist marriage is already established in Scotland and seems to be working well. It seems to me that the Bill provides an obvious opportunity to introduce equality between humanists in Wales, England and Scotland sooner rather than later. I do not see that as a problem.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Gentleman's point. He made fun of the advice given to us by the House's most senior Law Officer. I obviously do not sit on the Government Benches, but I have the highest regard for the Attorney-General's advice, and he told us clearly that supporting an extension only to humanists would be discriminatory. We have the European convention on human rights, and I say hooray for that—I am in favour of it—but how does the hon. Gentleman excuse the fact that the new clause applies only to humanists rather than having broader coverage? It is discriminatory.

Geraint Davies: The status quo is discriminatory in any case, which is why we are asking for equality for same-sex couples. Humanist marriages occur in Scotland without being challenged in the European Court, so there have been test cases. Like others, I am free to make jokes about the Attorney-General; he has no planet-sized brain that should intimidate us, and his reference to tiddlywinks invited scorn and ridicule, which I thought it was reasonable to supply. On that hilarious note, I will bring my comments to a close.

Mr Blunt: I rise to reassure the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) that there is support for him on the Government Benches and to encourage the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) to press the new clause to a vote and not be put off by the blandishments that she may hear from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I say that because I am suspicious when I cannot hear a single argument against the principle of a proposal—there is agreement that it is absolutely reasonable and a proper extension of rights to humanists—but we get a barrow load of technical or legal difficulties and risks, and the idea that there has not been time for consultation. The idea that we do not have the opportunity during the passage of the Bill through both Houses of Parliament to sit down and address the technical objections to this suggestion and others, and to get the Bill right before it finally hits the statute book, does not reflect terribly well on us as legislators or on the advice that we can command.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison) said that the Bill was not the right vehicle for addressing the matter, but I do not think that we will see another marriage Bill coming down the track any time soon. Ministers' enthusiasm for re-engaging with the issue, after going through the joy of the past 18 months of consultation and processes, will be a little limited. That was why, yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary

of State suggested a five-year time bar before the issue would be reconsidered. That was overturned at the insistence of the Opposition, whose amendment she accepted. I rather suspect that that time-limitation arrangement was suggested because Ministers have been somewhat scarred by the process of the Bill.

That makes it more important for us to take advantage of this opportunity to deal with some fundamental points that seem glaringly obvious to me. It seems glaringly obvious that humanists ought to be allowed to conduct marriage ceremonies and that the arguments that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) has put forward yesterday and today ought to be addressed. We should take this opportunity to have a fundamental look at how marriage is delivered and to divide civil and religious marriage properly, so that we have dealt with all the problems that we are now wrestling with.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) prayed in aid the advice that we heard from the Attorney-General, but I have to say that although I am a very great friend of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and have huge admiration for his work and his intellect, I have never heard such nonsense on stilts put forward under the guise of independent and wise advice. It was certainly not the product of careful consideration, because it has come to the House at rather short notice. On reflection, his rather strange division between secular people and religious people, with the former not deserving the same consideration for the protection of their rights, would itself fall foul of any convention on human rights worth its name.

My right hon. and learned Friend ought to have the opportunity to give rather more considered advice as the Bill proceeds through Parliament. I am sure that when it is considered in another place and then comes back to this House, if there is satisfaction that his arguments hold water, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston and her colleagues who tabled the new clause will be happy to consider them again. We need to address the technical and legal objections that are being made to a measure to which I have heard no Member put forward principled opposition.

Lady Hermon: Again, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking an intervention. I am not making this up; I am reading in black and white article 14 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which states:

“The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention—”

that includes the right to marry, which is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the convention—

“shall be secured without discrimination on any ground”

within the United Kingdom. It could not be clearer. The advice of the Attorney-General is that if new clause 15 is accepted and extends only to those who are humanists, that is discrimination and in breach of article 14. Will the hon. Gentleman address that point?

3 pm

Mr Blunt: If the Attorney-General's advice is correct, there is a slight problem because existing laws are already discriminatory in that respect and vulnerable to challenge by the European Court of Human Rights. As I said earlier, it is preposterous to make the point that

extending human rights and the right to marry to a group of people will somehow fall foul of the European Court of Human Rights, if our existing laws—which are more restrictive—do not already fall foul of that Court and would be challengeable in that regard. That is why I have a problem with that point. Humanists have a proper belief system and deserve protection under the charter and our laws, just like anyone else.

Sir Tony Baldry *rose*—

Mr Blunt: I am just about to conclude, but I cannot resist taking an intervention.

Sir Tony Baldry: That is characteristically generous of my hon. Friend. He said that there were no principled objections to the new clause, but may I try him on this one? He supports the Bill and wants there to be same-sex marriages, which is its purpose. I am sure that he also wants to ensure that no faith group that does not wish to conduct same-sex marriages is obliged to do so. The Bill sets in place a number of protections, and moving from a buildings-based system of marriage to a celebrant-based system, which the new clause would introduce, would simply unpick all the protections that have been built up through the course of the proposed legislation. If the protection of other groups is not a principled objection, I am not sure what is.

Mr Blunt: My hon. Friend speaks for the Church of England in this House and his principled objection is that it should have special protections. I frankly do not think that a quadruple lock is necessary; for me a single lock ought to be perfectly satisfactory. He and I will therefore differ on the practicalities of the protections that need to be given to religious organisations. He does not object to the principle that humanists ought to be allowed to carry out marriages—I have not heard him say that—but he is concerned that the consequences might pose a risk to protections for other religious groups to carry out marriages in the way that they want. I hear and understand that argument, but I think that it is probably technically deficient.

In the time that the Bill will take to be considered in another place, and before it returns to the House, it is perfectly possible for all of us who want the Bill to proceed to test these propositions and see whether they undermine the protections that we seek to put in place. I do not believe that they do, and simply asserting that they would does not satisfy me. I want to understand that such arguments have merit. I do not believe that they do, but I am open to considering the arguments further, which is what we should do.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but may I help him with the tiddlywinks issue? The Attorney-General has referred to this issue as a comparator for humanism, but there is settled legal opinion in the European Court of Human Rights, the British judicial system and the Equality Act 2010 that the protected characteristic of a religion or a belief applies not to an individual belief or the fact that a few people get together, but to a whole belief system that has a structure and is organised and settled. That is why I am certain that the Attorney-General is wrong in the advice that he has given.

Mr Blunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I cannot see anything wrong with the point he has just made, but it is obviously open to my right hon. and hon. Friends to put their points and contradict him.

Dr Huppert: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech and is generous in giving way. There is an issue of how to deal with legal advice. Does he agree that the law is capable of being constructive and not just a constraint and that it would therefore behove the Attorney-General and the Government to come up with ways to change the new clause to make it compatible with the law, rather than saying, “This doesn’t work; try again.”?

Mr Blunt: To be fair to the Attorney-General, that is precisely what he said. He thought it would be perfectly possible to address these issues. He raised objections to the House. I happen not to agree with or believe them, but he said that it should be possible to address the issues being raised. Unless Members are prepared to stand up in the House and say that they oppose humanists being allowed to carry out marriages in principle and explain to me and the rest of the country what their reasons are, we owe it to humanists to do our damndest during the passage of the Bill to enable them to enjoy the ability to marry under their belief system with the same rights that we give to others.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Earlier in my political life I was Minister of Finance and Personnel in the Northern Ireland Executive, and in that capacity, bizarrely, I had responsibility for the Office of Law Reform and for registration. I worked to bring forward measures that were about changing how civil registration and civil law on marriage related to the different religions in Northern Ireland, because it related very differently. Unlike what the hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) said in his description of the law on marriage in England, which was that is entirely related to premises or property, the situation in Northern Ireland meant that for Catholics, as long as a marriage was conducted by an episcopally-ordained priest—it did not matter where—the state recognised it. For the Church of Ireland, only the premises mattered.

Under powers that came from the old position of Lord Lieutenant General in Ireland from the 17th century, I had to sign if a new Church of Ireland church was created. There was a wonderful vellum scroll and illuminated manuscript—so much so that I was able to tell my wife that I felt like a lay bishop in the Church of Ireland. For Presbyterians it was different again: the persons were recognised, for the conduct of marriage, within the geography of a given presbytery, and marriage was not confined to a particular building or anything else.

We brought forward measures to try to equalise things, and in many ways we borrowed from changes made in Scotland. Some of the Churches were shaky on it at the time, but the smaller Protestant Churches were glad of our changes, because many that could conduct marriages on their own only if a civil registrar was also present to verify it, were then able to conduct them under their own auspices and integrity of their rites and rituals.

At that time I made it clear to my officials that if demand emerged in relation to humanists or another belief system, we would have to address that. It did not

[Mark Durkan]

emerge during the debates at the time, but I support the principle of it. I have said about other aspects of the Bill that all equality should be equal; the problem that some of us have with this Bill is that it is not equal in all cases in its central thrust of extending equality to same-sex couples. I supported the Bill on Second Reading and continue to support it, but I appeal to colleagues to stop jumping and hopping about here and there on the issue of when they want equality, and when they support and respect belief systems.

I have no problem with this Bill or any other measure respecting the belief system of humanism, and ensuring that people can achieve that. That is happening with legislation in the south of Ireland. I represent a border constituency. I am a Catholic who is part of a cross-border diocese. As a result of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill which passed the Oireachtas, later this year and certainly next year humanist marriages will be conducted in Ireland just over the border from my constituency. Just as many people who are married in church go over the border for those weddings, so too will people from my city for humanist weddings. I therefore have no principled opposition to new clause 15.

The legislation in Ireland gives the registrar general the capacity to recognise a secular body, which can in turn appoint people who would be registered to solemnise marriages. Like new clause 15, the Irish measure defines a secular body as one that must exist for at least five years and as a charity. The body cannot have profit making as one of its purposes. The legislation also describes such a body as

“an organised group of people who have secular, ethical and humanist beliefs in common.”

The Irish Attorney-General felt that that term would cover against any allegation that the provision was so specific that it related to one existing organisation only—the Humanist Association of Ireland. The Irish Attorney-General therefore found a way around—there is a specific and clear definition, but it is not open to the challenge that it is exclusively defined, which seems to be what the UK Attorney-General was saying. Those who support the principle of new clause 15 might want to look at the Irish wording as things progress.

It is right that hon. Members should be accommodating of a belief system that is not properly recognised in our marriage system and that they want such a belief system to be recognised in the Bill, but they should think about the speed with which they rejected emblematic, conscience amendments yesterday. People with other distinct belief systems feel a wee bit under threat and are concerned about slippery slopes. There was an attempt yesterday to make a concession and offer comfort by recognising such belief systems, but hon. Members decided they would not do so. Today, there is an opportunity to accommodate another belief system. Many hon. Members who rejected the accommodation of people’s belief systems yesterday back today’s proposal. I wish they would have supported both measures.

Greg Mulholland: As ever, the hon. Gentleman brings an interesting perspective from his experience. Regardless of the many different views—it is important to say that there are not just two views—it is incredibly disappointing that the Government, despite saying they would engage and listen, have accepted not a single amendment in

Committee or on the Floor of the House. I am afraid that that is not an appropriate way in which to make a big change of this nature. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern?

Mark Durkan: I absolutely share the hon. Gentleman’s concern. That will be one of the difficulties. The fewer amendments that are accepted in the House, the bigger the excuse for the other place to take longer, and to go more deeply and more wide ranging with amendments. People should be able to see that the House has given the Bill due consideration and added to it in a number of respects. If people wanted belt-and-braces protections in the Bill, and apps and widgets, to make them feel more secure and comfortable, why not give them? We should want people to feel more comfortable with the passage of the Bill, no matter what their reservations about its provenance. That is why I support amendments that make more people, such as humanists, feel included in the equality that the Bill extends.

Hon. Members should remember that we had a choice yesterday on civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples. The issue was ducked. We were told that the matter could be complicated and that there could be a review. I would like the people who supported that measure to feel included in the effort to extend equality in the Bill. I hope that that happens if the matter is raised in the other place. I do not believe that this will be the last the House sees of the Bill. The Bill will come back to us, because people are saying that we are being selective in adding to the Bill and widening its scope.

Some hon. Members argued against the civil partnerships amendments yesterday even though they support the principle of equality in civil partnerships. They argued that such a measure was not germane to the Bill, and that it took us beyond the Bill’s scope. However, the same people want an extension for humanist marriage—I agree with them—even though other hon. Members say that there is a risk and that it could raise far more complicated issues. The Attorney-General and the Government are not the only ones who must answer questions as to the inconsistency or strength of their argument. I have noted a lot of inconsistency in the House on how far we go to respect belief systems.

3.15 pm

I continue to support the main purpose of the Bill. I ask hon. Members to be more accommodating in respect of all belief systems than they have been so far. Hon. Members who have Church-related objections to the Bill have strong objections to how I have voted and how I will continue to vote, but perhaps I am lucky, because none has been swivel-eyed and none has argued with pious prejudice. There have been measured objections. They wanted the protection clauses because they are concerned that their faith and their sense of the love of God will be the new love that dare not speak its name. That is what makes people worried and discomfited. I want hon. Members to give full equality, consideration and comfort to humanists, and full respect for their belief systems. I also want those things for all Christians.

Simon Hughes: I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). I agree with a huge number of his comments. He and I have voted similarly pretty well throughout the passage of the Bill.

I want to pick up on a comment the hon. Gentleman made towards the end of his speech. He and I voted for new clause 10 on the implementation of civil partnerships for straight couples. I voted for the new clause not because it was a wrecking amendment but because I believe in the principle. I signed it before the Government tabled their new clause proposing a review and before Labour tabled its amendment. If people look at my record, they will see that I have argued for that position over many years, yet it is suggested that I was trying to block the Bill. The hon. Gentleman has a similar view to mine.

Stephen Williams: I originally proposed a version of new clause 10 in Committee. I did not see it as an attempt to wreck the Bill; I genuinely felt it was an opportunity to close that loophole.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are obviously not going to reopen yesterday's debate. We are discussing other amendments today.

Simon Hughes: The proposals appear to be linked, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend for that proposal and many others he has made, and for his much-respected work. We do not agree on every single item, but his record is one of which the Liberal Democrats and Parliament should be proud.

Let me put my position on the record. I believe, have believed and was brought up to believe that marriage is ordained by God. I believe that marriage is traditionally ordained by God to be between one man and one woman. I believe that marriage was set up by God for the creation of children. I believe that it was to link the biological needs of children with their biological parents. I believe that it was for biological complementarity. I believe that it was for gender complementarity, and that it was a gift of God in creation. That is why I have taken a traditional Christian and other-faith view on how marriage has traditionally been—for one man and one woman—which was the case long before we legislated for such things in this country and made them the law of the land.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes: I will give way, but I anticipate being able to deal with the hon. Lady's intervention.

Ms Abbott: On the question of children, is the right hon. Gentleman arguing that couples who are infertile or couples who marry when the female partner is past the age of childbearing—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are not talking about infertile couples. Unfortunately, we are on the humanist part of the Bill, and that is what we will discuss. Fortunately or unfortunately—depending on which way we look at it—we must try to speak to the amendments if we can. I hope, Mr Hughes, that you are not going to tempt many others down another track.

Simon Hughes: I will not, but with respect I want to say a word about humanism and speak to my new clause 18, which is in this group, on the difference between the church and the state.

Let me say to the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) that of course marriage is never only for the production of children. Many people get married without that intention, and it might be impossible for some. That is not the argument. In the theological tradition, one purpose of marriage is to have children, and that is not possible, biologically, between two men or between two women. Some churches believe that marriage is a sacrament or holds another special position.

We move from that position of faith to one where we legislate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith) intervened earlier to make it clear that Methodists, Quakers, Jews and the Free Churches had to fight for the right to perform marriages in their churches. Now, places that have nothing to do with churches or faiths are licensed to carry out marriages—civil marriages became possible. The position of registrar was set up and people are able to have entirely civil marriages in a registry office. That is still the case. Marriages can be held in a place that is entirely civil—in a state-authorised location—or in a place of worship, which can also include the legislative provisions that the state requires.

In all my time in the House, I have argued that we should try to separate those two things. New clause 18 suggests a way of doing that, just as new clause 14, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), does. I believe in the disestablishment of the Church of England. I am a member of the Church, but I believe in its disestablishment. Just as the Church in Wales has been disestablished, I have always believed that in England we should separate as much as possible the activities of the Church and the activities of the state. Marriage, therefore, between a man and a woman in a Christian or religious sense is different from marriages, partnerships or unions that are secular, or between people of the same sex.

I pray in aid the view, which has been quoted already, of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). It was referred to in the Public Bill Committee and goes back to what he said in 2004. When he was asked whether he agreed with the proposition about same-sex marriage, which is at the heart of the Bill, he answered:

“I do not support that; I believe that marriage is an institution that is ordained of God and should be celebrated between a man and a woman. However, I also believe that two men or two women can have a relationship that in many ways mirrors that between a man and a woman but is not identical. Therefore, I believe that we should have in law separate institutions that reflect that reality.”—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D, 21 October 2004; c. 68-70.*]

That has always been my position too. We should give equal rights to gay and straight couples to form partnerships, unions or relationships that give the same pension rights and status, but are not the same as the traditional marriage between a man and a woman.

Colloquially, people talk of equal marriage, and I understand that. People who are in civil partnerships talk of being married, and of their husbands and wives. We are not going to be able to put the clock back, which is why new clause 18 talks about “civil marriage” and not civil union. Many of my Christian friends say that that is an unacceptable compromise, because the Christian view of marriage cannot be changed by calling it civil marriage. We have to wrestle with that issue and sort it

[*Simon Hughes*]

out, because we could have civil marriage that is different from faith, Christian or religious marriage, and I think that people would reasonably understand the difference.

Dr Huppert: I respect my right hon. Friend on many things, but I disagree with quite a lot of what he is saying. Is he genuinely saying that he would deny faith groups, which believe marriage should truly be equal, the ability to do that, because of his personal belief? Is he refusing to allow them to call it a proper marriage or a faith marriage?

Simon Hughes: If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I do not believe that and I am not arguing that. They should of course be entitled to hold that view.

This group of amendments seeks to give humanists the right to have humanist weddings. I support that proposal. I understand the objection to the technical drafting, and perhaps that needs to be considered. However, the principle—my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt) made the point—of allowing humanist weddings seems to me to be the right one. The hon. Member for Foyle argued that that is what happens over the border in Ireland. Humanists have a belief, and therefore they should be entitled to have weddings according to their belief. Constituents have argued for that, it happens already in Scotland, and, like other people, I too have been to a humanist ceremony—not a wedding, but a funeral.

As a light intervention, we should not be overly afraid of the word “pagan”. My dear late mother, who lived in a village in Herefordshire, in her latter years went to a pagan wedding in the orchard in Hampton Bishop. She said it was one of the most enjoyable weddings she ever attended. Of course, there was a civil ceremony beforehand. People should be allowed to have the practice they want, including humanist weddings.

Susan Elan Jones: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me what his proposal would mean to a Nigerian couple on Old Kent road who want to get married in their large, African, black majority church? Would they have to have a separate civil wedding?

Simon Hughes: That is a good question. The hon. Lady, as a former Southwark councillor, knows well the communities I represent. The short answer is that we could do it one of two ways. We could either do what is done in many countries on the mainland of Europe, which is to require everybody to have a civic ceremony first. In France or Belgium, people go the town hall, have the civil ceremony and then go to their church, mosque, temple or synagogue and have their faith ceremony. Secondly, one could separate, in the place of worship—the black-led church on the Old Kent road, my own church or any other—the civic part of the ceremony from the faith part. That is not done in the same way at the moment. In my church in Bermondsey people do not see clearly the distinction between the two parts. The couple going to the church on the Old Kent road would believe they were being married in the eyes of God. They would also want to be married in the eyes of the law. It could be done in either of those ways.

What do I want new clause 18 to achieve? For heterosexual couples, I want us to allow a humanist wedding, a civil marriage or a civil union, and civil partnerships. For same-sex couples, I want full, equal civil rights as a married couple, to be called either a civil marriage or a civil union. I want them to have civil partnerships, too. I hope also that we will not allow the easy transfer between civil partnerships and civil marriage, going from one to the other by signing a form, which is the weakness of clause 9.

New clauses 18 and 14 seek to address an issue that the House has not so far wrestled with: would it not be better to seek to address the need to separate, for these purposes, the faith and belief of people of faith that marriage is ordained by God, and the civil responsibility of the state to provide a place where people can come together and perform a ceremony in the eyes of the law? It is pity that we have not addressed it. I will judge the mood of the House on whether to put that to a vote. I am sure it will be addressed in the other place. I hope we can give everybody equal status in the eyes of the law, and, coming back to the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), the right for each faith group to decide whether to regard heterosexual couples and same-sex couples as able to be married in the context of their faith, which we should allow to all faiths, as well as to those with no faith at all.

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker, for having to leave the Chamber earlier.

On Second Reading, I was in a minority among Labour Members in voting against the Bill. I voted against it not because I did not want to see equality, but because, as some saw it, people’s faith and beliefs were being challenged. Again, today, I acknowledge the need to respect people’s faiths and beliefs, but I feel that that should extend to humanist beliefs and that humanists should have the option of a humanist marriage ceremony.

3.30 pm

Given the volume of correspondence I received in the lead-up to Second Reading, I would say that this Bill is the most controversial I have been involved in since entering the House in 2011. When it was presented on Second Reading, I was made very aware of my constituents’ concerns, and like many Members I was inundated by e-mails, letters and phone calls in which people overwhelmingly expressed their fear that their beliefs, faith and religious freedoms were being challenged. I have not received that level of correspondence over today’s new clauses.

As a result of the number of inquiries I received, I took time to scrutinise the Bill, and I found cause for concern. The religious communities felt vulnerable and at risk of having their faith and their freedom to practise their faith threatened by the Bill. The Churches felt that they would be legally bound to carry out same-sex ceremonies, even to the point of being threatened with legal proceedings if they refused. It would not have been fair to place the Churches in such a position, so I concluded on Second Reading that I could not support the Bill. I voted against it not because I was not committed to equality—I most certainly am—but because I did not want the religious communities put in that position. It was not an easy decision to take.

I kept my constituents up to speed as the Bill progressed through Committee, and to date the response to the changes made and the reassurances given to the Churches in Scotland has been nothing but positive. The opt-in gives religious communities the assurance that their faiths will be respected and that they will have the right not to conduct same-sex marriages if it is against the teachings of their Church.

I have been contacted by some via the wonder that is Twitter. One person wrote that we should vote for the Bill because fairness trumped faith. I have to tell that person and the House that nothing trumps faith, but I will support the Bill, as amended, through Parliament because respect, understanding and equality must be delivered for all, including humanists seeking the right to a humanist marriage ceremony.

I have seen the Bill divide generations over their understanding and acceptance of this issue. I concede that it will not be the case with every family, but I have two sons who cannot understand why this equality has not been introduced before. They ask, “Why? Why has Parliament not addressed this before?” My parents, who have been married for 55 years, also ask, “Why? Why is this changing now?”, and they are worried. They wonder if it will change or adversely reflect on their own long marriage. I tell them that it will not and that in the months and years ahead people will be asking why we did not introduce this equality before. In time, they will be reassured that the Bill will strengthen, not weaken, marriage.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an interesting speech, and I think we can all identify with what he says about the change between generations, but change happens. Only yesterday, we heard that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted to allow gay ministers to be ordained, if the congregations so choose. That is a major change illustrating that equality is now regarded as important even by the national Church of Scotland.

Mr McKenzie *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. The hon. Members for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie) and for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Sandra Osborne) are making valid points, but they are Third Reading points and not relevant to the new clauses on recognising humanism, which we need to deal with before we get to Third Reading. I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman did not get teased down the route the hon. Lady wants him to go down and instead referred specifically to the new clauses.

Mr McKenzie: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will take your direction and end by simply saying that respecting faith and belief and equality are essential and must be extended to humanist marriages.

Mike Weatherley (Hove) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt), I wish to speak in favour of new clause 15, although I will try not to duplicate the points he made so very well.

As many in the Chamber will know, I have been a strong supporter of equal marriage from the outset. Indeed, in 2010 I wrote to the Prime Minister asking for

legislation to be laid before the House. While we are talking about equal marriage rights, it seems logical that we should address the issue of humanist marriages at the same time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate said, it could be a decade before we revisit this issue. There has been talk about the percentage of various people in the last census, but in a recent YouGov poll, 67% of people—two thirds of the population—said they had no religion. Those in a huge section of our society in England are being denied the opportunity to make a full-scale commitment to one another. Their only option is a register office marriage.

As we have said before, that is not so in Scotland, where it has been legal to have a humanist marriage since 2005. Indeed, last year more people took that route than entered into Roman Catholic marriages, and the expectation is that the figure will pass the number of Church of Scotland marriages in 2014. Clearly there is a huge demand for this change in the law. If my postbag is any indication, I would expect similar numbers to be reflected in England; I can report that I have had many letters in support of humanistic marriages and none against. As has been mentioned, it is also possible to have a humanist funeral—just not a marriage, in the eyes of the law.

For those who are opposed, there is often a fundamental misunderstanding about what humanism is. I did not know much about the definition either until a few years ago. My father was diagnosed with cancer and was told he had six months to live. He calmly set about putting his affairs in order, which included his funeral arrangements. I was surprised when he put down the details of the humanist funeral he wanted. He was an exceptionally honest, hard-working man, well respected in the community and living by what we all know as Christian values. He did not go to church, but then again the majority of people do not.

Throughout recorded history, there have been non-religious people who have believed that this life is the only life we have, that the universe is a natural phenomenon with no supernatural side and that we can live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. They have trusted to the scientific method, evidence and reason to discover truths about the universe and have placed human welfare and happiness at the centre of their ethical decision making. Today, people who share these beliefs and values are called humanists and this combination of attitudes is called humanism. Many millions of people in Britain share this way of living and of looking at the world, but many of them have not heard the word “humanist” and do not realise that it describes what they believe.

Just to be clear, a humanist, roughly speaking, has come to mean someone who trusts the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works; rejects the idea of the supernatural, and is therefore probably an atheist or agnostic; makes ethical decisions based on reason, empathy and concern for human beings and other animals; and believes that, in the absence of an afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same. That definition is important, because we have heard a lot about how Jedi knights and

[Mike Weatherley]

so on will be able to do this. We have also heard other definitions and talked about tiddlywinks, but it is important to realise that these are real, strong, belief cultures.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech in favour of humanist weddings. I agree with him in principle, but is he not concerned, being a believer in equal marriage—as I know he is—about the Attorney-General’s advice that if we accepted the new clause, we would threaten the religious guarantees that we have given the Church of England?

Mike Weatherley: Of course I have total respect for the Attorney-General’s opinions, but as we all know, in law and legal advice, there is no firm decision or certainty until something goes to court. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate, I have yet to hear a cohesive argument for why what my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) describes would be the case. Just saying it time and time again does not make it right. If someone can say why that would happen, we would of course listen. The last thing I want to do is delay the implementation of same-sex marriage, as my hon. Friend will know, but we are in danger of missing a huge opportunity to extend equal marriage to a huge section of our population who at the moment are being ignored.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should ignore the advice and legal opinion offered by the Attorney-General? Does he think that we should just put that aside and push ahead with this provision?

Mike Weatherley: People ignore legal advice for all sorts of reasons. I am saying that I would like that legal opinion to be put to the test. We should not simply say, “Oh well, if that is the case, we will just sit back and not do this.” It is up to us to find a way of doing it. I do not happen to think that that interpretation is the correct one, and I would like to see it put to the test, as would many other people.

It is evident from what is happening in Scotland that there is a huge latent demand for humanist marriages, as well as for equal marriages. If humanism was right for my father, I for one would like to see equal marriages extended to include humanist marriage ceremonies. I would find it odd if those who supported same sex equal marriage did not also support equal marriage for others, which is why I am supporting the new clause.

Dr Huppert: It is a great pleasure to follow the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mike Weatherley). I also want to pay huge tribute to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). It has been a great pleasure to work with her during the passage of the Bill, and her speech today set the scene extremely well. I pay tribute to her, although I am not sure whether that will help or hinder her future plans. I thought that she did extremely well.

There are two issues that we need to debate today. One is the principle of whether we should allow humanists to conduct weddings; the other relates to the process of

how we might get there. This is all made much more complicated because our marriage laws are incredibly complicated. They have exceptions and exemptions all over the place. The Second Church Estates Commissioner, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry), who speaks for the Church of England, and who I imagine knows the Marriage Act 1949 quite well, has spoken of how the rules are all tied to places. Section 26 of the Act states that marriages may be solemnised in

“a registered building...in the office of a superintendent registrar”,

and

“on approved premises”.

It also permits

“a marriage according to the usages of the Society of Friends (commonly called Quakers)”

and

“a marriage between two persons professing the Jewish religion according to the usages of the Jews”.

So we already have an exception and, as far as I can tell, the world has not fallen apart since those provisions were passed in 1949. They have worked without any problems. There are other areas of marriage law that are just complicated. We do not have a simple, clear system, and we are not going to get one as a result of any legislation that we pass today. That will involve further work.

Let me turn first to the question of principle. Is there a desire to allow humanists to conduct weddings? This was mentioned by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt). If any Member here in the Chamber disagrees with the principle of humanists being allowed to conduct weddings, I would be grateful if they would intervene on me to say so. If no one expresses such a view, we will take it that there is no dissent on that principle.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is presuming; the fact those people who are currently in the Chamber do not express disagreement with him does not mean that he is right or that they all agree. That is blatantly obvious.

Mike Weatherley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment. He is absolutely right to suggest that we cannot speculate accurately about the views of the people who are not in the Chamber. It is clear, however, that no strong views have been expressed that challenge the principle of holding humanist weddings, and I hope that that will be useful if this is discussed further in another place. There has not been a strong chorus of speeches here expressing disagreement with the principle. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the views of all 650 Members have not been taken into account, however. It would be helpful to know whether the Secretary of State supports humanist weddings in principle. She is welcome to intervene on me to give me her view on that. There is a desire for this change among the general public. Indeed, most people I have spoken to have been surprised to learn that humanist weddings are not allowed.

There are problems with how the process would work. People who had a humanist wedding would have to have a register office wedding first. Some registrars are very helpful, and make it easy for that to happen. They make it a seamless experience. Others, however, are difficult. They ensure, for example, that the events

take place in different locations, thus breaking up the ceremony, to the detriment of people who should be having one of the happiest moments of their life. Some people who have a humanist wedding celebration do not have a legal wedding. I presume they know that they are not legally married, but that can cause problems for them. So there are concerns about the way in which the process works at the moment.

We know that this is a pro-marriage step. We have heard a lot from the Government and the Minister to say that the aim of the whole Bill is to support marriage. We know that that is what it does. We know that in Scotland between 2005 and 2011 there was a very large increase in the number of humanist weddings—the figure I have for the increase is 2,404—and there was a small decrease of 418 in civil weddings. Overall, that is a very large number of extra weddings. That is surely something that a pro-marriage Government would thoroughly want to support.

3.45 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is making some strong points. Anecdotally, in my constituency, a former member of the Welsh Assembly who is a humanist celebrant tells me that from her experience, if the provisions were made legal, the numbers would increase. She certainly sees a demand from the people of Cardiff South and Penarth.

Dr Huppert: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I should declare that I am a member of the British Humanist Association and an officer of the all-party parliamentary humanist group, and I have spoken to a number of people who have confirmed that there is a demand for this to happen. People wish to do humanist marriage and there does not have to be a majority before we think that it is the right thing to do.

What are the problems? This takes us to the process of how to get there. The Second Church Estates Commissioner, the hon. Member for Banbury, and others have asserted that this would unpick the lock. What I never heard—perhaps we will hear it from the Minister—is exactly why the locks that protect faith groups would be unpicked by allowing humanists to act as registrars for a wedding. It is really not clear. I have heard it implied that it is because this would involve celebrants and it would not happen at a registered place. We have heard that Jews and Quakers are already exempt from the requirement to have a registered place. If the lock has already been unpicked by that, why should it be a problem? We have simply not heard any detailed analysis; it seems that people are saying things because they have been told that they are true. That is not really good enough.

I am concerned about the process that has brought us here. The Second Church Estates Commissioner—sadly, he is not in his place—suggested that the proposal was put through at the last minute and there was not enough time to deal with it adequately. I tabled my amendment initially on 5 February, immediately after Second Reading. I vividly remember it because I was slightly annoyed that somebody else had tabled another amendment before I had even got to the Table for mine. I was delighted that it received support from across the House

and that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams) led on it in Committee with the support of the Labour Front-Bench team.

There was time from 5 February to make comments, and comments were made. There was detailed discussion, for example, between the British Humanist Association and Government officials. A couple of comments were made about how the provision would fit in with the locks and, interestingly, about its breadth. My original amendment would have allowed all approved organisations to participate, with a few safeguards, and did not specify humanism. The Government advice from the meetings with officials was that that should be changed. I know that the Minister disagrees, but it is entirely consistent with the letter and I was very specifically told by the BHA that it was given the advice to limit the provision to humanism.

I am happy to read out again the relevant section from the Minister's letter:

"I note the changes that have been made to narrow the scope of the amendments to cover humanist organisations only, as we discussed."

The letter went on to say that

"we remain of the view that"

humanist ceremonies

"cannot be dealt with in isolation".

That is simply not consistent with the idea that the Government had no role in this.

Maria Miller: I am sorry, but I must complete what the letter sent by the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), said. It went on to state clearly that

"the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill is the wrong mechanism to effect the changes to marriage law that you desire. Therefore the Government is unable to support your amendments."

I am quoting directly from the letter. That clearly shows no opacity in the situation. I think that the hon. Gentleman's previous comments were not entirely consistent with what is written in the letter.

Dr Huppert: I thank the right hon. Lady for reading out the rest of the letter, and I am happy for anybody to see it; I see that her Parliamentary Private Secretary has copies of it. She is right that it did not say that the Government supported the amendment or that they had another way of delivering it; it does not say, "Here are amendments that could make it work." It says that the Government do not support the change because it is the wrong mechanism; it does not say, "We see you have now reduced the scope and we are very worried about this because we think you should broaden it back out again to be ECHR-compliant." It is quite clear that the strong impression formed by the BHA from the meetings—I am sure there will be minutes—is that it was given strong advice to tighten the amendment. If that is not the case, it is hard to understand why it would choose to change the original version, which is obviously available for anyone to read. There has been ample time for the Attorney-General to consider the new clause, to be consulted on it and to be asked for his ruling on whether it would accord with the European convention on human rights. Strangely, however, that did not happen until the very last moment.

[Dr Huppert]

There have been other meetings. For instance, we had a detailed discussion with the Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Hugh Robertson), and I thank him for his time. As he will no doubt recall, the objections that were expressed did not centre on the fact that the new clause would make the whole Bill non-compliant with the convention, but there was talk of the cost of updating the computer system to allow an extra field for humanist weddings. He is nodding. A number of other issues were raised: for example, concern was expressed about the possibility that the measure would allow humanists to conduct weddings out of doors, which members of other faiths are not allowed to do under our marriage law unless they are Jews or Quakers.

I find it truly bizarre that if there is concern about challenges with regard to the proposals before us, there is not fundamental concern about challenges to legislation under which the rules governing Jews and Quakers differ from those governing any other group. We have plenty of legislation that singles out the Church of England and the Church of Wales, because they are, or were, connected to the state. I would be grateful if the Minister, or anyone else, could tell me how many times the fact that Jews and Quakers are listed, but not Hindus, Sikhs or any other group, has been subject to a legal challenge. In fact, that simply has not happened.

I respect the Attorney-General's position, but I do not understand how he can have formed his opinions. I hope that we will be able to see a detailed analysis, from him or from the Minister via him, explaining exactly what the objections are. Above all, however, I believe passionately that the law could be constructive. The Government do not have to agree with humanist weddings, and they do not have to agree that this is the best way to legislate, but if they are acting in good faith in relation to the concerns that are being raised, I hope that they will say not just what the problems are but how they could be fixed, because many of us want them to be fixed.

I do not mind whether this wording is retained or other wording is introduced. I do not mind if an amendment is tabled that merely adds an extra line specifying humanists beneath the words

"professing the Jewish religion according to the usages of the Jews".

I do not mind if the Government present, or find time for, another Bill to deal with the issue. I simply want humanist weddings to take place. I hope that the Minister and the Attorney-General will not just erect barriers, but will help this Parliament to do what it clearly wants to do.

Stephen Williams: I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) in paying tribute to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). In Committee, the debate took place the other way around: I spoke to the amendment first, and she spoke second.

It has been a pleasure to work across and among parties on this issue, because it is not a divisive issue. We all genuinely want to correct what we consider an anomaly in the law. I am, however, deeply disappointed that we have found ourselves where we are today. As my

hon. Friend said, the Second Reading debate took place on 5 February, and the sitting of the Bill Committee during which I proposed the original amendment took place on 12 March. I know that two Departments are considering the Bill, and that No. 10 and the Deputy Prime Minister have been involved as well, but there has been quite a lot of time for the issues to be resolved.

It is disappointing that today, almost at the eleventh hour and 59 minutes, the magic bullet, or nuclear weapon, of the Attorney-General has been wheeled out to tell us that the new clause falls foul of the European convention on human rights. That was never put to us on Second Reading or in Committee, or during the many bilateral private discussions which have taken place between the various parties and Ministries that have been involved in putting the new clause together.

Other, spurious, objections have been made at various times. It has been said, for instance, that the new clause would create an exception. However, as a number of people have pointed out, the law in England and Wales already makes exceptions for the Jewish community and for Quakers. Even more spurious objections have been presented, and leaked to the *Daily Mail*. Another thing that I find deeply disappointing is that both the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* specifically named both the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston and me as being in favour of Jedi weddings—or the pagan ceremonies in Scotland about which we heard earlier from the hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry), who speaks for the Church of England.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): The force is not with them.

Stephen Williams: Indeed; the force is not with those arguments!

The other argument that has been put forward is that this Bill is the wrong vehicle at the wrong time. I ask this of the Government Front-Bench team: if not now, when? Marriage Bills are not introduced in this place very often. I am sure the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) will correct me if my chronology is wrong, but I think that since the Reformation there was a marriage Bill in the reign of George III to deal with clandestine marriages, there was civil registration in 1837, divorce was legalised in 1857 and there was one marriage law in the 20th century, which was in 1949—and that is it in the whole sweep of hundreds of years of history of this Parliament debating law. This is our opportunity in the first decade of this century to try to get it right.

Chris Bryant: There was more legislation before that as well, not least the Book of Common Prayer, which lays down specific aspects. My main point, however, is that the Hardwicke Act of 1753 tried to rectify the situation that people did not need a Church of England vicar, a minister of religion or a building in order to get married, and that all they needed to do was plight their troth. That is why the situation was tidied up. Unfortunately, a near-monopoly was then given to one religion, and the Quakers and the Jews allowed in at that point.

Stephen Williams: I suppose I did tempt the hon. Gentleman to intervene, although I did also say "since the Reformation". As a genealogist in my spare time, I am also very familiar with the Hardwicke Act of 1753.

So, to return to my point, if not now, when? The Government have not addressed that question to our satisfaction. Instead, we are left with a suspicion that there is no good will and no intention to allow a clear pathway towards humanist weddings being given legal status.

The new clause has been very carefully drafted and redrafted since the Committee stage to take account of the objections, of which we were aware at that time. It clearly says that this right will only be granted to an organisation that is a

“registered charity...advancing...the non-religious belief known as humanism”.

It also says the registered charity must have existed for five years and the Registrar-General must be satisfied it is “of good repute.” We have heard of many other locks in the course of our discussions of this Bill, but this is surely a triple-lock that ought to satisfy everyone.

When we were considering whether opposite-sex couples should be allowed to enter into civil partnerships, it was asked where the evidence was that people would want to do that. In the context of this new clause, there is clear evidence that there is demand for humanist weddings north of the border, where they are now the third most popular means of getting married, and some of the people who are getting married in Scotland are from England and Wales, because they cannot legally do so in Bristol or anywhere else in England or Wales. This new clause certainly meets a need, therefore.

Our current law is completely out of step with society. Sometimes Parliament has to give a lead and bring the public with it. In this instance, however, we are in danger being seen as behind the grain of public opinion and of public demand for humanist marriage to be legalised. I hope that at the last minute, when the Secretary of State speaks in a few moments, we will grasp victory out of the jaws of defeat.

What I do not want to hear from the Secretary of State is the same old situation from the Government of “Heads we win, tails you lose.” I hope we do not get into that situation. There is good will among parliamentarians of all parties to legalise humanist weddings, and I hope we will take a step towards achieving that today.

Maria Miller: We have had a robust and impassioned debate on a subject about which people feel very strongly. I must make it clear from the start that it is not, and continues not to be, the objective of this Bill to extend marriage to belief groups, which is, to all intents and purposes, what many of the amendments in this group would do. I do, however, join other Members in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who is representing the Opposition on these proposals, because she spoke with passion and eloquence about the importance of humanist ceremonies in celebrating marriage.

The hon. Lady is right to say that for many people who undertake such ceremonies, they can be an important way of marking and celebrating such an event, but it is important to make the point that neither is this the time nor is the Bill the place to make the sorts of changes she is advocating, unless she wants to risk the objective of the Bill, which is to extend marriage to same-sex couples.

Humanists can already marry, but same-sex couples cannot, and that is the unfairness that the Bill is designed to remove.

4 pm

I shall have to disappoint my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) by saying that I think is some principled opposition to the amendments in this group. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) stated some strong and principled objections. The Government’s argument, which I will set out, also contains principled objections.

New clause 15, new schedule 1 and amendments 19, 20 and 21 are intended to enable humanists, but no other belief organisation, to conduct legally recognised marriages in ceremonies according to their beliefs. That is not a simple change but a fundamental shift in the system of regulation that safeguards the institution of marriage. The amendments would create a manifestly unfair and inequitable position that was vulnerable to legal challenge—a point that the Attorney-General made eloquently in his interventions. They would also undermine the quadruple lock in the Bill designed to protect religious organisations that do not want to conduct same-sex marriages, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury pointed out.

The amendments would create a new route to marriage—a two-tiered system—and we simply cannot support them. They would unravel the foundations of marriage law and require the introduction of a celebrant-based system for marriage, instead of the current buildings-based system. There would be far-reaching consequences to making such a fundamental change. For example, a move away from a premises-based system to a celebrant-based one would mean that any organisation that successfully applied could hold marriages wherever it wished. In Scotland, where there is a celebrant-based system, members of organisations that we in England and Wales would not traditionally associate with undertaking marriage have been given the authority to do so. Hon. Members have already mentioned the White Eagle Lodge, pagans and the Spiritualists’ National Union, which have been able to conduct marriages. It is entirely up to the authorities in Scotland to enable that to happen, but the House must understand that that would be the potential outcome if the amendments were incorporated into the Bill.

The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) made several important points about Scots law, the Council of Europe and whether there would be an issue for Scotland. Scots law is not incompatible with the ECHR, as other belief organisations can conduct legal marriages. That is our point, and in a way he has proved my point for me: the amendments would not enable that, that is why they would leave the Bill in a very difficult position.

Dr Huppert: There are many points on which I would love to tackle the Secretary of State, including the idea that the amendments are allowing everybody in one version, and not enough people in another, and that either way they fail the Goldilocks test. She makes the case, as I understand it, that if we allowed a route that was not premises-based, it would mean completely redoing marriage law. Does she accept that marriage law already

[Dr Huppert]

has routes for Jews and for Quakers that are not premises-based, and that to have a route that is not premises-based simply cannot fundamentally weaken marriage law, as it would have done so since 1949 and before then?

Maria Miller: My hon. Friend reads my mind, because I was about to go on to that very point. He is right: it is important that we recognise that those of the Jewish faith and Quakers have a particular position, and we have been accommodating their needs since marriage was first regulated in this country back in 1753, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) mentioned. That is a long-standing historical arrangement designed to respect and accommodate ancient and religious traditions. My hon. Friend will understand that because it has been established in time, it cannot be changed retrospectively and it is therefore entirely consistent with the position set out by the Attorney-General.

Kelvin Hopkins: I do not follow the right hon. Lady's logic. She says that the Jews and the Quakers have a particular position, which has been accommodated. Why cannot we have a particular position, which is accommodated too?

Maria Miller: Because the existing arrangement pre-dates the European convention on human rights, as the hon. Gentleman knows. That is the anomaly. Furthermore, it is not legally possible to restrict—

Mr Blunt: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Maria Miller: May I make a tiny bit of progress before taking my hon. Friend's intervention?

Furthermore, it is not legally possible to restrict the approved organisations approach only to humanism. There can be no basis to justify a difference of treatment between one belief organisation and another, and if we did so we would be vulnerable to legal challenge—the very point that the Attorney-General made. If the amendment were accepted, I would have to consider whether I could sign a section 19(1)(a) statement, indicating that in my view the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the European convention on human rights, on the introduction of the Bill in another place. I would probably have to sign a section 19(1)(b) statement that I cannot state that in my view the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the convention, because of the different treatment of humanists and other belief organisations. That is clear, it is a statement of fact and it is entirely consistent with the situation outlined by the Attorney-General.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General said, the amendment would clearly make the Bill incompatible with the European convention on human rights. This is a complicated issue that could be looked at further in the other place, but I want to make it clear to the House today that if the issue is discussed in the Lords, further information can be provided if that is requested and required. I am happy to write to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston, and to place a copy of my letter in the Library, setting out the legal objections offered to the House today. I hope that

would help to inform proceedings in the other place. I would be happy to copy the letter to the Liberal Democrat spokesman.

Kate Green: May we ask that that letter sets out in detail the Government's objections in the context of the convention on human rights, and that there will be no gaps? It seems to us that new objections have emerged even in the course of the debate this afternoon, so I would be grateful for the right hon. Lady's assurance that that will be a comprehensive statement of the Government's concerns in relation to the European convention on human rights.

Maria Miller: I am happy to say that the letter would be a comprehensive statement of the concerns that I have. I have covered many of those today, but I will consider whether there are any that I have not included for reasons of time. I am happy to be as helpful as I can.

Mr Blunt: My right hon. Friend has advanced the rather preposterous proposition that the United Kingdom's accession to the European convention on human rights is now acting to limit the rights of members of our population—humanists—to conduct marriages. That goes to the central point. I will be happy if she can give the House the assurance that the Government are in principle in favour of humanists conducting marriage, and that they will use the resources at their disposal to find a way of getting that on to the statute book. If it is not going to happen in the course of the Bill—I do not want the Bill delayed, any more than anyone else—at least the Government can make that statement of policy intent.

Maria Miller: My hon. Friend may not have fully understood the argument being put forward by the Attorney-General. The issue is that the amendments discriminate in favour of one group over another. Humanists are being singled out for particular treatment. I am very happy to set out the argument fully. This is a different situation from—

Mr Blunt: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Maria Miller: Will my hon. Friend allow me to respond to his intervention before he intervenes on me again?

This is a particularly difficult area. Marriage law and the principles behind it have evolved over many centuries, as the hon. Member for Rhondda pointed out. Yes, there are anomalies in some areas, but we are talking about a particular set of amendments relating to humanists and the problem that would be faced if they were incorporated in the Bill. It is not the Government's policy to extend marriage in the way that my hon. Friend is talking about. Humanists can already get married. The Bill is all about ensuring that people who cannot currently get married—same-sex couples—are able to do so. That should be the focus of our discussions.

I also draw hon. Members' attention to the confusing and contradictory nature of the amendments. Is humanism non-religious, as suggested in the definition of approved organisations in new clause 15? If so, would the protections in the Bill for religious organisations apply? There was some confusion about that, particularly as to whether

this would allow the marriage of same-sex couples. Or is humanism religious, as suggested in amendments 20 and 21, which add reference to approved organisations to the definition of a “relevant religious organisation”? Are we clear what humanism means in legislative terms, and who the definition would catch? The amendments simply highlight some of the problems that would arise from trying to shoehorn a new category of marriage into the current legal framework.

Dr Huppert: I do not think that the Secretary of State quite addressed the question put by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt), which was whether in principle—if there was a way that did not involve the Bill, did not have ECHR problems and did not cause any other problems—she and the Government would support the concept of humanist weddings.

I am really rising because I am so shocked at the concerns about the extra amendments, which again were inserted at the suggestion of Government officials. The BHA has changed this to suit the Government, and the Government then complain about the changes.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Mr. Huppert, it is not necessary to restate at length a previous question. I remind you that interventions should be brief, not a series of questions. It would help enormously if we stuck to those conventions.

Maria Miller: I can be very clear. It is not coalition policy to undertake the actions that the hon. Gentleman outlines. I have already dealt with the comments made about the work of my officials. Most individuals who have been dealing with my officials have found their work incredibly diligent and helpful. I am sorry that he does not feel that that has been the case in this instance.

New clause 14 would create a new status of civil union and repeal the Marriage Act 1949. That would prevent the creation of any new marriages: put simply, England and Wales would no longer recognise marriage within the law. It seems that the intention here is that civil unions would replace marriages—a change that would affect everyone who wants to marry in England and Wales in the future. That is simply not a position that the Government can support.

Conversely, the Bill is about strengthening marriage, and the Government strongly oppose any measure that would undermine marriage. New clause 14 would damage the important institution of marriage beyond repair. It would do all intents and purposes abolish it. I therefore note and welcome the intention of the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) not to press the new clause to a vote. It is not something that we could support if he were to do so.

Greg Mulholland: I thank the Secretary of State for that kind acknowledgment. The new clause was very much an attempt to show that we should be separating the state recognition of marriage from the religious. That is the point, not what it is called in the end. We are changing the institution of marriage through the Bill anyway, so to do so properly and more succinctly is something that should be explored in the other place.

Maria Miller: I do not believe that we are changing marriage. Marriage is one state, which we are enabling a new set of individuals to access, so I do not agree with

my hon. Friend’s argument. This is not about changing marriage; it is about ensuring that more people can get into it.

4.15 pm

Greg Mulholland: Will my right hon. Friend give way, briefly?

Maria Miller: I will make some progress, because we have another string of amendments to get through.

The effect of new clause 18 and amendments 58 and 59 would be to require all marriages not conducted through a religious ceremony to be called civil marriages. The intention seems to be to separate marriage conducted through civil and religious ceremonies into two distinct institutions. Let me be clear that there is one legal institution of marriage in England and Wales that couples—all couples, we hope, as a result of the Bill—can join through either a religious or a civil ceremony. The new clause would create a separate type of marriage without any consideration of the legal impact. The legal consequences of such a new distinction are completely unclear.

New clause 18 contains no reference to same-sex couples, so it does not seem to require that such couples should be limited to access to civil marriage only, which might be thought to have been the purpose of distinguishing between religious and civil marriage for legal purposes. That is simply not something the Government can support. We all want couples to be able to access the important and single institution of marriage, and that is what the Bill is about. The Bill has one clear and straightforward purpose: opening up the existing institution of marriage to same-sex couples. It is not designed for the sort of fundamental changes proposed in the new clause.

Simon Hughes: Does the Minister not accept, however, that there are many people who believe that the civil status of coming together in marriage should be open to straight and gay couples alike, but that people of faith and faith groups should be free to define what they understand as marriage? Some of them would permit same-sex marriage, but some of them take a different view and would not.

Maria Miller: I entirely agree with what my right hon. Friend says and think that is what the Bill delivers. It delivers the ability of civil marriage to accommodate same-sex couples and enables religious organisations that wish to opt into that to do so, but allows others not to if that is what they choose. That is an important and fundamental principle of the Bill that I think reflects what he has just said.

I believe that the changes proposed in the amendments are an unnecessary and potentially unhelpful diversion from the important objective we are trying to achieve: removing the unfairness that excludes same-sex couples from being able to marry. We must remain focused on that objective and not be sidetracked into discussions on other issues at this point. I ask hon. Members not to press these amendments, so that we can proceed to discuss the next group.

Kate Green: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to this interesting and, at times, passionate debate. I pay particular tribute to the hon.

[Kate Green]

Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), who tabled the amendment that led us to new clause 15, and the hon. Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams), who first tabled it in Committee, for the work we have been able to do across parties to bring the proposal to the Floor of the House this afternoon.

Despite the fact that the proposal has been before the House in some form or other since 5 February, as the hon. Member for Cambridge pointed out, it seems that the legal doubts expressed this afternoon by the Attorney-General have come to us rather late in the day. That does not mean that we do not take them extremely seriously; of course we do, but it would have been helpful to know that discussions were taking place with officials, whether or not they were proactively suggesting that such changes to the original proposal would help to strengthen it. The fact that discussions took place some weeks ago means that it is a matter of particular regret that the legal difficulties with the proposal were not highlighted earlier.

The Secretary of State said that my amendment and, I think, others in the group were unnecessary. For humanists, it is not unnecessary at all. Yes, they can choose to have a civil marriage and a humanist ceremony, but they do not have available to them a ceremony that they feel would properly recognise them as marrying one another and making that public commitment in front of family and friends. That is the discrimination that we seek to address. However, I take very seriously her wish, which she knows we share very strongly, to see this Bill proceed. We do not want it to be delayed or have its development and progress inhibited by arguments about these proposals.

I want to pick up on one or two of the objections that were raised not only by Ministers but by other hon. Members around the Chamber, suggesting that there are still genuine uncertainties about what is and is not provided for in current law and what we now seek to achieve. If the Secretary of State is willing to come forward with a statement of the Government's legal concerns, that would be extremely helpful in properly facing off all the objections that have been raised in time for them to be understood and considered before the Bill is debated in the House of Lords. We do not want a re-run of objections arriving late or being raised without justification. It is clear from what has been said today that many hon. Members would like the Government's position to be fully argued in good time for a fully informed debate in the House of Lords.

Some Members, particularly the hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) and the Secretary of State, have said repeatedly that these proposals in some way undermine the quadruple lock that has been put in place. The Secretary of State suggested that that is because it is not clear whether the protections that it affords would apply to humanists, and if so, that might undermine the protections for religious organisations. If so, it would be extremely helpful to understand exactly how that is. We would be grateful if the Secretary of State fully clarified that in the letter that she says she will make available to the House.

A misunderstanding has come up repeatedly this afternoon. We recognise that the system in England is different from the system in Scotland, which registers

celebrants. The system in England is not based only on the registration of premises for Jews and Quakers, for example. There is no requirement for them to hold their ceremonies in certain premises, but they are required to hold ceremonies in accordance with their usages. What is more, the amendment would not attach registration to celebrants. It is about registering organisations, and one form of organisation in particular—that which is a belief organisation, a charitable organisation or a humanist organisation that secures the approval and authorisation of the Registrar General. It is very clear which kind of institution we are trying to cover.

The most serious objection is the human rights objection, which, sadly, only emerged at the beginning of this afternoon. I would be grateful if any hon. Member who participated during the earlier stages of the Bill and who remembers differently could correct me, but I do not recall the human rights objection being raised at any point before this afternoon. Of course it is vital that we take account of the Attorney-General's concerns and advice on this matter; it would be utterly irresponsible of us not to do so. However, even the Attorney-General's advice changed over the course of this afternoon. At the beginning of the afternoon, he said that there was a problem with the proposal because it could apply so widely that any organisation, including a society for the promotion of tiddlywinks, might potentially be discriminated against if it were not authorised to carry out marriages as well. I think that he rowed back from that later on and acknowledged that only belief organisations would be authorised. He was right to say that the possibility of discrimination between different belief organisations is the central human rights issue that must be addressed.

The Attorney-General: Let me make it quite that it has to be a belief organisation because unless there are some grounds for belief, I assume that there is no reason for carrying out a ceremony. I am sorry if my point sounded flippant, because it was not intended to be. My point was that belief organisations can be very wide in their scope and are certainly not confined to humanism.

Kate Green: I appreciate the Attorney-General's concern that there could be human rights challenges on those grounds. It would be useful to know how he assesses the chances of such a challenge being successful and to understand on what basis a challenge might be argued. It would also be useful to know what precedent there is of such challenges being successful elsewhere.

I am prepared to wait for the fully analysed opinion to be presented to the House. I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to provide that in good time before the Bill proceeds through the House of Lords. I hope that she will take note of our interest in having a proactive opinion, as the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt) said, that identifies how any defects in the proposal could be cured, as the Attorney-General has mentioned. Given the commitment from the Secretary of State, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 9

CONVERSION OF CIVIL PARTNERSHIP INTO MARRIAGE

Dr Huppert: I beg to move amendment 15, page 10, line 24, at end add—

(9) Where a civil partnership formed under part 1, section 96 of the Civil Partnership Act (Civil Partnership with former spouse) is converted into a marriage under this section—

- (a) the civil partnership ends on the conversion, and
- (b) if both partners so elect, the resulting marriage is to be treated as having subsisted since the marriage dissolved under Schedule 2 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 was formed.’

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

Government amendments 25 to 39.

Amendment 49, in schedule 4, page 33, leave out from line 42 to line 4 on page 34 and insert—

‘(2) Omit sub-paragraph (1).’

Government amendments 40 to 47.

Amendment 13, in schedule 5, page 36, leave out lines 10 to 37 and insert—

‘Section 4 (successful applications): for subsections (2) and (3) substitute—

“(2) The certificate is to be a full gender recognition certificate if—

- (a) the applicant is not a civil partner and does not request an interim gender recognition certificate,
- (b) or the applicant is a civil partner who does not request an interim gender recognition certificate and the Panel has decided to issue a full gender recognition certificate to the other party to the civil partnership.

(3) The certificate is to be an interim gender recognition certificate if either—

- (a) the applicant is a party to a protected civil partnership and the other party to the civil partnership has not made an application under section 1(1).
- (b) the applicant is a party to a protected civil partnership and the Panel had decided not to issue a full gender recognition certificate to the other party to the civil partnership,
- (c) or the applicants is party to a protected marriage, requests an interim gender recognition certificate and the application includes a statutory declaration of consent from the applicant’s spouse.

(3A) If a gender recognition panel issues a full gender recognition certificate under this section to an applicant who is a party to a marriage or civil partnership, the panel must give the applicant’s spouse notice of the issue of the certificate.”.’

Amendment 14, schedule 5, page 39, line 39, leave out ‘(by virtue of section 4(2)(b) or (4A)).’

Amendment 18, in schedule 5, page 40, line 18, at end insert—

‘One-off compensation payment to couples whose marriages were annulled to permit a person to obtain a gender recognition certificate

9A Schedule 4 (Effect on Marriage): at beginning insert—

“(1) This section applies to a formerly married couple whose marriage was annulled in order to permit one or both partners to that marriage to obtain a full gender recognition certificate, provided that—

- (a) the marriage was annulled following the coming into force of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, and
- (b) the formerly married couple either—
 - (a) (i) formed a civil partnership with each other within six months of the annulment of their marriage, and continue to maintain their civil partnership, or
 - (ii) have continued to live together as a couple in the same household since the annulment of their marriage.

(2) The couple shall be compensated from public funds to the amount of £1,000 by way of apology for the distress and costs incurred as a result of the annulment of their marriage.”.’

Amendment 22, in schedule 5, page 40, line 18, at end insert—

‘Reinstatement of marriages annulled to permit a person to obtain a gender recognition certificate

9A Schedule 4 (Effect on Marriage): at beginning insert—

“(1) This section applies to a formerly married couple whose marriage was annulled in order to permit one or both partners to that marriage to obtain a full gender recognition certificate, provided that—

- (a) the couple have continued to live together in the same household since the annulment of their marriage, and
- (b) both partners to the former marriage give notice to a registrar that they wish their marriage to be reinstated.

(2) When notice is given under (1)(b), the marriage shall be reinstated with effect from the date the couple give notice to have it reinstated.”.’

Amendment 16, in schedule 5, page 40, leave out lines 30 and 31 and insert—

- ‘(a) the registration of qualifying marriages,
- (b) the registration of qualifying civil partnerships,
- (c) the issue of replacement marriage certificates displaying the new details of the parties to the marriage but maintaining the original date,
- (d) the issue of replacement birth certificates where the application is shown on the certificate, with the consent of the other parent named and—
 - (i) where the child has reached 16 years of age, the consent of the child to whom the birth certificate relates,
 - (ii) where the child has not yet reached the age of 16 years, the consent of the other parent named on the birth certificate, where present.’

Government amendment 48.

Amendment 12, schedule 7, page 50, line 37, at end insert—

‘24A Section 12 (grounds on which a marriage is voidable): omit paragraph (h).’

Dr Huppert: We now move on to a rather different subject, but it is still an important one that affects a number of people greatly. A range of issues apply specifically to people who change their gender, who transition between genders or who are transgender. There may not be a huge number of people in that category and they may be a small minority, but they have been subject to some of the worst discrimination over many years and decades. Indeed, that has happened partly because there are not as many people in that group as in other groups.

Another group that we will not talk about specifically today is that of people who are intersex and who do not associate with one gender for a range of reasons. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) has tabled some amendments to clarify the position for such people. I assume that it is clear that the Government’s intention is that marriage will be equal and will not exclude those who do not identify as male or female. I assume that there is no intention to discriminate. We therefore need to focus on the specific issues for the small group of people who are transgender.

[Dr Huppert]

Last Friday was IDAHO—the international day against homophobia and transphobia—and I spoke to people who have suffered such discrimination at an event in my constituency. My constituency is perhaps uniquely blessed in having not only a number of people who are out about the fact that they are transgender—many people, for understandable reasons, are cagey about admitting that they are transgender—but a number of transgender people who have been elected to the local council. Indeed, we had the first transgender mayor in the country. She was very proud of that role.

There is far too much transphobia, which many people have to face. Like other hon. Members, I have worked with Trans Media Watch, which keeps an eye on the truly disgusting articles that appear in the press about people who are transgender. I heard a number of awful stories at a recent event. To give one of the many examples, Lucy Meadows, a primary school teacher, killed herself after a very nasty article came out in the *Daily Mail* shortly after she transitioned. That is not acceptable in society, and we need to make a stand against it.

Sometimes, such things happen because people wish to be actively nasty. Sometimes, problems are caused for people who are transgender because of problems with the legislation that we produce. We do not always think of people who are transgender when we are writing legislation and there can be unintended consequences. I do not believe that this Government or the last Government have ever intended to discriminate against people who are transgender, but it has happened by accident.

We have had a few specialist debates—for instance, about which gender of police officer should search people who are transgender. I proposed that we should just ask people whom they wished to be searched by, which would resolve the problem.

4.30 pm

One problem that many transgender people face is when their marriage is stolen from them. A number of people are in a perfectly stable and loving married couple, one of whom wishes to transition. I know a number of people in that category. As it happens, the ones I know have been male to female transitions, but that is not uniquely so at all. Under the current law, for somebody to transition, they have to end the marriage. We, the state, say to people who still love each other, “You must get a divorce and break your marriage.” They were allowed a civil partnership when those were introduced, but they still have to go through that process, which is quite an upsetting thing to do.

There is some good journalism about transgender issues. There was a piece in *The Guardian* a couple of weeks ago about one of my constituents, Sarah Brown, who is a city councillor in Cambridge. She and her partner Sylvia, who were married, still live together and are still in a loving couple. The article states:

“For Sylvia, the toughest part of Sarah’s transition was being forced to replace their marriage with a civil partnership. ‘I thought it wouldn’t make a difference,’ says Sylvia. ‘I’m a scientist, I’m rational. It’s just a bit of paper, but it made us cry.’ In contrast to the poetry of the wedding vows, they found the language of the civil partnership ceremony like a business arrangement.

Sylvia and Sarah hope to remarry when the marriage (same-sex couples) bill becomes law, but their original marriage can never be restored in the eyes of the law. ‘When the registrar pronounced us civil partners it felt like the state was kicking us in the teeth,’ adds Sarah.”

That is what we as a country did—not deliberately in any way, but by accident—and many people feel the same. That is why I have tabled a range of amendments and worked with colleagues who care about these issues, of whom there are a number in all parties, to see what we can do to fix this.

We can now make some amends, because some of the couples affected will now be able to move to a marriage, as Sylvia and Sarah talked about doing. Amendment 15 simply argues that when such couples convert back from a civil partnership into a marriage, if both wish to do so, they should be able to count the marriage as having continued during the gap. In that way, we would be saying that, because we took their marriage from them for that period, we would let them count as having been married even though in fact they had to go through a civil partnership and then back again.

The amendment might have all sorts of effects, including on pensions, although I do not think it would have any financial consequences on a scale that the Government should be concerned about. Mostly, it would have a moral effect on the couples involved. It would say to a couple who stayed together through a transition that their relationship continued and that we value it as such. I do not intend to press it to a vote, but I expect the Government to consider it carefully and I hope that some progress will be made either here or in the other place, so that we can provide some restoration for the people whom we forced to go through the process.

I support amendments 18 and 22, which I believe that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) will discuss later, as they would also take some steps in the right direction. Amendment 18 would provide £1,000 in compensation to people who lost their marriage, not because we value that stolen marriage at £1,000—that is not the point in any way—but to acknowledge that we forced people into something that we should not have forced them into, so causing them genuine emotional hardship. Amendment 22 is an alternative way to restore the lost marriages and does not go quite as far as amendment 15. The point that I wish to make is not about the exact details; it is that we need to make restoration for people who went through the process.

None of the amendments is quite perfect. One person in a same-sex couple in a civil partnership might transition in future, in which case they would not be allowed to continue in that civil partnership. They would have the route of changing to a marriage available to them, so it is less of a concern, but it is a small anomaly.

Amendment 15 seeks to right a wrong that we have caused. I fear, however, that we may make errors in the Bill, not because of any intent to get things wrong, but because of the consequences of complex issues working together. Amendments 13 and 14 deal with one such issue. Where a couple are married and one transitions, there is a requirement to have a gender recognition certificate. Under current provisions, their partner would have to agree to allow them to get that certificate. Therefore, if I am married to somebody and wish to transition and change my gender, they get to veto whether that is fully legally recognised. Why should that

be? A relationship might have terminally broken down for some reason, in which case it is possibly heading towards divorce, but that may not be so. The couple might not wish to go through that, yet one person is allowed to say to the other, “You may not do this; you may not legally change your gender fully. You will have to force through a divorce, which can take a very long time.” We should try to avoid the spousal veto.

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree it is bizarre that a man or woman who is transitioning can have surgery and change their name but cannot have a gender realignment certificate without spousal approval?

Dr Huppert: I find it very bizarre. There are a number of anomalies in the whole process because of how it is set up, but a gender recognition certificate may be applied for only two years after someone has transitioned into the acquired gender full time, so there has already been quite a long time to try to sort out other issues. Amendments 13 and 14 would simply end the spousal veto, so that people who transition do not have to rely on their spouses to give approval. Some spouses will not give permission for that to happen.

Amendment 16 deals with marriage and birth certificates when there are transgender issues. It argues that replacement marriage certificates should be available for people who have transitioned, so that we do not force them to be outed every time they have to show a marriage certificate. We would reissue a marriage certificate with the original date and new names. That is a simple thing, but it will make a big difference. Not everybody who has transitioned wants to be known as somebody who transitioned. Many people just want to be known by their new name and new gender, and they do not wish to explain their past in every case. They already face that often enough when dealing with various institutions and medical issues. We should not force people to out themselves every time that they need to present a marriage certificate.

Bob Stewart: There will be problems with police records, for example, if people change names like that, and that will cause a big problem.

Dr Huppert: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. In many cases, of course, there is no problem, and there are technical ways in which the issue has been resolved. It is already possible for people to transition and the state manages to cope—income tax, HMRC and other systems manage to cope and each have detailed arrangements. I do not think that would pose a problem for somebody transitioning to avoid their previous criminal record, but it would avoid their being outed inadvertently or accidentally, which is a genuine fear for a large number of transgender people.

At the moment, a child’s birth certificate cannot be reissued on the parent’s transition. Again, that raises concerns about privacy and outing, not just for the transperson but for their families, for example, when applying for school places. Under the amendment, replacement birth certificates could be issued with the new gender and with the consent of the child once they have reached an age at which they are able to consent. Older children should clearly have some say in this.

Such a provision would protect the privacy of the person who has transitioned where such information should not be revealed.

Clause 12 relates to an interesting aspect of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, which gives grounds to void a marriage. It states that a marriage can be voided if

“the respondent is a person whose gender at the time of the marriage had become the acquired gender under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.”

If somebody marries somebody who has already transitioned, they can at any point cancel the marriage on that ground. Technically, that applies only if the person did not know that their partner had transitioned, but the problem is that, if someone is not public about the fact that they have transitioned, they are at risk of their partner, at any time, saying, “I did not realise.” There would be little proof, unless we expect transpeople always to tell others.

We could get rid of that anomaly and still allow normal divorce proceedings to be started. The marriage could still be ended if there was an incompatible breakdown when a person discovers the history of their partner—there would still be a way out for them if they feel they cannot continue—but we should remove the automatic sense that somebody has done something wrong simply by being transgender. That is a real concern. There have been such cases in Scotland—they were not to do with marriage, but with other sexual interactions—and there have been sex-by-fraud cases simply because somebody was transgender. We simply should not allow that to happen. Those are small and specific issues, but the proposals will make a difference to a persecuted minority within our country.

Government amendments on pensions and transgender people are welcome. I thank the Government for making that step, which is welcomed by the trans community and is to be supported.

Before I conclude, I want to highlight amendment 49, which is in the name of the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). I hope she does not mind my speaking to it before she does. The amendment would end a bizarre anomaly. If I marry somebody and die, they get a survivor’s pension related to the amount of time that I have spent in work. However, if I have a civil partnership with somebody and die, the payment they receive is related not to the time when I started work, but to the time when civil partnerships came into existence. That is bizarre. Any insurer would not know whether I would choose a marriage or civil partnership. It seems odd that one pension is backdated to when I started work, and the other goes only part way. It would make sense if both pensions dated back to the date of the marriage—I can understand the logic, although I do not believe that that is the right solution—but there is a blatant and odd inequality.

Most employers pay no attention to the anomaly because they are keen to be helpful to their employees. Many of them can nominate people to whom they are not married to receive the survivor’s pension. However, we should not have such inequality written in law. I apologise to the hon. Lady for saying that before she has had a chance to do so.

I hope that the Government take those issues seriously, because we can fix anomalies of the past and avoid making further ones in the present.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert). I will address many of the issues he has raised. As he said powerfully, the amendments seek to provide some small right to the dreadful wrong that has been done to those couples who were forced by the state to annul marriages in order for one of them to avail themselves of their most basic civil rights.

Amendments 18 and 22 are in the name of the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), who is unable to be in the Chamber today because he is attending the spring session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I gladly agreed to speak to the amendments as the second signatory, because I have long been concerned to see that injustice rectified.

I shall provide the House with the case example that led the hon. Gentleman to table the amendments. His constituents have been married for 35 years as man and wife. The Gender Recognition Act 2004 forced them to annul their marriage, which they did in 2007, so that the male-to-female transsexual in the relationship could obtain a gender recognition certificate in her acquired gender and get on with her life. The legislation did not allow the couple to continue to be married even though they wanted that. Both were extremely clear that they wished to stay together and did not want a divorce. They had cared for, supported and loved each other as a married couple for more than 30 years, and wanted the care and support they mutually offered each other to continue in the years ahead. They wanted to keep their family together for their own sake and for the sakes of their children.

Since being forced to annul their marriage, the couple have lived together as two women in a civil partnership. They entered into a civil partnership on the very same day their marriage ended and still live together, but they should never have been made to annul their marriage, even if an alternative legal mechanism was available in the form of a civil partnership. They have lived together continuously for 44 years and it is their marriage anniversary that they still celebrate. For many couples, annulment was deeply distressing and not something of mere technical and legal significance.

As I think we would all recognise, reasons for marrying and making a public commitment are intensely personal and varied. For some, marriage is not just about legal practicalities, and the blunt replacement of one legal mechanism with another is not the end of the matter. Other hon. Members will have similar cases. The number of people involved is not large—a point I will come on to in a moment—but the injustice done to them is real. We ought to take this opportunity to go some way to righting the wrong done.

What can the Government do to make amends? Amendment 18 proposes to require the Government to make a one-off compensation payment from public funds to couples whose marriages were annulled, to permit a person to obtain a gender recognition certificate and enter into or continue to maintain a civil partnership; or to those who have continued to live together as a couple in the same household since the annulment of their marriage, but who did not choose to go down the route of a civil partnership. It is a simple principle: married couples forced by the state to have an annulment that they did not want should be compensated by the Government by way of an apology for the distress and

cost incurred as a result of the annulment of their marriage. The amendment proposes a nominal sum of £1,000. The public expenditure implications would be negligible—we know the numbers are small, as I will go on to explain in a moment. The £1,000 compensation payment would be far less than the cost for couples who have had to pay for a divorce and a civil partnership ceremony.

4.30 pm

A written question, answered by the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), the Minister with responsibility for equality, confirmed that 151 interim gender recognition certificates were made—the certificates given when someone seeking full legal recognition is in a pre-existing marriage. The interim certificate could be used as grounds for annulment. After annulment, a full certificate giving the long sought-after civil rights could then be issued. Some of those 151 couples will have gone on to divorce and continue to live with, or form civil partnerships with, their former spouses. It is only they who would be eligible for compensation under the amendment, so the cost would probably be no more than tens of thousands of pounds and could not, at the absolute maximum, be any more than £151,000. The financial implications of the amendment, therefore, are tiny to the point of being negligible. This is about a symbolic apology: the state apologising for having, as the hon. Member for Cambridge put it, stolen those marriages.

Lady Hermon: I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene on what is a very interesting contribution. Will she clarify a small point, but one that is of great significance to those in Northern Ireland? I am following the logic of her argument. Under schedule 2 to the Bill, those in England and Wales can avail themselves of same-sex marriage. As soon as they go to Northern Ireland, however, that marriage would have to be treated as a civil partnership. Is the logic of her argument that the state that passed the legislation must also compensate those who regard themselves as married couples in England and Wales, but become civil partners again in Northern Ireland?

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point. Given that we are talking about a symbolic apology, it would be generous and appropriate for it to be offered in Northern Ireland too. My argument is not a narrow legal argument. A wrong was done. To the extent that the wrong was done by the Government, one can make an argument that the measure is relevant only to those who were living in the country at that time.

Lady Hermon: It is very generous of the hon. Lady to take a second intervention. Just to be clear, I was not making a recommendation that compensation be paid by the state. I was simply asking the hon. Lady whether her amendments would oblige the Government to pay compensation in the circumstances she outlined. Is the logic of her argument that she would advocate compensation in Northern Ireland? I certainly am not doing so.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Lady for that clarification. In that case, my answer is simple: yes, I would.

Amendment 22 would remove any reference to compensation and deal specifically with the reinstatement of marriages in cases where couples had their marriages annulled, so that a person could obtain a gender recognition certificate and continue to live together without forming a civil partnership. In cases where civil partnerships were formed after forced annulment, I am pleased that the Bill provides some assistance. Under clause 9, a couple are permitted to convert their civil partnership into a marriage to be treated as having subsisted since the date the civil partnership was formed.

Couples who were forced to annul a marriage and enter into a civil partnership will not be able to rewrite history—at least not legally—but it will almost be as if there was no break in their marriage, which of course they never wanted to annul in the first place. These are not the only cases, however, and we must ensure that all cases are covered. As a result, amendment 22 is designed to help couples who annulled their marriages so that one person could get a gender certificate, but who did not then enter into a civil partnership. As far as possible, the injustice that they have also faced must be addressed.

When the issue was discussed in Committee, the Minister expressed sympathy for couples who had been required to make the difficult choice of whether to end their marriage to enable one of the parties to obtain gender recognition, but she said that she could not support an amendment that sought to reinstate marriages from the date they were annulled because of the difficulties that could be caused with any rights and responsibilities that the couple had accrued since their marriage was annulled—for example, retrospective entitlements to benefits and taxation.

In order to help the Government and make some progress, in this version of the amendment, I and the hon. Member for York Central are proposing that reinstatement of the marriage be from the date that the couple gave notice to have it reinstated. This would address Ministers' concern about retrospective legislation. It is not ideal. I would much prefer a fully retrospective measure, but given what the Minister said in Committee, it would be better than nothing for this small but greatly wronged—I still believe—group of people. Couples were forced to make a distressing and appalling choice, largely because policy on same-sex marriage was lagging so far behind what was right and just. I hope that we can use the window of opportunity in this historic Bill to do the right thing.

Margot James: I congratulate the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) on their work in this important area. A couple in Stourbridge came to me two years ago, one of them having undergone gender reassignment treatment and surgery. They were very distressed that their marriage had been annulled and did not want to enter into a civil partnership, for their own reasons. Does this not underline the benefit of the Bill? People who are in this position having had gender reassignment surgery will have the choice, whether they are gay or heterosexual.

Caroline Lucas: Yes, I think it does underline the benefit. As we have said, the numbers are not huge, but for the individuals involved, it was very distressing, so I think it appropriate that we take this opportunity to address the situation.

My amendment 49 would address the continuing discriminatory hurdle in the Bill around pensions. The Bill allows employers and pension providers to award gay spouses and civil partners a fraction of the survivor benefits payable to a partner in a mixed-sex marriage. It is an unnecessary and counter-productive anomaly in a Bill that otherwise makes landmark progress in furthering the fundamental human rights of gay people. The amendment would give same sex couples entering into a gay marriage entitlement to the same pension rights as married opposite-sex couples. It removes both existing discriminatory provisions in the Equality Act 2010 and the subsequent extension of that discrimination in this Bill.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): In tabling amendment 49, the hon. Lady has identified an anomaly that deserves to be rectified in the way she suggests. If the Government and the House want to give complete equality to same-sex relationships, they must address the pension question, otherwise we will have this extraordinary anomaly that if a person in a same-sex relationship today chooses to enter into a heterosexual marriage tomorrow, their new spouse would have full pension entitlement, whereas their former same-sex partner, whom they might have had a relationship with for many years, would get a fraction of that pension entitlement. If the Government and the House want same-sex relationships to have full equal rights, her amendment must be the right course of action.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that intervention. I know he has had first-hand experience in his constituency of exactly this issue.

Paragraph 18 of schedule 9 to the Equality Act 2010 allows employers and pension providers to ignore the service and contributions of gay employees made before 5 December 2005 when it comes to assessing survivor benefits for their civil partners and occupational pension schemes. Paragraph 15 of schedule 4 to the Bill would extend that discriminatory provision to same-sex spouses.

As we saw in yesterday's debate on opening civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples, the Government are comfortable arguing that unforeseen costs to pension schemes are a legitimate justification for sanctioning discrimination, yet their warning that the equalisation of treatment in the provision of occupational pension benefits will cost too much simply cannot be substantiated. No pension provider can accurately predict how many individuals in a pension scheme will be gay, never mind how many of them will marry or form a civil partnership with an individual who outlives them by a significant period of time.

Dealing with uncertainties around length of life, the possibility of illness, the decision to marry and many other issues is second nature to pension providers. Gay married people pose no more uncertainty than their straight counterparts. What is more, according to the Government's figures, two thirds of pension providers already do the right thing, so any additional liability to pension schemes will surely be minimal. The financial implications of perpetuating discrimination could be very grave indeed, though, for those individuals who

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have paid into their pension schemes in the same way as other employees, yet will be denied the survivor benefits available to married mixed-sex couples.

One recent employment tribunal found that an occupational pension scheme was directly discriminatory because it provided a civil partner only with the benefit from pension rights accrued since 2004—in other words, when civil partnerships became available in the UK. John Walker and his civil partner have been together for 20 years and registered their civil partnership at the first possible opportunity, yet the pension scheme sought to restrict the survivor benefits available to John's partner to just £500 a year. If John dissolved his civil partnership and married a woman today, she would be entitled to £41,000 per annum in the event of his death.

With the help of Liberty, John challenged that discrimination and recently won his legal battle to secure equal pension benefits for his civil partner. The employment tribunal relied on European Court of Justice rulings, which concluded that treating married and same-sex couples differently over the pensions payable to a survivor when national law recognises the relationships as equivalent in other respects breached the framework directive on equal treatment in employment. My amendment 49 would ensure full compliance with that directive and, crucially, ensure that the equality rulings made by the courts are applicable to all marriage relationships.

Mrs Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that if people are to have parity before the law, they must have not just emotional parity, but financial parity? Anything less would not be equality in any shape or form.

Caroline Lucas: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. We are talking about genuine equality. That means legal equality, as well as symbolic or any other kind of equality.

That tribunal was a landmark case. Interestingly, the Government lost the case, so one could argue that agreeing to my amendment 49 might save them money, as they would not need to pay out in future legal cases that might go against them. If the law remains as it is for civil partners and that inequality is extended to those in same-sex marriages, it could be several decades before gay couples achieve real equality in pension provision. I see no justification for continuing to permit discrimination in this area. I hope very much that colleagues will support amendment 49 and join me in overturning an anomalous and discriminatory provision.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): It is a pleasure to participate in this important debate on this group of amendments.

I have been quite conflicted over this entire subject. I am a godfather to a lovely little boy who has been adopted. His parents are in a partnership and they are both gay. I see myself very much as a progressive Conservative, and I certainly recognise that society's attitudes have advanced, which is reflected in the fact that we are debating the amendments in such detail today. Of course we do not send children up chimneys any more, or allow only privileged landowners to vote, and we got rid of slavery long ago.

5 pm

Now that we are debating the final set of amendments to the Bill, however, I have to ask where the call is for the details that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) mentioned. Where are the demands to drive those changes? There is certainly a trajectory in society that suggests that the amendments should be debated as part of the wider Bill. Like other MPs, I have had a full postbag and inbox, and I am grateful for the correspondence on these issues. Some of the language has been quite creative and provocative.

Mike Freer: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend. Speaking as a gay man in a civil partnership, I had no idea that my pension rights could be curtailed until someone wrote to me about it. The reason my hon. Friend might not have had much about that in his postbag could be that most gay people in a civil partnership have no idea that they are being discriminated against if they are in a contracted-in scheme.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The question is whether the Bill should be the vehicle for making those changes, but I very much respect his views.

I represent the beautiful, very diverse constituency of Bournemouth East. It has a substantial elderly population—some Members of Parliament have chosen to call Bournemouth “God's waiting room”—as well as a vibrant town centre with a huge gay population. It is also a university town. So it has an elderly population and a young generation, as well as a large gay community. I have talked to members of the gay community about the Bill. I have also made an effort to speak to religious groups, individuals and organisations across the town, not only about pensions but about matters such as gender recognition. We debated those matters in schools as well. I have to say that I heard no significant call for these proposals generally, and certainly not for the provision in amendment 15, tabled by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert). There were no planned demonstrations or pent-up anger because the issues had not been addressed.

Many people in the gay community like the general proposals in the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) has just pointed out, certain aspects in life need to be corrected, and this debate has been helpful in that regard. In general terms, however, most of the people I spoke to said, “Go away and focus on the economy.” They suggested that this was an important issue, but wondered why we were dealing with it right now.

The Bill was not mentioned in any Queen's Speech, and I believe that the Government could have helped themselves by following the normal protocol of announcing that the measures would be introduced in a particular legislative period. Given that backdrop, I take my hat off to the Secretary of State and her Ministers for their stamina in pursuing the amendments they have tabled. They must have known from the start how controversial the amendments and the Bill as a whole would be. I am grateful for the Secretary of State's assurances, especially on Government amendment 25.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, as I always do. The Bill as a whole has certainly been controversial—it has divided the parties

and the country—but does he agree that amendment 49, tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), is not controversial and should attract widespread support across the House and outside in the country? It represents a bit of unfinished business from the Civil Partnerships Act 2004.

Mr Ellwood: I understand what my hon. Friend says, but I step back and wonder whether all these amendments are required right now and whether this is where society wants to go right now. Many Members have been forced to make a decision, and there is naturally a tendency to want to support the Bill and not to view it as out of place. My question is why these issues are being brought to our attention at this moment in time. As I say, I did not see the deluge of calls for this measure, although the trajectory of society moving forward means that this is very much how we would anticipate the Bill and its amendments.

I am pleased that we have this opportunity to conduct this debate, which has prompted us to think about the wider issues of the role, purpose and values of marriage in our society. We are debating amendments relating to gender recognition and so forth, which has educated us about the historic role of the state in respect of the Church.

The Bible is full of commands that are unknown or ignored by many Christians today. That reflects how society is very much moving forward. Wives used to be subject to their husbands; children arguing with their parents used to be taken out and stoned to death; women used to have to cover their heads in church. Those things are either unknown by Christians today or simply ignored because they have no place in modern society. The Church has changed its views over the years—indeed, the Bill has changed as we have debated it over these last few months.

The Church remains divided on many subjects: the burning of witches, abortion, contraception, the status of illegitimate children and so forth. On a wider perspective, it is the role of Parliament to challenge the Church on these issues and through the Bill and amendments, as we did on the grander issues in the past. Slavery was indeed defended by many bishops because of the Bible; the Old Testament regulated for slavery; divorce was clearly condemned by Jesus in the Gospels, and those who had divorced were not permitted to remarry. In the Church of England, marriage was “Till death us do part”; it was long thought to be lifelong and indissoluble, yet divorce was formally introduced in this place in 1857.

What, then, are my thoughts on this Bill? I am absolutely supportive of the concept, but, like many of the Government amendments, it is ahead of its time. That puts many of us in an awkward position. Do we support the Government amendments and the Bill, which I believe to be somewhat messy and not well handled, albeit on a subject to which I do not object. Should I vote against the Bill and the amendments for which many of my constituents have called? A significant number of them were moved enough to call me to make sure that I did not support specific amendments or indeed the Bill as a whole. Then there is the final option, which is to abstain on the amendments and the Bill, thus honouring many of the calls not to support the Bill’s proposals while ensuring that my vote is honest to myself.

I shall conclude because I know others wish to participate in this important Report debate. I hope I shall not digress too far from the subject matter by mentioning that the FTSE 100 yesterday recorded its highest value in 24 years; despite being a significant economic indicator, it got no mention in this place. I hope that after Third Reading later today, we can back to considering the economy. The subject of gay marriage is significant and should be brought into law, but I remain to be convinced that it should be a priority for now. Those who will benefit from the change in the law are calling for the change now.

Jim Shannon: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to amendments 27 and 28. It will not be a surprise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to hear that I am deeply unhappy about the Bill. I have said that in Public Bill Committee and in this Chamber in the earlier debate, I said it yesterday and I will reiterate it today.

I want to thank the Government for at least listening to me and my party on one issue. The Bill proposes that same-sex marriages formed in England and Wales should be recognised as civil partnerships in Scotland and Northern Ireland. That is consistent with the way in which overseas same-sex marriages are currently recognised in the House.

I was a member of the Committee that scrutinised the Bill. When I say “scrutinised”, I mean that the hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) scrutinised it very thoroughly. Most of the Committee’s members, however, sat in silence throughout the five days of our debates on the clauses, and most of them tabled precious few amendments. They seemed to see themselves as cheerleaders for the Bill, rather than the scrutinisers that they should have been. Never before, during my short time in the House of Commons, have I known members of the official Opposition to abdicate their responsibility to hold the Government to account quite so thoroughly.

Some of us did table amendments, and took the time and the trouble to speak. I pointed out to the Committee that Scottish Ministers were to be asked to give their consent to legal changes allowing recognition of English same-sex marriages, whereas Northern Ireland Ministers were merely to be consulted. Amendments 27 and 28 give us an opportunity to align the law with that in Scotland, which is good news.

As I said in Committee and have said in the Chamber, the Bill has generated the biggest single postbag I have received on any issue in all my years as an elected representative—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am trying to be as tolerant as possible, but we are discussing this group of amendments, not previous amendments and what happened in Committee. I am trying to be fair, but we are in danger of not remaining where we should be.

Jim Shannon: Amendments 27 and 28 provide for “consent”, Mr Deputy Speaker, and remove the reference to consultation. Why is that important? It is important to the people whom I represent in Northern Ireland because it introduces accountability to the process. Some 1,700 of my constituents have contacted me about the

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issue: members of the Church of Ireland, Presbyterians, Methodists, members of the Elim Pentacostal Church, Baptist Brethren, evangelical groups, Roman Catholics, Sikhs and Muslims. Members of faith groups throughout Northern Ireland have asked us, as Members of Parliament, to push for consent rather than consultation, and we have done so.

I believe that when we convey opinions about the importance of faith and religious persuasions, as we have in the House today and as we did in Committee, those opinions cannot be ignored. It has grieved me when some members of the Committee, and perhaps some Members in the House, have brushed aside the opinions of those with hard-held religious views.

Several of my fellow Northern Ireland Members have received similar amounts of correspondence from constituents, all of them pushing for consent rather than consultation. Only 17 of my constituents who contacted me were in favour of the changes. There was very much a minority view, but it is one that we must respect and take on board.

The Northern Ireland Assembly will make the final decision on the issue, which is why amendments 27 and 28 are important. The Assembly has rejected same-sex marriage on two occasions under the consultation process. The first occasion was on 1 October 2012, when it was rejected by 50 votes to 45. Then, on 29 April this year, it was rejected by 53 votes to 42.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been generous, and have allowed what I thought was a kind of preamble, but we are actually discussing a group of amendments entitled “Gender, benefits and miscellaneous”. That is the problem that I am facing. I thought that the hon. Gentleman must be getting there. I am sure that he is, and will confine himself to the subjects under discussion from now on.

Jim Shannon: I may have been a wee bit over-ambitious in trying to express some of my points of view, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I appreciate your generosity. I will return to the issues directly.

The Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Hugh Robertson), confirmed to me, in a letter that I received yesterday, that

“Amendments 27 and 28 to clause 15(6) of the Bill make all orders and regulations made under the Bill subject to the consent of the Department of Finance and Personnel if those amendments would otherwise fall within the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

The amendments have clearly given the Assembly the authority to make a final decision on the issue. That is very significant, and I thank both Ministers for what they have done.

This issue is immensely important to us in Northern Ireland, and has given rise to a massive postbag. I thank Ministers again for enabling consent rather than consultation to be enshrined in legislation.

5.15 pm

Mike Freer: May I return to the topic of amendment 49, which I was very pleased to co-sign with the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas)?

Let me start by reassuring my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) that building a stable and cohesive society is one of the most fundamental roles of Government, so to be doing that today through debating this Bill is a highly appropriate use of parliamentary time. To those who ask whether we should be doing something else, I say that I can, perhaps unusually for a man, multi-task, so I think I can manage both to speak in this debate and to deal with other pressing issues.

Turning specifically to the amendment, it is important to distinguish between contracted-in and contracted-out pensions. This is quite a technical change and it does not apply to contracted-out pensions; it applies only to contracted-in pensions. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion said, two-thirds of pension schemes already allow spousal survivors in civil partnerships equivalent widow or widower benefits without having to be forced to do so by the law, but one-third of them are discriminating. What is worse, that is an optional discrimination; they are choosing to discriminate against surviving civil partners in contracted-in pension schemes.

Let me try to explain why that is so fundamentally wrong. The hon. Lady gave the example of John Walker. Had he married a woman, she would have got a pension on his death of £41,000, but his civil partner got a pension of just £500 per annum. That diversity is the wrong kind of diversity; that is pure discrimination. Let us assume two men or two women join a pension scheme on the same day, and they both have the same level of service, and they both enter into some form of partnership, but one gets married and the other goes into a civil partnership, and let us also assume that the day after they get married or enter their civil partnership, they are both, by some quirk of fate, killed in a car accident. The pension of the widow in marriage will be go back to the date her former husband joined the pension scheme, let us say some 20 years previously, but the civil partner only gets to go as far back as when civil partnerships came into law. That cannot be right by any stretch of the imagination.

When researching why the Government were resisting this amendment, I was told that one of the issues is the cost factor. Everything we as a Government do has a cost, so I thought there must be some huge cost—perhaps £4 billion, which was a ready price-tag yesterday. In fact, the cost of giving equal pension rights on contracted-in pensions to civil partners is £18 million—not £80 million or £80 billion, but £18 million. It is true that that is a lot of money, and I certainly would not mind having £18 million in my bank account, but let me put that into perspective. The assets under management of the pension industry amount to £360 billion, so the cost of removing this anomaly is 0.006% of assets under management. I do not think that is a price we cannot afford.

I was also told that it is wrong to force pension providers to make retrospective calculations on which they did not base their pension actuarial decisions. That, too, is a flawed argument. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion said, the actuaries behind a pension scheme make a whole variety of assumptions about longevity, how many of their pensioners will die in service and how many of them will die as a pensioner, and how long they will stay in the pension, and the accrual rate will be based on an assumption that most of their members will get married. It is complete nonsense

to suggest that pension providers cannot allow civil partners who survive to get the same benefit as a widow or widower because it has not been accrued, as there is absolutely no evidence that the actuaries have not been able to make that calculation. If they made the calculation that X% of their pensioners would get married, they could simply make assumptions about a man in a civil partnership. They will have had no knowledge of whether that man or woman would have decided to get married or to enter a civil partnership and there is no logical or financial reason why the anomaly cannot be removed.

I hope that the Minister will give some commitment from the Government that the anomaly will be reconsidered. I know it was mentioned in Committee and that the Government are resisting the amendments, but I urge my ministerial colleagues to address the issue.

James Duddridge: I totally support the comments my hon. Friend is making about removing the anomaly. Is there a list of companies that are already doing the right thing and, crucially, those that are doing the wrong thing? Are those companies named and shamed? Often, when we flick through the glossy corporate reports they say lots of glowing things and that the company is doing the right thing, but are they putting their money where their mouth is and supporting equal rights?

Mike Freer: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I have tried to dig around to find out the size of liabilities and which companies are doing this, but unfortunately I cannot find that information. It is fair to say that many corporates take great pleasure in trumpeting in their annual reports what they would regard as their social responsibility, but I think that they should be saying loud and proud—to coin a phrase—that they are treating civil partners in the same way as heterosexual widows and widowers.

I hope that my ministerial colleagues can give some ground and say that the Government are willing to reconsider the matter. The cost is not even a rounding error in the Government accounts or for the pension industry, but the benefit to the recipients is beyond value.

Kate Green: It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), whose contributions to our debates on this Bill at every stage have been exemplary, moving, powerful and reasoned.

I am very pleased to welcome warmly many of the amendments on transgender issues. I particularly welcome Government amendments 40 to 47, and I thank Ministers, who I know have taken on board issues raised in Committee about pension protections for transgender couples. I am pleased that the concerns raised in Committee have been addressed in the amendments. They will create no new liability for pension funds and will remove for some couples the hideous decision about whether a member of the couple should proceed with gender reassignment and, in the process, remove the pension rights of a much-loved spouse. I know that following the debate in Committee, transgender people and their partners are pleased by the Government's response and I want to put on record my thanks to Ministers for that.

I also welcome the other amendments on transgender issues in the group. Although I have some concerns about the compensation provision, the calculation given

to us by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) suggests that there is relatively—indeed, microscopically—little cause for any Chancellor to be concerned. I hope that the Government will consider very carefully the whole package of amendments on transgender issues proposed by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) and others. As I think the hon. Gentleman said, many of the injustices that the amendments seek to address are probably inadvertent injustices, but they are none the less deeply wrong injustices suffered by transgender couples. I invite Ministers to look, even as the Bill continues its passage through Parliament, at ways in which we might put rectifying action in place.

On amendment 49, on pensions, I too recognise the anomaly that exists between the treatment of pension rights for married couples and same-sex civil partners. I also recognise that resolving this anomaly is not without difficulty. We have always accepted the estimate of £18 million potential additional cost to private contracted-in occupational pension schemes, and I agree with hon. Members who have already said that in the scheme of overall funds under management for pension companies, that seems a very small amount indeed, although I also accept the concern that extending pension rights to civil partners could have a disproportionate impact in a very small number of cases, particularly in small and often charity employer schemes.

In relation to other schemes and the possible wider effect, for example on contracted-out occupational pensions, where Ministers have suggested a potential impact of £90 million, or in relation to public sector schemes, I must say that I am still puzzled as to why we think there is any further implication. In February I obtained a note from the House of Commons Library which pointed out that civil partners are already entitled to survivor benefits in contracted-out and public sector schemes in relation to benefits going back to 1988. That is a result of the Civil Partnership (Contracted-out and Appropriate Personal Pension Schemes) (Surviving Civil Partners) Order 2005. The Library said that the same was true of public sector schemes, as I say. So I am not clear how the exemption would affect those contracted-out and public sector schemes.

Although I have great sympathy for the amendment, the Government should come forward with a full analysis in order for Parliament to take an informed decision on what the cost implications would be. That is why I tabled new clause 17, which was not selected for debate. I understand the reasons for that, but it would have asked for the full report of the pensions costs implications for all forms of occupational pension and the impact on pension funds and pensioner poverty to be presented to Parliament. Although the new clause has not been selected for debate, I join the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green in asking Ministers to present the fullest possible information to Parliament so that we can make a proper decision. I recognise that if we get it wrong, we could drive very small pension schemes out of business, which would exacerbate inequalities in other ways.

As things stand, we are without a proper review of the cost. Ministers have expressed concerns that it could be more—potentially considerably more—than £18 million, and on the basis of the information before us, I regret that I cannot support amendment 49 today. However, I

[Kate Green]

want to place on record my strong support for the principle that underpins it, and I very much hope that information that will enable us to move forward will be available to the House as soon as possible.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mrs Helen Grant): It is nice to be able to make a contribution at last to this important debate, after sitting on the Front Bench for quite a few hours.

I will first speak to Government amendments in the group. This is a large group of amendments that, in broad terms, concern pension entitlements, gender reassignment, devolution and a number of miscellaneous matters. Government amendment 25 ensures that the protection for the Church of England in the Bill is both full and clear. We have been continuing our discussions with the Church since we knew that it had doubts about whether the power provided in clause 11(5)(c) would be sufficient to enable us to provide full protection for Church of England ecclesiastical law from the effect of clauses 11(1) and 11(2). It is an important part of the protection that Church of England canon law should not be affected by the provisions in the Bill and that references to marriage shall continue to mean marriage between a man with a woman only. Having consulted the Church of England, we have decided to provide further protection by referring to ecclesiastical law in the Bill. The amendment affects only law applying to the Church of England in the limited cases where the effect of marriage is at issue.

5.30 pm

The Government's devolution amendments clarify and make improvements to provisions on the control of secondary legislation affecting legislation within the competence of the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. These changes follow constructive discussions with the Scottish and Northern Irish Administrations, which have sought additional reassurance on the extent to which the Secretary of State will, under the Bill, be able to amend or introduce legislation normally within their competence.

In respect of Scotland, we are extending the current requirement in clause 15(6)(a) on the Secretary of State or Lord Chancellor to obtain the consent of the Scottish Ministers prior to making orders that amend legislation within the competence of the Scottish Parliament. That will broaden the consent requirement to regulations as well as orders, and will additionally require such consent when orders and regulations make provision under the Bill that is within the competence of the Scottish Parliament.

In respect of Northern Ireland, we are proposing arrangements that essentially mirror those for Scotland. Rather than a requirement to consult the Department of Finance and Personnel, we now propose a consent requirement that would apply to regulations as well as orders, and to measures creating new legislation within the competence of the Assembly.

Government amendment 48 relates to marriages in overseas consulates and armed forces bases, and means that if an Order in Council made under schedule 6 contains provisions that would be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish

Parliament must be consulted before such an order is made. Similar arrangements are proposed for Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon: My intervention relates specifically to Northern Ireland and harks back to the useful advice given at the beginning of the debate by the Attorney-General in relation to the risk of discrimination. The Minister will know that under the Bill as drafted, if it is enacted, schedule 2 means that a couple who avail of the facility of a same-sex marriage will be fine in England and Wales, but as soon as they go to Northern Ireland it reverts to a civil partnership. My concern, mirrored by the Attorney-General's intervention in relation to an earlier amendment, is that within the United Kingdom, surely that is discrimination on grounds of different status in Northern Ireland as compared with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mrs Grant: I could not quite hear everything that the hon. Lady said, but my consideration is that it is down to Northern Ireland to respond. I am assured that that is right, but if that is not correct I will write to her to clarify that.

Jim Shannon: Perhaps the Minister's correspondence could clarify the matter. I believe that the authority lies with the Northern Ireland Assembly. Perhaps she might like to reply, if that is in order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs Grant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am being reassured from both flanks, and from much higher authorities than me, that that is the situation.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way on these devolution matters and for the work the Government have done to ensure that we have our own separate legislation for same-sex marriage. Can she assure me that she will do all she can to work with Scottish Ministers and ensure that everything required for a legislative consent motion will be approved by the UK Government so that we can go ahead with our own process in Scotland?

Mrs Grant: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. We will certainly work very hard on that together.

I turn now to Government amendments 30 to 32, which are purely technical and simply ensure that the use of the phrase "existing England and Wales legislation" is entirely coherent, so as to remove any possible doubt as to its meaning. Government amendments 33 to 39 are technical and make changes to the Domicile and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1973 to ensure that it works entirely properly for same-sex marriages. Amendment 33 makes changes to the 1973 Act in relation to what applies to opposite-sex and same-sex marriages and to give effect to schedule A1.

Amendments 34, 35, 36 and 38 make changes to ensure consistency of language with the 1973 Act. Amendment 37 inserts a provision into schedule A1 to enable applications for an order to end a marriage because one of the couple is dead to be made under the Presumption of Death Act 2013. Amendment 39 enables schedule A1 to work using the presumption of death

provisions of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 if the 2013 Act is not in force when the Bill comes into force. Amendment 39 also amends schedule 1 to the Domicile and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1973 provisions on staying—meaning halting—matrimonial proceedings in England and Wales when there are other court proceedings at the same time outside England and Wales about that same-sex marriage. That will ensure that such proceedings on the same divorce, judicial separation or annulment do not give rise to conflicting decisions, which would prevent resolution of the issue.

Lady Hermon: I am listening intently to the Minister and am sorry to interrupt her at this stage, but I must bring her back to Northern Ireland. I really want an assurance from the Government that we in Northern Ireland will not see legal challenges on the grounds of breaches of the European convention on human rights by those who, if the Bill becomes law, avail of same-sex marriage in England and Wales. It is specifically paragraph 2 of schedule 2 that concerns me. It states:

“Under the law of Northern Ireland, a marriage of a same sex couple under the law of England and Wales is to be treated as a civil partnership... (and accordingly, the spouses are to be treated as civil partners).”

I just need reassurance from the Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are getting to Third Reading points and I would not want the hon. Lady to use up the points that would be better made then.

Mrs Grant: I am afraid that, as this is a devolved matter, it is impossible for me to give the assurance that the hon. Lady is asking for. Northern Ireland, rightly, has to look at the issue itself.

Government amendments 40 to 47 deal with pension entitlements. They amend part 6 of schedule 4, which provides for same-sex married couples to be treated in the same manner and to be entitled to the same survivor benefits as civil partners. As drafted, that includes couples in same-sex marriages who have preserved their marriage following the change of legal gender of one of the spouses, and it is designed to ensure that all same-sex couples are treated alike for this purpose. We recognise that our policy of treating same-sex marriages in the same way as civil partnerships for occupational pension survivor benefits may create a problem in relation to survivor benefits for a very small group of individuals whose spouses change gender during their marriage. We understand that this could deter a transsexual person from seeking to change their legal gender because of the financial impact on their husband or wife. If the amendments are made, widows of marriages that become same-sex as a result of the husband's change of legal gender during the marriage will still be treated as widows for the purpose of calculating survivor benefits in a contracted-out occupational pension scheme; and for schemes that are not contracted out, in calculating any entitlement to survivor benefits, the marriage will continue to be treated as opposite-sex marriage.

Mike Freer: If I heard the Minister correctly, she said that any transgender couple who transition will keep their full entitlement from the date of joining the pension scheme, but a civil partner survivor will still be restricted

to the point at which civil partnerships became law. Does not that create yet another anomaly?

Mrs Grant: I think that I have made the position clear. The concession is intended to target a very small group of people, and we do not intend to open it up any further. The main reason for giving the concession is that there has been no break in the marriage.

Amendment 49 would remove the exception in the Equality Act 2010 that allows occupational pension schemes to take into consideration only accruals from 2005 for the purpose of survivor benefits for those in a civil partnership. It would also remove the provision in the Bill that extends the exception to same-sex married couples. When civil partnerships were introduced, an exception was added to equality legislation that allowed schemes to restrict access to survivor benefits for those in civil partnerships, so that schemes are required, when calculating survivor benefits, to take into account only accruals from 2005, when civil partnerships were implemented.

We have a responsibility to balance the interests of all parties involved in a pension, so while we are of course absolutely committed to equality for same-sex couples, we do not believe that it would be right to put on schemes the significant additional and retrospective financial burdens that would arise from removing the Equality Act exception. We are very conscious that defined-benefit schemes already face difficult economic conditions.

Mike Freer: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Grant: I would like to make a little headway, as I have a fair way to go.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) referred to the recent case of Walker, which was supported by Liberty, in which an employment tribunal found that a pension scheme had discriminated against a member by using that exception. The Government do not agree with that finding. The decision of the tribunal is not binding and there is nothing in it that leads us to question our policy. We intend to challenge the decision robustly. The Government have recently been added as an interested party in the appeal. On that basis, I ask the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion not to press the amendment.

5.45 pm

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister explain what the situation will be if the Government lose the appeal, which seems entirely likely given the legal case?

Mrs Grant: As an optimist, I would prefer to decide what action is appropriate if that happens. I do not want to prejudge the appeal.

I shall now deal with the non-Government amendments on gender reassignment. Amendment 15 would enable a marriage to be held to be continuously valid from the date of the original marriage solemnisation, effectively restoring the original marriage. Amendment 22 would allow couples who have continued to live together following the annulment to apply to have their marriage reinstated from the date on which they notify the registrar of their wish to have their marriage reinstated.

[Mrs Grant]

I understand the concerns that prompted hon. Members to propose those amendments, and the Government have great sympathy for couples who felt required to make the difficult choice to end their marriage to enable one party to obtain gender recognition. However, it is not possible to reinstate a marriage that has been lawfully ended by an order of the court. It will be possible to backdate converted marriages to the date of registration of the civil partnership, as the civil partnership will not have been lawfully ended.

Couples who have continued to live together will be able to marry by virtue of the changes in the Bill. I realise that that will not be a reinstatement of the original marriage, but I sincerely hope that couples will feel able to make use of these important provisions. I realise that some transsexual people in this situation may be disappointed, but we need to ensure that a person's legal relationship status is completely clear at all times in the eyes of the law.

Amendment 18 would enable a one-off payment of £1,000 from public funds to be made as compensation for the distress caused to and costs incurred by couples who had their marriages annulled to enable one or both parties to get gender recognition. I cannot support that amendment because we have to take the law as we find it. It is not fair arbitrarily to compensate couples who decided to end their marriage under the law that applied at the time. There will be other couples who felt unable to end their marriage and who may have suffered distress as a result of not being able to obtain gender recognition. We have taken on board the issues that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion and my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) have raised, and we will continue to listen carefully.

The first part of amendment 16 would provide a power for the Registrar General to make regulations about the issuing of new marriage certificates to couples in which one or both parties have obtained gender recognition that reflect the trans party's acquired gender, but retain the original date of registration. That could include the date of registration of a marriage that had been annulled. I assure the House that that part of the amendment is unnecessary because the power provided in the Bill is wide enough to deal with those matters. We will give serious consideration to the registration date that should be referred to on any new marriage certificate issued to a couple who are to stay married following gender recognition. We will also need to ensure that the certificate does not inadvertently reveal that one party has gender recognition.

The second part of amendment 16 would provide a power for the Registrar General of England and Wales to make regulations providing for amended birth certificates for transsexual people's children to reflect the transsexual person's acquired gender. The amendment does not seem to be directly related to equal marriage, and in any event I cannot accept it as section 12 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 makes it clear that gender recognition does not affect the status of a transsexual person as the father or mother of a child. That section is necessary to ensure the continuity of parental rights and responsibilities and to protect the right of children to know the details of their biological parents.

Amendment 12 is intended to remove the provision in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 that makes a marriage voidable when a transsexual person marries a non-trans person but does not inform that person of their trans status prior to the marriage or at the time when it takes place. I cannot accept the amendment, because the current provision in the 1973 Act and the corresponding provision in the Civil Partnership Act 2004 provide important protection for the non-trans spouse. If a non-trans person finds themselves in a marriage to which they did not fully consent, it is only right that they should be able to apply to annul the marriage rather than have to wait to bring time-consuming and often costly divorce proceedings.

Amendments 13 and 14 would require the Gender Recognition Panel to issue full gender recognition certificates to all applicants in protected marriages, irrespective of the non-trans spouse's views. It would then be open to the non-trans spouse to issue divorce proceedings. I understand that the amendments are intended to remove the so-called "spousal veto" in schedule 5. However, let me be clear that non-trans spouses will not be able to veto their spouses obtaining gender recognition. I also understand that the amendments are intended to deal with the problem of hostile or obstructive non-trans spouses who deliberately seek to delay nullity proceedings. I have not seen any evidence that that is a widespread problem. If the grounds for the marriage being voidable are met, the hostility or absence of the non-trans spouse should not delay a court in issuing a decree of nullity. If there is evidence that unnecessary delays are occurring, we believe that it should be a matter for the court.

It must be remembered that a marriage is contracted between two people who should have an equal say in the future of that marriage. We consider that it would be unfair to remove the right of every non-trans spouse to have a say in the future of their marriage before gender recognition takes place. I therefore ask hon. Members not to press their amendments relating to gender reassignment.

Finally, I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to this important debate. I am conscious of time and know that I need to leave a little time for the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) to respond, so I will conclude my remarks.

Dr Huppert: We have discussed some important and detailed issues that matter intensely to a range of people. I am grateful for the tone in which the debate has been conducted by almost everybody; it has been productive. I know that people from the trans community and other minority sexual communities who have been watching are impressed that Parliament is able to discuss these matters.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is no longer in his place, said that there is no pent-up anger about some of these issues. I would quote comments sent to me by some of my transgender colleagues, but I suspect the language would be rather unparliamentary. There is certainly pent-up anger among people about their stolen marriages.

As I am sure the Minister is aware, I disagree on some of the detail about these amendments and I maintain that there are some concerns. I was worried by some of the language about not fully consenting to a marriage, although I am sure the Minister did not mean to imply

that people need to be protected from transgender spouses or transgender people—I am sure that is not what was intended. I was grateful to hear her say that the Government will continue to listen carefully on such issues. I hope there will be further discussion in another place and that the Government will reflect on what more they are able to do.

There has been some progress and I acknowledge some of the Government amendments. On stolen marriages, amendment 15 was always an ideal, and I am well aware of the Government's objection to backdating. It would be wonderful if it were possible to do so, and I am sure the Attorney-General is a good enough lawyer to find a way to do that. The Minister highlighted the fact that couples will be able to backdate their new marriage to the date on which their civil partnership was formed, so there is some form of backdating, which is welcome. In many cases, there will be a one-day gap between two otherwise identical marriages, which is slightly odd, but I am grateful for that progress. Amendment 15 was always somewhat optimistic, but I hope we can make progress on some of the other issues.

Amendment 49, tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), is critical. It has been noted that the current position gives rise to some truly odd anomalies. We are introducing—quite correctly—protection for someone who is transgender and transitions, so that they do not lose out on pensions by virtue of that, but we are leaving in place a slightly bizarre anomaly, mentioned by the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), regarding people who have a same-sex relationship, because we are not backdating that to before 2005. That seems deeply anomalous and I am sure the Attorney-General will give clear advice about discrimination on that basis.

Mike Freer: I raised that question because of the anomaly that a gay man or a straight man joining the pension scheme will pay contributions at the same rate but receive different benefits, which is discrimination.

Dr Huppert: It is absolutely discriminatory. It is also the case that a bisexual man or woman would pay at the same rate and would get a different pension transferred depending who they happen to end up with. That seems truly bizarre. The position is not at all sustainable and if the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion presses her amendment to the vote, I expect that I and my colleagues will support her. It is a free vote but I promise my support. However, given that Opposition Front Benchers have said they will not support the proposal, I will understand if the hon. Lady wants to leave her amendment for consideration in another place. The situation is completely unsustainable and it should not last the passage of this Bill. Amendment 15 is right in principle, but I accept that it will not win support, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 11

EFFECT OF EXTENSION OF MARRIAGE

Amendment made: 25, page 11, line 8, leave out from 'other' to end of line 10 and insert

'ecclesiastical law (whether or not contained in England and Wales legislation, and, if contained in England and Wales legislation, whenever passed or made).'.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Clause 15

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendments made: 26, page 12, line 36, leave out from 'order' to 'would' in line 38 and insert

'or regulations under this Act, except an order under section 18(3), containing provision which'.

Amendment 27, in clause 15, page 12, line 40, leave out 'consult' and insert 'obtain the consent of'.

Amendment 28, in clause 15, page 12, line 41, leave out from 'order' to 'would' in line 42 and insert

'or regulations under this Act, except an order under section 18(3), containing provision which'.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Clause 17

EXTENT

Amendments made: 51, page 14, line 1, at end insert 'except for section (Review of civil partnership)'.

Amendment 52, in clause 17, page 14, line 5, at end insert

'except for section (Review of civil partnership)'.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Schedule 2

EXTRA-TERRITORIAL MATTERS

Amendment made: 29, page 21, line 26, leave out sub-paragraph (5).—(*Maria Miller.*)

Schedule 3

INTERPRETATION OF LEGISLATION

Amendments made: 30, page 23, line 30, leave out from beginning to 'legislation' in line 32 and insert

'In existing England and Wales'.

Amendment 31, page 24, line 7, leave out 'which has effect as indicated in section 11(2)'.

Amendment 32, page 24, line 21, leave out 'which has effect as indicated in section 11(2) and'.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Schedule 4

EFFECT OF EXTENSION OF MARRIAGE: FURTHER PROVISION

Amendments made: 33, page 26, line 28, leave out from 'courts' to end of line 30 on page 27 and insert

'is amended in accordance with this paragraph.

(2) Subsection (1): after "entertain" insert "any of the following proceedings in relation to a marriage of a man and a woman".

(3) After subsection (5) insert—

"(5A) Schedule A1 (jurisdiction in relation to marriage of same sex couples) has effect."

(4) Subsection (6): after "Wales" insert "(whether the proceedings are in respect of the marriage of a man and a woman or the marriage of a same sex couple)".

7 Section 6 (miscellaneous amendments, transitional provision and savings), subsection (3): after "Act" (in the first place) insert "or by virtue of Schedule A1 to this Act,".

8 Before Schedule 1 insert—

“SCHEDULE A1

JURISDICTION IN RELATION TO MARRIAGE OF SAME SEX
COUPLES

Introduction

1 This Schedule shall have effect, subject to section 6(3) and (4), with respect to the jurisdiction of the court to entertain any of the following proceedings in relation to a marriage of a same sex couple—

- (a) proceedings for divorce, judicial separation or nullity of marriage;
- (b) proceedings for an order which ends a marriage on the ground that one of the couple is dead; and
- (c) proceedings for a declaration as to the validity of a marriage.’

Amendment 34, page 27, line 32, leave out ‘a divorce order’ and insert ‘divorce’.

Amendment 35, page 28, line 3, leave out ‘a nullity order’ and insert ‘nullity of marriage’.

Amendment 36, page 28, line 28, leave out from ‘for’ to ‘even’ in line 29 and insert

‘divorce, judicial separation or nullity of marriage’.

Amendment 37, page 28, line 32, leave out from ‘for’ to end of line 38 and insert

‘an order which ends a marriage on the ground that one of the couple is dead on an application made by the other of the couple (“the applicant”) if (and only if)—

- (a) at the time the application is made, the High Court does not have jurisdiction to entertain an application by the applicant under section 1 of the Presumption of Death Act 2013 for a declaration that the applicant’s spouse is presumed to be dead, and’.

Amendment 38, page 28, line 44, leave out ‘of validity’ and insert

‘as to the validity of a marriage’.

Amendment 39, page 29, line 47, at end insert—

8A (1) Schedule 1 (staying of matrimonial proceedings in England and Wales: interpretation), paragraph 2: after “kinds” insert “(whether relating to a marriage of a man and a woman or a marriage of a same sex couple)”.

Transitory provision until commencement of Presumption of Death Act 2013

8B (1) This paragraph applies if section 1 of the Presumption of Death Act 2013 has not come into force at the time when the amendments of the Domicile and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1973 made by the other provisions of this Part of this Schedule come into force.

(2) Schedule A1 to the Domicile and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1973 has effect with the following modifications until section 1 of the Presumption of Death Act 2013 comes into force.

(3) Paragraph 1 has effect with the following provision substituted for paragraph (b)—

- (b) proceedings for death to be presumed and a marriage to be dissolved in pursuance of section 19 of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973; and”.

(4) Schedule A1 has effect with the following provision substituted for paragraph 3—

3 The court has jurisdiction to entertain proceedings for death to be presumed and a marriage to be dissolved if (and only if)—

- (a) the applicant is domiciled in England and Wales on the date when the proceedings are begun,
- (b) the applicant was habitually resident in England and Wales throughout the period of 1 year ending with that date, or
- (c) the two people concerned married each other under the law of England and Wales and it appears to the court to be in the interests of justice to assume jurisdiction in the case.”.

Amendment 40, page 34, line 4, at end insert ‘, or

- (c) married to a person of the same sex in a relevant gender change case.

“(1B) The reference in sub-paragraph (1A)(c) to a relevant gender change case is a reference to a case where—

- (a) the married couple were of the opposite sex at the time of their marriage, and
- (b) a full gender recognition certificate has been issued to one of the couple under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.”.

Amendment 41, page 34, line 13, after ‘(2)’ insert ‘—

- (a) paragraph (a): after “man” insert “, or a woman in a relevant gender change case;”;
- (b) ’.

Amendment 42, page 34, line 18, after ‘woman’ insert ‘(other than in a relevant gender change case)’.

Amendment 43, page 34, line 27, at end insert—

‘() After subsection (9) insert—

(10) In relation to an earner who is a woman, a reference in this section to a relevant gender change case is a reference to a case where—

- (a) the earner is a woman by virtue of a full gender recognition certificate having been issued under the Gender Recognition Act 2004, and
- (b) the marriage of the earner and her widow (that ends with the earner’s death) subsisted before the time when the certificate was issued.

(11) This section is subject to regulations under section 38A.”.

Amendment 44, page 34, line 29, after ‘woman’ insert ‘or a woman married to a woman in a relevant gender change case’.

Amendment 45, page 34, line 32, after ‘woman’ insert ‘(other than in a relevant gender change case)’.

Amendment 46, page 34, line 34, at end insert—

‘() After subsection (3) insert—

(4) In relation to an earner who is a woman, a reference in this section to a relevant gender change case is a reference to a case where—

- (a) the earner is a woman by virtue of a full gender recognition certificate having been issued under the Gender Recognition Act 2004, and
- (b) the marriage of the earner and her widow (that ends with the earner’s death) subsisted before the time when the certificate was issued.

(5) This section is subject to regulations under section 38A.”.

Amendment 47, page 34, line 35, leave out paragraph 20 and insert—

20 (1) Section 37 (alteration of rules of contracted-out schemes) is amended as follows.

(2) For subsection (4) substitute—

(4) The reference in subsection (3) to a person entitled to receive benefits under a scheme includes a person who is so entitled by virtue of a qualifying relationship only in such cases as may be prescribed.

(5) For that purpose a person is entitled to receive benefits by virtue of a qualifying relationship if the person is so entitled by virtue of being—

- (a) the widower of a female earner;
- (b) the widower of a male earner;
- (c) the widow of a female earner, except where it is a relevant gender change case; or
- (d) the survivor of a civil partnership with an earner.

(6) In relation to a widow of a female earner, the reference in subsection (5)(c) to a relevant gender change case is a reference to a case where—

- (a) the earner is a woman by virtue of a full gender recognition certificate having been issued under the Gender Recognition Act 2004, and
- (b) the marriage of the earner and her widow (that ends with the earner's death) subsisted before the time when the certificate was issued.

(7) This section is subject to regulations under section 38A.”.

20A Before section 39 insert—

“38A Regulations about relevant gender change cases

(1) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, make provision for—

- (a) section 17,
- (b) section 24D, or
- (c) section 37,

to have its special effect in relevant gender change cases only if conditions prescribed in the regulations are met.

(2) Regulations under subsection (1) may, in particular, prescribe conditions that relate to the provision of information by—

- (a) one or both of the members of married same sex couples, or
- (b) the survivors of such couples.

(3) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, make further provision about cases where (because of regulations under subsection (1))—

- (a) section 17,
- (b) section 24D, or
- (c) section 37,

does not have its special effect in relevant gender change cases.

(4) Regulations under subsection (3) may, in particular, provide for the section in question to have its ordinary effect in relevant gender change cases.

(5) Regulations under subsection (1) or (3) may, in particular, modify or disapply any enactment that concerns information relating to—

- (a) the gender or sex of a person, or
- (b) the change of gender or sex of a person,

including any enactment that concerns requests for, or disclosure of, such information.

(6) In this section, in relation to section 17, 24D or 37—

- (a) “relevant gender change case” has the same meaning as in that section;
- (b) “special effect” means the effect which the section has (if regulations under subsection (1) of this section are ignored) in relation to relevant gender change cases, insofar as that effect is different from the section's ordinary effect;
- (c) “ordinary effect” means the effect which the section has in relation to same sex married couples in cases that are not relevant gender change cases.”.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Schedule 6

MARRIAGE OVERSEAS

Amendment made: 48, page 45, line 31, at end insert—

“(2) In the case of an Order in Council containing provision which would (if contained in an Act of the Scottish Parliament) be within the legislative competence of that Parliament, no recommendation is to be made to Her Majesty under this paragraph unless the Scottish Ministers have been consulted.

(3) In the case of an Order in Council containing provision which would (if contained in an Act of the Northern Ireland Assembly) be within the legislative competence of that Assembly, no recommendation is to be made to Her Majesty under this paragraph unless the Department of Finance and Personnel has been consulted.”.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Title

Amendment made: 54, title, line 4 after ‘overseas,’ insert

‘and for the review of civil partnership.’.—(*Maria Miller.*)

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: It is always so encouraging to see such a display of enthusiasm at this hour.

Third Reading

Queen's consent signified.

5.58 pm

Maria Miller: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I start by thanking the Front Bench speakers from the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, as well as those from other parties located in their area of the House, who are too numerous to mention, for the good natured way in which the Bill has been discussed, both on the Floor of the House and in Committee. The Bill has excited many different views, but we have always conducted ourselves in the best ways of this House.

While I am giving thanks, I also thank the officials who have worked very long hours to ensure that the proceedings of the House took place in a seamless manner, that questions were answered, and that papers were made available. My heartfelt thanks go out to them all for the hard work they have put into the Bill.

I have spent some time thinking about how I would address the House on Third Reading. As I have said, for many reasons, the subject draws strong opinion from Members on both sides of the House. Just as the Civil Partnership 2004 Act was discussed in pubs, homes, church halls and communities throughout the country, so has the Bill. Over the past few months, I have listened carefully to many different voices within and outside Parliament. Throughout the passage of the Bill, we have had passionate but fair debates. In the best traditions of the House, we have maintained respect for one another's views, and had open and constructive discussions with all involved.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend makes an important point on discussions with constituents. It might be wrong to generalise, but does she agree that there is a generational aspect to approaches to the Bill—the younger generation very much supports it, but the older generation is concerned about the society in which they have grown up?

Maria Miller: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I am not sure whether he puts me into the older generation—I hope not. There are differences in views across the generations, and differences in views in different parts of the country and different communities. We must accept that people have different views for whatever reason. The most important thing is that we maintain respect for people's different views. Such an open approach, which we have taken throughout proceedings on the Bill, has meant that the Government have been able to take action to improve the Bill, and to reassure hon. Members on some of the issues they have raised.

[*Maria Miller*]

The Government have throughout remained committed to the principle that people should not be excluded from marriage simply because of who they love. The institution of marriage underpins our society. Over the years, as society has evolved, so has marriage. As such, it has remained our bedrock. The values of love, commitment and stability underpin marriage—they are the values on which our society is built. Despite our differences in opinion, no hon. Member would dispute that those are the values we should promote. If the values of marriage are the values on which we want to build our society, they must be available to all, and they must underpin an institution that is available to all couples. Our country is renowned the world over for its tolerance. We have a rich tapestry of faith, belief and culture. That is unique—it is part of what makes us British. Those strong traditions will enable same-sex couples to marry.

In no way will the measure undermine those who believe—for whatever reason, whether religious or philosophical—that marriage should be between a man and woman. They can continue to believe that. That is their right. No religious organisation or individual minister will be forced to conduct same-sex marriages if they choose not to do so, and nor will religious organisations or individual ministers be forced to have same-sex marriages conducted on their premises. The quadruple lock that the Government have designed provides robust and effective protections. The Government are also clear that the Bill does not prevent people, whether at work or outside, from expressing their belief that marriage should be between a man and a woman. That is their right. Teachers will still be able to express their personal beliefs about marriage as long as they do so sensitively and appropriately. Employers will be unable to dismiss or discipline a person simply because they say they do not believe in same-sex marriage.

I acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed on those issues. The right for people legitimately to express their beliefs is why we have committed to do all we can to clarify or strengthen the protections on freedom of expression. I understand the importance that right hon. and hon. Members place on that.

If, through the Bill, we can strengthen marriage and protect it as the bedrock of our society in these changing times for the decades to come, provide protection for those religious organisations and their representatives who do not want to marry same-sex couples, and reassure those who disagree with same-sex marriage that their right to express such a belief is protected, then we should do so confidently and assertively. I am confident that we have struck the right balance. We have listened carefully to the concerns that have been raised, and we have made changes on the basis of those concerns.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The Secretary of State speaks of changes. Will she clarify how many Acts of Parliament will have to be amended as a result of the Bill?

Maria Miller: Many pieces of legislation will have to be amended, which is why we have provisions in the Bill, particularly on ecclesiastical law, to ensure that all required amendments are made. My hon. Friend is right that this is complex. That is why I have been at

pains, particularly yesterday and today, to ensure that we do not introduce new concepts into the Bill. We want to keep clarity and focus, and ensure that we do the job. I believe that in the years ahead we will look back on the passage of the Bill, as we now look back on the introduction of civil partnerships: we will be in no doubt that equal marriage is right and we will be proud that we made it happen.

It is important that we debated in detail some difficult and challenging issues. Yesterday, we talked about civil partnership. Equal marriage will correct something that is fundamentally unfair, and remove a barrier that prevents a whole group of people from access to an institution that underpins society. Civil partnerships were created to give same-sex couples equivalent legal rights to marriage at a time when society was not ready to give them access to marriage. Although I am clear that taking a decision on the future of civil partnerships now would not be a responsible thing to do, I have listened to Members' clear concerns, particularly in the comments expressed yesterday. As such, we have agreed to undertake an immediate review of civil partnerships. That will be an important way to ensure clarity on how that aspect of legal recognition of relationships is taken forward.

We have had further discussions today, with Members drawing on issues concerning humanist ceremonies. The system of marriage in England and Wales, as we discussed in great detail, is based on a system of premises, and not, as in Scotland, celebrants. A change of the nature proposed in today's amendments would, as we heard from the Attorney-General, be a fundamental change to the current structure of marriage. As has happened in Scotland, it would also open to the door to a range of other belief organisations being able to conduct marriages. Such decisions are a matter for Scotland—this is a devolved matter—but if we are to discuss these matters it is only right that Members are aware that the amendments tabled could not preclude opening up the ability to conduct marriages to belief organisations other than humanists. The Attorney-General made an important contribution to the debate. New clause 15 would have given preferential treatment to one particular belief group and made the Bill incompatible with the convention on human rights, so I thank the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) for not pressing the new clause. I welcome that decision.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend assure us that the provisions of the European convention on human rights will not be compromised by the fact that the Bill makes unequal provision for civil partnerships?

Maria Miller: Yes, I can. I am glad that I can make that clear for my hon. Friend, and may I apologise to him for not taking his intervention yesterday? I could not quite hear who it was. Had I known, I would definitely have accepted it. I sincerely apologise to him.

I accept that for some colleagues their beliefs are an insurmountable barrier to supporting the change, but to other colleagues I say, "Now is the time". Let us not be sidetracked or distracted; let us not expand the remit of the Bill beyond its original intention; let us make equal marriage possible because it is the right thing to do; and then let us move on. I am pleased to commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), I should point out to the House that I have had indication of no fewer than 14 right hon. and hon. Members seeking to contribute on Third Reading, in consequence of which I am imposing a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

6.11 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I am proud that the Commons has reached the Third Reading of this Bill, and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House also feel proud to support it and to be on the right side of history. I thank the Prime Minister and the Government for introducing the Bill. I am proud, too, that Labour votes passed the Bill on Second Reading and will do so again this week. We are strongly committed to the Bill.

The Opposition have, of course, disagreed with the Government on some issues, including on the Bill's handling of humanism, which we hope will be discussed further in the Lords. We also wanted early progress on opposite sex civil partnerships as an issue of equality before the law, but I hope that we have now agreed progress there. Nevertheless, the Minister will know that we have approached each of these issues, even when we have disagreed, in a considered way to ensure that the Bill can make progress, and I am glad that votes from Labour and across the House have ensured that no one now has any excuse to ditch or delay an important Bill that I think will bring happiness to many people.

I thank, too, all Members who, because it is the right thing to do, have championed the Bill even when they have faced pressure in their constituencies not to do so. I thank hon. Members who sat on the Committee and worked hard at every stage to get the Bill through. In particular, I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who have done immense work on the Opposition Front Bench, and my hon. Friends who supported them in Committee. I think that they, and certainly the Government, will agree that nothing makes us more grateful for the normal presence of the Whips—I am glad they join us today—than being charged with taking through Bills that depend on free votes.

This is the right thing to do. This Parliament can now join Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Uruguay, France, which has just passed its own legislation, and New Zealand, whose MPs last month celebrated their gay marriage legislation in fabulous style by breaking into song. We can only wonder what would happen if the Minister and I leapt up and started leading a Eurovision-style chorus of “Congratulations” or perhaps Abba-style—probably not “One Man, One Woman”, but certainly, “I do, I do, I do, I do, I do.”

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Yvette Cooper: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will begin with an appropriate Abba song.

Daniel Kawczynski: The shadow Minister highlights other countries that have already introduced similar legislation. If we did not pass this legislation, would we

not have to recognise the marriages of citizens from those countries who came to live or work in the United Kingdom or those who came here on holiday anyway?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We should recognise those people's marriages. We should be proud to do so, and we hope that other countries across the world will join us, including countries where there is still terrible homophobic discrimination, which we should be fighting against. I hope we can lead the way by championing this Bill. We should remind people why we are doing this. It is time to give same-sex couples the same rights as opposite-sex couples to get married. It is time for equality in marriage.

Mike Freer: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for taking a chance on me. This week alone, two more countries and six states in America have approved same-sex marriage. Is not the tide of history with us and not against us?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman is right. I pay tribute to the work he has done to champion this legislation. I think we are on the right side of history by taking it forward. It is time to celebrate, not discriminate, when a couple decide they want to make a promise to stick together for as long as they both shall live.

I have had many letters and e-mails since Second Reading; I want to share some briefly with the House. One man wrote to me describing the difficulties he had had being accepted by his family because of his sexuality. He said:

“My partner of 14 years is neither recognised nor accepted. It is however fantastic to hear politicians...standing up for people like me, ensuring that we can become equals at least in the eyes of the state, if not in the eyes of our parents and our religions.”

Another wrote to me to say:

“I'm a 23 year old gay man...I've had people tell me all my life that I am less worthy, wrong and sinful because of my sexuality, and although I've been incredibly lucky to have supportive family and friends throughout, it does grind you down. And it can hurt, really and truly hurt.”

He, too, described the importance of seeing politicians in this House

“so publicly and passionately support the rights of people like myself and many others to have a more equal standing in society is really one of the most empowering things that can be done—political leaders standing up for those whose voices so often get silenced. I truly feel it is an historic moment in Britain and all I can say is thank you.”

That is what this Bill is all about. Rarely is legislation so personal. Rarely does this House have the chance strongly to reaffirm the equal respect we have for every human being, regardless of their sexuality, and the equal respect we have for their loving, long-term relationships.

We have heard strong objections to the Bill in the course of these debates. In this House we show respect for each other's views, even though we disagree with them. Some have been concerned about the impact of the Bill on their faith and some have objected to aspects of it on grounds of their faith. It is important for us to respect freedom of religion, and I believe that the Bill has done exactly that. I hope those Members will feel reassured that their concerns have been respected. Of course, no religious organisation or priest can be required to conduct same-sex marriage and there are multiple locks in the Bill to prevent that from happening.

[Yvette Cooper]

It is also important to remember that many people with strong faith, of all faiths, strongly support this Bill. We should not see it as something that promotes a secular-faith divide, because it does not. I am pleased, too, that Quakers, Unitarians and Reform Judaism have said that they want to be able to celebrate same-sex marriages. I am pleased that they will be able to do so as a result of this Bill. I hope that other faiths will change their minds over time, because that is freedom of religion too.

We have heard other objections to the Bill in these debates. We have heard people claim that allowing gay and lesbian couples to get married will somehow undermine the marriage of heterosexual couples, but how will it? There are MPs in this House who want to get married who will be able to do so as a result of this Bill: excellent—I personally hope I get an invitation to the reception—but does that undermine my marriage? How could it—unless, of course, they want to marry the shadow Chancellor, which could pose a few challenges. This Bill does not undermine the marriage of anybody in this House or across the country. The idea that two brides tying the knot says anything about the relationship of their neighbours next door is simply ludicrous. Nor is it good enough to say that marriage is by definition between a man and a woman, because marriage has rightly changed before and it can do so again. That is not a definition; it is discrimination.

We have seen this subject become part of the internal debates within the Conservative party. To Conservative Members I would simply say that fighting over Europe is one thing—they are welcome to that—but I hope that they will stop fighting over this. I hope that they will join Members across the House in being proud of this Bill. I have heard many Conservative Members talk about the anger in their constituencies and the anger among their party members. I hope that they will now feel able to stop talking about the anger and to start talking about the joy. This is about the joy that we can deliver for those who want to get married just as their parents did, the joy that we can make possible for the couple who want to get married just as their sister or brother did last year, and the joy that we can provide by saying to couples across Britain, “We won’t discriminate against you on the ground of your sexuality. We respect, support and celebrate your relationship.”

Members might recall that I argued on Second Reading that marriage was about the joy and the sorrow, about the excitement and the tragedy, and about the romance of the wedding day as well as the deeper romance of growing old and grey together, even once the party has faded. I gave the example of an elderly couple, one of whom was caring for the other who had dementia. I described the love, commitment and duty that that showed, and said how powerful that was, whether it was between a man and a woman, two men or two women. In response to that, I received an e-mail from a man who wrote:

“I was particularly touched at your reference to a couple enduring dementia. This is precisely what my parents are now facing after 54 years of marriage. The example they have shown me over my lifetime and now that my mother suffers with the disease is precisely what marriage is all about. I try every day to live up to their example, as I enjoy a wonderful relationship with my partner whom I love very much. I expect in this day and age,

and for generations to come, that we should be able to have our commitment to each other acknowledged in law in an equal way with our straight friends. Your argument is truly Christian in nature, entirely humanist and on the right side of history. My partner and I, our families, and our future children thank you from the bottom of our hearts.”

I thank all those who are supporting the Bill. Let us be loud and proud. Let us start the singing. Let us celebrate, not discriminate. Let us pass this Bill. Let us put aside the anger, and let us hear it for the joy.

6.22 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Earlier today, while the Health Secretary was responding to an urgent question on accident and emergency departments, I had to take myself along to the A and E department at St Thomas’s hospital because something was wrong with my eyes. I am told that everything is fine, but I had some drops put into my eyes and, as a result, I am now unable to see the official Opposition. The only thing I can see, and have sought to remark on, is the loud and proud and typically revolting tie of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). However, I notice that you are wearing the same tie, Mr Speaker. I therefore unreservedly withdraw my remark.

The most serious concern that has been advanced about the Bill relates to ensuring that religious freedom is protected. The concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) are surely genuine, and we were right to pay attention to them. I would not support any measure in this House that would force a Church to conduct a same-sex marriage against its will. That principle of religious liberty is immensely important. The fact that the Bill protects Church organisations and that the Church of England has expressed its confidence in the locks that have been put into the Bill should give the House confidence that we can proceed with this measure. Of course there are other aspects of religious freedom that we need to protect. They were discussed yesterday and will be the subject of further discussion in the House of Lords.

The essence is that no church will be forced to conduct a same-sex marriage against its will. Religious freedom cuts both ways, and those who have rightly spoken on behalf of religious freedom cannot ignore the cause of religious freedom for Churches that do wish to conduct same-sex marriages. What about the Quakers, the Unitarians or the liberal Jews; what about their religious freedom? My argument is that the Bill extends religious freedom and does not restrict it and that those who are concerned about religious freedom should support it. Those advancing these arguments need to say why they have not been interested in Churches such as the Quakers and why they believe that the law of the land should prevent those Churches from doing what they seek to do.

Other arguments have been put against this legislation—that it redefines marriage for everyone, so that even if Churches are protected, the concern remains that it changes the definition of marriage for others, too. As has been said on a number of occasions here, how exactly does it harm or affect those who enter into a heterosexual marriage if a same-sex couple enter into a marriage, too? How does it devalue, change or alter the marriage they have? The truth is that this is not a measure that can remotely be held to do any harm to

people at all. Absolutely no harm is done by this measure and a very great deal of good can be done by it.

Less impressive arguments have been advanced in respect of this legislation. It has been said that because same-sex marriages cannot be consummated, there is some problem or lack of equivalence, or that because adultery provisions will not apply directly, there is a lack of equivalence. Actually, most heterosexual marriages are, sadly, ended by the cause of unreasonable behaviour, which could apply just as easily to same-sex couples. I think there was an unfortunate implication behind that criticism, which was that somehow same-sex couples were seeking a licence to enter a marriage in respect of which they sought to escape or avoid the vows undertaken. Of course, the absolute opposite is the case. It is right to extend same-sex marriage to gay couples precisely because it is a good thing if they enter into a loving and permanent commitment to each other. That is a good thing for them, for society and for families, and we should celebrate and support it.

Daniel Kawczynski: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a consensus across the country that this legislation is important and that we should back it? Even in my rural county of Shropshire, a recent opinion poll taken by the local media showed a majority in favour of this legislation.

Nick Herbert: I thank my hon. Friend and strongly agree with him.

I was about to say that it has been suggested that the public are not with this legislation. Of course an element of the public are concerned about it. That much is clear, but it is also clear from all the independently conducted opinion polls—not those conducted by the pressure groups opposed to the Bill—that a majority of the public support this legislation and that the majority is increasing, as we have seen throughout the world. As for the idea of holding a referendum on such measures at any time, apart from being a bad idea in itself because the House of Commons decides these matters, such a referendum would be likely to pass this measure in any case because the public are in favour of it.

When homosexuality was decriminalised, some Members of Parliament objected. When civil partnerships were introduced, some Members of Parliament objected. They were found to be wrong because society moved on. Attitudes change and attitudes to gay people have changed. The Bill will do no harm and a very great deal of good by celebrating love and commitment and by treating a minority equally. That is why we should welcome it.

6.28 pm

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): As is well known in this House, the Democratic Unionist party opposes this legislation and continues to oppose the Bill in principle. I want to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) who served in Committee and faithfully put forward the perspective that we hold on the need to protect the traditional definition of marriage. I also want to thank other hon. Members who share that view, including the hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), for Spelthorne

(Kwasi Kwarteng) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who also served in Committee and did a commendable job in putting forward our perspective.

I believe that marriage is foundational, that it is for one man and one woman, and that it ought not to be redefined. I believe that marriage is universal and not just for Christians, although I am a Christian and my stance on this issue, like that of my right hon. and hon. Friends, is influenced by our Christian faith. I believe that marriage is for everyone, man and woman, who wants to take up that right in law. I believe that the definition of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman should stand. I believe that marriage is beneficial, and that it is for the mutual help and support of husband and wife and for the procreation of children.

Our opposition to the redefinition of marriage is not born of prejudice. It is not born of homophobia. It is born of a deep sense of our Christian faith, and I hope that that can be respected. Our Christian faith is important to us. It is what motivates us to take the stances that we take on many issues. It is shared by many people in our native Northern Ireland, where a high proportion of the population still go to church and more than half our children attend faith schools.

The Northern Ireland Assembly recently voted not to introduce same-sex marriage in our part of the United Kingdom. I welcome the commitment that the Minister has given to seek the consent of the Department for Finance and Personnel, which is responsible for this matter in Northern Ireland, before implementing any amendments that would have an impact there. Notwithstanding that, however, we remain opposed to the legislation in principle. I was a member of the Standing Committee that dealt with the Bill that became the Civil Partnership Act 2004. I remember pointing out at that time that civil partnerships would inevitably lead to a demand for same-sex marriage and being told by the then Government that that was nonsense, that we were scaremongering and that it would not happen.

The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) tells us that marriage has changed and will change in the future. When we talk about equality in marriage, where do we draw the line? There are some in this country who believe that marriage should be between a man and more than one woman. Will we not, in time, hear another demand for equality—the demand that a man who wants to be married to more than one woman should have that right enshrined in law? If marriage is to change in the future, will not the House, in time, be presented with proposals to give effect to the demand for equality for those who want to be married to more than one partner?

We are told that we are on the wrong side of history. Well, time will tell whether those of us who take the stand that we are taking are on the wrong side of history. I have heard that argument many times in the past, and I have watched as the House has legislated time and again to undermine some of the fundamental building blocks of our society. I look around me, and I see the harm that that does to our society.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Who would the right hon. Gentleman say was on the right side of history as a result of the 1967 legislation that decriminalised homosexuality?

Mr Donaldson: I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker. In respect of the Abortion Act 1967, I know that Northern Ireland is on the right side of history, because we refused to accept that legislation. The fact is that 8 million unborn children have not had the opportunity of life because of bad legislation in this House.

I think that, when it comes to the wrong side of history, time will tell, and the judgment will come. I am happy, and my party is happy, to stand on our beliefs, and we ask for them to be respected. We may, in the end, lose the vote in this House, but that does not alter our opinion that this is bad legislation and that it is wrong.

Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con): Some of the arguments about the right side and the wrong side of history were advanced at the time when civil partnerships were introduced. I was not in the House then, so I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman made the case or whether other members of his party did, but the case was made by some that the introduction of civil partnerships would lead to the decline of society in some way. In my urban constituency in Battersea, it is not people coming together in love to form committed relationships who cause a problem; it is families breaking up in rancour who cause real distress in my community.

Mr Donaldson: I hear the hon. Lady's point, but in the context of this Bill, I simply do not agree that when we tamper with the fundamentals of our society, the result is necessarily a good thing for our society and beneficial in the long run. I believe in the traditional definition of marriage; I believe in the traditional concept of marriage and I believe that the Bill undermines that. I therefore believe that the House is making a mistake in pressing ahead with it.

The stance that my party takes is not without support out there across this nation. We may be a small party in a small region of the United Kingdom, but on this issue we speak for millions of people across the United Kingdom who share our view. We tamper with these things and change these laws, and we may well come to regret the things that we sometimes do in this House and the legislation that we pass. Our party makes no apology for taking this stance, therefore.

This evening, we stood outside with some of the Christian people who have gathered outside this building. They are very hurt. We talk about pain and hurt. There are a lot of Christians across this country, and also Muslims and Jews—people of strong faith—who are hurt by this Bill. I hope that will be borne in mind.

I want to thank the hundreds and thousands of my constituents who have written to me in support of the stance I and my colleagues have taken on this issue. Tonight, they will feel very sad indeed.

6.36 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): First, I want to thank the Clerks in the Public Bill Office for their patience, diligence and fairness in dealing with all the draft amendments that were submitted in the Bill Committee and the remaining stages.

We are in an extraordinary situation for what is the Third Reading of a Bill that redefines marriage, and I never thought our Government would have done this.

There was no clear manifesto commitment, no coalition agreement on it and no Green Paper—there was just a sham consultation—and there are no significant amendments to the Bill beyond the civil partnerships review. We have had programme motions that have denied all MPs the opportunity to scrutinise the Bill in detail. Consciences have been constrained. Indeed, a recent private poll of MPs showed that at least one third of Members did not believe they had a free vote on Second Reading. Let us see what happens on Third Reading, but that will no doubt create a concern in the other place when it comes to discuss the Bill on 3 June, if it passes its Third Reading tonight.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for their diligence in Committee. If we had not served on the Committee, there would have been almost no scrutiny of the Bill at all.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): We find ourselves in the unusual situation that none of the political parties put this in their manifesto. Does my hon. Friend agree that the other place will have complete legitimacy if it chooses to reject the Bill because the Salisbury convention should not apply here?

Mr Burrowes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, and the other place is certainly looking in great detail at the way we have handled the Bill.

I welcome, however, the fact that, after the 13 sittings of the Bill Committee and yesterday's debates, the Government have finally recognised the concern that the impact of the Bill will go beyond the marriage ceremony. My constituents need an explicit assurance that the Bill will not curtail their reasonable expression of their belief in traditional marriage, so I welcome the Government's late undertaking last night in relation to schools and free speech. We must go further than that, however. If Members believe in traditional marriage and in liberty, they should vote against the Bill on Third Reading.

Jim Shannon: I, in turn, want to thank the hon. Gentleman for his hard work in the Bill Committee. Was he encouraged by the Christian ladies and gentlemen who attended the Bill Committee over a period of five or six meetings and energetically supported us as members of it and by those who took part in the prayer vigil outside over the past two days and who prayed hard?

Mr Burrowes: I do indeed welcome their prayerful support and, indeed, the fact that there has been engagement from those who are on all sides of the argument.

There has been much tolerance and respect in the debate from those on both sides of the House, but I must take this opportunity to say—I have informed the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) of my intention to do so—that there have been comments that have gone beyond tolerance. There have been intolerant comments that were, frankly, offensive to my constituents and many of his. How dare the right hon. Gentleman equate the position of Christian Members of Parliament such as me and others with the slave traders of Wilberforce's

time? Wilberforce supported traditional marriage and would, I am sure, have been on the side of the dissenters on the Bill.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that by playing the race card and accusing the Bill's opponents of being in step with the racists and traffickers of years gone by, he is offending not just me—that does not matter—but the majority of the black and minority ethnic communities who are opposed to the Bill? He has offended the black majority Church leaders in his constituency and mine who wrote to *The Times* recently and said:

“If the Government gets its way, it will not be a victory for equality. Equality requires diversity, and diversity requires distinctiveness, and marriage is and always will be distinctively a union between a man and a woman... The Government is not respecting difference, and it is not promoting a plural society.”

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) *rose*—

Dr Huppert *rose*—

Mr Burrowes: Unfortunately, we are running out of time.

What is pernicious is equating hon. Members' opposition to redefining marriage with previous discrimination on the basis of race. That plays into the hands of those who have accused me and many hon. Members of being homophobic or bigoted simply for standing up for marriage—[*Interruption.*] I will give way to the right hon. Member for Tottenham shortly. Such intolerant reaction to our belief in marriage runs the risk of being fomented by the state orthodoxy in the Bill about the new gender-neutral meaning of marriage. For our constituents—those who really matter—those who disagree risk vilification and discrimination and they certainly will not get the protection they deserve under the Equality Act 2010.

Mr Lammy: I am greatly saddened that the hon. Gentleman chose to use the term “playing the race card”. My comments were merely sited in an understanding of equality. There have been many battles on equality in this House. The battles against slavery, racism and sexism were noble, and many people outside the House will recognise that the fight for gay rights is one of equality; it is not playing—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) must have a chance to finish his speech.

Mr Burrowes: The Bill is triumphed over as being all about inclusivity, when what it has done has caused division, not just in the Conservative party—that is not the most relevant point—but in the country. The settled, respected position on supporting civil partnerships and the previously united concept of marriage between Church and state have now had a wedge driven between them by the Bill. Indeed, we had late resolutions to try to deal with the inequalities that are still apparent. What unites the opposition to the Bill is an unshakeable belief that will not accept the state's redefinition of marriage and will recognise only the distinctive value of marriage as the bringing together of one man and one woman.

Throughout its passage through the House, the Bill has lacked legitimacy and scrutiny. I urge all hon. Members to exercise their consciences, listen to the real concerns of their constituents and join me in voting no on Third Reading.

6.42 pm

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): This is a great day for Parliament and for the country, and I pay tribute to the Government and the Prime Minister for showing the political courage necessary to prioritise this legislation. I pay tribute to those on my Front Bench for their constructive approach, which will make it more likely that the Bill will eventually become an Act.

My only regret is that the debate is taking place in the absence of David Cairns, the late Member for Inverclyde, who was known, liked and respected by Members from all parts of the House. David was never defined by his sexuality, but he certainly found happiness and completion in his relationship with his partner, Dermot. I have no doubt at all that were he alive today he would be voting enthusiastically for the measure before us. Even though his name no longer appears on the list of voting Members of this House, I will feel David beside me as I walk through the Aye Lobby at 7 o'clock.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. In view of the level of interest, I am reducing the time limit on Back-Bench speeches to three minutes with immediate effect.

6.44 pm

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): On Second Reading, I talked about many of the letters of concern that I had received from constituents and reflected that that conflict was one that I had had in my life. My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) talked movingly yesterday about the freezing effect, and she is right about that period. To realise that you were gay in that climate was difficult, to say the least, but I was one of the lucky ones. I had two great parents who supported me through that difficult time.

Religious faith is not just the preserve of heterosexuals. One of my hardest challenges was balancing my sexuality with my faith. It has taken me years to do that, and as I said at the time, some of those battles were the hardest and darkest in my life.

Fiona O'Donnell (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in welcoming the vote in the Church of Scotland this week to allow gay ministers?

Stuart Andrew: I am grateful for that intervention and yes, I certainly welcome that.

In the context of the Bill, I understand the anxieties of people involved in religious organisations, but I am convinced by the evidence sessions and the questioning that the locks in place secure and protect those religious freedoms. We have heard a great deal about the Church of England in these debates; there are debates within the Church of England too. I went to my own church

[Stuart Andrew]

and was a little anxious about facing people there and discussing this issue, but the majority in the room supported the Bill.

Despite the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and I disagree, I pay tribute to him for his diligence in his analysis and scrutiny of the Bill. I sincerely appreciate his calm and measured tone. I just wish that that tone could have been adopted by everyone. The extremes on both sides of the cause have not acted well, and it has been disappointing, to say the least, over the past few months to hear some of the phrases used. Yesterday, the term “aggressive homosexuals” was just one such phrase.

To that I say this: I am not an aggressive man, but I have had the misfortune of facing aggression in a violent, physical form, and no, I am not referring to that incident. [Interruption.] In 1997, I was attacked and beaten unconscious by three men because of who and what I am. That had a profound effect on me at that time, but in time I fought back, and what helped were the decisions taken in this place. Through a series of Acts, this House brought equality nearer. Where legislation led, society followed, and over time that balance changed and our society became more tolerant. Each small step forward felt like a huge leap forward for me personally.

I joined the Conservative party for a host of reasons, two of them being a belief in freedom of choice and in allowing people to live their lives as they choose. This Bill has the protections for religious organisations that mean that they have the freedom to choose not to marry same-sex couples, but people like me and many others have the freedom to choose to marry the person they love. It therefore strikes the right balance.

6.47 pm

Caroline Lucas: So much has been said about same-sex marriage over the past couple of days. It is important on the occasion of Third Reading to return to the fundamental principle that underpins what we are trying to achieve. That principle is equality. Ultimately, this is about basic human rights. Nobody should be denied on the basis of their sexuality the opportunity to be legally married.

We are righting a wrong and I urge Members in the other place to remember that when they consider the Bill. Peers, including some but not all bishops, recognised the justice of introducing civil partnerships back in 2004, and I hope they will also recognise the justice of now granting same-sex couples the choice to enter into marriage, especially as the Bill has gone to great lengths to protect important religious freedoms.

Colleagues have remarked on the historic nature of the decisions being taken, and I agree. We live in a world where 85 United Nations member states still have repressive laws against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, where same-sex marriage is still a distant dream, and where being L, G, B or T can in some cases be a death sentence. But some dreams come true, and today is an important symbolic as well as practical step forward for equality and human rights.

I met a very inspiring campaigner at a trans networking event in Parliament the other day whose business card carried the strapline, “Tolerance is not good enough”.

That neatly sums up what I want to say. Tolerance is important, yes, but we need to carry on for more than that. We need to fight for true justice, for true equality, for true LGBT rights, as well as for tolerance. For me, that also has to include the issue of equal pension rights for those in same-sex marriages and civil partnerships. I am saddened that we have not made more progress on that here today, but I hope very much that it will be taken forward in the other place, as I hope will righting some of the injustices that still remain for the trans community.

But today on Third Reading is a time for celebration. For many hundreds of constituents from Brighton, Pavilion who have written to me in support of same-sex marriage, this Bill is about their lives, their loves and their futures together. I have heard many stories about why this legislation is important, including from one constituent who simply said, “Everyone should have the right to marry the person they are in love with.” Another told me that she hopes Brighton and Hove will be the first city to perform a gay marriage. To her I say, “Watch this space.”

I also thank those people against changing the law who have lobbied me, all of whom have been respectful of my position and my right to support same-sex marriage. I know it is difficult for some to square the Bill with their understanding of marriage, but I maintain that it is wrong for gay couples to continue to pay the price for that by being denied equality. Equality and justice must underpin everything else—a principle and a priority, not just something tacked on to existing pledges to try to attract more votes. The majority view in the House today has reflected that, and I hope that it will continue to do so as we vote on Third Reading.

6.50 pm

Mr Bone: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) who puts her case, as usual, with great sincerity. I will be voting against Third Reading tonight, partly because I think that the Bill is wrong; marriage is between a man and a woman. My real motive for voting against Third Reading, however, is the lack of parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill. We are yet again dealing with an amazing piece of important legislation that owing to the programme motion is going through without proper scrutiny in the House. Yesterday, whole parts of the Bill could not be amended because consideration of the amendments were not reached. I cannot even talk about those amendments tonight because I would be out of order. So we have again to allow the other place to decide on the amendments to a hugely important constitutional Bill.

It seems extraordinary to me that for the Third Reading debate Back Benchers have been allowed 40 minutes, and you, Mr. Speaker, have had to impose a three-minute limit to allow as many as possible to speak. The idea that we can compare this to the days of Wilberforce, when he would talk for three, four or five hours, is absolutely ridiculous. I would go back to that system, and I suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) might agree. We should not have had the closure every evening. Why could we not have talked until 10 or 11 o'clock tonight on Third Reading so that Members could have made their points? I would then have been much happier when the Division

came that all the differences had been properly considered. I will end there, because other hon. Members want to speak, but I urge all hon. Members, for the sake of Parliament, to oppose Third Reading.

6.52 pm

Ms Abbott: I simply wanted to say what a momentous piece of legislation this is. Some things we do in the House of Commons do not affect ordinary people at all; some things we do in the House of Commons are best ignored; but this Bill will make a lot of people's lives much better. I have supported this cause all my political life, long before it was fashionable on the Labour Benches, and I never thought I would live to see the day when the Bill would approach its Third Reading.

Members have talked about their constituents. I remind the House that I represent some people who are troubled by the Bill. Some of them come from countries where homosexuality is illegal. Some of them come from countries where homosexuality is punishable by death. I have had to say to them, "I respect your views, but I have stood for human rights all my life and I stand for human rights on this issue too."

We could not let this debate pass without mentioning all the ordinary people, all the grass-roots campaigners, who made it possible for us to reach this point. I think not just of people involved in their local or national campaign, but of the ordinary people who have showed kindness and decency and who accepted a child when that child was not expecting acceptance. They all played their part. We could not have this debate without mentioning Peter Tatchell, not always the easiest of comrades, but someone who has devoted his life to human rights. We could not have this debate without mentioning Ken Livingstone, who was the first local authority leader to bring in civil partnerships and show the wider political world that we could have civil partnership without the end of the world as we knew it. And of course there is Tony Blair, who brought in civil partnerships in the last Parliament.

Some people listening to this debate will be thinking, "This is all very well, but there is war in Syria, climate change and a huge economic crisis, so why does this matter?" Let me tell the House why it matters. When this legislation finally goes through, there will be adolescents going to bed that night who are struggling with their sexuality and who, knowing that the law has gone through, will think as they go to sleep, "Maybe it's not so bad. Maybe my life isn't ruined. Maybe I can find some acceptance. Maybe I can come out to my friends, and maybe even to my mother and father." If this debate and this legislation makes the lives of so many hundreds of thousands of young people just a little better, we will have done great work in the House tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Dr Julian Huppert. If he can speak more briefly—he does not have to—more Members will get in.

6.55 pm

Dr Huppert: I will try, Mr Speaker.

On the Liberal Democrat Benches, we believe that the state should not bar a couple who love each other from marrying just because of their gender or sexuality, whether they are straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or whatever, and that the state should not ban groups who wish to conduct same-sex marriages from doing so.

This is an important day, and it is a day to celebrate. When my party passed a motion on equal marriage in the UK three years ago, I did not think that we would be able to get to this legislation so quickly. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone), the previous Equalities Minister, for her determination which has transformed the issue and made sure that we could get here. I also pay tribute to the two Stephens, my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol West (Stephen Williams) and for St Austell and Newquay (Stephen Gilbert), who served on the Bill Committee. The Bill is right today and will seem even more right in future. In five, 10 and 20 years' time, we will look back and see that it was the right thing to do.

I am proud of the Bill as it is, although it could be better, and we have discussed some of the possible improvements over the past two days. Equal civil partnership is the right thing in theory and in practice, so we need to find the right opportunity and the right vehicle for introducing that. We have heard no good reason why in principle humanists should not be allowed to conduct weddings. The Attorney-General is an excellent lawyer, so I am sure that he will be able to find a way to ensure that we allow that to happen legally.

This is a very positive day, but we should remember that there is still homophobia and transphobia in the UK, and it is even worse in other parts of the world, where people fear for their lives and it is illegal for them to be who they are. We must take steps to ensure that that finally ends. We must not send people back to places where they will be persecuted for who they are. I urge all hon. Members to support the Bill.

6.57 pm

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): This is not the most important thing to come before the House in this Parliament, or even this year, but it is a really good thing. I am delighted that the most celebrated friend in my household, loved by me, my wife and my three children, will have the chance, if he wants, to marry the man he loves. I did not come into politics to be defined by what I am against; I want to be defined by what I am for. Tonight is a good night.

6.58 pm

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I know that for some this is a day for self-congratulation. Others in our society and our country are deeply wounded. I humbly and unashamedly confess that I am a born-again, Bible-believing Christian. I fear that in many ways our nation is swiftly turning its back on many of the great principles it was built upon. Some suggest that we hold on to our traditional views of marriage because of culture or tradition, but I do not believe that that is so. I believe the biblical definition of marriage. I did not make it up; God gave it to us in his precious word.

[Dr William McCrea]

Some have suggested that over the years religious organisations and church councils have changed their mind on a number of issues, and indeed some have already changed their opinion on the definition of marriage. That might be so, but the word of God, by which all men and women shall be judged on the day of judgment, and the standards revealed therein have not changed. Man may have changed, but God's word has not. We may be a nation that seeks to go back to the days of Judges, when

"every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

I suggest that this legislation will bring our nation many problems, whether for teachers or in our day schools. Indeed, I certainly pray that God will deliver us even when the Bill goes to another place.

6.59 pm

Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We are on the edge of a profound social change. What a pity there was nothing in the manifesto. What a pity we did not have a Committee stage on the Floor of the House. What a pity we had only two hours to discuss the protection of people in the workplace. This change has been made tonight without full discussion; now it is over to the other place.

6.59 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley: The Bill passed its Second Reading by 400 votes to 175. The amendments wrecking it were rejected by seven to one.

We last redefined marriage in 1973 when we brought in the prohibition on same-sex marriage. I think it is time to undo that and define marriage as being between two people who are qualified to marry.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 366, Noes 161.

Division No. 11]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Betts, Mr Clive
Abrahams, Debbie	Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Alexander, rh Danny	Blenkinsop, Tom
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Blomfield, Paul
Alexander, Heidi	Blunt, Mr Crispin
Ali, Rushanara	Boles, Nick
Allen, Mr Graham	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Andrew, Stuart	Bradley, Karen
Ashworth, Jonathan	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Brake, rh Tom
Bain, Mr William	Brennan, Kevin
Baker, Norman	Brokenshire, James
Baldwin, Harriett	Brooke, Annette
Balls, rh Ed	Brown, rh Mr Gordon
Banks, Gordon	Brown, Lyn
Barclay, Stephen	Browne, Mr Jeremy
Barker, rh Gregory	Bryant, Chris
Baron, Mr John	Buck, Ms Karen
Barron, rh Mr Kevin	Burden, Richard
Barwell, Gavin	Burley, Mr Aidan
Bayley, Hugh	Burnham, rh Andy
Beckett, rh Margaret	Burstow, rh Paul
Begg, Dame Anne	Burt, Alistair
Benn, rh Hilary	Burt, Lorely
Benyon, Richard	Byles, Dan
Berger, Luciana	Byrne, rh Mr Liam

Cable, rh Vince	Fuller, Richard
Cameron, rh Mr David	Gapes, Mike
Campbell, Mr Alan	Gardiner, Barry
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies	Gauke, Mr David
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	George, Andrew
Carmichael, Neil	Gibb, Mr Nick
Caton, Martin	Gilbert, Stephen
Champion, Sarah	Gilmore, Sheila
Chapman, Jenny	Glass, Pat
Clark, rh Greg	Goldsmith, Zac
Clark, Katy	Gove, rh Michael
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Grant, Mrs Helen
Clwyd, rh Ann	Grayling, rh Chris
Coaker, Vernon	Green, rh Damian
Coffey, Ann	Green, Kate
Colvile, Oliver	Greening, rh Justine
Cooper, rh Yvette	Greenwood, Lilian
Corbyn, Jeremy	Griffith, Nia
Creagh, Mary	Gummer, Ben
Creasy, Stella	Gwynne, Andrew
Crockart, Mike	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Crouch, Tracey	Hames, Duncan
Cruddas, Jon	Hamilton, Mr David
Cryer, John	Hamilton, Fabian
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hammond, Stephen
Curran, Margaret	Hancock, Matthew
Dakin, Nic	Hancock, Mr Mike
Danczuk, Simon	Hands, Greg
Darling, rh Mr Alistair	Hanson, rh Mr David
Davey, rh Mr Edward	Harper, Mr Mark
David, Wayne	Harrington, Richard
Davidson, Mr Ian	Harris, Rebecca
Davies, Geraint	Harris, Mr Tom
De Piero, Gloria	Harvey, Sir Nick
Denham, rh Mr John	Healey, rh John
Dobson, rh Frank	Heath, Mr David
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Doughty, Stephen	Hemming, John
Dowd, Jim	Hendrick, Mark
Doyle, Gemma	Hendry, Charles
Dromey, Jack	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Duddridge, James	Herbert, rh Nick
Dugher, Michael	Hillier, Meg
Duncan, rh Mr Alan	Hilling, Julie
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Hinds, Damian
Durkan, Mark	Hodge, rh Margaret
Eagle, Ms Angela	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Eagle, Maria	Hoey, Kate
Edwards, Jonathan	Hollingbery, George
Efford, Clive	Hopkins, Kelvin
Elliott, Julie	Hopkins, Kris
Ellis, Michael	Horwood, Martin
Ellison, Jane	Howarth, rh Mr George
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Howell, John
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Engel, Natascha	Huppert, Dr Julian
Esterson, Bill	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Evans, Chris	James, Margot
Evans, Graham	Jamieson, Cathy
Fabricant, Michael	Jarvis, Dan
Farrelly, Paul	Javid, Sajid
Featherstone, Lynne	Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Field, rh Mr Frank	Johnson, rh Alan
Field, Mark	Johnson, Joseph
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Jones, Andrew
Flint, rh Caroline	Jones, Graham
Flynn, Paul	Jones, Mr Kevan
Foster, rh Mr Don	Jones, Susan Elan
Fovargue, Yvonne	Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
Francis, Dr Hywel	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Freer, Mike	Kawczynski, Daniel
Fullbrook, Lorraine	Keeley, Barbara

Kendall, Liz
 Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
 Kirby, Simon
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Latham, Pauline
 Lavery, Ian
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Leslie, Chris
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Emma
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Luff, Peter
 Macleod, Mary
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McKechin, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, rh Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moore, rh Michael
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mowat, David
 Mulholland, Greg
 Munn, Meg
 Munt, Tessa
 Murphy, rh Mr Jim
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nash, Pamela
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Onwurah, Chi

Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Osborne, Sandra
 Ottaway, Richard
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Robertson, rh Hugh
 Robertson, John
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Mr Frank
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Rudd, Amber
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Sawford, Andy
 Seabeck, Alison
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Simmonds, Mark
 Skidmore, Chris
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Soubry, Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Stunell, rh Andrew
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Swales, Ian
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Thornton, Mike
 Thurso, John
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vaz, Valerie
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa

Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Walley, Joan
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weatherley, Mike
 Webb, Steve
 White, Chris
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil

Wilson, Mr Rob
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
 Wright, David
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Zahawi, Nadhim
Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Desmond Swayne and
Sir Bob Russell

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Amess, Mr David
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bebb, Guto
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benton, Mr Joe
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bingham, Andrew
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burns, rh Mr Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cash, Mr William
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Clarke, rh Mr Tom
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, Stephen
 Crausby, Mr David
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 de Bois, Nick
 Dobbin, Jim
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Dorries, Nadine
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Jonathan
 Evennett, Mr David
 Ffello, Robert
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark

Freeman, George
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gray, Mr James
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Halfon, Robert
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Oliver
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hermon, Lady
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kelly, Chris
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McCrea, Dr William
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, Esther
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Milton, Anne
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James

Mudie, Mr George
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Neill, Robert
 Nuttall, Mr David
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paice, rh Sir James
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Perry, Claire
 Pound, Stephen
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, John
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rutley, David
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Shepherd, Sir Richard

Simpson, David
 Smith, Henry
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stride, Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Teather, Sarah
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tredinnick, David
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wright, Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:

**Mr John Randall and
 Mark Lancaster**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Secretary Chris Grayling relating to the Rehabilitation of Offenders, the Motion in the name of Secretary Theresa May relating to the Police, the Motion in the name of Mr Edward Vaizey relating to Reducing the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communication networks, and the Motion in the Name of Alistair Burt relating to Further Amendments to EU Restrictive Measures Against the Syrian Regime.—(Nicky Morgan.)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS

That the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2013, which was laid before this House on 26 March 2013, in the previous Session of Parliament, be approved.—(Nicky Morgan.)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

POLICE

That the draft Police Act 1997 (Criminal Record Certificates: Relevant Matters) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2013, which was laid before this House on 26 March 2013, in the previous Session of Parliament, be approved.—(Nicky Morgan.)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

**REDUCING THE COST OF DEPLOYING HIGH-SPEED
 ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION NETWORKS**

That this House considers that the draft Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communication networks (European Union Document No. 7999/13) does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity for the reasons set out in the annex to Chapter One of the Second Report of the European Scrutiny Committee (HC 83-ii) and, in accordance with Article 6 of Protocol No. 2 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, instructs the Clerk of the House to forward this reasoned opinion to the Presidents of the European Institutions.—(Nicky Morgan.)

Question agreed to.

Syria (EU Restrictive Measures)

[*Relevant documents: 35th Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2012-13, HC 86-xxv, Chapter 4; 1st Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, HC 83-i, Chapter 2*]

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of EU Council Decision 2013/109/CFSP amending Decision 2012/739/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Syria; takes note of the deteriorating situation in Syria that has led to the deaths of more than 70,000 people at the hands of the Assad regime; and supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government to agree with Council Decision 2013/109/CFSP.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the important issue of Syrian sanctions. In addition to the statement made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my appearance today, the Government have sought to keep the House and the European Scrutiny Committee updated through statements, answers in the House and correspondence, including between the European Scrutiny Committee, which has called this debate, and the Minister for Europe.

Today's debate is the result of the European Scrutiny Committee report dated 13 March, which referred for debate on the Floor of the House the Council decision agreed by member states on 28 February. The decision amended the EU arms embargo to allow for the provision of non-lethal equipment and technical assistance for the protection of civilians. I apologise to the House that on that occasion the Government had to override the normal scrutiny process due to negotiations on the Council decision in Brussels going to the wire. I appreciate the House's forbearance on that, and I welcome the opportunity today to debate issues around that Council decision and subsequent developments on Syria.

Syria is one of our greatest foreign policy challenges, not least as it has brought about a humanitarian crisis on a scale not seen in decades. The enormity of death and destruction is horrifying. More than 80,000 people have died, a quarter of the country's population has been displaced and more than 1 million Syrians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

A year ago, 1 million people inside Syria needed humanitarian aid. That figure is now nearly 7 million, and the United Nations forecasts that it will reach 10 million by the end of this year—10 million people displaced by the Syrian conflict. To put that number in context, it is the combined populations of the cities of London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool, and all are in dire need of shelter, water, food, health care and other basic supplies.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has repeatedly made clear, most recently in his statement to the House yesterday, our objective is to achieve a political solution to the conflict in Syria and bring an end to the terrible violence and human suffering. Sanctions are an important tool in achieving that objective, but as with any tool, they must be used intelligently to make maximum impact.

Our initial aim in imposing sanctions was to cut off the flow of funds and arms to the Syrian regime, choking off its ability to continue to wage war against

its people, and to increase pressure on individuals in the regime to end the violence. Those sanctions have had a profound impact on the regime's financial flows and put it under increasing pressure, but they have not proved decisive. The Syrian regime has continued to receive material and financial support from its international backers and been able to continue its brutality. I am proud of the leading role that Britain has played in using sanctions to put pressure on the Assad regime. We must now play a leading role in refining those sanctions to ensure that they continue to support our overall goal of achieving a political solution and ending the violence and suffering.

As the conflict in Syria deteriorated, it became clear earlier this year that elements of the existing sanctions package had become an obstacle to our efforts to help the opposition National Coalition to deliver life-saving support to civilians inside Syria, and an obstacle to our efforts to increase the pressure on the regime to end the violence. The Syrian regime has shown no remorse in targeting civilians, including those involved in distributing essential assistance. That is why we pushed to achieve an amendment to the EU arms embargo in February to allow the opposition to receive much-needed technical advice and assistance in addition to a greater range of non-lethal equipment.

The breakthrough achieved by the UK in February has allowed us and other European partners to consider a greater range of measures to help to protect civilians in Syria. The Syrian opposition needs to be appropriately trained to respect the principle of international humanitarian law. The technical assistance includes advice to the opposition to help it to get on with the business of governance and saving the lives of ordinary Syrians.

Since the amendment achieved in February, the situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate. Syria is an unmitigated humanitarian disaster. The Assad regime continues to use heavy weaponry and ballistic missiles on its own people, and there is increasingly persuasive evidence that chemical weapons have been used by the regime.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The House is well aware of the dreadful situation in Syria, and of the atrocities allegedly committed by the Assad regime, but will my hon. Friend tell us more about the atrocities committed by the people to whom he wishes us to send arms? The House and the country need to be clear on whether the good boys are on one side and the evil boys are on the other, or whether there are faults on both sides.

Alistair Burt: As my hon. Friend is aware, it is clear that there are faults on all sides, but all the evidence collected so far by the UN indicates that a greater degree of atrocities have been committed by the regime than by elements of those opposed to it. He is correct to draw attention to the latter, as the Government do. Abuse of human rights is incompatible with our values and we condemn it everywhere. However, the opposition is divided into different elements. We wish to support and are supporting those that we believe are moderate, and those that have declared their adherence to democratic principles, most recently in April. They are under pressure from the more extreme elements, but we condemn atrocities

[*Alistair Burt*]

on either side. We are working with those who we believe have the right values. Those are the ones we wish to continue to be supported.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): In the strategy that the Government appear to be adopting in contemplating giving arms supplies to one opposition group, are we not in danger of fuelling a civil war within a civil war? The only solution is a political one involving all countries, including Iran.

Alistair Burt: It remains absolutely clear that the UK objective is to seek that political solution. That is why my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is on his way to Jordan today to take part in talks. The UK has made no decision on the release of any arms or any lethal weapons to any part of the conflict. The purpose of seeking to lift the arms embargo is to increase pressure on the regime and to give the moderate opposition a sense that it has extra backing, but no decision has been made on sending any arms into the conflict.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Minister has rightly spoken of the atrocities committed by Assad and acknowledged the atrocities committed by rebel forces. Will he expand on the links between certain groups of rebel forces, such as al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda? Will he give the House an up-to-date sitrep on that?

Alistair Burt: Yes, indeed. Al-Nusra has declared some allegiance to al-Qaeda, which is one of the reasons why the United Kingdom has no contact with it. From what we know, there are a variety of different groups opposed to the regime and there are loose links between many of them. However, those in the National Council, with which we are working most closely—it has evolved in the past two years—do not want to be connected with those who have an allegiance elsewhere. They have declared their principles and values, which is why we wish to work with them. It is true that a variety of forces are now ranged against the Assad regime, but in seeking to support some of them, the House should recognise that there are those with good values who deserve to be supported as they seek to protect civilians against the barrage from the regime.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has heard the recent observation by a well-known commentator, who said, “If you’re not confused about Syria, you don’t really understand it,” emphasising the complexity of the issues with which we are dealing. May I offer him a parallel from the past? When the Russians invaded Afghanistan, those who were resisting them were supplied with a great deal of weapons. After the Russians left, and when it was necessary for the allies to take military action in Afghanistan, many of those same weapons were used against the allies. How can we ensure that what we give to the so-called good people does not fall into the hands of the bad people?

Alistair Burt: My right hon. and learned Friend is anticipating something that is not before the House. No decision has been made to introduce new arms into the

situation. As we know, plenty of weaponry is already in the region. Our work has been to support the elements in the National Coalition who adhere to the values they have declared, and to provide non-lethal support and encourage them in looking after civilian areas. The dangers are real, as he makes clear. However, the point is not that no weapons are currently going in and that a change in the arms embargo would suddenly introduce them; weapons are already going in. The issue we are concerned with is how to stop the conflict. That is why we come back to the urgent need for a political solution.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): It must surely be the Government’s prime objective to ensure that VX gas and weapons of mass destruction do not get into the hands of al-Qaeda. Is that not more likely if we give more support to the forces that oppose the Government, which include al-Qaeda? This is not just a civil war; it is a war by proxy between Sunni and Shi’a, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Russia and the west. Surely the Minister can see that if those weapons of mass destruction get to al-Qaeda it will make this country more vulnerable?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman raises two separate points. First, I seek to make it clear that there is no support going to al-Qaeda elements in Syria from the United Kingdom. All our support is channelled through the National Coalition, which does not have a contact to supply any matériel to forces aligned with al-Qaeda. It is precisely to encourage and support moderate elements that the United Kingdom has been working so hard, with others, in the past couple of years to ensure that those elements have the means to protect the population they are looking after.

Secondly, securing any chemical weapons that may be there is a live issue today that concerns all the nations surrounding Syria. The responsibility for securing chemical weapon stocks lies squarely with the regime. My point is that these issues are already ongoing; there are already risks and nothing we are seeking to do will add to those risks. The most important thing is to continue the work on political transition, and to take advantage of the opportunity that has been created in recent days and of the efforts that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is now engaged in. That is what needs to happen. Risks in relation to weapons are already there no matter what happens to the lifting of the arms embargo that we are discussing.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his work on this matter. Is it not the case that 25 years ago in Iraq another Ba’athist party dropped chemical weapons on Halabja, and does he not agree that the Ba’athist party in Syria has now reached that red line? I welcome these EU sanctions, but NATO and the free world need to do much more to intervene to prevent a chemical holocaust.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We remember with horror the events of 25 years ago, which heighten our concern about the stocks of chemical weapons. As the House is aware, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday, and I have repeated today, that we have plausible evidence of their use, but we have not yet got definitive evidence of where they have been used or who might have used them. That

work is now in the hands of the UN; we are pressing it to get on with the work, and we encourage all nations to comply and work with the UN in order to get a definitive answer. I can assure my hon. Friend, however, that the House's concern about chemical weapons is absolutely shared by Her Majesty's Government.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Following on from all the points about atrocities, will my hon. Friend make every effort at every opportunity to make it clear to those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, on both sides, that the international community will make every effort in due course to bring them to trial either before the International Criminal Court or a UN special court, such as happened after Sierra Leone? We need to make it clear that eventually justice will catch up with them.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that the House can be proud of the part that the UK has already played, not only in making it clear that there will be that accountability, but in providing the means to ensure that that accountability happens. Providing the opportunity for training, collecting material, instructing people on what evidence to look for and the like have been an important part of what we have contributed up to now. He is correct, however, that without fear or favour those who take part in atrocities, no matter on which side they range themselves during this conflict, should be subject to the rule of law and international justice.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): If we are concerned about the civilian deaths from air attacks by the regime, would it not be better to do something about stopping the regime using aircraft and helicopters to attack civilian areas, rather than give sophisticated weaponry to people who might then hand it on to others to use against us in the future?

Alistair Burt: I repeat again, at the risk of riling the House, that we are not discussing whether the UK is providing weaponry. That point has been well made. The question of air cover has been discussed before. As the House knows, the Syrian air defences are not weak, and up till now no one has considered there to be a practical way of dealing with them, but part of what I will say is about all options being open. Lifting the arms embargo will increase the flexibility available to those who might need to protect civilians, or supply those who are protecting them, in the future. It offers that necessary flexibility, but no such decision has been taken.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I recognise that the Minister is held in high esteem in the House for his response to humanitarian issues across the world. He refers to the relaxation of the arms embargo. One of the great concerns among Members is the 3.5 million refugees and displaced persons, many of them children. Can he assure people inside and outside the House that the provision of humanitarian aid—clean water, sanitation, clothing, food, blood, medicines—will continue and that the people who are really feeling the pain of this conflict will be helped?

Alistair Burt: Absolutely. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that remains a matter of the utmost priority to us. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday, the situation is immensely complex. There is a humanitarian disaster not only within Syria but outside, with, it is reckoned, 1.5 million refugees scattered throughout Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and surrounding areas, and we are working to provide support both outside and inside the country. Some 71% of the latest UN plea for support has been provided, but the rest is urgently needed. We have fulfilled our pledges, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the situation in the camps and for those being hospitable to people in their homes is dire.

The hospitality being given in people's homes is important—we think of this going on in Lebanon, Jordan and other places. It creates pressure on the domestic population, as rents go up and the local economy becomes distorted, and after a time hospitality becomes stretched and strained, so it is essential that we continue to provide support. I am proud of the way in which the United Kingdom, as the second largest bilateral donor, has been able to do that.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Minister knows that my greatest concern is about the dangerous folly of doing anything to assist an alliance of groups that contain thousands of al-Qaeda fighters to get their hands on Assad's chemical weapons. Rather than reiterate that, may I ask for an assurance that before there is any lifting of the arms embargo, there will be a full debate, with a vote, in this House?

Alistair Burt: In response to my hon. Friend's first point, let me again make it clear that the efforts of the United Kingdom Government—this should not be left unsaid—are directed to supporting those who do not have the ideology and the declared aims of al-Qaeda. It is very important that that distinction is made, because those moderate forces are looking for recognition. They want to be able to say that they can hold areas and provide support to civilian populations, because they want to be able to provide a contrast with those who might not have Syria's long-term interests at heart. That is why our support for the National Coalition is so important.

In response to my hon. Friend's second point, I can do no better than repeat the words of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who said yesterday:

"I regularly come back to the House whenever there is the slightest variation in the situation, so if there are any developments in the Government's policy I would certainly seek to do so."

He later said:

"If we come to a choice about that, it is a very important foreign policy and moral choice, which of course should be discussed fully in this House."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2013; Vol. 563, c. 908-909.]

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): Jabhat al-Nusra and the Salafists were a fairly small about group 12 months ago. Part of the problem is that they have been much better armed and are much better fighters, so that elements in the Free Syria army, which is not as well armed as the Islamists, are flaking away to them. That is one area that my hon. Friend needs to consider. Another is that the UK has the chair of the UN Security Council—

[Mr Brooks Newmark]

the presidency—next month. That presents us with an opportunity to pursue a radical agenda of engagement with all parties, perhaps including Iran, which has elections next month.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. Before the Minister replies, may I remind all Members that this is a timed debate? The Minister has been generous in giving way, but this debate needs to end at 8.46 pm. At least nine Members, if not more, wish to participate, so we need to make a little more progress through the Minister's speech if we are to get everybody in—unless those who are making interventions but are on the list plan to withdraw their names.

Alistair Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is always difficult: it is important to answer questions as they come up, but I entirely understand the point of trying to move the debate on. I am very much in the hands of colleagues. I will answer questions, but I know we must move on to the speeches. My remarks will not be not terribly long after this, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I thought there might be a number of questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am only trying to be helpful to the House. I did not set the time limit for this debate; I am only trying to be fair to Back Benchers. I do not wish to chastise the Minister; I am merely pointing out the facts before me this evening.

Alistair Burt: I did not for a second take it that I was being chastised; I was only trying to be helpful to all colleagues—but let's not go there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Newmark) makes two points, and I absolutely agree with him. His understanding of the situation is clear. He makes an entirely fair point about how al-Nusra has been able to garner support at the expense of more moderate elements. He makes an absolutely valid point, which I hope I have also made in my speech. He is also absolutely correct to say that we will be leading the UN Security Council next month. The Foreign Secretary set out the situation in relation to Iran yesterday. Of course Iran has influence and an interest in the area. My right hon. Friend is keen that those who get round the table for Geneva II should probably be the original cast, but my hon. Friend's point is well made.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): In any peace talks or conferences that might take place, has the coalition sorted out the leadership question? It is not clear to the public which members of the leadership will be involved in those peace talks.

Alistair Burt: We have worked closely with the Syrian National Coalition over the past couple of years, and there are recognised figures in it. The actual group that will attend the talks in Geneva—if indeed they take place there—has not been decided, but there are recognisable leadership figures in the coalition with whom we deal.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Alistair Burt: I should like to make a little more progress. I will then be happy to answer more questions, and perhaps wrap up at the end if there is time.

In light of the developments that I referred to earlier, we need to consider again how best to use sanctions to find a swift and enduring resolution to the crisis. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House in his statement yesterday:

“The case for further amendments to the EU arms embargo on Syria is compelling, in order to increase the pressure on the regime and give us the flexibility to respond to continued radicalisation and conflict. We have to be open to every way of strengthening moderates and saving lives, rather than the current trajectory of extremism and murder.”—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2013; Vol. 563, c. 905.]

There is a glimmer of hope. The United Kingdom and France are working closely with President Obama and President Putin to try to find a political solution to the crisis. As I have said, we all want that more than anything else, but this is a fragile and fleeting chance. The Assad regime has made a lot of promises to negotiate but has never delivered on them, and the moderate opposition in Syria, the National Coalition, is losing faith.

We and our partners in the European Union must play our part to make the talks a success. That means building leverage on both parties—the regime and the opposition—to do a deal. We must send a message to the regime that we will not stand by while it kills its people in increasing numbers and in increasingly appalling ways. We must make it clear that, if the regime does not ensure that these talks are a success, no option is off the table. We must also show the opposition that we will support their search for a just outcome that they can sell to the fighters in Syria and to the wider population.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I wholeheartedly endorse what my hon. Friend is saying about the importance of working with our European allies and with the United Nations to put pressure on Russia in particular, because it is key to securing peace in Syria.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Recent conversations between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, President Putin, Secretary of State Kerry and the Russian Foreign Minister have indicated a degree of involvement with Russia. Talking with Russia has never been off the table. Russia has great significance through its relationship with the regime in Syria, and we believe that it should now use that relationship to bring the regime to the table.

We and key allies, including the US and France, believe that lifting the arms embargo will help us to achieve the goals that I have just described. It will strengthen the hand of opposition politicians in relation to the fighters, and the hand of the moderates in relation to the extremists. It will also show that we are committed to supporting them and have the flexibility to consider further action if the regime makes a mockery of this chance for a political solution.

I want to make this Government's position clear: no decision on arming the Syrian opposition has been taken. Amending the embargo on opposition forces would not mean that we would automatically and immediately begin arming them, although we cannot rule that out in the future; but even without acting on it,

providing an exemption from the current arms embargo for opposition forces would send a powerful and timely signal to both sides. It would say to the Assad regime that a political solution is the only option, as there will be no military victory. It would tell moderate opposition forces and politicians not to lose faith in their fight against oppression or against the extremists who are seeking to capitalise on the continued instability.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Is the Minister saying that the message to the regime is that if talks do not succeed, nothing will be off the table? Some people in the opposition might interpret that as giving them a stake in ensuring that talks do not succeed, because guns and other collateral would then come into the equation. That would not help the moderates. Instead, it would help those who have a mindset of, "We're going to be top dog, and top gun."

Alistair Burt: If there were a realistic assumption on either side that the balance of arms could change sufficiently to give one side an advantage over the other so that there was a point to continuing the slaughter, the hon. Gentleman's point would be well made, but the assessment that more and more people are making, on the ground and outside, is that a military solution is not possible. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday, there are only two scenarios here: one is long drawn-out killing and humanitarian suffering on a massive scale, with no decisive result; the other is the peace opportunity that is now before us. I entirely take the hon. Gentleman's point, but our argument is that, because of that assessment that there can be no military victory, let us give the moderates the sense of support and protection they might need to be flexible if conditions change. The important point is to press both sides to negotiations and talks, because that must be successful.

We make no mistake: the regime is trying to change the balance of forces on the ground even as we talk, and will do so even as negotiators meet in Geneva. Lifting the embargo for the opposition will give us the flexibility to protect civilians, save lives and respond to a major escalation in the conflict, such as the use of chemical weapons. Even if the embargo were to be lifted, we are clear that lethal supplies would be considered only if they were a necessary, proportionate and lawful response to extreme humanitarian suffering and there was no practicable alternative. Any supplies would be carefully calibrated and monitored, as well as legal; they would be aimed at saving lives, alleviating the human catastrophe and supporting moderate groups. Our policy on Syria will continue to focus on bringing an end to the bloodshed.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): It is obviously a very difficult situation and I respect what the Minister is trying to do. No one believes that the UK Government are going to give arms to an organisation linked to al-Qaeda. The point is that in Syria, given what we have already heard about the strength of extremist groups, there is no way we could guarantee that such weaponry would not fall into the hands of extreme elements.

Alistair Burt: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday, there are no guarantees, but over time we have established a series of links with moderate groups who would have no vested interest in

allowing equipment that might be used against them to fall into the wrong hands. The hon. Gentleman anticipates a situation that we are not in, but I hope I can reassure him that the risk of diversion is very much on the Government's mind. Pathways have been found for equipment and support, which are already going in, but I say again that Members need not suppose for a moment that stuff is not already ending up in the wrong hands. That is why finding a political answer is urgent; that is why the Foreign Secretary has gone to Jordan; that is why people are gathering now to seek that. The longer this goes on, the worse it gets, and diversion becomes even more likely.

Let me conclude by saying that in both bilateral and multilateral efforts, including our vital co-ordinated efforts through the EU, we will continue to respect the rule of law for which the Assad regime has shown so little regard. At all times, our overriding objective will remain encouraging the parties to come together to agree a transitional Government who can start to build a stable, inclusive and peaceful Syria, which the people of Syria so much deserve. I commend the motion to the House.

7.48 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the ongoing conflict in Syria and specifically amendments to the EU arms embargo. I commend the European Scrutiny Committee for calling this important debate.

Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House are deeply concerned and horrified by the violent and brutal conflict and loss of life in Syria. The death toll has now reached 80,000 people, and the refugee crisis is intensifying, with more than 1.3 million people having fled to neighbouring countries. As the Minister outlined, this is a humanitarian crisis on a scale not seen in decades.

I am grateful to the European Scrutiny Committee for giving the House an opportunity to consider specifically, in detail, the decision made by the Council of Ministers in February to amend the existing EU arms embargo to allow the transfer of non-lethal military equipment to certain groups in Syria.

The debate is timely, given that the EU-wide embargo is due for renewal at the meeting of the Council of Ministers next week. As a result of the Council's agreement in February, the Foreign Secretary announced to the House on 6 March that the British Government would increase their support for the Syrian opposition and that that would include equipment that had previously been banned under the EU embargo. The change in both the scale and the type of material support from the United Kingdom clearly marked a new stage in the Government's engagement with the opposition forces.

Since that date, and specifically on 15 April, the Government have informed the House that, among other items, a number of vehicles with ballistic protection, packs of body armour and hundreds of radios have been transferred to the Syrian opposition as gifts from the Government. Equally important, we have received details about the ongoing training of Syrian opposition members in which the UK has been involved. I am grateful for further details provided by the Minister today and by the Foreign Secretary in his statement yesterday.

[Emma Reynolds]

We welcome measures taken by the Government that help to unite members of the fragmented opposition in Syria, help them to communicate better with each other, help them to gain a better understanding of international law and help them to protect themselves and civilians from the violence being inflicted on them by the Assad regime. However, we are extremely concerned about the suggestion that the EU arms embargo should be amended further, or rolled back completely.

In the light of the February Council decision and the forthcoming Council discussion early next week, I seek further clarification of the Government's position from the Minister. Will he tell us precisely what the Government will be calling for with respect to any alteration in the embargo next week? It has been suggested that they are considering two options. The first is to seek an exemption from the embargo for the national coalition of Syrian and opposition forces, and the second is to remove the "non-lethal" language to allow lethal equipment. That would effectively render the embargo null and void. Which of those options will the Government seek to secure on Monday and Tuesday next week in Brussels?

What support, beyond that of France, have the Government secured in the other 25 member states of the European Union? It seems clear that Germany and Austria, among others, are opposed to the lifting of the embargo. If no agreement is forthcoming, will the Government veto the continuation of the embargo? Yesterday, in response to an excellent question from the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway) about the possible use of the veto, the Foreign Secretary said:

"We will meet as Foreign Ministers in Brussels next Monday to look at those discussions in detail. I can say to my hon. Friend that we are prepared to do that if necessary, but of course we are looking for agreement with other EU member states."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2013; Vol. 563, c. 911.]

Will the Minister confirm that the Government are prepared to veto the renewal of the arms embargo next week? I think that, if they intend to do so, there are further fundamental questions that they need to answer.

First, the Government have spoken of the need to tip the balance in favour of the opposition. Can the Minister give us his assessment of the amount of weaponry that would be required to tip the balance against Assad, taking into account the support that we believe that he continues to receive from other states? Secondly, how will the Government ensure that the weapons supplied do not fall into the hands of extremists groups such as al-Nusra, which is aligned with al-Qaeda? Thirdly, given that the Foreign Secretary said that he could only offer his "best endeavours" to prevent British-supplied material from going to groups in Syria for which it is not intended, will the Minister tell us whether the Government would be willing to supply arms without any end-use guarantees? I am sure that the whole House would be cautious—several Members have demonstrated their concern today—about any step towards arming Syria's opposition without a range of solid assessments and analyses from the Minister and his colleagues in the Foreign Office in regard to the end users of any British-supplied arms.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Is not the weakness in the argument that the arms may fall into the hands of the wrong people the fact not just that we can never give such guarantees, but, above all, that the wrong people already have plenty of sophisticated arms, which are being supplied perfectly legally from Russia, Qatar, Iran and everywhere else because there is no UN arms embargo?

Emma Reynolds: History teaches us to be extremely cautious. In the past, the west—ourselves, the US and others—has supplied arms to forces that then turned against us, so we need to learn the lessons of history and be extremely cautious.

Mr Newmark: I totally respect the hon. Lady's position, but history has also taught us that when we stood aside and did nothing in Rwanda, 800,000 people got slaughtered, and it took us four years to go into Bosnia, while, again, hundreds of thousands of people got slaughtered.

Emma Reynolds: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about the loss of life in Syria. The problem with the solution that the Government seem to be offering us is that it could lead to an escalation, not a de-escalation, of the conflict by fuelling the fires of the conflict, rather than encouraging a solution.

The opposition in Syria is fragmented. What more can the Government do to help the moderate elements of the opposition unite and work together?

If the Government believe that arming the opposition in Syria is now the best option available to the EU, how will that help halt the violence and secure a peace that lasts? Are there not significant risks now and in post-conflict Syria, and what would be the implications for peace and reconciliation between the country's diverse religious and ethnic groups after the conflict?

The Prime Minister was in Washington last week, yet in yesterday's statement by the Foreign Secretary, we heard little detail about what the Prime Minister has discovered about President Obama's thinking on arming the opposition. Can the Minister enlighten the House on that point? Moreover, can the Minister provide the House with more detail about the format of the US-Russian peace conference and what role our Government will play in it?

Finally, if the Government veto the continuation of the arms embargo next week and after that decide to arm the opposition, will the Minister commit to bringing that future decision before the House, so Members on both sides can vote on what the Foreign Secretary yesterday called a moral issue?

Sir Menzies Campbell: The hon. Lady has returned to the veto. Has she, like me, sought to establish whether on any previous occasion the United Kingdom has exercised a veto within the European Union in relation to the imposition of sanctions? If we were to do so in this case, what does she think the political outcome would be?

Emma Reynolds: I do not know of any circumstance in which the veto has been used in this area. I agree with the implication of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question and his concern: there could be implications

for other parts of the world, such as, perhaps, Iran, where we have EU sanctions. That is a point worth making.

I hope what is said in today's debate and the caution urged by Members across the House will be reflected in the approach the Government take at the Council meetings on Monday and Tuesday. There is real concern across the House that arming the opposition will not guarantee peace in a country where sectarian, tribal and democratic impulses are all present. We are all united in our wish to see an end to the bloodshed in Syria, but serious questions remain about whether the Government's change in policy will secure that peace. The test of the Government's action will be whether it leads to a de-escalation, rather than an escalation, of the ongoing conflict and bloodshed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. Eight Members are seeking to catch my eye to take part in tonight's debate. I am not going to set a time limit. Instead, I ask Members to work it out among themselves. If each of them speaks for five minutes, including interventions, that will leave a few minutes at the end for the Minister to address any outstanding questions, so watch the clock, please.

7.59 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): I support the decision made at the last EU Foreign Ministers' Council. The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs has raised no objection to the decision to provide further non-lethal equipment to the rebels or to the subsequent decision to supply further equipment to the state of Jordan.

This is a dire situation, and there are no easy answers. We are right to have stood back, and the EU arms embargo has been the right policy to date. Last March, however, the Foreign Affairs Committee raised questions for the Government about their intentions. The Foreign Secretary, in his letter to me dated 20 April, said that the policy was not "static" and that

"We cannot stand by why the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate at an ever more rapid pace."

From that and from the Foreign Secretary's statement yesterday, in which he said that he was quite prepared to veto the renewal of the EU arms embargo, one must conclude that although the Government might not have made a decision to arm the rebels they are seriously considering whether to do so.

For me, that prompts three questions: is it legal; is it wise; and how will Parliament be kept informed? To impose military force against a sovereign state is contrary to the UN charter, but we are not looking at quite that state of affairs. There is no precedent for an intervention in what is essentially a civil war. The letter of 20 April also set out the legal basis for a humanitarian intervention, stating that any such intervention would have to be a

"necessary, proportionate, and lawful response to a situation of extreme humanitarian suffering and... there is no practical alternative".

That clearly follows out the doctrine set out in the 2005 world summit that established the principle of the responsibility to protect, but the responsibility to protect has always required a Security Council resolution, which will clearly not happen on this occasion.

There have been past interventions without a Security Council resolution—namely, in northern Iraq, Kosovo and Sierra Leone—but they were all pre-2005 and the new doctrine and they all involved repressed populations that were not in a civil war. I submit that Syria is different. This is a civil war. It is also, arguably, a breach of Syrian sovereignty. The Government have recognised the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as

"the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people",

but that is not the same as recognising it as a Government. The definition of a Government is whether they are sufficiently in control of a territory and exercising governmental authority to constitute a Government. That is not the case here. That all adds up to a very large question mark, in the absence of a Security Council resolution, over the legal legitimacy of such an intervention.

Secondly, is it wise? As Members have intervened to point out, this is now a regional conflagration. The Arab world is split, with the Saudis, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan determined not to let the Muslim Brotherhood take control of Syria, and Qatar and Turkey backing a Muslim Brotherhood constitution. Hezbollah is now engaged and Iran has indicated that a defeat for Syria is a defeat for them, too. That all adds up to its being highly unlikely that there will be a diplomatic breakthrough. Russia, clearly, remains as entrenched as it ever was.

The dilemma for the Government and the Minister is that if they arm the rebels, it will clearly lead to a huge loss of life and a possible subsequent proxy war. Not to arm them, however, will see the Assad regime continue its barbarous regime. Either way, there will be a huge loss of life. I do not believe that the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister will rush this, and they are wise not to do so. Frankly, I do not envy them in the judgment that they have to make.

I have concluded that the EU arms embargo has been the right policy, but that it has now outlived its usefulness. In the absence of a UN embargo, it is a very difficult situation in a complex arena. I do not believe it is sensible for the Government to have their arms tied by the EU embargo. I wish them well in seeking agreement to amend it and agree with the Minister that it sends a timely signal to the Assad regime. If he cannot reach agreement, he should be prepared to veto the renewal.

Finally, on Parliament, the Foreign Secretary said yesterday:

"Our assessment is that the use of chemical weapons in Syria is very likely to have been by the regime."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2013; Vol. 563, c. 906.]

For those of us who were here in 2003, when we went to war on the strength of an intelligence assessment that none of us had seen, that rings alarm bells. If the use of chemical weapons is used as a justification for further intervention, I invite the Minister and the Government to ensure that that intelligence is made available either to the Intelligence and Security Committee or to a committee of privy councillors. Either way, it is essential that the House is kept fully informed.

8.5 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee on his contribution. I agree with everything he said, with one

[*Mike Gapes*]

exception. I do not support the lifting of the EU arms embargo, and it is very important that we recognise that Britain and France are outliers in the European Union. Many other countries have been resisting moves by the UK and French Governments over recent months and there will be a decisive split in the European Union on this issue if the Government persist in the approach that they are taking. Perhaps that is what the coalition Government want, or perhaps it is what part of the coalition Government want, but it is not in our long-term interests or in the interests of future European co-operation on this issue.

I have enormous sympathy for the Minister. He is a good man and he has been put up today to defend an extremely difficult position. He has to justify a very bad policy. It is a bad policy, because the prospect of our Government providing sophisticated weaponry at some point in the future, which is the intention and which is what this is all about and has been about incrementally over the past few weeks, means that surface-to-air missiles could be used to shoot down civilian aircraft in the region—missiles which might ultimately be found to have been supplied by the UK and France to elements in the Syrian opposition, and which might then have been sold, captured or handed over by people who defected from one faction to another.

If we are going to put sophisticated weaponry into the region to deal with the brutality of the Assad regime, that sophisticated weaponry should be in the hands of people, first, who are trained to use it, and secondly, who will operate according to the laws of war and who are ultimately controlled by NATO powers—either through Turkey, our NATO ally, or through the UK, the French and the United States working collectively to bring in a no-fly zone.

Two years ago, because of the threat to Benghazi, the coalition Government said that we needed to intervene with a no-fly zone. I supported them, as did most Members in the House. Now we have seen the deaths of tens of thousands or perhaps 100,000 people in Syria already and all the other consequences—the millions of displaced people and the refugees—yet we are not prepared to act. We are, of course, waiting for Obama, and Obama is not coming. He is not prepared to move. I asked the Foreign Secretary yesterday what his understanding was of the position of the US Government with regard to arming the opposition or a no-fly zone, and I got no answer.

The real tragedy in this situation is that countries that could make a difference to end the conflict relatively quickly are sitting back, while other countries, particularly the Qataris, and Hezbollah supported by Iran, are fuelling the process—and Russia, because it wants to keep the Tartus naval base, is prepared to do almost anything to back the Assad regime. I am not holding my breath for success at the forthcoming conference. Either there will be no agreement on who will participate, or agreement will not be reached unless it is a Dayton-style process and everybody is put in a room and kept there, with international forces putting pressure on them until an agreement is reached.

The prospect is that we will perhaps start arming elements in the opposition, but the conflict will continue for a very long time, with the sponsors of the Assad

regime continuing to provide more and more weaponry. Russia will strengthen the air defences and the whole outcome will be a disaster. We need to be trying not to give arms to the Syrian opposition, and instead to be battering on the doors of the White House and the Kremlin and doing far more to get the countries that really can make a difference to stop the process before it is too late.

8.10 pm

Mr Robert Walter (North Dorset) (Con): I welcome this evening's debate on the Council's decision and commend the Government on securing the flexibility that we and other countries need to step up the pressure on the Assad regime. I am especially pleased that the Council document explicitly sets out the humanitarian context that underlies our rationale for action. The urgency for a political or, reluctantly, a military solution is the humanitarian imperative on which I want to focus for a few moments. We cannot talk of aiding the Syrian opposition without stressing the urgent need and plight of the Syrian people, who live in constant fear for their lives and who in their hundreds and thousands are fleeing every day.

The Syrian crisis is entering its third year, and while we hope for a political solution, a humanitarian tragedy continues to unfold before our eyes. The situation for Syrians is desperate. Life for those caught up in the spiralling violence is unbearable. As ordinary civilians fall into ever deeper despair, the humanitarian need is growing more urgent by the day. According to the United Nations' estimates, the death toll is now 80,000; 8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance; and more than 4.25 million people have been driven from their homes by the fighting to other areas of Syria, with now well over 1.3 million refugees in neighbouring countries. The majority of these refugees are women, children and the elderly, more than half of whom are children below the age of 11, suffering first and foremost from psychological trauma. These figures are alarming, but from my own experience having visited two camps in Turkey, I can say that they do not capture or convey the full extent of the crisis.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees conceded that the total numbers are far higher than have officially been accounted for. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate rapidly as increased fighting and changing of control of towns and villages, in particular in the conflict areas, is driving more and more people out of the country.

Beyond Syria's borders, the problems continue. For the countries that have taken in those refugees—Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey—the burden that they face in economic, security and social terms, on their energy, water, health and educational facilities, is huge and proving a serious challenge that far exceeds their capabilities to cope with.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend says about the burdens put on Jordan in particular. Does he agree that more pressure should be put on the United Arab Emirates to contribute more to humanitarian relief?

Mr Walter: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I want to make a point about the international community's responsibility, and that includes the Gulf states.

If the scale of the humanitarian needs continues to outstrip the support available, the risks will only soar. The pressure on Jordan's already scarce water, energy and education resources is enormous. Approximately 40,000 Syrian students have started attending classes in Jordanian schools, and health services are strained by the average daily influx of 3,000 refugees into Jordan alone. If that influx continues at that pace, we will be looking at 1 million refugees in Jordan by the end of the year.

Where is the European Union and the rest of the international community in this devastating and desperate hour? Many promises have been made, but not enough have been delivered. I find it dispiriting that we have collectively fallen so far short of our obligations to help the Syrian people caught up in the turmoil and to alleviate the burdens borne by the neighbouring host countries. Appeals for funding to provide food, water and other humanitarian aid inside Syria have received only meagre support, while the UN Refugee Agency says that its appeal for half a billion dollars was only one-third funded. As a result of the woeful state of funding, the UN and other aid organisations can reach only 1.5 million of the people in desperate need, of whom there are probably around 3 million.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Walter: I am very conscious of the time limit that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have placed upon me and so will take no more interventions.

There was a conference in January at which \$1.5 billion was pledged. The Foreign Secretary reported yesterday that payments have now reached 71% of the amount pledged, but that is still nearly half a billion dollars short. I think that we can be proud of honouring our financial commitments, but we know that there are still countries that have not done so. That is not good enough. When the Foreign Secretary goes to Brussels on Monday, there must be progress on dialogue. In the long term, the whole international community will have to pull together to find a solution to the conflict.

8.16 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I am pleased that we are having this debate and hope that at the meeting in Brussels the Government will not use their veto and lead us into the danger of supplying arms to Syria. For some time now the Foreign Office has been chatting quite openly about the possibility of supplying arms. Indeed, in a letter to me of 22 April the Minister stated:

“As things stand today, there is going to be a strong case as we come towards the end of May, for the lifting of the arms embargo on the Syrian National Coalition, or some very serious amendment of the EU arms embargo”.

I just make the point, as others have, that we would be supplying arms to people we do not know. We do not know where those arms would end up or how much worse the conflict would get as a result. Anyone who doubts the leakage of arms should think carefully about the way the USA raced to supply any amount of arms to any opposition in Afghanistan in 1979, which gave birth to the Taliban and, ultimately, al-Qaeda. We should

think very seriously before doing that. I hope that we do not end up with any arms supplies, or indeed any UK involvement in the conflict.

There is obviously a horrific situation in Syria, with tens of thousands dead already and hundreds of thousands of refugees in neighbouring countries, and the situation will probably get far worse for them all. That is not to say, however, that there are not huge internal conflicts within Syria or that the Assad regime has not committed enormous human rights abuses, but the west has a very selective memory on this. There was a time when western Governments were happy to co-operate with President Assad on many issues. The Assad regime received very large numbers of refugees from Iraq—mainly Palestinians driven out of Iraq after the US invasion. One thinks of the plight of Palestinian people who have been driven from country to country for the past 60 years. The anger in those refugee camps will be the start of the conflicts and wars of tomorrow. There has to be a recognition of human rights and human justice.

However, this war is becoming a proxy war for all kinds of interests. Let us just think of the countries and organisations already involved, by supplying arms, funding or what is euphemistically called non-lethal assistance. The European Union is clearly very involved, as is the United States, and Russia is clearly involved in supplying arms to the Assad Government and protecting its own base there. The Gulf Co-operation Council countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are supplying vast amounts of money and arms to the area. Iran feels under threat and thinks that it is next on the western countries' hit list, so it is presumably helping the Assad regime in some form. Turkey is a neighbouring country that is both receiving refugees and supplying some weaponry and assistance. Israel has now got involved, with reports of the bombing that took place last week. In today's edition of *The Guardian* there is a report of a land incursion near the Golan Heights that was beaten off by certain forces, we know not which.

This is a time, surely, to reflect on the western strategy in dealing with all the issues with which we have been confronted since 2001. In Afghanistan, we have spent a lot of money and lost a lot of soldiers. Lots of civilians have died, and the country remains poor, corrupt and divided. Iraq is a place that can hardly be called at peace. In Libya, we went in with the no-fly zone and spent an awful lot of money and time bombing large numbers of people, and one could hardly say that there is a western-style liberal democracy there at present. Syria was a colonial creation. The French were very good at oppressing Syrian nationalism in the 1920s, and now the country is in danger of splitting apart altogether.

If there is to be a political solution, which the Minister says that he wants, the conference that is being planned looks increasingly like a conference to impose some kind of victorious solution. A conference must include all the countries of the region and all the parties that are in any way involved in this conflict, obviously including Iran, and must recognise the role that Israel is playing. The west was incapable of getting the nuclear non-proliferation treaty conference for a nuclear-free middle east going, so I hope that it is more successful in getting this conference going.

Finally, will the Minister give an absolute assurance that there will be a debate and a vote in this House before any precipitate action is taken and before any

[Jeremy Corbyn]

arms are supplied to anybody, so that those of us who disagree with that proposal will get the chance to express our dissent?

8.21 pm

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Let me start with a note of criticism that relates not to our policy on Syria but to the scrutiny of European documents in this place. The Council decision was taken on 28 February and referred to this Chamber by the European Scrutiny Committee back in March. It is now nearly June; in fact, the three-month arms embargo to which the decision referred has nearly finished. This is not a criticism of the Minister, and certainly not of the Chair. I am afraid that Government business managers must address the issue, and we must all try collectively to carry out European scrutiny in a much more timely and effective fashion.

I strongly welcome much of what the Minister said, particularly his strong emphasis on the main focus of British policy being the achievement of a peaceful political solution. That has to be right, and it has to be our main objective in every decision we take. The Geneva peace process that we hope will develop over the coming months is central to this, and the role of Russia and other countries in the region is a crucial part of that process.

Some slightly ill-judged questions have been asked during the debate. The hon. Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway), who made a very wise speech, asked at one stage whether it would be legal for us to intervene in the dispute in Syria, yet I have not heard anyone on the Government Benches saying that we should intervene. We are, in the end, talking only about the possible partial lifting or changing of an arms embargo in a country in which there is no universal arms embargo. In fact, arms are flowing into the country, funded, in the case of the regime, by Russia, supported by Iran and by Hezbollah. The arms that are flowing to the jihadi elements such as Jabhat al-Nusra and possibly al-Qaeda are, by all accounts, funded from within the Gulf. Those arms are flowing in completely legally because of the lack of a UN arms embargo.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) asked whether we were fuelling the fire. It is quite difficult to see how it could be fuelled any more—there is already an inferno. In effect, the EU arms embargo is a little like a sticking plaster floating in a flood. The country is already awash with arms. The most sophisticated arms are going to the regime and, I am afraid, to the jihadis, who are gaining ground against other elements.

As I said, I am worried about the tone of some Members' speeches. I admire in many respects the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), but he fell foul of this trap. To talk as though no democratic or moderate force is present in the country—to simply ignore its existence—is to make a fatal error. We have fallen into that trap in many parts of the world over the decades. We have assumed that democracy, moderation and the rule of law could never exist in Latin America, eastern Europe or Africa, but one after another, the peoples of those continents and regions have shown

that they are capable of fighting for freedom and democracy without falling into the hands of extremism. If the Arab spring taught us anything, it was that Arabs too can be moderate, Arabs too can fight for democracy and Arabs too can resist the temptations of extremism.

The Syrian conflict did not begin with western intervention. [Interruption.] I think that the hon. Member for Islington North did strongly imply that, but we will both have to check the record. The Syrian conflict began with Syrian people rising up against a dictatorship, in exactly the same way as the conflicts in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, and the conflicts that are still tentatively going on in other countries. If we talk as if this is an endless and inevitable bloodbath carried out by wild-eyed foreigners, we do a grave injustice to those who are trying to promote values that we would recognise. The Syrian National Coalition has endorsed the values of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law. [Interruption.] There is laughter behind me. I am surprised that Members think that this is funny.

The Syrian National Coalition and the Free Syrian army are implicated in crimes. Those should be investigated and we should put intense pressure on the coalition to clean up its act and ensure that its fighters respect civilian populations. We must do our best to make these people, who are clearly no angels, behave in a way that would make us proud to support them. To simply ignore them and assume that the conflict will end up as a Sunni-Shi'a battle between the Assad regime and jihadis could be an historic mistake.

As I have said, the most important thing is that we do everything we can to support the Geneva process and a regional, political solution. That has to involve Russia because it is critical to the process. It will inevitably draw in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, although I am not sure whether it is practical to have those two countries at the Geneva peace conference because it might end up as more of a Sunni-Shi'a fight than it was before. We have not only a political and diplomatic duty, but a moral obligation to ensure that the peace process works. Provided that they have not been annihilated in the meantime, present as partners in that peace process must be those who are fighting for freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

8.27 pm

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): Although this debate is somewhat retrospective, as the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) pointed out, it raises important questions about our current and prospective roles in the conflict in Syria.

I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr Walter). I have spent seven years travelling to Syria and have had the opportunity to meet Bashar Assad and other members of the regime several times. The tragedy that is unfolding for the silent middle in Syria is terrible to behold. It is a beautiful country that is being dismembered day by day. We must think very carefully about our next steps.

What is the situation today? On one side is the Assad regime, which is responsible, as we have heard, for more than 80,000 deaths, more than 1 million refugees and more than 4 million internally displaced people. The regime has 300,000 soldiers plus the dreaded Shabiha, 16,000 pieces of heavy artillery and an air force. It has

the Russians on its side, who are providing hardware such as S300s, Yakhont surface-to-ship missiles and the most robust air defence system in the middle east other than Israel's, as well as military advisers who are increasing in number day by day. It also has the Iranians on its side, who are providing the Revolutionary Guard and strategic advice, and it has Hezbollah on its side. It has electronic intelligence, money and arms provided by the Iranians, and it even has the Shabiha being formed into a national defence brigade by the Iranians, who are giving direction.

What does the opposition side have? Simply, it has two groups that are highly fragmented—the FSA, which has about 30,000 people, led by General Idris, who essentially have just small arms at their disposal; and on the other side, as many colleagues have said, the Salafis, who have about 3,000 to 5,000 people and are themselves fragmented. We have heard about Jabhat al-Nusra, but there is also Liwa al-Islam, Liwa Saqour and Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham, among other Islamist groups that are fighting there.

So we have an asymmetric war in which Bashar Assad has no incentive whatever to negotiate seriously. What are our options? They are fourfold. One is a containment strategy that would prevent the conflict from spreading, but unfortunately it would merely lead to more death. Another is a no-fly zone, as proposed by the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). That would indeed tip the balance, but it would put the lives of our Air Force pilots at risk, and I do not believe that after Iraq and Afghanistan, the military establishment in this country has any appetite for that.

The third option is lifting the arms embargo, which I believe would put pressure on Bashar Assad. However, as the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) said—I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) will also make this point when he gets his opportunity to speak—there is a risk that arms may fall into the wrong hands. However, the signal that we would send by lifting the arms embargo would put pressure on the regime.

The final option is a radical diplomatic engagement strategy. In that regard, we have two opportunities before us. One is the fact that the UK holds the presidency of the UN Security Council next month, and the other is that there are Iranian elections next month, which may provide an opportunity for us to press the reset button regarding engagement with Iran. As the hon. Member for Islington North said, we need to engage with all parties—the Gulf states, Turkey, the EU and the US as well as Syria, Russia and Iran.

Time is running out. We must show Bashar Assad at Geneva that he is at the last chance saloon. I encourage the Foreign Secretary to exert pressure through a two-pronged strategy of radical diplomatic engagement with all parties and a real threat of lethal support to the FSA. Only then will there be a real prospect of ending the tragedy unfolding in Syria.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. We have two more speakers. If each takes five minutes and no more, we will have a few minutes for the Minister at the end. I call Robert Halfon.

8.32 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to raise three points. First, I welcome the renewal of restrictive measures against Syria and any amendments that increase pressure on the Assad regime, but I fear that they do not go far enough. Secondly, the Government and the EU need to take further action against groups, particularly Hezbollah, that support the Syrian regime. Thirdly, this is not about intervention but about muscular enlightenment, and we must act now. I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) said that the Government's actions were fuelling the conflict, because they have taken every diplomatic course, yet 80,000 people have been killed in the past three years.

I strongly support the McCain plan, which states that we need to work together as an international community to protect civilians by suppressing Assad's air defences. The advantages of following that policy are plentiful. It would give us safe space where essential humanitarian aid could be given out, especially medical supplies, food and water, and a valuable area where the anti-Assad forces could train and become a more effective fighting force.

We talk about the problem with arming the opposition, but the fact is that because we have done nothing over the past two years—I am talking not about our country but about the free world—the Islamists have inevitably filled the vacuum. We must not forget that organisations such as Hezbollah are arming the Islamist groups, which is why we have to identify the correct opposition groups that believe in a more democratic and free Syria. I believe that we can do that.

I mentioned chemical weapons in my intervention on the Minister, and we must find out which companies have supplied the Assad regime with chemical materials. We know that up to 500 companies supplied Saddam Hussein with the chemical weapons that allowed him to attack Halabja, and I hope that the Government will look into the issue. We must proscribe Hezbollah—not just the armed wing but the political wing—because of its activities in supporting the Assad regime and the suppression of the people.

No. 10 Downing street said in April 2013 that there is “growing evidence” that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway) said that we need evidence for that, but we have seen it on BBC television. I do not want to go back 25 years and let another Halabja happen, and it looks like that is coming. We must take action now.

Richard Ottaway rose—

Robert Halfon: I will not give way because my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) wants to speak. We have done everything possible diplomatically, and it is right that we take further action in supporting the right opposition groups, creating safe havens, and showing people that we want to stop mass genocide.

8.35 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that Syria is a melting pot for a proxy war that is being fought out

[Mr John Baron]

either directly or indirectly at various levels, whether it is Sunni versus Shi'a Muslims; the west versus China or Russia; concerned minorities within the country, such as Alawites and Christians, against what could follow; or Iran versus Saudi Arabia. It is a crossing point for conflict, and I urge the Minister and the coalition Government to think carefully before they pour more arms into a conflict that could not only escalate the violence within the civil war, but lead to an escalation of an arms race beyond Syria's borders which, at the end of the day, could be a mistake of historic proportions.

History is very important. Our track record of arming groups or individuals is not good, no matter what anybody says. We armed the mujaheddin, and there is a fair chance that a good number of those weapons were used against us. We armed Saddam Hussein and supported him in his war against Iran—again, some of those weapons were probably pointed at us. History is important because it teaches us that if we support, arm and intervene in regimes, civil wars and conflicts, often what we are trying to remove or put right becomes embedded even further.

Look at our efforts since the second world war to take on communist regimes around the world—in Korea, China or Vietnam. Despite western interventions, those regimes are essentially still in place. If our goal is to create a sort of stability and liberal democracy of our making, we have only to look at what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, where democracy is not flourishing, despite the high cost in lives and treasure. It is flourishing in north Africa and other regions of the middle east where the west has played a much more minor role.

I urge the Government to think carefully before going down the road of arming the rebels. The Minister was right to say that that is not the narrow debate we are having tonight, but he must accept that we are debating an EU Council decision made on 28 February which is up for renewal—or certainly revisiting—on 1 June, and he cannot deny that the Government have been flying kites on this issue. We are therefore right to raise it on the Floor of the House tonight, particularly given that the decision will be revisited shortly—on 1 June, I understand.

I ask the Minister to consider one or two other points. We do not know much about the rebel forces, but we do know that some are linked to al-Qaeda and some have committed atrocities. Tracking and tracing weaponry that we put into Syria because we would deal only with the moderate elements is beyond the capability of any western Government, unless we had troops on the ground to monitor the situation more closely, and I am sure the Minister will not suggest that course of action.

There can be little doubt that the more weapons we put into a conflict, the more the violence escalates. The idea that we can put weapons into a civil war and not inflate or escalate the violence beggars belief. Of course putting more weapons in will increase the violence. That is why Oxfam and a number of charities that have people on the ground have come out publicly in the past week or two to say, "Do not do it. Do not go down that road, because bad things will happen." There is already

a humanitarian crisis in Syria. Pouring more weapons into the conflict cannot do any good; it can only escalate the violence within the country.

In the minute I have left, I urge the Government instead to focus on diplomacy. Diplomacy has not yet run its course. We have the conference suggested by the Russians, which we should pursue to the very end. We should also do what we can on the humanitarian side, where more can be done. Hon. Members have made a number of suggestions that we should explore, and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr Walter) made the point that we could do more from a humanitarian point of view.

One last time, I urge the Government to refrain from exploring the view that we should arm the rebels. Syria is the crossing point of a conflict that arming the rebels could escalate. We could be very sorry for what follows.

8.41 pm

Alistair Burt: I thank all colleagues for their contributions to this short debate. We have covered a lot of ground, and I appreciate how colleagues have handled it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) reminded me of the line from "Argo", which could have been used in a number of other films. There are no good choices. They are all bad choices. What we are trying to do is make the best of a very difficult situation. Virtually every colleague understood the complexity and difficulty of the situation, and that, after two years of unrelenting killing by the regime, we are left with very difficult choices.

I will do my best to cover a number of points made in the debate, but colleagues will appreciate that I might be unable to cover every point made. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) raised a number of questions. If she looks back on my responses to interventions, she will see a number of the answers, such as on the balance of weaponry and diversion. I understand the issues and try to do my best to deal with them.

The Government are seeking consensus with our EU partners. The sanctions stand or fall by consensus. Clearly, the Government are determined to try to get consensus within the EU. If consensus is not possible and the sanctions fall, we would be prepared to introduce domestic sanctions to cover the gap, but our intention and determination is to do things by consensus.

I have sought to reiterate to the House that our policy remains to seek a political solution. A number of speakers were anticipating a point that we have not reached. As my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) said, that is not illegitimate in this debate, but I firmly counsel colleagues that questions about whether we should arm people are not on the table. He and other colleagues cannot believe for a second that the risks and the dangers, such as diversion, are not top among the concerns of colleagues in the Foreign Office and throughout the Government. As a number of speakers said, however, the situation is already dire. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) and other colleagues spoke of what is already happening and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr Walter) and others spoke of the humanitarian situation. Changing the EU arms embargo will not suddenly make the situation worse. It is already horrendous. We are trying to do something different.

The purpose of seeking to lift the arms embargo is to give the flexibility to which my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway) and for Braintree (Mr Newmark) referred. Lifting the embargo gives flexibility, assists the moderates against the extremists, assists the politicians against those who wish to see solely a military solution, and gives flexibility in circumstances we do not know. Unless it is lifted, the process of lifting it in difficult circumstances would be almost impossible. Decisions after that will be of enormous complexity and difficulty, and the Government are well seized of that.

I cannot stress often enough to the House the importance the Government place on the current political process, and its urgency. That is foremost in all our minds. Colleagues across the House have spoken about the impossibility of the military situation, and that is why it is so important that the Foreign Secretary is backed wholeheartedly in the efforts that he and others are making to achieve peace.

Finally, on the point about coming to the House, it is important to repeat the remarks the Foreign Secretary made yesterday:

“men, women and children...suffering virtually every kind of weapon that man has ever invented being dropped on them while most of the world denies them the means to defend themselves. If we come to a choice about that, it is a very important foreign policy and moral choice, which of course should be discussed fully in this House.”—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2013; Vol. 563, c. 909.]

He drew attention both to the urgency of the situation, what is happening at the moment, and his determination to have the matter fully discussed.

8.46 pm

One and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the Speaker put the Question (Standing Order No. 16(1)).

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of EU Council Decision 2013/109/CFSP amending Decision 2012/739/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Syria; takes note of the deteriorating situation in Syria that has led to the deaths of more than 70,000 people at the hands of the Assad regime; and supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government to agree with Council Decision 2013/109/CFSP.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 6 to 8 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to undertake to pay, and to pay by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, in respect of Beechbrook Capital as part of the Business Finance Partnership, sums exceeding £10 million and up to a cumulative total of £20 million.

EDUCATION

That the draft Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (Consequential Amendments to Part 1 of the Education and Skills Act 2008) Order 2013, which was laid before this House on 14 March, in the previous Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft Duty to Participate in Education or Training (Alternative Ways of Working) Regulations 2013, which were laid before this House on 14 March, in the previous Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Mr Syms.*)

Question agreed to.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That:

(1) the matter of the Government's Legislative Programme as outlined in the Queen's Speech as it relates to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Wednesday 12 June at 9.30 am and 2.00 pm to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above; and

(3) the Chair shall interrupt proceedings at the afternoon sitting not later than two hours after their commencement at that sitting.—(*Mr Syms.*)

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That the Motions in the name of Secretary Vince Cable relating to Financial Assistance to Industry in respect of investments to support lending to small and medium-sized enterprises and in respect of early stage venture capital funds investing in small and medium-sized enterprises shall be treated as if they related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instruments be approved.—(*Mr Syms.*)

PETITIONS

Objections to a Free School (Edgware)

8.47 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Hendon, and specifically on behalf of the Broadfields Estate residents association.

The petition states:

The Petition of Residents of Hendon,

Declares that the Petitioners oppose the Avanti House School development on Broadfields, Edgware; further that the petitioners note that Avanti House School have identified land between Hartland Drive and Broadfields Primary School for a new school which would accommodate 1680 pupils and that sport pitches are planned to be placed on green belt land; further that the petitioners do not believe that the area can accommodate this and the proposed school will not actually serve the Broadfields area or even the Borough of Barnet; further that pupils would arrive by cars and buses adding to already congested roads and that the north part of Broadfields is surrounded by green belt land and access is possible via only two roads meaning the area is only able to handle residential traffic. This development threatens to cause traffic chaos and ruin the lives of our local community.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government not to support the relocation of Avanti House School to the Broadfields site in Edgware, and draw attention to this petition and to a second submitted to Barnet council, containing 1,002 signatures.

And the Petitioners remain, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[P001179]

Closure of Rhyl Crown Post Office

8.48 pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I wish to present the following petition to Parliament on behalf of the residents of Rhyl and the Vale of Clwyd, who are totally opposed to the proposal by Post Office Ltd to

[Chris Ruane]

franchise Rhyl Crown Post Office. They believe that the proposal will severely damage the provision of services in Rhyl, especially to the elderly, and they call on Post Office Ltd to withdraw its proposal and to retain Rhyl Crown Post Office.

The petition states:

The Petition of those concerned about the proposed closure of Rhyl Crown Post Office,

Declares that Rhyl Crown Post Office should remain within the Crown Network and not become a franchise. The Petitioners believe that the proposal for a franchise will severely damage the provision of services in Rhyl.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Minister of State for Business and Enterprise to protect much-loved public services.

And the Petitioners remain, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[P001180]

Planning (Mottingham)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mr Syms.)

8.50 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to raise this issue in the Chamber, and I am delighted to see several hon. Members still here as we approach closing time—an appropriate metaphor, perhaps, given the subject of this debate.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Not for the Porcupine.

Robert Neill: No, I hope not for the Porcupine.

I want briefly to set out what seems to be the particularly worrying pattern of behaviour that the proposal to demolish the Porcupine public house in Mottingham in my constituency highlights. It is obviously of great concern to residents of Mottingham, which, it is worth saying, is not an amorphous part of London suburbia, but a genuine village with a real sense of identity, and the Porcupine pub is a central part of that village community. It is also worrying because the behaviour of the two substantial companies involved has potential impacts beyond this case.

Perhaps I can put that into some context. There has been an inn on the site of the Porcupine public house since 1688. It is not, I accept, locally or statutorily listed, but it is steeped in history. There has always been a pub there in the middle of the village, and it is virtually the one remaining bit of community space left in the village, so it is of real significance to the people of the Mottingham area. It has a long local history. I am told that Tom Cribb, the 19th century world bare-knuckle boxing champion, trained in the Porcupine inn and that it has been called that since the days when a spiked machine was used to crush oats and barley in alehouses, so it has a long heritage and, as I say, is dearly loved by people in the Mottingham area. We have seen, however, a shabby and underhand means of closing this public house against the community's wishes.

I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Minister here to respond to the debate and I want to thank him personally for the trouble that he took to come down to Mottingham, visit the site and meet some of its residents—more of that in a moment. First, however, I want to thank some other people, because the campaign to save the Porcupine public house has seen many people doing a lot of hard work. It is worth mentioning Liz Keable and all the other committee officers of the Mottingham residents association, who have worked very hard; Emily Bailey, who started an online petition that has gathered more than 1,600 signatures; the local councillors, including my Conservative colleagues Charles Rideout and Roger Charsley, who represent the Mottingham ward of the London borough of Bromley, and Councillor John Hills, who represents the adjoining ward in the neighbouring London borough of Greenwich, just the other side of the road from the public house; hundreds of residents who have written in and e-mailed to support the campaign; and the 250-plus people who turned out when the Minister came to visit last week. I also wish to say special thank you to David Bingley, who started the campaign. Sadly, his ongoing hospital treatment means

that he cannot be here to watch the debate from the Gallery, but I know he will be watching from his hospital bed, and I am sure that you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, if I say that we thank him for his efforts and wish him a speedy recovery.

That is the history of this public house and the strength of feeling surrounding it. The Porcupine was knocked down once before, in 1922, and on that occasion the brewery provided a temporary pub for people to use while it was rebuilt, but I am afraid that a very different attitude has been adopted now. In essence, the owner of the Porcupine pub, Enterprise Inns, has in my judgment deliberately let the pub run down and then sought to dispose of it for development. I am afraid Enterprise Inns has a bad track record in that regard. It is becoming frankly notorious for such behaviour. Its four annual reports show an alarming decline in the total number of pubs it operates, from 7,399 in September 2009 down to 5,902 in September 2012. Enterprise Inns seems to have a deliberate policy of running down its estate. It is quite clear from its annual report that, having disposed of more than 400 pubs in the last year, Enterprise Inns is disposing of assets to pay down debt. It is a company that, frankly, has not had good trading results. To my mind, it seems to be behaving more like a property company than a brewing company.

What Enterprise Inns has done in this case adds insult to injury. Not only did it dispose of the site, but it did so without giving any notice to the population. The site was never advertised. There was no sign that this public house was going to be closed. It closed literally overnight, having been sold through a commercial deal to Lidl supermarket, with no notice given to anyone. Lidl UK now proposes to demolish the public house and erect a non-descript supermarket on the site. It is reprehensible that this pattern of conduct by Enterprise Inns seems to be designed to circumvent the Government's work to give greater protection to public houses. The Government have taken important steps, by creating the ability to list places such as the Porcupine as assets of community value and by giving greater protections in the national planning policy framework.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the campaign that he is running with the local community. As he knows, the Porcupine in Mottingham village is just across the road from my constituency, so my constituents are concerned, too. He has the full support of those who are trying to save the Dutch House pub in my constituency. This is very much about a local community coming together to save both community assets. Does he agree that this case is a test for the NPPF? We should be listening to local people, as against huge businesses such as McDonald's, Lidl and Enterprise Inns.

Robert Neill: I am grateful to hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I welcome his support for the campaign, and I agree.

Enterprise Inns has a debt of £296 million and is running down its estate to pay it off. It does not seem to be interested in running its pubs, as they can be run, as going concerns. The community in Mottingham was denied the opportunity to make an application to have the Porcupine listed as an asset of community value in advance, because it was given no notice. By the time the

pub closed, it had already changed hands and Lidl had already moved in and boarded it up. Ironically, it did so with a hoarding that was beyond the size permitted under the planning regulations—a breach of development control, which says something about Lidl's attitude. When my hon. Friend the Minister responds, I should be grateful if he considered what more we might do about the behaviour of Enterprise Inns in seeking to circumvent the legislation that the House put in place to protect such assets.

Greg Mulholland: The all-party save the pub group is entirely behind my hon. Friend's community campaign and will offer him any support we can. The simple answer—I hope we will hear this from the Minister—is twofold. First, as my hon. Friend will know, the great news is that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is consulting on finally dealing with the property scam that is the pubco model, which includes Enterprise Inns. I hope that we will hear later this year that that will be dealt with. Secondly, I hope that we will start to get it through to the community pubs Minister—my hon. Friend and I had debates when he used to be the community pubs Minister—that although the provisions in the Localism Act 2011 are positive, we cannot accept a planning framework that allows such behaviour. We must have a change, so that pubs cannot become supermarkets behind communities' backs and without any consultation with those communities. That cannot be right.

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman would almost have had time to consume a pint in the course of his intervention.

Robert Neill: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I understand my hon. Friend's point, and I am grateful to him for his intervention. You will know of the importance that all communities attach to their local public house, Mr Speaker, and this behaviour is particularly reprehensible. It has denied people the opportunity to step in, unlike what has happened at other places nearby, such as the Baring Hall public house near Grove Park station, where notice was given and the community was able to get the asset listed. That opportunity was denied in the case of the Porcupine as a result of the underhand behaviour of Enterprise Inns.

The situation has been made worse by the behaviour of Lidl. It is becoming apparent that the company's business model is one of acquiring public house sites and turning them into supermarkets in a secretive and predatory fashion—[*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) says that this is about collusion, and I have to say that a lot of people in Mottingham would agree.

As I have said, the situation has been made worse by Lidl's behaviour. Representatives of the company came to a public meeting organised by the Mottingham residents association and, to put it charitably, gave misleading information about the status of the planning application. They claimed that they already had permission to demolish the public house, when in fact they had not even made an application. Since then, although they claim that they wish to consult the community, they have done no more than board up the public house. They want to demolish it so that, in effect, the pass will have been sold

[Robert Neill]

and it will be impossible to rebuild a pub on the site, but I am pleased to say that Bromley council will have to consider a section 31 application. I am sure that it will deal with such an application in an appropriate fashion. My hon. Friend the Minister cannot prejudge planning cases, but I would simply observe that I believe that there are very strong planning grounds for deciding that this is not an appropriate place for a supermarket.

Lidl's poor behaviour did not stop there, however. Until I secured this debate—as well as earning a rebuke from you, Mr Speaker, for making an intervention on the matter at business questions that was perhaps a little less crisp than I try to be—Lidl had refused to engage at senior level with me or any other elected representative. Lidl is a privately owned, German-based company, and it is now buying up pubs around London and turning them into supermarkets. Ironically, there is a Lidl just 10 minutes away from this site, in Eltham, as well as branches of Marks & Spencer, the Co-op and Sainsbury's within easy reach of it.

I find it extraordinary that, having misled residents over the status of the application, Lidl took no steps to correct that. It put in an application, then forgot to pay the fee for about seven days, which says something about the company. When I sought a meeting with a Lidl board director, the company refused to give my office the names of its directors. We had to go to Companies House to find out who they were. It refused to give me the names, and refused to meet me until it heard about the publicity generated by this debate. That is a contemptuous way in which to treat the public.

There are two messages for people in all this. First, they should know how Lidl is behaving in this case. Secondly, the Campaign for Real Ale is actively promoting its "List your Local" campaign, and my message to anyone with a pub owned by Enterprise Inns in their community is that they should get it listed as an asset of community value now, because they cannot trust Enterprise Inns not to sell it from under them without telling them. That is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. As things are, a demolition application has now been submitted and will have to be considered by Bromley council. I am happy that it will take whatever steps are appropriate, but this case demonstrates an attitude that is damaging for the community in that area.

This is not the only occasion on which Lidl has behaved in this way. In Warlingham, it destroyed the former Good Companions public house. It knocked it down, but it has yet to submit an application to redevelop the site. It demolished a former police station in Dartford as soon as it acquired it, and the residents of Dartford have had to live with a derelict site for the subsequent 15 months. That is predatory behaviour. It is unacceptable and unbecoming of a public company. I hope that the directors on the board of Lidl will realise the reputational damage that their conduct is doing. I say that more in hope than in expectation, but we can at least use the engine of publicity to flag up their behaviour and that of Enterprise Inns. The Minister might be aware that an application has now been submitted for the Porcupine public house to be listed as an asset of community value, and I hope that it will give it some protection in due course.

Clive Efford: The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way to me again. My constituents added their names to that application and were told that because they lived in neither the ward nor the borough, they could not have their application registered as an asset, despite that fact that it is happening in the middle of their village, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. They are very disappointed and asked me to express their view here tonight.

Robert Neill: I understand that, and it is an issue that we may need to think about, particularly given that the local authority boundaries in some urban areas do not necessarily follow the community ties with an area. I hope that even though Bromley council is not statutorily obliged to do so, it will none the less be aware of the strength of feeling from across the other side of Mottingham.

The other option is to consider an article 4 direction, and I understand that an application to Bromley council for such a direction has been made. The one thing that we need to bear in mind is that there is sometimes a tendency for owners of properties that are subject to an article 4 direction to make excessive claims on compensation in an endeavour to deter local authorities from using the article 4 powers. That happened with the Baring Hall hotel in Grove park, where I understand a claim for compensation of about £1 million was initially made, but has now been significantly reduced. There is, of course, an onus on the owner who seeks compensation for article 4 actually to prove loss. I wonder whether the Minister can say more about the guidance that we can give to local authorities, so that they are not intimidated against using article 4 directions by the behaviour of large, well-funded commercial organisations.

I hope that I have now had the chance to ventilate on a subject that is hugely important to my constituents. I end by saying that the porcupine is a seemingly harmless animal until provoked. Well, the residents of Mottingham have been thoroughly and justifiably provoked by the threat to their Porcupine. I hope that this debate has given us the chance to flag up what amounts to troubling behaviour not just for residents of Mottingham, but for anyone concerned about protecting valued local pubs across the country.

9.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Brandon Lewis): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on securing this important debate. It is important to the people of Mottingham and the Porcupine pub, but it also gives us a chance—as we have heard from the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), the chairman of the all-party parliamentary save the pub group and from the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), the member for the Dutch House—to outline some of the rules affecting pubs and their acquisition by some of the companies mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst is aware that on 29 April, Lidl UK submitted a part 31 notification to the London borough of Bromley council of its intention to demolish the Porcupine pub. I know that my hon. Friend has expressed his concerns directly

to the council about the implications of the notification, so that his views and those of his constituents can rightly be taken into account when the council considers the case, which it has to do before 28 May. I also know that local residents recently submitted, as my hon. Friend has said, a request to the council for an article 4 direction for the removal of permitted development rights for both demolition and change of use on the site, which I am advised is still being considered by the council. The council will need to notify the Secretary of State if and when a direction has been drafted.

As my hon. Friend has outlined, the Porcupine pub ceased trading in March and the site was sold to Lidl UK at around the same time. It is still the case that no formal planning application has been submitted to the council regarding the proposals. I know that my hon. Friend knows from his time in the Department for Communities and Local Government that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the merits or otherwise of the notification or the proposed article 4 direction, or indeed on the possible success or otherwise of any planning application for the erection of a retail unit on the site, as I would not wish to prejudice the Secretary of State's position, should any of these matters come before him. I nevertheless note one of my hon. Friend's closing comments about the value of guidelines for councils' use of article 4 directions, which might provide councillors with greater knowledge.

When I visited the Porcupine with my hon. Friend, councillors asked me about the article 4 direction and about the compensation issue. I think that we need to look into just how guarded council officers are being about the advice that they are giving members about the risk of compensation. We need to ensure that there is a proper understanding of the risk and that it is not overstated, so that councils do not overestimate it and fail to take an opportunity that could be used in many cases to protect pubs under article 4.

I know that my hon. Friend is well versed in the planning system, to which he has referred in detail this evening. However, for the record, I will explain the position relating to, in particular, part 31 notifications and article 4.

The demolition of most buildings is permitted development, which means that specific planning permission is not required. However, that is subject to a requirement to notify the local planning authority concerned through a part 31 notification, so it can decide whether to prescribe the method of demolition and restoration of the site. That often gives a community a brief opportunity to become aware of an issue and do something about it, as has happened in the case of the Porcupine.

As for article 4 directions under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, public houses and shops are classed as separate uses under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. That recognises the different land use impacts of their particular uses, and would ordinarily mean that planning permission would be required to change from one class to another. When issues arise, however, local authorities, working with their communities, can restrict the use of permitted development rights by means of an article 4 direction, and, as my hon. Friend said, that is being considered in this case.

As soon as the direction has been drafted, notice is served locally for 21 days, and the Secretary of State is notified at the same time. Having considered the local consultation responses, the local authority then considers whether to confirm the direction. It can do that by serving a further notice locally and notifying the Secretary of State.

There have been calls in the House recently for the removal of permitted development rights that allow pubs to convert to other uses at a national level. The hon. Member for Leeds North West, representing the save the pub group, has spoken about that on a number of occasions. However, the Government are clear about the fact that localism should be at the heart of planning. We need to avoid any disproportionate restrictions on change of use that might result in more empty buildings, spoiling the local environment and holding back economic development. However, that does not prevent us from doing what we can to protect our community pubs.

As my hon. Friend said, we should encourage communities to ensure that their locals are listed as community assets. CAMRA is running a fantastic campaign, and I urge Members to look at its website, which gives clear and simple directions about how to list a pub. It is good to hear that the people of Mottingham are adopting that route while there is still a building to protect. I sensed the public feeling there the other day, when at least 200 of them turned out. Listing a pub is a simple process. It is necessary to be on the electoral roll, but I noted my hon. Friend's comments on that requirement, and I will look into it. Only 21 people in the area need to propose the listing, and I encourage people to do it.

Greg Mulholland: Will the Minister give way?

Brandon Lewis: I will give way briefly.

Greg Mulholland: I thank the Minister for listening to what has been said about this issue. However, he is now a CAMRA member—I am delighted about that—and he knows that CAMRA does not agree with him and believes that we need more protection. It is great that he visited the pub, but, having heard the case, does he honestly think that it is in the interests of localism or pubs to retain a national planning framework that allows the conversion of wanted, full, busy, profitable pubs to branches of McDonald's, supermarkets or flats without the community's having a say? That is not in the interests of localism. It is undermining what the Minister and I both believe in.

Brandon Lewis: I was about to say something about that. There is sometimes a gap when a company buys a property that was not already listed and does not need to demolish it. The first a resident may know about it is when the boarding goes up advertising whichever company that happens to be. That may be the first indication that Enterprise Inns, or whoever, has sold it off.

As I have said, we do not intend to change planning laws per se, but we do need to ensure that whatever we do is proportionate. The listing of a community asset is a simple, light-touch, but effective way of protecting a pub. However, I accept that there may be an opportunity to take that a step further in order to prevent circumstances in which a resident does not know that a property has been sold or has become a Tesco, a Lidl or a McDonald's until the store opens or the boarding goes up. I am prepared to look at that, but I must make it clear that,

[Brandon Lewis]

as I have outlined, we are not going to make any substantive changes to change of use and general planning that are disproportionate.

I want to stress again that communities that value their pubs should do what they can to have them listed. The Government have done a great deal to help to protect pubs through our work on planning, under the national planning framework, and through providing the ability to list a pub as a community asset. That has had a great impact. We have also helped to protect pubs by developing the Plunkett Foundation so our communities can buy pubs, and we have put funding into Pub is the Hub. There is also the Chancellor's fantastic move to cut the beer duty escalator and beer duty itself.

In conclusion, I am not in a position to comment on the specific case of the Porcupine pub, although I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst on the fantastic work he is doing in highlighting what is happening and on the action he has taken. I cannot go any further at present without being prejudicial to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, so I will leave it there, and wish my hon. Friend and the residents of Mottingham well in their endeavours.

Question put and agreed to.

9.15 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 21 May 2013

[MR MIKE WEIR *in the Chair*]

UK City of Culture 2017

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Nicky Morgan.)

9.30 am

Mr David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I am delighted to have this opportunity to talk about the merits of Southend being chosen as the city of culture in 2017, but it would be remiss of me to claim credit for securing the debate, which was entirely the idea of the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth). I am truly pleased with the number of colleagues who have turned up this morning. I had intended to speak for about 20 minutes, depending on interventions, but I think that everyone here wants to contribute so I might have to shorten the speech a little. I want to give everyone the opportunity to talk about their own area.

I will start with a quote from Gandhi. He is not someone I have quoted before, other than on dieting. Gandhi said:

“No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.”

That is true, and certainly so of the 11 areas and towns bidding to become UK city of culture in 2017. None of the areas bidding would have much culture at all if it were not for the fact that they belong to the United Kingdom. Every part of our country, of which we are all so proud, is rich in culture.

I must warn Members that the building is, at this very moment, surrounded by people. The good residents of Southend are peace-loving people. They want to encourage people peacefully, so right now the building is surrounded by the thoughts of Southend residents, who are urging the judges to choose Southend as the city of culture. If colleagues feel unwell during the debate, it might be because they are having unkind thoughts about Southend, which are being attacked by the powerful thoughts of Southend residents.

That leads me on to a number of remarks, with which I have been charged, about the 10 competing cities. As far as I am concerned, the United Kingdom is a wonderful country, and I will not have a bad word said about any part of it. When I look around this Chamber, I feel that the idea that any part of the United Kingdom could be called a dump is absolutely disgraceful. The idea that any part of the United Kingdom would not know what culture was is also absolutely disgraceful.

When the remarks were reported, it was suggested that I tour the United Kingdom to see the competition at first hand, and I am delighted to say that I have started on a tour. It is a big area to get around, and it was suggested that I visit places by helicopter—I was not too keen on that—and then someone proposed that I borrow Nigel Farage’s light aeroplane, the one he used during the general election campaign. If using it was as successful as it was in 2010 it would no doubt cause a bit of publicity, but it would be the end of me.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, and whoever else was responsible, on securing the debate. As part of his grand tour of prospective second UK cities of culture, will he respond to an invitation from me—and, I am sure, from my colleague, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan)—to visit the first UK city of culture, Londonderry, which is currently enjoying its year of culture? We would be delighted to see the hon. Gentleman, perhaps at the tattoo in August.

Mr Amess: Absolutely. Both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) will certainly be visiting that city.

I will start with my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd). I had a wonderful visit to Hastings—if I had the money, I might even buy a little holiday home there—and I was very impressed with the hospitality that I was afforded by her good self.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): We very much enjoyed my hon. Friend’s visit. He saw around the Jerwood, which is a fantastic new gallery. Is he not now reconsidering some of his earlier phrases? He must be rather anxious about the high level of competition from other places, such as Hastings.

Mr Amess: As politicians, we all suffer from misreporting. I think that Hastings has a splendid bid.

Moving on to Kent, which will be my next visit, we know that it is the garden of England. I absolutely condemn all the rumours about the roses being infested with black fly, greenfly and rust, and I very much look forward to visiting Kent shortly.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): My hon. Friend rightly says that the garden of England is in full bloom—it is as beautiful as ever—but on his tour around the country he should take advantage of the unrivalled high-speed rail link, to get swiftly from London down to east Kent and see the cultural attractions for himself.

Mr Amess: That is a controversial path down which I will not go.

Moving on to Wales, I have had some very unkind remarks made about Wales on my website. I think that the people there are absolutely fine. I have a number of relatives living in Wales, and they seem all right. What we know about the Welsh is that they have magnificent voices and produce some wonderful actors and actresses.

Moving on to Scotland, I had a very nice letter from the Lord Provost, and I think that all the suggestions I have had on my website about Scottish people being mean and that some of them conduct interviews while chewing gum, are very unfair indeed. I very much look forward to visiting Scotland, not least to sample the whisky and the haggis.

Dame Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): It is indeed a very polite and kind letter from the Lord Provost. I hope that the hon. Gentleman makes it to Aberdeen, because he will then realise that the competition is really on.

Mr Amess: I am looking forward to my visit.

[Mr Amess]

Moving on to Leicester, we all know what a strong bid it has. It has a wonderful cricket ground, but I have to say that I had no idea about its secret weapon, in the form of the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). Anyone who has not seen him perform on YouTube is missing a joy. I, for one, think that we need not spend any more money on finding someone to represent us in the Eurovision song contest next year because it must be the right hon. Member for Leicester East.

Then we move on to Hull.

Alan Johnson (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I am pleased to hear him make these points, which I think can be summed up by saying, “You don’t promote your own bid better by denigrating other bids.” Indeed, would he go a little further and say that anyone who described other towns and places in the UK as dumps would be hindering rather than helping their campaign?

Mr Amess: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and that is why, when various individuals suggested on my blog that Hull was the riviera of the north, I had no hesitation in agreeing with them. Hull is a wonderful place, and I have many relatives living there as well.

Then, I have, of course, been to Chester, which has a wonderful race track and some iconic buildings. Jessie J is supporting Chester, and I will come shortly to the fact that I hope that will.i.am will support Southend’s bid.

Then we come to Plymouth. Again, I have rebutted all the suggestions on my website that whenever someone goes to wonderful Plymouth the clotted cream seems to be curdled. I am very much looking forward to my visit to Plymouth, which my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) has suggested I make.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I am delighted that my hon. Friend will be coming. He will, of course, have the opportunity to come to one of the finest theatre production companies—one of five such companies in the whole country. He will also be very welcome to meet his fellow Southend Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), whose father-in-law was, as it happens, a councillor on Plymouth city council and is backing our bid.

Mr Amess: That was a blow below the belt, of which I was not warned. I shall not cancel my visit—I suppose I shall still go. I look forward to it. Plymouth is where my mother always took her holidays, and it is wonderful there.

The competition is potentially very lucrative to the winner in two ways: it brings cultural benefits as well as tremendous economic ones. Londonderry, the current United Kingdom city of culture, and Liverpool, European city of culture in 2008, can certainly support that view.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this matter before the House. I am surrounded by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and my hon. Friend the Member for East

Londonderry (Mr Campbell), and we are very aware of the good that comes from being city of culture. This year, the 2017 city of culture will be announced in Londonderry. The jobs and the opportunities are there, as is the focus of the world, but although Londonderry may be the city of culture for the United Kingdom, it is for the whole of Northern Ireland in particular, and we will all benefit from that.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the spin-offs from being the city of culture go across not only the whole of Northern Ireland, but the United Kingdom? May I also invite him to come to Londonderry for the historical event on about 12 August. It will be a very good event that I know he will enjoy, as everybody else does.

Mr Amess: I accept the hon. Gentleman’s invitation with enthusiasm. Given that Derry is a similar size to Southend, there is much encouragement for us in how the unbiased judges will look at the 11 competitors.

It is difficult to measure cultural benefits, but the Royal Ballet has performed in Londonderry, the National Youth Orchestra has held concerts in the homes of ordinary people and—I hope that I am not ruining the Minister’s speech—the Turner prize exhibition and award ceremony will be held there, which is the first time that it has been held outside England. Those are just a few of the events, but there are many more.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I must say that I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman’s pinball tour of the country, as he visits the other bidding cities. Does he appreciate that one reason why the Derry/Londonderry bid succeeded was that people concentrated on what we had to do to get our bid right, and did not bother much about what other people were or were not doing?

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the impact of the city of culture achievement on the city this year, which includes the fact that the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is being held for the first time in a city anywhere in Ireland. It is the biggest Irish event in the world and is being held north of the border for the first time, just after the tattoo that other hon. Members have mentioned.

Mr Amess: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his advice. Southend borough council and Evolution Squared are doing a first-class job in promoting our bid, but I do thank him. The events in Derry that we have heard about will inspire the youth of Londonderry to take up instruments, and will be things to tell their grandchildren about. Liverpool saw record numbers of visitors to its museums throughout 2008, and I am sure that the end-of-year figures will be similar in Derry, so the cultural benefits are absolutely clear.

Economic benefits are slightly more measurable. At a conservative estimate, Derry/Londonderry expects 600,000 extra visitors to the city over the course of 2013. Three thousand new jobs have been created in the city, and £100 million has been invested in its infrastructure. I am advised that for every £1 invested, the city of culture is expected to generate £5. Those facts are all the more staggering given its relatively small area. The competition is not a joke, but a prize that is well worth winning for each of our constituencies or areas. Although the analogy with Liverpool is less perfect, because it

won a pan-European competition, it is worth noting that it generated an extra £176 million in tourism spending alone in 2008, so there is an economic benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East and I believe that being the city of culture will be vital to the continued regeneration of Southend.

I want to say some words about Southend. I am biased: I think that Southend is the strongest bid. If anyone agrees, the hashtag to use is “Southend on Culture”, although I advise the House that I do not use Twitter. Our bid is themed—quite beautifully, if I may say so—around the Thames estuary, which flanks our town and is at the end of one of the most famous waterways in the world. Fittingly, if Southend wins the bid, a museum of the Thames estuary would be developed, and we would continue to partner other estuarial areas across the world, such as the River Plate—if that happens, we will not discuss the Falklands.

That, of course, is just the start of what we have to offer. Saxon remains have been found in Prittlewell. They are very valuable, being similar to finding Edward underneath the car park—[HON. MEMBERS: “Richard!/] Well, a king who deserved better. We, too, have royalty in Prittlewell. The remains were uncovered during a road-widening exercise. Archaeologists discovered an undisturbed 7th-century chamber grave beneath a mound, which has been described as

“the most spectacular discovery of its kind made during the past 60 years.”

Professor Christopher Scull said:

“The Prittlewell Prince Burial is one of the most significant archaeological discoveries bearing on Anglo Saxon England. As such it is a find of international significance for early Medieval Europe.”

Some 110 objects were excavated, ranging from bowls to a sword and a lyre. That is just one example of our rich history in Southend.

Equally detailed is the work of the UK Hand Engravers Association in Southend, which is quite simply exquisite high culture. I am well informed that Southend is a hotbed of metal culture, which was created initially in Liverpool. That modern art form celebrates interdisciplinary artwork and art in civic space. It will be celebrated at the village green festival in Chalkwell park on the 13 July. When the torch came to Southend last year, a famous composer worked on the anthem and we had the biggest choir in the country. The people following the torch around the United Kingdom said that the Southend welcome was the best in the country. We are blessed with a great host of artists—Paul Karlake, Mark Wallinger, Benjamin Grosvenor, Mary Flanagan and Elizabeth Price, to name just a few—so we have a strong bid.

I do not know whether this event is being held in conjunction with my celebration—or commiseration—of having been a Member for 30 years, but on 8 and 9 June, a festival in Southend will give people just a taste of what they can expect if we win the bid for 2017. There are plans to have a fashion show on the iconic pier—it is the longest pier in the world—and we hope to set a world record for the longest catwalk. I do not know whether supermodels will turn up, but I think that some very famous people will support that event. There will be live music, and the Wiggles dance club will perform—we must borrow the hon. Member for Leicester South for that performance. That diverse group loves all forms of

dance: body popping, swing, jazz, tap and Latin-American. Furthermore, East 15, which offers the world’s only stage fighting degree, will be in attendance, as will various local world-class jewellery makers. Not only will all that be on offer, but a song called “I love Southend” will be written specially for our bid.

On the topic of festivals, it should not be forgotten that Southend has a film festival and a jazz festival, and I will appear in a comedy festival. Our jazz festival was supported by none other than Sir Michael Parkinson last year, and our comedy festival is set to be opened by Russell Kane this year. I recently attended our film festival, which was very enjoyable, and I met many famous actors and actresses. Most festival goers no doubt take the opportunity to sample Rossi ice cream while in Southend, which is the finest ice cream in the world. The company has existed for more than 80 years, and lucky members of the public will be served with it—we may even keep some for hon. Members.

Finally, Southend has a contestant in “X Factor” and a contestant in “The Voice”. Leanne Jarvis, who is being tutored by will.i.am, went to Earls Hall infant and junior school and Chase High secondary school. She and I went to No. 10 yesterday to offer the Prime Minister some further advice and encouragement on how to run the country, but after hearing her sing, we decided that we would just support her bid to win “The Voice”. She is a fabulous singer, and I hope that everyone will support her.

The UK city of culture contest is undoubtedly very important. All the bids are excellent. The judges will have a very tough time deciding which city wins the bid and which cities should be in the last four. I very much hope that Southend makes it.

Some people look at the word “Southend” and pronounce it as it is written. In actual fact, it stands for “Sou the ND”, which means “sue the national detractors”. Southend very much condemns all those people who have made disparaging remarks about every other part of the United Kingdom; we could not be more patriotic and proud of our country. I simply think that Southend deserves to win the bid, and I hope that, in 2017, we will be the city of culture.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. A large number of Members wish to speak. I intend to call the Front-Bench speakers no later than 10.40. If Members stick to five minutes, we might get everyone in. If they do not, we will have a problem. Those wanting to intervene should also bear that in mind.

9.51 am

Dame Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Weir, for your words, and the hon. Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) and other colleagues for securing this debate. As one of those who also put in for this debate, I am absolutely delighted that it is taking place this morning. I appreciate the difficulties that you have, Mr Weir, because when I tried to lobby you to support the Aberdeen bid, I discovered that you were supporting Dundee.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): I am completely neutral.

Dame Anne Begg: Unfortunately, Mr Weir, your position this morning does not allow you to speak in the debate.

Aberdeen is an important economic driver not just of the Scottish economy but of the British one, too. We have a thriving offshore oil and gas industry, which is doing extremely well and is now moving into renewables. We like to call ourselves the “energy capital of Europe”. Aberdeen is a vibrant city that is full of life and energy, so why on earth do we want it to become the city of culture? It is because the one thing that is missing in our city is a strong cultural identity. Unfortunately, the participation rate in cultural activities by the people of Aberdeen is lower than the national average—both in Scotland and in the UK as a whole. We want to use the bid to build up the part of our community that has perhaps not always got the attention that it deserves because we have been too busy making money and running the energy sector.

The emphasis has always been on the economic side of Aberdeen and not so much on the cultural side or on making the city a much more attractive place to live. Many agencies say that it is difficult to attract staff to Aberdeen because everyone thinks that it is much too far north—it is quite far north—and too cold. They come up with all the negative things about Aberdeen. Indeed, it is also said that the locals themselves take after the grey granite of the buildings. However, when people move and make a life in Aberdeen, they discover what a wonderful place it is, and it is then difficult to move them somewhere else if their job demands it.

What we want to build on and what we want to use the bid for is the cultural offer that will be there for the people of Aberdeen. Although Aberdeen is far north, it is not too far north, and that is another reason why the city of culture bid would be so great for the city; it would bring us more into the centre of the UK. Hopefully, it would help us to create a centre that people would be prepared to travel to in order to take up the cultural offer.

Aberdeen already has great buildings that deliver aspects of culture. His Majesty’s theatre, for example, is incredibly grand. It was only when I went to theatres in London that I discovered just how grand it is, because the ones in London are quite pathetic in comparison. We have an art gallery on which we are about to spend a few million pounds, refurbishing and extending it. We have Peacock Visual Arts, which has a world-famous print works, the Gray’s School of Arts, the Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and two universities that also do cultural things. Indeed the Aberdeen university festival is just finishing at the moment. It is perhaps worth pointing out here that we had two universities in Aberdeen at the same time as there were only two universities in the whole of England—in Oxford and Cambridge.

We have a strong cultural history, but we would like to build on the cultural involvement in our communities. Although we are a rich and vibrant city, the wealth does not always trickle down to the poorer areas. We hope the culture bid might be able to reach the parts of our communities in Aberdeen that the oil wealth has not necessarily reached, and we are keen to build up localised events that will involve people more than the local galleries. We know that there is an appetite there and that people want to be involved, but we need something

that will pull it all together and act as a dynamic force on the city council and on Aberdeenshire council to bring the cultural offers together.

Finally, when the tall ships came to Aberdeen in 1997, the whole town turned out for the event; it was fantastic. We had Vikings from Shetland wandering about the town, which was bizarre. They turned up in the local pubs and restaurants. That was a wonderful example of what Aberdeen could do if it got the opportunity to become the UK city of culture in 2017.

9.57 am

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): Many right hon. and hon. Members will be aware of the beautiful city of Chester: our world-famous Roman city walls; our historic cathedral; the unique mediaeval shopping galleries, the Rows; our beautiful River Dee; and the Eastgate clock, which is the most photographed clock in the world after the clock that stands above this House. All are key features in our city, and all are known across the globe. My hon. Friend the Minister recently described Chester as

“a jewel in the crown in the north-west”.—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2013; Vol. 561, c. 466.]

He was wrong, because Chester is much more than that. It is a unique city, and if it qualifies and wins the city of culture, it will be a national treasure. However, we are not resting on our laurels. Chester is not merely a museum, but a living, thriving city. It is a city that is facing up to the challenges of the modern day, adapting and constantly changing, and our heritage and culture play a massive role in that.

Culture is being used as a key catalyst for change. For hundreds of years, Chester has been a market town and a shopping centre for north Wales and Cheshire. As shopping habits change, it is essential that our high street offerings change too. Chester is embracing that change, ensuring that our city offers a unique and complete experience—whether that is through street festivals, music and dramatic art in our unique historic public realm or through guiding shoppers to visit some of our many cultural attractions. We recognise that culture is essential to our economic growth and to ensuring that Chester can compete with our larger metropolitan neighbours.

The council is investing heavily in our heritage and our culture. Millions have been pumped into our historic environment: restoring our city walls; creating a unique interactive heritage trail; renovating the town hall, to bring it back to its Victorian splendour and create a new performance venue; restoring the Roman gardens; refreshing the riverside promenade; and reinterpreting Chester’s Roman amphitheatre, to allow visitors to see what it would have been like and to bring it back into use as a city centre performance venue, not for gladiatorial combat but for modern film and music festivals.

All the time, new festivals are being introduced, such as the film festival in the amphitheatre, a new Chester fringe, theatre in the park or Chester Rocks, which makes use of Chester’s race course, the oldest in the country, and which this year will feature one of my daughter’s favourites, Jessie J, who has already been mentioned in the debate. At the same time, our traditional festivals, such as the food festival, the music festival,

Theatre in the Quarter and the literary festival, are now making a real impact on the national stage and attracting an ever-increasing number of visitors.

Chester mystery plays, the mediaeval passion plays, were first performed more than 600 years ago by the guilds of the city. They continue to grow and are a highlight of the city's 2013 cultural calendar. Although they are traditionally only performed once every five years, they will be performed in 2017 if we are successful in our bid to be city of culture. The council also has massively ambitious plans to build a new first-class theatre in the city. Work has recently started on the site, and the new theatre is due to open in 2016.

Culture in Chester is back on the scene and back with a bang, and the reaction from the people of Chester has been fantastic. The local newspapers have been backing the bid, claiming that the city's cultural offering is at a historic high, and their letter pages have been filled with residents saying how proud they are of our city and our culture. Social media is also playing a part, allowing Cestrians to engage with and support the city's bid in new and exciting ways.

Our bid to be the city of culture 2017 harnesses that public enthusiasm. The council is hoping to create a cadre of community volunteers, similar to the hugely successful volunteers programme at the London Olympic games. These volunteering opportunities will allow young people to become involved with culture, art and music, and to further their own skills and enthusiasm. Part of the aim is to encourage unemployed people to become volunteers, giving them opportunities of responsibility, boosting their self-esteem and allowing them to learn new skills that can be transferred into the jobs market.

The fact that we have been long-listed to be the city of culture 2017 is a massive boost for Chester, and the changes in expectation and attitude in our city during the past few years show that we are able to compete and to show Britain and the world what a fantastic city of culture Chester would be. I am not the only one who thinks that. The bookies agree, with Chester the 4-1 favourite to win the bid according to William Hill. I am delighted to back Chester's bid to be city of culture.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. To get everybody in, I am now imposing a formal time limit of four minutes for each speech.

10.3 am

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this very important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) on securing the debate and I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), because I know he has been trying to secure such a debate for many weeks. My hon. Friend will probably mention the fact that a king has been found in Leicester recently. In Hull, we cannot boast of finding a king under a car park, but we can say that in 1642 Hull Corporation declared support for Parliament by denying Charles I entry into the city.

I support and welcome the bid that Hull city council has submitted for this prestigious title. In economic terms, Hull—like many areas—is having a tough time, but winning this title would hugely boost the city's morale. More importantly, it would create a great number

of social and economic benefits, as we have seen in other cities that have previously held the title. It would be the tipping point for the council's 10-year plan, which hopes to deliver 7,500 new jobs, many of them focused on culture and tourism.

I think that I am right in saying that in Hull as many as 50 people are chasing every single vacancy, so it is important to emphasise how winning the bid might benefit the city. Hull often gets a bad press, but we have an awful lot to boast about. We have contemporary festivals and modern cultural attractions that would challenge those on offer in any European capital. We have some beautiful buildings built at the height of Hull's prosperity, which was in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Mr Weir, I had intended to speak for about 10 or 15 minutes, but I am afraid that when I saw the number of right hon. and hon. Members here in Westminster Hall today I had to cut down my speech considerably.

Alan Johnson (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case for Hull. Does he agree that one of the most exciting things about Hull and the Humber area is the opportunity that exists for digital creation? We have artists, graphic designers, musicians and technicians from Grimsby institute and Hull university creating a real opportunity, both to make digital creation part of the redevelopment of Hull and to provide jobs for our future.

Karl Turner: I absolutely agree—my right hon. Friend is completely right about that. I was going to address the issue of digital creation, but now I need not say any more about it.

There seems to be an imbalance whereby other northern cities have capitalised on cash for arts, and I hope that a successful bid for the prestigious city of culture title will rebalance that situation a little for Hull.

I will finish by quoting Rupert Creed, the famous playwright from Brighton who moved to Hull and settled in the city. He argued that Hull has always been a creative city and a place prepared to try new things, saying:

“There's this blank canvas, this willingness to make things happen.”

We want to come out of the shadows, shine and become the gateway to the world, as we once were.

10.7 am

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) for securing this debate, and it is fantastic to hear from so many Members about the benefits of their own constituencies. I know from conversations with colleagues that for many people Hastings summons up three things. First, there is our famous battle—I am happy to say that there is no historical confusion about that—as well as the Norman conquest and the castle on the hill, which was built just four years after the conquest. Secondly, there is the fishing port, which is still a major issue economically in the town and in terms of fairness; we are always campaigning to get higher quotas for our fishermen and I hope that this Government will be able to deliver them. Thirdly, there is our famous seaside, which attracts so many visitors.

[Amber Rudd]

However, Hastings has recently become a cultural storm of activity in art, music and literature. We have both a history of culture and modern cultural initiatives being established in the town. Historically, we have had the International Chess Congress, which has been going since 1920, and to bring us right up to date we now have the Jerwood gallery, which has recently been built and which has a fantastic exhibition of modern art. Also, it has recently been announced that our pier, which sadly burned down just over two years ago, is to receive £13.5 million of lottery grant, and during the next few years it will rise like the phoenix to invigorate the town.

However, the strongest cultural base that Hastings has is its events. It seems that every other weekend, particularly during the summer, there is some fabulous event, which is inclusive and open to everybody, to liven up the weekend and to attract tourism and investment. We have just had the May day bank holiday, including the Jack in the Green event. There was also marching, drums and our famous Morris dancers. Incidentally, two years ago our Morris dancers came up to London to protest against the proposed changing of the May day bank holiday; they performed outside Parliament and were fantastic. In August, Hastings has old town week, which includes parades, bike races, street races and—perhaps more unusually—a pram race. In September, we have a month-long arts festival, Coastal Currents, and a seafood and wine festival that now runs for two days. In October, in common with local tradition, at the end of a week's events the Hastings Borough Bonfire Society burns an effigy of someone it really dislikes. That always causes nervous tremors in elected officials locally.

My favourite event is the recently introduced pirate day, which has been going for four years. It was set up to beat the "Guinness Book of Records" entry for the largest number of pirates to congregate on a beach. It has to be taken seriously: a cutlass and an eye patch will not do. This time last year 14,231 people were there. I warn people coming to Hastings on 21 July that they will look out of place if they are not dressed as a pirate.

Hastings, city of culture, has the right ring to it and is something that we could build on. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg) said, it is also about trying to move people who are not so familiar with culture into having a cultural experience, and that is what our bid does. Supported by the *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*, we are planning a marvellous march, if we succeed, from France, up to York, along Harold's journey, exhibiting the cultural strengths of the whole area. Between us, we feel that we could make a huge impact. We are, by the way, supported by Bexhill as well. This is an opportunity for Hastings and the country to see the fantastic cultural centre that our town has become.

10.11 am

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): When people think of Swansea, naturally they think of Dylan Thomas, who was born there 100 years ago next year, when we celebrate the centenary. Of course, Dylan Thomas is the most translated poet of all time, second only to Shakespeare. I am putting forward this bid on behalf of Swansea bay city region, which includes Carmarthen and Neath Port Talbot.

There is a glistening array of stars from Swansea, both past and present. One only has to think of Sir Anthony Hopkins, Michael Sheen and Catherine Zeta-Jones—I am sure that Michael Douglas is applying for a visa as we speak—and many more.

The industrial revolution, in many senses, started in Swansea. Swansea was the first globally connected location for heavy industry, with the price of copper being set there. Indeed, Copperopolis is the latest idea: a museum of metallurgy in an environment, to attract an international audience.

We have thriving universities, which are at the forefront of innovation, both in metallurgy—for instance, working with Tata Steel—and with modern connected creative works, such as 3D imagery, interactive, animation, etc. We are very much on the cusp of the future.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that Copperopolis, the nickname we give to Swansea, is well supported in its cultural bid by Tinopolis, the name we give Llanelli, which has a tremendous tradition in south Carmarthenshire of cultural and industrial heritage? Its latest venture, the state-of-the-art Furnace theatre and associated venues, offers fantastic opportunities, from the more traditional male voice choirs and Llanelli proms, to avant-garde groups, such as Llanelli Youth Theatre, performing "Tomorrow I'll Be Happy". Does he agree that the support from that industrial base in Llanelli, with its bilingual cultural heritage, will add a great deal to Swansea's bid for cultural city 2017.

Geraint Davies: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's contribution. The tin, steel, copper and coal, the Welsh and English languages, the land and the sea, and the urban and the rural together provide diversity and a global reach. Choirs and the history of singing and music are also important for our bid, as is the setting of Swansea bay city region. We have some "pier" pressure from Southend, but Mumbles pier is a great pier and Joe's ice cream is fantastic, and I confess that I would prefer it to the ice cream that can be found in Southend.

The brand of Swansea is now on the world map, thanks to Swansea football. We are an emerging sports city: the Ospreys rugby team is an example of that. We have just had the Olympic kit brought to Swansea bay for beach volleyball. I hope and expect that we will be a national venue for a national beach volleyball competition.

Swansea university is now the closest in the world to the sea, having previously been second only to California, as I understand it. We are a diverse and multicultural emerging city with a global reach. We hope that a lot of our celebrations—for example, the Dylan Thomas celebration next year—will be globally networked, including people from Bollywood as well as traditional literature. We need to build on the wider Dylan Thomas brand. Of course, Dylan Thomas enjoyed a couple of beers, as well as a quite exciting lifestyle. We hope, over time, to bring a sustainable festival, a bit like the Hay or Edinburgh festivals, alongside other assets, such as Copperopolis. We also have the National Waterfront museum for Wales, which, again, celebrates and builds on industrial heritage. Swansea market is the largest of its type in Wales, with a great heritage over hundreds of years.

Obviously, Swansea has borne the scars of its industrial past, plus the tragic three nights of the blitz that we suffered under the Luftwaffe, but we hope to move

forward, with further development of the port, which, historically, was industrially geared for trade. There are new, emerging opportunities, from the cultural point of view, for ferries and for cruise-borne people to visit Swansea and Swansea bay city region.

The news, following our campaign, of electrification of the railways will increase the connectivity and the opportunity for people to see wonderful Swansea and Swansea bay and the Gower, with beautiful golden sands, where people can enjoy culture, the sun and environment, and the good food of Swansea. I hope, later this year, to have a Swansea food day in Parliament, to celebrate some of the great foods created across Swansea bay city region.

We have been the forge for generating steel and various sorts of metallurgy and now I hope that the basic resilience and creativity of the community will help hurtle us forward to the celebration next year and onwards to 2017, so that we have a sustainable cultural legacy that will underpin our position as the true cultural centre of south Wales.

10.17 am

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Mr Amess)—my very fine hon. Friend—on securing this debate. I am delighted that he did not try to rubbish Plymouth during the past few months and delighted, too, that Plymouth did not appear in “The Hitchhikers’ Guide to the Galaxy”, in which Arthur Dent, as my hon. Friend may recall, thought he had died and gone to hell, but in reality had gone to Southend. Ford Prefect, another character in that story, said that he was surprised about Southend, because although the sea remained where it was, the buildings and the rocks went up and down.

I support Plymouth’s city of culture bid. I am looking forward to my hon. Friend visiting Plymouth in the next few weeks. Our bid for the city of culture in 2017 will help regenerate parts of our city, including our inner city. In the Efford ward, during the past 10 years, the local community, through the Heart of Efford and the city council, has used grants and the arts to regenerate a council estate, built immediately after the last war in an area previously decimated during the blitz.

My hon. Friend will also have the opportunity to see where my mother’s acting career started, in Devonport, probably at the age of five. She went on to act at Birmingham Repertory before the war.

By making Plymouth the city of culture in 2017, the authorities will build on its cultural heritage and reputation. Plymouth has the Theatre Royal, one of the five UK production companies; the Drum theatre, often used by Plymouth’s vibrant amateur dramatic societies; TR2, which manufactures many of the sets for theatrical productions throughout the country; Plymouth university’s Peninsula Arts; Plymouth College of Arts, one of the UK’s five independent arts schools; and a proposed new arts free school, which is to be sponsored by the college and the Theatre Royal, and which has attracted Government funding and support.

Plymouth was also home to the late Robert Lenkiewicz, Beryl Cook and Joshua Reynolds. We have some of the UK’s finest post-war architecture, following the devastation of the blitz. In addition, we have a large number of

Georgian buildings, including Admiralty house, which was the home of Nelson’s deputy, Lord Collingwood; the royal naval hospital; the home of Captain Hardy—also of Nelson fame; and Conan Doyle’s home, where he wrote “The Hounds of the Baskervilles”. Furthermore, we have the Barbican theatre, a community-based theatre company; the New Palace theatre, where Laurel and Hardy put on their last performance, and which we are keen to rebuild; and the Ten Tors orchestra, which put on a brilliant proms concert on Saturday.

This is a unique opportunity, and I very much hope the Arts Council will listen to Plymouth’s case and give us its support.

10.20 am

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend West (Mr Amess), who put in a tremendous performance in opening the debate. Earlier this morning, I was looking at the betting odds, and the bookies have Southend second from bottom, at 14:1, but it will certainly be worth a flutter after the hon. Gentleman’s speech. I also noticed that Leicester is the second favourite, at 5:1, and I hope we do not go down the betting league tables after my speech.

As hon. Members would expect, I want to focus on Leicester. I come with the support of the two other Leicester MPs, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), as well as the support of Leicester city council and Leicestershire county council. I was pleased to see the hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) in her place a few moments ago, because she is also very supportive of the bid.

We have heard much about the history of different cities and towns this morning, and Leicester, too, has a great history. We can trace our origins back to the iron age. We have Roman settlements, as well as Saxon and Norman influences. We have tremendous architecture and historical buildings, such as the Roman Jewry wall and the Guildhall. We hosted Shakespeare’s company, and there are suggestions that Shakespeare himself may have been in Leicester.

In recent years, of course, we have found and dug up Richard III. He was buried in Leicester for 500 years, and we recently found him in a Leicester city council social services car park. We therefore have royalty in Leicester, and I say to hon. Friends from Yorkshire, “We are holding on to him. Keep your hands off!” Cardinal Wolsey is also buried somewhere in Abbey park, and it is perhaps time we dug him up, too.

For the benefit of Opposition colleagues, I should say that Leicester has a history of radical politics. As Members might expect from a city that was built on textiles in the past 200 years or so, we had a luddite tradition. At one point, of course, Ramsay MacDonald also sat for a Leicester constituency—may he be a reminder to any Liberal Democrats of the fate of leaders who go into coalitions.

Leicester is a city of tremendous diversity. Forty years ago, families from Uganda made their home in Leicester. They were followed by families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. We have many Hindu temples, gurdwaras and mosques, all within yards of each other.

[Jonathan Ashworth]

We had the first Jain temple in Europe. In Leicester, Members could be greeted with the words, “Assalamu alaikum”, “Namaste”, “Sat sri akaal” or, more simply, “Alreet, ma duck.” That is very much part of Leicester. We all celebrate our faiths, and we all come together to celebrate Diwali, in the biggest such celebration outside India. We all celebrate Vaisakhi and Eid, and we all join in the lighting of the Hannukkah candles in Victoria park, as well as celebrating all the Christian festivals.

There are not just religious festivals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West would have said had she been here, we have the biggest comedy festival in Europe after that in Edinburgh. After his performance today, I hope we can book the hon. Member for Southend West for our comedy festival. We also have lots of community festivals. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East organised a mango festival. Ours is therefore the only bid that can guarantee that it will have the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee handing out mangoes to those who come to the city to celebrate.

Across the city, we have different community events. ITV did a documentary saying that crime and antisocial behaviour on one of our estates was terrible. People on the estate came together and put on a tremendous summer community event, showing that they were not prepared to take what an outside TV documentary was saying about them. That is our trump card: the people of Leicester coming together, whether to support our football team and Leicester Tigers or to join in the various religious festivals we organise. That is what Leicester is about, and that is why our case is overwhelming—we have the best people.

10.25 am

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. The fact that you chose to chair the debate, and the bids from Scottish cities, including Aberdeen, underline your confidence in the fact that Scotland will be fully part of the United Kingdom in 2017, when the city of culture year starts.

We have heard wonderful presentations from different Members of Parliament about the cultural and creative merits of their areas. Surely, the purpose of the UK city of culture year is not just to change perceptions in the community about the importance of culture and art and the incredible contribution they make to economic regeneration, but to change perceptions about the cultural offer among people outside our home areas, across the UK. One of the great successes of the Derry/Londonderry city of culture year must surely be that it has not only inspired people in Northern Ireland, but brought in many new visitors to the city who had not previously had the chance to experience its delights.

That is very much at the heart of the east Kent bid, which is about what the city of culture year has to offer not only east Kent, but the rest of the UK. Kent is on the frontier of the UK, facing our European neighbours, so we have a chance not only to bring in people from the UK, but to show the rest of Europe what the UK has to offer in a new, challenging, surprising and creative location.

East Kent’s is a unique bid, because it is not based on one city. Instead, as the bid says, it is based on “a city imagined”—a city drawn from a diverse collection of communities and towns, as well as the city of Canterbury, all of which make up the east Kent area. From Whitstable and Margate, around the coast to Dover, Folkestone and Romney marsh, and inland to Ashford, we have a new creative area, which is at heart of the east Kent bid.

The area has a terrific cultural heritage. We have a King, in the form of Henry IV; he is not under a car park, but buried safely in Canterbury cathedral. In the early days of English literature, Chaucer wrote the tales of the pilgrims making their journey to Canterbury. The area was the inspiration for many of Charles Dickens’s books. He wrote “Little Dorrit” while staying in Folkestone. Many will be familiar with the dramatic scene from the recent dramatisation of “Great Expectations”, when Pip meets Magwitch on the coast, which is set in Romney marsh, in my constituency.

The area is also a vibrant centre for the cotemporary arts, with the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate the home of that great international artist Tracey Emin. The Folkestone Triennial arts festival is one of Europe’s leading festivals of sculpture and contemporary art, and the last festival was opened by the Minister. He has seen first hand the impressive work of Roger De Haan and the Creative Foundation in Folkestone. They hold fantastic creative events, making creative regeneration part of the economy. By making east Kent the centre of the UK creative world in 2017, we are seeking to acknowledge what has been done so far, to build on the important work of creative regeneration in the economy and to celebrate the work of local artists.

Derry/Londonderry put ambassadors at the heart of its bid, and we have many fantastic ambassadors, drawn from the sons and daughters of east Kent. We have people such as Tracey Emin and Orlando Bloom, who is from Canterbury, as well as Jools Holland, who now lives in Kent, and Mark Sargeant, who came back to Kent to open his fantastic new restaurant, Rocksalt, in Folkestone, which has been a great success.

We want to build on the experience of the sons and daughters of east Kent and the fantastic network of creative and innovative businesses and cultural centres which already exists. East Kent will make a tremendous ambassador for our country in 2017. If we are successful in our bid, I would urge all Members to come and be part of it.

10.28 am

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): It is a huge honour for any city to win the title of UK city of culture, and I am sure all the bids will be strong. The value and kudos involved in winning are enormous. Sarah Shortland, who was vox-popped in *The Herald* in Plymouth, said:

“It would be good for Plymouth—I visited Liverpool after they won European Capital of Culture and they’ve changed lots there.”

We all know just how important winning the bid will be.

Although I am sure that everywhere we have heard spoken about today is lovely, those places cannot compare with Plymouth. As TripAdvisor points out, there are more things to do in Plymouth than in cities such as Bath, Oxford and Cambridge. Its setting alone is

brehtaking: the third largest natural harbour in the world—a magnificent backdrop for cultural and sporting events, such as the America's cup and the British fireworks championships.

Plymouth's heritage and cultural links are many and varied, and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) has touched on some of them; but I want to consider it from the perspective of its maritime history, and use that as a starting point, to whet people's appetites. It was important in Tudor times. Francis Drake of course set off from Plymouth to circumnavigate the globe. The church where he was married is in St Budeaux in Plymouth. There is a wealth of archive material that would certainly be brought out and displayed during a city of culture year. The pilgrim fathers left England for a place that they named Plymouth. They did not name it Southampton, or after anywhere in Essex; so Plymouth is known globally. Charles Darwin, in HMS Beagle, left from Plymouth. Captain Cook is also associated with it; and Francis Chichester returned to Plymouth in Gipsy Moth. Napoleon spent time on board a British warship in Plymouth harbour.

Of course, there is also wartime history. At the time of the D-day landings many troops, particularly Americans, left for Normandy from Plymouth. The civilian history of those dark days is also interesting, and many memories and much history could be brought out during a city of culture year. Jill Craigie's film "The Way We Live", about the post-war reconstruction of Plymouth, stands out. It set out the Watson-Abercrombie plan for rebuilding the city centre, which was so special architecturally. Jill Craigie was of course the wife of Michael Foot—politician, journalist and writer—and we are launching a fund to build a memorial for Michael, a man of so many talents.

We have the Royal William yard and Twofour Productions, which is the largest independent production company outside London. It was a pleasure to invite my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) to visit it recently. The south-west media are wholly behind our bid, including Ian Wood, the editor of the Plymouth *Herald*. We have heard about the theatres in Plymouth, but we also have museums. We have the oldest Ashkenazi synagogue in the English-speaking world, which is still in regular use. We hold regular multicultural events to celebrate Diwali, Eid and the Chinese new year. The new chief executive of Destination Plymouth sums it up:

"Plymouth has assets most cities can only dream of—a stunning waterfront, a city surrounded by outstanding countryside; it's fast becoming a foodie heaven and is the cultural arts and entertainment capital for the region."

We are going to use Smeaton's tower and the lighthouse—the model for modern lighthouses, which sits proudly on Plymouth Hoe. That will be the beacon for our city of culture bid for 2017.

10.32 am

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): In many ways this debate is wrongly named. As I have listened I have felt it should clearly be named "Cities of Culture" as it is not about a single city of culture. I urge the Minister to consider the possibility that, although there will be only one city of culture, some of the other bids should be recognised additionally. The Southend bid, rather like the Kent one, has considered not just

Southend-on-Sea but the region as a whole, in the country as a whole. In fact, the front page of the bid documentation positioning Southend for city of culture in 2017 states that it would explore the heritage, landscape and character not just of Southend but of the Thames estuary, and the way it has defined the culture of the whole United Kingdom. Perhaps the status of city of culture would be used not just to showcase a city or town, and a region and county, but all our constituencies. If people flood in from overseas to visit Southend I am sure they will also have time to visit one or two of the other places mentioned by hon. Members today.

I congratulate Southend council, and particularly Rob Tinlin, the chief executive, as well as the leader of the council, on pulling the bid together. It is not simply a detailed 30-page document. It is a movement within the town; that movement, and the enthusiasm about the culture, are building. It feels almost embarrassing that we have been given three opportunities in relation to the bid. Not only has my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) secured the debate, despite Leicester's good work, but now that he has introduced it, I can bookend it. If there are any constituencies or areas that he has not yet offended, time will unfortunately not allow me to mop up.

There are a few things to do with Southend that I want to talk about—specifically education and its role in culture. I went to the Colchester campus of the university of Essex in the 1990s, and now we have a campus in Southend. We have a wonderful college with many cultural programmes and degrees, which add to the fabric of society. All too often in the past, young, talented people moved away and did not come back. Now they want to stay in Southend. There are truly many opportunities. It may be that when people think of Southend they think of the pier—the longest pleasure pier in the world—Rossi ice cream, and the sea front; but perhaps we should also recognise the art galleries with fabulous Constable paintings, and the history that goes far beyond the town's boom time of the 18th and 19th centuries. There is a monastery built in the 11th century, with 45 acres of park land, right in the middle of the town. That is a wonderful resource. We have Porters, a 16th century house that is the mayoral residence, which was visited by Disraeli, and by Churchill during the war, on his way to Shoebury ranges. In fact it was Disraeli who called Southend the riviera of Essex.

Some hon. Members have made literary references. I found a whole book in my office about authors with Southend connections, rather than just one or two references. Southend has a strong bid, and is doing well. I suggest to the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) that since the debate started the odds have shortened and Southend is in an even stronger position to win.

10.36 am

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend West (Mr Amess), not only on securing this important debate, but on the strong case he has made for Southend-on-Sea to be named as the UK city of culture in 2017. I agree with him that it is a town that offers many cultural opportunities. Last year it opened the new cultural centre that can be found at the tip of the world's longest pleasure pier.

[Dan Jarvis]

The Focal Point gallery houses the town's contemporary art, and Priory park bandstand provides the town with music throughout the summer months. In its own words, it is "Town, shore and so much more".

The debate comes at an opportune time as 11 areas—Aberdeen, Chester, Dundee, east Kent, Hastings and Bexhill-on-Sea, Hull, Leicester, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Southampton, Southend-on-Sea and Swansea bay have all applied to be the next UK city of culture in 2017. I am delighted that so many towns and cities from regions across Britain are competing for that important title. It is a testament to what culture means to our country and the value it brings to our communities, but importantly it also means that each of those communities will place culture at the heart of their agenda in the coming months and years.

The cultural sector of this country is hugely successful. It creates jobs, generates revenue, attracts inward investment and enriches the lives of individuals, families and communities. We are a creative nation. Our cultural sector is the lifeblood of the creative industries, which provide 1.5 million jobs and are a major contributor to our economy. Last year's Olympic opening ceremony and the Cultural Olympiad reminded people across the world that Britain is a cultural world leader—that our artistic traditions are strong and we are rightly proud of them. However, that success happened not by chance but by choice. The previous Labour Government invested in the arts, and that investment enabled culture to revitalise some of our previously grey city and town centres. As the cultural scene has developed, so too have jobs, growth and the social well-being of the people who live there. Labour introduced free access to museums and galleries, ensuring that the number of visitors increased year on year.

Geraint Davies: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that the former Ford plant in Neath Port Talbot is now hosting "Da Vinci's Demons." There is a huge film set for an American-gear production that will bring vital jobs and income. Does he agree that such evolution from traditional industry to creative industries can bring jobs and added value to our communities?

Dan Jarvis: I absolutely agree. I am particularly interested to hear about the transition that the industrial base has made to some degree in my hon. Friend's constituency. Perhaps there will be an opportunity for me to visit at some point in the future.

I was talking about some of the things that the Labour Government did. We introduced creative partnerships, which gave more children than ever before the opportunity to take part in cultural activities, thereby developing an interest and a passion for the arts that will hopefully serve them well in the future. Nowhere are those benefits more clear than in those cities that have been named cities of culture: Liverpool, which held the European title in 2008; and Londonderry, which held the first UK title this year.

In 2009, following the success of Liverpool's status as European city of culture, the then Labour Culture Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), launched the UK city of culture. Today, that vision has become a reality, with Londonderry

being transformed to unlock creativity and ensure that thousands of people flock to visit the city in the coming months. The immediate and lasting impact of a city that embraces culture in that way is clear. The effect in Liverpool in 2008 was striking. In that year alone, visitors voted with their feet, ensuring that the city had almost 15 million cultural visits. Some 67,000 schoolchildren in the city were involved. There was an £800 million economic benefit, and the number of residents who visited a city attraction was 10% above the national average. Liverpool has been transformed and is now known throughout Britain as a cultural hub.

Today, we are debating the UK city of culture bid for 2017. In our country we have the appetite, the skills, the talent and the tradition, but many organisations within the cultural sector exist on a complex funding stream of public investment, commercial revenue and private giving. That ecology ensures creative independence, freedom of artistic innovation and, in good times, stability, but some decisions currently being made by the Government are putting it at risk.

Since 2010, the Government have cut the budget of Arts Council England by more than 30%. Local councils across the country are dealing with devastating cuts to their funding streams. They are struggling to balance those cuts, and the Local Government Association has warned that, by 2019-20, 90% of discretionary funding streams, such as culture, leisure and libraries, may be cut.

It is not all bad news. Many local authorities are innovatively working in partnership to minimise the damage caused by the funding crisis, but that is a result of new thinking from councils. The cuts come without any real Government guidance for local community arts organisations or any real national Government support for local councils. Today, I ask the Minister to pledge to work with councils, which are leading the way, and to provide all towns and cities with guidance on how culture can be protected.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Edward Vaizey): Given the hon. Gentleman's criticism, what are Labour's proposals to increase the arts budget? Will he use this opportunity to apologise for the last Labour Government's slashing of the lottery budget?

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention, which I will use as an opportunity to respond to a point he has made elsewhere on a number of occasions on the Labour-run local authority in Newcastle.

Newcastle is losing £100 million over the next three years, which is a 6.8% cut, whereas the Secretary of State's local authority is gaining 4.4%. I want to put the record straight. In those unfair circumstances, I took the decision to visit Newcastle and instigate dialogue between the local authority, Arts Council England and local cultural institutions. As a result, the arts cut has been revised downwards from 100% and the cultural sector will now receive £600,000 a year and have access to a £6 million capital fund. That represents a very good example of what we are doing in opposition to work constructively with local authorities in these difficult times. Perhaps the Minister will give some indication of the conversations he has had and the work he has been doing with local authorities to safeguard the arts in these difficult times.

Mr Vaizey: I notice that the hon. Gentleman takes all the credit, having initially supported Newcastle's 100% arts cut, and gives no credit to the hard work of Arts Council England, which works closely with Newcastle city council. Will he take this opportunity to praise the Arts Council's work with Newcastle city council?

Dan Jarvis: The Minister may have missed my reference to Arts Council England, and I pay warm tribute to it and its work. We should be careful about the tone of this debate. We have all come here in good faith to talk about the relative merits of a number of bids, which is the tone at which we should pitch this debate.

Amber Rudd: Newcastle has not bid for the city of culture, so I urge the hon. Gentleman to give his views on the city of culture process. In the spirit of cross-party engagement, I ask him to observe that my borough council, which is Labour-run, has been leading on its bid, with which I have been involved. Now is not the time to make so many political comments; instead, we should celebrate how, together, we can do city of culture bids for the best of this country.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention. She might note that I was actually conducting this debate in a manner of which she would approve until the Minister intervened, which is when I felt the need to respond. I suggest that we move on and raise the tone of the debate.

Mark Durkan: As the MP representing Derry/Londonderry, I put on record our huge thanks to Arts Council England, which got behind our city once the bid was won. It shared funding, insight and key introductions. Whichever city wins the 2017 bid will get huge, positive and key support from the Arts Council.

Dan Jarvis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that useful intervention. I completely agree. Arts Council England is doing important work in these challenging times. It has recently published a significant report that clearly articulates and reflects on the economic benefit of the arts within our country. I will highlight a couple of the points that the Arts Council has made recently.

The report states that 0.1% of Government funding is spent on the arts, yet the arts make up 0.4% of the economy. That, of course, does not account for the creative industries or for tourism. The arts provide 0.5% of total UK employment, and at least £856 million a year of spending by tourists visiting this country can be attributed directly to the arts and to culture. Those points were recently made in the important report of Arts Council England, and I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to its important work on preserving our arts in these difficult economic times.

Beyond doubt, the cultural sector is a driver of jobs and growth in the UK. It is clear that public money invested in the cultural sector represents good value and offers a good return, which is an incredibly important point in the context of this debate.

Geraint Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the huge debate on growth versus cuts to reduce the deficit, and given the enormous emerging middle class in English-speaking markets in China, India, south America and so on, investment in the arts now will be paid back many times over?

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. Before the shadow Minister responds to that intervention, I remind him that we need to give the Minister time to reply to the debate. I urge him to bring his speech to a close.

Dan Jarvis: Okay. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) for his intervention. Unfortunately, there will not necessarily be time to address it. Let me move on briefly—because I know that the Minister will wish to conclude the debate—and say some things on which I hope we can all agree.

I believe that the cultural sector provides unlimited opportunities for young people, invoking imagination and creativity while ensuring that they learn the dedication, commitment and dexterity that come with playing a musical instrument, singing in a choir or performing in a theatre or dance group. I see in my constituency the value that young people get from those kinds of activity. I saw that on Saturday night, when I attended a concert by the brilliant Barnsley youth choir, and I very much look forward to that choir hosting the world-famous Aurin choir from Hungary, who will be coming next month to sing alongside our own choir. The value that young people get from such opportunities is hugely important.

Mr Weir, I am conscious that we are running short of time, so I will conclude by saying that Labour Members believe that our creative sector deserves creative thinking and that that is exactly what we should be providing to ensure that the arts continue to thrive in these tough times. The hon. Member for Southend West has, in his typically ebullient way, made an excellent case for Southend-on-Sea. I wish him and Southend-on-Sea the very best with their bid, as I wish all the other cities that are competing to be the UK city of culture in 2017 the very best. I hope that the appetite to hold this title will provide further proof to the Minister and to the Government as a whole that culture is worth supporting for 2017 and beyond.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Edward Vaizey): It is a pleasure to be under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I thank the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), for his 15-minute speech. In the eight minutes remaining to me, I will try to pay tribute to the many interventions and contributions made by hon. Members.

The debate was framed by an elegant Southend sandwich—my hon. Friends the Members for Southend West (Mr Amess) and for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge). I confess that of the many cities bidding to be the UK city of culture, I have not yet visited Southend. That is something that I will remedy over the summer, because I know that Southend is "Town, shore and so much more". The "so much more" must refer to my two hon. Friends, who represent it so well in Parliament, but perhaps also to the Focal Point gallery, the Beecroft art gallery, the Old Leigh studios, the Southend Pier cultural centre, the Priory Park bandstand and, indeed, the Cliffs pavilion, where this Sunday Tony Stockwell, the psychic medium, will be appearing and will no doubt be able to tell us who will win the title of UK city of culture.

[*Mr Edward Vaizey*]

We also heard a fantastic contribution from the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg). I visited Aberdeen with Ken Baker many years ago when he was Conservative party chairman, and what a cultured chairman he was, because before we went to the Scottish Conservative conference, we made a beeline for the Aberdeen art gallery and saw the wonderful Richard Long sculptures. It is the granite city, and what better adornment to its cultural heritage could it have than being the birthplace of our brilliant Secretary of State for Education?

Of course, there is also Hull, which I visited on the way to the by-election caused by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), a former Minister for Europe. Hull has eight museums. It has the Hull Truck theatre company. Perhaps the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) could tell the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), who is no longer in his seat, that I also said that of course Hull is now the home of the author of the best political memoirs for a generation. It is my birthday on 5 June, and I intend to ask my mother for a copy, but I will not do so if a signed copy appears in my office in the next few days.

Swansea, too, is a city that I have not yet visited, but I will remedy that over the summer. As we learnt today, it is the home of beach volleyball, the national waterfront museum and, of course, the filming of “*Da Vinci’s Demons*”. I thank the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) for pointing out that tax reliefs for film and now for television and animation—and soon, we hope, for video games—are supporting our creative industries.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley) pointed out the adornments of that fair city—a city that I visited recently, that is building a new library and new theatre and that understands the importance of culture.

I failed to mention properly the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East, who again made a fantastic intervention on behalf of his city. Of course, we also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd). That, too, is a town that I have visited. I have gone with her to visit the Jerwood gallery. That is another good example of lottery money being used to regenerate culture.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) was ably supported by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabek). I gather that they are working in tandem. That picks up on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye that the support for culture and for the UK city of culture transcends political divides. Plymouth, too, is a city that I have visited. Its bid is backed by Tom Daley. I have visited the Theatre Royal. The original building was built 200 years ago this year; unfortunately it was demolished in 1937. I have visited TR2, the Drum theatre and Plymouth art school. They are all fantastic adornments to that city.

The hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) was bigging up the virtues of Leicester—a city that I visited recently to speak at the vibrant Leicester Conservatives’ annual dinner. I also visited recently its newly built Curve theatre—another arts building built

with lottery funding. Of course, there is also the amazing story of the discovery of Richard III’s skeleton—a story that has captured the public imagination.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am delighted that the Minister visited Leicester and that he has referenced Richard III. Does he agree that Richard III should remain in Leicester?

Mr Vaizey: I am staying out of that one.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins). East Kent is a place that I visit frequently. I spent my summer holidays in Ramsgate, where my aunt lived. I am to open the Deal music festival. I pay tribute to the work of Roger De Haan and his support for Folkestone and of course Turner Contemporary. The area is also the location of the Romney marshes, where my own father is buried. We have no idea why he wanted to be buried there and we got lost on the way to the burial, but it is a very beautiful place for him to be buried.

This is probably the first proper debate that we have had in this House since I have been the Culture Minister on culture in general, rather than a specific issue.

Dan Jarvis: What does that say about the priority that this Government place on the arts?

Mr Vaizey: It is; we have not had an Opposition debate. I yearn for the hon. Gentleman to use his influence—call an Opposition debate on arts and culture and we can talk about how we have restored the money lost in the lottery cuts of the last Government in order to support our culture. Of course, the lottery, which was brought in by the Major Government and supported by the last Labour Government, has invested a huge amount in our cultural infrastructure. I want to talk about that. I want to talk about the fact that I am passionate about our culture. I want to talk about the fact that the UK city of culture, a concept introduced by the last Labour Culture Secretary and supported by the Conservative Culture Secretary—it has cross-party support—is incredibly important. It has shown how important culture is to cities and towns throughout the country. There is no public money invested in this; it has come from the grass roots up, supported by hon. Members and by their towns and cities.

James Duddridge: In terms of the origins of cities of culture, I recall that back in the 1980s—was it in 1988?—Glasgow was a city of culture. Was that something that the UK Government supported or was it European?

Mr Vaizey: This is exactly the point. Glasgow was European city of culture. That was 23 years ago, but I can still remember the slogan: “Glasgow’s miles better”. If people go to Glasgow now, they will see that the legacy is still there. People can also go to Liverpool, which, five years ago, was the city of culture. The economic benefit was £800 million. I visited a video games developer there who had previously lived in Liverpool but had left the city. He said, “I came back to Liverpool because when it became the city of culture, I knew there was stuff going on. That’s why I’m back in Liverpool.”

Derry/Londonderry will have an extra 600,000 visitors this year. That is twice as many as normal. We are talking about 150 events, 75% of them free. We are talking about the Royal Ballet, the Turner prize, the Ulster

orchestra and Seamus Heaney. This is what it is all about, and culture has cross-party support in this House. That is why we are doing our best to support—

Dame Anne Begg: In relation to cross-party support, I do not know whether the Minister realises, but it is a Scottish National party council in Dundee that is behind the bid putting forward Dundee as the UK city of culture 2017. Does the Minister have any observation to make on whether it knows something that we do not know about the outcome of the referendum next year on Scottish independence?

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Lady is right: we are better together. That is a good example of how the cultures of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England all work together to create this fantastic nation that is known all around the world for its incredible culture.

Geraint Davies: Will the Minister be promoting the centenary of the birth of Dylan Thomas? Does he regard him as an iconic UK poet and literary person as well as a Welsh one?

Mr Vaizey: Yes, I regard Dylan Thomas as a Welsh poet, a British poet and a poet of the world.

I want to end on this note. I am proud that this Government have restored the money lost in Labour's lottery cuts, that we continue to support arts and culture and that the Arts Council is working so effectively with local authorities up and down the country. People who do down culture in our local areas outside London—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. Time is up. We now move on to the final debate this morning.

Planning (Broughton)

11 am

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I thank Mr Speaker for granting me this special parliamentary debate to highlight the planning issues affecting the important village of Broughton in my constituency.

I welcome the planning Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), to his place. He takes such issues extremely seriously and I know that he will listen with an attentive ear to what I have to say on behalf of my constituents. My aim is to relay to him the feelings from a recent public meeting that was held in the village of Broughton on 11 May, attended by significantly more than 200 villagers. I wish to relay to him what they were telling me and other local elected representatives about their concerns to do with the development of their village.

I want to pay particular tribute to local borough councillors, Jim Hakewill, who stepped down as mayor of Kettering last year, and Cliff Moreton, who have been effectively representing local residents' concerns on the issue. Likewise, the Broughton parish councillors, including Mary Rust and Hilary Bull, and Mr Gary Duthie, the clerk to the parish council, have all been doing sterling work.

The problem is that national planning policies are allowing inappropriate housing development to take place in the village of Broughton. For those who are unfamiliar with Kettering, it is middle England at its very best. Geographically situated in the heart of England, it represents all the best that middle England has to offer. Broughton has about 2,500 people, making it one of the largest villages in the borough of Kettering; it is located in the south-west of the borough, just off the A43 which links Kettering to Northampton. Before the completion and approval of a neighbourhood plan for the village, however, building developers are able to use national planning policy guidelines and the lack of a demonstrable rolling five-year housing delivery target from Kettering borough council to submit planning applications for housing developments around the village, confident that the applications will meet with approval from the borough council or be won on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

The developments are in unsuitable locations that are unlikely to be included as preferred development sites in the village's neighbourhood plan, once it has been produced, and as a result there will be unacceptable pressure on the local infrastructure used by existing residents. Broughton parish council is firmly committed to the development of a neighbourhood plan for the village, but before such a plan is signed off, there is in effect carte blanche for developers to choose sites around the village, put in a planning application for housing development and get it approved.

The problem started with a planning application from Redrow Homes South Midlands—the Kettering borough council planning reference is KET/2012/0709—for the development of 65 dwellings at Cransley Hill in Broughton. There are to be 46 homes, 19 affordable homes and a substation. On 12 February, the application

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

was put before the borough council—I have the privilege of being a member—and 67 comments were received from local residents, 65 of which objected to the application.

The site in question is to the north-west of the village, on a parcel of land between the built-up part and the A43. It is adjacent to but outside the village envelope and on a greenfield site. Objections included: the site is greenfield and good farmland; sewerage and electricity supply are at capacity; there is a problem with water pressure in the village; there is pressure on school places; the village does not have a doctor, dentist or chemist's; there will be traffic congestion as a result of the development, on top of the existing parking problems in the village; there is not enough local public transport, and the bus service is often inadequate; many of the local footpaths are unlit; lanes in the village are unsuitable for construction traffic, and the density of the development is too great. That is a flavour of some of the objections to the application.

However, Kettering borough council granted approval for the application. It did so not because it wanted to, but because of the Government's national planning policies, which insist that, if the council cannot demonstrate a rolling five-year housing delivery target, it must grant permission to such sites. If it does not do so, the Planning Inspectorate will, charging costs to Kettering borough council.

According to a statement from Kettering borough council:

"The five year land supply is pretty simple—the Council has to be able to demonstrate that there are enough housing sites with a realistic prospect of being built out to satisfy the targets in the Core Spatial Strategy over the coming five years, and if we cannot do that, then there is a presumption in the national planning framework that consents will be given to new applications, unless there are sound planning reasons for refusal. Because of the slow down in the national economy, we can no longer argue that we have a five year land supply but the government have not changed the rules; indeed they have strengthened them."

That is right, because the present Government have enhanced the policy adopted by the previous Government in insisting on a rolling five-year housing delivery target for each authority—it is now plus 20%.

There were good reasons for the council to refuse the application. It was contrary to: policy 1 of the local core spatial strategy, "Strengthening the Network of Settlements"; policy 7, on housing delivery; policy 9, "Distribution & Location of Development", and policy 10, "Distribution of Housing". It was also contrary to the local plan, to policy RA/3, about restricted infill villages, and to RA/5, "Housing in the Open Countryside". According to the council:

"Saved policy RA/3 of the Local Plan defines Broughton as a Restricted Infill Village. Policy RA/3 states that where development is proposed outside of the defined boundaries of a Restricted Infill Village, open countryside policies will apply (policy RA/5). Saved policy RA/5 states that planning permission will not normally be granted for residential development in the open countryside, and sets out several exceptions. The development proposed does not meet any of the exceptions in the policy.

Therefore, the adopted Development Plan position is that the village is not a priority for development, and development outside the boundary is contrary to policy unless the development is required to meet local needs",

which it clearly is not.

Kettering borough council cannot be accused of developing its planning policies slowly. Indeed, Kettering is part of the north Northamptonshire core spatial strategy, which was adopted in June 2008. It was the first core spatial strategy of its type in the whole of the country. That was as a result of the planning policies of the previous Government, but Kettering was not slow in coming forward—it ticked all the boxes and in pretty smart fashion. In policy 10 of the core spatial strategy, there is a housing requirement of 1,640 new dwellings in the rural area of Kettering during 2001 to 2021. Just over half way through, in March 2012, there had been 1,421 housing completions in the rural area, with a further 41 soon to be constructed. That left an outstanding requirement of just 178 dwellings over the best part of 10 years. The council cannot be accused of not building houses in the local area, and it seems extremely punitive that, as a result of the Government's planning policies, this application for 65 houses in Broughton was approved. I am not blaming Kettering borough council for that. It is doing only what it has been told to do by the national Government, but I blame the national Government's policies.

Redrow Homes has set an example, and another application has just been submitted, this time by Glanmoor Investments Ltd, for development of 67 dwellings with associated parking at Glebe avenue, Broughton on the other side of the village, again in an area unsuitable for development. There is every likelihood that that planning application, under the same criteria, will be approved. The village of Broughton is likely to find itself with an additional 130 houses, and will find it difficult to cope with such a scale of development.

Councillor Jim Hakewill has highlighted the problem effectively. He was so cross on behalf of local residents about what is emerging in Broughton that he delivered a letter to the Prime Minister at No. 10. On 12 March, he wrote:

"The desperate problem we have is that developers...are seeking to exploit the fact that, whilst Kettering Borough Council have gone through the pain of approving permission for some 7,500 homes, some of those are unable to be built until the A14...has a new junction"—

junction 10a. Kettering borough council

"has done all it can to create a five year supply, making hard, sometimes unpopular decisions."

He continued:

"The Borough Council are well on their way to creating the Local Plan framework under which the communities will have their Neighbourhood plans tested."

Broughton

"Parish Council are desperately keen to engage with the Borough to create a Plan to be proud of, a positive independent inspection and a referendum to support it. All of this will be of no consequence whatsoever should this current application be formally approved. It will be imposing development that has no local support; it will set a precedent for uncontrolled development and disillusionment for local people, who would normally be prepared to get involved with their community's future. Worse than that by pre-empting the decisions about where best development would suit Broughton the applicant will have no obligation to deliver"

community infrastructure levy

"funding for the benefit and mitigation of development that a Neighbourhood Plan would demand. The application contravenes all the current Local Plan and Core Spatial Strategy policies we

are used to relying on. Indeed it has significant highway implications for the safety of villagers, present and future, using the village centre shops and particularly the primary school.”

Councillor Hakewill continued:

“Our request is simple: Stop the current permission from being issued, give a clear lead that the development and completion of a Neighbourhood Plan must happen before applications will be approved, and that Government Inspectors will uphold that right, dismissing appeals in advance of”

an

“approved Neighbourhood Plan. Don’t let random development spoil”

villages like Broughton.

That sums up the position well. I invite the Minister to come to Broughton, to speak to and listen to local residents who are worried about the future of their lovely village. Broughton is not against any development, but it does not want inappropriately large development on inappropriate sites, especially when Kettering borough council has a very good record of working with central Government to provide local homes for local people. Indeed, it approved 5,500 homes under the previous Government on the outskirts of Kettering at Kettering East. Those homes cannot be included in the rolling five-year housing delivery target because, for the development to go ahead on that site, the Highways Agency must approve a new junction—junction 10a—on the A14.

Many housing starts are waiting to happen, dependent on a Government decision on highways. Kettering borough council is doing its best to unblock that blockage, but while it is in place, those houses cannot be counted against the borough council’s rolling five-year housing delivery target and that exposes villages like Broughton to inappropriate development. Developers know that, which is why they are coming forward.

Through you, Mr Weir, I appeal to the Minister for help. Kettering borough council is trying to be helpful, but it is in a difficult position with the Government’s national planning policy framework on rolling five-year targets. I appeal to the Minister on behalf of my constituents in Broughton and all those who live in rural communities in Kettering. He is welcome to come and listen to local concerns, but will he please use his authority to allow authorities such as Kettering to say no to such development when neighbourhood plans are being worked up and will be in place soon? We need his help in the interim.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Nick Boles): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on an important local issue. He is, as you know, Mr Weir, the living embodiment of localism, being a representative of his constituents not just in this Parliament as a Member of Parliament but as a borough councillor. I am in awe of his work ethic in taking on two such testing roles.

I strongly welcome Broughton’s interest in pursuing a neighbourhood plan. It is probably the most transformative of the Government’s planning innovations, and I am delighted that it is making particularly good progress with the first three referendums on neighbourhood plans, which were passed with overwhelming majorities. Thame in Oxfordshire secured a higher turnout than

the county council elections that took place on the same day. People went to the polls to vote for the neighbourhood plan, but did not vote for a county council candidate. There is a huge amount of popular interest in neighbourhood planning, and I strongly welcome any community that wants to pursue one.

My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot discuss individual applications, past or prospective, but I hope that I can explain to him how the balance of planning policy works and offer to engage with him and Broughton’s residents in future. At the heart of the Localism Act 2011 and the national planning policy framework that it introduced is our wish to devolve to local communities responsibility for making provision for future development as well as the power to plan how those development needs should be met. It is important to understand the combination of the power and the responsibility.

This country has an intense housing need; that is true in Northamptonshire, in my county of Lincolnshire and certainly to the south of both. Every year, the country has built many fewer houses than we need just to meet the growth in our population as a result of ageing and other social changes. That is why we placed at the heart of the framework the idea that discharging responsibility to the local community involves providing sufficient sites to meet the five-year land supply need. That means having sites that are available for development now that could satisfy the area’s housing needs over the next five years. The framework then says that if a local authority does not have the five-year land supply in place, its housing policies will not be considered robust, and applications for housing developments will therefore have to be judged against the national framework policies, which cover a wide range of planning issues, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

To reassure my hon. Friend, it is important to understand that it is not a presumption in favour of all development—it is not a free-for-all. The presumption is in favour of sustainable development. The sustainability policies, which are clearly set out in the national planning policy framework, relate to environmental protections and to the importance of sufficient infrastructure. Sustainability captures not only environmental concerns, but economic sustainability and physical sustainability, in terms of the infrastructure supporting development. I am well aware of other decisions by inspectors. They regularly turn down proposals for development when authorities do not have a five-year land supply, because they accept that those development proposals are not sustainable and would conflict with important policies in the framework.

The presumption kicks in when there is no five-year land supply. As my hon. Friend has accepted, that is unfortunately, at the moment, the case for Kettering borough council, although he makes a good argument about why that is, in part, a result of problems with the A14 and its new junction. I would like to reassure him that, as somebody served indirectly by the A14, I am very keen for the A14 improvements to be brought forward. Just yesterday, I met the Minister in the Treasury with responsibility for infrastructure, Lord Deighton, to discuss major national infrastructure projects, and I know that improvements to the A14 are absolutely at the top of the Government’s list of priorities for such projects.

[Nick Boles]

I hope that together we can work to try and accelerate those improvements and the creation of the junction, which my hon. Friend supports. I hope, however, that he also accepts that national policy must be made to apply equally everywhere. Having a policy that requires boroughs to have a five-year land supply means that his borough then needs to find alternative sites while the sites off the A14 are not available, knowing that there will continue to be development needs, and perhaps at the back end of the 15-year plan, those sites will come on stream and other sites will not need to be provided, once the A14 development is complete.

My hon. Friend quoted Councillor Jim Hakewill's eloquent letter, which I read and replied to on the Prime Minister's behalf, and which asked, importantly, whether it would be possible to call some kind of moratorium on development applications while neighbourhood plans are under way. That case has been made by other Members of Parliament and by a number of organisations, including the Campaign to Protect Rural England. The difficulty with that proposal is that, first—of course, Parliament could change this—there is no legal basis for introducing a moratorium on development applications while plans are under way.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly—because we can change the law any time if we are persuaded of the merits of doing so—it would, unfortunately, create a perverse incentive that I fear communities less responsible and less proactive than my hon. Friend's would be inclined to abuse. If we said that once work had started on a neighbourhood plan, there would then be a moratorium on all development applications until the plan process was complete, every single community in the country that wanted to stop development would have a clear incentive to start a neighbourhood plan and take their own sweet time to conclude it, as they would know that they could see off any application in the meantime.

Unfortunately therefore, we need to have, embedded in the system, a dynamic incentive for communities to get a move on and put their plans in place, whether at neighbourhood or local level. The fact is that only through having a robust plan can the community make decisions about speculative applications and know that they will stick. That provides the incentive to take the difficult decisions involved in drawing up a plan, and for the borough council, of which my hon. Friend is a member, to put in place its five-year land supply. That same incentive puts a tiger in the tank of people working as volunteers in neighbourhoods to do their community plan, because they will then know that if they want to control the future development of their community, the plan is urgent, important, and worth getting on with.

In the meantime, I accept that a few applications may be made that will ultimately be accepted, either by the planning authority or by a planning inspector on appeal, that the community would rather not see happen. I completely understand that, but planning is a long game. My hon. Friend has been representing his constituents and residents for a very long time at different levels, and

I hope that he will carry on doing so for an even longer time in future. Even if an application that a community does not like gets through in the next year or two, the game is over the next 10 or 20 years. If, 15 years ago, there was the possibility of having neighbourhood plans in all those communities, they would have been able to shape such developments in a way that they were never able to.

I hope that the community of Broughton, which my hon. Friend is representing so well today, will see that even if they cannot control the application that he referred to, they have the possibility, through plan making, of controlling developments for the next 15 years. That applies not only to housing developments, but to the development of community facilities, green spaces and design codes, and to lots of other issues that are vital to people growing up and living in a community.

Mr Hollobone: I have been listening to what the Minister is saying. He has obviously spent a lot of time on the brief and is explaining the policy clearly. On the way home to his constituency, I have a feeling that he probably comes very close to Kettering. Would he be kind enough to call in at Broughton, at a meeting that Councillor Hakewill and I would be pleased to arrange, so that he could listen to residents' views on the issue and explain the policy?

Nick Boles: I would be delighted to. There is nothing I enjoy more than getting out of Westminster and talking to people. I was in Worcestershire and Shropshire last week, and next week I am in Devon and Cornwall—it is rather quicker and easier to get to Kettering and Broughton. I would be delighted to come and talk to residents, and hopefully explain to them the benefits of neighbourhood planning.

It is not that there are no frustrations—there are. It is not that there are no disappointments—there are. It is not that it is easy or quick—it is not. It is a long, painful process that requires volunteers and local councillors to undertake exhaustive efforts on behalf of the common interest, which is a thoroughly admirable thing that I applaud. However, we have a support contract in place to offer communities such as Broughton direct support. There is the possibility of securing a grant of £7,000 towards the out-of-pocket costs of organising a neighbourhood plan. I would be happy to explain that to them, and hopefully, to share the experience of other communities that have done neighbourhood plans successfully. Neighbourhood plans, such as that in Thame, have had to wrestle with substantial development. A plan has been backed that includes plans for 775 additional houses in Thame; nevertheless, it secured the support of more than 70% of the people who voted.

I believe that neighbourhood planning is the answer. I hope that the people of Broughton will not be downcast or put off this important initiative, and I would be delighted to join my hon. Friend in meeting them to discuss how we can make their neighbourhood plan come to reality.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

The High Street

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and delighted to have the opportunity to introduce this debate on the future of our high streets. Let me start by saying that, as it is a widely recognised barometer for the performance of our economy, it is especially worrying to have seen more retail chains go into insolvency in the past 12 months than ever before. Yesterday's British Retail Consortium report, showing that the number of empty shops has reached a new high, adds to a growing sense that our high streets are experiencing a short and painful decline, which the Government, I will argue, are not doing enough to address. First, however, I want to put into context the value of our high streets in terms of retail, as a focal point for communities and as a generator of social capital and civic pride.

As retail is the traditional home of Britain's biggest private sector employer, it is worth noting that the latest figures from the House of Commons Library show that the retail sector employs 4.2 million people—more than 15% of our work force. It accounts for 34% of all turnover in the UK and, according to the British Retail Consortium, employs 40% of all those aged under 20. UK retail sector sales were worth more than £311 billion in 2012. It is a massive sector and an important rung on the employment ladder for young people.

However, high streets are more than just a place of commerce. They are dynamic hubs of social activity where enduring social bonds are formed that help to create strong and vibrant communities. Local high streets are also a strong source of civic pride; they can help shape a keen sense of local identity, common heritage and local values.

If we take all that into account, it is hard to imagine a future in Britain without the high street playing a substantive role in community life, but as we all know, high streets currently face enormous challenges and many local high streets are fighting for their lives. Faced with that threat to such an important economic and social driver, it is incumbent on Government to act. In the early days of the coalition, Ministers at least gave the impression that they recognised that. The Minister responsible for high streets—the Minister for Housing—said in November 2010:

“My colleagues and I are committed to tackling these challenges head on. After all, our high streets need to be centres for economic growth as we move towards the recovery.”

Two and a half years later, those words have a distinctly hollow ring. Instead of commitment to tackling the problems, Ministers have shown indifference. Indeed, their actions have made things worse. They have not only failed even to give a full response to Mary Portas's 2011 review, but, year after year, they continue to ignore calls from business groups for some respite on business rates. Every year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer keeps piling millions of pounds on to the bills of retailers, which is causing insolvencies everywhere. And whereas Mary Portas, the Government's high street tsar, said in her report that the high street had reached “crisis point”, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and

Skills blithely claims that there is no crisis on the high street. Those are not the actions of a Government committed to tackling a serious problem. They are the actions of Ministers with their heads in the sand.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making powerful points. Does he agree that the biggest boost that the high street could get would be to be on a level playing field with Amazon, which is not paying taxes in this country at the moment?

Simon Danczuk: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I will come to the point about Amazon, and not just in relation to business rates; corporation tax is also an issue.

Let me examine the flagship Government policy to tackle the problems facing our high streets—the much talked about Portas pilots. I was an initial supporter of the Portas review and I thought that the pilots were a good idea, but that was before the previous Minister responsible for high streets, who is now the Minister without Portfolio, turned what should have been a serious policy exercise into a farcical circus. Further help was on hand from Optomen Television, which managed to hijack a Government policy and turn it into a reality TV series.

I should like at this point to praise the current Minister responsible for high streets for distancing himself from the antics of his predecessor. He has had the good sense to change the ridiculously titled Future High Street X-Fund to something that is more appropriate to public policy, instead of trying to ape Peter Kay's last spoof reality TV show. The High Street Renewal Fund sounds much more dignified, but the damage has been done.

It is a year this Sunday since the first wave of Portas pilots was announced. The retail grade magazine, *The Grocer*, reports that an “emerging findings” report was supposed to be published this April, but has now been shelved. People close to the situation are quoted as saying that there have been

“teething problems including concerns over corporate governance.”

They go on to say that

“having a formal audit-style report may not have been worth the paper it was written on.”

When will the Government's “emerging findings” report be published, and when will the Government respond to Mary Portas's recommendations?

Ministers called the Portas pilots the “vanguard of a high street revolution”.

However, they have been not so much a revolution as a revelation—the revelation that we need substance, not just public relations, to deliver real change.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this very important debate. Does he agree that there is a very important role for local authorities and local business groups in helping to encourage businesses? For example, in Hackney, we are trying to develop outlet retail, to boost the local high street, on Mare street. That one-to-one engagement with businesses is very important at local level, in addition to whatever might happen nationally.

Simon Danczuk: I could not agree more. However, the engagement of businesses has been successful in some areas, but very unsuccessful in others, not least in terms of some of the pilots.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Local people in Houghton tell me that they are concerned about the growing number of fast-food and takeaway outlets on the high street there. They want a better retail offer; they are concerned about the damage that that is doing. Should local people not be offered a greater say in the planning of high streets? In the current circumstance, local people feel powerless to stop that and feel as though they do not have a say on the offer available to them on their town centre high street.

Simon Danczuk: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is one that the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Labour party, addressed just before the county council elections in terms of planning abilities for local authorities so that they can shape their town centres and high streets more effectively.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): Surely customers currently dictate that, because market forces will determine which shops are viable.

Simon Danczuk: My response to the hon. Gentleman's point is that the high street is too important to communities simply to be left to the free market. There is a requirement for intervention both nationally and locally.

It has been widely reported that many of the first and second-wave Portas pilots have spent hardly any money and some have spent nothing at all. Did Ministers not award the pilots to towns that already had ready-to-go plans to transform their high streets? At a time when urgent action was needed, everyone anticipated that the pilots would hit the ground running. Instead, most of them have withdrawn into a shell and are in a state of paralysis. It now looks as though some of the plans had been drawn up on the back of an envelope and were nowhere near viable. Can the Minister explain how long those pilots are supposed to last? Will they carry on struggling to put plans together indefinitely?

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate and I praise the work that he has done in Rochdale. The debate has been quite partisan so far. I am a bit more favourable towards what the Government have done so far. I think that the Portas review was quite a good piece of work. However, I share my hon. Friend's concern about where the money has been spent and the fact that it has not been spent in some towns. Our experience in Stalybridge is the opposite. We have done some great work, but without any resources. I just wonder whether the Government will be able to say something about how they might get resources to town teams who are doing very good jobs in their areas if places that have been pilots have not been able to do the things that they wanted to do already.

Simon Danczuk: That is an interesting intervention: if money is not being spent in some pilot areas, surely it could be moved to areas with more innovative approaches that are ready to hit the ground running. It would not be fair to tar all pilots with the same brush. I am aware of excellent work that is making a real difference in Market Rasen and Nelson, both of which have shown strong leadership and rich community engagement.

Given the problems, it is no wonder that the Co-operative Group recently—just this week—demanded a review of the Portas pilots. If ever a programme illustrated the disconnect between Whitehall and local communities, this is it. The e-mail exchange that has come to light between Mary Portas's team and officials from the Department for Communities and Local Government serves to highlight the problems. An example of how Government officials let TV companies set public policy can be seen in an e-mail about local councillors and residents arguing over their high street. A member of Mary Portas's team e-mailed the DCLG stating:

"In TV terms the fight between the bureaucrats and the passionate citizens could be great".

That Government officials were having such a conversation beggars belief. The Portas pilots were supposed to be about improving local high streets, not creating arguments for argument's sake to make good TV. Robin Vaughan-Lyons, chairman of the Margate town team said that people had been left in tears by the antics of Mary Portas's film crew. He told *The Grocer*, not a publication given to sensationalist reporting, that they

"are a group of people who are more interested in publicity and being on TV than they are in helping Margate and they have been deliberately encouraged by the film crew to make personal attacks on us."

We should all celebrate bringing together volunteers to form town teams, for which people give up their time freely to help make their community a better place to live. Surely that is what the Prime Minister envisaged as the big society in action. How disgraceful that Government officials colluded with a TV company to sow seeds of division in communities and stoke up resentment simply to create a dramatic storyline for an hour of tawdry TV. That is not the government by citizens for society that the Prime Minister promised us, but government for television. As one soap opera inspires another, the Minister who was responsible for high streets made sure that the Portas pilots spawned other funds and initiatives. The Government's high street innovation fund is one such example.

In her review of December 2011, Mary Portas underlined what she wanted councils to do:

"This should be game-changing stuff and thoughtful engagement, not just the usual suspects round a table planning the Christmas decorations."

How do Ministers square that, I wonder, with the fact that many thousands of pounds from the high street innovation fund has been spent by councils on Christmas lights and hiring Santa Claus and reindeer? Last month was the launch of high street champions, an initiative to support high streets by partnering them with large businesses, but only in the pilot towns. Obviously, it is good to see businesses working together, but I am not convinced that matching big national chains with independent businesses is the best approach.

Meg Hillier: There can be exceptions. Tesco was born in Hackney on a market stall in Well street, which has great challenges. The local manager had the freedom, after, it has to be said, some negotiations with headquarters, to refuse to have a fresh meat counter because there was a butcher outside the door and to refuse to have a fried chicken counter because of the number of fried chicken shops in the street. Where partnership works, it works well, but, as my hon. Friend highlights, it is challenging for the individual managers of big stores.

Simon Danczuk: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The question is about how Government can affect the situation locally. There are lots of examples of good practice at a local level, but we have not had a strong sense of direction or leadership from the Government on town centres and high streets.

Rather than talking about high street champions, I would like the Government to consider funding digital champions: experts in multichannel retail, who can make a real difference and work with the independent retail community to help it embrace multichannel retail to supplement shops and safeguard its future. Independents make up 69% of all shops, and we need to do everything we can to safeguard their presence on our high streets.

When we look back on high street policy carried out by the coalition Government, we see that the multitude of headline grabbing initiatives have blinded us to the elephant in the room that is causing the most damage on the high street. I refer of course to business rates. The Government have collected an extra £500 million over the past two years through increased business rates, and yet they have spent only £20 million on the Portas pilots. Week in, week out, businesses in Rochdale tell me that the tax is far too high and is dragging them close to the brink. Research published this year by the Forum of Private Business shows that 94% of small business owners think that business rates are far too high. There is a growing sense that the Government see the high street only as a cash cow to milk to exhaustion.

The sense of injustice is further embedded by the Government's decision to postpone next year's business rates revaluation. While London property prices continue to rise, business owners in more affluent metropolitan areas can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that the Government will keep their rates artificially low, but many northern businesses, which have seen property prices fall by 40% in some areas, have to pay the top-of-the-market 2008 rates until 2017. We end up with the absurd scenario of Burnley effectively subsidising Bond street, and Rochdale subsidising Regent street. Business rates for an Amazon fulfilment centre in Doncaster are calculated at £44 per square metre, yet for an out-of-town Comet store in Rochdale, which as we know subsequently closed, they were £125 per square metre. Even worse, the rates for one unit in a Rochdale shopping centre are calculated at £1,080 per square metre—24 times more expensive than the rates Amazon pay in Doncaster.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Does my hon. Friend agree that, although business rates show no flexibility, landlords are being flexible over rents? Business rates represent a barrier to trade.

Simon Danczuk: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I have seen properties in Rochdale with business rates that exceed the price of the rent; that cannot be right. There is a significant and serious problem with business rates. There is no doubt that they are past their sell-by date. Will the Minister use today's debate to acknowledge that this prehistoric tax regime is unfairly holding businesses back and is not fit for purpose? The Valuation Office Agency needs an urgent overhaul and business rates desperately need reform.

Many people are of course already doing their bit to try to reform our high streets and move away from the chain stores' monopoly, to give a new generation of people the skills to set up new and diverse businesses. I pay tribute to Retail Ready People, an initiative led by vInspired and the Retail Trust, which works with young people in Rochdale to help them set up a pop-up shop on the high street. It is working all over the country to give young people the skills and confidence to take over empty shops.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and on his attempt to blame the coalition for many of the problems with our high streets—it is inventive, if nothing else. Amazon is a big employer of my constituents. Last year I tried to help secure transport for people from my constituency to work there. It is an important local employer that he has bashed a couple of times. Does he want Rochdale business rates to move towards Amazon business rates or does he want Amazon business rates to move towards Rochdale business rates? If it is the former, can he tell us where the money will come from?

Simon Danczuk: It is neither. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) made the point that Amazon is not paying full corporation tax, and there is a discrepancy in business rates, so I suggest that we need to overhaul the whole business rates system. It is simply not fit for purpose.

I am aware that many other voices are not locked into the myopic consensus that characterises Government thinking on the high street. One of them is that of Bill Grimsey, a turnaround specialist, who was formerly the chief executive of Wickes, Iceland and other companies. I met Bill recently, and he explained that town centres cannot be saved as pure retail destinations. Technology is already influencing how we shop, and in the future everything will change. What is required, he argued, is a holistic approach to creating vibrant high streets that addresses housing, education, health, entertainment and shopping.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He has not yet addressed something that probably costs retailers more than business rates: credit card interchange fees. If they were reduced to what Europe has said the cross-border level should be, £1 million would be put into every MP's high street. That is an enormous amount of money. Would the hon. Gentleman, therefore, give the Government credit for acting on credit card interchange fees through the recent consultation, and will he hope that we can make progress? That would make a substantial difference, by putting demand into local economies.

Simon Danczuk: I welcome that intervention. I am not very familiar with the issue, and it has not been raised with me in relation to the high street, but the hon. Gentleman makes an interesting and important point, about which I am keen to learn more.

We need a fully focused, committed approach by Government, not another dose of dilettante PR. Currently, it is hard to know who is in charge of high street policy. Let us just spend a moment trying to make sense of where the change we need is coming from.

[*Simon Danczuk*]

The Business Secretary turned up at the recent Retail Week Live conference and talked about accepting Mary Portas's 38 recommendations, when there were only 28. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is constantly in the newspapers, using emotive language to talk about car parking charges while he continues to cut council budgets to the bone. A Department for Communities and Local Government Minister claims that the unfair business rates revaluation delay is right, despite not one voice in retail supporting the move. The Minister with responsibility for Portas pilots and high streets carries out the role on a part-time basis while he tends to his main duties as housing Minister, and today we have a planning Minister addressing this high street debate.

I say to the Minister that someone needs to get a grip. We need a full-time high streets Minister and clear, strong leadership from the Government. Only then might the Prime Minister's woolly rhetoric about ensuring that high streets are at the heart of every community start to mean something.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Philip Davies (in the Chair): I have six or seven Members wishing to speak, and I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at no later than 3.40 pm. I do not intend to put a fixed time limit on speeches, but if people speak for about seven minutes, everyone should be able to make a decent contribution. I hope that everyone will look to that kind of time scale.

2.53 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) on having introduced the debate with his usual cheery optimism, in a slightly more partisan way than he needed to. I must apologise to you, Mr Davies, because I am moonlighting from the Finance Bill and might have to return there before the final summing up. I have another colleague here in a similar situation—the Whips should not be informed.

On Sunday I had a very optimistic experience. I was in a small street in Southport called Wesley street, where the traders have suffered for some time, blighted by shops not being filled and worries about custom. They have done a great deal for themselves, including painting their shops in contrasting vibrant colours. On Sunday they had organised a festival. They had put a green swathe down the middle of the street and a series of events was taking place. The place was absolutely buzzing. That group of traders have had the courage and initiative to reinvent themselves, and that is what we need in the high street.

The high street must, in a sense, reinvent itself. Certain pressures are not due just to the coalition Government, as might be supposed from the opening contribution. They are due to fairly long-term things, such as changes in shopping and working habits, the fact that we are living in an age of austerity and there is generally less money around and less profit for companies, and the fact that the drift out of town continues. Overwhelmingly, they are due to the threat of the internet and the fact

that people can now shop at any time of the day or night. In some places, including my own constituency, the pressures are also due to the threat from increased mega-retail development—as I call it—such as at Liverpool One, Bluewater and the Trafford centre.

People look at what is happening in their local high street and see it as a kind of blight. They regret the lack of vitality. They look at the empty shops, and believe that something must be done. That is apparent, but what is not is what must be done. Some things clearly will not be done. The clock will not be put back, the internet will not be abandoned—people will use it more—and people will continue to change their habits. We cannot roll back to the 1960s.

Above all, the high street cannot buck the markets. Certain things are thriving. In the high street, things that may be undesirable, such as charity shops, and payday loan and cash register companies, are thriving in the current regime. Nail bars seem to do extraordinarily well in my neck of the woods, and coffee shops are in wild abundance—no one need be short of caffeine in any part of the UK as far as I can see. Building societies are also there, but they are a rather dull and sober presence. Most of the general public do not see that as satisfactory, and they say that something must be done. But it is not obvious what must be done, or who will do it.

Businesses are doing something anyway—they are pulling out. The chains have deserted many of our towns, some by going bust and some by moving to retail in other ways. Councils must do something, but they are desperately short of cash, and I agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale that metropolitan boroughs in particular are getting a poor deal at the moment with regard to the grant support settlement. Councils also complain about being short of certain necessary powers and levers—the Minister might have something to say about that—and they are also short of options.

Very early in any conversation with retailers we are asked, “What can you do about parking and the onerous charges? What can you do to level the playing field with out-of-town shopping?” Councils can tinker, but they cannot stop rationing parking because people will have just as many cars and there will be no more space in town centres than before. There will need to be some sort of system.

People say that the Government must do something, but the Government do not seem to have a clear or obvious solution. If they had one, I think they would employ it, because there is certainly the public demand, and also demand from other Members of Parliament. They do fund schemes, such as the Portas ones, and they employ advisers, such as Ms Portas. I think that they also employ Terry Leahy, which I am not so sure about. In my view, he is not necessarily the guy who has done the most for the high street over the past few years—certainly not in my town. We have a big out-of-town shopping centre, and Tesco made an unsuccessful bid to increase its area for non-food retail there, which would have hugely damaged the high street.

What I am trying to say is that the solution is elusive, which is probably because there is not just one solution but a range of individual ones. During the Portas phase, the Government did not approach a local authority and say, “You must do this,” or “You must do that,” but rather, “Bid for what you think you can do that will

work". The Government have a positive role. They can spread good practice. If they find that something works in Stockport or Rochdale, they should tell the world about it so that other local authorities and communities can follow suit. They can encourage the reinvention of the high street, through the promotion of business improvement district projects and the like. In my constituency, we hope soon to have a BID of some sort. A business improvement district gives local retailers more control over their immediate environment, and that can only be a good thing.

The Government need to do something, and sometimes it is easier to reduce the retail footprint, where that is sensible. If that means more domestic use in town centres, that is not necessarily a bad thing, as far as the vitality of towns is concerned. It might bring young people to a town who otherwise would not get housed at all.

The Government can do something about out-of-town development. I am told by the Federation of Small Businesses that Tesco often pays no rates on its car parks. It pays rates on its stores, but it has often negotiated an environment in which it pays no rates on its car parks. That is a clear anomaly that could be addressed to level the playing field.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, above all, the Government need to do something about the rates system, or about stimulating and producing some change in the commercial property market.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman touches on an interesting topic when he says that Tesco and other large stores pay rates on their stores, but not their car parks. In examining the possibility of large out-of-town stores paying rates on their car parks, would it not make sense to redeploy and recycle that money into the regeneration of town centres to give them innovation, as well as colour, class and style, and so ensure that they are reinvigorated, even if that costs a bit more for out-of-town centres?

John Pugh: Totally. Out-of-town shopping centres have a duty to the town that they are outside, and with which they are often not engaged.

I understand that, during the pre-Budget negotiations, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills thought it reasonable to investigate whether something might be done about retail business rates, but that the difficulty is how to advantage the people we want to be given an advantage—the small shopkeepers—not the big players, some of whom need no financial support whatever. I could refer again to Tesco.

Where we want to do something about business rates, that is currently more complex than it need be, which I want the Minister to investigate. I have heard reports from small business sources that when they want a downward valuation of their business rates and have a serious case—and when business rates are out of kilter with rents, as the hon. Member for Rochdale suggested—it takes far too long to get a result. By the time that it has all been sorted out, they will be out of business.

My fundamental point is that retailers must adjust to the shock of the new. They need to see their shops not as antagonistic to the internet, but must play along with it and be portals for it, because they have certain

advantages. The current system, with white vans constantly going up and down the country and leaving brown parcels in the porches of people who are out, is not frightfully efficient. There is no capacity within internet marketing or sales for much to be done about repair or return, at least not without additional expense. Very little quality control can be exercised when people deal with an internet retailer, as opposed to one whose shop they can walk into to complain about the product. The interesting point—this is why I think that the hon. Gentleman is really on to something—is that some big stores, such as John Lewis, which have used the internet very well, have found that that has not corrupted or reduced their in-store sales, but has enhanced and developed them, so antagonism need not exist.

In conclusion, there is a need for the retail sector and the high streets of this country to pull themselves up by their own boot straps. There is significant help that the Government can get, and I am sure that there will be lots more sensible suggestions.

Several hon. Members rose—

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. I reiterate, I hope with more success, the need for brevity from Members to allow everybody to speak.

3.3 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): This has been a good debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) began it very well by pointing to the sharp and painful decline of the high street, and by drawing attention to the importance of the retail sector for the employment of young people in particular, and for the vibrancy of our communities and culture. As he said, local high streets are now fighting for their lives.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), who has reminded us of the obligation on high streets to reinvent themselves. That is something that they have done over the ages. In the 1950s, Scunthorpe high street was dominated by the Co-op. Every store up and down the high street, from the butcher's and the baker's to the carpet maker's, was the Co-op. It has since gone through many changes, and now faces more challenges.

The challenges have been clearly spelled out in this debate. High streets are operating in the worst recession since the 1930s, with people understandably not spending money. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale covered the issue of the rigidity of business rates, which, still set at pre-2008 boom-time levels, act as corsets round the high street in this time of challenge. The Government should have the imagination and ingenuity to respond to that. The predilection for online shopping, which is not going to go away, is also changing habits on the high street. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said, it is important to have a level playing field between online retailers and those on the high street.

Car parking is an issue in Scunthorpe in relation to how the high street manages to compete against out-of-town shopping. Scunthorpe has two high streets: one in Ashby, which is a small market centre, and the main one in Scunthorpe itself. Scunthorpe is being challenged by a big development proposal led by a developer called

[*Nic Dakin*]

Simons, with an anchor store for Marks & Spencer, which is of course attractive to the area. There is plenty of space in the town centre that would be good for a Marks & Spencer store, but we unfortunately live in a world where the business model is to develop out-of-town retail. If local people had any purchase on the decision making, they would encourage Marks & Spencer to come to the area, but to a town centre retail position.

As Members have said, incentives encourage retailers to go out of town rather than to the high street, which is part of the challenge that we face. The Government might reflect on how best to respond. Planning permission has been agreed for the out-of-town development that I have mentioned, but the developers now want to alter it to allow them to have coffee shops on the site as well, which would further disadvantage the town centre, despite its being made clear in the original application to the planning committee that that was unlikely. Retailers feel that the advantage is moving against them.

What do retailers in Scunthorpe and Ashby say that they need to equalise the playing field? They say, "Give us two hours' free car parking." That is the key to the equalisation of the playing field. To be fair to Conservative-controlled North Lincolnshire council, it has gradually moved on that point. There has been a bit of kicking and fighting. I produced a 2,000-person petition in favour of two hours' free car parking in Scunthorpe and Ashby. Retailers have made it very clear that they need it to transform their chances of staying alive through these difficult times. The Scunthorpe town team, led by Eddie Lodge and colleagues, has done an excellent job in highlighting its value for the Scunthorpe retailer and shopper, as has Keep Scunthorpe Alive, which is led by Des Comerford and town-centre retailers. Two hours' free car parking is needed to equalise the playing field through these difficult times. It would be helpful if the Government came up with a bag of cash, but I suspect that that will not happen.

As the hon. Member for Southport pointed out, council budgets face very difficult challenges, and North Lincolnshire council is no different, but it has gradually moved towards creating two hours' free parking. It is obvious to anybody who understands the area that if the Parishes multi-storey car park in the centre of Scunthorpe, which is not heavily utilised, had two hours' free car parking throughout the day, with payment still being on exit, that would transform opportunities. Perversely, the Conservative-controlled council is flirting with the idea of changing it to a pay-and-display car park, and having two hours' free car parking from about 2 pm, but that would vitiate the dwell time. When people go into town centres, we want them to spend time there and, if they bump into my colleague, the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), to have a coffee with him, without worrying about getting a ticket on leaving the pay-and-display car park—unfortunately, we have very vigilant car park attendants. I am using the debate to spell out the case for two hours' free car parking in the Parishes multi-storey in Scunthorpe. That would be a shot in the arm for the local economy and the local high street.

I recognise and commend the work of local businesses Primark, BHS, Barclays, the Poundshop, Vodafone, and Coe and Co. They have all made investments in the

town centre in the past two years, so this is a changing scene. I also highlight Fallen Hero, which won the Drapers award for young fashion retailer of the year only last year. It is a model of what my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale called multi-channel retail, in that it has a high street presence and an online presence, and that is a dynamic way forward for the high street.

3.10 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): The recession; the progression to out-of-town shopping and superstores; the march of the internet; Lord Prescott's decision to get rid of Tynedale local authority in favour of a Northumberland county council in Morpeth, which is miles away; and the car-parking inequity in Northumberland: those and many other problems bedevil our high streets. Worst of all, however, is our convenience culture: our innate desire to take the easy path or the soft option, and that leads us to the one-stop shop. All of us, in this room and in life, are guilty of taking that option, but if we do not use our high street, we will lose it.

The reports of the death of our high streets are, however, greatly exaggerated. They remain the beating heart of our communities. They are more than just a row of shops; they and their small business are the heart of our local communities. To be fair, the Government are, as I am sure the Minister will outline, doing good work on extending small business rate relief until April 2014 and on changing the planning laws to assist the high street. I strongly approve of those policies, which are helping, and I hope to see improvements in the way the Valuation Office Agency goes about its business, and all of us will have had experience of inequities in that respect as constituency MPs.

Meg Hillier: I am listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman. I know Hexham, and I believe it won an award a few years ago for being the best place to shop in England or the UK—I cannot remember which, but I am sure he will tell me. He sounded a bit gloomy, but perhaps he could share some of the secrets of Hexham's success so that we can take them back to our constituencies.

Guy Opperman: Watch, listen and learn. The truth is that Hexham has a wonderful high street. As the hon. Lady correctly said, Hexham was named market town of the year in 2005, with a mix of charm, accessibility and community spirit that set it apart from its peers. The judging panel said:

"There is a definite sense here of a town with a pride and a purpose. It is friendly and welcoming, where people matter and visitors are made to feel at home."

I could go further, but time does not allow me to.

The blunt reality is that the town has suffered the same problems as all other towns. It may have an abbey that has been there since 600, it may have Hadrian's wall on its doorstep, it may have God's own county around it and it may have a plethora of wonderful independent retailers, book festivals and music festivals—all manner of good things—but it is not immune to the problems that affect other towns.

That brings us to what individual Members of Parliament and the Government can do. What we can do to address the points that have been identified—this is what I

would like to think we are doing in Hexham—is roll up our sleeves and come up with a plan to reinvigorate our high street. With the town council, the county council and the proponents of the town plan and the neighbourhood plan, we have formed an action plan, which we have called “In Hexham, For Hexham”. It sets out six key objectives for restoring the town to its former glory. It takes on some of the good ideas from the Portas review, such as free parking. It looks to employ town centre managers to co-ordinate everything on behalf of retailers. It is transforming sites that welcome visitors, such as the bus station, so that they actually look good. We are cleaning the town, painting the town and planting the town. In those three aspects, there is great scope.

Fundamentally, we are inviting all retailers to give us a wish list of what they would like to see changed, and we are actioning those lists through MPs’ offices and the county council. We are also physically rolling up our sleeves. On 6 July, along with all the retailers, I will be going around the town and smartening it up. That is very much what individual retailers have to do: they must come together and work strongly so that there is positive change in their local area. There is much more I could say, but I hope that, over the coming months, we will see significant and real action to transform Hexham town.

To finish, let me take my cue from the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) and celebrate Hexham. No less a newspaper than *The Guardian*, which I obviously read every day, said Hexham remains one of the best places to live in Britain. It informed its readers that Hexham is

“as cute as a puppy’s nose”

and

“as handsome as Clark Gable”—

it was not talking about the MP, I hasten to add. It asked whether my humble home is

“the nicest market town in the known universe”.

Finally, it urged its readers on, saying, “Let’s move to Hexham”. I am not sure what that would do to my majority, but I welcome one and all to come and taste the unique retailing and high street blend that is Hexham in Northumberland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. Five people are seeking to catch my eye. We have less than 25 minutes before I call the Front Benchers. I therefore urge people to show some self-control and consideration for others so that we can get everybody in.

3.16 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): From Hexham to Hackney. There are some of the same delights, but also some of the same challenges.

I want to focus particularly on the plans for Mare street and the Narrow way, but we also have Dalston shopping centre, which is a little tired, although there are plans to revamp it, and it is a busy, active level B shopping centre. We have the wonderful Broadway market, which was improved as a result of residents and retailers joining forces, and it has very much become a destination

where people meet up. We also have Victoria park, and estate agents have dubbed the surrounding area Victoria Park village. The local food retailers, particularly the Ginger Pig butchers and the local fishmongers, act as anchor stores, helping to attract shoppers who will browse in other shops in the area, such as the excellent Victoria Park Books, and in the local art galleries.

There is also Chatsworth road, which is still on the turn from being a high street with many challenges to one where there are now some quite expensive shops and a nice market with expensive goods. There are still some of the lower-end, cheaper goods, and there is a challenge to make sure the local community is served by having affordable, as well as destination shops. Then there is Well street, which has faced many challenges, and which still has some way to go, partly because one local charity owns a lot of the premises, and it has been difficult to turn them over to new retailers, for reasons I do not have time to go into. Finally, there is Hoxton Street market, which is very old and famous. Again, it is being revamped, as part of an attempt to improve our markets.

The hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) summed up Hexham in his own way, and I would sum up Hackney in terms of its three main markets. There is Broadway market, where it costs about £2.50 for a loaf of bread, but people have a great time sitting watching the world go by. There is Ridley Road market, where people can buy traditional fruit and veg, and where retailers have been known to sell bush meat and cane rat, which the council clearly clamped down on very quickly. Parts of the Ridley Road feel very much like a Nigerian market. There is also Hoxton Street market, where you can get three pairs of knickers for a pound—I see you are very interested in that, Mr Davies. However, that sums up the many differences in my constituency, which covers a wide range of people. We then have Kingsland Waste market, which is a sad shadow of its former itself, although there are plans to improve the markets generally.

I want to touch particularly on Mare street and the Narrow way. The council is looking at trying to improve the high street. A recent survey measured the footfall and conducted face-to-face interviews with 478 individuals. It showed that the area is popular for shopping, particularly with people who live nearby, but only 5% of those surveyed planned to meet friends there. That is one of the challenges: this is not a destination that people go to do things other than their basic shopping.

Some of the overall strengths and weaknesses highlighted were quite interesting, and they perhaps sum up the challenges facing high streets up and down the country. The strengths were that there was an established local catchment—so people went there because it was convenient—and great good will and loyalty. It is the main local centre for more than 140,000 consumers—so friendly, not frenzy, Mr Davies, is what you get in Hackney shopping streets. There are many reasons to visit. There are still banks and useful shops. Buses are a key strength: people can get there easily by public transport.

On the negative side, customer numbers appear to be in decline—not just in Mare street and the Narrow way; there are few new customers. We are not getting the destination shoppers we need to increase the footfall. There is little new development. The shop fronts are tired, and the area has been left behind for a long time.

[Meg Hillier]

Trading is down, which is a sign of the times for all of us on our high streets, and the retailers' offer is limited—particularly on food and beverages, where provision is particularly poor. The study by the Retail Group for Hackney council concluded that people need more reasons to visit, and more trip generators.

What, then, has the council done to try to improve things? The balance between the roles of the council and Government, and of retailers, is interesting. The Manhattan Loft Corporation has been brought in by the council and is investing significant amounts of money in a fashion outlet retail centre, close to Mare street and the Narrow way. We have had a Burberry outlet store for many years. The way to tell a Hackney councillor was by their smart mac and fold-up Brompton bicycle; but we now have Aquascutum and Pringle outlet stores recruiting local unemployed people—so that is a boost to jobs, and there are great plans for redevelopment there. Anyone who wants cheap, high-end fashion can come to the new outlet store in Hackney when it is fully developed. There will be a range of developments in the railway arches nearby, and they will entice in local designers for pop-up stores. We are a fashion hub, with some top designers interested in coming to the area. That must all filter through to the old Mare street and the Narrow way, however, to ensure that there is change.

I have two key pleas to make to the Minister. The first is about bookies and change of use—and we have the planning Minister here. I am not against high street bookies, but we have 65 in Hackney and five, I think, in that one high street, so they are too concentrated, and the ease of change of use makes it far too easy for them to open next door to each other. Secondly, we need the Government to think seriously about business rates. I shall not repeat the points that my colleagues have made, but it is a big issue. When businesses tell me that they pay more in business rates than in rent, it is a real issue. No wonder high streets are struggling.

3.22 pm

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) on raising this important subject. It is one on which I am passionate, because my parents ran shops, so after school I often played behind the shop counter. We had wool shops—so I wore ill-fitting jumpers well past the time when it was socially acceptable—and a series of hairdresser's shops, which were ultimately wasted on me. I am also the vice-chair of the all-party groups on town centres and on retail. I am unashamedly a big fan of Mary Portas and her work. In my constituency, I have organised retail forums and I regularly attend the inSwindon business improvement district company board meetings, working with retailers.

Town centre regeneration on the high street is a major issue in Swindon. We were on the cusp of major regeneration when the 2008 economy crashed, and the developers, as they did across the country, went out of business. However, thankfully, the diggers are now in place. We have a brand new cinema, restaurants and all sorts of regeneration, and it is a huge relief to the town—a town with 300,000 people within 20 minutes of its town centre and 3 million within an hour. It is no

coincidence that a £65 million rebuild has just been confirmed for our Oasis leisure centre, because it is so easy to get to Swindon.

We have a McArthurGlen outlet village, which is a model of the retail world. It has been hugely successful and continues to expand at an incredible rate. That is the basis of some of the points I want to make: what works so well for the McArthurGlen outlet village is that it is one centre and one point of contact, so a retailer needs to talk to only one person—not the local authority, or so-and-so the landlord. There is one point of contact, with one set of marketing, employing all the staff and ensuring that customer service is good. If any of the retailers fail to conform, they are out. That improves the customer experience. We have the potential, with the proposals for super-BIDs, to give an organisation such as a BID all the powers in a town centre, treating it a bit like one big shopping centre, making it easier for retailers, and consolidating marketing and promotion.

Several hon. Members have rightly highlighted the importance of parking. Probably the biggest disaster under the previous Government was the obsession with green travel plans, under which councils built on car parks, hiked up parking charges and forced shoppers to use buses. Buses have their place but that decimated town centres. Thankfully my local authority recognised that, and after a 22% fall in footfall in five years, car parking charges were cut. There was praise for that in the Mary Portas review. The charge is now £2 for 4 hours, and, unsurprisingly, there has been an 11% increase in footfall. Crucially, the dwell time has also increased. Over time, reversing that policy has meant collecting more income. Flexibility is vital. From a planning perspective, town centres need to change, so local authorities must accept—this will be music to the Minister's ears—that they need to be absolutely flexible. In Swindon, whenever developers came along and said, "Look, we want to flip the town centre on a 5° axis," the local authority said, "No problem at all." That is why we will get major town centre regeneration.

Several hon. Members have highlighted the problem with business rates. I do not want to repeat arguments, but I know that the British Retail Consortium has done fantastic research on that, and it is true that something is terribly wrong when business rates are higher than rent. Landlords are being flexible and lowering costs. In my constituency I think the cost has gone from £180 to £140 per square foot; but business rates are rigid. I know that in theory local authorities can be flexible, but they do not necessarily have the funding for that. I propose that either we need a system linked to the rent being paid, so that if a landlord is flexible, the business rates would be flexible, or—and this will upset my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy)—we need to deal with Amazon. It is destroying the high street that is its shop window. There should be some form of internet consumer tax, with the revenue ring-fenced to subsidise the traditional high street business rate case. It will not be popular with Amazon. I met its chief executive and he did not share my view, but that suggests it is probably the right thing to do.

We need the next generation of independent consumers, so that we do not have identikit town centres. I have been doing a huge amount of work to encourage opportunity for young entrepreneurs. Some local authorities have not been quick enough about spending the money

that the Government have provided for the high street. There should be opportunities, to give young entrepreneurs a go. I have set up several schemes, which have proved very successful. Mary Portas made a relevant point, which was that retailers got lazy and need to sort their game out. Customer service is crucial. That is why John Lewis has been doing so well. In previous debates I have highlighted businesses in my constituency, such as Bloomfields and the Forum. They have set themselves apart and bucked the trend, and are expanding.

I urge the Minister to remain flexible, promote best practice and work with the all-party groups on town centres and on retail and the British Retail Consortium. Let us be proud that we are a nation of shopkeepers.

3.27 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) on securing the debate.

As the chair of the all-party group on small shops, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the high street. Like my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) I am the child of shopkeepers. I grew up over the shop—and under the till, half the time. I am proud of the small shops heritage that I have, and which our nation has, as a country of small shopkeepers.

Witham town has had several challenges to its high street, as other towns have, but it is an entrepreneurial community. There is phenomenal good will among the residents and the town team group. Despite the occupancy rate—there are about 114 empty premises in Witham town; it is slightly higher than in other parts of the Braintree district—there is no doubt that with the right amount of support from our local authority and the business community and community groups, we are coming together to innovate and address the town centre challenge differently and creatively.

The Government should be commended for many positive schemes, such as the town team partners initiative, StartUp Britain and the high street innovation fund. For entrepreneurs in particular, who will be the next generation of business leaders in the community, such schemes are engaging.

I should like the Minister to comment on several issues. One of our priorities in Witham town is to reinvigorate the high street by renewing interest in the local market. That includes relocating it to the high street. It is all about location. It will expand the offering and make the high street more attractive. Of course we can consider parking and similar issues, too. I should be grateful if the Minister elaborated on the measures that could be used locally to implement changes successfully—to cut through red tape and some of the local government bureaucracy and barriers that hinder the town team.

Like many town centres, Witham needs investment in its public spaces, and our local community groups coming together to do something about them is one of the greatest areas of recent work. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) mentioned painting and tidying up the local community, and I commend the initiative of the Witham Boys Brigade to plant flowers and tidy up what I call the Witham gateway, which is straight off the A12. Small solutions such as that, once they spread across our towns, bring a great sense of community and enhance the aesthetic values of

our communities. Getting businesses and local firms to sponsor such community initiatives is also a great way of involving them.

We have touched on business rates, but I want to discuss the impact of crime on our high streets, in particular on small shops. There is no doubt that crime undermines businesses. It is terribly demoralising for business owners who put their lives into their small shops and high-street businesses. Shopkeepers who work hard to earn every single penny are being threatened by criminals and find their lives and livelihoods being put at risk, which is absolutely awful. I want the Minister to join me in calling on the police, prosecutors and courts to do more. While our law enforcement agencies have good intentions, more should be done to support those setting up businesses and investing their livelihoods in our high streets, and to compel offenders to pay more in fines.

I will leave it there due to the time, but sending a positive message to businesses about crime should be part of the Government's wider programme to support our high streets, which includes all the successful measures already put in place.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. We will go to the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.40 pm. That leaves the parliamentary neighbours, the hon. Members for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), eight minutes to divide between themselves.

3.32 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I think my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), is more than happy for me to eat into his time as we are such good neighbours. I thank him for the confirmation I just got from the look on his face.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk)—apparently that constituency is in Lancashire—on securing the debate and on much of what he said. Like other speakers, I agree with the comments about the need to deal with business rates, so I will not repeat those arguments. Similarly, I am grateful to my flatmate and hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) for making some response to comments of the hon. Member for Rochdale about the previous Government's planning policies. I sat on a local authority for 10 years and I can say that the planning policies of the time seemed to work against our town centres in many ways, so the failures cut across political divides.

I should also point out that we, as consumers, are hypocrites when it comes to our high streets. We all love them, but how many of us have recently ordered online? How many of us have recently ordered from Amazon? The arms are not going up, but I have no doubt that I am not the only one here to have ordered from Amazon in recent months. Of course, Amazon does employ local people, but we have to understand that we are all slightly hypocritical.

I want to focus on what local authorities can do, because they can play a really positive role. Indeed, the local authorities in my constituency—North Lincolnshire council and East Riding of Yorkshire council—are currently playing positive roles. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) made an excellent speech. Scunthorpe's is probably the most challenging high

[Andrew Percy]

street in our area in terms of regeneration, and its difficulties are much more complex. He said that the local Conservative council was edging towards free parking, which is slightly disingenuous given that it was the previous Labour administration that scrapped free parking and imposed charges across north Lincolnshire. It was the Conservative council, when it took control in 2011, that scrapped the charges in Brigg and introduced free parking periods in Scunthorpe, which had never been done before. The hon. Gentleman did at least acknowledge that it was the Conservative council that was behind those measures. The introduction of free parking has made a huge difference in Brigg. Talk to retailers and they will say that the two-hour free-parking period has had a massive impact on the number of people coming into the town. In Epworth, the council has worked incredibly hard to provide 40 extra parking spaces, which was a big boost to its town centre.

Councils need to get a bit smarter about their resources. The council in Brigg has tied together its vision for the high street with its vision for tourism, leisure and heritage and has created a new heritage centre. The library has been moved closer to the town centre, which is now becoming a hive of activity that people want to visit for a whole range of reasons. The previous Labour council was going to close the tourist information centre—[*Interruption.*] It was consulted on. We have not only refurbished it, but have developed that service even further. There is much that councils can do.

Another scheme that should be considered across the country is the creation of wi-fi hotspots in our town centres, something that North Lincolnshire council is committed to funding. Across in the East Riding of Yorkshire, I have managed to get a local company to offer the service for free in Goole town centre. It is another way of drawing people in with a USP that says, “This is a modern centre.” Shops and cafes can also make use of it. They can have a shop front, but they can also generate online sales and promote themselves that way.

A great deal can be done and I ask the Minister, if he wants to, to come and spend some time in north Lincolnshire and look at what we have done on free parking and on trying to put services back into our town centres. We are currently working on another project with another town in my constituency that I hope will come to fruition soon. Even in these tough times, local authorities can do things to help to bring people back into town centres.

I had plenty more to say, but in fairness to my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes I am going to sit down and allow him to talk about his constituency. I ask hon. Members to count how many times he says “England’s premier east coast resort.”

3.37 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak in this debate as the third member of the north Lincolnshire trio. This debate provides an opportunity for us all to showcase our high streets, and I will be no exception to that. First, however, I want to touch on the Portas review, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) and others.

As I have said in previous debates, I do not regard the Portas review as a panacea for the revival of our high streets. I do not want to pour cold water on it, but as a former member of a town team for many years, I can assure hon. Members that virtually every idea in the review has been discussed, debated and tried not only on the Grimsby town team, on which I was representing the local authority—like this Government, it was at the time a successful Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition—[*Interruption.*] I take the applause of the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin). My point is that we cannot just assume that reducing parking charges, for example, is the absolute answer. I say that not because I am against it—I would have free parking wherever possible—but the reality is that we at North East Lincolnshire council wrestled with how we were going to deal with the £1 million income that we get from parking charges and set that against the obvious attractions of trying to provide cheaper or free parking. As we heard from the other two north Lincolnshire Members, North Lincolnshire council has come up with a good scheme that contributes considerably towards that, but it is not the absolute panacea.

There is a danger that such debates can turn into a round of “knock the supermarkets,” but let us not forget that, as we heard earlier, supermarkets such as Marks and Spencer and Tesco actually grew from market stalls. Meeting the demands of the consumer is the key here. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe mentioned the Co-op, and I can remember being dragged down Grimsby’s Freeman street by my mother to the Co-op, which was an enormous department store in those days. It dominated the whole shopping centre and was the Tesco of its day. So there has always been a department store, as it were, with everything under one roof, but the independent retailers must be able to compete with that.

Let me turn to Cleethorpes, the pre-eminent resort on the east coast. It has a very successful high street, St Peter’s avenue, which is only a mile and a half from Tesco’s out-of-town development. However, having a mix of shops, including independent shops, that meet consumer demand is the key. Those shops in Cleethorpes are thriving and successful.

As I close, I have one point to put to the Minister. We all recognise that, with changing consumer patterns, there are too many retail units, or former retail units, in every high street and every parade of shops in every town up and down the country. I appreciate that the Government are doing some things in terms of planning to help with the reclassification—change of use, and so on—but what is needed is a scheme to regenerate those properties, to bring them back into use and to prevent the dereliction that plagues so many of our high streets.

3.40 pm

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Davies, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again.

I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) on securing this debate. The fact that it is timely, necessary and topical is evidenced by the number of Members who are here in Westminster Hall today. I also thank him for his excellent contribution to the debate, which clearly pointed out the lack of appropriate action being taken by the Government to regenerate our high streets.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) for raising the issue of payday loan companies, which is an issue I will return to later, and my hon. Friend for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for reminding us that the retail sector is very important as an employment base in our constituencies and for offering opportunities to young people. I must also say to him that, having heard his contribution, I now feel I know the members of his town team personally; I hope they appreciate that.

At one point, I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) and the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) were trying to outdo each other in arguing about which place was the best to visit—Hackney or Hexham—and in particular where the best market was. I have noted their comments for future shopping trips.

Of course, other Members pointed to the need to have greater differentiation on our high streets and to the need to invest in public spaces, and we heard lots of other ideas about how to improve the high street. There were also lots of invitations for the Minister, which I hope he is grateful for.

At the outset, I will say that I do not particularly want to criticise Mary Portas and the approach she has taken. She and the Government were right to flag the challenges that our high streets face from the recession, online trading and out-of-town centres. It was right that we had a focus on the high street and I do not blame Mary Portas for being a celebrity or for wanting to make a TV show. However, I am critical of the Government for not taking this issue seriously enough and for not having an approach to the high street that is capable of meeting the challenges that Mary Portas identified.

I feel a bit sorry for the Minister who is here today—the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles)—because of course he is not the Minister who was responsible for setting the Government's approach. The Minister who was responsible is the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), who has been mysteriously quiet on this issue, which is not at all like him. Of course, he is not here today to answer for the lack of action, but the Minister who is here will know that there is much criticism of the Government's approach.

Retail expert Paul Turner-Mitchell put it perfectly when he said it is

“wrong to call the winning bids Portas pilots when most town teams were left to their own devices to try and turn things round. The problems on the high street are deeply entrenched and they need serious attention, not an off-the-shelf reality TV approach”.

Indeed, we know that only seven of the current round of Portas pilots have spent any money and that in total—across all 27 town teams—only 12% of the budget has been spent. That points to something going seriously wrong with the Government's approach and we are entitled to ask what they will do to address the more “entrenched” issues.

The fact is that the Government have seriously let down the Portas pilots, and although those pilots may make good TV the communities that submitted winning bids have not received the support they were promised. Even more seriously, the Government have let down the rest of the country's high streets and town centres.

More than 400 towns competed to become Portas pilots. At the time the pilots were announced, the Minister without Portfolio said that the other areas could learn from their example, but that seems scant consolation now. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) pointed out, perhaps the Government should consider how to make the money that has been put into the Portas pilots go further if it is not being spent by the areas that have already been successful. My question to the Minister is this: what is being done to help the many towns and areas up and down the country that simply do not have any means at their disposal to help them turn their high street around?

We know that this problem is very serious, with as many as one in three shops closed in some areas and 14.2% of shops closed in the country as a whole. Surely it is time for the Government to focus on real policies to support our high streets, rather than on helping to make reality TV shows.

Perhaps that was what was in the Government's mind last week when they announced changes to use class orders. Members could be forgiven for not noticing that announcement, because this huge change to our policy for the high street was sneaked out in a written ministerial statement, accompanied by regulations that the Government are currently proposing to put through by use of the negative procedure. However, what these changes to use classes could do is to allow virtually any class of commercial premises on our high streets to become any type of shop, fast food restaurant or shop in the euphemistically called “financial and professional services” sector, which, alongside banks and estate agents, includes payday lenders or legal loan sharks and betting shops.

Given that this is an area that the Minister who is here today has responsibility for, I hope he can tell us what was going through his mind when he decided that what struggling high streets need is to make it easier to have more bookies and more payday loan companies sprawl across them. I would like to hear the rationale for that decision today.

Nationally, there are now 20% more payday loan shops and 3.3% more betting shops than there were a year ago, and I do not think there is a huge clamour out there in any of our communities to have any more of those shops; we want fewer of them. They are taking the place of independent retailers, clothes shops and health food shops. There are now more than twice as many betting shops on British high streets as all the cinemas, bingo halls, museums, bowling alleys, arcades, galleries and snooker halls combined. I am sure that the owners of the payday loan companies were jumping for joy when they learned that this year they could accelerate the growth of their businesses without even having to ask permission for a change of use of the buildings they intend to occupy.

That policy is so disastrous that I am not at all sure who the Government think it will help. It certainly will not help independent start-ups, which are hampered—as we know—by the lack of available credit. Somewhat belatedly, the Chancellor seems to have recognised that, in that he has set up a new fund to support small and medium-sized businesses to gain access to credit. However, we also know that the current use class system allows a change of use for a premises in the A class from another type of use to use as a shop. So there are already ample

[*Roberta Blackman-Woods*]

opportunities for empty shops to be used in other ways, or for pop-up shops to be created in empty buildings. The Government should be encouraging that process, rather than the creation of yet more payday loan companies.

Indeed, in that regard it is Labour that is being really localist, because the Minister has effectively, for a period of two years, deregulated use classes on the high street. We want to give local authorities real powers to be able to decide what use classes there are and how they operate on the high street, and to give all our communities a real say in shaping their high street, differentiating it and making it something that local people can be proud of. I want to hear why the Minister has taken the route he has.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Nick Boles): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) on securing this debate. He brings huge authority to all our debates in the House because of his particular life experience and honest common sense. He is a forensic member of the Communities and Local Government Committee and I am already nervous at the prospect of facing him in a Committee sitting relatively soon.

We can start with some common ground—there may not have been a huge amount of it, but there is some—which is that the importance of our high streets is greater than purely economic. They are not simply businesses; they play a role in our communities as the hub of the social and cultural life of our towns. It is, therefore, important for all of us to find ways to help them adjust to change.

We have heard from all hon. Members who participated in the debate a wide range of stories about many situations, including the fact that people can buy three pairs of knickers for a pound in Hoxton market—I shall be taking up that offer soon, though for which purpose we will not describe now—and that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) is cuter than a puppy's nose. I think, Mr Davies, that you will agree that that is a fair description. However, it is interesting that, despite the variety of communities, economic circumstances and geographical locations that have been discussed, a number of common themes have emerged. That is because the changes taking place in our high streets and town centres are not just a reflection of the recent recession, devastating though that has been for some businesses, or of particular Government policies, though those policies over the years have had positive and negative effects, which I will go into, but are a result of some dramatic technological and behavioural changes taking place in society, of which I suspect we have seen only the beginning.

My starting proposition to all hon. Members who have taken part in this debate is that we cannot stand Canute-like and command the waves of technological and social change to turn back. That has been the approach of past Labour Governments in response to industrial changes. That has always been a disaster and has always cost the taxpayer a huge amount of money, and it has never saved anybody their jobs or their livelihoods.

We need to do what my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (John Pugh) suggested and help retailers and high streets, and the local authorities that govern them, to adjust to the shock of the new. The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) mentioned ways that that is happening in her constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) spoke about how his town is exploring interesting approaches to tempt new retailers, with new formats and new ways of serving the customer and giving them an offer that competes with the convenience of ordering stuff from their sofas.

What can the Government control and what can they not control? We need to mention business rates. The business rates system is simple. A single amount is raised that is uprated every year by inflation, but by no more, and the increase in a business rate on one business has to be matched by the decrease elsewhere on another business, because the total contribution to the Exchequer is the same and simply increases by inflation.

I say to the hon. Member for Rochdale that in the five years of the Labour Government's last term, the total take from business rates went up by £4 billion and in the five years of this Government's term it has increased by a bit more than £2 billion, so there has not been the swingeing increase in business rates that he tried to show. In the meantime, we have introduced a doubling of small business rate relief, which is extended until 2014. That is benefiting a huge number of small retailers. Although business rates will need to be taken into account with regard to the changes that we have been talking about—I do not suggest that the business rates system will not need to change over the medium term—there has been no shift under this Government that might explain the problems faced by our high streets.

Parking is a slightly more relevant issue, in terms of changes that have happened. When it is possible for people to buy whatever they need from their sofa, it needs to be easy and comfortable for them to buy something from a shop. I detected from the physical movements of Opposition Members that even they recognised that the last Labour Government's policies on parking charges were entirely counterproductive. In backing a rise in parking charges to try to drive people out of their cars, they succeeded. People got out of their cars and got on to their laptops, on their sofas, and bought stuff that way. I am glad to hear many examples of far-sighted Conservative authorities cutting parking charges introduced by Labour authorities, thereby benefiting north Lincolnshire, in Brigg, Scunthorpe and other places, and tempting people back into town centres. That is a constructive approach.

Ultimately, central Government, and sometimes even local government, cannot pretend to themselves that they have within their gift the power to conjure a renaissance in our high streets. This Government believe that all we can do is try to anticipate what is happening and try to liberate, so that people can try out new ways of doing business, and back innovation. Through anticipation we can try to understand how the technological sea change that is taking place will affect people in future. My hon. Friend the Minister responsible for this area has set up the future high streets forum to explore the longer-term changes—perhaps slightly longer term than those addressed by previous studies of this problem.

It is in an attempt to liberate that we have introduced the temporary changes to the use class orders and will look at further changes to those orders, to make it easier for local authorities to decide that some retail frontages should benefit from greater permitted development rights. We are saying that no national Government, no planning Minister—neither I, nor the hon. Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods), should she ever succeed me in this position—and no other Minister can possibly determine what is the right use for a particular property. I would even go so far as to suggest that some local authorities are too slow to adapt to change. They would love, as in France, to declare that particular premises had to be preserved for ever for a baker or a butcher, but unfortunately this is not realistic. It does not work and the state of the French economy is proof enough of that fact. We have to liberate so that they can experiment.

That brings me to the various ways in which this Government are backing innovation, through the Portas pilots, the town team partners, the high street innovation fund and the high street renewal awards. All these measures are helping to back innovative ideas. It is no surprise to hear, yet again, from Labour Front Benchers that they consider the best way of measuring the success of a policy to be how quickly public money has been spent. We do not consider that a measure of success. We consider it prudent of those Portas pilots that have received grant from this Government but have not yet convinced themselves that they have a worthwhile investment to wait until they have worked out something that they think will make an impact.

It is simply not good enough to persist with the approach of the last Government, spraying money around, hoping that some of it will stick and make a difference. Every pound and penny is the earnings of a member of the British public and constituent, and that money should be spent only when the innovation it is supporting will deliver real change.

We all want our high streets to revive, but we should recognise that, when they do so, that will be in many different forms across the country and will not look anything like anything any of us grew up with. We should not be afraid of that; we should embrace that future and back those who will bring it about.

Armed Forces (Recruitment Age)

4 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Davies, although I wonder whether, in different circumstances, I might hear you use the words “nanny state” after you hear what I have to say.

I am pleased to secure this debate on a topic that most hon. Members will agree is sensitive and important. I have every respect for the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), who has served with distinction in our armed forces and who will respond to the debate, but I am disappointed that the Ministry of Defence could not field a Minister to do so.

That said, I do not consider this a party political question, and Governments of all colours have maintained the status quo. In fact, when I raised the issue during the Armed Forces Public Bill Committee in 2011, the challenges from my own colleagues were even more robust than that from the Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Mr Robathan), who was then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence. The purpose of this debate, however, is to raise the profile of the issue and to ask the Government to consider being the one that makes this much-needed change.

Most people know that the armed services in Britain can recruit from the age of 16 upwards. Most accept it as simply the way things are, but I think many have never really considered what it means to enlist 16 and 17-year-olds and whether the needs of the military really justify that position. It strikes me as amazing that in the 21st century we have 16-year-olds deciding to sign up for the UK’s armed forces—and, in time, for combat roles—when the vast majority of nations across the globe have ended the recruitment of children.

It is correct that recruits do not take part in armed conflict until they are 18, but 16-year-old recruits overwhelmingly enlist into combat roles, so as soon as they turn 18 they can be sent to the front line. Those enlisted as adults are less likely to be in front-line combat positions. I am pleased, however, that following the 2011 Public Bill Committee, the Minister amended the terms of service regulations to allow young people up to the age of 18 to leave the armed services, but he now needs to do more.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): I am most interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Having commanded a company of junior leaders and a battalion of more than 1,000 regular soldiers, I seriously challenge his figures. How can he possibly say that the majority of adults do not go into combat roles and that combat roles rest more with those who are recruited at 16? Nothing in my 25 years as an infantry officer supports that.

Alex Cunningham: I respect the hon. Gentleman and his work in the military. Perhaps he has more knowledge of the matter than I do, but my understanding is that it is less likely for a person who enlists as an adult to be in front-line conflict. I will check my facts and ensure that, if I address the situation again, I am correct.

[*Alex Cunningham*]

The time has come to heed to advice of Child Soldiers International, the Children's Rights Alliance for England, UNICEF, the United Nations, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Select Committee on Defence and raise the lowest age of recruitment from 16 to 18.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I spoke to the hon. Gentleman before this debate. Through my role in the armed forces parliamentary scheme and my contact as a cadet force representative in Parliament for those in Northern Ireland, over the past 20 years I have met some of the most excellent young men and women. They have tremendous qualities and, having been introduced to the Army at 16, are leaders of men today. With great respect, I cannot understand how the hon. Gentleman can advance this point of view when we all have experience of young people who excel at what they do having being inducted at 16.

Alex Cunningham: I have no doubt that there are young people recruited at a very early age who go on to excel, but there are some people who might have chosen a different path had they been given the opportunity. I will address some of that later in my speech.

There is no similar under-age recruitment in other dangerous public service vocations, such as the fire or police services. Young people under 18 are legally restricted from watching violent war films and playing violent video games, yet they can be trained to go to war.

Not many people realise that having 16 as a minimum recruitment age is hardly typical among developed and democratic countries. In fact, the UK is the only member of the European Union and the only permanent member of the Security Council that still recruits at 16. We are one of only 20 countries that continue to recruit at 16, while 37 countries recruit from the age of 17. We receive the same criticism as several countries that I am sure no one here would want to see us lumped in with.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has asked the Government to

“reconsider its active policy of recruitment of children into the armed forces and ensure that it does not occur in a manner which specifically targets ethnic minorities and children of low-income families”.

I am saddened that such language could be used about our country.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman make a clear distinction between those countries that routinely exploit children as young as 10, 11 and 12 and this country, which recruits 16 to 18-year-olds in non-combat roles where they have an opportunity to change their view of what they want to do at 18 and beyond?

Alex Cunningham: There is a tremendous difference between countries that deploy children as young as 12 or 13, or even younger, and what we do in Britain, but we are still recruiting children into our armed services. Although they do have the opportunity to leave the armed services before the age of 18, they do not have to make that specific decision. I will address that later in my speech.

Despite the recommendations from the various groups I have mentioned, no British Government have yet carried out a feasibility study for an all-adult military.

I realise the Minister's representative cannot speak for previous Governments, but is that something on which the Government will keep an open mind? Is it something that will be considered within the MOD?

I certainly do not wish to denigrate the efforts of our troops and those who serve at the age of 16 and 17. They serve our country proudly and should be congratulated, like all armed service recruits, for their bravery and commitment, but these are decisions that should be made on the basis of as much information as possible and with full adult consent—and I do not mean the signature of a parent or guardian, but young people making their own decision when they reach adulthood.

Patrick Mercer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Cunningham: No, I will not.

In most other walks of life, we would not expect 16-year-olds to make commitments that could potentially endanger their life and safety, and I hope hon. Members agree that the armed services should not be any different, although I again acknowledge the change that means recruits now thankfully have the right of discharge up to their 18th birthday. I also hope that Ministers will agree that someone at that young age is not equipped to take such a serious decision that could bind them to fighting on the front line, in some cases many thousands of miles from home.

That commitment to duty is often made when the recruit is 16 years old, with no obligation proactively to reconfirm their enlistment once adulthood is reached and they can be deployed. We ask an awful lot of our recruits. Teenagers are significantly less mature emotionally, psychologically and socially, and young people from deprived backgrounds, who form the majority of under-age recruits, are particularly vulnerable. It can be no coincidence that recruits who sign up as minors suffer higher rates of alcoholism, self-harm and suicide than those who enlist as adults.

Aside from the moral rights and wrongs of tying children to service at a later date, there is a compelling fiscal case for an all-adult military. Based on data from the MOD compiled by ForcesWatch, the cost of recruiting and successfully training those aged 16 to 17-and-a-half is between 75% and 95% higher than for adults. The longer period of initial training, at 23 weeks or 50 weeks, is enormous compared with the 14 weeks for adults.

According to the latest report of Child Soldiers International, “One Step Forward,” the annual saving of increasing the armed services recruitment age could be up to £94 million, which is enough to fund more than 24,000 civilian apprenticeships. I doubt the MOD wants to surrender even more of its budget, so that cash could instead be used elsewhere to offset the cuts that will see it reduce its regular fighting force from 102,000 to 82,000 by 2017.

I do not want to make my case on the basis of cost savings, but I hope that those who are more motivated by fiscal concerns will see the scope for assisting with the MOD's commitment to cutting its costs. If the Minister's representative is not convinced by my argument, or interested in the substantial savings, he may be motivated to make changes because of their political appeal. In March 2013, ICM asked respondents what they thought the minimum age should be to join the

forces. Some 70% of those who expressed an opinion said it should be 18, so there may well be votes for him and his colleagues in a change.

There are also issues of long-term social mobility and employability to consider. I have no doubt the Minister's representative will rehearse the well-worn argument that the Department uses of giving employment and training opportunities to young people who may otherwise be unemployed. The fact is, however, that most 16-year-olds are not in the market for work. In 2009-10, 94% of 16-year-olds stayed on in education. Others may argue that the armed forces provide for young people who come from difficult home circumstances, from a background of suffering abuse or simply because they have been thrown out on the streets. As I argued during the Armed Forces Bill Committee nearly three years ago, the armed forces must not be seen as some kind of escape route from abuse or unemployment. As a nation, we need to develop the support and services young people need, rather than holding up the armed forces as an easy option so early in life.

While I am pleased that the Army continues to set targets for functional skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy, the case can be made that young recruits would be much better served by the state education system in developing those skills. A higher minimum recruitment age would mean that young people need not choose between a higher standard of post-16 education and armed service.

Our country would be better served by an all-adult military. Is it right that many soldiers serving in Afghanistan find themselves there due to a decision they took when they were still children? It is a decision that many would have reversed in adult life, had they been given the chance. We should listen to what the United Nations and the Joint Committee on Human Rights are saying, and join with the overwhelming majority of nations worldwide, which have stopped recruiting children—that is what they are: children—and have raised the age to 18 and upwards. We could do it because it would save the Government money or because it would be popular, according to the polls, but I hope we do it because it is the right thing to do and so that we can leave the military to adults.

4.12 pm

The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury (Mark Lancaster): It is a pleasure to be able to respond to this debate, and I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) on securing it. I acknowledge his genuine concern about the recruitment age for armed forces personnel and, in particular, the recruitment of those under the age of 18. I fondly recall serving with him on the Armed Forces Bill Committee a couple of years ago and to his credit he has been consistent in his view; he raised this issue then.

Let me begin, however, by reminding the House that there is no compulsory recruitment into the armed forces. All those under the age of 18 are volunteers and the Ministry of Defence takes pride in the fact that our armed forces provide challenging and constructive education, training and employment opportunities for young people while in service, as well as after they leave.

The armed forces remain the UK's largest apprenticeship provider, equipping young people with valuable and transferable skills for life.

I declare an interest, because I applied to join the Army before the age of 18. I went through a regular commissions board, and I made an informed choice to join the Army when I was still a minor. Although I did not attend Sandhurst until shortly after my 18th birthday—albeit a short course for the type of commission I was undertaking—I recall my time in the regular Army while I was a teenager with great pride and a sense of satisfaction. That may in part be due to my posting to Hong Kong, but that is another matter.

I thought it would be useful for the House if I set out our recruitment policy. The minimum age for entry into the UK armed forces reflects the normal minimum school leaving age of 16, and although changes under the Education and Skills Act 2008 are being progressively introduced between 2013 and 2015, the minimum statutory school leaving age will remain at 16. Participation in education or structured training will be mandatory until 18. In the services, all recruits who enlist as minors and do not hold full level 3 qualifications are enrolled on an apprenticeship scheme unless their trade training attracts higher level qualifications. All undertake structured professional education as part of their initial military training and therefore automatically fulfil their duty to participate under the new regulations. No change in policy is required.

Many individuals who join under the age of 18 are not academically high achievers and the duty of care and the training that the armed forces provides enhances their self-esteem and prospects for their whole working life, within or without the services.

Alex Cunningham: I think I omitted this part of my speech, but I wonder whether the actual educational outputs for young soldiers are poor. What will the Government do to drive up the amount of education, so that they have transferable skills when they leave the armed forces? We find that so many of them do not have those skills.

Mark Lancaster: I am afraid I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. In my experience as a Royal Engineer, I commanded some young soldiers. The standard of the training in the secondary skills they obtain, be it in bricklaying, plumbing or as an electrician, was second to none. I experienced that first hand, so I do not agree with his point.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene. While I absolutely applaud many of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), not least the financial argument, which I partially buy, does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that it is difficult to recognise the element of despair that the hon. Gentleman brings into his arguments? It is as though these individuals have no choice and their backgrounds are so dreadful that it is either prison or the street. It is as though the Army is a bad alternative to those things. My experience commanding junior soldiers and regular adults was just the opposite. Juniors in particular were treated with kid gloves and not a single soldier in the infantry ever went on operations if they did not want to.

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which I agree with. I fully respect the position of the hon. Member for Stockton North, but, with the greatest respect to him, I am not sure that his concerns are borne out by our experiences of service within the armed forces. I will return shortly to the point, not least the cost-benefit aspect.

We fully recognise the special duty of care that we owe to under-18s, and commanding officers have had that made clear to them. Our recruiting policy is absolutely clear. No-one under the age of 18 can join the armed forces without formal parental consent, which is checked twice during the application process. In addition, parents and guardians are positively encouraged to engage with the recruiting staff during the process. Once accepted into service, under-18s have the right to automatic discharge as of right at any time until their 18th birthday, as the hon. Member for Stockton North said. All new recruits who are under the age of 18 and have completed 28 days' service have a right to discharge within their first three to six months of service if they decide that the armed forces is not a career for them. All service personnel under the age of 18 have the right to leave the armed forces before their 18th birthday, following an appropriate cooling-off period. It is not in the interests of either the individual or the services to force them to stay where they are not happy.

MOD policy is not to deploy personnel under the age of 18 on operations. Service personnel under the age of 18 are not deployed on any operation outside the UK, except where the operation does not involve them becoming engaged in or exposed to hostilities. I am aware of instances where minors have inadvertently entered operations, but on those occasions we have taken immediate action to correct any breach of policy as soon as it has been discovered.

The total number of armed forces personnel under the age of 18 was 3,130 in 2011-12. The majority of them were in training. That figure breaks down to 90 in the Navy, 2,930 in the Army and 110 in the Royal Air Force. There is evidence to suggest that those joining at a younger age remain in service for longer and that under-18s in the Army achieve higher performance based on their earlier promotion. For example, when we looked at the 2001 intake of junior entrants, we found that the number still serving after six years was 44%, compared with only 33% of those who joined when they were over the age of 18. For the same intake, 23% of junior entrants reached the rank of lance-corporal or corporal, compared with 16% of the standard entry cohort. Figures for other cohorts reinforce that picture. Evidence clearly shows that junior entrants are likely to serve longer and to achieve higher rank than some senior entrants, so the additional costs incurred in their training reap considerable benefits for the service, the individual and society as a whole. As the hon. Gentleman said, that additional cost is recouped because, generally, the individual remains in service for longer: an additional three years for the infantry, four years for Royal Engineers, Royal Signals and Army Air Corps, and 10 years for the Intelligence Corps and the Corps of Army Music.

I am sure that some Members are aware that the services are among the largest training providers in the UK, with excellent completion and achievement rates. Armed forces personnel are offered genuine progression routes, which allow them to develop, gain qualifications

and play a fuller part in society, whether in the armed forces or in the civilian world. In the naval service and the Royal Air Force, initial military training is conducted on single sites and, because of the smaller scale, no distinction need be made in the training provided to those under age 18. In the Army, phase 1 training for under-18s, the basic military training course, is completed at the Army foundation college, where the facilities have been specifically designed for this age group. The training courses last either 23 or 49 weeks, both of which are longer than the basic over-18s course, dependent on the length of subsequent specialist training. Since junior entrants are likely to serve longer and achieve higher rank than some senior entrants, as discussed, the additional costs incurred can reap long-term benefits.

Our duty-of-care policy for under-18 entrants is laid down in a defence instruction and covers the duty-of-care obligations of commanding officers, together with welfare, mentoring and discharge regulations. This is a comprehensive document, setting out for the chain of command the many aspects of a commanding officer's responsibility for addressing the particular issues that can affect those under the age of 18. It makes clear that the care and welfare of under-18s require particular attention by the chain of command. It refers to the supervisory care directive, through which commanders are to set out for their environment, based on risk assessments, the processes that are to apply in caring for the particular vulnerability of young recruits. Commanders are to ensure that they comply with the wider legislation, which prohibits under-18s from purchasing or consuming alcohol, from gambling or from purchasing cigarettes and tobacco. Commanders are to ensure that they maintain appropriate contact with parents and guardians, and not only when there is the possibility that the recruit wishes to leave the service. The policy is regularly reviewed, to ensure in particular that it keeps pace with changes in legislation as they affect young people.

All recruits enlisted as minors who do not hold full level 3 qualifications are enrolled on an apprenticeship scheme, unless their trade training attracts higher-level qualifications. The time taken to complete the apprenticeship varies according to the programme being followed, but completion rates are high. There are two levels of apprenticeship: intermediate, which is equivalent to GCSEs at grades A to C; or advanced, which is equivalent to A-level. Additionally, while in service, all armed forces personnel, subject to meeting certain qualifying criteria, can claim financial support for education under the standard learning credit scheme and the enhanced learning credit scheme.

Inevitably, some recruits leave the armed forces after a relatively short period. All service leavers, regardless of their length of service, can attend housing and financial management briefings to assist their transition to civilian life. In addition, those with less than four years' service are entitled to advice on the type of state and voluntary and community sector assistance available to them post-discharge. I am aware of the criticism made of the support available to armed forces personnel who decide to leave. In recognition that we can do more for early service leavers, an enhanced package of resettlement for those having served less than four years has been trialled. Those trials have recently ended and the results are being evaluated. The evaluation will help to decide what resettlement provision for early service

leavers should be made available. Furthermore, all service leavers, regardless of how long they have served, are entitled to lifetime job-finding support through either the Officers' Association or the Regular Forces Employment Association.

In conclusion, it is important to state that under-18s who choose to join the armed forces are an important and valuable cohort among those starting their military career. We invest strongly in them and they repay that investment with longer service and high achievement. The duty of care for that cohort is paramount, and we are regularly inspected by Ofsted. Their training and education are clearly first class, and our policies on under-18s in service are robust and comply with national and international law. We remain fully committed to meeting our obligations under the UN convention on the rights of the child optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The armed forces provide prestigious and respected career opportunities for young men and women who may not have achieved the same in civilian life. We shall not deny them that opportunity.

Marine Conservation Zones

4.26 pm

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Davies. I requested this debate on marine conservation zones so that, in the short time available, other Members may also intervene; one or two have indicated that they would like to do so. My remarks are directed at the consultation on marine conservation zones and in particular at how the proposals affect Hythe bay in my constituency.

Everyone has an interest in a sustainable fishing industry, which can support many generations for decades to come, fishermen most of all, because they require a sustainable industry for their families and themselves to work in. That applies in particular to fishermen who work in areas such as Hythe bay, which is operated by the inshore fishing fleet of boats of less than 10 metres long. They are largely family businesses, and in Hythe bay we have a number of them along the 20 miles or so of the shore, in Dungeness, Hythe and Folkestone. Not only do they employ people directly in the fishing industry—catching in the boats and at sea—but onshore businesses rely on their work as well.

The fishing businesses sell directly to restaurants and food businesses in Kent and throughout the country and to the public. Such businesses include Griggs of Hythe, which was listed among Rick Stein's food heroes, or M. & M. Richardson of Dungeness, which was on the 2009 national short list for the BBC good food awards for food retailer of the year. Fish landed in Folkestone and sold through Folkestone Trawlers supply many restaurants, in particular Mark Sargeant's new restaurant in Folkestone, which is popular, and selling locally caught fish is a significant part of what it offers.

Hythe bay has been fished for thousands of years, probably for as long as men have been at sea in boats. Hythe and New Romney, both cinque port towns, have been represented continuously in Parliament since the first Parliament was called in the 13th century. Fishing is not only an industry for Hythe bay, but an important part of its culture and heritage, which is why I and others throughout the constituency who do not work directly in the fishing industry take the issue incredibly seriously and are as one in support of the fishermen in their concerns.

Those concerns have been brought about by the proposals published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the consultation on the marine conservation zones and where they are to be established around the country. A particular concern is that the proposed Hythe bay marine conservation zone is to be set at a "recover", rather than a "maintain" level. The fishermen do not have any objection to strong environmental standards to maintain the important habitat in the bay, but they think that that is being done successfully already. They would be happy with a marine conservation zone set at a level of "maintain", but not "recover", which suggests that there is a problem at the moment, and would prevent direct commercial fishing in that area. That applies not only to commercial fishing, but to fishing by many of the individuals who sea fish as a pastime, which is popular in Hythe bay and a source of considerable inbound tourism to the area.

[Damian Collins]

The main purpose of the marine conservative zone, as set out as part of the consultation, is to preserve the spoonworm, which lives in the sand in Hythe bay. It is very small and many of those who have fished in those waters all their lives have never seen one, but this is the habitat that Natural England is seeking to protect and was the object of its concern in the consultation on marine conservative zones. However, recent surveys commissioned by the Government show that there has been a near 100% increase in the local spoonworm population over the past decade, and that numbers in sand samples have increased from 800 per square metre to 1,400 per square metre. That suggests a conservation success story in Hythe bay: the fishermen understand that the delicate balance of creatures living in the waters is important to the fish and shellfish they catch, and it is being properly maintained.

Folkestone Trawlers showed me the equipment that the fishermen use to fish in Hythe bay, which is not heavy dredging trawlers and nets. The relatively small boats use light nets that skim across the surface. They have no interest in churning up the sea bed. The association pointed out that movement of the sea bed is perfectly natural. This area of water in the English channel was heavily defended during the first and second world wars and it is not unusual, particularly during storms at sea, for ordinance or even old mines from those wars to come up to the surface undetected because of the natural movement of the sea bed. There seems to be little evidence at the moment that disturbance of the spoonworm, which Natural England is seeking to protect, should give rise to concern.

A second concern that is incredibly important to the geography of Hythe bay, which is the coast that guards Romney marshes, is that a large area of the marshes is below sea level. They are important for sea and coastal defences. Some are maintained by major sea walls, such as that at Dungeness, but many are maintained by management of the high water mark shore, which is largely shingle. The shingle banks are moved and replenished as part of the natural work of sea defence that the Environment Agency conducts throughout the year.

It is proposed that the landward boundary of the marine conservation zone being set at the high water mark would be within the area that needs to be maintained, and is considered to be part of the one-in-200-years risk that is maintained along that part of the coast. It could mean that special licences are required for that basic work of rebuilding the shingle sea defences along that part of the coast, or even that that work could be prohibited. If so, new flood defences would be required at perhaps much greater cost to the Environment Agency or the Government or, worse, homes that are currently protected by the work may be in jeopardy. Clearly, that would not be acceptable to residents following the consultation on the marine conservative zones.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I know nothing about my hon. Friend's constituency, the case for the spoonworm, or the shingle banks, but having taken marine conservative legislation through Parliament as the Liberal Democrat spokesman, I know that it was carefully put together. He is absolutely right that it is not obligatory to consult industries such as the fishing industry or to involve it

in the management plans for the marine conservation zones. Does he agree that the Government must ensure that those industries are fully involved in the negotiation of the management plan which then underpins the marine conservation zones that he is eager to defend, as I am?

Damian Collins: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and goes to the heart of the matter. Fishermen are not against marine conservation. Their livelihood depends on its being managed successfully, but they are worried about the specific proposals for Hythe bay and their impact, and do not believe that that level of intervention is justified. They have been concerned about the consultation process and whether the industry's views have been listened to. I was shown an e-mail exchange by the Kent Wildlife Trust, which has supported marine conservation zones as constituted. It included a telling e-mail from a former fisheries liaison officer, who said of the consultation:

"The Hythe Bay"

marine conservation zone

"was originally proposed by a staff member of the Kent Wildlife Trust...during a Regional Stakeholder Group...meeting in London. The proposal received little support from other stakeholders and was totally opposed by all fishing industry representatives (this area being of vital importance to all the fishing fleets ranging geographically from Hastings to Ramsgate)."

He continued:

"At no stage during the stakeholder-involved Balanced Seas"

marine conservation zone

"process was there support for the whole proposed Hythe Bay"

marine conservation zone

"to be 'recover' as opposed to 'maintain'".

It is equally not the case that, during the consultation process, the fishermen opposed establishing any areas of protection. The local fishermen had proposed a zone between Dover and Folkestone that is not heavily fished, which they would be happy to set aside as a conservation zone. However, that recommendation was rejected as part of the consultation process and, instead, they were asked to accept restrictions in a zone that they were seeking particularly to defend and protect, and on which their livelihoods depend.

Other information from the Kent Wildlife Trust, which is part of its recommendation on Hythe bay, is telling about the conservation of the area and the success story there. It says:

"Hythe Bay is fortunate in having been the subject of a"

long-term

"series of surveys by the Environment Agency, with samples from the 20 point stations being processed by Heriot-Watt University Institute"

of Offshore Engineering. The surveys

"found an unusually rich assemblage of species to be present in the Bay".

To my mind, that suggests a great success story of management of that water.

I believe we must have a very robust scientific case even to think about changing the status of that water because the livelihood of an entire fishing industry—the inshore fishing fleet in Hythe bay—depends on that consultation and what happens. What must not be allowed to happen is that people's livelihood is jeopardised on someone's hunch that some intervention is possible,

based on surveys that were conducted not in Hythe bay, but elsewhere in United Kingdom waters, and not based on a robust study of the problem in those waters. People want a robust, clear scientific argument to be the basis of any decision, and unless that scientific argument can be made, the status of the conservation zone in Hythe bay should be set at “maintain” rather than “recover”.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with interest. He says that Hythe bay is already a well-preserved marine environment, but have the Government’s own statutory nature conservation bodies not advised that 58 of the 127 originally proposed zones were vulnerable to immediate damage and that Hythe bay was one if action was not taken?

Damian Collins: I understand the hon. Lady’s point, but I do not believe that there is any evidence to support it. The evidence from the Government’s own survey suggests that the spoonworms, which they are seeking to protect, are recovering strongly. The Kent Wildlife Trust’s submissions made it clear that it was not party to the latest survey information.

We must not gamble on the matter. If a case could be made to show that the waters in the area are causing grave concern, and that there is a real conservation risk that would impact in the near term on the biodiversity of the waters in Hythe bay, in turn on the local fish and shellfish populations, and then on local fishermen’s livelihoods, the debate would be viewed in a different way. Families are worried that the waters on which they depend will become unavailable and drive them out of business altogether, or drive them to seek new waters elsewhere along the channel coast, moving to already congested fishing areas around Rye and down the coast. They are worried that such a decision will have to be taken without a clear and robust scientific case behind it. That case does not seem to exist.

Fishermen are conscious of the fact that they fish in a special area of water and that it is of great interest because of its rich biodiversity. They are happy for it to continue to be monitored and studied, but they believe that the level should be set at “maintain” and not “recover” because the case is simply not there for a recovery plan to be put in place, and if it was, it could have devastating consequences for businesses and the fishing heritage of the coast.

I have had meetings as part of my discussions with the fishing industry with Fisherman’s Beach in Hythe, Ken Thomas and councillor Tony Hills of Lydd, who represent the fishermen from Hythe, Lydd and Dungeness, and with Folkestone Trawlers to get the views of fishermen in Folkestone, who also fish in Hythe bay. A petition has been raised, which was signed quickly by more than 1,000 residents. I presented it to Downing street with Councillor David Monk, who is the leader of Shepway district council, the local authority.

As part of our submission to the Government—I have also made a formal submission as part of the consultation on marine conservation zones—we have requested that serious consideration be given to the argument for the zone being set at “maintain” rather than “recover”. We have also asked whether the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who has responsibility for fisheries, could meet

the fishermen, see the waters that they fish and the type of equipment that they use, in order to understand the local case that they are making. They tried, as part of the initial consultation, to make the case—they felt that it was not listened to—about other waters that may be more suitable, why the special nature of Hythe bay needs to be protected and maintained, and that we should not lose the important inshore fishing fleet, which has been part of the culture, heritage and the economy of the south-east Kent coast for many centuries.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con) *rose*—

Philip Davies (in the Chair): I remind colleagues that permission should be sought from the Member who secures the debate and from the Minister. The Minister has indicated that he is happy for other people to speak briefly, if that will help.

4.41 pm

Dr Coffey: Thank you, Mr Davies. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I am thankful to my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) and my hon. Friend the Minister for allowing extra contributions.

On marine conservation zones, people generally agree that it is important to protect our seas. My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe was discussing the importance of his fishing community. My own fishing community has been part of aspects of the Greenpeace and the Fish Fight campaign about protecting diversity. However, in my constituency, there has been local uproar in Aldeburgh, Orford and surrounding areas about the potential designation of the Alde and Ore estuary. That, again, as my hon. Friend referred to, is based on flawed evidence.

There are different examples—the Alde and Ore has three or four characteristics, one of which relates to smelt. However, there has only been one sighting of smelt in eight surveys over five years, and partly that is because it is not a freshwater river. Smelt is normally found in those areas, and although local fishermen have seen it once, that was deemed to be because it was chasing its food stock. The issue of being a rocky habitat beggars belief locally. It is believed that the rocky habitat now deemed so special was ballast tossed off barges about 40 years ago—they are, literally, big circular discs. There is astonishment that that can now be treated as something special on which to curtail activity. In terms of muddy gravels, no evidence has been supplied. More work is going on in that area.

With all that is happening, the Marine Management Organisation is getting in on the act and causing quite a lot of concern for local activities—whether it is painting the lines for racing, or repairing a patch on the slipway. We were promised by DEFRA—and the Department has delivered—that some deregulation would be undertaken by the MMO, but not if the area is in a designated MCZ. Some small activities are being hampered or cost a lot of money to fulfil. I also refer to the larger one in the Stour and Orwell estuaries.

There is no doubt that my constituency—about 40% is designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty—has almost any designation that we can think of. There are Ramsar sites and special protection areas, and all those

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

different things. The port of Felixstowe has been able to work alongside precious habitat nearby to ensure that that is preserved. At the same time, while trying to continue as a commercial port, the marine conservation zone suggested for the area throws blanket coverage over the entire estuary, which is causing great consternation among the Harwich Haven Authority and the port about future activity. At the moment, certain areas where there is special designation are protected, and that should be respected, but I am very concerned that some unintended consequences of what is notably a good policy—trying to restore and conserve parts of our seas—may cause big problems for my constituents and their businesses in future.

4.44 pm

Mr Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) on securing the debate and on the careful way that he presented the case for his constituency.

I want to make three brief points. First, fishermen are not the only stakeholders in this. Although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) that fishermen should be more involved in the process, their views are not the only ones that the Government have to take into consideration.

Secondly, marine conservation zones work, and that is proved by the marine protection areas that have been extremely successful on the west coast of north America. There is also some evidence of the success of marine conservation zones around Arran and the Isle of Man in Europe.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Sanders: I will, although I do not have much more to say.

Mr Bradshaw: Is the hon. Gentleman also aware of research commissioned by the recreational anglers? It shows that fishing interests are not always allied. Sometimes the commercial fishing sector can be in conflict with the recreational sector, and the recreational sector, in many parts of the country, brings more income in to those local communities.

Mr Sanders: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. There are also divers and other people using the seas who contribute financially to the economies of the local areas concerned.

My third and final point—I hope that the Minister will refer to this—is the fact that we have to judge marine conservation zones as a whole, not individually. The network is crucial to their success. By altering one, we perhaps diminish the potential success of the concept as a whole.

4.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) on securing the debate. I should

immediately apologise for the absence of the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who cannot be here this afternoon. In some recompense for his absence, I make it immediately plain to the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe that the Minister has offered to come and meet him, and to talk to his constituents to understand the factors in his constituency better. I hope that that goes some way towards entering into the necessary dialogue. Whether I am at liberty to extend that invitation on the Minister's behalf to Suffolk Coastal as well, I am not sure, but knowing my hon. Friend, I am sure that he would have no problem entering discussions with the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey).

Perhaps it will be sensible if I outline the purpose of marine conservation zones, as we see it. The UK has a large marine area, which is rich in marine life and natural resource. Our seas are not just places of important biological diversity; they provide us with a variety of goods and services that are important for our social, economic and environmental well-being.

The Government are committed—in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders)—to contributing to the development of an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas. However, we have been clear that we want successful, well-managed sites, created in the right places in the right way, and not only lines on maps. We have to get this right so that our seas are sustainable, productive and healthy, and to ensure that the right balance is struck between conservation and important industries.

MCZs are a new form of marine protected area provided for under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The new MCZs are part of a wider agenda for protecting the important habitats and species in our seas. They will complement other marine protected areas—special protection areas, special areas of conservation, sites of special scientific interest and Ramsar sites—to contribute to a coherent network in our seas. About 24% of English inshore waters, out to 12 nautical miles, and more than 8% of the UK sea area are already established as marine protected areas to protect important habitats and species. In the UK, there are already 107 special areas of conservation, 107 special protection areas for birds with marine components, and 377 coastal SSSIs.

That is the overall framework in which we are working. The hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe is concerned, quite properly, on behalf of his constituents, about the balance that we must strike in his area between the interests of his constituents and their economic future, and the need for effective ecological support. I understand that. I am also well aware of the concerns that are being expressed in relation to the proposed site at Hythe bay and the “recover” conservation objective. An official from my Department attended a local meeting during the consultation to hear those concerns. Officials are currently reviewing the responses to the consultation, including considering evidence provided, and we will respond to the consultation in the summer.

Let me go back to the overall picture. The four regional stakeholder projects did some very good work to provide an initial list of proposals. We do not think it appropriate to designate all 127 site recommendations straight away, because of weaknesses in the evidence

base for many of the sites noted by the DEFRA-appointed science advisory panel in its review of the recommendations. However, we have since committed additional resources to plugging those gaps and, in the consultation, we proposed pressing ahead with the first 31 sites that we considered suitable for designation. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury will announce the timetable for future designations of MCZs later this year.

We are aware of the concerns that some people have raised about evidence standards. Adequate evidence is vital. Without it, it is impossible to define the management measures necessary and take effective conservation action. We want to see that happen quickly after designation. There will be no prospect of securing agreement from other member states to regulate the activities of their fishermen where this is required in waters beyond our 6-mile limits. We would also lack a proper justification for the regulatory burden placed on business or the enforcement and monitoring costs that fall on the taxpayer. That is why the evidence is essential.

The impact assessment that accompanied the consultation gave an indication of the costs and benefits of possible management measures for all the sites and provided a good indication of what might be expected. The management measures noted in the impact assessment were provided for illustrative purposes and to allow for the calculation of a range of potential cost implications for each site. Consultees were invited to comment on those in responding to the consultation and provide additional information to facilitate a better understanding of the possible implications of site designation and to help to refine associated costs. Management measures were not being consulted on at that stage. When an MCZ is designated, that does not automatically mean that economic or recreational activities on that site will be restricted. Restrictions on an activity will depend on the sensitivity of the species and habitats for which a site is designated to the activities taking place in that area and on the conservation objectives for those features.

Andrew George: I know that my hon. Friend cannot make up policy on the hoof in the absence of his hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), but the Act says that the Government are required to consult on the designation, although it does not say that the Government or the MMO is required to consult on the management plan. Would the Minister be prepared to say that he will ensure that the Department makes sure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to be consulted on the management plan as it applies within the new MCZs?

Mr Heath: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I would not make up policy on the hoof even if my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury was here, because that is not the way we do things in our Department. That said, the actual management measures will be drawn up separately and put in place by the relevant public authorities after designation and will be open for consultation, as appropriate, before they are implemented. I can say to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) that that is exactly what will happen.

This is particularly relevant to the point raised by the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe, where there is a dispute about the evidence. I accept that the evidence at the moment is generic across the Hythe bay area.

That is why we need more information about what is happening. Within the site, a rich sea pen and burrowing megafauna community is present in the soft sediment, which is presumed to be continuous across Hythe bay, based on data from sample points taken annually over a 10-year period. That is why the site is considered overall to be a biodiversity hot spot within the balanced seas area, but we need more information on exactly what is happening within that site.

Damian Collins: On that point, does the Minister agree that it would be wrong to change the designation of the area unless there was very clear scientific evidence as to why that change needed to be made?

Mr Heath: The precautionary principle suggests that we should do the reverse—that we should up the level of designation until such time as we can be confident that we will not be damaging the very ecological factors that give rise to the designation in the process—so that is the approach that we take, but it is sensitive to the information that we receive from the hon. Gentleman's local fishermen, among others, who will have a deep interest in and knowledge of the seas with which they are familiar. We need to look at that, along with all the scientific evidence, and then make a subsequent assessment of how to manage the site. That will be based, as I said, on the real factors. What is there? What is its value? What would be the potential damage from unregulated activity on that site? That would apply to any site.

The hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal was a little dismissive of ballast thrown overboard being a valuable habitat. I have to tell her that it can be an extremely valuable habitat if it is colonised by the right species and has therefore formed an ecosystem that is worthy of preservation. The derivation of the rocky material on the sea bed is not the issue. The issue is what is then growing on that material and how it relates to the surrounding environment.

I am not prejudging the hon. Lady's case. I know nothing about the sites off Suffolk Coastal and I have not been briefed to know something, because I was not aware that she was coming this afternoon, but I promise her that the same considerations will apply to her site as will apply to that of the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe in ensuring that we have the right information on which to base a reasoned argument. That really is the answer, and I am sure that it is what my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury will say when he goes to Hythe to discuss these issues. Let us look at the evidence, see what the appropriate designation is and work with those who have a specific interest in those waters—of course that includes the fishing community—to arrive at something that will work for everyone concerned. There is a very heavy responsibility on Government to get this right.

I have no responsibility directly for fishing and maritime policy at the moment, but I was involved at the very start of this process, back in the 1980s, when I was arguing on behalf of the World Wide Fund for Nature for conservation of our seas. At that time it was not even being thought of, but we are now at a highly developed stage in the process, where we have something that is realistic and holistic around our island nation, and it is really important that we get it right.

[Mr Heath]

To recap, the public consultation was launched on 13 December 2012 and closed on 31 March 2013. It gave stakeholders the opportunity to comment and provide more evidence on the proposed sites before final decisions are made. DEFRA received more than 40,000 responses to the public consultation. The evidence received from the public consultation, along with other evidence collected since the statutory nature conservation bodies submitted their advice in July 2012, is being evaluated and will be taken into consideration before Ministers make their final decisions on which sites to designate in the first tranche.

The Government remain committed to the development, as I said, of an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas. Now that the public consultation has

closed, we aim to publish our response in the summer before making final decisions on which sites to designate in the first tranche this year. These zones are not the sum of our ambition: we expect to be taking forward more sites in the next phase. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury will announce the timetable for future designations of MCZs later this year.

The area of Hythe is a vital one. We want to get this right. I can assure the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe that we will make strenuous efforts to listen to what his constituents have to say and to the views of others with specialist knowledge in this area, and I hope that we will reach the right decision.

Question put and agreed to.

4.59 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 21 May 2013

TREASURY

Visual Effects Industry

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): As announced at Budget 2013, the Government are today launching a consultation on options to provide further support for the visual effects industry through the tax system.

The UK has historically been one of the global centres for visual effects production, and is currently home to a number of world-renowned and award-winning visual effects studios making a significant contribution to British culture.

The visual effects sector makes a valuable economic and cultural contribution to the UK, supporting the performance of the wider digital and creative content sectors. This includes the film, animation, high-end television and film industries, which the Government aim to support through their targeted creative sector tax reliefs. The Government are therefore keen to explore the need for Government measures to address any reported decline within the UK visual effects industry.

The consultation published today invites views from individuals, companies, and representative and professional bodies on options to provide further support for the visual effects industry through the film tax relief as well as alternative spend and tax options to support the sector. Copies of the consultation document have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

This initial stage of consultation closes on 2 July 2013. The Government will take all responses into account.

HM Revenue and Customs Brief

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Sajid Javid): On 25 March HMRC published HM Revenue and Customs brief 04/13, which clarified the tax position of some regular payments to fund investors made by persons other than the fund itself. The brief stated that these payments, which are usually characterised by industry as rebates of the annual management charge, are taxable and should be subject to withholding tax and then further taxed as necessary at the investor's marginal rate.

It has been brought to the Government's attention that offshore investors also frequently receive such "rebates". Given the legal position, this means that tax should now also be withheld on rebates paid to offshore investors.

However, unlike distributions to domestic investors, offshore investors are not normally subject to withholding tax on either interest or equity distributions. The "rebates" paid to investors are economically similar to additional

distributions from the fund. Collecting withholding tax for offshore investors may therefore create distortions in how different forms of distribution from the fund are treated for tax purposes.

This difference could have a profoundly negative impact on the international competitiveness of the UK funds industry. Imposing a requirement to withhold tax would therefore be at odds with the Government's investment management strategy, published at Budget 2013. The Government are determined to improve the UK's competitive position as a centre for investment management.

The Government have therefore decided to ensure that this unintended consequence of the law as clarified by revenue brief 4/13 does not create inconsistencies in the tax system or impact on UK competitiveness.

The Government will imminently publish two short statutory instruments amending the Authorised Investment Funds (Tax) Regulations 2006 and also The Offshore Funds (Tax) Regulations 2009. These will remove the duty to withhold tax from "rebates" of the annual management charge in most cases where these payments are made to investors who are not UK resident for tax purposes.

Following a four-week consultation period, the Government expect to lay the regulations, setting out the detailed rules, subject to the usual parliamentary process.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Regional Growth Fund

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): Round 4 of the Regional Growth Fund closed in March and we received 309 bids, competing for a share of £350 million. The region which submitted the most bids was the North West, but there was a strong regional spread of applications across England.

Round 4 bids are now being appraised and will be reviewed by the independent advisory panel, chaired by my noble Friend Lord Heseltine. The panel will make recommendations to the ministerial group led by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and we hope that we will be able to announce selected bidders in the summer.

Rounds 1, 2 and 3

I would also like to take the opportunity to update the House on progress of the previous RGF rounds.

In total £1,920.9 million of RGF cash is available to businesses through RGF projects and programmes and over £800 million of private sector cash has already been invested thanks to this commitment of support. This will stimulate local economies and provide much needed growth and jobs. A summary of money available in each English region is at annex A.

The pace of RGF has significantly increased and we have enabled the private sector to invest its own money into projects in England, creating and protecting jobs and supporting the Government's industrial strategy to rebalance the economy.

We remain committed to ensuring money continues to be made available quickly, and companies can access RGF awards as soon as they agree a final offer with us. A total of 98% of projects and programmes from rounds 1 and 2 have agreed final offers and for round 3, 92% of awards have been finalised.

Withdrawn bids

I am publishing the most recent list of bidders who have withdrawn at annex B; updated from my written ministerial statement of 11 February 2013, *Official Report*, column 33WS. As stated previously, the withdrawal of a small proportion of bids is to be expected given the robustness of the contracting process.

Money from withdrawals is recycled into the RGF. Ministers can use this flexibly to encourage growth through specific economic opportunities or to respond to economic challenges in vulnerable parts of the country. In exceptional circumstances this will take place outside the normal bidding process, although detailed due diligence requirements will still need to be met.

Annex A – Finalised Awards by Region from Rounds 1,2 & 3

Region	Award Amount in millions (Finalised)
North West	£309.3
North East	£235.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	£218.7
West Midlands	£255.7
East Midlands	£112.5
East of England	£41.1
South East	£119.6
South West	£180.1

This is the money currently available in each region for business to draw down as agreements have been finalised up to these values.

The remainder of the money available is with the nationally run RGF programmes and totals £439.4 million.

Annex B - Withdrawn projects

A number of bidders have withdrawn since the last published list (February 2013). The withdrawal of a small proportion of bids is to be expected given the robustness of the contracting process.

Bidders may withdraw a project or programme for any reason. Commonly these include global market conditions; realisation through the due diligence process that the project could not be supported (including on state aid grounds); and changes in senior management or parent company strategy.

The alphabetical list of withdrawn bids to be published as an annex to the written ministerial statement is below. Those highlighted in bold denote the new withdrawals.

No	Name of Beneficiary	Round	No	Name of Beneficiary	Round
1	A&P Tyne Ltd	2	33	Kilgour Metal Treatments	3
2	Ames Goldsmith UK Ltd	1	31	LNX Distribution Ltd/Elonex	2
3	BCM Ltd	3	32	Marlow Foods Ltd	3

No	Name of Beneficiary	Round	No	Name of Beneficiary	Round
4	BRM Packaging Ltd	3	33	Messier-Dowty Ltd	1
5	C&C Baseline Ltd	2	34	Nissan UK P3	1
6	Caparo Precision Strip	2	35	Northern Tissue Group Ltd	2
7	Carlton & Co	2	36	Pailton Engineering Ltd	3
8	Cleveland Potash Ltd	1	37	PD Teesport Ltd	2
9	¹ CE3 - Conitech	1	38	Pilkington United Kingdom Ltd	2
10	CE4 – Verta Energy	1	39	PMT Industries Ltd	3
11	Cumbrian Holdings	1	40	Prom Chem Ltd	3
12	Cummins Generator Technologies Ltd	3	41	Rapiscan Systems	2
13	² CT5 – Exhaousto Ltd	1	42	Robert Bosch Ltd	3
14	CT7 – Aggregate Industries Ltd	1	43	St. Modwen Properties	2
15	CT8 – W.D. Irwin & Sons	1	44	SCM Pharma Ltd	3
16	CT9 – Arla	1	45	Shepherd Offshore Ltd	2
17	Diodes Zetex Semiconductors Ltd	2	46	Sirius Minerals	2
18	Disley Tissue Ltd	2	47	Stainless Plating Ltd	2
19	Federal-Mogul Friction Product	2	48	Sunsolar Energy Ltd	2
20	Fosters Bakery (Staincross)	2	49	T & N Plastics Ltd	2
21	Geothermal Engineering Ltd	2	50	Tameside/ Monopumps	1
22	GE Power Conversion UK Ltd	3	51	Thales Properties Ltd (Leicester)	1
23	Guilford Mills Ltd	3	52	The Listen Media Company	2
24	Heerema Hartlepool Ltd	2	53	Treves UK Ltd	2
25	Huntsman Polyurethanes (UK) Ltd	2	54	Turner Powertrain Systems Ltd	3
26	Hydra-Valve Advanced Valve & Pipeline Solutions	3	55	Universal Engineering	2
27	I-Plas Products Ltd: Recycled	2	56	Vestas Technology UK Ltd	2
28	ING Lease UK Ltd	3	57	Zegen (Wilton) Ltd	2
29	J&B Recycling Ltd	2			

¹CE is the Chirton Engineering package of projects

²CT is the Carbon Trust package of projects

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Planning Practice Guidance

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Nick Boles): The Department for Communities and Local Government ran a consultation exercise between 21 December 2012 and 15 February 2013 seeking views on the review group's recommendations contained in the report of the review of planning practice guidance led by Lord Taylor of Goss Moor.

The review has examined all current guidance material and has recommended rationalising advice and making it easier to use. Existing guidance is unwieldy in its current form and the review has recommended that it be shorter but retain key elements, and be more accessible to be useful to everyone using the planning system.

We accept that the existing guidance suite needs reform and consolidation. In the light of the positive response to this consultation, we are carefully considering the implementation of the review group's recommendations. As set out in the Budget, we will publish significantly reduced planning guidance, providing much needed simplicity and clarity in line with Lord Taylor's recommendations. We accept the majority of the report's recommendations, with the exception of those on signposting best practice material produced by the sector and the immediate cancellation of out-of-date guidance.

The Government's response to both this consultation and the Taylor review has been placed in the Library of the House and is available on the Department's website.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sporting Legacy

The Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Hugh Robertson): Through the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games, and other major sporting events, we have raised the level of ambition for sport in this country for people in every community. I would like to update the House on progress with the delivery of the Government's 10-point sports legacy action plan (my statement of 18 September 2012, *Official Report*, column 35WS). My last progress report was issued on 24 January 2013, *Official Report*, column 18WS. Since then, LOCOG has handed over its games maker database to Sport England working in partnership with UK Sport and London Partners and Join In. The consortium partners are now reaching out to the 5.3 million people currently on the database, with information about volunteering opportunities across the UK. This includes advice on how to volunteer at major sporting events such as the international cricket champions trophy in June and the rugby league world cup in November to ensure that we build on the success of the London 2012 games makers at future events.

On measuring sports participation, I can now confirm that there will be one set of data released through Active People. The next release of data will be in June 2013.

ELITE SPORT

Elite Funding

UK Sport has recently agreed the medal targets for summer Olympic and Paralympic sports for their targeted competition events in 2016. In June, UK Sport will publish these agreed medal targets as they are used to track progress towards success in Rio in 2016. Further information on this will be included in my next update.

WORLD CLASS FACILITIES

Good progress is being made on the transformation of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic park. In preparation for the reopening in July 2013, all eight of the park venues, including the five sporting venues, now have operators in place.

East village (previously the athletes village) will be London's newest neighbourhood; it will provide 2,800 new homes for Londoners from 2014 including outstanding free schooling for all ages at Chobham academy and an advanced medical clinic. Delancey and Qatari Diar have invested £557 million in the athletes' village, and will provide the long-term management of the site. The joint venture will work alongside Triathlon Homes who have invested £268 million in this project to date, and will manage the affordable housing in the village.

MAJOR SPORTS EVENTS

Since my written statement of 24 January, the UK has successfully delivered three major events:

- All England badminton champs;
- BMX Supercross world cup; and
- FINA diving world series

We have also won the right to host the following major sports events:

- IPC para athletics grand prix final 2013
- UCI track world cup 2013
- FIH hockey world league 2013
- The Tour de France Grand Depart 2014

We are currently bidding to host more events including:

- The track cycling world championships (2016);
- The European judo championships (2015);
- The rowing world cup (2015);
- The world figure skating championships (2016);
- The youth Olympic games (2018).

COMMUNITY

Places People Play

Sport England has again increased the funding for Places People Play raising it to £155 million. Sports facilities have now been improved and updated as a result of the programme.

Since my last update, 11,747 new sport makers have been recruited, bringing the total to 50,704.

The Sportivate programme has now given 225,000 young people the chance to try new sports, an increase of 84,445 since January. The programme has also been extended until 2017 with an additional £24 million of lottery funding.

YOUTH SPORT STRATEGY

In May, a £1.8 million a new year long pilot to test new and innovative approaches to the delivery of women's sport was launched in Bury. Also, as part of the strategy the first £5.1 million of the £40 million community sport activation fund has been allocated to 32 projects.

StreetGames has created 46 door step club pilots, designed to offer sustainable clubs for young people in disadvantaged areas.

A total of 80,000 students have participated in active universities, an increase of 35,000 since the first year and we now have 153 college sports makers in place in further education colleges. In addition, a pilot in Birmingham has led 18 schools to open up their sports facilities for community use.

JOIN IN

Join In 2013 will run for six weeks over the anniversary period. This year there will be 10,000 events, attracting 70,000 volunteers—these events will span the UK and 25% of them will focus on community activities. Since my last update, Join In have also become members of the consortium who own the LOCOG database, allowing them to build on their ambition to become the home of the games makers. In addition, Join In will host the “Go Local” event at the Olympic park on 19 July which will not only bring together those who volunteered in 2012, but also encourage them to inspire others to volunteer and to undertake projects in their own community.

SCHOOL GAMES

As of 6 May 2013, a total of 16,918 schools had registered for the school games, of which 13,271 are fully engaged in the programme. A total of 450 school games organisers are in post with funding extended until 2014-15. Around 70 county festivals of sport are taking place during the summer, and I would encourage as many Members of the House to support their local community schools as possible.

An exchange of young athletes with Brazil will take place again in 2013—helping to build on our excellent relationship in the lead up to Rio 2016. In September, Sheffield will welcome a mixed team of both able-bodied and disabled Brazilian athletes to compete alongside our elite, young athletes at the school games national finals. In return, the UK will be send a team of some of our best, young disabled athletes to compete at Brazil's school Paralympic-style games in November, providing them with valuable experience in competing against high-class international competition at a major sporting event.

PE/SCHOOL SPORT

On 16 March this year, the Prime Minister announced details of the new school sport premium, which will see £150 million a year going directly to primary school head teachers to improve the quality of PE and sport available for all their pupils. This will complement the £1 billion already being invested into youth and community sport—helping to ensure a lasting legacy of the London 2012 games and providing all young people the chance to begin a lifetime's habit of playing sport.

DISABILITY SPORT LEGACY

Sport England have just announced funding of £1,984,203 for the English Federation of Disability Sport for 2013-15. This will provide more opportunities for disabled people to take part in sport and deliver programmes to meet the needs of disabled people.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In February, Lord Coe was appointed chair of the International Inspiration Foundation (IIF). Following the creation of the new merged charity, the full board of trustees was appointed including Katherine Grainger CBE; Terry Miller and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). As of March 2013, the charity International Inspiration's programme has contributed to or influenced 40 sports or education policies in partner countries, helping to promote sustainable change in these countries' sports systems.

My next update to the House will be in July, to mark the anniversary of the opening of the London 2012 games.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs/Development Foreign Affairs Councils

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 27 May and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will attend the Development Foreign Affairs Council on 28 May. These meetings will be held in Brussels, and will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Syria

On Syria, Ministers will discuss the regional ramifications of the crisis and the prospects for the Geneva II talks. We will seek agreement to amend the arms embargo to allow EU countries the flexibility to provide greater support to the moderate opposition, including a broader range of military equipment.

Common Security and Defence Policy

Ministers will discuss preparations for the December European Council discussion on defence, with a focus on the first of the three taskings agreed at the December 2012 European Council. These taskings were to increase the effectiveness of the common security and defence policy (CSDP); enhance EU capabilities; and strengthen the European defence industrial base. We will encourage the discussion on the first tasking to focus on practical measures that improve cost-effectiveness of the EU's civilian and military missions and operations and deliver more effect on the ground, while continuing to ensure complementarity with NATO.

Middle East Peace Process

This is the first discussion of MEPP since the February FAC, at which EU Ministers addressed the deteriorating prospects for a two-state solution, and the importance of engaging the US. This discussion will be an opportunity to agree the focus of EU policy and engagement on the MEPP for the coming months. The UK will focus on how the EU can contribute actively, alongside other regional and international partners, to efforts led by the United States to drive progress on the MEPP. This will include the incentives the EU could offer the parties to reach a negotiated solution. The UK will reiterate the

importance of predictable, sufficient support for the PA and its institutions, as well as support for efforts to reinvigorate the Palestinian private sector.

Iran E3+3

Baroness Ashton is expected to update Ministers on the latest progress on E3+3 nuclear talks with Iran, including her meeting with the Iranian chief negotiator Jalili in Istanbul on 15 May. No discussion is expected.

Mali

Baroness Ashton is expected to update Ministers on the latest progress in Mali, including on the progress made at the donors' conference which took place in Brussels on 15 May. Discussion is expected to be limited.

Somalia

The Foreign Secretary will brief colleagues on the 7 May London conference, and will look ahead to the September Brussels conference.

DEVELOPMENT FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Council Conclusions to be adopted by the Council

We expect Ministers to adopt Council conclusions on the annual report 2013 to the European Council on EU development aid targets, the EU approach to resilience: learning from food security crises, and food and nutrition security in external assistance. The Government welcome these conclusions.

Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals Framework and Rio +20 Follow-up

This will be the main item for discussion. Ministers will debate the EU approach to the post-2015 development agenda and Rio+20 follow up. Council conclusions are expected to be adopted in June.

Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change

The Commission and European external action service will give an update on the implementation of this policy and anticipated process for delivery in the next programming period (2014-2020).

Information Points

There will be information points on food and nutrition security, member states' 2012 overseas development assistance (ODA) figures. Policy coherence for development, the 11th European development fund and local authorities.

Chris McManus (Inquest)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): In his statement of 13 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 141, the Secretary of State for Defence informed the House of the deaths of the British architect, Chris McManus, and his Italian colleague Franco Lamolinara, who were taken hostage by Islamist terrorist group Ansaru in Nigeria on 12 May 2011 and who tragically were killed by their captors during a joint UK/Nigerian rescue operation on 8 March 2012. The Secretary of State for Defence reminded the House that Her Majesty's coroner was legally responsible for determining the cause of Chris McManus' death and that his statement could not in any way prejudice the course of the coroner's inquiries.

HM coroner for Swindon and Wiltshire has now concluded his investigation, and held an inquest in Salisbury on 17 May 2013. He has recorded a verdict of unlawful killing.

Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt): I would like to update the House on the outcome of the recent conference of the five nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) nuclear weapon states (the "P5"). The conference, hosted by Russia, took place on 18-19 April in Geneva.

P5 conferences play a vital role in building the mutual understanding and trust needed to help the P5 take forward our shared NPT commitments. This was the fourth such conference that has brought together senior policy officials, military staff and nuclear scientists from all five NPT nuclear weapon states to discuss issues across the three pillars of the NPT. It follows on from conferences in London (September 2009), Paris (June 2011), and Washington (June 2012).

The P5 conferences are an important part of the international dialogue on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, demonstrating a shared determination to make progress on the commitments set out in the 2010 NPT action plan.

The P5 issued the following statement after the meeting: "The five Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear-weapon states, or "P5", met in Geneva on April 18-19, 2013 under the chairmanship of the Russian Federation, to build on the 2009 London, 2011 Paris and 2012 Washington P5 conferences. The P5 reviewed progress towards fulfilling the commitments made at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, and continued discussions on issues related to all three pillars of the NPT—non-proliferation, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and disarmament, including confidence-building, transparency, and verification experiences. The P5 also had a positive exchange with representatives of civil society during the Geneva P5 Conference.

The P5 reaffirmed their commitment to the shared goal of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament as provided for in Article VI of the NPT and emphasized the importance of continuing to work together in implementing the 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan. The P5 reviewed the outcome of the 2012 Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference, and significant developments in the context of the NPT since the 2012 Washington P5 Conference. They assessed issues relating to strategic stability and international security, and exchanged views concerning prospects for further steps to promote dialogue and mutual confidence in this area, including in a multilateral format.

In addition the P5 welcomed a briefing by the Russian Federation and the United States on the ongoing implementation of the New START Treaty and its success to date. The P5 were also briefed by the Russian Federation and the United States on the joint 2012 inspection in Antarctica conducted pursuant to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 and its Environmental Protocol. This joint inspection included verification that the international stations are implementing relevant environmental rules and that facilities are used only for peaceful purposes. The P5 shared views on objectives for the 2013 Preparatory Committee, the inter-sessional period thereafter, and looked ahead to the 2014 Preparatory Committee and 2015 Review Conference.

The P5 discussed the latest developments in the area of multilateral disarmament initiatives including the situation at the Conference on Disarmament. They expressed their shared disappointment that the Conference on Disarmament continues to be prevented from agreeing on a comprehensive program of work, including

work on a legally binding, verifiable international ban on the production of fissile material (FMCT) for use in nuclear weapons, and discussed efforts to find a way forward in the Conference on Disarmament, including by continuing their efforts with other relevant partners to promote such negotiations within the CD. The P5 reiterated their support for the immediate start of negotiations on a treaty encompassing such a ban in the Conference on Disarmament. They noted the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on FMCT, and expressed the hope that its work will help spur negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. The P5 reaffirmed the historic contribution of the pragmatic, step-by-step process to nuclear disarmament and stressed the continued validity of this proven route. In this context, they also emphasized their shared understanding of the serious consequences of nuclear weapon use and that the P5 would continue to give the highest priority to avoiding such contingencies.

The P5 advanced their previous discussions of an approach to reporting on their relevant activities across all three pillars of the NPT Action Plan at the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting, consistent with the NPT Action Plan, and resolved to continue working on this issue under France's leadership. They plan to continue their discussions in multiple ways within the P5, with a view to reporting to the 2014 PrepCom, consistent with their commitments under Actions 5, 20, and 21 of the 2010 RevCon Final Document. They welcomed the progress made on the development of the P5 glossary of key nuclear terms under China's leadership and discussed next steps. They stressed the importance of this work, which will increase P5 mutual understanding and facilitate further P5 discussions on nuclear matters. The P5 reaffirmed their objective to submit a P5 glossary of key nuclear terms to the 2015 NPT Review Conference. The P5 are working toward the establishment of a firm foundation for mutual confidence and further disarmament efforts. They shared further information on their respective bilateral and multilateral experiences in verification and resolved to continue such exchanges.

The P5 recalled their Joint Statement of 3 May 2012 at the Preparatory Committee of the NPT Review Conference and pledged to continue their efforts in different formats and at various international fora to find peaceful diplomatic solutions to the outstanding problems faced by the non-proliferation regime. They reiterated their call on the states concerned to fulfil without delay their international obligations under the appropriate UN Security Council resolutions, undertakings with the IAEA and other appropriate international commitments. In the context of the nuclear test conducted by the DPRK on 12 February 2013 and the continued pursuit of certain nuclear activities by Iran, both contrary to the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and IAEA Board of Governors resolutions, the P5 reaffirmed their concerns about these serious challenges to the non-proliferation regime.

The P5 underlined the fundamental importance of an effective International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards system in preventing nuclear proliferation and facilitating cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The P5 stressed the need for strengthening IAEA safeguards including through the promotion of the universal adoption of the Additional Protocol and the development of approaches to IAEA safeguards implementation based on objective state factors. They also discussed the role of the P5 in assisting the IAEA in cases involving possible detection of nuclear weapon programs in non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) in conformity with the provisions of the NPT.

The P5 continued their previous discussions of efforts to achieve the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and reviewed the recent UK-hosted P5 Experts Meeting on CTBT, at which the P5 identified a number of areas for future P5 collaboration and decided to pursue further inter-sessional work, in particular ahead of the Integrated Field Exercise in 2014. The P5 called upon all States to uphold their national moratoria on nuclear weapons-test explosions or any other nuclear explosions, and to refrain from acts that would defeat the object and purpose of the Treaty pending its entry into force.

The P5 shared their views on how to prevent abuse of NPT withdrawal (Article X). The discussion included modalities under which NPT States Party could respond collectively and individually

to a notification of withdrawal, including through arrangements regarding the disposition of equipment and materials acquired or derived under safeguards during NPT membership. They resolved to make efforts to broaden consensus among NPT States Party on the latter issue at the 2014 PrepCom, thus making a further contribution to the NPT Review Process.

The P5 reiterated the importance of the implementation of the 2010 NPT Review Conference decisions related to the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, in particular those related to the convening of a conference, to be attended by all the States of the Middle East, on the establishment of the Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the states of the region. They underlined their support for all States concerned making all efforts necessary for the preparation and convening of the Conference in the nearest future. They also reiterated their full support to the ongoing efforts of the facilitator.

The P5 reviewed their efforts to bring about the entry into force of the relevant legally binding protocols of nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties. They reaffirmed their view that establishment of such zones helps to build confidence between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, enhance regional and international security, and reinforce the NPT and the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. They reaffirmed their readiness to sign the Protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone as soon as possible. They underlined the importance of holding consultations, including on the margins of the Second PrepCom, with the States Party to the Treaty on a Nuclear Weapon-Free-Zone in Central Asia. They noted also the parallel declarations, adopted by the P5 and Mongolia, concerning Mongolia's nuclear-weapon-free status, at the United Nations headquarters in New York on 17 September 2012.

The P5 pledged to continue to meet at all appropriate levels on nuclear issues to further promote dialogue and mutual confidence. The P5 plan to follow up their discussions and hold a fifth P5 conference in 2014."

HEALTH

Gender Birth Ratios

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anna Soubry): Following a request from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Department of Health has undertaken an analysis to investigate whether the gender birth ratio in the United Kingdom varies by mothers' country of birth beyond the range that might be expected to occur naturally. The analysis concludes that when broken down by the mothers' country of birth, no group is statistically different from the range that we would expect to see naturally occurring. However, there are significant limitations in what these data can show. As there are small numbers of births for most groups, large differences in birth rates would be needed to identify ratios outside the normal range.

The UK gender ratio is 105.1 male to 100 female births and is well within the normal boundaries for populations.

Evidence suggests that a number of factors can influence the sex of a child. These include paternal and maternal age, coital rates, number of children and sex of previous children. However, ratios above 108 and below 103 are unlikely to occur naturally other than as a product of the random variability associated with small numbers of births.

Recorded birth ratios vary widely by mothers' country of birth. Initial analysis identified a small number of countries for which there were indications that birth ratios may differ from the UK as a whole and potentially

fall outside the range considered possible without intervention. However, departmental analysts emphasised that it is possible that this was the product of natural variation and that further analysis would be undertaken.

The further analysis was quality assured by the methodology team at the Office for National Statistics and identified 10 countries which over the period 2007 to 2011 had over 10,000 births and recorded gender ratios either lower than 103 (seven countries) or higher than 108 (three countries). However, the tests undertaken indicate a strong probability that this is occurring by chance. Only one country, Sri Lanka, was found to have a birth ratio significantly different from the figure of 105.1 for the UK as a whole. Mothers born in Sri Lanka have a birth ratio of 99.2 or 99 male children for every 100 female children. However, this is not statistically significantly lower than the 103 threshold and again is likely to be the result of random variation, particularly given the relatively small numbers involved.

The Department of Health will repeat this analysis on an annual basis following publication of birth data.

“Birth ratios in the United Kingdom: a report on gender ratios at birth in the UK” has been placed in the Library. Copies are available for hon. Members in the Vote Office and for noble Lords in the Printed Paper Office.

The documents can also be accessed at:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/gender-birth-ratios-in-the-uk.

TRANSPORT

Able Marine Energy Park

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): An application was made by Able Humber Ports Ltd on 16 December 2011 under section 37 of the Planning Act 2008 regarding a proposed development known as the Able marine energy park comprising a quay of solid construction on the south bank of the River Humber at Killingholme, together with an ecological compensation scheme on the opposite bank at Cherry Cobb Sands.

An examining authority was appointed for the examination of the application on 13 April 2012 and the examining authority’s report was delivered to the Secretary of State for Transport on 24 February 2013.

I have been appointed by the Secretary of State to decide this application in line with the Department’s guidance on propriety in quasi-judicial decision-making, so as to avoid any possible conflicts of interest which might arise from my other policy responsibilities.

Under sub-section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008 the Secretary of State must make his decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority’s report unless he exercises his power under sub-section 107(3) to extend the deadline. If he exercises such power the Secretary of State must make a statement, to the Houses of Parliament of which that Secretary of State is a member, announcing the new deadline.

I have decided to set the deadline for the decision to 24 July 2013 (an extension of two months) in order to allow the applicant to negotiate terms of a lease of land that they require for the project with the Crown Estate

who are the freehold owners of the land. This is to ensure compliance with section 135 of the Planning Act 2008 and the Crown Estate’s statutory duties. The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to give development consent for this project.

Lower Thames Crossing

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Stephen Hammond): The existing river crossing capacity in the lower Thames area—the Dartford-Thurrock crossing—is operating above the capacity it was designed for, and there is already serious congestion at the crossing with negative consequences for business productivity and the national economy. This crossing forms a key route within the strategic road network. It completes the orbital route of the M25 around London and provides the only Thames river crossing east of London. In addition, the Dartford-Thurrock crossing is located in the Thames Gateway area, where we expect substantial redevelopment and growth.

We therefore propose that a second crossing should be built across the Lower Thames and I am today publishing a consultation document inviting views on the relative merits of three options for locating a new road-based river crossing in the Lower Thames area and a variant of one of these three options.

The three options are:

Option A—at the site of the existing A282 Dartford-Thurrock river crossing;

Option B—connecting the A2 with the A1089; and

Option C—connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30.

A variant for Option C would additionally widen the A229 between the M2 and M20.

Government are committed to tackling the congestion at the Dartford-Thurrock crossing and will improve traffic flows by introducing free flow charging technology to replace the existing cash charge collection and extensive toll plazas. However, even with these improvements there will be a future need for additional river crossing capacity. That is why Government identified a new lower Thames crossing as one of its top 40 infrastructure projects in the national infrastructure plan 2011 and committed to reviewing and consulting on options for locating the new crossing.

The technical analysis undertaken for and by my Department is now complete. It has confirmed the need for additional road based river crossing capacity and concluded that that all three options—including one with the variant—would accommodate additional traffic growth and reduce congestion at the existing crossing albeit to varying extents. In addition, the review has concluded that it would technically be feasible to deliver a scheme at all of the options.

The consultation document and related technical reports, which I am publishing today, set out the findings of the technical analysis for the three options considered and the variant. It presents information about the impacts of providing a crossing at each of the options and invites views from all interested parties.

The responses received to this consultation will be analysed and interpreted to help inform our decision on where to locate a new crossing. In weighing up the

relative merits of the alternate locations, Government will need to consider the relative economic, environmental and social impacts as well as the potential cost, affordability and value for money.

This is the first stage of decision making. Subject to the decision on location, work will commence on the development of a scheme at the selected location and this will involve further consultation.

I am pleased to announce that the consultation will run from Tuesday 21 May until Tuesday 16 July. Anyone with an interest is invited to take part. A consultation

document and instructions for responding can be found on my Department's website. An electronic copy has been lodged with the Library of the House.

Department for Transport officials will also be available to answer questions with public information events on the following dates:

Thursday 13 June, Dartford library, 2-8pm;
Saturday 15 June, Grays library, 10am-5pm;
Monday 17 June, Chadwell library, 2-7pm;
Thursday 20 June, Bluewater shopping centre, 10am-9pm;
Friday 21 June, Lakeside shopping centre, 10am-10pm; and
Saturday 22 June, Gravesend library, 9am-5pm.

Petition

Tuesday 21 May 2013

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Decision of the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service

The Petition of the patients and community of Northallerton,

Declares that the Petitioners are outraged by the decision made by the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service to ban Doctor Derek Keilloh from practising medicine; further that Doctor Keilloh is a much admired, respected and caring professional and has served the

Community of Northallerton for almost 10 years with dedication, humility and humanity.

As new statutory rules governing the MPTS procedures are expected to be approved by Parliament in 2013, we call into question the MPTS (GMC) policy of being able to erase a Doctor on probability and supposed public interest rather than any clinical failing, and suggest the support this Petition has received shows otherwise. The Petition was originally addressed to the Medical Practitioners Tribunal and achieved 1,034 signatures and we trust that this shows enough public opinion to interest the House.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons acknowledge and investigate a sanction which they believe was too harsh.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001181]

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 May 2013

[Continued from Column 618W]

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Arms Trade: Exports

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which countries have received official UK Government invitations to the Defence and Security Equipment International exhibition in September 2013. [155384]

Michael Fallon: A list of countries invited by the UK Government to Defence and Security Equipment International 2013 (DSEI 2013) will be released on the UK Trade and Investment website on 10 September 2013 which is when the exhibition opens. A copy of the list will be sent to the hon. Member at that time.

Clothing

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have made a claim for evening dress allowance in each of the last five years; and what the total cost of such claims has been. [155440]

Jo Swinson: Within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (including UKTI Admin) between 1 December 2011 and 1 May 2013 there were a total of 23 claims for reimbursement for the costs of formal wear. The total cost of these claims was £2,807.85. Prior to this date these costs were not recorded separately within the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Staff are entitled to reimbursement for hiring formal wear if they are required to accompany Ministers or represent the Department at official functions. They should not be left out of pocket from carrying out their official duties. The Department is rigorous in ensuring that all claims are legitimate and necessary.

The information relating to claims within non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally within the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Community Development Finance Institutions

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the potential for community development finance institutions to (a) lend to businesses and charities and (b) create jobs; and if he will make a statement. [156478]

Michael Fallon: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) undertook an evaluation of the Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) sector in spring 2010. The report highlighted the ability of CDFIs to be efficient vehicles for improving access to finance in under-served markets. BIS has continued to work closely with the sector through liaison with the Community Development Finance association (CDFA).

Currently Government provides support to CDFIs through the following interventions:

Regional Growth Fund (RGF). The CDFA has received £30 million under the first round of the RGF. This has been matched by Co-op Bank and Unity Trust to create an overall fund of £60 million for CDFIs to onward lend to SMEs and social enterprises.

Start-Up Loans. Around 18 CDFIs are currently lead parties in delivery consortia for the Start-Up Loans scheme. A further 8-10 CDFIs are also involved in providing back office functions and/or volume lender provision to other delivery partners. To date the Start-Up Loans scheme has provided around 3,900 loans to new start up businesses.

The Government's Community Investment Tax Relief scheme has enabled CDFIs to raise around £90 million to date for onward lending into the sector.

BIS has also flexed the criteria of the Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG), 13 accredited CDFIs now benefitting from access to the scheme.

Construction Industry Training Board

Jason McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many small and medium-sized construction enterprises are paying levies to the Construction Industry Training Board. [156077]

Matthew Hancock: The number of micro, small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) that paid the Construction Industry Training Board levy in 2012 was 24,949.

A further 40,064 SMEs in the construction industry did not pay the levy as their total payroll costs fell below the small firms' exemption threshold.

Note:

These categories are based on the Office of National Statistics (ONS) classification of SMEs. In other words:

Medium-sized: 50 to 249 employees

Small: 10 to 49: employees

Micro: 0 to 9: employees.

Jason McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when the thresholds for payments to be made by small and medium-sized construction enterprises to the Construction Industry Training Board were last changed. [156078]

Matthew Hancock: The small firms' exemption threshold for the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) Levy was last changed in 2009 when it was increased from total payroll costs of £76,000 to £80,000.

CITB introduced a 'taper' in 2012 such that employers with total payroll costs between £80,000 and £100,000 are only required to pay 50% of their levy liability.

Proposals for the exemption threshold levels are included as part of levy consultations with employers, and so are agreed by employers and subject to Levy Order approval through Parliament.

Credit: Interest Rates

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of payday loans made in (a) total and (b) in each region in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [156479]

Jo Swinson: The Office of Fair Trading's (OFT) payday lending compliance review estimated that the total number of payday loans made in 2011-12 was between 7.4 and 8.2 million. Government is not aware of estimates covering the periods 2010-11 and 2012-13. However, Consumer Futures estimated that the total number of payday loans in 2009 was 4.1 million. Government is not aware of any estimate of the number of payday loans in each region.

We are very concerned about the mounting evidence that consumers are experiencing significant problems with payday lending across all regions. That is why on 6 March we announced a strong action plan for tackling the key problems in this market, alongside the regulators. In the immediate term, payday lending is a top enforcement priority for the OFT. They are taking strong action against the leading 50 payday lenders after uncovering evidence of widespread irresponsible lending. The full outcomes of this action should become apparent over the forthcoming months, with some early results already clear. The OFT also expect to announce in June whether to refer the payday market to the Competition Commission.

Over the longer term, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is prioritising consideration of tough new rules that payday lenders will be subject to once the FCA takes over the regulation of consumer credit in April 2014. Payday lenders will face much more stringent authorisation and enforcement procedures from April 2014.

Export Credit Guarantees: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will take steps to strengthen international environmental standards relevant to UK Export Finance to include limits on emissions of greenhouse gases. [155548]

Michael Fallon: I refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), on 17 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 115-16WS, that the UK will seek to promote the strengthening of relevant World Bank Group international standards to include limits on emissions of greenhouse gases.

Exports: North East

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many UK Trade and Investment export trips were made from the North East to (a) the European Union and (b) Eastern Europe; and how many companies from the North East and of what size went on them in each of the last three years. [156361]

Michael Fallon: UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) in the North East region have supported the following number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), less than 250 employees, within the last three years.

In 2010/11, (a) two market visits within the European Union of which 13 SMEs received a UKTI subvention and (b) one market visit to Eastern Europe of which two companies received a UKTI subvention.

In 2011/12, (a) two market visits within the European Union of which 13 SMEs received a UKTI subvention and (b) no market visits to Eastern Europe.

In 2012/13, (a) four market visits within the European Union of which 18 SMEs received a UKTI subvention and (b) two market visits to Eastern Europe of which seven SMEs received a UKTI subvention.

Foreign Investment in UK

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to his Department's press notice of 9 May 2013, on inward investment and the London 2012 Olympics, how much of the additional £2.5 billion in foreign direct investment arising from the Olympics went to (a) Wales and (b) other nations and regions of the UK. [155385]

Michael Fallon: In the period up-to the end of March 2013, £21.54 million of investment went into Wales arising from the Olympics.

Investment into other nations and regions of the UK as set out as follows:

	£ million
East Midlands	3.86
London	1006
North East	19.43
North West	30
Scotland	115
South East	81
South West	716
West Midlands	410
Yorkshire	59.34

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to his Department's press notice of 9 May 2013, on inward investment and the London 2012 Olympics, how many of the 31,000 additional jobs arising from the £2.5 billion in foreign direct investment to the UK as a result of the Olympics were in (a) Wales and (b) other nations and regions of the UK. [155386]

Michael Fallon: 498 additional jobs arose for Wales from the £2.5 billion in foreign direct investment to the UK as a result of the Olympics up to the end of March 2013.

Other nations and regions of the UK received the following number of additional jobs:

	Number
East Midlands	51
London	14,928
North East	7
North West	315
Scotland	850
South East	553

	Number
South West	12,550
West Midlands	1,160
Yorkshire	150

Fraud

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if (a) his Department, (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible and (c) his Department's executive agencies use (i) Atos and (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services. [156473]

Jo Swinson: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) does not use Atos or any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services. However we are using expertise across the Department and its partner organisations for counter-fraud and related activities.

I have asked chief executives of the executive agencies to respond directly to the hon. Member. This information is not held by BIS in respect of non-departmental public bodies.

Letter from Tim Moss, dated 16 May 2103:

I am replying on behalf of Companies House to your Parliamentary Question tabled 15 May 2013, to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, UIN 156473.

Companies House does not use Atos or any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

Letter from Richard Judge, dated 17 May 2013:

The Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has asked me to reply to your question, if (a) his Department, (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible and (c) his Department's executive agencies use (i) Atos and (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

The Insolvency Service is currently in the process of transitioning its main IT service provision from IBM to Atos. Whilst the new contract with Atos does not provide specific counter-fraud measures, once our relationship with them has been fully established, we expect to benefit from improved monitoring that will assist in the identification of potentially fraudulent activity.

The Insolvency Service does use two other companies for information gathering in connection with our counter fraud activities. These are Dun and Bradstreet and Experian.

Letter from John Alty, dated 17 May 2013:

I am responding in respect of the Intellectual Property Office to your Parliamentary Question tabled 15th May 2013, to the Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The Intellectual Property is a Trading Fund and Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It does not use Atos or any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

Letter from Peter Mason, dated 17 May 2013:

I am responding in respect of the National Measurement Office (NMO) to your Parliamentary Question tabled on 15 May 2013, asking the Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) about companies used to provide counter-fraud activities and related services.

NMO uses a company to conduct annual penetration tests to ensure that its information technology systems are safe from unauthorised access. NMO also uses the facilities management

contractors, AMEY, to ensure site security by means of e.g. cameras, security guards and lighting. NMO does not use Atos in any respect.

Letter from Kim Thorneywork, dated 17 May 2013:

Thank you for your question in asking the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, if (a) his Department, (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible and (c) his Department's executive agencies use (i) Atos and (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

Please be advised that the Skills Funding Agency does not use Atos or any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

In future, it will procure these services, when required, using the Government Procurement Service Consultancy ONE framework for Financial Audit and Investigation.

Letter from Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB, dated 17 May 2013:

As Director General and Chief Executive of Ordnance Survey, I have been asked to respond to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, "if (a) his Department, (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible and (c) his Department's executive agencies use (i) Atos and (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services".

Ordnance Survey does not use Atos or any other company to provide such services.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from David Parker, dated 16 May 2013:

Thank you for your question addressed to the Secretary of State for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills asking if (a) his Department, (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible and (c) his Department's executive agencies use (i) Atos and (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

The UK Space Agency is an Executive Agency of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and does not use (i) Atos or (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

Letter from John Hirst, dated 17 May 2013:

I am replying on behalf of the Met Office to your Parliamentary Question tabled on 15 May 2013, UIN 156473 to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The Met Office has not used Atos for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

The Met Office Counter-Fraud Officer has attended seminars and workshops provided by the PWC Fraud Academy and the Fraud Advisory Panel and uses counter-fraud resources available on the Transparency International UK website.

I hope this helps.

Letter from Alasdair Lewis, dated 16 May 2013:

I write on behalf of Land Registry in response to Parliamentary Question 156473 tabled on 15 May 2013 which asked the following:

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, if (a) his Department, (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible and (c) his Department's executive agencies use (i) Atos and (ii) any other company for the provision of counter-fraud activities and related services.

Land Registry does not use Atos for the provision of counter-fraud activities. We do use a range of technological based solutions to combat registration fraud, for example a credit reference supplier. Any external services currently play a small part in our overall strategy. Land Registry does not disclose the services being consumed or the identity of individual suppliers so as not to provide fraudsters with valuable information.

I hope you find this information useful.

Further Education

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will consider increasing investment in tertiary education to bring it in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average. [156103]

Mr Willetts: The UK has an efficient tertiary education system that performs above the OECD average for both the entry and the completion rate for academic degrees. Relative spending levels do not indicate the quality of a system.

There are a number of indicators reporting on tertiary education expenditure in the OECD's annual publication "Education at a Glance". These figures are constructed on the basis of internationally agreed definitions and concepts which are not perfectly aligned with our own domestic measures. In international terms, tertiary education corresponds broadly to the UK concept of higher education.

The OECD figures suggest that, in the UK, total funding per full-time equivalent student is a little above the OECD average, although the balance between public and private expenditure is more heavily weighted towards the private sector, largely because of our system of tuition fees and student loans. The Government provides a significant level of financial support to students during their studies, designed to ensure that financial limitations do not discourage students from less affluent backgrounds in pursuing tertiary qualifications.

Green Economy Council

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many meetings of the Green Economy Council have been held since February 2011; what proposals and recommendations it has issued to Ministers; and if he will place on his Department's website copies of all papers discussed at the Council since its inception. [156011]

Michael Fallon: The Green Economy Council has met five times since it was convened in February 2011.

The Council's role is to advise Government on policy development, copies of minutes and papers have therefore not been placed in the Library or on the Department's website.

Higher Education

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps the Government is taking to ensure the international competitiveness of UK universities. [156101]

Mr Willetts: The Government recognises the important contribution that our higher education (HE) institutions make to the UK through teaching, research and income from export activities. Our HE institutions have a world class reputation for quality which underpins their strong presence in international university league tables, recruitment of international students and in attracting international academics and funding to support research. Government supports this competitive position through a range of activities such as:

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which reviews and reports on how well UK HE institutions maintain quality and standards in accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. This system has a global reputation for success and has influenced parallel developments overseas.

The UK's research funding regime which supports activity of the highest quality and impact. Government funding for research has been protected in the current challenging economic climate, which gives our institutions confidence to continue investment research and related programmes.

Promoting UK HE institutions overseas, through bilateral visits and missions to key overseas partners and the development of agreements, such as the UK India Education Research Initiative and participation in Brazil's Science without Borders programme. This activity aims to enable opportunity for a wide range of UK institutions, covering areas such as international student recruitment, the creation of partnerships between individual institutions and the joint funding of research and programmes.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will consider increasing investment in innovative research and development in UK universities to bring it in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average. [156102]

Mr Willetts: According to OECD figures, in 2010, 27% of gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) in the UK was performed in the HE sector—above the OECD average of 19%.

The Government recognises the importance of innovative research and development in UK universities and that is why, despite very difficult fiscal circumstances the £4.6 billion per annum funding for science and research programmes has been protected in cash terms and ring-fenced against future pressures during the spending review period.

In addition to the £1.9 billion of capital funding announced in the 2010 spending review a number of announcements have been made for additional capital expenditure in research and innovation totalling £1.5 billion. This includes £300 million for the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund which will enhance the facilities for world class university research, by fevering at least double that amount of co-funding from the private sector and charities.

Higher Education: Admissions

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to reverse the decline in applications to universities in England and Wales by students from India and Pakistan. [155542]

Mr Willetts: Applicants to UCAS (undergraduates) from India increased from 2011 to 2012 and applicants to UCAS from Pakistan declined:

<i>Applicants to UCAS (undergraduates) from India and Pakistan</i>		
<i>Year of entry</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>
2008	3,030	2,601
2009	3,287	2,402
2010	3,552	2,348
2011	3,441	2,081
2012	3,602	2,056

Note:

Entrants to higher education institutes in England and Wales from India and Pakistan decreased from 2010/11 to 2011/12.

Source:
UCAS

Entrants by domicile English and Welsh HEIs

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
<i>India</i>			
Postgraduate (PG)	17,220	17,000	11,220
Undergraduate (UG)	3,550	4,935	3,620
Total	20,770	21,930	14,840
<i>Pakistan</i>			
Postgraduate (PG)	3,485	3,940	2,755
Undergraduate (UG)	1,310	1,565	1,365
Total	4,795	5,510	4,120

Source:
HESA

The Prime Minister's visit to India featured higher education strongly on the agenda. I accompanied my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, leading a large delegation of UK Vice Chancellors, who participated in an education roundtable, and interacted directly with students in Janiki Devi college, Delhi and publicised a number of new partnerships and scholarships.

The British high commissioner, James Bevan, has made higher education a central theme in many of his public speeches. For example, he listed the top 10 reasons to study in the UK in a speech on 23 November 2012

www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-education-the-best-for-the-brightest

and was published in Indian national press.

The UK's ongoing support for student recruitment is delivered in a number of ways including:

Promotion via press releases, social media and speeches by the high commission, British Council, and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI).

British Council Services for International Education Marketing. These are paid for services for the UK higher education (HE) sector to support their work in India including attendance at the UK education exhibitions or university visits. There are two main exhibitions each year which reach over eight key cities in India, and there are also now virtual exhibitions so that students can "tour" UK universities at other times of the year.

Global Education UK website—a student facing web portal to help students in thinking of studying in the UK.

Additionally many universities carry out work directly in India: some have their own offices, use their alumni or sign up agents to promote their institutions. 1

In the next two years, we aim to reverse the trend in applications from prospective Indian students to UK universities. Through the British Council, we will use outreach events, social media, and other marketing measures to target young Indians, their families and education agents to underline the quality and value of a UK higher education. We will work in close partnership with UK universities themselves.

In the past year the GREAT campaign funded 60 jubilee scholars from India. These students came from over 20 states across India and they will be spending one year in the UK undertaking a full time master's programme. These students will become ambassadors for future students. In addition a promotional film was made on "There's never been a better time to study in the UK". This film was screened across the MTV and CNN IBN networks over a three month period.

BIS supports the UK education sector and the research councils to establish partnerships between UK and Indian HE institutions and also supports this work in

the longer term. Through joint programmes, joint research and other collaborative activity there is potential for student exchange to be included in their partnership arrangements.

The UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) is a five-year joint UK and Indian Government programme with the objective of enhancing the education and research relationship between India and the UK. The first phase ran from 2006 to 2011 and phase two was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in July 2010 to run from 2011 to 2016. The programme is worth £5 million per year and focuses on four strands: leadership development, innovation partnerships, skill development, and enhancing mobility. The Research Council's UK partnership with India is worth over £100 million in joint research programmes and future activities to promote early researcher exchanges will form part of their work in collaboration with the UKIERI programme.

Pakistan

The British high commission, UKTI and the British Council work together to promote the UK as a destination of choice and the UK is the number one choice for Pakistani students to study higher education outside of Pakistan.

For example, the high commission in Islamabad are running a Chevening scholarship programme and their 'Celebrating Connections' campaign aims to improve awareness of the links between Pakistan and the UK to further improve perceptions of the UK in Pakistan. The campaign spans education, trade and culture. 'Education is GREAT' branding is used at events and in publicity.

UKTI supported a UK based event management company to organise an education fair earlier this year. Over 30 UK universities visited the market and participated in the fair.

The British Council run regular campaigns across the core cities in Pakistan and last year these included:

Employers' road-shows in Pakistan and the UK for Pakistan employers to meet with and discuss potential employment with Pakistani students studying in the UK and also have done the same in Pakistan. This has been very successful for students returning from the UK and also as an incentive for prospective students. These activities have taken place in five cities and involved over 100 employers.

Regular education fairs, exhibitions and campaigns working with media partners.

On line information and support campaigns to support students access linked to higher education institutions in the UK.

The British Council work with education agents to provide effective training and high quality advice for prospective students and work with key Pakistani agencies such as the higher education commission on postgraduate studies in the UK.

Higher Education: Gender

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps the Government is taking to promote gender equality between academics in UK universities. [155610]

Mr Willetts: The responsibility for staff equality matters rests with higher education institutions (HEIs), as the employers. In the annual Grant Letter to the Higher

Education Funding Council for England, the Government has encouraged the sector to continue to address long standing equality issues, including more diverse representation at senior levels in HEIs.

Higher education institutions receiving grant funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England also have to meet the requirements of the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010 and advance equality of opportunity.

The Equality Challenge Unit, an independent higher education sector body, provides higher education institutions with support on all equality matters and works directly with institutions to help them tackle under-representation among staff groups.

One example of the work it undertakes is the Athena SWAN Charter which recognises and celebrates good employment practice for women working in science, engineering and technology (SET) in higher education and research.

Membership is open to any university or research institution committed to the advancement of the careers of women in SET. BIS provides some funding for Athena SWAN via the Royal Society as part of our science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) Diversity Programme.

Higher Education: Wales

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much research and development funding universities in Wales received from central government in the last year for which figures are available. [155549]

Mr Willetts: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data of income to higher education institutions shows the following research grant income from central Government received by universities in Wales in 2011-12:

	<i>£ million</i>
Higher Education Funding Council recurrent research grant	71.1
BIS Research Councils research grants	51.0
UK central Government bodies ¹	46.2

¹ This includes UK central Government bodies, local authorities, health and hospital authorities.

Note:

BIS Research Councils research grant data excludes income from The Royal Society, British Academy and The Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Source:

HESA Finance Statistics Return 2011-12 Tables 5a and 5b-available at: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_collns&task=show_colln&Itemid=232&c=C11031&s=5&wvy=any&wvs=1&isme=1

Insurance Companies: Billing

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what steps he is taking to encourage insurance companies to sign up to the prompt payment code; [155518]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of late payment by insurance companies on small businesses; [155519]

(3) if he will launch a specific campaign to encourage insurance companies to pay small businesses promptly. [155520]

Michael Fallon: In November I wrote to the chief executives of companies in the FTSE350, including a number of insurance companies, urging them to sign up to the Prompt Payment Code (PPC). Three quarters of FTSE100 companies are now signatories. Insurance companies that have signed up to the code include Aviva plc, Admiral Group plc, Direct Line Group and Hasting Insurance Services Limited. A full list of companies signed up to the code can be found at:

http://ppc.promptpaymentcode.org.uk/ppc/signatory_paged.a4d

The Government understands how much of a strain late payment can put on all businesses (not just those affected by insurance companies) and has been actively working with both business and the finance community to understand where Government intervention can be helpful.

We will continue to work to strengthen the PPC and encourage greater membership and explore the challenges of late payment in concert with business bodies.

Iron and Steel: Research

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had with the management of Tata Steel on the continuing operation of research and development facilities in Teesside and Rotherham; and what assistance his Department plans to provide to ensure that research and development facilities for steel technologies in the UK are enhanced. [155621]

Michael Fallon: BIS Ministers and officials have regular discussions with Tata Steel management on a range of issues of importance to the company. In a statement to its workforce on 29 April, Tata Steel reiterated its commitment to retaining a strong R and D capability in the UK.

Government assistance is available to help the UK steel industry to finance research and development; this includes programmes funded by the Technology Strategy Board. The steel industry also has opportunities to participate in collaborative R and D projects funded by the EU Research Fund for Coal and Steel.

Legal Costs

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much his Department spent on external legal advice (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and (b) since 4 September 2012. [155611]

Jo Swinson: The Department's financial system has recorded the following expenditure for the periods requested against legal advice and services and legal consultancy:

	<i>Expenditure (£)</i>
(a) 7 May 2010 to 4 September 2012	4,938,652
(b) since 4 September 2012	1,084,892

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much his Department spent in total on external legal advice from QCs (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and (b) since 4 September 2012. [156022]

Jo Swinson: The Department's financial system does not differentiate between the different levels of external legal advice provided. However, expenditure recorded for the periods requested against legal advice and services, and legal consultancy is as follows:

(a) 7 May 2010 to 4 September 2012: £4,938,652

(b) since 4 September 2012: £1,084,892.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the highest day rate paid for external legal advice by his Department is since 7 May 2010. [156023]

Jo Swinson: This information is not held centrally within the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the top 20 highest amounts paid for external legal advice by his Department was in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; to whom they were paid; and for what reasons the legal advice was sought. [156024]

Jo Swinson: This information is not held centrally within the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Motor Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking with the automotive industry to promote the UK as the best location for research, development and commercial application of driverless technology in the automotive industry; and if he will make a statement. [155641]

Michael Fallon: The joint industry/government Automotive Council has identified intelligent mobility, which encompasses more efficient management of vehicles and roads—including driverless road vehicles—as one of five strategic technology themes. Work is under way in the council to produce a technology roadmap for intelligent mobility.

A Robotics and Autonomous Systems (RAS) Special Interest Group (SIG) and Steering Group was established in January 2013 that will produce a technology roadmap and a high level strategy over the next year. The Robotics and Autonomous Systems SIG and Transport Knowledge Transfer Network (KTN) held a joint road mapping workshop on 14 May 2013. A representative of the Automotive Council attended this workshop to ensure cross-linkage with their work. The outputs will help to define the likely time frame and actions required to establish a world leading science base and RAS industry in the UK.

The Transport Systems Catapult, which has been established by the Technology Strategy Board, will focus on innovation for efficient and sustainable ways to move people and freight across national transport systems and will support businesses in bringing innovative products and services to market.

Patents

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many patents have been registered in the UK in each of the last 10 years. [156352]

Jo Swinson: Patents having effect in the UK may be obtained by one of two routes: either from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) or from the European Patent Office (EPO). In each case the respective office conducts a thorough examination procedure before granting a patent. The numbers of patents granted by each route in calendar years 2002-11 are shown in the following table. The numbers of patents granted by the IPO are reported in the IPO's annual fact and figures publication, available from

<http://www.ipo.gov.uk/about/whatwedo/ourpublications/ourpublications-review.htm>

Data for 2012 are due to be published shortly. Numbers of patents granted by the EPO with effect in the UK are taken from the EPO Worldwide Patent Statistical Database.

Calendar year	Patents granted by IPO	Patents granted by EPO	Total
2011	7,173	58,360	65,533
2010	5,594	54,106	59,700
2009	5,428	48,287	53,715
2008	5,360	55,623	60,983
2007	5,930	50,837	56,767
2006	7,907	58,349	66,256
2005	10,159	49,501	59,660
2004	10,541	54,468	65,009
2003	9,761	55,519	65,280
2002	8,690	43,900	52,590

Pay: Liverpool

Steve Rotheram: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many businesses in Liverpool are currently paying the living wage and above; and if he will take steps to introduce a national living wage. [155856]

Jo Swinson: Information on how many businesses pay above the living wage is not available.

The Government supports businesses that choose to pay the living wage however decisions on what wages to set, above the national minimum wage, are for employers and workers. There are no plans to introduce a national living wage.

Our primary policy to support the low paid is through the national minimum wage. The aim is to help as many low-paid workers as possible, while making sure that we do not damage their employment prospects by setting it too high.

The Government recognises that these are tough times and is doing absolutely everything it can to help those on low pay with the cost of living. That is why the Government is cutting income tax for the low paid and has taken 2.4 million people out of income tax altogether since 2010.

Changes to the personal allowance mean that from April 2013, someone on the minimum wage working 29 hours a week will no longer pay income tax -and someone working full time (35 hours) on the minimum wage will have seen their income tax bill cut by more than half since 2010.

Most employers choose to pay their employees more than the minimum wage. It is up to them to decide whether they wish to sign up voluntarily to pay a 'Living Wage'.

Regeneration: North West

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what amount of funding was spent by the North West Development Agency on regeneration in Blackpool, Southport and Morecambe; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of this funding. [155618]

Michael Fallon: Information to enable this Department to provide an answer to the question raised would incur disproportionate costs as the records of the North West Regional Development Agency are now mainly held in archive.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155785]

Jo Swinson: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) monitors and collates the costs of regulations introduced by the Department through the statement of new regulation process. This involves taking a strategic look at forthcoming measures to see how regulatory costs and benefits will meet the targets under one in, two out. The estimated costs and benefits of all measures are assessed through impact assessments which are scrutinised by the Regulatory Policy Committee. All in-scope legislation is also subject to post-implementation reviews to ensure that it is not imposing burdens on business that are disproportionate and/or have not been anticipated.

BIS has been involved in nine Red Tape Challenge themes, which reviewed over 750 regulations. Following consultation with business and civic society, we have committed to scrap or repeal over 50% of these regulations. On two of our early themes, we have already delivered over 75% of the regulatory repeals or simplifications we committed to in the retail theme, and over 50% from the manufacturing theme. Implemented Red Tape Challenge measures are published in the statement of new regulation.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended; [155807]

(2) if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155951]

Jo Swinson: The one in, one out rule was introduced on 1 September 2010 and applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2011. One in, two out replaced the one in, one out rule and has applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2013. Details of regulations introduced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) that fall within the scope of one in, one out (OIOO) or one in, two out (OITO) are published in the statements of new regulation and will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Renewable Energy

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to his Department's announcement of 26 March 2013 of £31 million of funding for new nuclear technology, what amount has been set aside for (a) new renewable technology in the UK, (b) enhancements in that sector's supply chain and (c) increased opportunities to commercialise new renewable technologies in that sector; and if he will make a statement. [156124]

Michael Fallon: The Department's announcement of 26 March 2013 of £31 million of funding was for new nuclear technology only.

The Government expects to invest in excess of £800 million in this spending review period directly to support a broad portfolio of innovative low carbon technologies, including renewables.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent estimate he has made of the size of the global renewables market; what steps he is taking to develop long-term partnerships to enable UK businesses to compete in this market; and if he will make a statement. [156125]

Michael Fallon: Global investment in all clean energy assets is expected to increase from \$189 billion in 2012 to \$630 billion in 2030¹.

UKTI is developing partnerships in many markets, including China, Taiwan, India and Northern Europe. UKTI continues to support UK companies at key global exhibitions in the UK and overseas and through ministerial visits to build relationships with governments, business and academic institutions.

¹ Bloomberg New Energy Finance

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what analysis he has made of the economic benefits of improving the UK's supply chain capabilities for (a) onshore wind, (b) offshore wind, (c) solar power, (d) marine energy, (e) geothermal and (f) other renewable energy technologies; and if he will make a statement. [156126]

Michael Fallon: The 2011 Renewable Energy Roadmap updated in December 2012 sets out the Government's approach to supporting the development of key renewable energy technologies, including encouraging a UK-based supply chain.

Offshore wind is one of 10 sectors across the economy that is considered of strategic importance to the UK economy and BIS is leading work to develop an industrial strategy for offshore wind which will set out the economic benefits from improving the UK's supply chain capabilities.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he has carried out a review of the research and development landscape in the UK for renewable energy technologies; and if he will make a statement. [156127]

Mr Willetts: On behalf of the Research Councils UK (RCUK) Energy Programme, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) appointed Energy

Strategy Fellow, Professor Jim Skea, to develop a new roadmap of research, skills and training needs across the entire energy landscape. The roadmap will provide the evidence base for the RCUK Energy Programme to plan its long-term research activities and investments.

The Government also completed a review of the low carbon innovation landscape in 2011 which focused on enhancing the delivery of publicly funded innovation support for low carbon innovation technologies. A copy of the review is available in the Libraries of the House.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will publish a renewables industry vision statement to allow UK industry to present its ambitions over the next 40 years; if he will make an assessment of whether such a policy would (a) ensure the development of a vibrant UK renewable industry, (b) position the UK as a strong player in the global renewables market, (c) set out how the renewable industry can be an area of economic and strategic national strength and (d) form the start of a commitment for the renewables industry to work more collaboratively with Government in pursuit of a vibrant and globally respected UK industry; and if he will make a statement. [156128]

Michael Fallon: Renewable energy will have a strong role to play alongside nuclear and gas and with increased deployment there will be economic opportunities. This is why the Government announced three energy industrial strategies partnered by industry. We have published strategies for the nuclear and oil and gas sectors and a strategy for offshore wind will be published in the coming months. This will set out Government and industry actions to create a vibrant and strong supply chain for offshore wind and the economic benefits associated with it. The Offshore Wind Industry Council, which I co-chair, met for the first time on 16 May, to build the strong and effective partnership between Government and the industry.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what consideration he has given to the establishment of a renewables research and development advisory board; and if he will make a statement. [156129]

Mr Willetts: The Research Councils UK (RCUK) Energy Programme has a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), which advises on the strategic direction, scientific content and co-ordination of research and development (R and D) within the Energy Programme.

Representatives from BIS, Technology Strategy Board and Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) attend the RCUK Energy SAC meetings held three times a year. The membership also includes representatives from universities and business.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will develop research and development roadmaps for renewable energy technologies to ensure the UK is able to make informed decisions on future renewable options beyond 2020; if he will ensure that these roadmaps analyse the advantages of (a) the realisation of industrial benefits, (b) the development and exploitation of intellectual

property internationally and (c) being seen as a credible international partner; if he will include in any such roadmaps the research outcomes that would support implementation of future technology pathways and detailed illustrative timelines as examples of these pathways; and if he will make a statement. [156131]

Michael Fallon: The Government and its key partners in the Low Carbon Innovation Coordination Group (LCICG) have developed Technology Innovation Needs Assessments (TINAs) to inform the prioritisation of public sector investment in low carbon innovation. The aims of TINAs are to identify and value the key technology innovation needs that deliver the greatest benefit to the UK. Building on the TINAs, the LCICG is currently working with industry to develop a strategy for low carbon innovation. This will set out a shared LCICG vision of its members' aims, principles, approach and priorities within technology families for public investment between now and 2020. The intention is for this strategy to be published in autumn 2013.

In 2011 the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published a Renewable Energy Roadmap that sets out how we are going to reach our goal of generating 15% of our energy use from renewable by 2020. The Roadmap focused on seven key technologies, including offshore wind, marine energy and biomass heat, with a further update to add solar photovoltaics in December 2012. Deployment of these and other renewable technologies could bring significant investment and jobs to the UK. Between 1 April 2011 and 31 July 2012, DECC collated renewable industry announcements totalling around £12.7 billion confirmed and planned investments, with the potential to support of around 22,800 jobs.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) appointed Professor Jim Skea as a Strategy Fellow for the Research Councils UK (RCUK) Energy Programme in May 2012. Professor Skea will develop a new roadmap of research, skills and training needs across the entire energy landscape to meet the UK 2050 climate change targets.

The roadmap will be developed over five years and updated annually in light of new technological developments and policy change. During this time the Fellow will consult with stakeholders in the research community, government bodies including DECC and the private sector to map out systems of energy innovation for a range of countries and technologies. The Energy Technologies Institute will also provide support and industrial expertise for the development of the roadmap documents. The roadmap will provide the evidence base for the RCUK Energy Programme to plan its long-term research activities and investments.

Scotland

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what (a) his Department and (b) its non-departmental public bodies procured from companies based in Scotland of a value in excess of £25,000 since May 2010; and what the cost to the public purse was of each such procurement contract. [155773]

Jo Swinson: This information is not held centrally within the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate costs. However, since January 2011,

central Government Departments have been required to publish on Contracts Finder information on the contracts they award at:

www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/

Students: Loans

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 13 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 73W, on fraud-error and debt, what estimate he has made of the annual savings to the Student Loans Company from the introduction of a check first before paying approach; and what the annual level of fraud reported by the Student Loans Company prior to the introduction of a check first before paying approach was since 2005. [156475]

Mr Willetts: Fraud detection and prevention are key areas of work for the Student Loan Company (SLC). The SLC has always applied a check first before paying approach, but is continuously looking to improve the quality of the data and tools it has to support that approach. It continues to make a valuable contribution to the counter fraud activities of the taskforce sharing good practice developed with support from a range of public and private sector partners. The following table provides a breakdown of the savings made by the SLC through its counter fraud work since 2011-12 when it was able to use new fraud prevention tools.

Financial year	Savings from counter-fraud activities (£)
2011-12	2,268,697
2012-13	13,579,907
Total	15,848,604

Training

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible enrolled in publicly-funded training courses in each of the last five years; what the total cost has been of such courses; and what the monetary value was of the 10 highest training course fees in each such year. [155420]

Jo Swinson: The majority of the BIS training budget is delegated to the individual business units. This enables them to target resources to their learning priorities. BIS does not centrally collate details of individual course attendances.

The spend on training in core BIS since its inception in 2009 is

	Spend	Average spend per head
2009/10	4,190,088	1,144

	Spend	Average spend per head
2010/11	2,340,575	710
2011/12	2,662,967	879
2012/13	2,070,999	658

The focus of centrally managed spend in 2011/12 was on performance management and in 2012/13 was on civil service learning delivered leadership and management courses.

BIS does not collect learning data from its non-departmental public bodies.

Travel

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible claimed reimbursement for travel subsistence expenses in each of the last five years; what the total cost was of such claims; and what the monetary value was of the 20 highest subsistence claims in each such year. [155401]

Jo Swinson: Information on how many officials have claimed reimbursement for travel subsistence expenses, together with the monetary value of the 20 highest subsistence claims in each of the last five years is not held centrally within the Department, and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

The following expenditure has been recorded within the Department's financial system against the subsistence reporting point:

Financial year	Expenditure (£)
2008/09	556,633
2009/10	481,719
2010/11	326,912
2011/12	224,262
2012/13	211,921
2013/14 (up to 13 May 2013)	27,725

These data exclude non-departmental public bodies as this information is not held centrally within the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Unmanned Air Vehicles: Exports

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will consider subjecting the export of components of unmanned aerial vehicles to strategic export controls. [155500]

Michael Fallon: Components for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are already subject to strategic export control if they are: (a) specially designed or modified for military use; or (b) specified in the EU dual-use control list. These controls are agreed in the international export control regimes and apply to the items with the greatest strategic importance.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 May 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND Conditions of Employment

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in her Department are employed on zero hours contracts. [156054]

Mike Penning: No one in my Department is employed on zero hour contracts.

Electoral Register

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration she has given to a change in the electoral law to provide for an automatic annual canvass of registration. [156047]

Mike Penning: I wrote to the Northern Ireland parties in February this year to consult them on the Government's proposals for changes to electoral registration in Northern Ireland following the Electoral Commission's November 2012 report on the register.

As I set out in that letter, the Government do not believe that an annual canvass would be cost effective, relative to other registration activity. The reintroduction of an annual canvass would lead to an increase in the Northern Ireland Office budget of around 7% a year, as well as a corresponding increase to the costs of registration activity to local authorities in Northern Ireland.

The Government does however feel that it would be appropriate to hold a full canvass during 2013 to ensure that as many people as possible are registered accurately before elections in 2014.

ICT

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many (a) computers, (b) mobile telephones, (c) BlackBerrys and (d) other pieces of IT equipment were lost or stolen from non-departmental bodies in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if she will make a statement. [156432]

Mike Penning: My Department has two Executive non-departmental public bodies—the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland; and one advisory non-departmental public body—the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland. As such bodies are independent of Government, the hon. Member may wish to write to the Commissions directly on these matters—contact details are set out in the following table:

ALB	Status	Contact details
Parades Commission for Northern Ireland	Executive NDPB	Info@paradescommission.org
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Executive NDPB	information@nihrc.org

ALB	Status	Contact details
Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland	Advisory NDPB	bni@belfast.org.uk

TREASURY

Bank Cards: Fees and Charges

Bob Blackman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment his Department has made of the potential effects on the UK economy of the EU Commission's proposals to harmonise interchange rates across the EU; [155925]

(2) what response his Department has made to the EU Commission's proposals to harmonise interchange fees across the EU. [155926]

Sajid Javid: The European Commission is expected to publish a legislative proposal by summer 2013 to regulate multilateral interchange fees on card payments. The proposal will be accompanied by an impact assessment.

The Government will make its own assessment of the legislative proposal once it is published.

Banks: Loans

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to removing the state underwriting of loans to UK banks. [156013]

Sajid Javid: The National Loan Guarantee Scheme (NLGS) is the only government scheme that provides government-guarantees on funding to UK banks. The scheme was launched to help businesses access cheaper finance by reducing the cost of bank funding.

In the light of the Funding for Lending Scheme (FLS), banks who were offering NLGS loans will now, instead, deliver credit easing to the whole economy through the FLS. However the NLGS remains available to banks if they wish to use it in the future or if market conditions change.

Bingo

Ian Austin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the bingo industry. [156061]

Sajid Javid: Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

The Treasury publishes a list of ministerial meetings with external organisations, available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister_hospitality.htm

Debt Collection

David Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that debt collection companies do not attempt to collect statute bound debts. [156056]

Jo Swinson: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has published guidance for businesses engaged in the recovery of consumer credit debts and what it considers to be improper business practices. The OFT accepts that it can be reasonable, in England and Wales, to ask for repayment of a statute barred debt on the basis that the debt still exists, but is no longer enforceable through the courts.

However the OFT considers that the following practices may be unfair:

Misleading the debtor as to their rights and obligations (i.e. threatening legal action when it is known, or ought to be known, that the relevant limitation period has expired)

Pursuing the debt under circumstances in which the debtor has heard nothing from the creditor during the relevant limitation period

Continuing to press a debtor for payment after he has stated that he will not be paying because the debt is statute barred

In Scotland: any attempt to recover a debt that is known to be, or ought to be known to be, extinguished

The OFT would expect creditors to alert prospective debt purchasers to the fact that a debt is statute barred. Failure to have regard to the OFT guidance on statute barred debt will call into question a licensee's fitness to hold a consumer credit licence and may prompt regulatory action.

ICT

Mr Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (a) computers, (b) mobile telephones, (c) BlackBerrys and (d) other pieces of IT equipment were lost or stolen from his Department in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [156436]

Sajid Javid: The following computers, mobile telephones, BlackBerrys and other pieces of IT equipment have been lost or stolen from the Department in the financial year 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13:

2010-11	
Items lost or stolen from the Department	Recovered
12 laptop computers	4
1 mobile phone	0
10 BlackBerrys	2
11 other pieces of IT equipment	0
2011-12	
Items lost or stolen from the Department	Recovered
8 laptop computers	5
0 mobile phones	n/a
17 BlackBerrys	2
29 other pieces of IT equipment	3
2012-13	
Items lost or stolen from the Department	Recovered
8 laptop computers	2
0 mobile phones	n/a
11 BlackBerrys	0
34 other pieces of IT equipment	0

All the laptop computers involved in these incidents were encrypted devices that are not accessible without a security token and more than one password. The BlackBerrys are also password protected.

No tokens or passwords were left with these items, and so there was no data loss, and steps were taken, as soon as the theft of these electronic items were reported, to ensure that they provided no means of access to any of the Department's IT systems.

Members: Correspondence

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to reply to the letter to him of 13 March 2013 from the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South and the follow up letter sent by the hon. Member on 25 April 2013. [156546]

Mr Gauke: I have replied to the hon. Member.

Mobile Phones

Pamela Nash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which company holds the largest contract to provide mobile telephony services to HM Revenue and Customs; how much was paid under this contract in the last year for which figures are available; how many individual services are covered by the contract; when the contract was awarded; and when the contract will next be renewed. [155941]

Mr Gauke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 22 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 674W.

Mortgages: Government Assistance

John Healey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether older people without a mortgage can qualify for the equity loan scheme that is part of the Help to Buy initiative. [156021]

Mr Prisk: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

This Government believes that housing and planning policies should reflect the wide range of circumstances and lifestyle choices relevant to older people today.

All applicants for the Help to Buy equity loan scheme must take out a mortgage. This requirement is in place as the Homes and Communities Agency, which is delivering the programme on our behalf, is unable to act as a first charge lender.

I appreciate this may mean that some older purchasers may not be able to access the scheme. However, we have made provisions for older people to access home ownership through the Older People Shared Ownership scheme.

This scheme enables older people to purchase between a 25-75% share of a purpose built property from a registered provider on shared ownership terms. We recognise that, the household income for many older people is unlikely to rise significantly, therefore any purchaser who has purchased a maximum 75% share will not have to pay any rent on the unowned equity.

We have also introduced measures to stimulate the development of more specialist housing options for older people. The Government has set up a new care and support housing fund, which will provide £300 million

of capital funding to encourage providers to develop new specialist accommodation options for older and disabled people.

Mutual Societies

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he plans to take to incentivise the creation of mutual financial institutions. [156009]

Sajid Javid: The Government is strongly supportive of mutuals, and promoting diversity within financial services. The Department of Work and Pensions is currently running a project to modernise and develop the credit union sector, with the anticipation that they will be able to serve 1 million more people by 2019. Alongside this, HM Treasury has recently closed a consultation on whether to raise the maximum interest rate cap for credit unions from 2% to 3% per calendar month to enable credit unions to become sustainable. A response to this consultation will be issued shortly.

The Government also published a consultation on the 'Future of Building Societies', earlier this year. The Government's intention is to ensure that building societies can continue to compete on a level playing field with banks, while retaining their distinctive low-risk business model.

Pay

Mr Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average was of (a) basic pay, (b) bonuses, (c) share incentive scheme payouts, (d) stock options and (e) other remuneration of the top (i) 1 per cent and (ii) 0.1 per cent of earners in each of the last five years. [155896]

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson dated May 2013:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what the average was of (a) basic pay, (b) bonuses, (c) share incentive scheme payouts, (d) stock options and (e) other remuneration of the top (i) 1 per cent and (ii) 0.1 per cent of earners in each of the last five years. (155896)

Average levels of earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), and are provided for all employees on adult rates of pay whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence. The ASHE, carried out in April each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. ASHE data can be used to estimate average levels of basic pay, but suitable data are not available from which to estimate average levels of bonuses, share incentive scheme payouts, stock options or other remuneration.

ONS is in the process of producing the estimates of average basic pay for the highest-earning 1 per cent and 0.1 per cent of employees for each year from 2008 to 2012. The honourable member will be contacted directly with the answer, as soon as it is available, and a copy of the letter placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department; [155804]

(2) what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended; [155827]

(3) if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155970]

Sajid Javid: The introduction on new regulation by the Treasury is monitored through the six monthly Statement of New Regulation, when the regulation is in scope of One In Two Out. Since January 2013 the Statement of New Regulation has also included regulation which originates in the EU. Information on costs is recorded in Impact Assessments where there is a significant impact on business.

New regulation with an impact on business is subject to a review clause, and a review of this regulation will be required by a date specified in each piece of legislation.

The Treasury responds to any requests for regulation to be revoked or amended on a case by case basis.

A table which provides a list of all Treasury regulation introduced since May 2010, whether it was subject to the One-in, One-out or One-in, Two-out rules will be placed in the Library of the House. Web links are provided to pages which explain what legislation the regulation amends or revokes and what the cost and benefits of the regulation is. It should be noted that the One-in, One-out rule began operating in January 2011, and was replaced by the One-in, Two-out rule in January 2013.

Revenue and Customs: Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people from Northern Ireland called HM Revenue and Customs in each of the last three years; and what the average waiting time was of such calls in each such year. [156269]

Mr Gauke: I would refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on 22 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 678W.

HMRC periodically publishes its performance statistics at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/about/bus-plan-qds.htm>

and now at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-plan-indicators>

Scottish Affairs Select Committee

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's appearance at the Scottish Affairs Committee on 15 May 2013, (a) on what date his Office first received the invitation to appear at this session and (b) on what date his Office accepted the invitation to appear at this session. [156416]

Danny Alexander: I received the invitation to appear at the 15 May meeting of the Scottish Affairs Committee on 18 April and HM Treasury accepted the invitation on 10 May.

In addition, on the same day I was required to be in London to respond on behalf of the Government to the Queen's Speech debate in the House of Commons.

Social Security Benefits: East Renfrewshire

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in East Renfrewshire constituency were in receipt of (a) child benefit, (b) working families tax credits, (c) incapacity benefit, (d) disability living allowance and (e) income support in May (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013. [156634]

Mr Gauke: The information is as follows:

(a) Information on the number of families benefiting from child benefit by parliamentary constituency is available in table 6 of the HMRC publication "Child Benefit—Geographical Statistics" for August of 2010, 2011 and 2012 at:

www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/child-geog-stats.htm

This information is not yet available for 2013.

(b) Working family tax credit was abolished in March 2003 and replaced by child tax credits (CTC) and working tax credits (WTC).

Information on the number of families benefiting from CTC and WTC is available for April and December of 2010, 2011, 2012 and April 2013. Statistics by parliamentary constituency are published in table 4 of the HMRC snapshot publication "Personal Tax Credits: Provisional Statistics—Geographical Statistics" at:

www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/prov-geog-stats.htm

(c) Information on the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit in East Renfrewshire constituency, for the period May 2010, May 2011 and May 2012 is available at:

http://83.244.183.180/100pc/ibsdta/tabtool_ibsdta.html

(d) Information on the number of people in receipt of disability living allowance in East Renfrewshire constituency, for the period May 2010, May 2011 and May 2012 is available at:

http://83.244.183.180/100pc/dla/tabtool_dla.html

(e) Information on the number of people in receipt of income support in East Renfrewshire constituency, for the period May 2010, May 2011 and May 2012 is available at:

http://83.244.183.180/100pc/is/tabtool_is.html

With respect to parts (c) to (e):

Guidance for users is available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/tabtools/guidance.pdf>

Information for May 2013 is not yet available.

Social Security Benefits: Foreign Nationals

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people HM Revenue and Customs has stopped paying benefits to for having no right to be in the country for each of the past five years; and what the total amount of benefits claimed by these people was for each of the past five years. [156644]

Mr Gauke: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tax Avoidance

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from Google, Amazon and Facebook in respect of plans to take forward new measures to increase financial transparency. [155510]

Mr Gauke: Treasury Ministers regularly meet with businesses and their representatives to discuss a wide range of issues. As has been the case with successive administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of such meetings.

Taxation: Bingo

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on taxation of bingo. [155924]

Sajid Javid: Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

Taxation: Gambling

Ian Austin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the rate of gross profit tax levied on (a) bingo clubs, (b) online bingo and (c) bookmakers is; and what the reasons are for differences in the rates. [156117]

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the rate of gross profit tax levied on (a) bingo clubs, (b) online bingo and (c) bookmakers is; and what the reasons are for differences in the rates. [156114]

Sajid Javid: The rates of general betting duty, bingo duty and remote gaming duty were all set by the previous Government. Bingo duty applies to terrestrial bingo and is charged at 20% of gross profits. Remote gaming duty applies to bingo played online and is currently charged at 15% of gross profits, and general betting duty is charged at 15% of gross profits. At Budget 2013 the Government left rates unchanged.

All gambling taxes, including bingo duty, are kept under review by the Government.

SCOTLAND

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155802]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not take forward regulations. The Scotland Office is responsible for delivering a programme of Orders under the Scotland Act 1998, which are outwith the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and are primarily made in consequence to provisions made in Acts of the Scottish Parliament.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155825]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office has not taken forward any regulations subject to the one in one out or the one in two out procedure.

Each year, the Scotland Office takes forward a programme of Orders under the Scotland Act 1998. Generally, Scotland Act Orders make changes to the law in England and Wales, Northern Ireland or the reserved law of the UK which are outwith the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and many of these changes are consequential to provisions made in Acts of the Scottish Parliament.

In addition to the Scotland Act Orders programme, the Scotland Office has introduced Orders to commence the provisions of the Scotland Act 2012, which implemented recommendations from the cross party commission on devolution in Scotland (the Calman Commission).

The Orders under these Acts do not in themselves introduce regulations.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155968]

David Mundell: Each year, the Scotland Office takes forward a programme of Orders under the Scotland Act 1998. Generally, Scotland Act Orders make changes to the law in England and Wales, Northern Ireland or the reserved law of the UK which are outwith the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and many of these changes are consequential to provisions made in Acts of the Scottish Parliament.

In addition to the Scotland Act Orders programme, the Scotland Office has introduced Orders to commence the provisions of the Scotland Act 2012, which implemented recommendations from the cross party commission on devolution in Scotland (the Calman Commission).

The Orders do not in themselves introduce regulations and there were no implementation costs associated with these Orders.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Apprentices: Farriers

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 15 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 257W, on apprentices, what steps he is taking to ensure that people with an offer of an apprenticeship provided through the National Farriery Training Association that was due to begin in autumn 2013 can start their farriery apprenticeship this year. [156564]

Matthew Hancock: Provision at the National Farriery Training Association has been suspended as a consequence of Ofsted's judgment that this was inadequate.

I have asked the Skills Funding Agency to follow its intervention policy to deal to the issues raised by Ofsted. In addition, the agency is working closely with the Farrier's Registration Council and the National Farriery Training Association to put in place an alternative model of delivery that addresses the immediate concerns raised by Ofsted, and will allow apprentices to start in autumn 2013.

Senior staff from the agency are meeting with the Chair of the Farrier's Registration Council to explore this model in the next few days.

Climate Change

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 14 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 128W, on climate change, what the likelihood of the cited statistical model is relative to a driftless autoregressive integrated model. [156639]

Michael Fallon: The Met Office has not made a comparison between the cited statistical model and a driftless autoregressive integrated model because the two are designed for different purposes. The cited model is constructed to make error estimates in observations of near-surface temperature, while the other seeks to emulate the evolution of a data time series: in this case instrumental records of global average near-surface temperature anomalies.

Employment: Mental Illness

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what measures are in place to ensure that people suffering from mental health issues in the workplace are encouraged to seek treatment; [155783]

(2) what estimate he has made of the annual cost to businesses of mental illness in their workforces. [155784]

Dr Poulter: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department of Health.

The Department of Health's Public Health Responsibility Deal Health at Work Network aims to improve public health throughout the workplace. It includes a pledge for employers to make reasonable workplace adjustments to ensure that people with mental health conditions can continue to work effectively.

Through the NHS outcomes framework, we will hold NHS services to account for their role in helping people with mental health problems to stay in employment.

The Mental Health Strategy's Implementation Framework sets out what employers and employment support organisations can do to help people with mental illness find and stay in employment. This includes:

- assessing the impact of mental health problems on their work force, what this means for their business and taking action accordingly;
- joining the Mindful Employer scheme to help increase awareness of mental health in the workplace;
- signing up to the Time to Change campaign to raise the profile of mental health and address stigma; and
- joining the Responsibility Deal Health at Work Network.

A policy paper published by the Centre for Mental Health in 2007 estimated that the total cost to employers of mental health problems among their staff was nearly £26 billion a year in 2007.

Groceries Code Adjudicator

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the timescale is for introducing the supermarket adjudicator; and if he will make a statement. [156517]

Jo Swinson: The Groceries Code Adjudicator Act gained Royal Assent on 25 April 2013.

In common with standard legal convention, the Act will come into force two months from the date of Royal Assent. The Adjudicator's office will issue a consultation on the exercise of her powers shortly thereafter. Her investigatory powers will come into force after the final version of her guidance has been agreed and published.

Higher Education: Standards

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to address low student satisfaction rates in UK universities. [156317]

Mr Willetts: The Government's higher education reforms are designed to make universities more responsive to students' needs, to increase student choice and to improve information to students so they are able to choose a course and institution that best suits their needs and expectations. Universities that provide a better student experience will attract more students and be able to expand where they chose to do so.

The Government supported National Study Survey (NSS) publishes the ratings of final year undergraduates across the UK. All English universities participate in the survey and the overall response rate is 67% (287,000 students in 2012). The 2012 survey showed that, nationally, 84% of English students were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning on their course, although there is a lower score for assessment and feedback of 71% in 2012.

However there is no room for complacency, satisfaction rates can vary significantly between institutions and even within institutions in different subjects. We are encouraging universities to use NSS results and other sources of feedback from students to identify where they need to make improvements—to meet the challenge from Government and students to focus on improving the academic experience they offer.

In addition, by introducing the new Key Information Set, we have made it easier for university applicants to access the latest NSS results alongside a range of other information for their subject area, to help inform their decision making. This is available via each university course page and the revised Unistats national comparison website:

<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will investigate the variations in teaching hours between undergraduate courses in UK universities. [156362]

Mr Willetts: Universities have to provide more information to students and prospective students than ever before. The Key Information Set provides 17 pieces of information on student satisfaction rates, employment outcomes, fees and accommodation costs. We wish to see universities supplement this with a wider range of clear information on, for example, contact hours, class sizes and who will provide the teaching. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is leading a multi-agency project (including the NUS) to provide additional guidance to higher education providers and students on these three areas, together with the use of student feedback.

We are also making it easier for students to hold their institutions to account for delivering a high-quality student experience. QAA now include student representatives in all their review teams, and each review will take account of evidence from the institution's students in writing and/or through meetings. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator/OIA takes up and reviews student complaints where they cannot be resolved through institutions' own complaints procedures.

Innovation: Gender

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what plan his Department has to consider the European Commission report, She Figures 2012 on gender in research and innovation; [156371]

(2) what plans his Department has to respond to the European Commission report, She Figures 2012 in respect of England. [156522]

Mr Willetts: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) welcomes the European Commission's report on gender research and innovation, which highlights the continuing under-representation of women in both the public and private research sector. Although BIS has not been asked formally by the Commission to respond to the report, we will consider how best to make use of the data in developing the Department's policies in support of this issue.

The STEM work force is vital to growth and the economy and our research base misses out when we are not drawing scientists from as wide a talent pool as possible. BIS is funding the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society to jointly run a STEM Diversity Programme to identify and remove barriers to joining STEM work force; improve retention and progression rates for people once they join the work force and widen the scope of diversity work from a previous focus on gender issues only, to cover all minority or disadvantaged groups.

Also in January this year, Research Council UK (RCUK) set out the expectation that equality and diversity should be embedded at all levels and in all aspects of normal research practice. RCUK expects those in receipt of Research Council funding to provide evidence of ways in which equality and diversity issues are managed at both an institutional and departmental level. This will provide an incentive to universities to improve the impact of their diversity and equality policies, ensuring the work force reflects society, and makes best use of all the talents available to it.

Medicine: Education

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many (a) male and (b) female medically qualified academic staff are employed by universities in England and the UK; [156366]

(2) how many (a) male and (b) female medically qualified academic staff employed by universities in England and the UK also have an honorary contract with the NHS. [156367]

Mr Willetts: The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes data on staff at UK higher education institutions (HEIs).

The HESA Staff Record provides data in respect of the characteristics of members of all academic and non-academic staff employed under a contract of employment at a reporting HEI in the UK. Staff employed under consultancy contracts, or on the basis of payment of fees for services without a contract of employment, are not included in the record.

The Staff Record shows the number of staff for whom medicine and dentistry has been designated as the subject discipline appropriate to their academic qualification. This is not necessarily the academic subject in which that staff member may currently be teaching or researching.

Academic staff with qualifications recorded against medicine and dentistry JACS groupings^{1, 2} and those with NHS contracts, English and UK higher education institutions³ academic year 2011/12

	English HEIs			UK HEIs			Number Total
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	
Total staff with a medicine and dentistry HE qualification	2,445	3,545	5,995	2,960	4,285	7,250	
<i>Of which with a NHS contract:</i>							
HEI contract and NHS honorary contract	1,020	2,165	3,180	1,280	2,610	3,890	
Separate HEI and NHS contracts (e.g. A + B contracts)	60	95	150	65	110	180	
Joint HEI/NHS or primary/community health care contracts	25	75	100	35	125	160	
Total	1,100	2,335	3,435	1,380	2,845	4,225	

Note:

Figures are on a full person equivalent (FPE) basis, and have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, so components may not sum to totals.

¹ Joint Academic Coding System grouping of Medicine and Dentistry.

² Based on the academic discipline of the member of staff.

³ Excluding the Open university.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency Staff Record.

Money Lenders

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department is taking to tackle loan sharks and illegal money lenders. [156497]

Jo Swinson: The Government established the National Trading Standards Board (NTSB) for England and Wales in April 2012, following our consultation on 'Empowering and Protecting Consumers'. Since its launch,

the NTSB has continued to fund the delivery of Illegal Money Lending Teams in England and Wales, which were previously directly funded by BIS. As well as tackling and prosecuting loan sharks, the teams work with community partners to provide access to advice and support for victims. The NTSB reports to BIS on progress on a quarterly basis.

In 2012/13, the teams either charged or had proceedings instituted against 44 individuals for offences which included illegal money lending. This resulted in 13 custodial sentences. In the same year, £120,000 in cash and an estimated £952,000 in assets were seized from loan sharks. In England over £100,000 of proceeds of crime money was re-invested within local communities to help spread the Stop Loan Sharks message.

In Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities launched a month-long Stop Loan Sharks campaign in March 2013. The campaign urged the public to report suspected unlicensed lenders, and was supported through a variety of advertising including the radio, in buses and washroom panels.

Pension Funds: Shareholders

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to make it easier for small shareholders to question the way in which their pension investments are managed by firms. [156012]

Jo Swinson: Individuals often hold shares indirectly through an investment fund as part of a broader investment portfolio, or electronically through a broker or other intermediary.

In these cases it is usually the fund or intermediary that has the right to attend, speak and vote at company meetings. However, it is possible for the fund or intermediary to nominate another party to exercise voting rights and that can include individual shareholders. Individual shareholders would have to request that their fund or intermediary delegates these rights to them and it is up to the particular fund or intermediary to decide whether to offer this service.

The Government recently commissioned Professor John Kay to undertake an independent review of investment in UK equity markets. The review looked at the relationships between shareholders, the companies they invest in and the intermediaries and agents in the investment chain. Professor Kay published his final report in July 2012.

The Government welcomed Professor Kay's report and, in response to one of Professor Kay's specific recommendations, committed to explore the most cost effective means for individuals to hold shares directly on an electronic register. The Government is now working to achieve this objective in the context of current EU policy proposals relating to central securities depositories and securities law. The Government believes that future arrangements for investors to hold shares electronically should increase shareholder transparency and facilitate shareholders exercising their rights.

Renewable Energy

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will publish a long-term renewable energy strategy to 2050 including

(a) the challenges that need to be met between now and 2050, (b) his vision for the future of renewable energy in the UK and strategy to ensure renewables have the best prospect of reaching their full potential, (c) the role of Government, regulators, industry, academia and other interested parties in delivering this strategy and (d) a clear framework against which decisions and priorities for policy and research to underpin the strategy will be taken; and if he will make a statement. [156130]

Michael Fallon: The coalition agreement set out this Government's commitment to supporting the deployment of renewables in the UK. In July 2011 we published our Renewable Energy Roadmap, which set out how we intend to meet the UK's legally binding target of generating 15% of our energy use from renewable sources by 2020. This was updated in 2012.

In the Carbon Plan (December 2011), the Department set out four energy pathways that are consistent with its target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. The Carbon Plan is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-carbon-plan-reducing-greenhouse-gas-emissions--2>

The 2050 Calculator model, used to inform the pathways, is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/2050-pathways-analysis>

This model describes the possible role of renewables over the decades, without presupposing any one scenario.

Science: Higher Education

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what assessment his Department has made of the success of steps taken by universities to recruit and retain female staff in clinical and medical STEM subjects; [156368]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to encourage UK universities to recruit and retain female staff in clinical and medical STEM subjects. [156369]

Mr Willetts: The responsibility for staff equality matters rests with higher education institutions (HEIs), as the employers. In the annual Grant Letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Government encourages the sector to continue to address long standing equality issues, including more diverse representation at senior levels in HEIs.

Higher education institutions receiving grant funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England also have to meet the requirements of the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010 and advance equality of opportunity.

The Athena SWAN Charter recognises and celebrates good employment practice for women working in science, engineering and technology (SET) in higher education and research. Membership is open to any university or research institution committed to the advancement of the careers of women in SET. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) provides some funding for Athena SWAN via the Royal Society as part of our science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) Diversity Programme.

The Athena SWAN Charter exists to instigate real and continuing change for women and also their male colleagues. HEIs and individual departments have to

demonstrate a commitment to improving working practices and also measure the impact these changes are having, and tackle areas where progress has not been as fast. The Charter is run by the Equality Challenge Unit, an independent higher education sector body, which provides higher education institutions with support on all equality matters and works directly with institutions to help them tackle under-representation among staff groups.

BIS welcomes the announcement in April 2013, that Athena SWAN presented a record 68 awards to individual departments and higher education institutions (HEIs). 24% of submissions were from medical and dental schools and departments, and 29% of awards were to these disciplines. Last year this figure was just 9%. This increase will have been due, in part, to the action taken by the chief medical officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies. In July 2011 Dame Sally wrote to the Medical Schools Council, outlining her intention that all medical schools who wish to apply for National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centres and Units funding need to have achieved an Athena SWAN Charter Silver Award.

PRIME MINISTER

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Prime Minister what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by No. 10 Downing Street in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155824]

The Prime Minister: There have been no regulations set by No 10 Downing Street since May 2010. This Government's 'One-in One-out' rule has stopped new regulations being added faster than removed. The rule has saved business around £1 billion in regulatory costs since 2011. We have now changed this to a 'One-in, Two-out' rule. For every new cost imposed on business by new regulations, we will demand equivalent savings of double that value over the remainder of the Parliament.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Order Paper

Sir Alan Beith: To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether any financial savings or additional costs are expected to arise from the redesign of the Commons Order Paper; and if the Commission will make arrangements for the views of hon. Members on the new Order Paper to be ascertained. [156249]

John Thurso: No immediate financial savings are expected but in the longer term the redesign will contribute to reducing the amount of hard copy printing, and so to substantial recurring savings. No additional costs will arise.

The redesign of the Order Paper and Future Business was undertaken in-house. The main aim was to make the Order Paper better suited to electronic publication and distribution. The opportunity was also taken to bring the design up to modern standards for accessibility

by the sight disabled. An Order Paper application which allows hon. Members to download the Order Paper to tablet devices has already been developed. An enriched electronic version of the Order Paper, which will include hyperlinks to documents referred to in it, is planned.

The Administration and Procedure Committees were invited to comment on the redesign ahead of its launch. The feedback received so far has been generally very positive. Modifications have already been made in response to feedback received, such as including Members constituencies alongside their names in notices of oral questions. The Principal Clerk of the Table Office welcomes comments from all users of the Order Paper.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Prosecutions

Jason McCartney: To ask the Attorney-General what measures the police and Crown Prosecution Service are taking to reduce the decision time in choosing to bring a prosecution forward. [156116]

The Solicitor-General: The Police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) are working together to reduce the decision time in choosing to bring a prosecution forward by:

Improving the arrangements for police officers seeking CPS charging decisions by providing a 24 hours, seven days per week service through CPS Direct, the CPS dedicated charging service: CPS commenced this work on 1 April 2013.

Amending the Director's Guidance for Charging to allow the police to charge shoplifting offences where a not guilty plea is anticipated. Under these arrangements, the police are responsible for charging approximately 72% of all offences without reference to the CPS.

Working with other criminal justice system agencies to embed and extend the use of digital working and to extend the range of circumstances in which specified proceedings may be prosecuted by the police. A best practice model has been developed for specified proceedings, which includes:

encouraging more consistent use and expansion of Fixed Penalty Notices;

replacing court summons with police postal charging;

revising information to defendants to prevent unnecessary attendance at court;

enabling CPS prosecutors to deal with contested cases only.

Extending specified proceedings in this way will offer a simpler and more proportionate response to these high volume low-level offences. It will increase police discretion and mean the CPS can focus their resources on more serious and contested cases, where their, independence and specialist skills add most value.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Register: Northern Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, with reference to the findings in the report by the Electoral Commission of 27 November 2012, continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland on the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register in Northern Ireland, if he will provide an estimate of the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register for each Northern Ireland parliamentary constituency. [156046]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that its most recent assessment of the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Northern Ireland was designed to provide overall estimates for Northern Ireland and for some key demographic groups. It did not estimate completeness and accuracy by parliamentary constituency. It would have been prohibitively expensive to do so reliably due to the size of the sample required.

The research found overall that rural areas in Northern Ireland had higher rates of both completeness and accuracy than urban areas. It also identified a strong correlation with age and length of residence: individuals in older age groups and those who had been resident at their property for more than one year were more likely to be registered.

The report is available on the Electoral Commission website:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what initiatives are being considered by the Electoral Commission to reach out to under-registered groups in Northern Ireland. [156048]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that one of the recommendations in its report on 'Continuous Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland' was there should be household registration activity before the 2014 elections. The Commission also recommended that this activity should be supported by public awareness activity.

As a result of the report findings, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland recommended to the Secretary of State that a full canvass of electors be conducted in autumn 2013.

To support this canvass the Commission will run a Northern Ireland wide public awareness campaign with the overall aim of maximising the effectiveness of the autumn canvass.

The public awareness campaign will take place in a number of phases between August and October to encourage everyone eligible to vote to return their canvass forms. It will include advertising on TV, radio, press, outdoor and online. Although the campaign will target everyone eligible to vote in Northern Ireland it will also aim to target those groups identified in the Commission's report as being less likely to be registered. This includes:

people who have been resident at their property for less than two years;

people renting from a private landlord or letting agency;

18 to 34-year-olds; and

people in the lower socio-economic groups C2, D and E.

CABINET OFFICE

Clubs

Steve Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to promote membership of service clubs; and if he will make a statement. [155781]

Mr Robathan: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

It is not in the Government's remit to recommend membership of private clubs. However, we do recognise and appreciate the important role that service clubs play in supporting the armed forces community.

Job Creation: Yorkshire and the Humber

Andrew Jones: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many private sector jobs were created in Yorkshire and the Humber in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [156505]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated May 2013:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary

Question concerning the number of private sector jobs created in Yorkshire and The Humber in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. 156505

The ONS does not directly provide estimates for the number of private sector jobs created, only the net change in the number of people in private sector employment, which in turn, are estimated as the difference between total employment from the Labour Force Survey and data from public sector organisations.

The table below contains estimates of the number of people in private sector employment in Yorkshire and The Humber at June 2009, June 2010, June 2011 and June 2012 and the net change between these periods.

On 1 April 2012, English further education colleges and sixth form college corporations were re-classified from the public sector to the private sector. Estimates of their employment are therefore included in the private sector from June 2012 and in the public sector for earlier periods.

The table below also contains estimates of private sector employment excluding the impact of this reclassification, that is, if English further education colleges and sixth form college corporations in Yorkshire and The Humber had been classified to the private sector throughout.

Private sector employment in Yorkshire and the Humber

<i>As at June each year</i>	<i>People in employment</i>	<i>Net change</i>	<i>People in employment including English FE colleges and sixth-form college corporations throughout</i>	<i>Net change excluding the impact of the reclassification of English FE colleges and sixth-form college corporations</i>
2009	1,843	—	1,866	—
2010	1,841	-2	1,864	-2
2011	1,886	45	1,909	45
2012	1,892	6	1,892	-17

Population: Scotland

Margaret Curran: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many and what proportion of the residents of each parliamentary constituency in Scotland were born in (a) England, (b) Wales and (c) Northern Ireland. [156555]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated May 2013:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many and what proportion of the residents of each parliamentary constituency in Scotland were born in (a) England, (b) Wales and (c) Northern Ireland. 156555

ONS do not produce any statistics on parliamentary constituencies for Scotland. This Parliamentary Question should be referred to the Ministers in the Scottish Government for answer.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department; [155787]

(2) what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended; [155809]

(3) if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were; [155953]

(4) if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were; [155957]

(5) what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended; [155813]

(6) what processes his Office has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office. [155791]

Miss Chloe Smith: The Cabinet Office follows the Better Regulation Executive's Statement of New Regulation processes and guidance to monitor and collate cost information for regulations introduced by the Department. This is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-the-impact-of-regulation-on-business/supporting-pages/operating-a-one-in-two-out-rule-for-business-regulation>

The Cabinet Office uses the Red Tape Challenge (RTC) website to review and revoke regulation. RTC is a cross-government platform, hosted and managed by the Cabinet Office, which allows anyone to tell us which

regulations are working and which are not; what should be scrapped, what should be saved and what should be simplified. This is available at:

<http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/home/index/>

The one-in, one-out rule was introduced on 1 September 2010 and applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2011. Since January 2011, information regarding the regulations the Cabinet Office has introduced and those it plans to remove has been published on a six-monthly basis in its Statement of New Regulation (SNR). The statements also show the net direct costs to business. The period January 2011 to May 2013 is covered by the SNRs 1 to 5, which are available on GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-the-impact-of-regulation-on-business/supporting-pages/operating-a-one-in-two-out-rule-for-business-regulation>

One-in, two-out replaced the one-in, one-out rule and has applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2013.

Universal Credit

Stephen Timms: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how he plans to reflect the number of universal credit recipients in the monthly labour market statistics during the transition from jobseeker's allowance to universal credit. [156342]

Mr Hurd [*holding answer 20 May 2013*]: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated May 2013:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how it is planned to reflect the number of universal credit recipients in the monthly labour market statistics during the transition from jobseeker's allowance to universal credit. (156342)

The Claimant Count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefit principally for the reason of being unemployed. In periods prior to the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) the Claimant Count reflected the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or National Insurance Credits. As UC replaces a number of existing means-tested benefits, including the means-tested element of JSA, there will be people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed both from JSA and a subset of the total range of UC claimants.

Following a consultation in 2012 by ONS, it was agreed that the Claimant Count would reflect those people who were still receiving JSA, plus the subset of UC claimants who were claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. This UC element would be defined as those claimants who are not earning and subject to a full set of labour market jobseeker requirements, that is required to be actively seeking work and available to start work in order to qualify for benefits.

Once the transition to UC has completed, the Claimant Count will consist of those still claiming contributory based JSA, plus the subset of jobseeker UC claimants. However, during the transition it will also include the remaining people claiming means-tested based JSA until those cases are migrated.

On 29 April 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) started a Pathfinder for UC which created the first jobseeker UC claimants. The first Claimant Count after the start of the Pathfinder is the count for May 2013, based on a count date of 9 May, due for publication in the Labour Market Statistical Bulletin on 12 June.

ONS is working with DWP to include jobseeker UC claimants within the Claimant Count statistics at the earliest opportunity. UC information will be collated and quality assured by statisticians

within DWP to ensure they meet the necessary quality standards. Information will then be passed to ONS for inclusion within the regular Claimant Count statistical series.

It is not anticipated that ONS will receive information on the number of jobseeker UC claimants from DWP in time for inclusion in the May 2013 Claimant Count.

In the interim period, until DWP are able to provide a quality assured UC series, ONS will add notes to the Claimant Count to indicate that it does not include UC cases. Alongside this ONS will highlight figures relating to the number of JSA cases in local areas affected by the Pathfinder prior to and following the introduction of UC, to help users understand the possible impact of the absence of UC cases from the count. Since the Pathfinder at first covers just one Jobcentre and is limited to a subset of new claimants, the initial impact on the Claimant Count is expected to be very small.

Once DWP are able to provide a quality assured UC series, ONS intends to include these in the headline Claimant Count series and revise the figures for earlier periods back to May 2013 to reflect the full Claimant Count.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Children: Maintenance

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to Phase Two of the new statutory child maintenance scheme, what procedures his Department will adopt when seeking to broker a return to a child maintenance Direct Pay agreement without contact between the two parties, in cases where a parent with care has declared they were a victim of domestic violence, and the non-resident parent, currently within the statutory collection service, has requested a second chance at paying through a Direct Pay arrangement on the basis that his behaviour has changed. [156216]

Steve Webb: Where the application fee is waived because the applicant has declared themselves to be a victim of domestic violence, they will be able to choose the 'money transfer option' within Direct Pay. The money transfer option has been designed to provide a safe, anonymous, method for non-resident parents to make payments direct to the parent with care without the latter having to disclose any personal contact details to the former and without the case having to remain in the collection service.

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what risk assessments have been carried out by his Department regarding child maintenance cases under Phase Two of the new statutory scheme, where the Child Maintenance Service has waived the intended application fee on grounds of domestic violence, and where the alleged perpetrator asserts the choice to make the maintenance payments due direct to the parent with care who has declared she is a victim of domestic violence by him; and what regard such assessments have to (a) financial abuse and (b) coercive control. [156217]

Steve Webb: Where the application fee is waived because the applicant has declared themselves to be a victim of domestic violence, they will be able to choose the 'money transfer option' within Direct Pay. The money transfer option has been designed to provide a

safe, anonymous, method for non-resident parents to make payments direct to the parent with care without the latter having to disclose any personal contact details to the former and without the case having to move into the collection service.

The definition of domestic violence for the purposes of the application fee waiver is aligned to the full Home Office definition, and as such will cover any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive behaviour and financial abuse.

If a paying parent withholds Direct Pay payments in order to control or financially abuse their partner, we will move quickly to enforce the payment of maintenance through the statutory Child Maintenance Service.

Council Tax Benefits

Alison McGovern: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much each English local authority awarded in council tax benefit in 2011-12. [156072]

Mr Hoban: Council tax benefit expenditure for 2011-12 by local authority is in the table entitled "Tables showing benefit expenditure by country, region and local authority from 2000-01 to 2011-12" which can be accessed via the following URL:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/index.php?page=expenditure>

Note:

The breakdown of CTB expenditure is based on a combination of statistical data and local authority subsidy returns. 2011-12 expenditure is currently based on initial subsidy returns (final audited returns will be analysed and published later this summer).

Disability Living Allowance

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance has been issued to local authorities on the treatment of disability living allowance in relation to applications for discretionary housing payments. [156212]

Steve Webb: In establishing if the claimant requires further financial assistance, the local authority can decide how to treat any income or expenditure, taking into consideration the purpose of the income, where appropriate.

In the revised guidance issued in April, we advised that local authorities may decide to disregard income from disability related benefits, as they are intended to be used to help pay for the extra costs of disability and are likely to be committed to other liabilities for which the money was intended, such as Motability schemes or provision of care.

Disposable Income

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many disabled people in (a) each local authority area and (b) constituency live in households with incomes below 60 per cent of contemporary median net disposable household income (i) before and (ii) after housing costs; [156611]

(2) how many people in each (a) local authority area and (b) constituency live in households with incomes below 60 per cent of contemporary median net disposable household income (i) before and (ii) after housing costs; [156612]

(3) how many children in each (a) local authority area and (b) constituency live in households with incomes below 60 per cent of contemporary median net disposable household income (i) before and (ii) after housing costs. [156613]

Esther McVey: It is not possible to provide figures either by local authority area or by constituency, due to small sample sizes. Figures can only be provided either by region, by country, or for the UK as a whole.

In 2010-11 across the UK there were 2.3 million disabled individuals living in households with incomes below 60% of contemporary median net disposable household income, before housing costs; and 2.7 million after housing costs.

In 2010-11 across the UK there were 9.8 million people living in households with incomes below 60% of contemporary median net disposable household income, before housing costs; and 13 million after housing costs.

In 2010-11 across the UK there were 2.3 million children living in households with incomes below 60% of contemporary median net disposable household income, before housing costs; and 3.6 million after housing costs.

Figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000. Low income figures are published annually in the Households Below Average Income publication available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=hbai>

The Government launched a consultation on measuring child poverty on 15 November 2012. The consultation sought views on changing the way child poverty is measured to ensure we accurately capture the root causes of poverty. Measuring relative income in isolation is not a helpful way to tackle progress against our commitment to eradicating child poverty. The consultation closed on 15 February 2013. The responses to the consultation are currently being analysed, and the Government's conclusions will be published in the summer.

Housing Benefit

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance his Department has issued to local authorities on treatment of vulnerable recipients of discretionary housing payments at the end of a six-month award. [156211]

Steve Webb: There is no limit to the length of time over which a discretionary housing payment may be made. It may be appropriate for the local authority to make a short-term award to give a claimant time to sort out their financial or housing circumstances, particularly if they are trying to find alternative accommodation or gain employment. A time-limited award may also be appropriate when an impending change of circumstances will result in an increase in benefit.

Alternatively, the local authority may wish to make an indefinite award until the claimant's circumstances change. The start and end dates of an award are decided by the local authority, on a case by case basis.

When there is a specific end date to the award, local authorities should make it clear to the claimant what the period of the award is and how to re-apply, if necessary.

Glyn Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure tenants in the social rented sector do not fall into arrears as a result of receiving direct payments. [156299]

Steve Webb: The Government is committed to supporting working-age recipients of housing benefit to make the transition to a single monthly direct payment of benefit.

Landlords will be primarily responsible for collection of rent in the first instance and will be the first to contact tenants if any arrears accrue.

The direct payment demonstration projects are testing how DWP and landlords can best support claimants to make their rent payments. They are already starting to show that a majority of tenants are confident in receiving their housing benefit straight into their bank account.

We are working with the advice sector to ensure that claimants are able to access budgeting support services to help them to manage their money successfully, in preparation for universal credit. We will also have the option to make managed payments of rent to landlords for the minority of claimants who we assess to be at risk of not being able to manage direct payment effectively initially, enabling the provision of more extensive support over a longer period. Full guidance on alternative payment arrangements and budgeting support has been published on GOV.UK at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181400/personal-budgeting-support-guidance.pdf

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent on housing benefit in each local authority area in each of the last 30 years. [156610]

Steve Webb: Housing benefit expenditure since 1996-97 by local authority is in the table entitled "Tables showing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit expenditure by Local Authority from 1996/97 to 2011/12" which can be accessed via the following URL:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/index.php?page=expenditure>

Expenditure prior to 1996-97 is not available by local authority but total expenditure is available in the table entitled "Tables from 1948/49 to 2017/18" also accessed via the above URL.

Note:

The breakdown of HB expenditure is based on a combination of statistical data and local authority subsidy returns. 2011-12 expenditure is currently based on initial subsidy returns (final audited returns will be analysed and published later this summer).

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claimants were assessed as a member of a protected group and exempt from housing benefit restrictions for 52 weeks, on the grounds that an occupant of their home had died within the previous 12 months in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; [156641]

(2) how many claimants in employment at the time of their initial claim were awarded protected group status on the grounds that they could previously afford their rent in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; [156642]

(3) how many claimants were granted 13 weeks protection from housing benefit restrictions in 2012 on

the grounds that they could previously afford their rent, and were single, under 35 years, without child dependents and living in the private rented sector. [156643]

Steve Webb: The information requested is not readily available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Jobcentre Plus: Walthamstow

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of (a) the league table and (b) the stricter benefit regime figures referred to in the internal staff memorandum by the Walthamstow Jobcentre adviser manager, dated 20 February 2013. [156523]

Mr Hoban: The Department does not have league tables for sanction referrals. On 15 May 2013, the Department published, down to office level, the data on referrals and outcomes since 2001 and this information can be found at:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=adhoc_analysis

Jobseeker's Allowance: Scotland

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants of jobseeker's allowance in (a) Glasgow East constituency and (b) Scotland have (i) received a sanction and (ii) received a sanction and disputed it in each of the last five years; and how many such claimants had a sanction overturned as a result of it being reconsidered or appealed in the last five years. [155680]

Mr Hoban: Statistics on how many claimants of jobseeker's allowance in (a) Glasgow East constituency and (b) Scotland have (i) received a sanction and (ii) received a sanction and disputed it in each of the last five years; and how many such claimants had a sanction overturned as a result of it being reconsidered or appealed in the last five years are given in the following tables:

Number¹ of jobseeker's allowance (JSA) claimants with a sanction applied by area and year³, 1 January 2008 to 31 May 2012

Area	Action ²	Year ³				
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Scotland	Sanction applied	28,330	35,290	42,230	40,620	22,050
Jobcentre Plus Group ⁴						
Glasgow East parliamentary constituency ⁵	Sanction applied	850	950	1,030	1,060	640

Number¹ of jobseeker's allowance (JSA) sanctioned claimants who asked for a reconsideration or appealed the original decision by area and year³, 1 January 2008 to 31 May 2012

Area	Action ²	Year ³				
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Scotland	Reconsidered	7,150	9,180	12,300	13,500	6,840
Jobcentre Plus Group ⁴						
	Appealed	590	660	1,520	1,640	440
Glasgow East parliamentary constituency ⁵	Reconsidered	180	270	320	340	190
	Appealed	20	30	70	70	20

Number¹ of jobseeker's allowance (JSA) sanctioned claimants where the original decision was overturned on reconsideration or appeal by area and year³, 1 January 2008 to 31 May 2012

Area	Action ²	Year ³				
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Scotland Jobcentre Plus Group ⁴	Overtaken— Reconsideration	3,680	5,100	7,770	9,010	3,750
	Overtaken—Appeal	70	90	150	160	70
Glasgow East parliamentary constituency ⁵	Overtaken— Reconsideration	80	150	210	220	140
	Overtaken—Appeal	—	—	10	10	—

¹ Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 and will include individuals who have had more than one referral decision or the same decision in more than one year e.g. if an individual has a sanction applied and has also appealed a sanction then they will appear twice, "—" denotes nil or negligible.

² Action:

The number of sanctions applied is the number of varied⁶, fixed length⁷ and entitlement decision⁸ sanction referrals where the decision was found against the claimant. The decision to apply a sanction can be overturned following reconsideration or appeal by the sector decision maker.

³ Year of Decision:

The year in which the decision on the sanction referral, reconsideration or appeal was made. The year 2012 includes data only up to and including 31 May, which this is the latest data available for all geographical areas.

⁴ Jobcentre Plus Group:

Formerly known as Jobcentre Plus Regions. Jobcentre Plus Groups were updated to reflect changes to the hierarchical structure of Jobcentre Plus implemented on 5 April 2011 from 11 regions to seven groups.

⁵ Parliamentary constituency:

Parliamentary constituencies are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant postcode directory. Boundaries are as at the reference date. More information and a map can be found at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/beginner-s-guide/maps/index.html>

Notes:

⁶ Varied length sanctions:

A sanction of between one week and 26 weeks is imposed for leaving employment voluntarily without just cause, refusing employment without good cause, or losing employment through misconduct. The actual period in each case is at the discretion of the adjudication officer who makes the decision.

⁷ Fixed length sanctions:

A sanction of between one week and 26 weeks is imposed for refusal, without good cause, to attend an employment programme or carry out a jobseeker's direction. Payment of benefit continues in full pending the adjudication officer's decision on a sanction question.

⁸ Entitlement decisions:

These are questions on which entitlement to JSA depends. For example, if there is doubt around whether the jobseeker's agreement (JSaG) is suitable, whether they are actively looking for work or making themselves available for work. In most cases payment of JSA will be suspended by benefit processing until the doubt is resolved.

Source:

DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate: JSA Sanctions and Disallowance Decisions Statistics Database.

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of new claims for jobseeker's allowance in Scotland were made online in each of the last 12 months. [156521]

Mr Hoban: The following table shows the total percentage of new claims made for jobseekers allowance online in Scotland:

	ADS monthly data (%)
2012	
May	25.1
June	35.1
July	29.8
August	30.5
September	36.1
October	37.4
November	40.3
December	43.7
2013	
January	50.3
February	48.9
March	53.3
April	67.1

National Insurance Credits

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department has in the last two years reviewed its advice on whether applying sanctions to National Insurance credit claimants who

fail to comply with jobseeker directions is legal under Regulation 8A(2)(b) of the Social Security (Credits) Regulations 1975. [155923]

Mr Hoban: The policy on credits only claimants has not changed—they will not be sanctioned if they fail to comply with a Jobseeker's Direction. We did make some changes to our guidance in 2012, however, to make clear that as there is no sanction for credits only claimants who fail to comply with a Jobseeker's Direction then there is no requirement to issue Jobseeker's Directions to them.

Offshore Industry: Safety

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what recent assessment he has made of the effect on the Health and Safety Executive of the draft European Union Directive on Safety in the offshore oil and gas sector; [155907]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the restructuring of the Health and Safety Executive on the offshore oil and gas (a) industry and (b) workforce; and what recent discussions he has had with representatives of that workforce on this restructuring; [155916]

(3) when the decision to abolish the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) offshore safety division was taken; and whether (a) his Department and (b) the HSE consulted (i) trade unions representing offshore employees and (ii) representatives of employers in the offshore oil and gas sector before this decision was taken; [155918]

(4) what recent assessment he has made of the effect on the culture of the safety regime for the UK oil and gas sector from the (a) restructuring of the Health and Safety Executive inspection regime and (b) draft European Union Directive on Offshore Safety; [155922]

(5) what assessment he has made of the effect on the safety inspection regime in the UK continental shelf of the Health and Safety Executive's decision to transfer specialist offshore safety inspectors to a new energy division overseeing the safety regime in mines, gas and pipeline industries and the offshore oil and gas industry; [156049]

(6) if he will publish the evidence base for the Health and Safety Executive's decision to transfer specialist offshore safety inspectors to a new energy division. [156050]

Mr Hoban: On 1 April 2013, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) created a new Energy Division, brigading what were the Offshore Division with HSE's pipeline specialists and its Mines Inspectorate. This relatively simple restructuring will strengthen HSE's ability to regulate the offshore industry.

All of the HSE's offshore regulatory programmes and priorities are completely unaffected by the change and so there will be no adverse impacts on industry or the workforce. Furthermore, HSE will be recruiting additional offshore inspectors.

HSE discussed these at meetings of the Step Change Leadership Team on 13 February and 17 April 2013. HSE communicated the rationale for the creation of the Energy Division to industry and trade unions at the Offshore Industry Advisory Committee (OIAC) on 19 March 2013; HSE consulted its own trade unions in making these changes, however it was not appropriate for DWP or HSE to consult with industry employee trade unions or employers.

Following the meeting of 19 March 2013, an open paper was circulated to all OIAC members. Judith Hackitt, HSE Chair, wrote directly to MPs/MSPs with a particular interest in the offshore industry to explain the changes. No further publications are planned.

The directive on the safety of offshore oil and gas operations has not yet been adopted. We expect the directive will further improve the UK's offshore safety regime by:

introducing a new competent authority for offshore safety and environmental regulation;

integrating management of safety and environmental risks; and,

improving information sharing.

HSE intends to implement the directive in a way that will ensure it plays its part in promoting a proper level of safety culture.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average age is of offshore safety inspectors working in the new energy division of the Health and Safety Executive. [155912]

Mr Hoban: The average age of the inspectors, currently working in the Energy Division is 51.6 years.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many surveys of safety

inspectors in the (a) offshore safety division and (b) hazardous industries division were carried out by the Health and Safety Executive in (i) 2007, (ii) 2008, (iii) 2009, (iv) 2010, (v) 2011 and (vi) 2012; and if he will place copies of the results of each such inspection in the Library. [155913]

Mr Hoban: The performance of inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive's Hazardous Installations Directorate is formally reviewed and assessed twice a year via the staff appraisal process. The Health and Safety Executive also surveys all of its staff each year using the 'Civil Service People Survey'. The detailed information from both approaches is confidential and is not made publically available.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many offshore safety inspectors were employed by the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 2007. [155914]

Mr Hoban: The number of offshore inspectors employed since 2007, is shown in the following table. The figures are full-time staffing equivalents.

<i>As at April each year</i>	<i>Number</i>
2007	112.6
2008	111.8
2009	103.3
2010	95.0
2011	103.3
2012	104.4
2013	109.1

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the use of the worker engagement tool kit survey to survey staff working in the energy division of the Health and Safety Executive. [155915]

Mr Hoban: The worker engagement tool kit has been developed by the offshore industry to help in their efforts to measure and improve work force participation in managing safety performance at offshore worksites; I support this. The tool kit has not been designed for, nor is it appropriate to use within, HSE.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the retirement rate amongst offshore safety inspectors working in the Health and Safety Executive was in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13; and what estimate has been made of the anticipated retirement rate of such staff in (i) 2013-14, (ii) 2014-15 and (iii) 2015-16. [155917]

Mr Hoban: The retirement rates for band 2 and 3 inspectors were as follows:

<i>Full-time equivalents</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2012-13</i>
Retirements	8	7	4
Average staff in post	95.7	99.8	101.6
Rate (percentage)	8.4	7.0	3.9

It is difficult to estimate future retirement rates, as staff can continue to work as long as they are fit and able and they only have to give as little as one month's notice before they retire.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consideration was given to recommendations 23 to 26 of the Cullen Inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster, published in November 1990 during the recent restructuring of the Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement. [156118]

Mr Hoban: I am satisfied that the Health and Safety Executive has an expert and independent force of inspectors focussed on the offshore industry delivering the major hazard identification, prevention and mitigation regime that was at the heart of Lord Cullen's report. I am also satisfied that the Health and Safety Executive has to adapt, as it has done since the report was published, how it goes about this task to reflect the changing environment of the offshore industry.

Pension Credit

Gregg McClymont: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people in (a) the UK, (b) Scotland and (c) Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East constituency who are eligible to receive pension credit but do not currently receive it. [156552]

Steve Webb: The Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-up report covers Great Britain for the financial year 2009-10. It provides caseload and expenditure estimates of take-up for income support and employment and support allowance (income-related), pension credit, housing benefit (including local housing allowance), council tax benefit and jobseeker's allowance (income-based). The latest release updates the statistics previously released on 10 June 2010. The figures are available online and can be found here:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=irb>

Estimates of take-up are not available for 2010-11 or 2011-12 nor are they sufficiently robust to present at geographies below Great Britain. As such estimates are not available for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East constituency.

Personal Independence Payment

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department has considered any changes to the personal independence payment system to include a provision for earlier payments to those suffering from specified illnesses and conditions. [156308]

Esther McVey: Personal independence payment has been designed to provide support tailored to an individual's personal circumstances. We do not think it right that we should have different rules for people purely on the basis of specific illnesses and conditions they have; labelling individuals by their impairments and making blanket decisions about benefit entitlement.

However, there are fast-track procedures and processes for people who have a progressive disease and their death can be expected within six months. Such claimants

will receive the enhanced rate of the daily living component without further assessment, paid from the date of their claim. They may also receive either rate of the mobility component if they satisfy the conditions of entitlement.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions his Department has had with the contractor for the personal independence payment assessments in Lot 2 (Wales and Central England) regarding Welsh language provision. [156311]

Esther McVey: Assessments for personal independence payment will comply with the Department for Work and Pensions' obligations under the Welsh Language Act (1993). All materials relating to the assessment process will be available in Welsh and the assessment itself can be carried out by a Welsh speaker, if requested.

Social Security Benefits

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people his Department has stopped paying benefits to for having no right to be in the country for each of the past five years; and what the total amount of benefits claimed by these people was for each of the past five years. [156645]

Mr Hoban: The information you have requested is not held by the Department.

Currently we check the nationality and immigration status of benefit claimants to ensure the benefit is paid properly and to prevent fraud. While this information is used, it is not recorded as part of the payment administrative systems.

Looking forward, the Government is looking at ways to record nationality and immigration status of migrants who make a claim to universal credit so that we have more robust management information about our claimants.

Social Security Benefits: Merseyside

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families in (a) Birkenhead constituency, (b) Wirral and (c) Liverpool City region will be affected by the benefit cap. [156279]

Mr Hoban: The number of households who we estimate will be affected by the benefit cap by:

(a) Parliamentary constituency has been placed in the Library; this will be updated to reflect new estimates.

(b) Local authority area has been placed in the Library and can be found here:

http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2013-0676/Local_Authority_breakdown_of_those_affected_by_the_benefit_cap_final.doc

(c) Liverpool city region, This area is a sum of the local authorities within, therefore can be found at the link above.

The benefit cap is being applied through a phased implementation which commenced on 15 April 2013 in Bromley, Croydon, Enfield and Haringey. It will be introduced at a national level from 15 July 2013. Also, estimates assume that the situation of these households will go unchanged, and they will not take any steps to either work enough hours to qualify for working tax credit, renegotiate their rent in situ, or find alternative accommodation. The Department is identifying and

writing to all the households who are likely to be affected by the cap and we are offering advice and support through Jobcentre Plus, including, where appropriate, early access to the Work Programme before the cap is introduced.

State Retirement Pensions

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to ensure that people who contract out of additional elements of the state pension are not left worse off in retirement as a result of doing so. [155831]

Steve Webb: Occupational pension schemes that were contracted out of the state additional pension on a defined benefit (DB) basis between 1978 and 1997 are required to provide a scheme pension. That pension, as a minimum, must be a pension broadly equivalent to the state earnings-related pension scheme (SERPS), so should not leave those people worse off in retirement as a result of being contracted out.

The requirements for contracting out on a DB basis were changed in April 1997, and schemes now have to satisfy an overall test, which was designed broadly to match the 1997 value of the state earning-related pension scheme (SERPS). This meant that the scheme pension must be broadly equivalent to or better than a pension based on 1/80th x average earnings in the last three years x years of service with a normal pension age of 65. From 1997, no state additional pension was earned if a person contracted out on a DB basis. But when the second state pension (S2P) was introduced in 2002, it became possible for a low to moderate earner to earn some state additional pension. Again, those who contracted out on a DB basis after 1997 should not be worse off in retirement as a result of doing so. Contracting out will cease for DB in 2016.

Under contracting out on a defined contribution basis, which was abolished in April 2012, the contracting-out rebate rates (the reduction in the amount of national insurance paid by the individual and an age-related rebate paid to the scheme at the end of the tax year) were recommended and set based on the Government Actuary's best estimates about the expected cost of replacing the state additional pension given up through contracting-out. There was always a known risk that the reality would turn out to be different from the assumptions, and individuals chose to enter these terms on a voluntary basis accepting that risk. The Government does not plan to take any steps to adjust the state pension to take account of any worse than expected investment outcomes.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the decile amounts of the deduction from state pension made in respect of periods of contracted-out employment for (a) men and (b) women reaching state pension age in (i) the latest year for which figures are available and (ii) each of the previous five years. [156154]

Steve Webb: Comprehensive information about the amounts of the deduction from state pension made in respect of periods of contracted out employment are not readily available from administrative data within the timescales available.

The Department will publish this information in an ad hoc publication before summer recess.

To estimate deductions in respect of periods of contracted-out employment for the purposes of the state pension reform the Department uses Pensim2 data. This is not a suitable data source for providing historical information.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to the answer of 11 February 2013, *Official Report*, column 510W, on state retirement pensions, what proportion of people would receive an amount greater than £144 per week net of any deduction made in respect of periods of contracted-out employment should the current system remain in place. [156155]

Steve Webb: State pension outcomes under the current two-tier system vary widely. By contrast, under single tier the large majority of pensioners in the medium term could expect to retire on the full weekly amount of single-tier pension.

The Department's modelling suggests that if the current system were to remain in place, around 35% of people reaching state pension age in between 2016-17 and 2036-37 would receive more than the illustrative £144 per week single-tier amount.

Under the proposed single-tier pension, around 70% of people reaching state pension age between 2016-17 and 2036-37 would receive an amount equal to or greater than the full single-tier amount.

Source:

DWP modelling based on PENSIM2

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to Text Box 2.2 of his Department's White Paper, The single-tier pension, CM 8528, when his Department's population projections will be published. [156157]

Steve Webb: The Department for Work and Pensions does not publish population projections. The expenditure projections referred to in the White Paper, "The single-tier pension: a simple foundation for saving" were published on 18 January.

They are available on the Department's website at:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc_analysis/2013/ltp_pensioners.pdf

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to Chart 2.4 of his Department's White Paper, The single-tier pension, CM 8528, if he will provide the figures used to produce that chart. [156158]

Steve Webb: The information is in the following table. Note that the estimates have been updated to reflect a 2016 start date for the single-tier pension and are consistent with chart 6.1 of the revised impact assessment, available at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/197841/single-tier-ia-april-2013.pdf

Percentage of GDP spent on pensioner benefits under current pension system and under the single-tier pension

	Current system	Single tier
2012	6.9	—
2013	6.9	—
2014	6.8	—
2015	6.7	—
2016	6.6	6.6
2017	6.4	6.4
2018	6.3	6.3
2019	6.2	6.2
2020	6.0	6.0
2021	6.1	6.1
2022	6.2	6.1
2023	6.2	6.2
2024	6.3	6.3
2025	6.4	6.4
2026	6.4	6.4
2027	6.3	6.3
2028	6.3	6.3
2029	6.4	6.4
2030	6.5	6.6
2031	6.7	6.7
2032	6.8	6.8
2033	6.9	6.9
2034	7.0	7.0
2035	7.1	7.1
2036	7.2	7.2
2037	7.3	7.3
2038	7.4	7.4
2039	7.5	7.5
2040	7.5	7.5
2041	7.5	7.5
2042	7.6	7.5
2043	7.6	7.5
2044	7.5	7.5
2045	7.4	7.3
2046	7.3	7.3
2047	7.4	7.3
2048	7.4	7.3
2049	7.5	7.4
2050	7.5	7.4
2051	7.6	7.5
2052	7.7	7.5
2053	7.8	7.6
2054	7.9	7.7
2055	8.0	7.8
2056	8.1	7.8
2057	8.2	7.9
2058	8.3	8.0
2059	8.4	8.1
2060	8.5	8.1

Notes:

1. Pensioner benefit expenditure includes state pension, pension credit, housing benefit, localised council tax support, attendance allowance, disability living allowance, winter fuel payments, over-75 TV licences and Christmas bonus.

2. Expenditure is for Great Britain, plus overseas state pension excluding Northern Ireland, and is presented as a percentage of UK GDP.

Termination of Employment

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees in his Department have resigned in the last year for which figures are available; and how many resigned citing ethical reasons for leaving. [155551]

Mr Hoban: Within the fiscal year 2012-13 1,783 employees resigned from the Department, this represents approximately 1.7% of our total work force employed during this time. This figure includes Child Maintenance Group who joined the Department in August 2012. Information on resignations citing ethical reasons is not collected.

Training

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training staff in his Department have received in (a) enthusiasm and (b) other personal aptitudes. [156066]

Mr Hoban: The Department does not train staff in the subjects the hon. Member has inquired about.

Unemployment

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will undertake an assessment of the potential effect on unemployment in the event that the UK were to exit the European Union. [156363]

Mr Hoban: I have no plans to conduct such an assessment.

Universal Credit

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what financial assistance his Department will make available to those receiving universal credit who do not budget effectively and run out of their credit money before the next payment is due. [155399]

Mr Hoban: A range of budgeting advances are available to universal credit claimants dependant on individual circumstances. These can be for up to 50% of the award of benefit. Funding for providing support in a crisis will continue after implementation of universal credit and, where appropriate, DWP will signpost claimants to other financial support, including that provided by local authorities and devolved Administrations.

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department has estimated the number of benefit claimants without bank accounts who will receive universal credit. [155756]

Steve Webb: No formal estimate has been made of the number of claimants without bank accounts who will receive universal credit.

DWP currently issues payments to around 800,000 working age claimants through methods of payment other than a bank account, such as the Post Office Card account or Simple Payment.

Many of these claimants already have access to a bank account; others will be offered support to access suitable financial products and money advice before migrating to universal credit.

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to assist universal credit claimants who do not currently have bank accounts. [155757]

Steve Webb: The majority of claimants already use a bank or building society account to manage their money and will continue to be paid in this way under universal credit. Some claimants do not currently use a bank account and we are working with the advice sector to ensure that claimants have appropriate support to help them access and utilise appropriate financial services.

We are also looking to support the development of accounts with built-in budgeting features, such as 'jam jar' accounts. We are consulting with financial providers across the private, social and third sectors, and considering the best ways to make these types of products more widely available.

Where a claimant is unable to access, any other form of banking solution, we will have the ability to make universal credit payments into a Post Office card account or by Simple Payment.

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have successfully claimed universal credit in the pathfinder to date. [156614]

Mr Hoban: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply I provided him with on 13 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 69W, on how many people have claimed universal credit in the pathfinder to date. The Department is working to guidelines set by the UK Statistics Authority to ensure we are able to publish statistics that meet high quality standards at the earliest opportunity. We intend to publish official statistics on pathfinder areas in autumn 2013.

We expect around 7,000 claims to be processed in pathfinders.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the net savings to his Department in the event that the winter fuel allowance was to be withdrawn from those pensioners currently eligible to pay income tax at the (a) higher rate of 40 per cent and (b) additional rate of 45 per cent. [156272]

Steve Webb: The estimates in the table are based on Department for Work and Pensions expenditure forecasts combined with information on the tax paid by older people from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs Survey of Personal Incomes.

AME savings from withdrawing the winter fuel payment from different categories of taxpayers

	£ million
(a) Higher rate taxpayers (40%)	100
(b) Additional rate taxpayers (45%)	5
Total	105

The table provides estimates of the expenditure associated with winter fuel payments, for higher and additional rate taxpayers, assuming the payment rate of £200 for people that have reached women's state pension age and are under 80, and £300 for people aged 80 or over. The figures are expressed in cash terms and rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Work Programme

Jessica Morden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of Work programme participants who will not have found sustainable work after completion of their two-year Work programme in (a) Wales and (b) the UK in the six months from June 2013. [156549]

Mr Hoban: The number of Work programme participants that have found sustainable work and qualified for a job outcome provider payment forms a part of the Work programme official statistics. We are unable to provide estimates of those that have not found sustainable work without compromising the integrity of the statistical release.

Jessica Morden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has for Work programme participants who have not found sustainable work after completion of that programme. [156550]

Mr Hoban: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave previously to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on 12 March 2013, *Official Report*, column 206W.

Work Programme: Powys

Glyn Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to the Government's Work programme, how many referrals have been made to the scheme in Powys to date; and how many such referrals have found employment as a result of being on the scheme. [156300]

Mr Hoban: Information on the number of people that have been placed in to employment from the Work programme is not available.

Statistics on the number of Work programme referrals and job outcomes by local authority can be found in the employment programmes section at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool>

Guidance for users is available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/tabtools/guidance.pdf>

Follow the instructions to create the required tables:

(1) In the Employment Programmes section select 'Click here for statistics regarding the Work Programme'.

(2) In the Benefit/Scheme section select 'Work Programme: Cumulative figures'.

(3) In the Analysis drop-down menu select either 'Referrals (Thousands)' or 'Job Outcomes (Thousands)'.

(4) In the Row drop-down menu select local authority.

(5) In the Column drop-down menu select from a range of different variables for a cross-tabulation.

(6) In the Subset drop-down menu there are a number of different variables available. If no subset is required, select 'NONE'.

(7) In the Date drop-down menu select the latest available date. For Work Programme data the latest available information is at July 2012

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries: Disability

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government is taking to ensure that a post-2015 development framework is inclusive of people with disability.

[156547]

Justine Greening: The Prime Minister has been clear that we need to build on the Millennium Development Goals to reach the marginalised and most vulnerable—including people with disabilities, and has been working with the international community to shape a Post-2015 agenda that will deliver for people with disabilities, including in key areas such as education.

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she plans to represent the Government at the UN High Level Meeting on disability and development on 23 September 2013.

[156548]

Justine Greening: The UK Government will be represented at the UN High Level Meeting on disability and development in September. The exact plans for who will represent the UK at the meeting have yet to be decided.

Developing Countries: HIV Infection

Pauline Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what initiatives she is supporting to streamline the licensing of new HIV medicines in developing countries.

[156620]

Lynne Featherstone: The UK Government supports efforts to agree licenses with holders of patents for HIV medicines to help the development of new generic medicines and formulations. For example, the Medicines Patent Pool aims to enhance access to HIV medicines by simplifying the licensing process, providing manufacturers with a one-stop-shop for licences for patents that may be required to produce a new generic.

The UK Government also supports efforts to strengthen processes for authorising and assuring the quality of HIV medicines in developing countries. This includes the Prequalification Programme managed by the World Health Organisation that verifies that HIV medicines (and other health commodities) meet quality standards.

Developing Countries: Poliomyelitis

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with (a) the European Commission and (b) other EU bodies about funding for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative; and if she will make a statement.

[156501]

Lynne Featherstone: DFID has regular contact with the European Commission (EC) about funding for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). We are working on this issue with other polio partners including the GPEI's spearheading partners, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and those member states that support polio eradication.

ICT

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many (a) computers, (b) mobile telephones, (c) BlackBerrys and (d) other pieces of IT equipment were lost or stolen from her Department and non-departmental bodies in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if she will make a statement.

[156430]

Mr Duncan: DFID's central accounting records show the following items have been reported as lost or stolen within the requested period.

Items	Number of items reported in:		
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Laptops	14	17	11
Mobile Telephones	1	3	14
BlackBerry	—	1	8
15" Monitor	—	—	1
Memory sticks	2	2	5

No items have been reported for the Department's non departmental bodies.

Overseas Aid

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the potential role of UK business in helping her Department achieve its objectives overseas; and what steps her Department has taken to assist UK businesses overseas in achieving these objectives.

[155894]

Justine Greening: We know that business, including UK business, has a crucial role to play in generating growth in developing countries by providing workers with jobs, poorer consumers with affordable and better quality goods and services, and governments with taxes that allow them to provide for their citizens' basic needs. UK companies have become highly competitive in the international development market, and have won a large percentage of DFID's competitively-tendered, centrally-procured contracts.

Following my speech at the London Stock Exchange, DFID is working with the Confederation of British Industry to develop a Business Engagement Strategy to enhance the scope for business, including UK business, to contribute to DFID's economic development agenda. We are also working across Whitehall to better coordinate trade and investment in the countries we work in.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Clothing

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have made a claim for evening dress allowance in each of the last five years; and what the total cost of such claims has been.

[155449]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does not pay an allowance for evening wear. The FCO will reimburse staff for the actual cost of hiring

formal clothing required when working at official evening functions, such as the Queen's Annual Evening Reception for the Diplomatic Corps, or State occasions.

Our accounting systems do not allow us to separate the costs spent on clothing from other expenditure and to do so would incur disproportionate cost. This is also true for FCO Services and other Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Israel

Graham Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to intervene more directly to deal with cases of administrative detention in Israel. [156576]

Alistair Burt: We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary rather than as routine practice, and as a preventive rather than a punitive measure. We have raised this with the Israeli authorities on many occasions, including at Foreign Minister, Attorney General and National Security Adviser levels.

We will continue to do so until the issue is satisfactorily resolved.

Palestinians

Mr Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he had with representatives of the Palestinian Authority on payments made to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in the last 12 months. [156465]

Alistair Burt: The Department for International Development continues to have regular discussions with the Palestinian Authority (PA) on this issue, and encourage the PA to ensure that payments to Palestinian prisoners and their families are transparent, needs-based and affordable.

Most recently, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr Duncan), discussed this issue with caretaker Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad during his visit to the region in April. The Head of the Department for International Development Palestinian Programme also met the PA Minister of Detainees to discuss this issue on May 7.

The caretaker Palestinian Prime Minister has made clear, both in public and to British Government officials, that payments to prisoners in Israeli jails are made at the request of the Israeli Authorities to meet basic living conditions.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the proportion of the West Bank covered by agreed Israeli master plans. [156616]

Alistair Burt: Of the West Bank, over 60% is Area C, exclusively controlled by Israel and including a significant part of the West Bank's agricultural and grazing land as well as being essential for the development of the main Palestinian population centres. Israeli-agreed master plans are not required for Areas A and B.

Of Area C, less than 1% of Area C has been planned for Palestinian development by the Israeli Civil Administration. According to the United Nations, more than 70% of the land in Area C has been allocated to Israeli settlements or the Israeli military and is unavailable for Palestinian use.

Israeli planning permission is required for building any structures 20cm above or below ground in Area C. According to Israeli Government statistics, four of 444 Palestinian applications for building permits were approved in 2010. Palestinian properties built without permission are susceptible to demolition by the Israeli authorities.

In order to support development of Palestinian communities in Area C, the UK, together with others in the international community, have funded the development and submission of 'masterplans' for a number of Palestinian communities in Area C. It is important to note that these plans do not address agricultural or grazing land.

There are currently 32 such masterplans progressing through the Israeli planning system and in December 2012, five of these were considered to have met the required technical standard by the Israeli Civil Administration. The 32 masterplans cover 0.38% of the West Bank or 0.6% of Area C.

We continue to urge Israel to ease the restrictions in place in Area C and to fulfil its obligation under the Oslo agreement to transfer authority over Area C to the Palestinian authority.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155795]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has not introduced any regulations since May 2010, within the scope of the "one in one out" and "one in two out" procedures. Most secondary legislation introduced by the FCO takes the form of Orders in Council rather than regulations and typically deals with matters such as the implementation of UN and EU sanctions and in the UK Overseas Territories (UK OT) and UK OT constitutional matters. Other FCO secondary legislation concerns either consular matters or the implementation of the UK's international obligations, for example in the fields of privileges and immunities of international organisations, international criminal law or the specification of EU treaties. These instruments do not regulate or impose costs on civil society organisations or business in the UK.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155817]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has not introduced any regulations since May 2010, within the scope of the "one in one out" and "one

in two out” procedures. Most secondary legislation introduced by the FCO takes the form of Orders in Council rather than regulations and typically deals with matters such as the implementation of UN and EU sanctions and in the UK Overseas Territories (UK OT) and UK OT constitutional matters. Other FCO secondary legislation concerns either consular matters or the implementation of the UK’s international obligations, for example in the fields of privileges and immunities of international organisations, international criminal law or the specification of EU treaties. These instruments do not regulate or impose costs on civil society organisations or business in the UK.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155961]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has not introduced any regulations since May 2010, within the scope of the “one in one out” and “one in two out” procedures. Most secondary legislation introduced by the FCO takes the form of Orders in Council rather than regulations and typically deals with matters such as the implementation of UN and EU sanctions and in the UK Overseas Territories (UK OT) and UK OT constitutional matters. Other FCO secondary legislation concerns either consular matters or the implementation of the UK’s international obligations, for example in the fields of privileges and immunities of international organisations, international criminal law or the specification of EU treaties. These instruments do not regulate or impose costs on civil society organisations or business in the UK.

Shaker Aamer

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Prime Minister will discuss with the US President the diplomatic efforts to release Mr Shaker Aamer from Guantánamo Bay. [155646]

Alistair Burt: The UK Government continues to make clear to the US that we want Mr Aamer released and returned to the UK as a matter of urgency. The US Secretaries of Defense and State have the authority to affect Mr Aamer’s release and return. Our efforts have therefore focussed on these departments as the most relevant parties. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised Mr Aamer’s case numerous times with Secretary Clinton, and reiterated the British Government’s commitment to securing his release and return on two separate occasions to her successor, Secretary Kerry, in May. The Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), also raised Mr Aamer’s case with his US counterpart earlier this month. I raised Mr Aamer’s case with US Deputy Secretary of State Bums during a visit to Washington in April, and senior officials continue to meet their US counterparts for discussions about Mr Aamer.

Training

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible enrolled in publicly-funded training courses in each of the last five years; what the total cost has been of such courses; and what the monetary value was of the 10 highest training course fees in each such year. [155429]

Alistair Burt: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agricultural Wages Board

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 19 March 2013, *Official Report*, column 610W, on Agricultural Wages Board, how many hours it took officials to scan and publish a summary of responses to the consultation on his Department’s website; and what estimate he made of the length of time that it would have taken officials to scan and publish each response to the consultation online. [155210]

Mr Heath [*holding answer 15 May 2013*]: The summary of responses to the consultation on the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) was produced as a normal part of any consultation process. We do not have records of how long the analysis and drafting process took.

It is not possible to accurately estimate the length of time it would take officials to scan and publish online each response to this consultation, as the wider process would incorporate time to label, file and index responses in a way that would be meaningful and usable for customers.

Agricultural Wages Board: Clwyd

Susan Elan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board on people in Clwyd South constituency. [155976]

Mr Heath: There has not been any assessment of the regional impact of the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board on agricultural worker’s wages.

We have been quite clear that there is considerable uncertainty about the impact on workers’ wages. The reality will depend on demand, which evidence shows is increasing, and how farmers use the increased flexibility.

Many workers are already paid above the agricultural minimum wage for their grade, so the removal of the Agricultural Wages Board will probably not affect their wages. Moreover, the underlying market conditions suggest that farmers will need to offer competitive packages to attract and retain skilled and qualified staff.

Workers with existing contracts at the time of abolition will retain entitlement to the terms of that employment until the contract either comes to an end or is varied by agreement between the worker and the employer.

All workers will be protected by the national minimum wage.

Agriculture: Pay

Roberta Blackman-Woods: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans he has to monitor effects of the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board on wages in the agricultural sector. [154196]

Mr Heath: DEFRA collects a range of statistics in the agricultural sector, including information about agricultural employment, and will continue to do so after the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board. Moreover, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) run by the Office for National Statistics provides data on wage levels in agriculture and allows direct comparison with other sectors.

Agriculture: Rain

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps his Department is taking to protect farmers from the economic consequences of the anticipated high levels of rainfall in summer 2013. [155609]

Mr Heath: Following the recent adverse weather, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), hosted a meeting of industry representatives, farming charities and banks to highlight the financial impact this exceptional weather is having on farm businesses and to see what more can be done to support farmers who are struggling financially. The meeting was very constructive; the Government acknowledged the strength of support for farmers from the banking sector and the same representatives will meet again in July. In the meantime, we have set up a working group to look at identifying risks and improving resilience of the farming industry.

DEFRA is investing £533 million in 2013-14 in flood and coastal erosion risk management through the Environment Agency. This will be spent on maintaining and improving defences and reducing the risk of flooding to home and commercial assets including farmland.

The Environment Agency's (EA's) ongoing asset maintenance programme provides substantial benefits for agricultural land by reducing the risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea. More than 98% of EA maintained flood defence assets, protecting high consequence systems, are in the required target condition. These high consequence systems help protect approximately 50% of the agricultural land in England that is at risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea, including the vast majority of the most productive Grade 1 and 2 land. The other 50% of agricultural land at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea is protected by defences in what the EA describe as low and medium consequence systems, where more than 95% of agency-managed assets are in target condition. Farmland will also benefit from capital improvement projects. For example, in 2011-12 DEFRA funded projects provided an improved standard of flood protection to more than 180,000 acres of farm land.

Anaerobic Digestion

Sir James Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the amount of land dedicated to growing crops for crop-only anaerobic digestion plants which have been granted feed-in tariffs. [156016]

Mr Heath: There are currently only six crop anaerobic digestion (AD) plants in the UK, requiring crops grown on roughly 3,300 ha of land. This is less than 0.02% of the available agricultural land in the UK.

Other AD plants may use crops as part of a crop/waste mix although the split between the amounts of crops/waste used may vary from week to week.

Biofuels

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking to prevent the development of biofuels competing with food production. [156583]

Mr Heath: The Government believes that food production must remain the primary goal of agriculture and the production of biofuel must not undermine food security, in the UK or internationally. Modelling analysis published as part of the Bioenergy Strategy suggests that increased EU demand for biofuels has led to global crop prices being around 3% to 5% higher than they would otherwise have been and that this would correspond to only a modest rise in food prices, since crops represent a small share of the cost of food production. As set out in that strategy, it is nevertheless essential that we continue to monitor the volume and all types of bioenergy demand and their links with food prices and production. To this end, we will continue to work with the European Commission in its ongoing evaluation of the economic, social and environmental impacts of the EU's biofuels policies.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of testing arrangements for tuberculosis in cattle; and what steps he is taking to improve those arrangements. [155285]

Mr Heath [holding answer 15 May 2013]: The Government is committed to ensuring we have a comprehensive and balanced package of measures to tackle TB, with eradication as our ultimate long-term goal. We already have a robust set of measures in place to tackle transmission between cattle—including compulsory testing, slaughter of infected animals and movement restrictions on infected herds.

Surveillance testing is assessed annually to review the adequateness of testing frequency. Latest changes were introduced in January 2013 when large parts of England moved to annual testing and radial testing around breakdowns. This was introduced in the low risk areas, to ensure that the disease does not establish in clean areas.

Underpinning the successful delivery of the Eradication Programme is the role of the farming industry and individual farmers, working in partnership with vets, Government and others. Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) manages the regulation

that sets TB test controls to defined policy requirements. Recent changes have been made to further enhance veterinary TB test quality assurance controls, strengthening procedural instructions and sanctions to meet European standards of governance.

DEFRA is currently undertaking a review of the use of the interferon gamma blood test, which is used to supplement the skin test for bovine TB under certain circumstances. The outcome of this review will be published later in the year.

DEFRA has also recently commissioned a research project to assess slaughterhouse surveillance which forms an important part of cattle controls.

Bread and Flour Regulations 1998

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with reference to the costings contained in the Bread and Flour Regulations 1998 Consultation Impact Assessment, what the costs would be to the (a) quarrying, (b) manufacture and (c) distribution industries of his proposals. [155047]

Mr Heath: During DEFRA's recent consultation on the Bread and Flour Regulations 1998, representations were received from operators within the industries referred to by the hon. Member. These built upon the information contained in the impact assessment on the costs of the various options to each of the sectors concerned. The Government is committed to ensuring that any policy decisions on the future of those regulations will take into account the effects on those industries, as well as health impacts and the interests of consumers. The Government intends to announce its decision before the summer recess.

Clothing

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have made a claim for evening dress allowance in each of the last five years; and what the total cost of such claims has been. [155448]

Richard Benyon: Core DEFRA and its non-departmental public bodies do not provide staff with an evening dress allowance and has not done so in the past five years.

Dogs

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage responsible dog ownership. [156091]

Mr Heath: The Government are introducing a range of measures to tackle irresponsible ownership of dogs. The measures include: extending the criminal offence of allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control to all places, including inside the dog owner's home; requiring all dogs to be microchipped from April 2016; and powers to enable local authorities and police to respond to instances of antisocial behaviour that involves a dog before the situation becomes dangerous.

Flood Control

Mr Graham Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of adding agricultural production to the considerations used by the Environment Agency when planning flood protection work. [154373]

Richard Benyon: The potential impact of flooding on agricultural production is already used by the Environment Agency when planning flood protection work. The case for maintaining or improving defences of agricultural land is assessed in a similar way to other assets, based on potential damages avoided to agricultural land, crops and productivity, together with impacts on infrastructure and other assets which play a role in growing food and making it available to consumers. DEFRA's policy statement on the appraisal of flood and erosion risk management underlines the need to value agricultural land and the damages that could be caused by flooding and erosion. DEFRA provided specific guidance in 2008 based on HM Treasury Green Book appraisal principles.

Agriculture continues to be a major beneficiary of the Environment Agency's flood risk management work. Capital projects completed during 2011-12 provided an improved standard of flood protection for more than 74,000 hectares of farm land. The Environment Agency's ongoing asset maintenance programme also continues to provide substantial benefits for agriculture by reducing the risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea.

More than 98% of Environment Agency maintained flood defences protecting high consequence systems are in the required target condition. These systems help protect approximately 50% of the agricultural land in England that is at risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea, including the vast majority of the most productive, Grade 1 and 2 land. Estimated average annual damages avoided to agriculture in these areas is £73 million. The other 50% of agricultural land at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea is protected by defences in what the Environment Agency describes as low and medium consequence systems, where more than 95% of Environment Agency managed assets are in target condition and the estimated average damages avoided to agriculture are in the order of £47 million per year.

Food: Production

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information his Department holds on the proportion of the EU's food requirement that was produced within the EU in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [R] [155834]

Mr Heath: The estimated EU food production to supply ratio is calculated to be approximately 90% in each of these years.

This estimate is calculated as production divided by consumption, based on the farm gate value of production and net of exports and imports. This calculation is based on highly aggregated EU-level data supplied by Eurostat, which make it difficult to be precise about the

estimate. The ratio is not an appropriate measure of “food security” since it fails to account for many dimensions of this complex issue.

Genetically Modified Organisms: Wheat

Mr Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost is of the additional autumn sown trial of GM wheat at Rothamsted Research, reference 11/R8/01; and how it will be funded. [156263]

Mr Willetts: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 April 2013, *Official Report*, columns 529-30W.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which UK supermarkets were invited to his Department’s stakeholder meeting to discuss F Gas Regulation in March 2013. [156627]

Richard Benyon: All UK supermarkets were invited, either directly or through invitations to industry representative bodies, to attend the open stakeholder meeting held in London on 4 March to discuss the European Commission’s proposal for a new regulation on fluorinated greenhouse gases.

Horse Racing

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if he will estimate the number of racehorses killed outright or destroyed on UK racecourses or shortly afterwards due to injury sustained in (a) flat, (b) all weather and (c) national hunt racing in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011 and (iii) 2012; [155475]

(2) if he will make an estimate of the number of racehorses killed outright or destroyed due to training injuries in the UK in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [155476]

Mr Heath [holding answer 16 May 2013]: These data are not held by Government. However, statistical data on numbers of horse fatalities at racecourses are held by the British Horseracing Authority (BHA). The BHA have supplied the following data:

	Flat turf		All weather		National hunt	
	Number of fatalities	Percentage of runners	Number of fatalities	Percentage of runners	Number of fatalities	Percentage of runners
2010	31	0.08	27	0.13	167	0.53
2011	21	0.05	15	0.07	145	0.42
2012	33	0.09	21	0.09	157	0.50

The above figures are not Government statistics but provided by the BHA, as required by their rules on horse racing. The BHA do not hold statistics on numbers of race horse fatalities during training because their rules do not require it.

any claims that horses are being transported in contravention of the regulation.

Horses: Exports

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what systems and checks are in place to prevent the export of horses for slaughter from the UK. [156334]

Mr Heath [holding answer 20 May 2013]: Banning the export of live horses would be illegal and undermine the principle of the free movement of goods enshrined in the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. There are therefore no systems or checks in place to prevent this activity.

However, the Government will continue to ensure that the requirements of the welfare in transport legislation (EU Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005) will be applied robustly to all long distance transporters of horses operating within the UK. The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratory Agency undertakes risk based inspections of consignments of horses both at premises of origin, in the form of supervised loadings, and at ports. Furthermore, local authority trading standards departments, who are the agents responsible for enforcement of the welfare in transport legislation, will investigate

Hydrofluorocarbons

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions he has had with UK retailers to discuss how to reduce the hydrofluorocarbon emissions emanating from their sector. [156570]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA officials continue to have regular dialogue with UK food retailers and the British Retail Consortium to discuss steps they are taking to address their use of hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) refrigerants. Furthermore, as part of the implementation of the fluorinated greenhouse gases regulatory framework, there have been concentrated efforts to work with the large food retailers, which are major users of HFCs, to address their HFC emissions and reduce leakage rates.

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of proposals put forward in the EU Council to reduce the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions emanating from hydrofluorocarbons. [156571]

Richard Benyon: We are carefully considering the European Commission’s (EC) proposal to assess the potential benefits and impacts, taking into account the extensive impact assessment that accompanies it.

The EC has acknowledged that further analysis of the impacts is needed for some elements of the proposal, which it is now undertaking.

We are also carrying out our own analyses of the potential impacts for the UK. In broad terms our early analyses indicate that some technical adjustments will be needed to the EC's proposal to enable it to be fully implemented. However, there is some way still to go in discussion of the EC's proposal before a final agreement can be reached. Our ongoing assessment work will continue to inform that process.

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will support an EU ban on the use of HFCs in commercial refrigeration equipment. [156625]

Richard Benyon: We would carefully consider proposals for bans on the use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) on a case-by-case basis. Support for any specific ban would depend on the date it took effect, taking into account the availability and technical feasibility of alternatives, together with the financial and environmental costs, and the benefits of replacing HFC refrigerants across the range of systems concerned.

Packaging

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps his Department has taken to reduce the environmental effects of packaging of products in the food and drink sector. [156045]

Richard Benyon: Significant achievements on packaging in the food and drink sector have been made during the first two phases of the Courtauld Commitment, the voluntary responsibility deal with food retailers and manufacturers. To date, 2.3 million tonnes of waste have successfully been prevented by Courtauld signatories and consumers.

A third phase of the Courtauld Commitment was launched on 9 May. This latest phase, which runs until December 2015, aims to prevent a further 1.1 million tonnes of waste. It has attracted 45 signatories, including all major grocery retailers and many household brands and manufacturers. This shows the grocery industry's commitment to reducing food and drink waste, for the benefit of both the environment and the economy.

There are now limited opportunities for more substantial reductions without resulting in product damage due to under-packaging. Our analysis shows that without Courtauld 3 there could have been a 3% increase in greenhouse gas emissions from food packaging as sales volumes increase. The environmental impact of food waste due to under-packaging is greater than the packaging itself.

Under Courtauld 3 there will be greater focus on designing packaging for recycling and increasing recycled content, where appropriate. Examples are designing and labelling packaging to make it easier for consumers to recycle, by specifying recycled content where appropriate, and continuing to optimise packaging while ensuring there is no compromise on product protection.

The Hospitality and Food Service Agreement, a voluntary agreement between the UK, devolved Administrations and the hospitality and food service

sector (which includes restaurants, hotels, caterers and pubs) also aims to reduce food and packaging waste.

155 companies have signed up to two targets under the agreement. The first of these is to reduce food and associated packaging waste arising by 5% by the end of 2015. This is against a 2012 baseline and will be measured by CO₂ equivalent emissions. The second is to increase the overall rate of food and packaging waste being recycled, composted or sent to anaerobic digestion to at least 70% by the end of 2015.

The Government has also set higher packaging recycling targets for business for 2013-17.

Refrigeration

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will consider bringing forward proposals to establish a standard code for refrigeration, processing and air conditioning; and if he will make a statement. [155197]

Richard Benyon: We are unsure which code is being referred to, or what the meaning of "processing" is in the context of refrigeration and air conditioning. If the hon. Member would be so kind as to provide us with more detail, we will endeavour to provide a substantive response.

Refrigerators: Pollution Control

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support his Department is giving to the Consumer Goods Forum initiative to phase out fluorine in refrigeration units. [156569]

Richard Benyon: We are aware of the Consumer Goods Forum's commitment to start phasing out the use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) in new refrigeration equipment from 2015. It is encouraging to hear that large consumer goods manufacturers and retailers are taking steps to address their use of HFC refrigerants and are looking for ways to introduce alternative systems to replace HFCs. Officials have met with members of the Consumer Goods Forum to discuss the initiative and understand more about the strategies they are adopting to achieve their objectives. We believe this is a useful example of how voluntary agreements can help deliver a reduction in HFC use in certain refrigeration systems.

Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare

Sir James Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking to improve the welfare of animals slaughtered without stunning. [156020]

Mr Heath: The Government would prefer to see all animals stunned before slaughter but recognises the right of members of religious communities to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs. The Government has therefore confirmed that it does not intend to ban religious slaughter without stunning at this stage. Nonetheless, it intends to continue discussions on possible further improvements in animal welfare with members of the Jewish and Muslim communities once the new EU Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing has been implemented.

Wheat

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support his Department is providing to scientists working on developing new wheat varieties. [156099]

Mr Heath: DEFRA provides support for the development of new crop varieties at a pre-competitive level through a number of mechanisms.

The Wheat Genetic Improvement Network has been funded through a number of sequential projects. These aim to generate pre-breeding materials carrying novel/enhanced environmental and other sustainability traits for the UK breeding industry. It is managed by a team including representatives of the key UK research groups and commercial breeding companies.

Breeding materials, knowledge, tools and technologies from the network are actively shared across the scientific and commercial breeding communities. These are used in other research funded by DEFRA, industry and the research councils. This network ensures that the material is exploited as widely as possible and commercialised for use on farm.

DEFRA also provides support for industry-led research (including genetic improvement) through the Sustainable Agri-Food Innovation Platform. This is in collaboration with the Technology Strategy Board, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and Scottish Government.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will provide funding for the National Institute for Agricultural Botany to develop a new form of high-yield wheat. [156100]

Mr Heath: DEFRA is currently providing funding to the National Institute for Agricultural Botany as part of a project looking at new wheat root ideotypes for yield performance in reduced input agriculture.

DEFRA research is commissioned in response to policy need. The majority of this research is let through open competition to which interested institutions including the National Institute for Agricultural Botany (NIAB) can apply.

NIAB currently has a programme of research on wheat improvement with funding from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board and the breeding industry.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Action Fraud

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of police constabularies in England have established formal links with Action Fraud; [155394]

(2) which police constabularies have not yet established formal links with Action Fraud. [155395]

Mr Jeremy Browne: All police constabularies (Forces) in England have established formal links with Action Fraud.

Buildings

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total running costs were for each building used, owned or rented in central London by her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three financial years. [154230]

James Brokenshire: The running costs of Home Office buildings including its agencies and non-departmental public bodies net of income received from other Departments are set out in the following table. Retention of offices in central London is kept under continuous review and substantial savings of £13.2 million per annum are expected in 2014.

Property name	Post code	Tenure type	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Notes
10 Victoria Street	SW1	MOTO ¹	1,057,261	—	—	Vacated 1 October 2010
2 Marsham Street	SW1	Leasehold	39,117,587	44,339,851	253,049,866	
Allington Towers	SW1	Leasehold	6,069,797	627,408	—	Vacated 28 September 2011
Angel Square	EC1	Leasehold	1,373,958	1,333,694	1,296,831	
Becket House	SE1	Leasehold	1,892,773	2,143,722	2,304,636	
Communications House	EC1	Leasehold	1,140,372	367,311	134,255	Vacated 23 June 2012
Counting House	SE1	Leasehold	657,366	745,460	791,585	
Fleet Street	EC4	Leasehold	1,413,153	1,511,160	1,490,658	
Globe House	SW1	Leasehold	6,035,430	6,062,288	5,863,618	
Hannibal House	SE1	Leasehold	1,129,735	282,434	—	Vacated 30 June 2011
High Holborn	WC1	Leasehold	4,055,120	4,137,353	4,498,774	
New Kings Beam House	SE1	Leasehold	3,173,000	2,379,750	—	Vacated 22 December 2011
Total ³			67,115,552	63,930,431	69,430,223	

¹ The Home Office occupied space in 10 Victoria Street under a MOTO (Memorandum of Terms of Occupation) with BIS.

² The Department's savings will increase by £13.2 million per annum when DCLG relocate to 2 Marsham Street in 2014, which will replace the income lost from other users that vacated in 2011 and 2012.

³ The table does not include details of four buildings on security grounds.

Domestic Violence

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many victimless prosecutions in cases of domestic violence have been conducted by each police force in each year since 2005; and if she will make a statement. [155232]

Jeremy Wright: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Ministry of Justice.

Information held centrally by the Ministry of Justice on the court proceedings database does not include the circumstances behind each case beyond the description provided in the statute. It is not possible to separately identify from this centrally held information prosecutions for domestic violence from other offences of assault. Information is not collated centrally on victims of alleged offences proceeded against, aside from the information provided by the statute under which proceedings are brought.

Drugs and Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education about support to families of drugs and alcohol users. [156553]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Home Office Ministers have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and others as part of the process of policy development and delivery. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Europol and Eurojust

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times European countries have made requests for cooperation from the UK via (a) Europol and (b) Eurojust in each of the last 10 years. [156392]

James Brokenshire: The number of requests made in the years for which figures are available is as follows:

	<i>Europol</i>	<i>Eurojust</i>
2003	1	37
2004	1	65
2005	1	82
2006	1	111
2007	1	170
2008	1	182
2009	3,995	224
2010	2,719	201
2011	3,449	197
2012	3,845	190

¹ Figures not available

Illegal Immigrants

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the number of people without the right to remain in the country for each year since 2005. [156646]

Mr Harper: The clandestine nature of irregular migration and the lack of a common definition mean that it is difficult to produce estimates on the number of people without a right to remain in the UK.

In the last decade there have been two estimates of the illegal migrant population in the UK, giving central estimates of 430,000 (range 310,000 to 570,000) in 2001 (Woodbridge, J. 'Sizing the Unauthorised (Illegal) Migrant Population in the United Kingdom in 2001'. Online Report 29/05, Home Office, London, 2005) and 618,000 (range 417,000 to 863,000) in 2007 (Gordon I., K. Scanlon, T. Travers, and C. Whitehead, 'Economic Impact on London and the UK of an Earned Regularisation of Irregular Migrants in the UK'. GLA Economics, Greater London Authority, London, 2009.).

The 2012 European Migration Network report 'Practical Measures for Reducing Irregular Migration' (Toms and Thorpe, 2012):

<http://emn.intrasoft-intl.com/Downloads/download.do;jsessionid=BB91F016906F64A5AD8BD0C1D8BA1586?fileID=2909>

sets out the current UK evidence on the illegal migrant population.

Immigration Controls

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for sponsor licences have been received in each of the last 24 months. [156560]

Mr Harper: The following table lists the number of sponsor licence applications received each month from 1 May 2011 to 30 April 2013:

	<i>Total applications received</i>
<i>2011</i>	
May	744
June	835
July	786
August	812
September	799
October	755
November	751
December	605
<i>2012</i>	
January	699
February	743
March	750
April	569
May	651
June	548
July	631
August	682
September	669
October	750
November	686
December	530
<i>2013</i>	
January	762
February	628
March	697

	<i>Total applications received</i>
April	718

Notes:

1. The figures quoted have been derived from management information and are therefore provisional and subject to change. This information has not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols.
2. Figure relates to sponsorship licence applications from employers and educational institutions.
3. Figure relates to applications logged in the period from 1 May 2011 to 30 April 2012.
4. Figures may include additional sub tier applications from employers and educational institutions seeking to extend the remit of existing licences.

Misuse of Drugs Ministerial Group

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions she has had as part of the Interministerial Group on Drugs with stakeholders; how many meetings the Interministerial Group on Drugs has had in each of the last 12 months; and if she will publish details of such meetings.

[156647]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Home Office Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of international partners, as well as organisations and individuals in the public and private sectors, as part of the process of policy development and delivery. Details of these meetings are passed to the Cabinet Office on a quarterly basis and are subsequently published on the Cabinet Office website.

Police National Computer

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether police information notices are recorded on the police national computer; and if she will make a statement.

[156239]

Damian Green: Police information notices are not recorded on the police national computer. There is currently no national policy for recording them.

Police: Recruitment

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice she has given to police authorities on the employment in civilian roles of former police officers.

[156486]

Damian Green: The Home Office has not provided any guidance on the employment of former police officers in civilian roles. This is a local matter for Police and Crime Commissioners and chief constables as the employers of police staff.

Surveillance

Mr Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases powers under the Regulations of Powers Act 2000 have been used for investigating non-serious crimes in each year since 2000; and what definition her Department uses for a serious crime under the Act.

[156315]

James Brokenshire: The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') defines 'serious crime' in section 81(3) as an offence which if committed by

someone aged 21 or over with no previous convictions would reasonably attract a prison sentence of three years or more, or an offence which involves the use of violence, results in financial gain or is conduct by a large number of people in pursuit of a common purpose. A breakdown on the use of RIPA in serious crime cases is not available centrally. General statistics on RIPA use are published each year by the independent Chief Surveillance Commissioner, the Interception of Communications Commissioner and the Intelligence Services Commissioner, copies of which are in the House Library.

Tickets: Fraud

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints of ticket fraud have been received by Action Fraud in each of the last five years.

[155393]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Action Fraud started recording specific reports of ticket fraud in January 2012. Prior to that reports were included in a more general category of fraud. Action Fraud received 3,217 reports in 2012 and 1,373 reports from January to April 2013.

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of ticket fraud policing since the disbandment of the Operation Podium taskforce.

[155396]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The report produced by Operation Podium, on tackling ticket crime during the London Olympics, has made a considerable contribution to the understanding of ticketing crime. Since its publication, the Home Office has remained in contact with the Metropolitan police to ensure that the lessons learned from securing this major event can be applied to other events in the future. The Government are currently considering the success of this work and its potential to further strengthen the work on tackling ticket fraud.

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints of ticket fraud received by Action Fraud (a) were issued a crime reference number, (b) were categorised as crime-related, (c) were investigated and (d) resulted in a conviction in each of the last five years.

[155397]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Action Fraud started recording specific reports of ticket fraud in January 2012. Prior to that reports were included in a more general category of fraud. The service issues crime reference numbers for both crime reports and information (crime related) reports. Action Fraud (a) issued crime reference numbers to 3,217 reports in 2012 and 1,373 from January to April 2013 (b) took 55 information (crime related) reports in 2012 and 19 reports from January to April 2013. No central record is held of how many cases reported to Action Fraud are subsequently investigated (c). Conviction data, held by the Ministry of Justice, records convictions for "fraud and forgery" and cannot be disaggregated further (d).

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

European Union: Citizenship

Mark Reckless: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support she plans to give to the 2014 to 2020 Europe for Citizens programme. [156075]

Hugh Robertson: The EU's 2014-20 Europe for Citizens Programme—an extension of this long-running programme—will enable local UK organisations to bid for funds to support civic participation, such as town-twinning and remembrance activities, including for the Holocaust. As an article 352 measure under the European Union Act 2011 the extended programme must be approved by an Act of the UK Parliament before a UK Minister can support it in Brussels. The programme requires unanimous support from all European Union member states to be taken forward. The Government intends to recommend to Parliament that it approve the programme.

Public Lending Right

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received seeking her agreement to enact the provisions of the Digital Economy Act 2010 as it relates to the extension of public lending right to the lending of e-books and audio books. [156500]

Mr Vaizey: The Government commissioned an independent review of e-lending in public libraries in England last year and the panel, led by William Sieghart, received evidence on this and related matters from the parties listed in the review:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-independent-review-of-e-lending-in-public-libraries-in-england>

The review recommended that Public Lending Right (PLR) be extended to e-books and audiobooks and the Government Response, published on 27 March 2013, sets out the Government's position in terms of extending PLR. Any proposal for the potential extension of PLR will be communicated in due course, following full consideration of this matter.

Public Libraries

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure that local authorities properly reward writers and creators for the use of their works in lending e-books and audio books via public libraries in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. [156648]

Mr Vaizey: It is the responsibility of library authorities to reach appropriate agreements with non-print rights holders or with other parties on behalf of those rights holders in order to license the lending of their non-print works.

Sign Language

Sir Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the equality of access available for deaf people

whose first language is British Sign Language in terms of communicating with (a) cultural, media, sporting and business organisations and (b) the agencies and public bodies for which she is responsible; and if she will make a statement. [155497]

Mr Vaizey: We recognise the importance of removing the barriers deaf people face in accessing services. The Equality Act 2010 provides the protection which ensures disabled people can access goods, facilities and services, by requiring those with duties under the Act, including Government Departments, to make a reasonable adjustment so that their services and functions are accessible. For example, installing perimeter loops in museum galleries.

We also recognise that technology has a vital role to play in assisting disabled people to access information, advice and services especially as public services increasingly go online. That is why DCMS is encouraging organisations to explore how they can meet the needs of BSL customers, through developing a mix of accessible contact strategies for their disabled and older customers via e-mail, SMS, instant messenger, text relay and Video Relay Services (VRS). This will assist many people who are deaf and hearing impaired.

More generally, the cross-Government strategy 'Fulfilling Potential' aims to make sure that all people, whatever their impairment, have the opportunity to receive a good education, obtain employment, access services and live as fully engaged members of a modern society in every aspect of day to day life.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Business Premises: Change of Use

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the statement of 9 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 46, on planning: re-use of buildings, (1) whether, under the changes to his Department's policy, (a) existing betting shop chains and (b) pay-day lending shops will be able to make use of the freedom to open up in A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, D1 or D2 premises without having to apply for planning permission; [156466]

(2) whether under the changes to his Department's policy a betting business could use the new permitted development rights to open up in a part of premises while it is still being used as a public house. [156467]

Nick Boles [*holding answer 20 May 2013*]: The new relaxations allow uses under A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, D1 and D2 to change use without the need for a planning application to A1, A2, A3 and B1 only, for a temporary period of up to two years. Financial and professional services, including betting offices, are in the A2 class, and change of use from A3, A4 and A5 to A2 is already permitted.

Betting premises are licensed through the Gambling Act 2005. Secondary legislation imposes a mandatory condition on the licenses of betting shops that the consumption of alcohol on the premises is prohibited. There is thus a legal prohibition on a betting shop from operating from a pub.

Carbon Monoxide

Jason McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what regulations govern the installation of solid fuel burners with respect to the prevention of carbon monoxide poisoning. [156208]

Mr Foster: Requirements J1 to J6 of the Building Regulations 2010 SI No. 2214 (as amended) relate to the installation of combustion appliances and are designed, among other things, to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Requirement J3 provides for the provision of carbon monoxide alarms, where appropriate, in dwellings.

Families: Disadvantaged

Mr Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which local authorities failed to identify and work with 75 per cent or more of their target families in 2012-13; which such authorities will have their funding cut in 2013-14 because of such failure; which other local authorities will receive less than 100 per cent of their provisional maximum funding for 2013-14; and for what reasons each such reduction in funding will occur. [153898]

Brandon Lewis: On Monday 13 May 2013, my Department published the latest progress information which details the cumulative totals of families identified and families being worked with as of end March 2013. This was posted on the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

All 152 upper-tier local authorities have been invited to claim attachment fees for the number of families with whom they intend to commence working in their troubled families programmes during 2013-14 (year 2 of programme). The timing of the payments of those fees will differ according to which of two groups they fall into when considering their progress information as at the end of 2012/13 (year 1 of programme). The groups are as follows:

Group 1:

Areas working with 75% or more of their year 1 families as of 31 March 2013 will receive their year 2 attachment fees in full, in one payment in the first quarter of 2013-14.

Group 2:

Areas working with between 33% and 75% of their year 1 families as of 31 March 2013 will receive half of their year 2 attachment fees in the first quarter of 2013-14 with the remaining half to be paid in the second quarter of 2013-14 providing they have caught up (i.e. commenced working with remainder of year 1 families) by then.

There are no areas working with less than 33% of their year 1 families as of 31 March 2013.

Homelessness: Asylum

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many adults have become homeless as a result of eviction following a refusal of refugee status. [156210]

Mr Prisk: The Department does not collect the information requested.

Right to Buy Scheme: Romford

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many local authority properties have been purchased through the Government's Right-to-Buy scheme in Romford constituency in each of the last five years. [156119]

Mr Prisk: Data on the sales of local authority properties through the Right to Buy scheme are not available at constituency level. Figures are available at local authority level and can be found in Tables 691 (quarterly data) and 685 (annual data) here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-social-housing-sales>

The figures show that there were 95 sales through the Right to Buy scheme in Havering, the local authority that covers Romford constituency, in the four years between 2009-10 and 2012-13. Figures at a local authority level are only currently available back to 2009-10.

Since the new discounts were introduced in April 2012, Right to Buy sales have trebled in Havering compared to the year before. But there is more to do to help inform tenants about their new rights and the new London discount of up to £100,000.

It should be noted that these are sales from local authorities and do not include sales of social housing stock through Preserved Right to Buy made by Registered Providers (such as housing associations).

Tenancy Deposit Schemes

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps his Department is taking to make tenants aware of deposit protection schemes. [156498]

Mr Prisk: It is a requirement of my Department's service concession agreements with the tenancy deposit protection scheme providers that they carry out publicity and marketing activities, aimed at tenants as well as landlords. There will be increased publicity following the recent launch of two new schemes in April this year, both from the new schemes in order to attract members, but also from the existing schemes in light of the additional competition.

There is also guidance for both landlords and tenants on tenancy deposit protection on the government's website gov.uk

TRANSPORT

Aviation: Exhaust Emissions

Kwasi Kwarteng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made on discussions with the International Civil Aviation Organisation on carbon emissions. [156484]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government remains committed to tackling the climate change impacts of international aviation at a global level and will continue to work through the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to push for an ambitious global agreement on measures to address emissions from this sector at this year's General Assembly (24 September-4 October).

Since December 2012 the UK has actively participated in the ICAO High Level Group on Climate Change which has met three times so far. The High Level Group has sought to resolve some of the long standing issues which have blocked progress in ICAO in the past. The discussions have been relatively constructive to date and we are hopeful that new text on addressing aviation emissions through a basket of measures, including market based measures will be adopted at the General Assembly.

Biofuels

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many jobs have been created in the biofuels industry as a result of the Renewable Energy Directive's requirement to create 10 per cent of transport energy from renewable energy; [156582]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the biofuels industry on UK economic growth. [156579]

Norman Baker: Consideration of the impact on growth and employment of the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation will be included in an assessment of the Obligation which we will conduct later this year.

'Advanced Biofuels: The Potential for a UK Industry, NNFCC 11-011' was published in November 2011. The study, commissioned by the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Department for Transport, estimated that strong development of advanced biofuels could create up to 6000 full-time construction jobs and over 2000 permanent jobs supplying and operating the plants by 2020.

According to recent industry figures it has been estimated that the biofuels sector sustains approximately 3,500 jobs. (REA/Innovas: 'Renewable Energy: Made in Britain', 23 April 2012).

Bridges: River Thames

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many meetings have been held between representatives of his Department and representatives of (a) the Department for Transport and (b) Transport for London to discuss East London river crossings in the last six months. [155940]

Stephen Hammond: In the last six months there have been no specific meetings to discuss East London river crossings. Departmental officials meet regularly with Transport for London representatives to discuss a range of policy and funding issues; some meetings have included brief discussion on the subject.

Bus Services: Corby

Andy Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the (a) overall and (b) unit cost is of providing free bus travel to pensioners in Corby constituency. [156658]

Norman Baker: The Government does not hold information regarding the cost of providing free bus travel to pensioners for individual Parliamentary constituencies. The Department for Transport carries out annual surveys of local authorities which are Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs) and the information for spending by individual TCAs, including Northamptonshire,

on concessionary travel is published in Table BUS0812b on the Government's web site at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/concessionary-travel-statistics-england-2011-12-and-2012-13>

Andy Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate his Department has made of the (a) total and (b) unit cost of providing free bus travel to 16 to 18 years olds in education or training in Corby constituency. [156659]

Norman Baker: There is no statutory bus travel concession for young people, although local authorities may decide to offer concessionary travel to young people on a discretionary basis.

The Government does not hold information regarding the cost of providing free bus travel to 16 to 18 year olds for individual Parliamentary constituencies. However, the Department for Transport carries out annual surveys of local authorities which are Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs) and the information for individual TCAs which enhance their concessionary travel schemes to provide some form of discretionary concession for young people is published in Table BUS0841 on the Government's web site. Information about concessions offered on a commercial basis by bus operators in individual TCAs is published in Table BUS0842. Both tables can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/concessionary-travel-statistics-england-2011-12-and-2012-13>

Cycling

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government is taking to encourage commuters to cycle to work. [156655]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport actively encourages sustainable travel including cycling to work. The Cycle to Work Scheme provides tax incentives to help employees purchase bicycles and equipment. Alongside this, we work in partnership with Business in the Community, Transport for London, British Cycling and the Cycle to Work Alliance through the website 'Businesscycle'. The aim is to increase cycling for work and commuting purposes.

We have also made available £14.5m to the Cycle Rail Working Group to improve cycle facilities at railway stations. Improvement projects will not only make it safer and more convenient for people to park their bike at the station but will encourage cycling for the onward journey from the station with new cycle hire schemes. This helps support the Department's recently published Door to Door Strategy which encourages use of sustainable transport for the whole journey.

Havering

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding (a) his Department and (b) each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible has allocated to the London Borough of Havering in each of the last five years. [156141]

Norman Baker: The most recent data available for total public expenditure on transport is given in HM Treasury's Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses for 2011/12.

Identifiable expenditure on transport in the London region for the last 5 years is reproduced below. Equivalent data is not available below regional level.

Transport:	National Statistics				
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
London	4,756	4,621	5,801	5,207	5,282
<i>Of which:</i> <i>current</i>					
London	2,445	1,822	2,219	1,864	1,857
<i>Of which:</i> <i>capital</i>					
London	2,311	2,800	3,582	3,343	3,425

£ million

Local Government Finance: Transport

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the value of awards to local authorities in England under the Local Sustainable Transport Fund was in 2012-13. [156506]

Norman Baker: In 2012-13, through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund we awarded local authorities £110.5 million revenue and £101 million capital funding.

Members: Correspondence

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to answer the letter from the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South dated 21 January 2013. [156565]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport does not have a record of receiving a letter from the hon. Member dated 21 January 2013, but we will be pleased to respond speedily if she could provide a copy.

Polyisobutene

Dr Wollaston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent correspondence he has had with the International Maritime Organisation on the reclassification of polyisobutene. [155942]

Stephen Hammond: None. However officials at the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have had initial, informal discussions with the International Maritime Organization Secretariat on the classification of polyisobutene (PIB) following the recent incidents off the South Coast.

Dr Wollaston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the (a) cause and (b) source of the recent polyisobutene pollution incidents was. [155943]

Stephen Hammond: Officials at the Maritime and Coastguard Agency are analysing data that shows which vessels transited the area where it is estimated that the discharges could have taken place. That may help to determine the source of the pollution and allow further

investigation to assess whether the discharge was permissible or whether there may be a case to take action against an unlawful discharge.

Dr Wollaston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to prevent further seabird deaths as a result of polyisobutene pollution resulting from both legal and illegal discharges at sea. [155944]

Stephen Hammond: Once the full reasons for the incidents are established, the UK will, if appropriate, formally approach International Maritime Organisation to discuss the discharge requirements for products carried on chemical tankers.

Private Finance Initiative

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which private finance initiative projects relating to his Department have been refinanced in each year since May 2010; what the value is of each such project; what the refinancing gain has been in each such case; and how much any such gain the relevant Government body received through a (a) lump sum and (b) reduction in the unitary charge. [156004]

Norman Baker: None of the private finance projects sponsored by the Department for Transport has been refinanced since May 2010.

Railways: Bournemouth

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisation is responsible for keeping the tracks running through Bournemouth railway station free of litter. [156250]

Norman Baker: Network Rail.

Railways: Fares

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to publish his review of rail fares. [156296]

Norman Baker: We are considering a range of options to improve rail fares and ticketing, and we intend to set out our findings and next steps this summer.

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the cost of rail fares. [156297]

Norman Baker: Since January 2013, the Department has received around 700 items of correspondence from MPs, members of the public and other bodies about rail fares. The subject has also been discussed in a number of meetings with industries and interested parties.

Railways: Finance

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total annual amounts paid in track access charges to Network Rail by each train operating company contracted to provide rail passenger services since April 2004. [156218]

Mr Simon Burns: The data requested refer to transactions between private train operating companies and Network Rail which is not held by the Department. However, information for recent years is contained within Network Rail's Regulatory Financial Statements which are available on their website at:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/browse%20documents/regulatory%20documents/regulatory%20compliance%20and%20reporting/regulatory%20accounts/regulatory%20financial%20statements%20for%20the%20year%20ended%2031%20march%202012.pdf>

Railways: Romford

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that Romford station will be served by National Rail fast trains into London Liverpool Street and Essex once existing Metro services are replaced by Crossrail services. [156140]

Mr Simon Burns: It is expected that Romford station will continue to be served by National Rail fast trains into London Liverpool Street and Essex once metro services are transferred to Crossrail.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155803]

Stephen Hammond: The information is as follows:

(a) All regulations introduced by the Department are monitored and examined through the Government's rigorous Better Regulation processes, which are described in full at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-the-impact-of-regulation-on-business>

All UK regulation that impacts on business and civil society organisations is listed on Department for Transport's (DFT's) statements of new regulation (SNR). These cover all regulations planned to be implemented or removed in six month periods (January to June and July to December each year) and are published on the website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-transport-statement-of-new-regulations>

(b) Information on costs and benefits of the regulations we introduce is assessed and recorded in impact assessments (IAs) which are published alongside the regulations on the

www.legislation.gov.uk

website. The information is collated in the SNR.

(c) DFT had four themes under the Red Tape Challenge programme—Road Transportation, Rail, Maritime and Aviation. Alongside internal government review of the body of regulations in these areas, this invited businesses and the public to suggest which regulations should be revoked or improved.

Since December 2011, new regulations have been subject to a sunset policy to ensure they are kept under regular review. Details of the policy can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sunset-clauses-and-regulations>

As a matter of good practice most IAs outline arrangements for post implementation review even for regulations where statutory review clauses do not apply.

(d) Each Red Tape Challenge (RTC) theme had a period in the spotlight on the RTC website but it was also made clear that contributions and suggestions from businesses and the public on burdensome regulation were welcome outside that period. That remains the case.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155826]

Stephen Hammond: The One in One out rule was introduced in September 2010 and applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2011. One in Two out replaced this rule and has applied to regulations introduced since January 2013. The Statement of New Regulation published every six months lists regulatory changes that are subject to the One in One out/One in Two out rule. This includes the introduction of new regulations and amendments and revocations of existing regulations. The following regulations that were listed on the statements have been introduced.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>In Force</i>
Airport Bylaws (Designation) Order 2011	2011 No. 828	13 April 2011
Aerodromes (Designation) (Detention and Sale of Aircraft) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Order 2011	2011 No. 832	13 April 2011
Equality Act 2010 (Work on Ships and Hovercraft) Regulations 2011	2011 No. 1771	1 August 2011
Vehicle Drivers (Certificates of Professional Competence) (Amendment) Regulations 2011	2011 No. 2324	18 October 2011
Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment (Amendment) Regulations 2011	2011 No. 1885	24 October 2011
Goods Vehicles (Community Licences) Regulations 2011	2011 No. 2633	4 December 2011
Public Service Vehicles (Community Licences) Regulations 2011	2011 No. 2634	4 December 2011
Road Transport Operator Regulations 2011	2011 No. 2632	4 December 2011
Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2011	2011 No. 2675	1 December 2011
M25 Motorway (Junctions 2 to 3) (Variable Speed Limits) Regulations 2012	2012 No. 104	10 February 2012
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2012	2012 No. 308	1 April 2012
Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment) Regulations 2012	2012 No. 977	20 April 2012

<i>Title</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>In Force</i>
M62 Motorway (Junctions 25 to 30) (Actively Managed Hard Shoulder and Variable Speed Limits) Regulations 2012	2012 No. 1865	20 August 2012
The Port Security (Port of Aberdeen) Designation Order 2012	2012 No. 2607	19 November 2012
The Port Security (Port of Workington) Designation Order 2012	2012 No. 2611	19 November 2012
The Port Security (Port of Grangemouth) Designation Order 2012	2012 No. 2608	19 November 2012
The Port Security (Port of Tees and Hartlepool) Designation Order 2012	2012 No. 2610	19 November 2012
The Port Security (Port of Portland) Designation Order 2012	2012 No. 2609	19 November 2012
Motor Vehicles (Tests) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2012	2012 No. 2652	18 November 2012
Motor Fuel (Road Vehicle and Mobile Machinery) Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting Regulations 2012	2012 No. 3030	1 January 2013
Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Passengers by Sea) Regulations 2012	2012 No. 3152	31 December 2012
Public Bodies (Abolition of the Railway Heritage Committee) Order 2013	2013 No. 64	29 October 2013
Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 258	8 March 2013
Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 1013	1 June 2013
Road Vehicles (Testing) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 271	20 March 2013
Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) (Exemptions) Order 2013	2013 No. 339	1 April 2013
Channel Tunnel (Safety) (Amendment) Order 2013	2013 No. 407	¹ —
Merchant Shipping (Passengers' Rights) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 425	27 March 2013
Operation of Air Services in the Community (Pricing etc.) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 486	5 April 2013
Renewable Transport Fuel Obligations (Amendment) Order 2013	2013 No. 816	¹ —
Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 950	1 June 2013
Rights of Passengers in Bus and Coach Transport (Exemptions) Regulations 2013	2013 No. 228	21 May 2013

¹ Come into force in accordance with article 1 in the regulations.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155969]

Stephen Hammond: All changes to UK regulation in scope of the One in, One out and One in, Two out rules (i.e. those that impact on business and civil society organisations) are listed, along with their estimated impact on business as validated by the independent Regulatory Policy Committee, on the Statements of New Regulation (SNRs). This includes the introduction of new regulations and amendments and revocations of existing regulations, divided up into six month periods (January to June and July to December each year). The answer to PQ155826 provides a list of titles of regulatory changes that have come into force. DFT's SNRs are published on the website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-transport-statement-of-new-regulations>

The One in, One out rule was introduced on 1 September 2010 and applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2011. One in, Two out replaced the One in, One out rule and has applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2013.

As well as being collated in the SNR, information on the costs and benefits of the regulations we introduce is assessed and recorded in impact assessments (IAs) which are published alongside the regulations on the following website:

www.legislation.gov.uk

Roads: Carbon Emissions

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of how much the carbon footprint of the UK's roads could be reduced through the sustainable production of asphalt at lower temperatures over the next 10 years; [156519]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of how much the production of asphalt contributes to the annual carbon footprint of the UK's roads. [156520]

Norman Baker: As part of the Highways Agency's carbon reporting, asphalt purchased by its supply chain for use on the Strategic Road Network estimates the production of asphalt contributes a little over 11% of the average annual reported carbon footprint of the Highways Agency, excluding traffic. It should be noted that the traffic loads on the strategic road network does not allow them at present to use cold asphalt.

The Department for Transport does not retain similar information for local highway authority roads.

Roads: Plymouth

Oliver Colvile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much Plymouth City Council received from his Department for highway maintenance in 2012-13; and how much his Department has allocated to Plymouth City Council for highway maintenance in 2013-14. [156062]

Norman Baker: The funding the Department for Transport is providing to Plymouth City Council for highways maintenance in 2012/13 and 2013/14 is as follows:

<i>Financial Year</i>	<i>£ million</i>
2012-13	2.183
2013-14	2.498

Local authorities are also able to use revenue funding, allocated by the Department of Communities and Local Government through the Revenue Support Grant for maintaining their local highways.

Neither capital nor revenue highways maintenance block funding is ring-fenced and it is for local highway authorities to decide upon their spending priorities across the whole range of services that they provide.

Roads: Romford

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities there have been as a result of road traffic accidents involving motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians in Romford constituency in the last five years. [156138]

Stephen Hammond: In the last five years in Romford constituency there have been the following numbers of fatalities in road traffic accidents:

	<i>Number of fatalities in accidents involving</i>		
	<i>Motorcyclists</i>	<i>Cyclists</i>	<i>Pedestrians</i>
2007	1	0	3
2008	0	0	0
2009	0	0	1
2010	0	0	0
2011	0	0	3

Note:

Constituency boundary as at 2010

Data for the year 2012 will be available in June 2013.

Transport: Yorkshire and the Humber

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what spending on transport infrastructure in Yorkshire and the Humber was in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [156504]

Norman Baker: The most recent data available for total public expenditure on transport are given in HM Treasury's 'Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses' for 2011/12.

The information requested is shown in the following table. This includes a split between current and capital expenditure for all years.

Identifiable transport expenditure in Yorkshire and the Humber, 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total expenditure</i>	<i>of which: Capital</i>	<i>£ million</i>
			<i>of which: Current</i>
2009/10	1,482	801	681
2010/11	1,393	774	619
2011/12	1,326	730	596

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**Anaerobic Digestion**

Sir James Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many crop-only anaerobic digestion plants have (a) been awarded feed-in tariffs, (b) applied for feed-in tariffs and (c) been rejected for feed-in tariffs in the last five years. [156017]

Gregory Barker: We do not hold information on which AD plants are crop only as part of the feed-in tariffs scheme which has been operational since April 2010. AD plants may use crops as part of a crop/waste mix although the split between the amounts of crops/waste used may vary from week to week.

Climate Change

David T. C. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for what reason his Department relies on the Met Office's assessment of the probability in relation to global temperatures of a linear trend with first-order autoregressive noise rather than a driftless third-order autoregressive integrated model. [156568]

Gregory Barker: The Met Office is one of Government's key advisory institutions on climate science, which undertakes climate research and modelling and provides advice on technical questions related to climate, to the Department. Global temperatures, along with other aspects of the climate system, are primarily assessed using physically-based mathematical models, rather than statistical models.

Clothing

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have made a claim for evening dress allowance in each of the last five years; and what the total cost of such claims has been. [155447]

Gregory Barker: There have been no claims by officials of (a) the Department of Energy and Climate Change or (b) its non-departmental public bodies for evening dress allowance.

Energy

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions his Department has had with energy providers on industry-supported helplines and Welsh language provision. [156219]

Gregory Barker: The Department has not had any recent discussions with energy providers on industry-supported helplines and Welsh language provision.

Energy: Disconnections

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) what recent estimate he has made of the number of households in the UK who have been disconnected by their gas supplier in the last 12 months; [156293]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the number of households in the UK who have been disconnected by their electricity supplier in the last 12 months. [156294]

Gregory Barker: Ofgem monitors and publishes information about disconnections of domestic electricity supplies (in its Domestic Supplies' Quarterly Debt and Disconnection reports:

<http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/Sustainability/SocAction/Monitoring/SoObMonitor/Pages/SocObMonitor.aspx>

The following tables show the number of disconnections of domestic electricity and gas supplies due to debt during 12 month period of Q2 and Q1 of 2012, Q4 and Q3 of 2011, the latest figures to be published.

Disconnection of electricity supplies

<i>Quarter period</i>	<i>Number of disconnections</i>
Q2 of 2012	138
Q1 of 2012	26
Q4 of 2011	83
Q3 of 2011	419

Disconnection of gas supplies

<i>Quarter period</i>	<i>Number of disconnections</i>
Q2 of 2012	33
Q1 of 2012	2
Q4 of 2011	38
Q3 of 2011	128

Green Deal Scheme: North East

Guy Opperman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the rollout of the Green Deal in the North East. [156580]

Gregory Barker: The latest Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation monthly statistics, as released on 14 May 2013, reported that there were 18,816 Green Deal Assessments lodged in Great Britain up to the end of April 2013:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-deal-and-energy-company-obligation-eco-monthly-statistics-may-2013>

DECC will publish, on 27 June 2013, our first quarterly Official Statistics publication which will contain more detailed analysis of Green Deal Assessments lodged up to the end of March. This will include geographic breakdowns.

Hydrofluorocarbons

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the implementation of the Montreal protocol and a strategy to reduce HFCs. [156626]

Gregory Barker: The UK is fully supportive of action through the Montreal protocol to phase-down HFCs. DEFRA is the lead Department for the implementation of the Montreal protocol. The UK is also working through the Department to secure a call from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on the Montreal protocol to phase-down the production and consumption of HFCs. DEFRA and DECC officials are working closely together on this issue. There has been no direct discussion between the respective Secretaries of State.

Given the importance of this issue and the emissions reduction potential, the UK also supports efforts to phase-down HFCs through a wide range of other fora such as the G8, G20 and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition.

ICT

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many (a) computers, (b) mobile telephones, (c) BlackBerrys and (d) other

pieces of IT equipment were lost or stolen from his Department in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [156425]

Gregory Barker: The following items were lost or stolen during:

<i>2010-11</i>	
	<i>Number</i>
Computers (including laptops)	5
Mobile phones	3
BlackBerry	12
Other IT equipment	0
<i>2011-12</i>	
	<i>Number</i>
Computers (including laptops)	10
Mobile phones	1
BlackBerry	17
Other IT equipment	0
<i>2012-13</i>	
	<i>Number</i>
Computers (including laptops)	5
Mobile phones	0
BlackBerry	9
Other IT equipment	0

All computers and BlackBerrys lost were encrypted to protect Government information.

Procurement

David Mowat: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to ensure that procurement and tendering processes run by his Department give a high priority to the improvement and retention of local specialist skills. [156574]

Gregory Barker: The Department of Energy and Climate Change procurement policies aim to ensure transparency, fairness, non-discrimination and value for money in accordance with Cabinet Office policy and legal requirements.

There is no specific requirement for policy teams to consider and include the improvement and retention of local skills within the scope of procurements, although they may become part of larger value contract service requirements through the promotion of apprenticeships and skills training.

Renewable Energy

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the remit of the local energy assessment fund; and if he will make a statement. [154937]

Michael Fallon: The Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) ran from December 2011 to March 2012.

The project which provided £10 million grant funding to support 236 early stage community energy projects, covering energy efficiency, electricity and heat, is currently being evaluated. This independent evaluation is examining the outputs achieved through LEAF funding and distilling lessons learned, which

can be shared with other community energy projects, and inform future policy in this area. We expect to publish in summer 2013.

Initial feedback from LEAF-funded renewables projects has been used to inform the design of the forthcoming £15 million DEFRA/DECC rural renewable energy fund (for England). This is due to be launched shortly.

Travel

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible claimed reimbursement for travel subsistence expenses in each of the last five years; what the total cost was of such claims; and what the monetary value was of the 20 highest subsistence claims in each such year. [155407]

Gregory Barker: Neither the Department of Energy and Climate Change nor its non-departmental public bodies keeps a central record of the number of individual staff claiming travel and subsistence.

We are able to provide the number and value of claims recorded from 2008-13, as shown in the following table for (a) core-DECC and (b) DECC's NDPBs (excluding the Committee on Climate Change).

Period	Core DECC			NDPBs ¹		
	Total claims (number)	Amount (£000)	"Top 20" (£000)	Total claims (number)	Amount (£000)	"Top 20" (£000)
2008-09	249	18	10	670	1,983	44
2009-10	392	68	29	774	1,786	38
2010-11	336	46	19	784	1,566	23
2011-12	327	35	15	962	1,922	40
2012-13	697	151	43	1,101	1,856	36

¹ NDPBs' Total number of claims and "Top 20" relate to NDA and CNPA only.

The Committee on Climate Change's travel and subsistence data are published in their Annual Reports as follows:

2009-10—(page 45)

<http://archive.theccc.org.uk/aws2/Annual%20Report/CCC-AnnualReport-2010-web.pdf>

2010-11

http://archive.theccc.org.uk/aws2/Annual%20Report%20&%20Accounts%202011/1427_CCC-AnnualReport-2010_6_bookmarks.pdf

2011-12—(page 40)

http://archive.theccc.org.uk/aws/corporate%202012/CCC_Annual%20Report%202012_Final.pdf

2012-13

Not yet available.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of people killed in unmanned aerial vehicle strikes in Afghanistan in each of the last three years. [155021]

Mr Robathan: While we investigate carefully all alleged incidents involving UK forces from whatever cause, the Government do not record total figures for insurgent or civilian casualties in Afghanistan because of the immense difficulty and risks that would be involved in collecting robust data.

Afghanistan and Iraq

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many minors have been deployed to (a) Afghanistan and (b) Iraq since the start of British military operations in those countries. [154864]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence can only provide information for the period after the implementation of the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system in 2007. Pre-JPA data could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

No such deployment has taken place since 2010. In the period 2007-10, a total of seven personnel, who were all 17 years old, were confirmed as having entered an area of operations, four on Op Telic, Iraq and three on Op Herrick, Afghanistan. We take immediate action to correct any breach of our policy as soon as it is discovered.

Armed Forces: Apprentices

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) with reference to the answer of 22 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 612W, on armed forces: apprentices, how many armed forces personnel completed military apprenticeships as a proportion of the total strength of each service in academic year (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11 and (c) 2011-12; [155946]

(2) with reference to the answer of 22 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 611W, on armed forces: apprentices, how many armed forces personnel completed apprenticeships to level (a) two and (b) three as a proportion of the total strength of each service in (i) academic year 2009-10, (ii) academic year 2010-11 and (iii) academic year 2011-12. [156034]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 20 May 2013]: Apprenticeship completions by service, level and year, and by proportion of total strength, are shown in the following table:

Apprenticeships completed	2009-10	Proportion of strength (%)	2010-11	Proportion of strength (%)	2011-12	Proportion of strength (%)
<i>Level 2</i>						
RN	1	1	1	1	2,182	6.6
Army	1	1	1	1	4,507	4.6
RAF	1	1	1	1	764	2.0
Total	9,874	5.6	9,836	5.6	7,453	4.4

<i>Apprenticeships completed</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>Proportion of strength (%)</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>Proportion of strength (%)</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>Proportion of strength (%)</i>
<i>Level 3</i>						
RN	1	1	1	1	339	1.0
Army	1	1	1	1	1,682	1.7
RAF	1	1	1	1	655	1.7
Total	2,065	1.2	2,173	1.2	2,676	1.6
<i>Level 2/3</i>						
RN	1	1	1	1	2,521	7.6
Army	1	1	1	1	6,189	6.3
RAF	1	1	1	1	1,419	3.7
Total	11,939	6.7	12,009	6.8	10,129	6.0

¹ Figures by service are not available prior to 2011-12.

Armed Forces: Disciplinary Proceedings

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the answer of 22 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 613W, on armed forces: disciplinary proceedings, (1) of the appeals against both finding and punishment, how many have resulted in the (a) finding being changed and (b) sentence being changed; and if he will make a statement; [155251]

(2) of the appeals against punishments, how many have resulted in the punishment being (a) altered and (b) quashed; and if he will make a statement. [155252]

Mr Robathan: The requested further breakdown of the data is provided in the following tables:

	<i>Appeals against finding and punishment</i>	<i>Finding quashed</i>	<i>Punishment only changed</i>
2005	120	39	23
2006	98	37	13
2007	91	25	10
2008	68	21	3
2009	47	14	4
2010	20	7	3
2011	31	11	2
2012	32	15	7

	<i>Appeals against punishment only</i>	<i>Punishment changed</i>	<i>Punishment quashed</i>
2005	192	81	11
2006	127	57	3
2007	88	44	2
2008	53	27	3
2009	85	33	1
2010	85	50	6
2011	86	49	6
2012	65	42	4

In the course of preparing this answer, some inaccuracies have emerged. I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), gave on 22 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 613W. In that table, two appeals dating from 2005 were omitted, and some data on outcomes was mis-categorised. A corrected version of the table is given in the following table:

Tri-Service Summary Hearing Appeals 2005-12

	<i>Appeals against finding and punishment</i>	<i>Appeals against punishment only</i>	<i>Finding changed (ie quashed)</i>	<i>Punishment changed (ie quashed or altered)</i>
2005	120	192	39	115
2006	98	127	37	73
2007	91	88	25	56
2008	68	53	21	33
2009	47	85	14	38
2010	20	85	7	59
2011	31	86	11	57
2012	32	65	15	53

Armed Forces: Health Services

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rights are in place to ensure his Department's personnel are treated within 18 weeks, in line with the NHS constitution, if commissioned by his Department. [156635]

Mr Francois: The treatment of military personnel aligns with NHS arrangements for the treatment of civilians. Armed forces personnel have the same constitutional right to the standard NHS timeframe of 18-weeks referral to treatment in accordance with the NHS Constitution dated 26 March 2013, published by the Department of Health.

Where there is an operational or occupational requirement, the Ministry of Defence secures higher levels of access from specified NHS Trusts or independent providers.

Up until April 2013 armed forces personnel could only be identified by NHS providers who hosted MOD hospital units. However, in line with the revised NHS Commissioning Strategy, the MOD has been working with NHS England, using NHS Connectivity, to introduce a system to identify all armed forces personnel.

The MOD has a close working relationship with the UK Departments of Health at both strategic and working levels to ensure, in line with the armed forces covenant, military personnel and their dependants receive the healthcare they are entitled to—at no disadvantage.

Armed Forces: Private Education

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) (a) for which schools continuity of education allowance was claimed and (b) to which schools that allowance was paid to in each of the last three years; [156051]

(2) how much his Department has spent on private school fees; and for how many individuals such fees have been paid in each year since 2009. [156052]

Mr Robathan: Continuity of education allowance is paid to eligible service personnel to facilitate a stable education for their children from the age of eight. It is not paid to schools. The information is not held in the format requested.

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on private school fees for the children of commissioned officers in the armed services in each year since 2010. [156172]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 20 May 2013*]: Continuity of education allowance (CEA) is an allowance available to personnel of all ranks who are eligible to claim it. As it is not possible to separate out payments for children who attend private schools from those at maintained schools, except at disproportionate cost, the answer reflects the annual totals of CEA paid to officers. The information requested is set out in the following table:

<i>CEA paid to commissioned officers¹</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>£ millions</i>
2010-11	74.0
2011-12	72.2
2012-13	65.8

¹ Some recipients included in the data for later years will have received CEA payments in earlier years as non-commissioned ranks.

It is worth remembering that this allowance is open to all eligible personnel, officers and other ranks. Of the current CEA claimant community around 50% were, or currently are, other ranks.

Armed Forces: Qualifications

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average length of service is before attaining level 2 qualifications in the Army, Navy and Royal Air Force. [156379]

Mr Robathan: The overall policy aim is that all personnel are qualified to level 2 within eight years. Where service personnel are engaged on an apprenticeship scheme they will achieve level 2 upon completion of their course. Some will enter the services already having achieved level 2 qualifications, but unless these form part of the entry requirement for their chosen specialist trade, this will not be recorded. This means that sufficient data to calculate an average length of service is not held.

Armed Forces: Rape

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many allegations of rape in the armed forces have resulted in prosecutions in each of the last three years. [156462]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence takes all reports of sexual offences very seriously.

The following table shows the number of cases of rape reported by members of the armed forces which resulted in prosecution by the Service Prosecuting Authority since 1 January 2010:

	<i>Rape referrals</i>	<i>Directed for trial</i>	<i>Conviction</i>
2010	6	1	0
2011	4	2	1
2012	9 ¹	5 ²	2

¹ One yet to be decided for trial.

² Three awaiting trial in 2012, tried in early 2013.

A case referred in any one year may be directed for trial, and the trial held, in a later year.

Armed Forces: Sexual Offences

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the answer of 10 April 2013, *Official Report*, columns 1229-30W, on armed forces: sexual offences, what the (a) average length of an investigation is and (b) start date of each case was; and if he will make a statement. [155253]

Mr Robathan: The Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many allegations of (a) rape, (b) sexual assault and (c) assault by penetration against members of the armed forces have been reported by civilians to the service police in each year since 2005; and if he will make a statement. [155263]

Mr Robathan: The following table details the number of allegations of rape, sexual assault and assault by penetration against members of the armed forces reported by civilians to service police in each year since the implementation of the Armed Forces Act 2006 on 1 November 2009 to 31 December 2012.

	<i>Rape</i>	<i>Sexual assault by penetration</i>	<i>Sexual assault</i>
2009	3	0	1
2010	15	3	9
2011	11	4	13
2012	9	2	7
Total	38	9	30

The term 'civilians' here include civilian dependants of service personnel, together with civilians unconnected with HM forces.

The data provided are based on information recorded by the service and shows cases where the service police have jurisdiction and the investigative lead. It does not, therefore, include cases which have been dealt with by the civilian police, including the Ministry of Defence Police, for which only limited information is held.

The rape figures comprise allegations of sections 1 and 5 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and inchoate offences.

Daniel Nightingale

Dr Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost to his Department has been of legal proceedings in respect of Sergeant Danny Nightingale up to the end of March 2013; what the estimated costs are of the current proceedings against Sergeant Nightingale; and if he will make a statement. [154567]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 13 May 2013*]: There is no separately identifiable internal cost to the Ministry of Defence for the Nightingale case. The total external costs of appointing external counsel for legal proceedings to the end of March 2013 in respect of the case of Sergeant Nightingale are in the region of £8,000. The anticipated cost of the current proceedings is between £5,000 and £7,000. All costs are exclusive of VAT.

Guided Weapons

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about SPEAR (3) in relation to (a) Typhoon and (b) F35. [156513]

Mr Dunne: SPEAR Cap 3, an air-to-surface capability for the joint strike fighter (JSF), is currently in its assessment phase. As part of SPEAR Cap 3 development onto JSF there is a requirement to trial and demonstrate the missile on a similar platform. Typhoon will be used for these trials.

Pensions

Mr Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the calculations which estimated the cost of (a) making the normal pension age 60 years for members of the Defence Fire and Rescue Service and the Ministry of Defence Police and (b) a potential average increase in pension contributions for these members of staff; and which organisation carried out these calculations. [155248]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 15 May 2013*]: I am withholding the information requested as it relates to the formation or development of Government policy. The normal pension ages of both the Defence Fire and Rescue Service and Ministry of Defence Police are currently under review in accordance with Clause 36 of the Public Sector Pensions Act 2013. This review of our current policy should be completed by the end of the year.

Procurement

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance his Department issues regarding the employment of outgoing civil servants by private employers with whom his Department has a contractual relationship. [155575]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 16 May 2013*]: It is right that those with experience in government should be able to move into business or other areas of public life, but it is equally important that, in the taking up of an appointment, there is no cause for suspicion of impropriety.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to upholding the Business Appointment Rules for civil servants which can be accessed using the following website:

<http://acoba.independent.gov.uk/>

This document sets out the circumstances in which officials should seek permission to take up an external role. MOD policy on this issue is available to all staff via the internal website.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155790]

Mr Robathan: None of the regulations made by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) since May 2010 impose a regulatory burden on business. The regulations put in place by the MOD are almost entirely for the internal administration of the Armed Forces and Defence assets. Requests for changes to them come from the appropriate MOD and armed forces policy branches.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155812]

Mr Robathan: The one-in, one-out rule was introduced on 1 September 2010 and applied to regulations introduced from 1 January 2011. All Ministry of Defence (MOD) regulations are related to internal administration of defence.

The one-in, two-out rule replaced the one-in, one-out rule and applies to regulations introduced from 1 January 2013. All MOD regulations are related to internal administration of defence.

Regulations introduced by month since May 2010 are as follows:

May 2010

The Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield Byelaws 2010—SI 2010/249

August 2010

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2010—SI 2010/1723

November 2010

The Reserve Forces Act 1996 (Isle of Man) Regulations 2010—SI 2010/2643

The Reserve Forces Appeal Tribunals (Isle of Man) Rules 2010—SI 2010/2644

The Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2010—SI 2010/2475

December 2010

The Visiting Forces (Designation) Order 2010—SI 2010/2970

February 2011

The Armed Forces Redundancy Schemes 2006 and the Armed Forces Redundancy Etc. Schemes 2010 (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/208

April 2011

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/811

The Naval, Military and Air Forces Etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/235

May 2011

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 (Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme) (Rights of Appeal) Regulations 2011—SI 2011/1240

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 (Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme) (Time Limit for Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations 2011—SI 2011/1239

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) Order 2011—SI 2011/517

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Trading Fund Order 2011—SI 2011/1330

June 2011

The Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2005 (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/1364

July 2011

The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011—SI 2011/1523

Harbours, Docks, Piers and Ferries—The Clyde Dockyard Port of Gareloch and Loch Long Order 2011—SI 2011/1680

August 2011

The Thetford Range Byelaws 2011—SI 2011/1142

The Defence and Security Public Contracts Regulations 2011—SI 2011/1848

October 2011

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Armed Forces) (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/2282

November 2011

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/2552

January 2012

The Armed Forces Redundancy Scheme 2006, The Armed Forces Redundancy Etc. Schemes 2010 And The Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2005 (Amendment) Order 2011—SI 2011/3013

April 2012

The Armed Forces Act 2011 (Commencement No. 1, Transitional and Transitory Provisions) Order 2012—SI 2012/669 (C.15)

The Ministry of Defence Police (Performance) Regulations 2012—SI 2012/808

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2012—SI 2012/670

The Northwood Headquarters Byelaws 2011—SI 2011/3102

June 2012

The Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 (Designation of Vessels And Controlled Sites) Order 2012—SI 2012/1110

July 2012

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2012—SI 2012/1573

September 2012

The Armed Forces (Enhanced Learning Credit Scheme and Further and Higher Education Commitment Scheme) Order 2012—SI 2012/1796

The Ot Moor Range Byelaws 2012—SI 2012/1478

October 2012

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Armed Forces) (Amendment) Order 2012—SI 2012/2505

November 2012

The Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2012—SI 2012/1750

December 2012

The Armed Forces Act 2011 (Commencement No. 2) Order—SI 2012/2921 (C.116)

The Armed Forces (Powers of Stop and Search, Search, Seizure and Retention) Order 2012—SI 2012/2919

April 2013

The Armed Forces Act 2011 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2013—SI 2013/784 (C.37)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Consequential Provisions: Primary Legislation) Order 2013—SI 2013/796

The Naval, Military and Air Forces Etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions (Amendment) Order 2013—SI 2013/241

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2013—SI 2013/436

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (Consequential Provisions: Subordinate Legislation) Order 2013—SI 2013/591

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2013—SI 2013/707

The Caversfield SFA Byelaws 2012—SI 2012/3088

The Visiting Forces (Designation) Order 2013—SI 2013/540

None. However, please note that each Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order remains in force for one year only and the byelaws replace earlier versions.

None, although the instruments mentioned above may amend earlier orders.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155956]

Mr Robathan: Regulations introduced, amended and revoked are a result of the regular updating and consolidation of departmental secondary legislation. They are prepared within existing departmental resources and do not have any external financial impact.

Reserve Forces

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reserve units are currently based in (a) Scotland, (b) Northern Ireland, (c) Wales and (d) England; and what the location is of each such unit. [154733]

Mr Robathan: There are some 142 reserve units in Scotland, 62 units in Northern Ireland, 47 in Wales and 696 units in England. The following lists detail the locations of these units, by service and UK country. Many locations have more than one unit.

*Royal Naval Reserve**England Units*

Bristol
Devonport
Fleet
Gateshead
Liverpool
London
Northwood
Nottingham
Sheffield
Whale Island
Yeovil

Scotland Units

Greenock
Rosyth

Wales Units

Sully

Northern Ireland Units

Lisburn

*Royal Marine Reserve**England Units*

Bristol
 London
 Merseyside
 Newcastle Upon Tyne
 Plymouth

Scotland Units

Glasgow

*Army**England Units/Sub Units*

Abingdon
 Aldershot
 Alnwick
 Altcar
 Ashford
 Ashington
 Ashton Under Lyne
 Aylesbury
 Banbury
 Barnsley
 Barnstaple
 Barrow-In-Furness
 Bath
 Bedford
 Berwick-Upon-Tweed
 Beverley
 Bexleyheath
 Bilborough
 Birkenhead
 Birmingham
 Bishop Auckland
 Blackburn
 Blackpool
 Bletchley
 Blyth
 Bodmin
 Bolton
 Bootle
 Bovington
 Bradford
 Bramley
 Brentwood
 Brighton
 Bristol
 Brize Norton
 Bulwell
 Burton-On-Trent
 Bury
 Bury St Edmunds
 Buxton
 Camberley
 Cambridge
 Cannock
 Canterbury
 Carlisle
 Chelmsford
 Chester
 Chesterfield
 Chilwell
 Chorley
 Cirencester
 Cobridge
 Colchester
 Corby
 Corsham

Coulby Newham
 Coulsdon
 Coventry
 Cramlington
 Crawley
 Crewe
 Croydon
 Darlington
 Derby
 Digby
 Ditton
 Doncaster
 Donnington
 Dorchester
 Dover
 Dudley
 Durham
 Eastbourne
 Ellesmere Port
 Ewell
 Exeter
 Farnham
 Gateshead
 Gloucester
 Grantham
 Grimsby
 Hartlepool
 Headington
 Hebburn
 Hereford
 Hermitage
 Hertford
 Hexham
 Hilsea
 Hitchin
 Hornsey
 Huddersfield
 Hull
 Huyton
 Ilford
 Ipswich
 Islington
 Keighley
 Kidderminster
 Kingston Upon Hull
 Lancaster
 Leeds
 Leicester
 Lincoln
 Liverpool
 London
 Loughborough
 Lowestoft
 Luton
 Maidstone
 Manchester
 Mansfield
 Middle Wallop
 Middlesbrough

Milton Keynes
 Newcastle
 Newport
 Newton Aycliffe
 Northallerton
 Northampton
 Norton
 Norwich
 Nottingham
 Oldbury
 Peterborough
 Plymouth
 Pontefract
 Poole
 Portsmouth
 Preston
 Prittlewell
 Pudsey
 Reading
 Redditch
 Redhill
 Reigate
 Rochester
 Rotherham
 Rugby
 Rusholme
 Salford
 Salisbury
 Scarborough
 Scunthorpe
 Sheffield
 Shrewsbury
 Southall
 Southampton
 Southfields
 St Helens
 Stockport
 Stoke On Trent
 Stourbridge
 Stratford-Upon-Avon
 Strensall
 Sunderland
 Sutton
 Swaffham
 Swindon
 Taunton
 Telford
 Thorney Island
 Truro
 Tunbridge Wells
 Tyne And Wear
 Tynemouth
 Upavon
 Uxbridge
 Wakefield
 Walker
 Walsall
 Washington
 Wattisham

West Bromwich
 Westminster
 Widnes
 Wigan
 Wigston
 Windsor
 Wolverhampton
 Woolwich
 Worcester
 Workington
 Worthing
 Worthy Down
 York

Scotland Units/Sub Units

Aberdeen
 Arbroath
 Ayr
 Bathgate
 Cumbernauld
 Cupar
 Dreghorn
 Dumbarton
 Dumfries
 Dundee
 Dunfermline
 Dunoon
 East Kilbride
 Edinburgh
 Elgin
 Forfar
 Galashiels
 Glasgow
 Glenrothes
 Govan
 Grangemouth
 Hamilton
 Inchinnan
 Inverness
 Keith
 Kirkcaldy
 Kirkwall
 Lerwick
 Leuchars
 Livingston
 Motherwell
 Paisley
 Perth
 Peterhead
 Stirling
 Stornoway
 Wick

Wales Units/Sub Units

Abertillery
 Bridgend
 Caernarfon
 Cardiff
 Carmarthen
 Colwyn Bay
 Cwmbran

Haverfordwest
 Monmouth
 Newport
 Pontypridd
 Prestatyn
 Queensferry
 Swansea
 Wrexham

Northern Ireland Units/Sub Units

Aldergrove
 Armagh
 Ballykinler
 Ballymena
 Bangor
 Belfast
 Coleraine
 Enniskillen
 Hollywood
 Limavady
 Lisburn
 Londonderry
 Newtonabbey
 Newtownards
 Portadown

Royal Auxiliary Air Force

England Squadrons

Benson
 Brize Norton
 Henlow
 Honington
 High Wycombe
 Leeming
 Marham
 Northolt
 Waddington
 Woodvale

Scotland Squadrons

Edinburgh
 Glasgow
 Leuchars
 Lossiemouth

Wales Squadrons

To be decided

Northern Ireland Squadrons

Aldergrove

Syria

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the UK has provided any (a) internal security training, (b) public order training and (c) sniper training or training in the use of heavy military equipment to Syria since President Bashar al-Assad came to office. [156010]

Mr Robathan: The UK has not provided any specific internal security training, public order training, sniper training or training in the use of heavy military equipment to Syria since President Bashar al-Assad came to office in July 2000.

The small number of Syrian personnel who attended initial officer training and staff courses between 2000 and 2008 will have been exposed to UK doctrine on these topics.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration the Defence Exports Support Group has given to lifting restrictions on exports of (a) lethal and (b) non-lethal military equipment to Syrian opposition groups. [156014]

Mr Dunne: The Defence Export Support Group has not met recently, however, Ministers consider, through the National Security Council and its sub-groups, important export issues.

The situation in Syria continues to deteriorate at an ever more rapid pace. Since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, more than 70,000 people have died. There are now more than one million Syrian refugees in the region. A year ago, one million people needed humanitarian aid inside Syria: that figure is now four million.

In the face of this situation of extreme humanitarian distress and political stalemate, we want Europe to review all options. We should support diplomatic progress in every way we can, but we also believe that we should review the European sanctions regime again given the extreme gravity of the situation. However, we have taken no decision at present to send arms to Syria.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Rehman Chishti: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which countries US forces have flown UK unmanned aerial vehicles to date. [154584]

Mr Robathan: US pilots have not flown UK Reaper except during the launch and recovery phase, from Kandahar, in support of operations in Afghanistan.

USA

Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether US law applies on US military bases in the UK. [156007]

Mr Robathan: The United States Visiting Forces are subject to both US and UK law, as set out in the NATO Status of Forces Agreement 1951, and enacted through the Visiting Forces Act 1952.

Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is in overall charge of security at (a) NSA Menwith Hill, (b) USAD Mildenhall, (c) USAD Lakenheath, (d) JAC Molesworth, (e) USAD Croughton, (f) USAD Barford St John, (g) USAF Fairford and (h) USAF Alconbury. [156053]

Mr Robathan: Policing and security arrangements at bases made available to the United States Visiting Force are covered under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency and the United States Visiting Force.

The United Kingdom, as the host nation, is responsible for security outside the perimeter fence of the bases, with the United States Visiting Force responsible for internal security.

Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons military land byelaws are proposed for introduction at USAF Barford St John. [156055]

Mr Robathan: The proposed new byelaws for introduction at RAF Barford St John are designed to facilitate the effective policing and regulation of activity on Ministry of Defence land, while ensuring the safety and security of USAF service personnel manning the site.

Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Space-based Infra-red systems radomes (SBIRS) at the American base at NSA Menwith Hill are actively operational; and if SBIRS have been used to date. [156063]

Mr Robathan: The Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS) at RAF Menwith Hill achieved operational status during 2011. We do not comment, for security and operational reasons, on the specific use of the SBIRS facilities at the base.

Veterans: Employment

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people went through the Career Transition Partnership in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [155306]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 15 May 2013]: The number of people who accessed Career Transition Partnership services in recent years is as follows:

	<i>Number</i>
2008	14,182
2009	10,072
2010	10,717
2011	14,429
2012	15,812

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions are placed on businesses who wish to advertise employment vacancies through the Career Transition Partnership. [155667]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 16 May 2013]: The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) welcomes employment vacancy advertisements from organisations in which the skills and experience of service leavers are recognised as a good fit for their work force. However, to ensure the integrity and quality of vacancies offered, the CTP does not encourage advertisements from recruitment agencies or employment 'broker' organisations.

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training is available to those who have left the armed forces to prepare them to find civilian work; and for what period following departure. [155669]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 16 May 2013]: All service leavers are entitled to some form of resettlement assistance to enable them to transition successfully into civilian life. This assistance includes a suite of training

and employment support from the Career Transition Partnership (a partnering arrangement between MOD and Right Management Limited, part of the Manpower Group). This training is also provided for those who have left the armed forces, where training vacancies exist, for up to two years post-discharge.

We monitor constantly the support we provide to service leavers. In 2012 Lord Ashcroft was appointed as Special Representative for Veterans Transition. In this role he will provide the MOD with advice on how we can further support those leaving the armed forces. It is expected that Lord Ashcroft will produce an interim report to the Secretary of State for Defence by the end of 2013, with more comprehensive recommendations being made during 2014.

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policies led by his Department are in place to provide veterans with employment opportunities on leaving the armed forces. [155670]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 16 May 2013]: Prior to leaving, all service personnel are entitled to resettlement assistance consisting of time, money and training according to length of service. Those who have served six years or more, and all those medically discharged regardless of how long served, are entitled to the full resettlement programme, which includes:

- a three-day career transition workshop;
- use of a career consultant;
- a job finding service;
- re-training time; and
- a re-training grant.

Those who have served four years or more are entitled to employment support in the form of a bespoke job finding service and career interview. Resettlement services are provided by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), a partnering arrangement between Ministry of Defence and Right Management Limited.

'Right Job' is the bespoke Career Transition Partnership's online job finding service, and it lists thousands of live vacancies which are updated on a daily basis. Right Job assists the service leaver in finding a job they believe is right for them, and enables employers to find qualified candidates who are leaving the armed forces. This service is free of charge to both service leavers and employers.

Service leavers are entitled to lifetime job finding support through either the Officers Association or the Regular Forces Employment Association.

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which businesses advertise employment vacancies through the Career Transition Partnership. [155671]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 16 May 2013]: Businesses of all sizes and from a wide and varied range of sectors advertise employment vacancies through the Career Transition Partnership. Sectors include:

- business services (e.g. project management and retail management);
- security;
- energy and utilities;
- transport and logistics; and
- engineering.

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training is available to those currently serving and preparing to leave the armed forces in order to prepare them to find civilian work. [155668]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 16 May 2013*]: Training is an integral part of our broader efforts to help service personnel make the transition into civilian life.

Service leavers may qualify for a resettlement training grant and government sponsored enhanced learning credits, to help towards the cost of nationally recognised qualifications.

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) provides a resettlement programme including up to 35 days retraining time and access to a wide range of accredited vocational training courses and workshops. The CTP service, including resettlement support, lasts for up to two years after individuals have left the armed forces.

HEALTH

Abortion

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the abortion statistics for 2012 in England and Wales will be published. [156417]

Anna Soubry: The Department's publication, 'Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2012', will be published in July 2013.

Abortion statistics are typically published in May or June each year. The Department is currently consulting users of abortion statistics on proposed changes to the publication, in particular the most effective way to present the detailed geography tables. The consultation closes on 10 June 2013. The 2012 abortion statistics have therefore been slightly delayed to accommodate the outcome of the consultation.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to ensure that all accident and emergency units have at least 10 consultants assigned to them; [156364]

(2) what guidance he gives to accident and emergency units on ensuring that staff are not overworked. [156365]

Anna Soubry: National health service bodies are responsible for considering what staffing levels are necessary and appropriate within their organisations, as well as the health and well-being of their staff. Therefore, the Department has not issued any central guidance on these issues.

NHS England's Urgent and Emergency Care Review, led by Sir Bruce Keogh, is taking a holistic look at the complex issues surrounding care delivery in this area. The Review, which is benefiting from the input of a wide range of experts, is tasked with making recommendations to ensure that urgent and emergency care is provided in a safe, effective and sustainable way.

One of the aims of the Review is to come to a consensus on options for organising and delivering urgent and emergency care, which will involve taking an evidence-based look at workforce and resourcing issues.

Health Education England has also set up an expert group, working in close collaboration with the College of Emergency Medicine and other key stakeholders, to look at what more can be done to ensure there is sufficient medical workforce being trained for accident and emergency requirements. The advice of this group will help inform NHS England's Urgent and Emergency Care Review.

Breast Cancer

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individual breast screenings were conducted under the NHS Breast Cancer Screening Programme in (a) England, (b) the West Midlands and (c) Birmingham in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date. [156557]

Anna Soubry: The information is not available in the format requested. Information on the number of women screened for England, the West Midlands strategic health authority (SHA) and Birmingham is provided in the following table.

Number of women screened (aged 45 and over) for England, West Midlands SHA and selected Breast Screening Units, 2009 to 2012

	Reporting year		
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
England	1,794,909	1,884,368	1,940,603
West Midlands SHA	193,172	204,956	214,472
City, Sandwell and Walsall Breast Screening Unit	33,585	37,259	42,048
South Birmingham Breast Screening Unit	10,974	10,447	14,026

Notes:

1. The breast screening programme collects information on the number of women screened and not individual breast screenings.
2. The two Breast Screening Units (BSUs) above cover Birmingham, but City, Sandwell and Walsall BSU also screens women from outside the Birmingham area.
3. Statistics are collected and reported by financial year and not calendar year. The most recent statistics available are for 2011-12.
4. SHAs were abolished on 31 March.

Source:

KC62 return, Health and Social Care Information Centre.

Coronavirus

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the World Health Organisation's update of 12 May 2013 on the coronavirus infection. [156083]

Anna Soubry: Based on the information in the World Health Organization's update of 12 May 2013, there is evidence of limited, non-sustained person-to-person transmission. The risk of novel coronavirus infection (nCoV) to United Kingdom residents in the UK remains very low. The risk to UK residents travelling to the middle east remains very low and does not warrant a change to current travel advice.

The risk of coronavirus infection to residents of or recent visitors to the middle east who are investigated in the UK with an unexplained severe acute respiratory illness also remains very low, but warrants investigation for coronavirus infection.

The risk of contacts of confirmed cases of nCoV infection is still generally considered to be low but emerging evidence suggests there may be specific circumstances where transmission can occur.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure hospitals are adequately prepared for any widespread outbreak of the novel coronavirus. [156084]

Anna Soubry: National health service hospitals are well versed in dealing with infection prevention and control covering the protection of staff, patients and members of the public and the normal practice of good hand hygiene is effectively used to reduce the spread of infection as far as is practicable.

Once laboratory confirmed cases have been identified, strict isolation and use of full personal protective equipment is recommended. Public Health England (PHE) has worked with the NHS to ensure contact tracing on all confirmed cases is undertaken to identify further possible cases and close contacts of confirmed cases are followed up for a period of 10 days since the date of last exposure to the index case.

PHE continuously reviews and updates its guidance on novel coronavirus infections.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with other European governments on containing an outbreak of the novel coronavirus. [156085]

Anna Soubry: Departmental officials and Public Health England are involved in discussions with the EU Health Security Committee, influenza section, on the subject of avian influenza A(H7N9) in China and novel coronavirus in Europe and the middle east. The purpose of these collaborations is to share recent developments and, based on international risk assessments, consider the health measures member states are taking at a national level to strengthen preparedness in case the two events develop further.

Dental Health: Children

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that children are taught the importance of good aural hygiene. [156088]

Dr Poulter: None. Parents and children are generally advised not to attempt to clean inside the ear canal in case they damage its lining.

Derriford Hospital

Oliver Colvile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of never events at Derriford Hospital. [156005]

Dr Poulter: The Department is aware of recent never events that have occurred at the Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust. We understand the Trust has implemented a number of immediate actions to safeguard patients pending the outcome of the formal investigations.

NHS England has established a Surgical Never Events Task Force to examine the reasons why there are still a relatively high proportion of never events related to the peri-operative environment being reported. The findings of the task force will inform

further work to eradicate these incidents from the national health service. The taskforce will report to NHS England by the end of July.

More widely, Professor Don Berwick is chairing the National Advisory Group on the Safety of Patients in England, which is exploring how to improve patient safety in the NHS in the wake of the Mid-Staffordshire Public Inquiry, and will also report in July.

Diabetes UK

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the contract between NHS IQ and Diabetes UK. [155897]

Anna Soubry: NHS Improving Quality is a joint venture between NHS England and the Department and is hosted by NHS England.

NHS Improving Quality works with a number of key stakeholders including charities like Diabetes UK to ensure our work is aligned to patients and carers requirements. NHS England advises that NHS Improving Quality has no contract in place with Diabetes UK.

Dietary Supplements: EU Action

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to protect the specialist retail and manufacturing of food health supplements following the proposal for EU maximum permitted levels for vitamins and minerals in such supplements. [156044]

Anna Soubry: Discussions on the setting of maximum permitted levels for vitamins and minerals in food supplements halted at the European Union level in 2009. Currently there is no date planned for negotiations to resume.

The Government's position is that any future decisions on vitamins and mineral food supplements need to be proportionate and based on evidence, so that consumers have confidence in what they buy, while maintaining a wide choice of safe products.

I have written to the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, Tonio Borg, and the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), has met with the Commissioner to emphasise the United Kingdom's position. Until further details are released on any future proposals, it is not possible to anticipate the full impact that the setting of maximum levels may have on consumer choice and the specialist food supplement sector.

Eating Disorders: Greater London

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been admitted to hospitals within Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust for (a) anorexia nervosa and (b) bulimia in each of the last five years. [156121]

Dr Poulter: The information is not available in the format requested.

Data for finished admission episodes with a primary diagnosis of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust and London strategic health authority (the main provider for 2007-08 to 2011-12) is shown in the following table.

Finished admission episodes¹ with a primary diagnosis² of (a) anorexia nervosa or (b) bulimia nervosa at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust and London strategic health authority of main provider³ for 2007-08 to 2011-12⁴, activity in English NHS hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

	Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust		London strategic health authority of main provider	
	Anorexia nervosa	Bulimia nervosa	Anorexia nervosa	Bulimia nervosa
2007-08	*	*	147	19
2008-09	*	*	138	15
2009-10	*	0	215	26
2010-11	*	0	182	23
2011-12	*	*	368	31

* Denotes a suppressed number between 1 and 5. To protect patient confidentiality, figures between 1 and 5 have been replaced with "*" (an asterisk). Where it was still possible to identify figures from the total, additional figures have been replaced with "**".

¹ A finished admission episode (FAE) is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FAEs are counted against the year in which the admission episode finishes. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

² Primary diagnosis

The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and seven prior to 2002-03) diagnosis fields in the hospital episode statistics (HES) data set and provides the main reason why the patient was admitted to hospital.

³ SHA of main provider

This indicates the strategic health authority (SHA) area within which the organisation providing treatment was located.

⁴ Assessing growth through time (in-patients)

HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, changes in activity may be due to changes in the provision of care.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre.

Eating Disorders: Young People

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure young people are aware of the dangers of undereating. [156120]

Anna Soubry: Public Health England is working to promote the achievement of a healthy weight across different population groups including, for example, through the Change4Life Campaign.

The NHS Choices website provides information covering eating disorders, reasons for being underweight, why being underweight is bad for health now and in the future and how to gain weight healthily. This information is aimed at underweight teenage boys and girls.

The National Child Measurement Programme captures information on children who are underweight, which provides an opportunity for local follow-up where there is a concern.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the prevalence of eating disorders among teenage men. [156122]

Dr Poulter: This information is not collected centrally. A survey carried out on behalf of the Department and the Welsh and Scottish governments by the Office for National Statistics in 2004 found the prevalence of eating disorders in boys aged 11 to 16 to be 0.1% (compared to 0.6% for girls of the same age). The survey was published as 'Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain', 2004 (ONS 2005).

For adults (aged 16 years and over) the most recent 'Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey', based on a survey by the National Centre for Social Research and the University of Leicester in 2007, was published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2009. This was based on answers to a survey rather than on existing diagnoses. For eating disorders this is based on a set of questions on attitudes to eating and a separate question about whether feelings about food had a significant effect on everyday life. The survey found that 6.1% of men aged 16 to 24 (compared to 20.3% of women of the same age) had possible eating disorders and that this had a significant impact on the lives of 1.7% of men aged 16 to 24 (compared with 5.4% of women).

General Practitioners

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to next amend the GP contract. [156628]

Dr Poulter: From 1 April 2013, responsibility for negotiating amendments to the general medical services contract passed to NHS England. Any regulatory changes required following these negotiations are made by the Department.

Preparations for the 2014-15 contract negotiations are under way and the negotiations are planned to conclude before the end of the calendar year in order to allow amendments, if required, to be made to general medical services contract regulations to come into force from 1 April 2014.

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps GPs are taking to keep elderly, frail people out of hospital. [156629]

Dr Poulter: The Secretary of State for Health recently announced that the Department will be developing, with NHS England, a plan for vulnerable older people. The plan will set out how general practice can best meet the needs of older people and those with long term conditions. This will include considering how best to ensure that older people are treated in the most appropriate setting.

NHS England have advised that general practitioner practices are increasingly taking a more proactive, population based approach to care management and NHS England are working with clinical commissioning groups to embed their approach.

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will introduce a rota of general practitioners into all accident and emergency departments; [156632]

(2) if he will require general practitioners to provide a 24 hour a day service seven days a week. [156633]

Anna Soubry: NHS England is responsible for the oversight of commissioning of urgent care services in England. This includes the development of new models of care to best meet patients' needs, including how health professionals, such as general practitioners (GPs), can best deliver urgent care in a range of settings.

As part of this, NHS England has established the Seven Day Service Forum, led by Sir Bruce Keogh, to identify ways to improve access to routine services around the country, seven days a week. The forum will consider the role of non-hospital services such as primary and community health care, and social services, in providing urgent care services. The use of GPs delivering care in different settings, for example the use of a rota in accident and emergency departments amongst other options, will be considered within this context.

The forum will report in the autumn.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Havering

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve the provision of sexual health services in the London borough of Havering. [156087]

Anna Soubry: The Government's ambition for sexual health is set out in its Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England published in March 2013. This makes clear the importance of good sexual health and well-being for people of all ages and across the life course. Each local authority will commission sexual health services based upon the needs of its community. The London borough of Havering will receive the following public health allocation, which also covers sexual health services, in 2013-14 and 2014-15.

	£/%
2013-14 opening baseline—historical spend (£)	8,030,000
2013-14 opening target—what they should get based on ACRA formula (£)	10,355,000
2013-14 increase based on historical spend plus growth ¹ (%)	10
2013-14 allocation—actual allocation 2013-14 (£)	8,833,000
2014-15 allocation—actual allocation 2014-15 with 10% increase ¹ (£)	9,717,000

¹ 10% increase is the maximum any local authority will receive for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Heart Diseases

Seema Malhotra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the number of (a) men and (b) women diagnosed with heart disease in (i) Hounslow, (ii) London and (iii) England. [156554]

Anna Soubry: The Department does not hold the information as requested as we are unable to provide an estimate of the number of people diagnosed with heart disease.

The following table details a count of finished admission episodes with a diagnosis of heart disease by for males and females for Hounslow Primary Care Trust (PCT), London Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and England residents for the year 2011-12.

	Male	Female	Unknown
Hounslow PCT	1,523	967	—
London SHA	44,780	29,101	8
England	346,444	228,727	16

This information is not a count of people as the same person may have been admitted on more than one occasion.

HIV Infection

Pauline Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason NHS England has withdrawn its BHIVA guidelines commissioning policy; and whether it intends to commission HIV treatment and services according to authoritative clinical guidelines. [156623]

Anna Soubry: We understand from NHS England that the British HIV Association guidelines are explicitly referred to in the service specification, which was recently consulted on and adopted by NHS England, and will be used to inform commissioning decisions relating to Human Immunodeficiency Virus treatment and services. The service specification is to be published on the NHS England website within the next few weeks.

Mental Health Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve training in mental health conditions and treatment amongst NHS staff. [155838]

Dr Poulter: The standards of healthcare training is the responsibility of the independent regulatory bodies.

Through their role as the custodians of quality standards in education and practice, these organisations are committed to ensuring high quality patient care delivered by high quality health professionals and that healthcare professionals are equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to deal with the problems and conditions they will encounter in practice.

From 1 April 2013 Health Education England (HEE) has responsibility for promoting high quality education and training that is responsive to the changing needs of patients and local communities and will work with stakeholders to influence training curricula as appropriate.

HEE has announced the launch of a dementia awareness on-line training module through e-Learning For Healthcare. The module is intended to ensure that staff working in health and social care are able to recognise and understand dementia. Additional modules will help staff to answer questions about dementia. This is part of a wider educational strategy that is in development to support implementation of the National Dementia Strategy and the Prime Minister's challenge to deliver major improvements in dementia care and research by 2015.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the NHS of treating mental illness. [155839]

Dr Poulter: The 2011-12 National Survey of Investment in Mental Health Services showed that total reported investment in mental health services was £6.629 billion for working age adults and £2.830 billion for older people.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place in the NHS to encourage people with a mental illness to receive treatment.

[155840]

Dr Poulter: NHS England has advised that it aims to both identify and encourage people with mental ill health to seek treatment. Commissioning agencies should have in place systematic ways of assessing the needs of their patients in order to identify those who have a mental illness, or are at increased risk of developing one. Those identified can then be prioritised for outreach and early intervention.

NHS England is also working with Public Health England and expert informatics partners to explore the use of both new technologies and community-based assertive outreach support involving families, communities and partner agencies. Work is also under way with Health Education England, clinical commissioning groups and the Academic Health Science Networks to explore ways of helping primary care staff to recognise and treat mental ill health early in primary care.

NHS England is committed to exploring ways of making it easier for people to get the information they need about how to access care and support. This includes a commitment in NHS England's Business Plan to encourage use of modern media formats forms of information on self-help, self-management and available services for those members of the public wanting to access services for the first time. For those people already in services, there is a commitment to improve access to care plans including better information on what to do in a crisis.

The introduction of NHS Health Check, for adults in England aged between 40 and 74, is also a proactive opportunity for people to seek information on health matters, including mental health.

Mental Health Services: Havering

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve the provision of mental health services in the London borough of Havering.

[156086]

Dr Poulter: North East London NHS Foundation Trust is working closely with Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals University Hospitals NHS Trust to improve health for people with mental health problems.

Mental health and well-being is a priority for this Government. Our overarching goal is to ensure that mental health has equal priority with physical health. The mandate to NHS England makes clear that everyone should have timely access to the mental health services they need.

NHS 111: South East

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the 111 service in the south-east; and if he will make a statement.

[156630]

Anna Soubry: There have been problems with the roll-out of NHS 111 in the south-east.

A range of indicators are used to measure performance of providers, and a number of these have not been met in the south-east coast region of the NHS (there are a number of providers in the wider region as the south east is not a specific NHS area).

We recognise that the service has not been good enough and we are working closely with NHS England to ensure improvement in performance. NHS England have put a number of measures in place already. NHS England area teams have been keeping a close oversight of the issues and are supporting local clinical commissioning groups and individual providers to ensure the service improves. NHS England has close monitoring arrangements, including where necessary daily, and also reports weekly on performance to the Secretary of State for Health. They will continue to do so until the key performance indicators are routinely met. We expect to see continued improved performance week on week into the summer.

NHS: Compensation

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many successful compensation claims made against the NHS referenced (a) anticoagulation, (b) warfarin, (c) heparin, (d) deep vein thrombosis and (e) pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

[155998]

(2) how many cases brought against the NHS Litigation Authority referenced (a) anticoagulation, (b) warfarin, (c) heparin, (d) deep vein thrombosis and (e) pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

[155999]

(3) what the cost was of successful compensation claims made against the NHS which referenced (a) anticoagulation, (b) warfarin, (c) heparin, (d) deep vein thrombosis and (e) pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

[156000]

Dr Poulter: The Department does not hold this data centrally, but it has been provided by the National Health Service Litigation Authority (NHS LA), and is shown in the tables.

The following points in relation to the data should be noted. The data shows the position at 31 March 2012; the data for 2012-13 is not yet available. The year refers to the year when the claim was made. Relevant claims were selected by searching for the keywords in the incident details on the NHS LA database. However a particular claim's data could possibly be duplicated, i.e. the incident could be identified by one or more referenced words. The amounts paid in a given year may include payments on settlements made in that year as well as payments made against settlements agreed in earlier years, for example where there are on-going annual payments.

The information in the following table shows how many successful clinical negligence compensation claims against the NHS were made which referenced

(a) anticoagulation, (b) warfarin, (c) heparin, (d) deep vein thrombosis, (e) pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

	Number of successful compensation claims against the NHS which referenced				
	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Anticoagulation	¹ —	8	4	5	4
Warfarin	7	14	12	6	9
Heparin	3	6	3	6	6
Deep Vein Thrombosis	34	35	32	37	30
Pulmonary Embolism	14	18	23	20	18

¹ Data for anticoagulation is not shown due to personal data protection reasons because it relates to a single anticoagulation claim and therefore it might be possible to identify the claimant from the data.

Date:

15 May 2013

Source:

NHS LA

The information in the following table shows the number of compensation cases brought against the NHS which referenced (a) anticoagulation, (b)

warfarin, (c) heparin, (d) deep vein thrombosis, (e) pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

	Number of compensation cases brought against the NHS which referenced				
	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Anticoagulation	10	9	7	6	7
Warfarin	19	17	16	11	14
Heparin	8	12	5	7	9
Deep Vein Thrombosis	95	59	51	42	46
Pulmonary Embolism	35	29	30	28	28

Date:

15 May 2013

Source:

NHS LA

The information in the following table shows the cost of successful claims made against the NHS which referenced (a) anticoagulation, (b) warfarin, (c)

heparin, (d) deep vein thrombosis, (e) pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

	Cost of successful compensation claims against the NHS which referenced				
	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Anticoagulation	¹ —	1,703,661	441,425	1,011,800	622,408
Warfarin	248,990	901,591	611,721	502,251	1,348,535
Heparin	240,232	717,777	331,613	1,803,292	660,779
Deep Vein Thrombosis	1,705,428	2,199,062	3,262,018	4,418,785	6,244,859
Pulmonary Embolism	765,704	1,779,480	2,147,342	1,809,637	2,499,314

¹ Data for anticoagulation is not shown due to personal data protection reasons because it relates to a single anticoagulation claim and therefore it might be possible to identify the claimant from the data.

Date:

15 May 2013

Source:

NHS LA

NHS: Resignations

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of (a) NHS doctors and (b) NHS nurses who have left their employment with between two and five years' experience in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date. [156559]

Dr Poulter: No estimate has been made of the number of national health service doctors and NHS nurses who have left their employment with between two and five years' experience in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 to date.

The primary source of NHS work force information is the electronic staff record (ESR) Data Warehouse.

However, the ESR Data Warehouse does not hold a robust record of employees' experience.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155797]

Dr Poulter: For each new regulation, the Department prepares an Impact Assessment, using guidance prepared by HM Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Where regulations have an impact on business, or seek to transpose European Union legislation into United Kingdom law, the Department seeks approval and validation from the Regulatory Policy Committee. Additionally, the impact of regulation within scope of the One-in/One-out and One-in, Two-out rules is independently verified and reported twice a year in the Statement of New Regulation.

The Department has worked with Cabinet Office to review its regulations through two Red Tape Challenges (RTC). Between 9 March and 12 April 2012, the Department ran a RTC on medicines, which identified 215 regulations that would be merged, simplified or scrapped altogether.

The Department ran a second RTC, between 6 November 2012 and 31 January 2013, to review over 500 regulations relating to public health, quality of care, mental health, the national health service and professional standards. The Department is still

reviewing the responses to this challenge and will announce deregulatory proposals in October 2013.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended; [155819]

(2) if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were. [155963]

Dr Poulter: Since January 2011, Whitehall Departments have been expected, under one in, one out (OIOO), to offset any increases in the cost of regulation by finding deregulatory measures of at least an equivalent value. This covered all regulation that came into force until December 2012. From January 2013, one in, two out (OITO) applies.

The following table sets out the regulations that have been introduced under OIOO and OITO.

<i>Title of the measure</i>	<i>Came into force</i>	<i>'In' net cost (£ million)</i>	<i>'Out' net benefit (£ million)</i>
The Medical Profession (Responsible Officers) Regulations 2010	January 2011	1.78	—
The Health Service Branded Medicines (Control of Prices and Supply of Information) Amendment Regulations 2010	January 2011	0.00	—
Regulation of Sunbeds	April 2011	7.50	—
Amendments to the Primary Medical Services (Electronic Prescription Service Authorisation) Directions 2008	April 2011	0.00	—
IR(ME)R Amendment Regulations 2011	October 2011	0.05	—
Prohibition on the sale of tobacco from vending machines	October 2011	9.80	—
Three Year Rule for New Pharmacies	October 2011	—	0.07
Prohibition of the display of tobacco at point of sale	April 2012	2.41	—
Care Quality Commission registration	June 2012	—	0.42
Consolidation of UK Medicines . legislation	June 2012	—	0.94
Smoke free signs	October 2012	—	0.07
OIOO subtotal		21.54	1.50
Medical Profession (Responsible Officers) Regs Language Skills	April 2013	0.00	—
OITO subtotal		0.00	0.00

Sodium Valproate

Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency issue regular caution in use warnings to general practitioners relating to the risks posed by taking sodium valproate during pregnancy. [155921]

Dr Poulter: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) have ensured that warnings about the potential for sodium valproate to cause birth defects in animals and possible related hazards to women of childbearing age have been in the product information available to healthcare professionals since the time of licensing in 1972.

As new data have emerged the product information supplied to all doctors and the Patient Information Leaflets available with the medicine have been updated in a timely manner and in accordance with legal and

regulatory guidance to reflect the known side effects including new information with regards to the safety of use during pregnancy.

The MHRA is committed to carefully reviewing any new evidence of risk and informing healthcare professionals and patients about any changes to the way the product should be used through changes to the product information and patient information leaflets.

Any new prescribing advice is also brought to the attention of prescribers in the monthly MHRA bulletin Drug Safety Update. The MHRA has issued three articles on the risks associated with the use of sodium valproate during pregnancy in Drug Safety Update and its predecessor, Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance and will continue to do so as new information emerges.

The product information for all medicines containing sodium valproate contains detailed advice in relation to its use during pregnancy. It is currently advised that women of childbearing potential should

not be started on sodium valproate unless clearly necessary (i.e. in situations where other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated).

Sorafenib

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of the drug sorafenib in England. [155906]

Anna Soubry: The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has issued technology appraisal guidance which does not recommend the use of sorafenib (Nexavar) for the first and second-line treatment of advanced and/or metastatic renal cell carcinoma, or for the treatment of advanced hepatocellular carcinoma.

In the absence of positive NICE technology appraisal guidance, national health service commissioners should make funding decisions based on an assessment of the available evidence and on the basis of an individual patient's clinical circumstances.

Where a cancer drug is not routinely funded by the NHS, patients may be able to access it through the Cancer Drugs Fund. A number of patients have received funding for sorafenib through the fund.

Speech and Language Disorders: Children

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will adopt the recommendations from the Communication Champion for England's report Augmentative and alternative communication: a report on provision for children and young people in England; and if he will make a statement. [156542]

Dr Poulter: Communication aids are directly commissioned by both NHS England and other commissioners (including clinical commissioning groups).

We are advised that NHS England's Clinical Reference Group (CRG) for complex disability equipment has developed a new, nationally consistent specification for this service, which was subject to public consultation prior to its adoption from 1 April 2013.

The specification notes the recommendations of the communication champion's report of 2010. The CRG will be meeting with a representative of the champion's office to go through the report and its assumptions, as part of its drive to ensure commissioning for this specialised service is placed on a more robust and equitable footing across England.

Vitamin D

Seema Malhotra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of (a) men and (b) women diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency in (i) Hounslow, (ii) London and (iii) England. [156637]

Anna Soubry: The Department does not hold the information as requested. However, we are able to provide a count of finished admission episodes with a primary or secondary diagnosis of vitamin D

deficiency by gender for Hounslow Primary Care Trust (PCT), London Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and England residents.

The following table details a count of finished admission episodes with a primary or secondary diagnosis of vitamin D deficiency by gender for Hounslow PCT, London SHA and England residents for the year 2011-12.

<i>PCT/SHA/country of residence</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
Hounslow PCT	66	113	0
London SHA	2,123	3,819	3
England	5,263	11,068	6

The above information relates to secondary care admissions only and does not include diagnoses in primary care or other settings.

This information is not a count of people as the same person may have been admitted on more than one occasion.

Young People: Departmental Coordination

Ann Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct a joint investigation with the Secretary of State for Education on ways to improve the safe sharing of information between health and social care services and schools and other services relevant to children and young people through the adoption of common standards and procedures for sharing information; and if he will make a statement. [156080]

Dr Poulter: This was one of a number of recommendations contained in the report of the review into information governance and information sharing in the health and care system conducted by Dame Fiona Caldicott at the request of the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt). This report was published on 26 April 2013. The Department of Health is preparing the Government's response to Dame Fiona's report and will be discussing this recommendation with the Department for Education. The Government response is expected in the summer.

JUSTICE

Personal Injury Claims

22. **Stephen Mosley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to reduce the cost of vehicle insurance through the reform of personal injury claim arrangements. [156196]

Mrs Grant: Part 2 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, which was implemented on 1 April 2013, will reduce insurers' costs in defending personal injury claims. We expect the industry to pass on these savings to the public through lower premiums.

Employment of Ex-offenders

Mark Menzies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to assist ex-offenders into employment. [156190]

Jeremy Wright: We have already ensured that prison leavers aged over 18 who claim jobseeker's allowance on release or shortly afterwards are referred to the Work programme immediately. And we have introduced work in prisons on a much larger scale than before, providing offenders with real work experiences and helping to build their confidence about operating in the work place on release.

Our Transforming Rehabilitation reforms will see new rehabilitation provider working to tackle the root causes of offending by using innovative approaches such as mentoring, and by signposting to services aimed at housing, training and employment.

Legal Aid

Karl McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to improve the value for money of the legal aid system. [156193]

Jeremy Wright: As set out in our consultation paper 'Transforming Legal Aid: Delivering a More Credible and Efficient System', we are bringing forward a number of proposals to reduce the cost of legal aid. These include reductions to the fees earned by those providing legal aid and making it harder for unmeritorious cases to gain funding.

Offending by Probationers

Graham Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he plans to take to reduce the number of offences committed by people on probation. [156195]

Jeremy Wright: We will put in place an unprecedented nationwide 'through the prison gate' resettlement service, meaning most offenders are given continuous support by one provider from custody into the community. We will support this by ensuring that most offenders are held in a prison designated to their area for at least three months before release. All offenders will then receive rehabilitation support in the community once they are released.

Animal Welfare: Crime

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will introduce tougher sentences in cases of extreme cruelty to animals; and if he will make a statement. [155030]

Mr Heath: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The maximum penalty for those convicted of offences connected with animal cruelty is six months imprisonment, or a fine of £20,000, or both. It is for the courts to decide what the appropriate sentence is following a conviction. The magistrates court sentencing guidelines provide magistrates with guidance on suitable penalties for individual cases.

Corporate Manslaughter

Roberta Blackman-Woods: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many convictions there have been for corporate manslaughter since 2007. [154198]

Jeremy Wright: There were no convictions for corporate manslaughter between 2007 and 2010 and one conviction in 2011.

Court proceedings data for 2012 are planned for publication later in May 2013.

Crime: Victims

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will amend the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction report to include a section on the needs of victims and the prisoners' attitudes towards their victims. [154181]

Jeremy Wright: The Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) reports are based on a survey of prisoners sentenced to between one month and four years in England and Wales in 2005 and 2006. The last interviews were conducted in 2010. Questions on the needs of victims were not asked, however, prisoners were asked whether they believed there was a victim of their offence. There are no plans to conduct another large-scale prisoner cohort study.

Our consultation on a revised Victims' Code, with an emphasis on providing clearer and stronger entitlements for victims, closed on 10 May. We are now considering the responses to consultation and are planning to respond to the consultation and publish the final version of the Code in the summer. MOJ has committed £50 million of annual funding since 2010 to victims' services. Through reforms to the Victim Surcharge and financial penalties, we have committed to raise up to a further £50 million for victims' services from offenders.

Offenders: Rehabilitation

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) if he will make it his policy that the Probation Service should not use door-to-door selling as part of the rehabilitation of young offenders; [155099]

(2) whether there are any statutory requirements for probation officers to offer training to offenders as door-to-door salesmen as part of their rehabilitation programme. [155100]

Jeremy Wright: There is no statutory requirement for probation officers to offer training to offenders as door-to-door salesmen, nor does the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) engage with or support any programme of this nature.

Although NOMS has received complaints from members of the public approached by people selling door-to-door, who claim to be ex-offenders engaged in a rehabilitation programme, offenders subject to post custodial licences are only permitted to undertake employment which is approved by their offender manager and it is very unlikely that permission would be given to undertake employment of this nature.

Parole

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many cases the Parole Board dealt with in (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011 and (e) 2012; [154418]

(2) what the Parole Board case load was on 1 April (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011 and (e) 2012.

[154419]

Jeremy Wright: The number of cases that the Parole dealt with in the following financial years was:

	<i>Number</i>
2008-09	28,596
2009-10	24,204
2010-11	25,566
2011-12	26,414

The figure in respect of 2012-13 is not yet available and will be published in the Board's 2012-13 Annual Report.

The Parole Board has not recorded the level of their caseload on 1 April of each of the years stated in the question.

Parole Board

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the Parole Board's funding was in each of the last five financial years.

[154420]

Jeremy Wright: The funding provided by the Ministry of Justice to the Parole Board in each of the last five financial years through the supplementary estimate was:

	<i>£ million</i>
2008-09	8.36
2009-10	9.85
2010-11	10.36
2011-12	10.17
2012-13	11.59

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the Parole Board's budget is for (a) 2013-14, (b) 2014-15 and (c) 2015-16.

[154421]

Jeremy Wright: The Parole Board's resource budget for 2013-14 is £10.85 million. Their budget allocations for the years 2014-15 and 2015-16 have yet to be finalised.

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many full time equivalent staff were employed by the Parole Board in each year since 2008.

[154432]

Jeremy Wright: The total number of individual permanent staff employed by the Parole Board for the following financial years was:

2008-09: 104

2009-10: 115.

The number of full-time equivalent staff employed by the Parole Board has not been recorded for the above two financial years.

The number of full-time equivalent staff employed by the Parole Board for the following three financial years was:

2010-11: 99.2

2011-12: 106.3

2012-13: 99.05.

Police Cautions

Mr Mark Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many conditional cautions for which categories of offence were issued by police authorities in each of the last five years.

[155392]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

The following Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) data show the total number of conditional cautions that were issued in each of the last five years for each police force area. Further tables containing a detailed breakdown of data by offence category have been placed in the Library of the House. The number of conditional cautions issued is taken from defendant based data and not the number of offences committed. The total number of cautions issued will therefore differ from that noted in the breakdown of offence category.

Prior to 8 April 2013, a decision to issue a conditional caution was taken following consultation between the police and the CPS. The police are now able to issue a conditional caution without reference to the CPS in all categories of offences except for indictable only offences and those categorised as hate crime or domestic violence.

CPS: Conditional cautions issued.

	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2012-13</i>
Total	8,378	8,229	6,933	4,981	3,774
Avon and Somerset	303	226	216	254	273
Bedfordshire	86	94	164	80	77
Cambridgeshire	163	254	460	185	123
Cheshire	155	155	148	144	82
Cleveland	80	53	83	47	39
Cumbria	193	225	147	89	78
Derbyshire	189	92	54	24	11
Devon and Cornwall	191	251	220	171	93
Dorset	167	117	154	143	193
Durham	86	83	45	19	8
Dyfed Powys	119	112	65	59	17
Essex	118	320	215	153	103
Gloucestershire	77	41	14	6	5
Greater Manchester	125	91	106	52	40
Gwent	25	33	36	11	7
Hampshire and IOW	405	347	296	177	294
Hertfordshire	53	85	222	138	111
Humberside	189	285	265	145	110
Kent	180	176	213	107	52
Lancashire	1,002	685	447	380	344
Leicestershire	148	199	90	79	59
Lincolnshire	29	93	41	19	2
London	769	748	615	494	334
Merseyside	511	392	495	451	249
Norfolk	352	341	262	233	129
Northamptonshire	51	140	87	66	38
Northumbria	119	138	84	61	60
North Wales	255	227	132	103	78
North Yorkshire	279	261	169	157	84
Nottinghamshire	159	181	185	106	42
South Wales	116	154	132	128	134

CPS: Conditional cautions issued.

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
South Yorkshire	211	267	62	42	26
Staffordshire	134	176	78	84	76
Suffolk	90	81	64	54	28
Surrey	69	98	100	69	71
Sussex	243	281	286	132	47
Thames Valley	173	177	170	111	112
Warwickshire	80	76	41	22	16
West Mercia	162	123	60	29	9
West Midlands	295	147	61	48	57
West Yorkshire	163	130	105	88	50
Wiltshire	64	74	44	21	13

Prison Sentences

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of prisoners serve the full length of their original sentence. [154183]

Jeremy Wright: All sentences are served in full. For the majority of offenders, this means serving part of their sentence in custody and part in the community. All release provisions are now contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 as amended.

Prisoners must be released in accordance with the legislation laid down by Parliament. While there have been various changes to this over the years, Parliament has consistently maintained the view that custodial sentences should be served part in custody and part in the community.

For determinate sentences of 12 months or more imposed on or after 3 December 2012 and those imposed before that date where the offence was committed on or after 4 April 2005, the first half of the sentence is served in custody and the second half is served on release on licence in the community to the end of the sentence. Release from sentences of less than 12 months is currently unconditional at the halfway point. The Offender Rehabilitation Bill changes this position.

For determinate sentences of four years or more imposed before 3 December 2012 where the offence was committed prior to 4 April 2005, release is determined on the basis of risk by the Parole Board between the halfway and two-thirds point of the sentence. The offender is on licence from the point at which he is released until the three quarter point of sentence. In respect of sentences of less than four years, the offender will be released at the halfway point, on licence to three quarter point.

For determinate sentences imposed before 1 October 1992, release is determined on the basis of risk by the Parole Board between the one-third and the two thirds point of the sentence. The offender is on licence from the point at which he is released until the two-thirds point. If parole is not granted, automatic release is unconditional at the two-thirds point.

For indeterminate sentence prisoners, the sentencing judge with regard to the legislation and guidelines in place at the time and taking into account any aggravating and mitigating factors of the case will set a

minimum term to be served. This punitive period is known commonly as the "tariff" period. No indeterminate sentence prisoner can expect to be released before they have served the tariff period in full. Release on expiry of the tariff period is not automatic. Release will only take place once this period has been served and the Parole Board is satisfied that the risk of harm the prisoner poses to the public is acceptable. As such, some life sentence prisoners remain in prison beyond their tariff as they are not considered to present an acceptable risk to the public. Whole life prisoners will spend the rest of their lives in prison.

Prisoners' Transfers

Jenny Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the cost was of transferring prisoners between prison establishments in England and Wales in each year from 2010 to 2012. [154940]

Jeremy Wright: The Prisoner Escort Custody Service (PECS), which is part of the National Offender Management Service, is responsible for the movement of prisoners between prisons, police stations and courts and their care and security while in court custody. PECS manages the secure escort contracts covering all those sent to custody in the prison estate, apart from Category A prisoners.

Under the current contractual arrangements for PECS, inter-prison transfers are provided for as part of a single contract, which includes all other prisoner escort journeys apart from those of Category A prisoners. It is not possible to separate out the cost of movements between prison establishments.

The full cost of delivering the PECS services between the years 2005-06 to 2012-13 was:

Cost of transporting prisoners, other than Category A prisoners, accommodated in the prison estate

	Total cost (£ million)
2005-06	146.5
2006-07	155.8
2007-08	164.2
2008-09	157.3
2009-10	161.4
2010-11	163.6
2011-12	146.1
2002-13	134.3

Information on the cost of transferring Category A prisoners between establishments is not collected centrally and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Prisoners: Suicide

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many incidences of (a) suicide, (b) attempted suicide and (c) self-harming there were in prisons in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [155173]

Jeremy Wright: All deaths in prison custody are subject to a coroner's inquest and it is for the coroner to determine the cause of death. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) classification system does not include suicide

as this requires knowledge of intent, which is not always known. Within the NOMS classification system, suicides are included in self-inflicted deaths, which also includes deaths where the prisoner took their own life irrespective of intent.

The number of apparent self-inflicted deaths for the last five years are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of apparent self-inflicted deaths in prison custody, England and Wales, 2008-12

	Number of apparent self-inflicted deaths
2008	61
2009	61
2010	58
2011	57
2012	60

An attempted suicide will be recorded as a self-harm incident. As it is not always possible to know the intent of the person to attempt to take their own life the number of attempted suicides in prison is not available.

The number of self-harm incidents between 2008 and 2012 is provided in Table 2. These will be higher than the number of individuals self-harming in prison custody as some individuals may self-harm more than once.

Table 2: Number of self-harm incidents in prison establishments, England and Wales, 2008-2012

	Number of self-harm incidents
2008	25,234
2009	24,184
2010	26,979
2011	24,648
2012	23,158

Statistics on deaths, assaults and self-harm in prison custody are published quarterly in the Safety in Custody statistics bulletin available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-in-custody>

The latest publication with figures up to 2012 was published on 25 April 2013.

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many incidents of (a) suicide, (b) attempted suicide and (c) self-harming occurred within the first (i) week, (ii) fortnight or (iii) month of arrival into a prison in the last year for which figures are available. [155558]

Jeremy Wright: All deaths in prison custody are subject to a coroner's inquest and it is for the coroner to determine the cause of death. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) classification system does not include suicide as this requires knowledge of intent, which is not always known. Within the NOMS classification system, suicides are included in self-inflicted deaths, which also includes deaths where the prisoner took their own life irrespective of intent.

Figures for the number of apparent self-inflicted deaths by time in the prison at the time of death in 2012 are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of apparent self-inflicted deaths by time in most recent prison, England and Wales, 2012

Time in most recent prison	
0 to 7 days	10
8 to 14 days	5
15 to 30 days	3

(a) An attempted suicide will be recorded as a self-harm incident. As it is not always possible to know the intent of the person to attempt to take their own life the number of attempted suicides in prison is not available.

(b) The number of self-harm incidents by time in current prison for 2012 is provided in table 2. These figures do not represent the number of individuals as individuals may be responsible for more than one self-harm incident.

Table 2: Number of self-harm incidents by time in current prison, England and Wales, 2012

Time in current prison	
0 to 7 days	115
8 to 14 days	835
15 to 30 days	1,378

Statistics on deaths, assaults and self-harm in prison custody are published quarterly in the Safety in Custody statistics bulletin available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-in-custody>

The latest publication with figures up to 2012 was published on 25 April 2013.

Prisons: Electronic Equipment

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of prison inmates have access to (a) television, (b) games consoles and (c) newspaper subscriptions. [155461]

Jeremy Wright: NOMS does not hold information on the proportion of prisoners who have access to television, games consoles or newspaper subscriptions. To obtain the information would involve contacting each prison and this would incur disproportionate cost.

On 30 April 2013, we announced changes to the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme, under which prisoners earn access to privileges, including TV, games consoles and newspapers. The changes, which will come into effect from 1 November 2013, will ensure that prisoners will now have to actively contribute to their own rehabilitation, help others and continue to behave well to earn privileges. Prisoners who refuse to work or engage in their own rehabilitation will not earn privileges. The revised IEP system will support what this Government is seeking to achieve in improving rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

Under the current IEP scheme, in-cell television is available to prisoners at the standard and enhanced levels of the scheme. In addition, television can be provided in other circumstances, such as within health care facilities or for those at risk of self-harm if judged to be appropriate. In both public and private sector prisons, in cell television is entirely self-financing; the money comes from payments made by prisoners.

In the adult estate, access to games consoles is restricted to prisoners who are on the enhanced level of the IEP scheme. Each prison will have decided locally whether or not to offer access to games consoles as part of the local IEP scheme. All games consoles are purchased at prisoners' own expense and no public funds must be used to purchase games consoles and equipment. 18 rated games are not permitted for any prisoner, no matter what their age is. Individual access to games consoles in the young people's estate is only available to those on the enhanced level of the rewards and sanctions scheme which operates in the same way as the IEP scheme in adult prisons. Young people may also access games consoles in communal areas. They are only permitted to purchase computer games and a games console for their own use and from a pre-determined list of approved consoles.

Newspapers and periodicals may, at the discretion of each individual establishment, be purchased by prisoners through the use of local supplier agreements. Permitted publications should be comparable to those available to the general public, but must not compromise safety, security or decency.

Probation

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what assessment he has made of the cost of introducing competition to probation services under his plans for transferring rehabilitation; [155587]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the potential cost of moving probation cases from the Probation Trust to a private sector provider on an occasion when the assessed risk of particular cases changes. [155588]

Jeremy Wright: The Ministry of Justice's published "Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform" on 9 May that sets out the reforms for how offenders will be rehabilitated in the community. We are committed to opening up rehabilitative services to a range of new providers, who will be paid by results to help offenders turn their lives around.

We anticipate that introducing competition to probation services will release efficiencies and drive down unit costs across the system. Our proposals are that the efficiencies released will enable us to extend the range of services provided. However, this will need to ensure our proposals will be affordable within the context of the MOJ commitment to deliver annual savings of over £2 billion by 2014-15.

We have indicated that protecting the public is our top priority, and we are clear that management of the offenders who pose the highest risk of serious harm

should remain with the public sector. It will then be for the public sector probation service to decide who manages that offender subsequently, but we do not anticipate large scale movement of offenders between providers, and so any associated costs would not be substantial.

Probation: Wiltshire

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of local initiatives for the provision of probation services including the formation of a staff spin-off mutual by Wiltshire Probation Trust. [155589]

Jeremy Wright: The Ministry of Justice's published "Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform"; on 9 May that sets out the reforms for how offenders will be rehabilitated in the community. We are committed to opening up rehabilitative services to a range of new providers, who will be paid by results to help offenders turn their lives around. As a part of this we expect to see more use of innovative approaches, such as mentoring and signposting to services aimed at housing, training and employment, to tackle the root causes of offending.

A number of Probation Trusts, including Wiltshire, have entered expressions of interest to gain support under the Cabinet Office's Mutuals Support Programme. The Secretary of State for Justice is not involved in that process as it would be improper given mutuals set up by the staff of Probation Trusts may be bidders in the competition process to provide rehabilitative services.

Remand in Custody

Jenny Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many defendants were remanded into custody in England and Wales in each month between January 2008 and April 2012. [154866]

Jeremy Wright: The tables show the number of prisoners received into prison on remand in England and Wales in each month from January 2008 to December 2012. The figures provided are a further breakdown of those published in Table 1.2 of the 'Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin' available on the:

www.gov.uk
website.

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Remand receptions into prison establishments¹ by type of remand 2008-12

Month	Untried receptions, by month 2008-12, England and Wales				
	2008	2009	2010 ²	2011	2012
January	4,879	4,454	—	4,408	4,264
February	4,472	4,380	—	4,183	4,331
March	4,512	4,790	—	4,615	4,436
April	4,848	4,662	—	4,186	4,072
May	4,830	4,592	—	4,691	4,262
June	5,101	5,104	—	4,505	3,966
July	5,437	5,056	—	4,552	4,486
August	4,833	4,324	—	5,777	4,442

Remand receptions into prison establishments¹ by type of remand 2008-12

Month	Untried receptions, by month 2008-12, England and Wales				
	2008	2009	2010 ²	2011	2012
September	5,068	4,967	—	4,712	4,112
October	4,936	4,593	—	4,514	4,360
November	4,620	4,597	—	4,515	4,047
December	3,881	3,688	—	4,179	3,449
All	57,417	55,207	—	54,837	50,227

Convicted unsentenced receptions, 2008-2012, England and Wales

Month	2008	2009	2010 ²	2011	2012
January	3,886	3,295	—	2,990	3,047
February	3,652	2,933	—	2,892	2,937
March	3,323	3,181	—	3,284	3,286
April	3,893	2,973	—	2,845	2,830
May	3,647	2,820	—	3,248	3,259
June	3,919	3,173	—	3,469	2,939
July	4,092	3,077	—	3,281	3,295
August	3,491	2,973	—	3,530	3,113
September	3,909	3,428	—	3,604	2,997
October	4,128	3,318	—	3,467	3,314
November	3,686	3,146	—	3,607	3,103
December	3,147	2,686	—	3,174	2,526
All	44,773	37,003	—	39,391	36,646

¹ Excludes police cells.

² Data for 2010 is unavailable due to problems in the supply of data for statistical purposes—see Definitions and Measurements document for more details: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192439/omsq-definitions.pdf

Note:

Untried and convicted unsentenced receptions cannot be combined to give total remand receptions as some individuals are counted under both types of remand reception.

Reoffenders

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many crimes were committed by those released from prison while on licence that were (a) low risk, (b) medium risk or (c) high risk in each of the last five years. [155541]

Jeremy Wright: The figures cannot be provided. The information held centrally on prison discharges (which is used to identify those released on licence) does not currently include an assessment of risk.

EDUCATION

Academies

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education with reference to the answer of 14 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 122W, on academy brokers, if he will publish anonymised details of (a) the nature of the two partially upheld complaints and (b) the grounds on which they were upheld. [156321]

Mr Timpson: With reference to the answer provided on 14 May, the two complaints against Brokers that were partially upheld regarded matters of conduct constituting minor procedural infractions. In both cases the complainants fully accepted and were satisfied with the conclusions of investigations.

Providing further information about the nature of the complaints, and the grounds on which they were partially upheld, would risk identifying individual cases and therefore jeopardise the confidentiality afforded to the complainant and subject, and be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

John Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the potential effects of reclassifying academies as private sector bodies on accountability arrangements. [156516]

Mr Timpson: The Secretary of State keeps the accountability arrangements for schools and academies under review. The Department for Education has no plans to reclassify academies as private sector bodies. Strong accountability will be at the heart of any future plans for the academies programme.

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many multi-academy trust arrangements there are; and what proportion of academies are in such an arrangement. [156618]

Mr Timpson: There are 369 multi-academy trusts, within which there are 1,166 academies. This is 40% of the 2,924 open academies, and 5% of all state-funded schools.

Child Minding

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) when he expects to consult on the creation of childminder agencies as described in the More Great Childcare policy document published by his Department in January 2013; and if he will make a statement; [156213]

(2) how many childminder agencies as described in More Great Childcare have been established; and if he will make a statement; [156214]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of childminder agencies as described in More Great Childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice which he expects will be established by September 2013. [156215]

Elizabeth Truss: The legislation to provide for the creation of childminder agencies is currently before Parliament, with the aim of enabling childminder agencies to operate from September 2014. No childminder agencies currently exist.

We plan to consult later this year on the key requirements to be placed on agencies in regulations.

Children: Day Care

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what meetings he, Ministers and officials in his Department have had with representatives of the child care sector in each of the last 12 months. [155124]

Elizabeth Truss: As Minister for Education and Childcare, I meet representatives of the child care sector on a regular basis. A list of my meetings, concerning child care issues since appointment in September 2012, is included in Table 1.

Prior to my appointment the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather), also met representatives of the child care sector in her capacity as Minister of State for Children and Families. A list of her meetings is included in Table 2.

In addition, Department for Education officials continue to have numerous meetings with representatives of the child care sector, as well as with others with an interest in early years and child care policy.

Table 1: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Elizabeth Truss

Date of meeting	Name of external organisation
<i>2012</i>	
1 October	My Family Care
2 November	4 Children Roundtable: Children's Corner day Nursery First Class Childcare Best Family Childcare & Out of School Club Ducklings at St Margarets Pre-School Greenside Pre-school Rounders Out of School Club Ducklings Childcare Twinkles Nursery Kaleidoscope Nurseries Bright Beginnings ChildCare Centre Leeds Play at Churwell North Leeds Community Nursery Guiseley Infants Twinkles Nursery x2 Childminders
15 November	Mumsnet
28 November	Save Our Nurseries and Montessori Schools Association
29 November	4 Children
18 December	Action for Children
19 December	Childcare roundtable with providers: 4 Children Busy Bees London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) Bright Horizons Kids Unlimited National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
<i>2013</i>	
10 January	Busy Bees Benefits
10 January	Kids Unlimited
15 January	Representatives from Childcare Voucher Providers: Sodexo Motivation Solutions Computershare Voucher Services Grass Roots Group Edenred
16 January	Netmums
17 January	Barnes Montessori Nursery
17 January	Happy Child
18 January	Kids Unlimited
18 January	Mumsnet
22 January	Busy Bees Benefits
23 January	National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
28 January	Daycare Trust
28 January	Bright Horizons
5 February	Playaway Nursery
5 February	Kids Unlimited
5 February	National Day Nurseries Association.(NDNA)
7 February	Mumsnet webchat
7 February	Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA)
12 February	Women Like Us
13 February	4 Children
13 February	Kids Unlimited
14 February	Childbase
15 February	Co-operative Childcare
27 February	National Children's Bureau (NCB)
27 February	The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
4 March	Childminders roundtable: X8 Childminders
5 March	Action For Children
5 March	National Childminding Association (NCMA)
5 March	Busy Bees Benefits
6 March	Daycare Trust

Table 1: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Elizabeth Truss

Date of meeting	Name of external organisation
7 March	Roundtable discussion: Kids Unlimited Bright Horizons Montessori Schools Association
11 March	Toadhall Nursery
13 March	Roundtable with various nurseries: Busy Bees Bright Horizons Asquith Nurseries Kids Unlimited Childbase Bertram Nursery Group Tree Tops The Co-operative Childcare Kids 1st Day Nurseries Childcare Corporation Happy Days Nurseries
18 March	Busy Bees Benefits
19 March	Working Families
20 March	My Family Care
1 May	4Kids
8 May	Cognita Schools

Table 2: Minister of State, Sarah Teather MP

Date of meeting	Name of external Organisation
2012	
16 May	National Childminding Association (NCMA)
21 May	The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
30 May	Early Years Provision Roundtable
10 July	4 Children
11 July	Action for Children
16 July	Mumsnet
31 July	First Childcare Commission Roundtable: 4Children Bright Horizons Childminder ContinYou Daycare Trust DCS Family Matters Institute Fatherhood Institute Mumsnet National Childminding Association (NCMA) ARK Centre for Research in Early Childhood Single Parent Action Network Nursery Leader Working Families Women's Business Council (WBC)
31 July	Second Childcare Commission Roundtable: Office of the Children's Commissioner Save the Children Ginger Bread Family & Parenting Institute National Day Nurseries Association Pre-School Learning Alliance Netmums London Early Years Foundation (LEYF)

Free School Meals

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many school students in (a) England and (b) Harlow constituency are eligible for free school meals. [155503]

Mr Laws: Information on the number and percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in Harlow constituency, Essex local authority and England is shown in the table.

Information on the number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals as at January 2012 is published in the Statistical First Release 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January 2012'.¹

¹ Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2012>

Maintained nursery, state-funded primary, state-funded secondary, special schools and pupil referral units^{1, 2, 3, 4}, number and percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals^{5, 6, 7}, January 2012, Harlow constituency, Essex local authority and England

	Maintained nursery and state-funded primary schools ^{1, 2}			State-funded secondary schools ^{1, 3}			Special schools ⁴		
	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals
England	3,947,650	760,910	19.3	2,809,815	449,485	16.0	80,505	30,170	37.5
Essex local authority	103,739	14,272	13.8	76,322	8,424	11.0	1,797	481	26.8
Harlow constituency	7,648	1,393	18.2	4,800	755	15.7	52	16	30.8

	Pupil referral units			Total ⁷		
	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals
England	13,235	4,855	36.7	6,851,205	1,245,420	18.2
Essex local authority	234	43	18.4	182,090	23,220	12.8

	Pupil referral units			Total ⁷		
	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals	Number on roll ^{5, 6}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{5, 6}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals
Harlow constituency	40	4	10.0	12,540	2,170	17.3

¹ Includes middle schools as deemed.

² Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

³ Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

⁴ Includes maintained special schools, special academies and non-maintained special schools, excludes general hospital schools.

⁵ Includes pupils who are sole or dual main registrations. Includes boarders. In pupil referral units includes pupils registered with other providers and further education colleges.

⁶ Pupils who have full-time attendance and are aged 15 or under, or pupils who have part time attendance and are aged between 5 and 15.

⁷ Includes maintained nursery, state-funded primary, state-funded secondary, special schools, and pupil referral units. Excludes pupils in alternative provision as full and part-time status is not collected.

Note:

National and total numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

School Census.

ICT

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many (a) computers, (b) mobile telephones, (c) BlackBerrys and (d) other pieces of IT equipment were lost or stolen from his Department in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [156424]

Elizabeth Truss: Data for 2010-11 and 2011-12 were previously provided to the hon. Member on 9 January 2013, *Official Report*, column 342W. The following departmental IT equipment was reported as being lost or stolen in 2012-13:

2012-13	Lost	Stolen	Total
Laptops	2	6	8
BlackBerry devices	25	4	29
Signify Tokens (remote access)	28	1	29
USB Memory Sticks	5	0	5

Information about mobile phones is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

All Department for Education IT equipment is fully security encrypted. The replacement cost of laptops includes encryption software to allow the handling of sensitive material up to 'Restricted' and to meet the Code of Connection for the Government Secure Intranet.

Internet: Curriculum

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make lessons on online safety and responsible use of social networking sites part of the national curriculum. [156499]

Elizabeth Truss: We recently consulted on proposals for the new national curriculum for computing. For the first time, this will require pupils aged five to 11 to be taught how to communicate safely and respectfully online, and to use technology responsibly, securely and safely. The final version of the new national curriculum will be published in the autumn and will be taught from September 2014.

Leave

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 15 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 132W, on leave, how many staff

on his Department's payroll were eligible for privilege days in 2012; and what the total payroll bill was in 2012. [155982]

Elizabeth Truss: The headcount of the Department as of December 2012 was 3,886. All staff on the Department's payroll qualify for one day's leave for the Queen's birthday and a further 1.5 days in addition to their annual leave entitlement and public holidays.

The total paybill costs are currently being prepared for the end year accounts and have yet to be audited. However, the paybill costs for 2011-12 can be found on the Department's website¹.

¹ Department for Education consolidated annual report and accounts 2011-12:

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc1213/hc00/0042/0042.asp>

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration he has given to introducing teaching about teratogenic medicines into the National Curriculum. [155919]

Elizabeth Truss: Our proposals for the new national curriculum were published for consultation on 7 February 2013 and the consultation closed on 16 April 2013. The proposed science national curriculum for key stage 3 includes content on the effects of drugs (including medicines as well as substance misuse) on behaviour, health and life processes such as conception, growth and development.

We believe it is for teachers to decide the detail of what is taught within that framework, including which type of medicines should be covered. There is also scope to teach about teratogenic medicines as part of personal, social, health and economic education lessons.

Pupils: First Aid

Seema Malhotra: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many school children have received training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation in (a) Feltham and Heston constituency, (b) Hounslow, (c) London and (d) England in the last five years; [156638]

(2) how many secondary schools in (a) Feltham and Heston constituency, (b) London and (c) England will be offering cardiopulmonary resuscitation training in 2013. [156640]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department does not collect data on training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation in schools.

Pupils: Health

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many times the word wellbeing occurred in school inspection guidelines in (a) 2010 and (b) 2013. [156447]

Mr Laws: This question is a matter for Ofsted. Her Majesty's chief inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has written to the hon. Member, and a copy of his response has been placed in the House Libraries.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent changes he has made to the inspection criteria governing pupils' wellbeing at schools. [156449]

Mr Laws: This question is a matter for Ofsted. Her Majesty's chief inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has written to the hon. Member, and a copy of his response has been placed in the House Libraries.

Pupils: Stress

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the effect of standardised testing on stress levels in school pupils. [156443]

Elizabeth Truss: The main purpose of national curriculum tests is to provide an accurate picture of children's attainment, so that they can be supported by their schools and teachers to achieve their best. There is no reason why young people cannot work hard, sit tests and enjoy their education. Good teachers in good schools will ensure that they achieve this.

Teachers and parents can support children to prevent tests becoming stressful. The tests should not cause stress if they are approached and administered calmly and sensitively, and pupils understand that the results will be used to plan their future learning.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what processes his Department has put in place to (a) monitor, (b) collate cost information on, (c) review and (d) respond to requests to amend or revoke regulations introduced by his Department. [155792]

Elizabeth Truss: Since 1 January 2011, the Department has published a statement of new regulation every six months where there are regulations in scope. Each statement of new regulation sets out the costs of new regulations that have an impact on the business sector (private businesses and civil society organisations) and that are due to come into force in the relevant period.

The Department regularly reviews regulation which relates to maintained schools with a view to simplifying or removing any unnecessary requirements. We have also established two stakeholder groups: the Bureaucracy Reference Group comprising teachers, school business managers and head teachers; and a sub-group of the Education Forum on reducing bureaucracy, which is made up of representatives from teacher unions and head teacher associations. These groups regularly meet to advise how existing bureaucracy can be reduced, and the most likely impact of new policies and legislation.

The Department has also set up the following e-mail account:

bureaucracy.views@education.gsi.gov.uk

so that any practitioners or members of the public can provide views on further steps that could be taken to reduce burdens—including amending or removing regulations.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will provide the estimated cost of each regulation introduced by his Department since May 2010; and what the estimated benefits of each regulation (a) amended and (b) revoked were; [155958]

(2) what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by his Department in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155814]

Elizabeth Truss: Since 1 January 2011 the department has published a "Statement of New Regulation" every six months. Each statement of new regulation sets out the cost of new regulations that are due to come into force to private businesses and civil society organisations. Table 1 as follows sets out the Department's regulations that have been included within these statements. Of the 13 regulations included on the Department's statements of new regulation, 11 have been net beneficial, and two have been broadly neutral.

From 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2012, the Department reduced costs to the business sector by £11.11 million a year. From 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2013, the department reduced costs to the business sector by a further £2.6 million a year.

Table 1: Compiled information from Department for Education statements of new regulation

Title of regulation	Date in-force	'One in, one out'/'one in, two out' classification	Equivalent annual net cost to business (£ million)
Education (Independent Educational Provision in England) (Provision of Information) Regulations 2010	January 2011	Out	-0.07
Child care (Inspections) (Amendment and Revocation) Regulations 2012	August 2012	Out	-0.20
Revised statutory guidance Free Early Years Education for Three- and Four-Year Olds	September 2012	Out	-0.50

Table 1: Compiled information from Department for Education statements of new regulation

<i>Title of regulation</i>	<i>Date in-force</i>	<i>'One in, one out'/one in, two out' classification</i>	<i>Equivalent annual net cost to business (£ million)</i>
Early Years Foundation Stage (Learning and Development Requirements) (Amendment) Order 2012	September 2012	Out	-10.00
Early Years Foundation Stage (Welfare Requirements) Regulations 2012	September 2012	Out	-0.30
Childcare (Early Years Register) (Amendment) Regulations 2012	September 2012	Out	-0.03
Equality Act 2010 (Commencement No. 10) Order 2012	September 2012	Zero Net	0.00
Childcare (General Childcare Register) (Amendment) Regulations 2012	September 2012	Out	-0.00
Early Years Foundation Stage (Exemptions from Learning and Development Requirements) (Amendment) Regulations 2012	October 2012	Out	-0.01
Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment). Regulations 2012	January 2013	Out	-0.29
Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012	January 2013	Zero Net	0.00
Revised statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children	April 2013	Out	-2.31
Residential Family Centres (Amendment) Regulations 2013	April 2013	Out	-0.00

Schools

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to promote maintained federations. [156617]

Mr Laws: The Department for Education supports schools working in partnership to improve standards. The new Governors' Handbook, published on 14 May 2013, provides governors with information about how to enter into a federation.

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many local authority maintained federations there are in England; and how many such federations are of (a) primary schools and (b) secondary schools. [156619]

Mr Laws: The Department does not hold a complete list of federations and their composition. Since September 2009 there has been a duty to inform the Department of the establishment of a formal or 'hard' federation made under section 24 of the Education Act 2002. However, this does not provide data on all federations since it includes neither federations established prior to September 2009 nor less formal federations that have been established under section 26 of the Act. In addition, there is no duty to inform the Department of the dissolution of a federation.

Sign Language

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will add British Sign Language to the list of prescribed languages of study at maintained schools. [155835]

Elizabeth Truss: While we recognise the importance of British Sign Language, the Government has no plans to add it to the list of languages that will meet the statutory requirement to teach a foreign language at key stage 2 from September 2014. We believe it is important that all pupils have the opportunity to learn one of the languages on the proposed list, for the reasons set out in the report of our consultation on this matter¹.

Schools will remain free to offer British Sign Language in addition to one of the seven languages from the prescribed list, should they wish to do so.

¹ This is available at:

www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum2014/a00221243/ks2-languages-consultation-report

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he plans to take to ensure that there are no restrictions to allowing deaf and hearing impaired young people in maintained secondary schools to study British Sign Language at GCSE level. [155836]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department does not place restrictions on deaf and hearing impaired young people studying for a GCSE. We recognise that there is currently no GCSE qualification offered by examination bodies in British Sign Language (BSL) but there is a range of vocational-related BSL and other signing media qualifications up to degree level.

The Department is aware that Signature is developing a GCSE qualification in BSL. They are in discussion with the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) to ensure that any GCSE is of the right quality and reflects the richness of BSL as a language.

Special Educational Needs

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will assess the report Future of AAC Services in England: A framework for equitable and effective commissioning. [156541]

Mr Timpson: The Government is taking account of the report, "The Future of AAC Services in England: A framework for equitable and effective commissioning", in establishing arrangements for the commissioning of highly specialised alternative and augmentative communication services (ACC) by the National Health Service Commissioning Board. It provides useful recommendations for the AAC sector to consider when developing services in the future.

Teachers: Pay

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions in 2013 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* departmental officials have met representatives of teaching organisations and trade unions to discuss the 2013 School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document. [156562]

Mr Laws: Our records show the Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), has met representatives from trade unions on five separate occasions where teachers' pay—although not necessarily the 2013 School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document (STPCD)—was discussed. Ministers within the Department met trade union representatives on two occasions where teachers' pay was discussed. The Secretary of State and Ministers have met representatives from trade unions on numerous other occasions for general discussions, during which teachers' pay may have been raised.

During 2013, as part of the consultation on the 2013 STPCD, officials from the Department met statutory consultees of the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), who include representatives of teaching organisations and trade unions, on nine occasions. Since publication of the document six meetings have been held with statutory consultees about implementation of the 2013 STPCD.

Teachers: Pensions

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions in 2013 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* departmental

officials have met representatives of teaching organisations and trade unions to discuss the Teachers' Pension Scheme. [156561]

Mr Laws: In 2013 the Secretary of State has had one meeting with a union general secretary at which the teachers' pensions scheme (TPS) was discussed. A further five meetings with unions and teaching organisations have also taken place during this period where issues related to TPS may have been discussed but were not specifically tabled for discussion.

I have met trade union representatives on five occasions, none specifically to discuss TPS.

During this period officials have had a total of 13 meetings with trade unions at which the TPS was discussed. This has included seven meetings with union officials to discuss the detailed implementation of the reformed TPS.

Teachers: Termination of Employment

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the number of teachers who have left their employment with between two and five years' experience in *(a)* 2010, *(b)* 2011, *(c)* 2012 and *(d)* 2013 to date. [156556]

Mr Laws: The number of teachers with between two and five years' experience who have left service from publicly funded schools in England in 2010 is 5,940. This figure includes teachers who are retiring and is estimated to exclude 10% to 20% of part-time teachers. The figure is provisional.

The Department will publish updates to its teacher mobility statistics (covering 2011 and 2012) in July 2013. Figures for 2013 will not be available until 2014.

Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 21 May 2013

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Private Finance Initiative

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which private finance initiative projects under his Department have been refinanced in each year since May 2010; what the value is of each such project; what the refinancing gain has been in each such case; and how much of any such gain the relevant Government body received through a (a) lump sum and (b) reduction in the unitary charge.

[154716]

[Official Report, 13 May 2013, Vol. 563, c. 55W.]

Letter of correction from Brandon Lewis:

An error has been identified in the written answer given to the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Pamela Nash) on 13 May 2013.

The full answer given was as follows:

Brandon Lewis: The following DCLG sponsored private finance initiative projects are reported by their authorities to have been refinanced since May 2010: Derby Housing

Non-Housing Revenue Account; Bolton Community Learning Resource Centre; Tyne and Wear Fire Headquarters and Community Fire Stations; and Newham Canning Town Housing Revenue Account. Details of their capital values are held on HM Treasury's current private finance initiative projects list:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pfi_current_projects_list_march_2012.xls

The Department does not carry information relating to the refinancing of the projects managed by local authorities. This is because there is no obligation for local authorities to inform Departments in the event of a refinancing.

The correct answer should have been:

Brandon Lewis: The following DCLG sponsored private finance initiative projects are reported by their authorities to have been refinanced since May 2010: **Derby Housing Non-Housing Revenue Account; Tyne and Wear Fire Headquarters and Community Fire Stations; and Newham Canning Town Housing Revenue Account.** Details of their capital values are held on HM Treasury's current private finance initiative projects list:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pfi_current_projects_list_march_2012.xls

The Department does not carry information relating to the refinancing of the projects managed by local authorities. This is because there is no obligation for local authorities to inform Departments in the event of a refinancing.

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