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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 7 February 2011**

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2010]

FIFTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 523

FOURTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2010-2011

### House of Commons

*Monday 7 February 2011*

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

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### EDUCATION

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Sure Start

1. **Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): What estimate he has made of the number of Sure Start children's centres that will offer a full service in 2014-15. [38218]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Sarah Teather):** The Government have ensured that there is enough money in the system to maintain the network of Sure Start children's centres and have provided new investment for health visitors. Local authorities, in consultation with local communities, can determine the most effective way of delivering future services to meet local need. They have a duty to consult before opening, closing or significantly changing children's centres and to make sufficient provision.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for that answer, but in my local authority area, Tameside, the early intervention grant that funds Sure Start faces a cut of 12%. Does she agree that such a cut could be a false economy, because one of Sure Start's great benefits is that it saves the state

further expenditure down the line by improving outcomes for young people through early intervention? What studies are her Department carrying out to estimate the likely future costs of cutting early intervention now?

**Sarah Teather:** We have provided a flexible grant because that is what local authorities said they wanted. Obviously, that includes money for Sure Start, but it also includes money for other things. Local authorities are the best people to make these decisions on the ground. Localism is the right way forward regardless of the circumstances, but when finances are tight there is a particular requirement on us to ensure that decisions are taken closest to where the impact is felt, because we are much more likely to get high-quality decisions in that way.

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the early years provision plays a vital part in social mobility? How many two-year-olds does she expect will benefit from the programme to extend that to disadvantaged children?

**Sarah Teather:** I absolutely agree that the early years play a vital role in social mobility, which is precisely why the Government have chosen to prioritise funding in this way. Tomorrow, we will debate the Second Reading of the Education Bill, whose first clause provides the enabling powers for us to regulate so that we can help an extra 130,000 two-year-olds to experience high-quality early education by the end of the spending period.

**Mr David Blunkett** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that there is an inherent contradiction in a policy that announces that the Government will protect the original local Sure Start programmes in the most deprived areas, which I was proud to develop from 1997, while, with the so-called "localism programme", saying, "It is entirely the fault of the local authorities," which have been denied the money to maintain those programmes in the first place?

**Sarah Teather:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to be proud of the Sure Start children's centres, which are an excellent programme. That is precisely why the

Government have made sure that the money is there in the early intervention grant, and why we have built on that by providing extra money for health visitors, through the Department of Health, and more money for things such as the family-nurse partnerships, which we know work on the ground and are often delivered through children's centres. I believe that localism is the right way forward. Good local councils are thinking creatively about, for example, how to ensure that they can cluster their centres and merge their back offices, and how to prioritise outcomes for children—it is outcomes that matter.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend envisage opening up the assets of these underused children's centres to community groups to expand the big society?

**Sarah Teather:** In some areas, local authorities are very good at making full use of the assets, which are often fantastic buildings, but in other areas they are not as good. I hope that providing the flexible fund will mean that local authorities start to think more creatively about how they can join services together and perhaps provide support for older children. By providing that kind of flexibility we enable local authorities to make the right decisions for their areas.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Recent research by the Daycare Trust and 4Children shows that, despite promises made by the Prime Minister and his deputy, 250 children's centres are expected to close within the year, with hundreds more at risk of closure or big cuts in the services they provide. Hundreds of thousands of parents across the country are deeply worried about this, but all we get from the Minister is glib indifference. I read this morning that the Secretary of State has announced that funding for music will be maintained, so, incidentally, the Government feel that that is worth ring-fencing whereas Sure Start is not. To paraphrase my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field), does the Minister not think that parents deserve much more than having to listen to the Secretary of State playing his fiddle while Sure Start burns around him?

**Sarah Teather:** That was a long rant and I struggled slightly to find the question in it. The important thing to say about the survey that 4Children did is that it is about people's concerns and not about decisions that have been taken—decisions have not yet been taken. We are saying to local authorities that we want them to focus on outcomes for children and families. We are trying to encourage them to do that by holding back some money for payment by results and we are developing that scheme with the sector at the moment. Good local authorities that make sensible restructuring decisions will be able to benefit from that, but if they make decisions that jeopardise outcomes for children, they will not be able to benefit from it.

### Discretionary Learner Support Fund

2. **David Wright** (Telford) (Lab): When he plans to inform colleges of the size of the discretionary learner support fund to replace the education maintenance allowance; and if he will make a statement. [38219]

**The Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (Mr John Hayes):** We plan to allocate the new funding replacing the education maintenance allowance in line with the usual timetable for overall funding allocations for schools and colleges, which will be made in the spring.

**David Wright:** The real concern is about transitional arrangements. Will the Minister explain what discussions he has had with colleges about the transitional arrangements, particularly for students who have already started their course and want to continue receiving funding support while they carry on with it?

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman is right that transitional arrangements are important. We are in discussions with colleges and their representative bodies to ensure that there is not the kind of problem that he identifies. We are determined to allocate these resources in the way that addresses disadvantage most cost-effectively and ensures that the worse-off are not still worse off as a result of the changes.

**Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): The previous Labour Government left 3.9 million children living below the poverty line. Can the Minister give an assurance that when the children abandoned by Labour eventually arrive at further education colleges, they will all receive a discretionary learner support fund grant?

**Mr Hayes:** As I have said, we will ensure that those who are worse off are not disadvantaged by the system. Redistributing advantage and ensuring that there is a change in the prospects and opportunities for those who begin worse off is at the heart of all this Government do. We are the champions of social justice—past, present and future.

**Mr Iain Wright** (Hartlepool) (Lab): In last month's debate on the education maintenance allowance, the Secretary of State pledged that any replacement scheme for EMA would cover the costs of transport and equipment and would support young people with special educational needs or learning disabilities as well as those with caring responsibilities, teenage parents and those who were eligible for free school meals when at school. Given that research from the House of Commons Library indicates that such pledges would have a first-year cost of £480 million and ongoing costs of £420 million a year, will the Minister confirm, on behalf of the Secretary of State, that this is the budget for EMA's successor and that he stands by the pledges he made to the House?

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman is far too experienced as a Minister to expect me to make that kind of on-the-hoof promise. Equally, he knows that we are determined to amend this scheme to allow it to be targeted using the discretion to do the kind of things that he highlighted. After all, his own shadow Secretary of State has said:

"I have never set my face against changes or savings to the EMA scheme."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 2011; Vol. 521, c. 863.]

### Teaching Standards

3. **John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): What plans he has to raise standards of the teaching profession; and if he will make a statement. [38220]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):**

There is nothing more important to a child's education than the quality of their teachers, which is why I set out plans to raise the status and standards of the teaching profession in the White Paper "The Importance of Teaching". We will focus on recruiting the best candidates to become teachers, we will improve their training and we will create more opportunities for all teachers to learn from the best.

**John Stevenson:** Will the Secretary of State reassure pupils and parents in my constituency of Carlisle that the quality of science and maths-based teaching will not suffer as the academies programme continues successfully to expand?

**Michael Gove:** I am delighted to be able to reassure my fellow Aberdonian that the quality of education that children in Carlisle enjoy will continue to improve. I have had the opportunity to visit some of the superb academy provision in his constituency. I know, and I am sure that every right hon. and hon. Member will be pleased to know, that we will guarantee an enhanced level of support for graduates who are scientists or mathematicians who wish to enter teaching in order to ensure that the subjects that will help to equip our children for the 21st century are given the boost they need.

**Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** I know the Secretary of State will want to acknowledge that thanks to Labour's reforms we already have the best generation ever of teachers—that is according to Ofsted. He says in his White Paper that quality teacher training is vital, but he is allowing taxpayers' money to be used to employ unqualified individuals to teach children in his so-called free schools. If having well-qualified teachers is vital for some schoolchildren, why is it not essential for all?

**Michael Gove:** We are making sure that all children have access to improved quality of teaching by ensuring that we reform initial teacher training in a way that builds—yes—on some of the successes that we have seen in the past. We are also ensuring that new teaching schools are established. Many of these will be free schools and many higher education institutions, including the university of Cumbria, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), are playing a role in helping to improve teacher training. Thanks to the expansion of Teach First, which the previous Government—yes—supported, but not as generously as we are doing, there are more talented teachers everywhere. I was delighted to be able to share a platform and a room with the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) on Friday, when we signalled that Teach First was expanding into the north-east of England, something that was never accomplished under the previous Government, but which, under this reforming and progressive Government—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Secretary of State will resume his seat. We are moving on to the next question.

**Vocational Education**

4. **Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):** What plans he has to improve vocational education; and if he will make a statement. [38221]

**The Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (Mr John Hayes):**

The Government are keen to make significant improvements to vocational education, its organisation, funding and target audience—for example, through university technical colleges. Professor Alison Wolf has been commissioned to produce a report which will be published in spring 2011 and her findings will inform our determination to reinvigorate vocational education.

**Graham Evans:** How will the Government boost the number of apprentices and ensure that those who complete their training will get the status and recognition that they deserve?

**Mr Hayes:** It was Dr. Johnson who said that a lack of manual dexterity constitutes a form of ignorance. The Government are determined to boost the number of apprenticeships, which is why we have put in place funding for 75,000 more adult apprenticeships and 30,000 more apprenticeships for young people. Today, in *The Times*—I know you will have seen it, Mr Speaker; others may not have done—we have for the first time celebrated the achievements of those who achieved higher apprenticeships in 2010. This ensures that apprentices and all those who aspire to and achieve vocational qualifications get the status and recognition that they deserve.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the Minister.

**Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab):** Can the Minister tell the House what evidence—the operative word is "evidence"—supports his decision to limit the curriculum so severely and thereby exclude many thousands of young people from accessing the curriculum successfully?

**Mr Hayes:** The evidence is that we have commissioned a report on vocational learning, we have put in place funding for apprenticeships, and we are determined to ensure that the status of those vocational courses is maintained and grown. The evidence is simply the evidence of the Government's commitment and record so far in office. That is good enough for me. It should be good enough for the hon. Lady.

**University Technical Colleges**

5. **Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):** What qualifications he expects to be required for pupils to gain entry to university technical colleges. [38222]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb):** University technical colleges will be 14-to-19 institutions, with 14 being the normal age of entry. We do not expect pupils to be required to have any qualifications to gain entry to a university technical college.

**Andrew Selous:** I share the hope that university technical colleges will indeed bring poverty-busting structural change, and I look forward to the establishment of one in Houghton Regis in my constituency. I hope my hon. Friend can reassure me that university technical colleges will not seek to exclude those who are not predicted to get brilliant GCSEs, who may well have just the right attitude to shine in a university technical college.

**Mr Gibb:** I am happy to provide that reassurance, and to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his active support for the central Bedfordshire UTC proposals. UTCs will be required to adopt fair and open admission arrangements. They will give priority to the same statutory groups as maintained schools, children with a statement of special educational needs and children in care, and they will not be able to require that children have reached certain levels of attainment or that they have specific qualifications in order to qualify for admission. UTCs are for young people of all abilities.

**Mr Denis MacShane** (Rotherham) (Lab): I welcome the proposal because we have in this country almost a contempt for technical qualifications and for engineering. Turning that around will require giving orders to the professional organisations and increasing the role and status of people coming out of those courses. Perhaps we might have one or two members of the Cabinet who are thus qualified, even if their only engineering qualification is engineering their financial blind trust to hide where their money is.

**Mr Gibb:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to support this development. We intend to have 12 UTCs up and running by the end of the spending review period. He is also right to emphasise the importance of science, technology, engineering and maths, which the Government are committed to.

**Mr Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for UTCs, but is he confident that the English baccalaureate will not have a cramping impact on the power of innovation in institutions such as UTCs, so that we can ensure the most appropriate education for all their pupils?

**Mr Gibb:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. The English baccalaureate is designed to leave ample time in the curriculum for other subjects, including vocational subjects. In the countries around the world that have the best technical education systems, core academic subjects are taught alongside, not instead of, technical or vocational subjects until their students reach the age of 15 or 16. Subjects such as modern languages are critical for the technical and vocational success of young people.

### Children's Homes

6. **Ann Coffey** (Stockport) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to reduce the incidence of children going missing from children's homes. [38223]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton):** All local authorities are required to have procedures and processes in place to minimise the risk of children in care going missing. In April, we will bring in revised national minimum standards for children's homes, which will strengthen the national guidance on this issue.

**Ann Coffey:** In Greater Manchester, more than half of all missing incidents involve children from children's homes. According to a recent Barnardo's report, many of those children are at risk from paedophile and criminal gangs. Will the Minister consider issuing statutory guidance

to local safeguarding boards, asking them to monitor all incidents of children going missing and share that information with other agencies, such as Ofsted, so that action can be taken to reduce the number of children going missing and the risk to them?

**Tim Loughton:** The hon. Lady makes a good point and I pay tribute to her work as chair of the all-party group on runaway and missing children and adults. I am looking closely at the Barnardo's report with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire). This is a serious issue, but, without being complacent, the incidence of children running away from children's homes has been reducing over the past few years, and the figures are calculated on the basis of those who are missing for more than 24 hours, but in fact most children return within 48 hours. It is something that I will continue to look at.

### Music Education

7. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on music education in schools of reductions in his Department's funding for music services. [38224]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** I am happy to inform the House that this morning we published Mr Darren Henley's review on music education, and I am hugely grateful to him for his in-depth consideration of the issues and for the realistic and practical measures he has put forward. Following that report, I can now confirm that funding for music education in 2011-12 will be the same as it was in 2010-11—£82.5 million. That is not a cut; it is a very good settlement for music services, which is consistent with our broader strategies for school autonomy and deficit reduction.

**Diana Johnson:** I, too, pay tribute to the work of Darren Henley, who has at heart the need to ensure that young people get a good music education. Labour's £332 million investment in school music helped children from poor and average backgrounds access good education in music. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the £82.5 million, although ring-fenced, is a real-terms cut? Local authorities are already slashing music services in their areas, so rather than blowing his own trumpet, should the Secretary of State not admit that this is really a cut, just as was his cut to school sport?

**Michael Gove:** Once again, we have had a superb pun: we had trumpets from the Back Benches and fiddles from the Front Bench, but what a pity they are not singing from the same hymn sheet as Darren Henley, local authorities and all those who care about music. From Alfie Boe the tenor, to Julian Lloyd Webber the cello player, everyone in the world of music is saying that today is good news for all children who want to learn more about music, including your own, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful.

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): Bedfordshire Orchestral Society has an enviable record of promoting music in schools, but it is reliant on funding from two local

authorities. Even ahead of today's good news from the Secretary of State, Bedford borough council has committed funding, so will my right hon. Friend join me in encouraging Central Bedfordshire council to do likewise?

**Michael Gove:** When Central Bedfordshire council hears that my hon. Friend and I are both on the case, I am sure that it will be only too happy to join in and become as one in harmony with us both.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** Once again, there is a chasm between rhetoric and reality: the big announcement is a cash freeze, which in real terms is a cut. It is another example of confused decision making. The right hon. Gentleman promises to increase access to music, but the cuts mean that 60% of schools, as surveyed by the National Association of Music Educators, are cutting music provision this year. Does he accept that, unless music is protected and ring-fenced not just for one year but into the future, all his rhetoric will lead to less music provision in deprived areas?

**Michael Gove:** There is a huge chasm between rhetoric and reality: the chasm between the apocalyptic rhetoric that we heard from the Opposition Front Benchers and their sock puppets elsewhere, and the reality of increased funding for those areas that need it most, and new funding for the teach music first scheme, ensuring that some of our most talented musicians from leading music schools and conservatoires work in our most challenging schools to ensure that every child has an opportunity, which I, like the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), believe should be extended to all. It is only under this Government, with this announcement on school music and our pupil premium, that we are at last ensuring that money goes to those children who need it most, instead of being wasted on the quangos and bureaucrats that characterised the past 13 wasted years.

### Early Years Education

8. **Lorraine Fullbrook (South Ribble) (Con):** What steps he is taking to improve the quality of the work force in early years education. [38225]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Sarah Teather):** The Government are committed to taking steps to improve and invest in the quality of the early education and child care work force. We continue to invest in the work force by making funding available via the new early intervention grant, and by committing to fund the early years professional status and new leaders in early years programmes in 2011-12. We will publish proposals to support further improvement in the quality of the work force in the spring.

**Lorraine Fullbrook:** Last week, when opening the Hesketh Bank children's centre in my constituency, I saw at first hand how essential the excellent staff are in helping families and children in the local community. How will the new leaders programme and the early years professional status programme ensure that more talented and committed people work in early years education?

**Sarah Teather:** I am very pleased to hear about the excellent work of the children's centre staff in Hesketh Bank. The two programmes to which my hon. Friend refers will focus specifically on professionalism in the early years work force. The early years professional status programme enables people who already work in the sector to have their experience acknowledged, their skills refreshed and their learning updated. The new leaders programme is based around the Teach First and Teach Next programmes and designed specifically to bring into the early years work force talented people, with the potential to be great leaders, who might not otherwise have thought about working in the sector.

**Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op):** The Minister will be aware of several distressing cases recently of children in early years care being abused by staff. Will she commit, as part of that development, to ensure greater child protection training for early years workers, so that they not only know what is happening to children in the home, but can construct working practices that ensure such abuse cannot take place in the future?

**Sarah Teather:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that matter, which has been very distressing to follow. She will be aware that no prosecutions have yet taken place, but I have asked Dame Clare Tickell to undertake a review for the Government of the early years foundation stage, and one of the things she is looking at is child protection and welfare.

### Religious Education

9. **Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con):** Whether he plans to include religious education in the humanities section of the English baccalaureate. [38226]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** Religious education did not count towards the humanities element of the English baccalaureate in the 2010 performance tables, because it is already a compulsory subject. One intention of the English baccalaureate is to encourage wider take-up of geography and history in addition to, rather than instead of, compulsory RE.

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but does he think that the exclusion of religious education from the English baccalaureate might dramatically reduce the number of students studying the RE full course at GCSE and have a knock-on and detrimental effect on the number of candidates for religious education teacher training?

**Michael Gove:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for making her point. We all recognise that high-quality religious education is a characteristic of the very best schools—faith schools and non-faith schools. But the decision to include geography and history in the humanities section of the English baccalaureate will mean that those subjects, which have seen a decline in the number of students pursuing them, will at last see an increase, alongside modern foreign languages. As the Minister of State, Department for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb) pointed out, the English baccalaureate is intended to be a suite of core academic qualifications, which every child can be expected to follow alongside other qualifications, whether vocational, RE or others.

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State tell the House on what research or evidence he has based his selection of subjects in the new English baccalaureate?

**Michael Gove:** Yes. The research and evidence that I undertook was to look at what the highest performing education jurisdictions do. When the OECD published its table on how our country had been doing in education over the past 10 years, I was struck to see that under Labour's stewardship we had slipped in the international league tables for English, for mathematics and for science. I was also struck by the fact that the numbers of students studying modern foreign languages, history and geography were declining. I was particularly struck by the fact that only last week the Russell group said that these are the subjects which the best universities expect of students if they are to go on and prosper and achieve the level of social mobility that sadly eluded us when the right hon. Gentleman was in government.

**Andy Burnham:** The Secretary of State mentions the OECD, so let me quote from last year's PISA—programme for international student assessment—report, which says:

“Most successful school systems grant greater autonomy to individual schools to design curricula and assessment policies”.

That is in direct contradiction to what he has just said. I support the right of every child to take these five GCSEs, but it is a narrow selection, and not right for everybody, and the way in which he has introduced it is restricting student choice right now. Many feel that it is not a fair way to judge all children and all schools, suggesting that some are second best. So is he really saying to young people and employers today that dead languages are more important than business studies, engineering, information and communications technology, music and RE? Will he not listen to the call from the Chair of the Select Committee, made just a few moments ago, to allow a broader and more flexible English baccalaureate?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but these questions are becoming excessively long. I hope that we can have a pithy response, and I am sure we will, from the Secretary of State.

**Michael Gove:** I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman has the brass neck to quote the PISA figures when they show that on his watch the standard of education which was offered to young people in this country declined relative to our international competitors. Literacy, down; numeracy, down; science, down: fail, fail, fail. I am surprised that he has the brass neck to stand here and to say that working-class children should not study modern foreign languages, should not study science, should not study history and should not study geography. If it is good enough for the likes of him, why should it not be good enough for working-class children elsewhere? Why is he pulling up the drawbridge on social mobility? Why is he saying that they are only fit to be hewers of wood and drawers of water rather than university graduates like you and me, Mr Speaker? Rank hypocrisy!

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): While I entirely accept the Secretary of State's point that RE is compulsory, it is not obligatory to

sit the GCSE. Does he agree that the very many faith schools where RE is compulsory are thereby penalised in the calculation of their English baccalaureate achievement?

**Michael Gove:** I appreciate the care with which my hon. Friend puts his question. I also appreciate the fact that he has been a very strong advocate for faith schools in his own constituency, including St Mary's, whose cause he has championed with particular eloquence. I do appreciate that many schools will want to offer RE as a GCSE, and indeed we would encourage them to do so, but the core element of the English baccalaureate relates to five subjects which we believe are the essential academic knowledge that students should be able to master. The news from the Russell group of universities last week that the subjects that we have chosen for the English baccalaureate are the subjects that they expect students to have if they are to go on to leading universities ensures that there is an appropriate match between schools and universities in advancing social mobility rather than seeing it decline, as happened in the past 13 years.

### Youth Services

10. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure the provision of good quality youth services. [38227]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton):** I should point out that the Department for Education does not have responsibility for the provision of youth services in Wales. However, we are working to modernise and improve the quality of services for young people in England with our stakeholders, including, of course, young people themselves. The early intervention grant is providing more than £2 billion per annum to local authorities' funding for early intervention services, including for young people. We secured £134 million in capital funding for the remaining myplace projects. The Government are also launching the national citizen service programme, which over time will offer all 16-year-olds a shared opportunity for personal and social development, community service and engagement.

**Nick Smith:** Youth services around the country are anticipating crisis as councils are forced to pass on savage cuts, and the Government seem unwilling to protect these vital services. Will the Minister confirm that the youth service, which provides services week in, week out, has a distinct and specialist role and will not be replaced by the national citizen service programme?

**Tim Loughton:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of good quality youth services, particularly those that are focused on the people who will get the most from them. To reiterate the point made by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather), it is the duty of local authorities to choose how best to spend their funds. National citizen service funding is a separate funding stream that was negotiated with the Treasury, and it does not impact on the funding for youth services from the Department for Education.

### Schools (Loughborough)

11. **Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of school standards in Loughborough constituency. [38228]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb):** In 2010, at key stage 2, 72% of pupils in Loughborough achieved level 4 or above in English and maths combined, compared with 73% in England as a whole. In 2010, at key stage 4, 56% of pupils in maintained schools in Loughborough achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C, including English and maths, compared with 55% in maintained schools in England as a whole.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the Minister for that reply. The GCSE results in Loughborough for the past few years have consistently been below the English average. Locally, many people attribute that to the fact that pupils change school at 14 in Leicestershire, which unsettles pupils and is difficult for teachers. Is he aware that many people in my constituency would like that system to change? Will the Department listen to head teachers on that issue?

**Mr Gibb:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in Loughborough. When she and I visited Humphrey Perkins high school and Loughborough Church of England primary school together before the election, it was clear that she was passionate about education and raising standards. I know that there is a widely held view in Loughborough that changing school at 14 can have a negative impact on GCSE results at 16. Improving standards must be the driver for local restructuring. I know that that is my hon. Friend's rationale for seeking to change the system in Loughborough. Lord Hill has a meeting with her and some teachers from Loughborough tomorrow—I mean literally tomorrow, not the parliamentary tomorrow—and I know that he will be keen to explore these issues in as helpful a way as possible.

### Core Subjects

12. **Richard Harrington** (Watford) (Con): What steps he plans to take to strengthen the teaching of core subjects in schools. [38229]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb):** The White Paper "The Importance of Teaching" emphasises the importance of high quality teaching in the core subjects. We are introducing the English baccalaureate, which recognises achievement in the core subjects of English, maths, science, a humanity and a foreign language. It is intended to ensure that children receive a broad and balanced education, with time in the curriculum for vocational and creative subjects. We are taking steps to strengthen the teaching of reading through the use of systematic synthetic phonics.

**Richard Harrington:** I am sure the Minister is aware that in 2009, fewer than one in 25 children who were on free school meals took chemistry or physics, one in five took history, and fewer than 15% took geography or French. What plans does he have to ensure that children from poorer backgrounds get access to a proper academic education?

**Mr Gibb:** I share my hon. Friend's concern. That is why we have introduced the English baccalaureate. We are concerned that the number of pupils who currently receive a broad education in core academic subjects is far too small. That is particularly the case for pupils in disadvantaged areas. The English baccalaureate is designed to recognise the success of pupils who gain GCSEs or International GCSEs at grades A\* to C across a core of academic subjects: English, maths, a humanity, the sciences and a language. We want to encourage more people to study those core subjects and to give all pupils the opportunity to study them, regardless of the school.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): Many youngsters achieve good grades in GCSE maths without ever having studied algebra. That puts them at a disadvantage when they want to pursue mathematics beyond GCSE. Should algebra not be a vital part of GCSE maths?

**Mr Gibb:** Yet again, the hon. Gentleman says something with which I wholeheartedly agree. He is passionate about raising standards in our schools, as are we. That is why we recently announced the setting up of a review of the national curriculum. An expert advisory panel of head teachers from around the country will consider English, maths and science as the first part of the review.

### Special Educational Needs

13. **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): How many applications his Department has received to establish free schools for children with special educational needs. [38230]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** My Department has received a number of proposals from groups and individuals interested in establishing free schools wholly or mainly catering for children with special educational needs. We have received more than 240 applications overall.

**Stuart Andrew:** It has been a pleasure of mine to work with two groups that are hoping to take advantage of the policy. One of them, the Lighthouse project in Leeds, this weekend submitted an excellent application to open a school for young people suffering with autism spectrum disorders. It is eager to do so in the autumn, but after what it has heard from the Department, it is concerned that there may be some delays. It does not want to lose momentum. Will my right hon. Friend agree to meet me and representatives of that organisation to see what we can do to progress the application?

**Michael Gove:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and the Lighthouse group. I have to stress that it is important to ensure that all the issues surrounding the establishment of any new school are successfully navigated. Opening any free school in September 2011 is a challenging timetable. Under the last Government it would take between five and 10 years for a new school to open, so it is remarkable that so many may open within a year. I will look closely at the matter, but I suspect that given the complexity of some of the issues involved we may not be able to open in September 2011. However, let us discuss it and ensure that we can support—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I gently ask the Secretary of State to face the Chamber, so that I can be the full beneficiary of his eloquence?

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State bear in mind the fact that successful special educational needs provision depends very much on integration with other schools? That was the finding of the former Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families. We very much support good SEN provision, but it must be integrated with the local schools that take other kinds of children.

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely recognise that when we are talking about children with special educational needs, there is such a broad and complex spectrum that one solution will not fit all children. I had the opportunity to visit Redcar community college on Thursday, and I saw there an imaginative proposal to co-locate Kirkleatham Hall special school with that college. That seems to be the right solution there, but different solutions will apply elsewhere. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ian Swales) for his impassioned advocacy of those two schools.

**Dan Rogerson** (North Cornwall) (LD): Further to the Secretary of State's answer, is he open to suggestions for replacing provision offered by pupil referral units in some parts of the country? Outcomes at such units are variable across the country.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and one thing that the Education Bill will do is make it easier to ensure that we can have high quality provision for students who are excluded for whatever reason.

#### Home-to-school Travel

14. **Mrs Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Whom his Department plans to consult in its review of home-to-school travel; and when that review will be completed. [38231]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** My Department is reviewing home-to-school transport policy, which has remained largely unchanged since the Education Act 1944, when the social, economic and education landscape was very different. As part of our review, we are considering how best practice can be spread to all local authorities. We will make further announcements in due course.

**Mrs Glindon:** North Tyneside's Tory-led council is currently reviewing its home-to-school travel policy to include a proposal to stop free and subsidised travel for children who travel more than three miles to school. As that will affect more than 400 pupils who travel from across the borough to St Thomas More RC high school, which is the only faith school in North Tyneside, will the Secretary of State please make a statement to support my constituents and their children against that unfair proposal?

**Michael Gove:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that issue. It is important that we support the exercising of school choice, and that we support faith schools and the great schools of North Tyneside, such as Whitley Bay high school, whose headmaster I had the opportunity to talk to on Thursday when I visited

the north-east. I will look into the specific situation that the hon. Lady mentioned, but of course one thing that all local authorities are dealing with is the drastic economic inheritance bequeathed by the last Labour Government.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the Secretary of State, who I know is a friend of North Yorkshire and a frequent visitor, look carefully at the proposals that North Yorkshire county council is coming up with for a similar review, bearing in mind that the distances that children have to travel cannot be covered by anything other than either bus or car?

**Michael Gove:** I am very well aware of the specific challenges that North Yorkshire has in helping to ensure that children can exercise school choice and go to the most appropriate local school. I know that it is one of the most successful local authorities in terms of both value for money and school performance, so I look forward to working with my hon. Friend and the local authority to come to the right outcome.

#### School Discipline

15. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve school discipline in (a) Kettering constituency, (b) Northamptonshire and (c) England. [38232]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb):** Raising standards of behaviour in our schools is a key priority for the coalition Government. It goes to the root of how we raise standards, and it lies at the heart of our determination to close the attainment gap between those from poor and wealthier backgrounds. The Education Bill, which we will debate tomorrow, sets out reforms to tackle poor behaviour, making it easier to impose no-notice detentions, extending search powers for items that disrupt teachers and making it easier for heads to expel violent and persistently disruptive pupils.

**Mr Hollobone:** Will my hon. Friend ensure that, under this Government, badly behaved pupils who do not want to learn cannot damage the education of hard-working pupils who do?

**Mr Gibb:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is not just the rights of the pupils who disrupt the class that are important—although they are—but those of the overwhelming majority of students in class, which we must also protect.

#### Education Maintenance Allowance

16. **Hugh Bayley** (York Central) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the savings to accrue from terminating education maintenance allowance payments in September 2011 for students who are already part of the way through a two-year programme of study. [38233]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** The cost of continuing to pay EMA from September 2011 for a further year to all students currently receiving it is estimated at £300 million, excluding the costs of administration.



**Hugh Bayley:** York college tells me that, last September, on the Secretary of State's watch, 650 students started two-year courses in the expectation of getting an education maintenance allowance for two years. To continue it would cost less than £500,000. Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider?

**Michael Gove:** I am very grateful for the moderate and considered way in which the hon. Gentleman puts his point—I know how passionate he is about further education. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Hon. Gentlemen should not yell from a sedentary position. I want to hear the Secretary of State's answer, and I hope that the House does, too.

**Michael Gove:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is ironic that we were just discussing poor behaviour and people in class disrupting those who want to learn. I am keen to work with the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), and college principals in particular, to ensure that our new, enhanced learner support fund can help all those vulnerable young people who need support to stay in education and learning.

**George Eustice** (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): When the Secretary of State assesses the size of the discretionary learner support to be made available to each college, will he consider at least making one of the criteria the number of second-year students who currently receive EMA, to assist colleges and students in the transition to the new system?

**Michael Gove:** That is a constructive suggestion, which I will consider as part of the review.

### Topical Questions

T1. [38243] **Mr Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** I am pleased to announce that, on 1 February, more than another 30 schools converted to academy status, meaning that there are now more than 440 academies. Tomorrow we will debate the Education Bill, which will give all Members an opportunity to consider the further advance of the movement, which gives all head teachers more autonomy, and promises all children the raising of standards. The Education Bill will also provide all Members with an opportunity to vote for measures that will ensure better discipline and higher standards in every school.

**Mr Slaughter:** The Schools Minister, the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb), is fond of saying that there is adequate money in the early intervention grant to fund the network of children's centres. An education authority such as Hammersmith and Fulham is cutting by half in one year the children's centre budget, closing nine out of 15 centres, including phase 1 centres in deprived areas, and sacking 50 staff—does that give the Secretary of State and the Minister pause for thought? If so, what will they do about education authorities that are wrecking children's centres?

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Sarah Teather):** The hon. Gentleman has expressed his concern to me about the position in his area, and we discussed it last week. I will say what I said in answer to other hon. Members: good local authorities are restructuring with care, and looking at methods of clustering centres to merge back-office functions, because they know that that is the way to benefit from the Government's work on payment by results.

T3. [38245] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): One of my local head teachers said to me last year that it can take up to a year to move a teacher who is not up to their particular responsibilities. Given that that could be a critical year for the children concerned, what steps can my right hon. Friend take to speed up that process?

**Michael Gove:** No one is served when people who should not be in the classroom continue there. It increases the burden on other professionals and deprives children of the highest quality education. We are reviewing the professional standards for all teachers to make it easier for head teachers to ensure that staff who underperform are given the support that they need to improve or to move on.

T6. [38248] **Mr Dave Watts** (St Helens North) (Lab): Given that the cuts in EMA will affect more than 2,600 low-paid families in my constituency, is the Minister not ashamed of that policy? What will he do to increase the top-up learner funds to help at least some of those families?

**The Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (Mr John Hayes):** I have made it clear that we are absolutely determined to ensure that the worst-off are not disadvantaged by the new arrangements. However, I believe that there is a strong case for greater discretion to target some of things that Opposition Front Benchers identified as salient in helping people to achieve their best.

T4. [38246] **Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way of getting more capital into free schools would be to enable them to obtain it on the open market by allowing them the freedom to make a profit, as they can in Sweden? When will my right hon. Friend have the courage of his convictions and enable free schools to have the same freedoms as they have in Sweden?

**Michael Gove:** It is always a pleasure to hear the radical proposals of my hon. Friend, whose stewardship of money when he was a councillor in Wandsworth and a Minister in a previous Conservative Government is a model to all. I shall look carefully at the case he makes, but the one thing that is clear is that we already know that our programme ensures that more new school places are being provided more cheaply than was the case under the previous Labour Government.

T7. [38249] **Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): Today is the first day of national apprenticeships week. We know that one of the most significant barriers to young people taking up apprenticeships is getting the right advice at school. In fact, there is now a confused

situation, because the Government want to end Connexions and introduce an all-age service. Will the Minister explain what extra funds will be available to schools to procure advice for young people?

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Lady is right to champion apprenticeships week. Indeed, she has personally championed apprenticeships in her constituency, and she knows that the Government are having ongoing discussions to see how we can help with that. It is critical that people get good, empirical, independent advice and guidance on vocational options such as apprenticeships. In the Education Bill, which the House is about to consider, we will make it a duty for schools to secure that independent, impartial advice on vocational learning.

T5. [38247] **Dr Julian Huppert** (Cambridge) (LD): Cambridgeshire gets less school funding per pupil than almost anywhere in the country. If we received the per pupil average across England, we would have some £34 million more for education. Can the Secretary of State explain why pupils in Cambridgeshire deserve so much less money, and will he review that?

**Michael Gove:** They deserve to be treated like every other student. We are reviewing funding and will be publishing a paper in the spring to try to ensure greater equity in the allocation of schools funding.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): All 19 of the children's centres in Sefton are under review. Does the Minister stand by her statement that local authorities have a legal duty to maintain a sufficient network of children's centres? If she does, how many of Sefton council's 19 children's centres should it keep open to meet those legal duties?

**Sarah Teather:** The hon. Gentleman and I discussed this matter in detail when he introduced an Adjournment debate last week. I stand by my statement. Similarly, the council has a legal duty to consult before closing, opening or restructuring in its area. I am sure that it is in the middle of that consultation at the moment, and that parents will make their views very clear.

T8. [38250] **Mr John Leech** (Manchester, Withington) (LD): Can the Secretary of State assure me that changes to education maintenance allowance will not leave college students disadvantaged compared with school sixth-formers, who will still be entitled to free school meals?

**Michael Gove:** That point is well made by my hon. Friend. We have an anomaly at the moment, whereby the position of those in colleges and those in schools is not the same. The whole thrust of our policy making has been to try to ensure a level playing field between schools and colleges. The point he makes with respect to EMA weighs heavily with my colleagues and me.

**Mrs Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): Staff at the Independent Safeguarding Authority in Darlington learned from *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday that the vetting and barring scheme is to be significantly scaled back. What conversations has the Secretary of State had with the Home Secretary about the reduction of that scheme, which is likely to affect child protection?

**Michael Gove:** I had the opportunity to visit the hon. Lady's constituency on Thursday, when I spoke to staff at Mowden Hall, the Department for Education headquarters in Darlington. I am pleased to say that I am the first Secretary of State to visit Darlington and Mowden Hall since the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett), which is indicative of this Government's commitment to the north-east, which was sadly not shared by the previous Administration.

A response to the Government's review of vetting and barring will be made. The House will be informed of the details first. The one thing that we know is that the bureaucratic burden on the voluntary sector will be lifted. We will not only have a more proportionate system, but more children will be kept safe. Above all, we will ensure that volunteers and those who do so much to help in our society are given the trust that they need in order to carry on doing the wonderful work that they do.

T9. [38251] **Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks) (Con): Will Ministers be prepared to look again at the rather puzzling exclusion of classical civilisation from the list of humanities scored in the English baccalaureate? Is classical civilisation not a humanity?

**Michael Gove:** I am tempted to reply, "Timeo danaos et dona ferentes," which, broadly translated, means, "Beware of geeks bearing gifts." However, my hon. Friend is an impassioned champion of both Latin and Greek and the wider application of the classics in state schools. Latin is now on offer in more state schools than independent, fee-paying schools, and Latin and Greek are included in the English baccalaureate, along with modern foreign languages. His impassioned advocacy of classical civilisation certainly weighs with me.

**Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I recently met some of the 229 students at Lewisham college in receipt of education maintenance allowance who told me that they had spent hundreds of pounds on equipment, IT and books. The Minister knows that there is a difference between the aspiration to be at college and sustaining attendance over a two-year period. Will he guarantee that no student in that situation will be forced to discontinue their second year because of lack of financial assistance?

**Mr Hayes:** The right hon. Lady is a champion of Lewisham college, which I have visited twice—I have laid bricks at Lewisham college, by the way, although not with any great skill. I can assure her that the places of college students, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear, will not be put at risk by changes we make, and we will certainly take full account of representations from her and others on that point.

T10. [38252] **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): When will the Minister announce further details of the learner support fund, including the amounts and time scales of such support to colleges across the country?

**Mr Hayes:** My hon. Friend makes a strong case for colleges. Perhaps it is time that I put on record the fact that this Government believe that further education colleges are the unheralded triumph of the English

education system. Furthermore, we will continue to give them greater discretion, greater opportunity and greater freedoms in order to allow those with the tastes and talents to pursue vocational and other kinds of learning to fulfil their potential.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State had a look at the letter from the headmaster of Tibshelf school explaining the difficulties of having to deal with the split school site in Bolsover and North East Derbyshire? Has he also received a letter from the Derby building company Tomlinson and Sons which expected to build the school, or does he have the same disease as the Deputy Prime Minister and stop dealing with his Red Box after 3 o'clock?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful for that well-crafted question from the eloquent, grammar-school-educated Member for Bolsover. I am well aware that Derbyshire county council, under many years of Labour rule, did not secure value for money for the taxpayer. I am pleased that the incredibly wasteful Building Schools for the Future scheme is being replaced with a more effective way of ensuring that money goes to the front line, and I look forward in due course to visiting Bolsover and North East Derbyshire with him and the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) in order to salute what a coalition Government are doing for a generation betrayed by Labour.

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I know that the Secretary of State is a strong supporter of our state boarding schools, such as Wymondham college in my constituency, which is doing excellent work pioneering special needs and academy schooling in the area. As he may know, Wymondham college was recently awarded academy status in order to pursue that work. Today, however, I received a letter from the college saying that the decision has been inexplicably reversed by officials in his Department. Will he agree to meet me and a delegation of Norfolk MPs to discuss the matter?

**Michael Gove:** I have to confess myself perplexed by what my hon. Friend tells me, but of course I would be delighted to meet him. I know what impassioned advocates he and my hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) have been for Wymondham college.

**Natascha Engel:** Children, parents and their teachers were delighted last month that the Government changed their minds about scrapping school sports partnerships. Unfortunately, however, the Secretary of State forgot to reinstate the money for them. I know that he is a very busy man and it was just an oversight, but will he take this opportunity to reassure the House that he will give school sports partnerships their money back?

**Michael Gove:** I am overjoyed that in all my meetings with Baroness Campbell, the head of the Youth Sports

Trust, since the announcement, she has expressed her delight that the funding that we have made available will be sufficient to ensure that the good work continues. I am reassured by her enthusiasm for this proposal, and I hope that the hon. Lady will be reassured too.

**Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): As Ministers review policy for young people and the youth services, will they ensure that they engage with local authorities, young people themselves and the voluntary sector to ensure that no local authority withdraws youth services where, with a bit of imagination, alternatives are available?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton):** My right hon. Friend makes a very good point about the importance of youth services, particularly of local authorities speaking to the people for whom those youth services are intended—young people. Not only has my Department set up a group from the voluntary sector dealing with youth issues, but a group of young people representing many of those organisations will be meeting me shortly to discuss the impact of the current situation on the charities and services in their areas.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): The Minister responsible for children's centres repeats the claim that good local authorities will merge their back-room functions and protect front-line services. Flagship Conservative council Westminster is merging back-room functions with Hammersmith, yet we expect children's centres to face a significant reduction in staff, in the range of services and in outreach facilities, which are anticipated to fall by 40%. Is Westminster a good council?

**Sarah Teather:** I repeat that we are encouraging local authorities to focus in particular on outcomes, rather than on inputs. That is why we are beginning the process of payment by results. Local authorities will need to ensure that their services are structured in such a way that they improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families, otherwise they will not benefit.

**Margot James** (Stourbridge) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend investigate the activities of the Anti Academies Alliance, which is threatening a series of political strikes against any school seeking academy status?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the House's attention to the activities of the Anti Academies Alliance, a group that is sponsored by, among others, the Socialist Workers party. There are a number of politically motivated strikes that some have been contemplating. I hope that Members in every part of the House will condemn any politically motivated strike action that makes children a political plaything. I also look forward to hearing from the Opposition Front Bench a clear and unequivocal condemnation of such activity.

## EU Council and North Africa

3.31 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on last week's European Council and comment on today's review by the Cabinet Secretary of the papers relating to the release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, which was published at 1pm today.

The Council discussed three principal issues: first, the continuing efforts to tackle instability in the eurozone; secondly, the role of energy and innovation in delivering a comprehensive growth strategy for the EU; and, thirdly, the situation in Egypt. Let me take each in turn.

Eurozone members are quite rightly looking at ways to resolve some of the underlying problems of the euro crisis, including by strengthening economic co-ordination arrangements. My job is to protect and promote Britain's interests. As I have said before, it is in our interests that the eurozone sorts out its problems. A strong and stable eurozone is in Britain's interests, but in my view there are three absolute essentials for Britain.

First, we should retain our national currency and our ability to set our own monetary policy, in the UK and for the UK. Secondly, we should ensure that we are not dragged into a new mechanism for bailing out eurozone countries in future. As I described when reporting back from the last European Council, we have achieved that. Thirdly, and most complex, although we should not prevent eurozone countries from coming together to deal with the problems that they face, we must ensure that this does not compromise the single market, which is an important British success story in Europe and should remain one of our key interests. There is a danger that, in developing stronger co-ordination, eurozone countries start affecting things that are more properly part of the single market for all EU members. I made sure that this point was recognised at the Council, and I secured specific assurances to protect the single market. The statement by the eurozone countries, which will be available to Members and which we all debated, makes that clear.

Extending the single market to energy has been a long-held objective of recent Governments of all parties. Achieving that could add up to 0.8% of European GDP and mean another 5 million jobs across Europe by 2020. If we make a 20% improvement on energy efficiency by 2020, that could significantly reduce the pressure on household bills. A single market in energy is good for jobs, competition and energy security, so practical co-operation and competition with the rest of Europe on this is firmly in our national interest. The Council agreed that

"the EU needs a fully functioning, interconnected and integrated internal energy market,"

and that

"the internal market in energy should be completed by 2014".

We also agreed that

"major efforts are needed to modernise and expand Europe's energy infrastructure and to interconnect networks across borders."

Britain should strongly support that, not least as we plan for the North sea offshore super-grid. The conclusions on innovation are also completely in line with what Britain supports and has been trying to achieve. Innovation and energy policy should be part of the growth strategy

that we are arguing for in Europe. We will publish our own proposals before the next European Council in March, which will specifically be discussing that subject.

Next, let me turn to Egypt. I was determined that the Council would not produce one of its heavily "caveated" and sometimes rather unclear statements, and I think the declaration that we agreed is strong. First, we agreed that the Egyptian authorities should

"meet the aspirations of the Egyptian people with political reform not repression".

Secondly, it is clear that a transition is needed to broad-based democratic government, and the declaration is emphatic that

"this transition should start now."

The European Council was also clear that this should involve the building blocks of free and open societies and democratic institutions, such as freedom of assembly, the rule of law, freedom of speech and free and fair elections.

I believe that there is a strong case—the European statement reflects this—that the EU needs to look hard at its role in that region. We have spent billions of euros of taxpayers' money in Egypt and neighbouring countries, with carefully crafted association agreements and action plans. We have offered funds, access to our markets and other assistance in exchange for progress on the rule of law, democracy and human rights. In Egypt, however, there has been little or no progress on torture, the judiciary, democracy or ending the state of emergency that has now lasted for 30 years. I believe that it is time for Europe to take a more hard-headed approach whereby the conditions on which we give money are real and insisted upon. I reaffirmed that message in a call at lunchtime today to Vice-President Suleiman, and urged him to take bold and credible steps to show that the transition that they are talking about in Egypt is irreversible, urgent and real.

Finally, let me say a word about the release of the Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, and the report that has been released today by the Cabinet Secretary. I have not altered my view, which I expressed at the time, that releasing Mr Megrahi was a very bad decision. He was convicted of the biggest mass murder in British history and, in my view, he should have died in jail. It was a bad decision, and the last Government should have condemned it rather than going along with it.

I commissioned this report during my visit to Washington last year. At the time, there was renewed controversy around the decision, a congressional inquiry into it, and calls for a bigger UK inquiry. Concerns were also being put forward, quite forcefully, in America and elsewhere that the whole release might have come about as a result of pressure by BP on the British Government to pressure the Scottish Government to make it happen. I do not believe that that is true, and this report shows that it is not true. It was a decision taken by the Scottish Government—the wrong decision, but their decision none the less. But in view of the continuing speculation in the UK and the US, I thought it right that all the British Government paperwork should be re-examined to assess whether more should be published, and I asked the Cabinet Secretary to do just that.

That is what Sir Gus O'Donnell has now done. In order to address the concerns that were being expressed, he was asked to look at three specific areas. First,

whether there was any new evidence that the British Government directly or indirectly pressured or lobbied the Scottish Government for the release of Megrahi. Secondly, whether there was pressure placed on the Scottish Government by BP for the release of Megrahi. And, thirdly, whether the Libyans were told that there were linkages between BP's investment and the release of Megrahi, either under the prisoner transfer agreement or on compassionate grounds.

The report and all the paperwork, running to 140 pages, have been placed in the Library of the House. All decisions on the declassification and publication of papers belonging to the previous Administration were of course taken independently by the Cabinet Secretary. Under the convention covering papers of a previous Administration, he has consulted the appropriate former Ministers and the former Prime Minister. Sir Gus was assisted by the former Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, to provide an independent validation. He saw all the paperwork, redacted and un-redacted, and his job was to advise the Cabinet Secretary on whether his report and the documents now being published were consistent with the materials that were reviewed. He was also tasked with determining whether this was a fair and accurate account of events. He is content on both counts.

The Cabinet Secretary concludes that the former Government were clear that any decision on Mr Megrahi's release or transfer under the prisoner transfer agreement was one for the Scottish Government alone to take. He finds that none of the material he reviewed contradicts anything contained within the former Foreign Secretary's statement to the House in October 2009. He makes the same finding with respect to the current Foreign Secretary's letter to Senator Kerry in July last year and with respect to statements made by the former Prime Minister on this matter. He notes that it is evident that the Libyans made explicit links between progress on UK commercial interests in Libya and the removal of any clause on the prisoner transfer agreement whose effect would be to exclude Megrahi from it. He notes that after Megrahi had been diagnosed with terminal cancer in September 2008, the then Government's policy was based on an assessment that UK interests would be damaged if Megrahi were to die in a UK jail.

The Cabinet Secretary finds—and this is a key point:

“Policy was therefore developed that HMG should do all it could, whilst respecting devolved competences, to facilitate an appeal by the Libyans to the Scottish Government for Mr Megrahi's transfer under the PTA or release on compassionate grounds. . . as the best outcome for managing the risks faced by the UK”.

One of the Foreign Office papers released today makes it plain that

“Facilitating direct contact between the Libyans and the Scottish Executive is a key part of our game plan on Megrahi”.

Another Foreign Office paper from January 2009 states:

“We now need to go further and work actively, but discreetly, to ensure that Megrahi is transferred back to Libya under the PTA or failing that released on compassionate grounds.”

Frankly, I believe this tells us something that was not made clear at the time. It goes further than the account that the former Prime Minister and the former Foreign Secretary gave, as we were not told about facilitating an appeal, facilitating contact or a game plan. Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary's report says:

“Policy was therefore progressively developed that HMG should do all it could, whilst respecting devolved competences, to facilitate

an appeal by the Libyans to the Scottish Government for Mr Megrahi's transfer under the PTA or release on compassionate grounds. . . as the best outcome for managing the risks faced by the UK.”

Hon. Members will be able to study the paperwork and consider these issues for themselves. My view is clear: we have learned some new information, particularly about what we were told by Ministers, but I do not believe that these papers justify calls for a new inquiry. What they do provide is further evidence that this was, in my view, a flawed decision by the Scottish Executive, which we already knew; and I believe they point to some broader lessons from this affair.

It is clear from these papers that the last Government badly underestimated—in fact, failed seriously even to consider except as an issue to be managed—the reaction both in Britain and in the United States to the release of Mr Megrahi, above all among many of the families who lost loved ones. The key point that emerges to me from reading the paperwork is that insufficient consideration was given to the most basic question of all: was it really right for the British Government to “facilitate” an appeal by the Libyans to the Scottish Government in the case of an individual who was convicted of murdering 270 people, including 43 British citizens, 190 Americans and 19 other nationalities? That, for me, is the biggest lesson of this entire affair. For my part, I repeat: I believe it was profoundly wrong. The fact that, 18 months later, the Lockerbie bomber is living at liberty in Tripoli serves only to underline that. I commend this statement to the House.

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. I want to start, because of their importance, with the European Council conclusions on Egypt. I believe that the Egyptian people are continuing to show enormous courage and consistency in their desire for fundamental and lasting change. As I said last week, we support the call for a clear, credible and transparent path towards transition as soon as possible.

May I join the Prime Minister and his fellow leaders of the European Union in condemning any attacks on peaceful demonstrators and urge the authorities to allow the people of Egypt to continue to exercise their right to free and peaceful protests? The Prime Minister spoke to Vice-President Suleiman today, so will he update the House on his view of the current talks between the Vice-President and the Opposition parties and tell us whether he thinks these might lay the ground for the transition? Will he also offer the latest thinking of the EU and allies on the difficult issue of the role of President Mubarak during the transition?

Does the Prime Minister agree that the transition must include not just the provision of free and fair elections but other democratic structures, from a free press and diverse political parties to an independent judiciary? Will he also take the opportunity to update us on the steps he has taken since last week to ensure the safety of British nationals in Egypt during the current turbulence?

Let me deal with the other matters discussed at last Friday's European Council. On energy policy, we welcome the Council's conclusions on the internal market in gas and electricity and on the North sea grid. We also

[Edward Miliband]

welcome the Council's plans for improvement of Europe's energy infrastructure. Such action can make us more resilient in the face of potential supply disruptions, as we saw in 2008-09 during the dispute between Russia and Ukraine.

Let me ask the Prime Minister two questions about the way in which our policy at home relates to the discussions in Europe. First, we note the Council's conclusions on the importance of renewable energy. May I ask the Prime Minister to update the House on the implementation of the renewable heat incentive, which is a crucial part of his renewable energy strategy? It was due to come into force in April this year, but has now been delayed. Can the Prime Minister tell us when it will be introduced?

Secondly, given that the financing of energy investment is a big issue across Europe, which the Council rightly flags up, may I ask the Prime Minister to update the House on progress in regard to the green investment bank? He has committed himself to building on our plans. Can he tell us whether he intends this to be a fully fledged bank, as many have argued that it should be?

I welcome the Council's conclusions on the wider economy, including the eurozone. May I ask what discussions took place on the prospects for European growth next year? The summit has concluded that

"the overall economic outlook is improving",

but I have to say that that is not how it will seem to many families in the United Kingdom. Did the Prime Minister share the recent experience of the United Kingdom with the Council, and did he warn his colleagues that cutting budget deficits too far and too fast could have damaging effects on growth and employment?

Let me now turn to the case of Mr Megrahi. The Lockerbie bombing was a terrible atrocity, destroying hundreds of lives and scarring the families left behind. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell, has conducted a serious and thorough report on the papers relating to Mr Megrahi's release, and we will study it in detail.

Sir Gus's report makes three significant conclusions that pertain to Mr Megrahi's eventual release. First, it concludes that the United Kingdom Government were worried about the impact on British interests of Mr Megrahi's dying in jail. That is precisely what the former Foreign Secretary said in a statement to the House on 12 October 2009. Secondly, the report makes it clear that there is no evidence that

"UK interests played a part in Mr Megrahi's release by the Scottish Government on compassionate grounds."

Indeed, Sir Gus went on to conclude that

"the former Government took great effort not to communicate to the Scottish Government"

their view. Thirdly, he concluded:

"Mr Megrahi's release on compassionate grounds was a decision that Scottish Ministers alone could—and did—make."

So the message of today's report is that Mr Megrahi's release was not influenced by the United Kingdom Government. Perhaps the Prime Minister will tell us whether he agrees with that.

Above all, what today's report should remind us is that the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 must live in the memories of this country and the United States. We must take all possible steps to ensure that it never happens again.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and questions. I think that he is right about the response of the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United States to events in Egypt. While, in my view, one can never be certain that every statement made by the European Union is being listened to that carefully, I believe that in regard to its statement that the Egyptian Government must choose reform and not repression, the recent behaviour of the army in Egypt has been encouraging.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the current talks would be good enough to lead to transition. That is an extremely difficult question to answer. The point that I made to Vice-President Suleiman was that the more that the Egyptian Government could do to demonstrate that, for instance, they were bringing some opposition leaders into a transitional Government, the more they would be able to convince people that they were trying to reform, change, and deal with the constitutional issues. We have advised them to try to get ahead of events rather than taking a series of incremental steps, which I do not think are doing enough to respond to the aspirations of the Egyptian people. As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, the transition is not just about the date of an election; it is about those building blocks of democracy that I mentioned earlier.

All United Kingdom citizens who wanted to leave have been able to do so. We will continue to keep travel advice under review, including advice on travel to the Sinai peninsula.

The right hon. Gentleman asked two very good questions about the renewable heat incentive, which is an absolutely vital initiative that we are taking, and about the green investment bank. Both projects are moving ahead. The Government have published structural reform plans with dates for implementation, so one thing that others can do is hold us to account when things do not happen during the week in which they are meant to happen, and I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will do that.

On the economy, the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned sitting round the European Council table and talking about the impact of cutting budgets. My overwhelming impression was listening—we had to listen at some length—to reports from Greece, Portugal and Spain about their economies. Having seen what they have had to cut and the difficulties that they are in, the warning that I take from that is, "Do not go back into the danger zone, where those countries still are."

On al-Megrahi, I set it out as best I could in my statement. It is clear to me that those who think that a conspiracy was cooked up between BP, the British Government and the Scots to release al-Megrahi are not right. It was a Scottish decision by the Scottish Government—in my view, it was mistaken. As I have said, we have learned something today about what we were told in this House by Ministers. When hon. Members look at what was said in this House and what we have seen in these papers, I think that they will agree with me—I am trying to be very reasonable about this—that we were not given a complete picture.

**Sir Malcolm Rifkind** (Kensington) (Con): As the then Secretary of State for Scotland, I had to visit Lockerbie on the night of that disaster, when I saw the terrible consequences that flowed from it. I have always been appalled by the release of the convicted murderer. The Prime Minister has drawn attention to the Cabinet Secretary's conclusion, in which the Cabinet Secretary states that the previous Government wished to do all within their power to facilitate the release of Mr Megrahi. Do not the documents released today show that, in pursuit of that objective, a Foreign Office Minister met his Libyan ministerial counterpart, offered to send details of how release on compassionate grounds might be obtained and wrote to his ministerial colleague on 18 October 2008? Does that not confirm that the previous Government were up to their neck in this shoddy business, that they were desperate to see the release of Mr Megrahi and that they must therefore share responsibility with the Scottish Government for one of the most foolish and shameful decisions of recent years?

**The Prime Minister:** As ever, my right hon. and learned Friend brings a mixture of experience and precision to this issue. We were told by the previous Government what they did not want, which was the death of al-Megrahi in a Scottish prison, but we were not told by the previous Government what they did want, which was the facilitation of his release. That comes over, time and again. The most powerful point that my right hon. and learned Friend makes is this: in the end, that man was convicted of the largest mass murder in British history, which should have been the thought coursing through ministerial veins and brains when Ministers wrote those memos and made those speeches.

**Mr Jack Straw** (Blackburn) (Lab): I fully understand the Prime Minister's concern and that of colleagues on both sides of the House about the timing and circumstances of the release of Mr Megrahi. However, having read the Cabinet Secretary's report in full, which I have here, may I say that it was wrong of the Prime Minister to elide quotations from the Cabinet Secretary's conclusions with his own gloss, implying that those were indeed the conclusions? As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has spelt out, and contrary to the implication that the Prime Minister has given to the House, the Cabinet Secretary concluded that nothing in the material that he reviewed contradicts anything that my right hon. Friend the former Foreign Secretary told this House on 12 October in a detailed statement or anything that my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister has said at any time on this issue. The conclusions back up the continued assertion made by the former Prime Minister, the former Foreign Secretary and me, as the Prime Minister has finally admitted through gritted teeth, that there was no pressure from BP on the Scottish Government, that we acted properly at all times and, moreover, that at no stage did we ever suggest to the Scottish Government what decision they should take.

On so-called facilitation, let me read to the House the very next sentence. It

"amounted to: proceeding with ratification of the PTA",

which was in hand anyway,

"explaining to Libya in factual terms the process for application for transfer under a PTA...and informing the Scottish Government that there was no legal barrier to transfer under the PTA".

That was all known before and does not contradict what my right hon. Friend the former Foreign Secretary said at the time.

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make two points gently to the right hon. Gentleman. First, although the Cabinet Secretary rightly, in my view, finds that nothing in this report contradicts what the then Foreign Secretary did say, my point is purely this: this is about what was not in that statement. That is because when you look at what is in the report, you find that it is very clear that there were all sorts of things—facilitations and game plans—that we were not made aware of.

I do not want, in any way, to misquote what Gus O'Donnell has done in a very good report. The conclusions in paragraph 34 state:

"Policy was therefore progressively developed that HMG should do all it could, whilst respecting devolved competences, to facilitate an appeal by the Libyans to the Scottish Government for Mr Megrahi's transfer under the PTA or release on compassionate grounds... as the best outcome for managing the risks faced by the UK."

All right hon. and hon. Members will be able to make up their mind whether what we were told by the previous Government was a full and complete picture. Everyone can make up their mind and I am pretty sure what a reasonable person will come to.

**Sir Menzies Campbell** (North East Fife) (LD): The emphasis in these matters has always been on Mr Megrahi's condition, but, respectfully, it seems to me that other issues have to be taken into account as well. The first is the nature of the crime, the second is the consequences of the crime and the third is the sentence imposed by the court. Had the British Government at the time taken proper account of those factors, I doubt very much whether they would have reached the conclusion that they did and sought to "assist", to put it neutrally, the Libyan Government. But, equally, if Mr MacAskill had taken proper account of the nature of the crime, the consequences of the crime and the sentence imposed, he would surely have found those as being factors that far outweighed any question of compassion.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman puts it extremely clearly. The fact is that al-Megrahi was allowed to go home and die with his relatives, but that is not a luxury he afforded to anyone who was on that jet, and you have to take into account the nature and the consequences of a crime when you think about your actions. As I say, when we get away from all the detail of the report and just stand back and think about the big picture—as I say, the lesson to be drawn is that we have to keep focusing on the big picture—which is the heinous crime that was committed, the lives that were taken and the families that were wrecked, we have to think that someone has to suffer the consequences of that.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just because three of the most glittering stars in the parliamentary sky have asked very full questions, that does not, in any way, oblige right hon. and hon. Members to follow suit. On the whole, I would rather that they did not.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What discussions took place at the EU Council about events in Egypt lending added urgency to breaking the impasse in the middle east peace process? What is the Prime Minister personally doing to break that impasse?

**The Prime Minister:** I did have discussions with Baroness Ashton about this, it was also discussed around the table and I had a very good meeting with Hillary Clinton in Munich. Obviously, there are concerns that instability in Egypt will make progress on the middle east peace process more difficult, but I strongly believe that we should not take our eye off the ball and that we should keep the pressure up—that means pressure on both sides. It means pressure on Israel to make progress on issues such as settlements and pressure on the Palestinians to return to meaningful talks. Britain will play a very key role in this, and I commend Baroness Ashton for her work.

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Trade between the United Kingdom and north African countries has historically been lamentable; we are way down the list on bilateral trade compared with our European partners. Will the Prime Minister do more to make sure that UK Trade & Investment plays a leading role in helping British companies to increase trade with countries such as Tunisia and Egypt to support democracy there?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a good point and the Foreign Secretary will be going to Tunisia later today. We want to have good trading relationships with those countries, but that should never be bought at the price of trading off our values. We should have had a clearer red line about what was and was not appropriate, but Britain has to trade itself out of recession and links with fast-growing countries all over the world are absolutely what we are trying to put together.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): Fine words have been said by the Prime Minister, the President of the United States and other western leaders about the very brave demonstrators in Egypt. Is it not possible that those demonstrators are asking—this is an interesting question—why the western powers have been so silent over the past 25 or 30 years about what has been happening in their country, including the authoritarian rule, the denial of liberty and the sadistic tortures that have been taking place in prisons? Those sorts of questions should be asked not only in Egypt but elsewhere.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. As I said in my statement, the EU has leverage over those countries in terms of the aid it gives and it should be tougher in asking for conditions in return for that aid. In terms of the situation we face today, I just do not accept that there is only, on the one hand, an Islamist regime or, on the other, standing up for the tough man—the dictator. We must encourage those countries not necessarily to have free elections just like that, at the flick of a switch, but to put in place the building blocks of genuinely free countries and open societies that will make sure that they have lasting democracies when they reach that goal.

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon South) (Con): The conclusion by Sir Gus O'Donnell that the previous Government did “all it could” to facilitate the release of Mr Megrahi is bad enough, but it is also inconsistent with the impression created by the previous Government. Has the Prime Minister made any assessment of the motive for such behaviour?

**The Prime Minister:** It is for Ministers to explain what they said and what they did not say. Clearly, they can rely on what is in the report about not being contradicted, but I think they have to look—and I hope they will do it fairly—and ask themselves, “Given that I was receiving memos about a game plan of facilitating contact and given that I was signing off those memos, shouldn't I have really said to the House of Commons and elsewhere that it was not just that we didn't want this man to die in a Scottish jail but that we were working actively with the Libyans to try to secure his release?” I think they should have said something more along those lines. I have genuinely tried to approach this by asking what is fair in terms of what we should have been told when those questions were asked.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I do not think that trade should ever be the sole determinant when it comes to our foreign policy, which is why I hope to persuade the Prime Minister to adopt more of his muscular liberalism, to coin a phrase, in relation to the Russian Federation. Sergei Magnitsky was tortured and murdered in a Russian jail when he was working for a British company in Russia. The United States Congress is now considering banning from the USA anyone who was involved either in the corruption he uncovered or in his torture and murder. Will the Prime Minister consider doing the same here and will he make sure that those views are expressed to Foreign Minister Lavrov when he visits next week?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point and I am glad that the phrase “muscular liberalism” is catching on. That is exactly the approach we have taken with Russia and we do raise questions such as those that the hon. Gentleman asked when we hold meetings with President Medvedev, as I have done, or with Foreign Minister Lavrov, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has done, and we will go on raising those issues. Some countries have not taken that approach, but we think it is the right approach.

**Mr Julian Brazier** (Canterbury) (Con): Bearing in mind that several of the key moderate figures in Egypt have made pledges to have a referendum on the long-standing peace treaty with Israel, will my right hon. Friend, in pursuit of the excellent answer he gave to the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) earlier, agree that a key factor in determining whether we get a good outcome in Egypt will be whether the current Israeli Government are willing to stop building more settlements and be serious about coming to the peace table?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, but we should also be clear with reformers and opposition figures in Egypt that we see progress on the peace process as being absolutely vital for the stability and prosperity of that region. This is where the European



Union has some leverage because in those association agreements we should be making sure that just as there is money in return for progress on things we care about internally, they should also be about standing by agreements that have been entered into, including in the peace process.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): I am grateful for an advance copy of the statement. The Prime Minister has long taken a different view on compassionate release from the Scottish Government or international observers such as Nelson Mandela. What is new, however, is that these official UK documents prove that as of autumn 2008, UK Labour Ministers supported Mr Megrahi being released to Libya, so they were saying one thing in public and the opposite in private. Is that not rank hypocrisy?

**The Prime Minister:** I have made my view clear and I tried to state it in a calm and reasonable way, because I do not believe that there was some conspiracy cooked up between a Scottish National party Government and a Labour Government. They find it hard enough to communicate with each other at the best of times. I see a few prominent Scottish MPs nodding. I think Ministers will want to look back at what they said and ask, "Could I have said more to give a complete picture?"

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I welcome the European Council's strong position of support for the Egyptian people, particularly with regard to assistance with the transition to democracy. However, building new Government structures is not straightforward and should not be rushed, and that is why it needs to start now. Will the Prime Minister ensure that in providing assistance, the EU draws on the expertise of organisations such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, both of which have a wealth of expertise in supporting fledgling democracies and working in Egypt?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady makes a good point about civil society organisations here that can work with civil society organisations in Egypt. The point that I would make about transition starting now is that precisely because the Egyptians say that there are all sorts of problems with amending their constitution and doing it quickly, they should be examining what they can do to build confidence among people on the streets of Cairo that they are genuinely changing. That is where I think considering including Opposition members in a transitional Government and giving some visible, clear and irreversible signs of what their intentions are would make a big difference.

**Mr Denis MacShane** (Rotherham) (Lab): I think we heard two statements today, and they should have been separated. On al-Megrahi, does the Prime Minister recall that many of us had to hold our nose as IRA killers and terrorists were let out for the greater good of peace and stability? On his statement, can he say something about Tunisia? That is a small country, with only 10 million people, secular, highly educated, looking to Europe for help. May I ask him to ask the Foreign Office—he will probably be knocking at an open door—to see what we can do with economic and political investment in Tunisia to bring it, particularly as it is much smaller and more manageable than Egypt, closer to Europe?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. That is one of the reasons why the Foreign Secretary is getting on an aeroplane this afternoon, going to Tunisia and talking to the Tunisians about helping to put in place the building blocks of a free and open society. One of the problems in these countries is the massive level of corruption. It was that which angered their populations so much, and we need to work with them. Going back to the issue of Libya and Northern Ireland, of course everyone had to hold their nose and talk to people we did not want to talk to and deal with people we did not want to deal with, but Governments were pretty frank about what we were doing and why we were doing it. That is my point.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): It is important that we do nothing to talk up the prospect of wider instability in north Africa and the Maghreb. Does my right hon. Friend share my dismay at less than forensic reports in the western press that seek to conflate inherently unstable countries such as Egypt and Tunisia with countries such as Morocco, which have a far more enlightened order economically, socially and politically?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We should not assume that those countries are all the same. Genuine stability should be based on the progressive realisation of the goal of a more open society and the building blocks of the sort of civil society that we recognise. We cannot pretend, as neo-conservatives did, that we solve the problems in one go simply by holding an election. We should be clear, as people who believe in those rights at home, that we should be trying to achieve them progressively elsewhere.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister referred, rightly, to the efforts and the work of Baroness Ashton. He also said that he had had discussions with Hillary Clinton. In that context, what is his understanding of the United States' attitude to the changes going on in Egypt? Is it US policy to support Mr Wisner's view that President Mubarak should stay, or to support the EU view that there should be an early transition?

**The Prime Minister:** That was a well-put question, which I will try not to glide around too diplomatically. The US and the UK are absolutely aligned on this; I spoke to President Obama over the weekend, and we are pushing for the same things. We want transition, we want it to be real and we want it to start now. We believe that it should include some of the things we have been discussing today, like bringing opposition figures into the Government, having dates for a road map for elections and making sure that they deal with some of the abuses of the past. In terms of what Mr Wisner said, I do not think that the way he put his words was a full reflection of the US Government's view, as I think has been made clear.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Given my right hon. Friend's important speech over the weekend, does he not agree that the previous Government's facilitation of the release of al-Megrahi sent entirely the wrong signal to dictators, Islamists and terrorists right across the globe and represents a considerable setback to those who oppose such things? Will he take steps to ensure that as a United Kingdom we are never faced with such a situation again?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, which is that when this happened a very bad message was sent about what we stand for in the UK and our views in terms of the response to such a heinous crime. It is important to bear that in mind, and as I said in my statement, I do not think that enough thought was given to that, which in the end is the most precious of all judgments that Ministers should make.

**David Cairns** (Inverclyde) (Lab): As the Minister of State in the Scotland Office at the time, and as Mr Megrahi's constituency MP, I strongly agree with the Prime Minister that Mr Megrahi should have spent the rest of his natural life in prison. Does he agree with me that however ill-considered and ill-judged phrases like "our game plan on Megrahi" may be—had anyone approached me with such a game plan, I would have told them where they could put it—it must not obscure the central fact that it was a decision that was taken, and could only ever have been taken, by Scottish Government Ministers? There was no collusion, no cover-up and no conspiracy, just a bad decision by the SNP.

**The Prime Minister:** I go a long way with the hon. Gentleman, who I think made the right judgment about the release of Megrahi. The problem, and this comes out in the report, is that memos submitted to Ministers in the Foreign Office included things like,

"Facilitating direct contact between the Libyans and the Scottish Executive is a key part of our game plan on Megrahi", and that submission was subsequently agreed by the Minister. That is the point. The language about facilitating contacts that was put into memos was subsequently agreed by Ministers, including the former Foreign Secretary, and we were not told about that in the House of Commons. That is an issue that needs to be addressed.

**Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): One fifth—20%—of the Egyptian population are Christians, mostly Copts and some Catholics. Does my right hon. Friend agree that pluralism and human rights need to be at the centre of any dialogue on the future of Egypt and that the litmus test for whether Egypt is going forward into the 21st century or backwards will be the treatment of minorities, such as Christians, in the weeks and months ahead?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. When you consider how much money the EU has put into a country like Egypt—something like €500 million over the last three years—those are exactly the sorts of things that we should be insisting on, which I think are tests of a civilised society.

**Sir Stuart Bell** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): May I tell the Prime Minister that the 17 member states of the eurozone will be quite comfortable in dealing with safeguarding the euro into the future? He was right to refer to the single market in his speech in Davos last week, as 60% of our trade is with the European Union, but I urge him not to treat the EU as à la carte, only with trade; it must also cover the environment, immigration and energy security—that is to say, menu fixe.

**The Prime Minister:** I do not entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman: 50% of our trade is with the EU, and 44% with eurozone members. We want a healthy eurozone, but if a menu fixe means that we have to join everything, including the single currency, frankly count me out.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Is it not terrific that we now have a Prime Minister who goes to Europe and puts Britain's interests first? Would he clarify just one point? He said that we will not be dragged into a mechanism to bail out the eurozone countries, but that we could of course opt in to such a mechanism. Are we just ruling a mechanism out, or are we not going to join a mechanism that will help bail out the euro?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend asks a very good question that requires quite a complicated answer. Because of the previous Government's decisions at the time of the general election, we are still at risk of the European financial mechanism, which was set up at that time and used in part to help Ireland, happening again, as it is decided by qualified majority voting. What we have achieved, in terms of the treaty change being proposed for the future, is to make sure that the UK cannot be pulled into a future mechanism for doing those things. That is the position we have managed to secure, and, as I say, in Europe once you have secured these things, you have to make sure that you damn well continue securing them for the future.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): The Prime Minister said in his statement, "It is time for Europe to take a more hard-headed approach where the conditions on which we give money are real and insisted upon." At the Security Conference in Munich, Baroness Ashton, when asked whether the European Union will continue to assist on conditionality for its aid, would not give a clear answer. Did the UK insist on that approach and Europe not agree, or did Baroness Ashton just fail to give us a precise answer?

**The Prime Minister:** What we discussed at the European Council was a specific declaration on Egypt, and I made sure that in that declaration there was some language about the association agreements that we entered into and making sure that they were real and tangible. I have the language in the folder before me; perhaps I can repeat it in a minute, because it does seem to me important. I am sure that Baroness Ashton, in looking at the conclusions that we reached, will recognise that we did all agree that that should be the case.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Could the Prime Minister tell us whether the EU Council took note that Morocco, which has embraced and is embracing a human rights and democracy agenda, has not suffered from outbreaks of civil unrest? Does he agree that we could do more to help that country and everyone in the region if we encouraged other nations in the area to take part in negotiations over a referendum on the future of Western Sahara?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. In our relations with those countries, we want to look at all the things that will help to encourage stability, progress and peace rather than strife.

In terms of the association agreement with Egypt, the declaration on Egypt says very specifically that we agreed:

"The basis for the EU's relationship with Egypt must be the principles set out in the Association Agreement and the commitments made."

So the European leaders agreed that statement, and I think it is important for the future.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): Were there any discussions at the European Council concerning Yemen? The Prime Minister will be aware of how important that country is in the fight against terrorism, and of the excellent talks between the Foreign Secretary and the Yemeni Foreign Secretary last week. Is the Prime Minister satisfied with the package of measures put forward by President Ali Abdullah Saleh? Is not the stability of Yemen absolutely vital in the area? If the Yemeni Government fall, al-Qaeda will be the winner.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which is that Yemen is vital to the security not just of that region, but frankly of our world, because there has been such a lot of al-Qaeda activity in that part of the Arabian peninsula. Yemen was mentioned at the European Council. In terms of the action that President Saleh has taken, clearly we want to see it in detail and see it put in place. There is a something of wake-up call in Yemen because of the incredible stresses and problems that that country faces, and we need to work with it. I have met President Saleh and spoken to him on the telephone, and the Foreign Secretary has had meetings, as the right hon. Gentleman says. We need to help Yemen with its reform programme, not just so that it becomes more stable, but so that it is able to deal with the cancer of al-Qaeda which is in its own country.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister believe it to be a coincidence that, despite numerous assurances from the then Labour Government that Mr Ronnie Biggs would remain in prison until he died, the then Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), conducted a U-turn and released Mr Biggs on compassionate grounds—mysteriously just weeks before Mr Megrahi was released on the same grounds?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is pulling me into territory where I should not go, but it does seem to me to be a pretty good medical record that people released from prison, normally on the brink of keeling over, then last for a very, very long time.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister mentioned that he wants to see a strong and secure eurozone. On a day when our papers are still full of stories about the predicament of British banks, which are vulnerable to loans that they made over recent years, and at the same time full of stories about bankers' bonuses, can the Prime Minister tell us whether there was a discussion about the still perilous state of our banking system throughout Europe, and the fact that bankers' bonuses are still paid out at such levels?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we did discuss what lies at the heart of the eurozone crisis, part of which is about banks that were hopelessly over-leveraged, over-extended and all the rest of it. Here in the UK, we are having a serious conversation with the banks whereby we try to sort out what we want to see. I want to see them paying more tax, I want to see them doing more lending, particularly to small businesses, and I want to see a smaller bonus pool than last year. I am confident that we will be able to achieve those things in this country.

**Mr Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I know that the Prime Minister has to use diplomatic language, but we all know that the truth is that if al-Megrahi had come from a non-oil rich, non-strategic country, he would still be in prison. So imagine the pain today of the mothers and fathers, the sons and daughters, of those killed on this flight. Can the Prime Minister somehow, on behalf of the British people, say sorry, apologise and articulate the view that never again will we appease murderous dictators in the interests of realpolitik?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend puts the point very powerfully. I would say to all those who lost loved ones in that appalling terrorist act that we are profoundly sorry for their loss and for how they have suffered. When one of them said, "I'm not able to spend Christmas at home with my loved ones in the way that this man is", I think they spoke for everybody. We have to understand that when a crime like that is committed, it is not some un-violent sense of retribution just to say that that person should not be released from prison. They have basically committed a life sentence on all those families who are never going to see their loved ones again. Not to understand that is to fail in the duty of a Minister.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): This further step towards our long-held goal of a single market for energy should open doors for areas like mine to forge ahead with offshore wind. Will the Prime Minister recognise and address legitimate concerns over the weakness of his policies for growth so that jobs are created here in the in the UK and small businesses can properly apply for and get jobs in the supply chain?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. At a European level, this is going to be helpful for the onshore and offshore wind industry and other renewable industries in this country. Also, here in the UK we have provided specific grants to ports to update their infrastructure so that large manufacturers can come here and manufacture wind turbines and provide offshore wind. I have spoken personally to companies that are coming to do that in parts of the UK. We will go on supporting the growth of this very important renewables sector.

**Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): The Prime Minister has highlighted some significant inconsistencies between what the previous Administration stated publicly and what was released by Sir Gus O'Donnell earlier today. Obviously, the focus should be on the victims of this horrendous crime, but what assessment has the Prime Minister made of the effects on the relationship with some parts of the US Administration?

**The Prime Minister:** The relationship is extremely good, and I think it will go on being good. I discussed this issue with Hillary Clinton when we met at the weekend. I think that the Administration have been grateful for the very strong and clear view that the Government have taken about the events surrounding the release of al-Megrahi and the fact that it was wrong. This point also goes back to what was said earlier. Of course, we want to have good relations not just with America but with Libya and with other countries, but we have to have some pretty clear lines in our minds

[*The Prime Minister*]

about what is going to be part of that relationship and what is not. Frankly, I think it is perfectly possible to have good relations if we are clear about those things.

**David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): I was fortunate enough to work briefly with one of the victims of the Lockerbie bombing who was so tragically taken from us in 1988. I am sure that the families of these victims will be very interested to read the report that was issued today. Is my right hon. Friend aware of whether any previous Ministers from the former Government are planning to meet the groups of families who represent these victims to explain the policy that has so obviously come to light today?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that a number of victims' families will obviously be interested in the report, and some will be seeking meetings either with the Government or with others. To be frank with my hon. Friend, not all the victims' families take the same view about al-Megrahi and what happened and whether he was responsible, and all the rest of it. We have to be clear that he was convicted after a properly constituted and thorough trial. He then had an appeal, which was quashed. On that basis, the decisions that were made were clearly wrong decisions.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): In the Cabinet Secretary's report, he notes that the former Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw),

"contemplated the merits of offering the Scottish Government a letter in support of a Libyan request"

to release al-Megrahi. Does the Prime Minister agree that that was an odd thing to contemplate if it was clear that there was a Government policy not to put any pressure on the Scottish Executive?

**The Prime Minister:** To be fair to the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), who is not here—although it is not my job to defend him—the report states that he considered making contact with the Scottish Executive and then decided not to. That piece of evidence suggests that there was not the great conspiracy that some people felt there might have been, in particular the American Senators I met who represent victims' families. It is easy to understand why they thought that might have happened. They were looking at a country overseas, and were hearing what BP was saying, what the Government were doing and what the Scottish Executive were doing. However, I do not think that that is how the evidence stacks up. There was no conspiracy—it was a Scottish decision. As I said, the report highlights some issues about what we were told and how we were told it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Greece is responsible for an extremely leaky part of the EU's external border. Its asylum system was recently condemned as being unfit. The problem for the UK is that should economic migrants make their way into the EU to claim asylum and end up in Britain, we cannot send them back to Greece. Was that issue discussed at the Council? How can we get the Greeks to secure their part of the EU frontier?

**The Prime Minister:** We did not discuss the EU migration issue at this Council, but we discuss it often. Greece and Italy tend to be voluble about it because they are often the door through which so many migrants come. I will make two points. First, we need to ensure that we can return people. The arrangements between Britain and France are extremely good. Secondly, one reason why we should not have a common immigration policy is that I do not want our population to be dependent on decisions made at the border of other countries. That is why I think we should keep this as an area of national competence.

## Points of Order

4.26 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you confirm whether it is parliamentary to refer to right hon. or hon. Members as being guilty of “rank hypocrisy”? Obviously, if it is parliamentary, we might like to use it on a daily or even hourly basis to describe the Government’s policies. I gave notice to the Secretary of State for Education that I would raise this point of order. If it is an unparliamentary expression, can you require an apology and a withdrawal?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for notice that he intended to raise it. At the outset, I say to the House that there was an enormous amount of noise in the Chamber when the Secretary of State was responding to a question and I did not hear clearly every word that he said. However, as the House would expect, I have had the record checked, and the words about which the hon. Gentleman complains appear in the draft *Official Report* at the end of the answer. It is indeed unparliamentary for any Member of the House to suggest that another Member is a hypocrite or has said something hypocritical. The term “rank hypocrisy”, when directed at what another Member has said, is unparliamentary and should be withdrawn. I hope that is clear.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I cannot remember, having been in this House for quite a few years, a statement by the Prime Minister on such a diverse selection of topics. I find it difficult to understand how Members can hold the Prime Minister accountable if he comes to the House with a potpourri of different aspects for which we are supposed to hold him accountable. Will it become a general process that we will not be able to tell what we will be asking the Prime Minister about?

**Mr Speaker:** The decision on whether to make a statement is a matter for the Government, the title of the statement is a matter for the Government and the content of the statement is a matter for the Government. I never have treated and never will treat anything said

by the hon. Gentleman, or any other Member, with levity. He is raising a serious point, but I do not feel that it is a matter for the Chair today. I hope I can safely say to the hon. Gentleman, who has been in the House for 31 years—coming up to 32 years—without interruption, that the idea that anything causes him difficulty is hard to credit.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that we no longer have debates in Government time ahead of the European Council, is it not even more reprehensible that the European Council statement has got mixed up with another major issue that should have been in a separate statement?

**Mr Speaker:** I really do not think that that is a matter for the Chair. I note what the hon. Lady has said about debates before European Councils, which is an important observation. The Leader of the House is in his place and has heard it, and if the hon. Lady wishes to pursue it through the usual channels or with the Leader of the House she is, of course, absolutely justified in doing so.

Earlier, I had an indication that the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) wished to raise a point of order.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab) *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** No, he does not wish to do so.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it not be strange if the Prime Minister came to the House and made a statement, and then when somebody asked him a question, he said, “I’m not answering that, because it’s outside the remit of what I came to the House for”? I should think that we should welcome the Prime Minister answering questions as widely as possible.

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure that I should be the arbiter of that. The hon. Gentleman has raised an issue of what he considers to be “strangeness” and asked me to rule on it, but I think that is beyond the remit of the Chair, so we will leave it there for today.

## Opposition Day

[UN-ALLOTTED HALF DAY]

### Fuel Costs

**Mr Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.31 pm

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the oil price has reached \$100 a barrel, and that diesel in the UK is the most expensive in Europe; further notes that the combination of the 1 January 2011 duty rise and the increase in value added tax is estimated to have added 3.5 pence to the cost of a litre of fuel; acknowledges the sharp rises in fuel prices over the past year and the resulting impact on headline inflation figures; recognises the financial pressure this places on hard-pressed families and businesses already struggling with high inflation and the impact of the recent rise in value added tax; condemns the Government's continued dithering over the implementation of a fuel duty regulator (or stabiliser) as neither a sustainable or stable way to make tax policy; further recognises the specific additional fuel costs for those living in remote and rural parts of the UK; is concerned that diesel in such places is approaching £7 per gallon; condemns the Government for its failure to prioritise the implementation of a fuel duty derogation; and calls for the introduction of a fuel duty derogation to the most remote areas at the earliest opportunity.

The issue of high and spiking fuel prices is one of major concern around the country, as we can witness from the campaigns run by national and local newspapers and by campaign groups local and national the length and breadth of the country. Those campaigns—my favourite is the “fight for fairer fuel” run by *The Courier*—are not driving public opinion but reflecting it.

I was taken by the front page of the newspaper a week or so ago, which stated, “Osborne ‘may override 1p fuel duty increase’”. The Chancellor had clearly been listening to some of the concerns that had been expressed. The newspaper went on to report that when he was asked on a local radio station if he could do anything about fuel duty, he said:

“We can over-ride it, we are looking at that.”

He also seemed to confirm that Ministers were looking into a fuel duty stabiliser so that, as he said,

“the Government steps in to try to protect people from the effects”

of volatility at the pumps.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is not just the *Dundee Courier*; the *Stornoway Gazette* is admirably drawing attention to rural fuel derogations in some areas of Europe, particularly Mediterranean islands that do not have the same fuel demands as the north of Scotland. The question has been raised why the matter is taking so long, why it is stalling in the European Commission and why the UK Government are not moving as efficiently and effectively as some European Governments in respect of their citizens' needs.

**Stewart Hosie:** I will come to the rural fuel derogation in the second part of my comments, but in relation to the *Stornoway Gazette*, I am sure that there are many other such campaigns. My hon. Friend's point reflects what I have just said—this is an issue of extreme concern in many parts of the country.

I was explaining that *The Courier* reported that the Chancellor had suggested that the Government were looking into a fuel duty stabiliser. I was about to say “so far, so good”, but unfortunately the next paragraph of the newspaper's front page read:

“The Treasury later played down any suggestion that the Chancellor was announcing any intention to scrap the rise”.

The Government's position is clear as mud.

Although the scrapping of a single rise would be extremely welcome, it is not what is fundamentally needed. We need a permanent fuel duty regulator and a stabiliser mechanism that is always in place to smooth out spikes when prices rise at the pump. It is not that the Government do not know that that is needed, because in the very same article, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is quoted as saying, I believe at a Press Gallery lunch:

“It is quite likely that we are going to get a nasty period of high fuel prices.”

I say to him that we are not going to get that; we already have a nasty period of very high fuel prices.

In January, diesel in Stornoway was £1.42 a litre—that is almost £6.50 a gallon. In Aviemore, in the Chief Secretary's constituency, the price was £1.38 a litre, which is nearly £6.30 a gallon.

**Mr MacNeil:** Those prices almost seem cheap now. They have gone up to £1.45 and £1.46 a litre. At Benbecula airport today, I spoke to Rhoda Macauley, who lives in Daliburgh and has a 50 mile round trip to work at the check-in, and is seriously considering whether working is worth her while, such is the price of fuel.

**Stewart Hosie:** That does not surprise me. In previous debates, after we have experienced high spikes, several Members in the House and elsewhere have reflected their constituents' views that they had almost reached the point when it was not worth going to work, particularly in rural areas with long distances to travel—I will deal with that later—because of the price of fuel. However, that applies not just in Stornoway, Aviemore or my hon. Friend's constituency. In Dundee last week, I paid more than £1.33 a litre—more than £6 a gallon in the city. That is now not uncommon, and it is unsustainable. It is inflationary, decimates family budgets and puts untold pressure on many businesses and business sectors. It is having a catastrophic effect in remote and rural areas. That is why we call on the Tory part of the Government to keep its promise to consult on and deliver quickly a fuel duty stabiliser, and on the Liberal part of the Tory-led Government to keep its promise to deliver a fuel duty derogation for remote and rural areas.

I have said that the high fuel prices are bad for business. The Federation of Small Businesses has told me just how bad. According to its January poll of members, should fuel prices continue to rise, 62% of those polled said that they would be forced to increase their prices; one in 10 suggested that they may lay off staff; more than a quarter said that they could be forced to freeze wages; more than a third said that they would have to reduce investment; and 78% said that rises would put overall business profitability in jeopardy. When we are trying to grow our way out of recession and into sustainable recovery, that is the wrong thing to do.

**Mr Mike Weir** (Angus) (SNP): I very much agree with my hon. Friend. However, is not the position even worse, given that people in many rural areas and constituencies such as mine have no alternative but to move goods by road? There is simply no other way of getting goods to our towns, which are not served, apart from the coast, by the railway line.

**Stewart Hosie:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In many parts of his constituency, goods must be moved by road. The days of rail terminals in Brechin or Forfar that would take freight are sadly long gone.

**Mr Weir:** I also point out that the idea that the goods can be moved by rail is flawed in any event because although, as my hon. Friend knows, a rail line goes through the coastal part of my constituency, there is no longer a goods terminal in Arbroath or Montrose, the two stations there. There is no alternative to road transport.

**Stewart Hosie:** My hon. Friend is right, and I am sure that hon. Members throughout the House will have examples of infrastructure that used to exist, but is no longer there, with the result that 100% dependence on roads is now the case.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): Does my hon. Friend accept that the high prices also affect rural businesses, where petrol, diesel and other goods, such as groceries, are sold? Those businesses are hit by not only the price rise in fuel, but the cost of carrying goods to their shops. That is a dreadful burden for businesses in rural communities.

**Stewart Hosie:** That is absolutely right. The price is hugely inflationary in rural areas. It is also a problem in some of the poorer parts of our cities, where car ownership is remarkably low. It means that some people with modest means do not even have the ability to travel to a supermarket, where there may be discounted goods. Instead, they are forced to pay higher prices in certain urban centres. That should not happen.

**Sajid Javid** (Bromsgrove) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this issue and to talk about the impact of high fuel prices on hard-pressed families, but he will know that fuel duty raises about £30 billion for the Exchequer, and that a 1p increase in duty raises about £500 million. His case would be far more powerful if he could outline the public spending he wants to cut so that fuel duty can be cut, because that money must be made up somehow.

**Stewart Hosie:** The hon. Gentleman makes the same point that the Labour party used to make—something must be cut to fund the Scottish National party proposal. However, the SNP argues that when the price at the pump increases, there is a VAT windfall. In any circumstances, we know that there is likely to be a windfall in excess of £1 billion from the North sea. We believe that that should be used to temper duty increases and to lower the duty level, so that the yield anticipated by the Government does not decrease, and to smooth the effects of the spiking at the pumps.

**Sajid Javid** *rose*—

**Stewart Hosie:** I shall move on a little. I have been generous, and I will give way again in a little while.

I was talking about the impact on business and the information provided by the FSB. As I said, 78% of its members who were surveyed in January said that the increase in duty would have an impact on them and put business profitability in jeopardy, which is the wrong thing to do when we are trying to grow our way out of recession. I would have thought that this Government would want to listen to the views of the FSB, not least because small businesses in the UK provide 90% of all our enterprises, and in Scotland they provide 50% of all jobs. They will be engines of recovery in this country.

John Walker, the UK chairman of the FSB, and Andy Willox, the FSB's Scottish policy convenor, said:

“Scottish small businesses want to grow, innovate and create employment but the cost of fuel puts the brakes on their ability to drive the recovery...Every extra penny spent at the pumps is a penny not being spent elsewhere in the economy and our members are finding it hard to plan for the future, as well as survive the present, due to the spiralling cost of fuel.”

**Mr Brian Binley** (Northampton South) (Con): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to interject a little on the question of small and medium-sized business. I agree with his thrust that they are vital and that they will provide the jobs growth that the growth agenda requires. However, will he join me in expressing concern that the four increases in fuel duty are not as necessary as we were told they were by the then Government? Does he agree with that?

**Stewart Hosie:** I believe that the SNP opposed a number of the fuel duty increases. The hon. Gentleman may have been an honourable exception—I hope he was—but my memory tells me that Tory Front-Benchers abstained on some of those increases over the past few years when they were in opposition. He is generally right, but as I said, the debate is not about the cancellation or postponement of a single increase, however welcome that is, but about the implementation of a permanent stabilisation mechanism.

Mr Willox said of this debate that:

“The FSB is right behind all moves to introduce a fuel duty stabiliser.”

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way on this very important subject. The Government pay around £7,000 per head per taxpayer in England, and yet they pay £8,500 for every Scottish taxpayer. Does he agree that if that subsidy were reduced, we would have more money across the country to cut fuel duty?

**Stewart Hosie:** I am always surprised when otherwise articulate, able and intelligent Members do not see the whole picture. When one looks at total tax and total income, rather than the mere, modest fragment of net identifiable expenditure, one sees a rather different story. Prior to the recession—independent figures stand this up—Scotland was about £50 billion in, £50 billion out. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, the UK ran a £0.5 trillion debt before the recession, so his argument is not particularly helpful, and nor does it really pertain to today's motion.

[Stewart Hosie]

Of course, some business sectors are hit rather harder than others. Some businesses have a little leeway in their pricing policy, but some have none. I was struck by the comments of Bill McIntosh, the general secretary of the Scottish Taxi Federation, who said:

“Taxi drivers”—

it is an important trade—

“are affected more than most by increases in fuel. Unlike other transport operators, taxi drivers can’t just raise their prices as fares are set by local authorities...The Scottish Taxi Federation welcomes and supports the proposal for a fuel stabiliser.”

That is important. The sector has a fixed pricing structure that it cannot adjust and rising input costs.

Many haulage firms—this is an extreme example—have already agreed long-term future contracts with a fixed price. There might be some variation, depending on the uplift in fuel, but it is unlikely, under the contractual arrangements, that they could be compensated for the very quickly and steeply rising input prices. In my view, the haulage sector suffers the largest single impact. According to the Road Haulage Association, operating costs have risen by 3.3% since last October. It tells me that fuel accounts for more than a third of the sector’s business costs, and that, in cash terms, an average rise is expected this year of £4,206 on the basis of increases over the past three months alone. That is quite extraordinary—an increase of £4,206 in the running costs per truck.

I suspect that that is why Phil Flanders, the Scottish and Northern Ireland director of the RHA, has said:

“The RHA...supports the SNP/Plaid Cymru motion to urge the Government to take immediate action to resolve the increasingly difficult situation that hauliers—and motorists—find themselves in due to the cost of fuel.”

He went on to say that it has always supported these

“proposals for a fuel duty regulator in order to bring stability to the costs of a haulage business where fuel”

in some places

“can account for around 40% of running costs...Whatever it is called—a stabiliser or a regulator”—

or a modulator—

“help is urgently needed for all hauliers and particularly those further from their market such as those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Remote rural communities also deserve special help given the exorbitant price they have to pay.”

I will say more about that later. He continued:

“It cannot be stressed strongly enough that in the past year fuel prices have gone up by at least 14% and in the last 28 months there have been 8 fuel duty hikes amounting to a 25% increase. This is just simply unacceptable for the economy.”

I share that view entirely.

The Freight Transport Association has followed up that support and welcomes the effort

“to develop the fuel duty debate further. Lives and livelihoods up and down the country are suffering in the face of unsustainable and crippling fuel costs. For businesses still in the grip of tough trading conditions these costs severely restrict cash flow and a company’s ability to do business; sadly this can translate to job losses and the difference between solvency and insolvency.”

It says that when the price of fuel

“rises steeply it has an immediate impact on a company’s cash flow.”

Given how the banks are behaving, with credit tight and squeezed, cash flow is vital.

The FTA also says:

“As part of the Fair Fuel UK Campaign, the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, along with backing from the RAC, are asking government principally to scrap the fuel duty rise planned in April and introduce a methodology for stabilising fuel prices.”

Indeed, Fair Fuel UK, which is supported by 20,000 road freight companies, the Royal Automobile Club, dozens of trade associations, other groups and tens of thousands of individual motorists, has said that it supports today’s attempt to raise this issue and its impact on the economy on the Floor of the House. It said that this motion and debate will...add pressure to the Government to act”, and act quickly, on what it calls a “fuel crisis”. There is no doubt that this is a crisis. It is also clear that there is not only an assessment of a real, immediate and serious problem, but a clear coalescing of those at the front line about the introduction of a stabiliser as the primary solution.

This is about not simply a fuel duty regulator or stabiliser, however, but the specific problems in remote areas.

**Mr Alan Reid** (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The hon. Gentleman has outlined the problem, but he has not given the solution. He has spoken for 18 minutes, but has not told us how a stabiliser would work. I would like to hear how it would work, so will he please explain it to us?

**Stewart Hosie:** The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that this is an Opposition day motion. If he waits until the Finance Bill, I am sure that both I and his hon. Friends will be happy to put forward detailed proposals and provisions, as we have all done on a number of previous occasions. Had he been listening to my response to an earlier intervention, when I explained how the proposal was due to work, he would know that we suggested it in 2005. We presented an amendment in 2008, and the then Conservative Opposition proposed something similar in July 2008. If he holds his horses, I suspect that we will have the detailed provisions for such a mechanism soon enough.

**Mr MacNeil:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Stewart Hosie:** I am going to make some ground.

This motion is not simply about the fuel duty regulator; it is about the problems in remote areas, where there is no choice but to drive. In a debate on introducing a rural fuel derogation in 2006, the argument was put as follows. The purpose of the proposal—on that occasion contained in a new clause—was to

“enable the Treasury to specify lower rates of duty on fuel to apply in remote rural areas. Hon. Members will know that article 19 of the European Union’s energy products directive allows member states to apply for a derogation to allow lower duty rates in specified areas. In October 2004, the French Government, with the support of UK Ministers and Ministers of other member states...did just that, following the example set by the Portuguese and the Greek Governments in previous years.”

The argument for applying such a measure in the United Kingdom rested on

“the very serious economic impact that higher fuel prices in rural areas have on areas such as the highlands and islands of Scotland. The truth is that people...in remote areas such as the highlands and islands are victims of a triple whammy. They pay higher fuel



prices and have much longer distances to travel, with few or no alternatives to making those journeys by car. Unavoidably, they spend more on transport than others and therefore also contribute more to the Treasury. Motoring costs represent some 18 per cent. of total household expenditure in rural Scotland compared with 13 per cent. across the rest of Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2006; Vol. 448, c. 738-39.]

Those were not my words; they were the words of the current Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I am disappointed that he is not here to stand by his words and make a commitment to drive forward a rural fuel derogation at the earliest possible opportunity.

**Mr Reid** *rose*—

**Stewart Hosie:** Before the hon. Gentleman gets to his feet, let me remind him that when the Liberal party last proposed a rural fuel derogation, we backed it. I suspect that some of his colleagues were less forthcoming in backing proposals that we had made, although there were some honourable exceptions who wanted to.

**Mr Reid:** Now that the Liberal Democrats are part of the Government, the hon. Gentleman should be pleased that the rural fuel derogation is going to happen. We tried for years and the Labour party knocked us back, but now that my right hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Danny Alexander) is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the rural fuel derogation for the islands is going to happen.

**Stewart Hosie:** I am delighted to hear that the rural fuel derogation is going to happen. I cannot wait to hear that from a Minister, because the reports that I read earlier tended to indicate a little confusion in the Government's ranks. I hope that that happens soon, for the following reasons.

In the final bit that I want to quote from the Chief Secretary's speech in 2006, he said:

“Median earnings in the highlands and islands are some 85 per cent. of the UK figure, so the inequitable situation”

that he had described

“hits an already poorer region very hard.”

He said that before coming to the Chamber, he had conducted

“a random survey of pump prices for a litre of unleaded petrol. In Aviemore in my constituency...the...price is 99.9p per litre. In Dalwhinnie, a little further south, it is 102p per litre. In Thurso, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), it is 102p per litre. In Lerwick, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), it is 106.9p per litre. By comparison, at Asda in Leeds the price is 92.9p, while in Morrison's in Camden in north London, it is 90.9p.”—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2006; Vol. 448, c. 739.]

In preparation for today, we were told by the AA that petrol cost £1.34 a litre in Portree and £1.42 a litre in Stornoway. With prices now more than 30p a litre more than four years ago, that means an increase of more than £1.30 a gallon—many hon. Members will remember when that was what a gallon of petrol itself cost. If the argument was correct then, when the price was between 90p and £1 a litre, it is even stronger today, when the price is £1.30 a gallon more.

**Mr MacNeil:** Does my hon. Friend remember just how full the Chamber used to be of Liberal Democrat Members when the prices were 30p a litre cheaper? Now, following the massive increase in prices and the

real rural pain being felt as a result, where are they? I see two Liberal Democrats here today. Any more? Please stick your hands up! No, just two Liberal Democrats. Shocking!

**Stewart Hosie:** My hon. Friend makes his point in his own inimitable way. I have to say that I cannot remember a time when the House was ever full of Liberal Democrats, but I think I know what he means.

I want to raise three specific issues in relation to the vital importance of the rural fuel derogation. In urban, built-up areas, 95% of people live within 13 minutes of a bus stop with a service more than once an hour. That compares with less than half of residents in villages and hamlets. Before any Member gets up to make a point about that, let me say that I know that there are parts of every constituency in which there are no bus stops, no bus services and no choice but to use a car.

**Mr Weir:** I am following with interest what my hon. Friend is saying. Did he read the report in *The Guardian* this morning which suggested that many English local authorities were slashing their subsidies on bus routes, which will lead to the closure of those routes in many rural areas? Does he agree that that would make the situation very much worse in rural areas of England as well?

**Stewart Hosie:** I have not seen that report, but those developments will clearly make things difficult in areas that depend on those subsidies. I hope, in the light of the price of fuel, that local authorities and the Government will try to ensure that as many bus services as possible, particularly lifeline services, are maintained. The key point about living in remote and rural areas is that there are fewer alternatives available, and in some cases, no alternatives at all. The use of a car in those areas is vital.

**Hywel Williams:** The lowest wages in Wales are in Powys, in the middle of Wales. Powys also has the highest incidence of car ownership, with many families having to run two cars because of the lack of public transport.

**Stewart Hosie:** My hon. Friend touches on an important point. It has been mentioned already that car ownership is normally a sign of wealth and affluence, but in remote, rural and sparsely populated areas, people on almost every level of income, including those on low and modest wages, require a car. That results in their spending a disproportionate amount of their net disposable income on fuel.

**John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): A further point that the hon. Gentleman will recall from the many debates that we have had on this subject is that people in my constituency and elsewhere who earn below the average wage often cannot afford to buy good, modern cars. Their cars are therefore much more costly to run. That is part of the triple whammy that I remember talking about six or seven years ago.

**Stewart Hosie:** There are whammies after whammies, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the use of a car can be a necessity, and that people have to buy whatever they can afford. Also, if the roads are not

[Stewart Hosie]

quite as good as they ought to be in remote and rural areas, that can pose its own problems, especially in winter.

There are three key issues in this debate. The first is the lack of choice, which is very important. The second, which I hope that urban Members will recognise, is the fact that the average mileage per year travelled simply to access essential services in rural areas is 8,794 miles. The comparator in urban areas is 5,200 miles. So the people in rural areas have no choice, and the distances that they have to travel are far greater. On top of that, the third factor is the price of fuel.

I am grateful to the BBC, which reported on 22 January that the RAC Foundation had found that some filling stations in Orkney were charging £1.50 a litre, which is £6.82 a gallon. An increase of only 4p or 5p per litre would result in the £7 gallon, which, because people have no choice, they would have to pay in order to travel the greater distances necessary in rural areas to access the services that most of us take for granted.

The time for talk and promises on fuel is over. There is now an absolute necessity for the Government—both bits of them—to deliver on their promises. We need to put the stabilisers on rocketing fuel prices now, before the brakes are slammed down on any chance of economic growth.

5 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add:

“notes the dramatic increase in the world oil price to over \$100 per barrel; further notes that there has been a significant impact on fuel prices in the UK as a result; recognises the impact this has on households and business; notes that the previous administration’s rises in fuel duty that have taken effect during the past year have further increased prices; further notes that the Government inherited the largest deficit in UK peacetime history, that the previous administration had no credible plan to deal with the deficit, that the Government has been clear that everyone will make a contribution to tackle the deficit but that the most vulnerable will be protected, and that the Government is considering a fair fuel stabiliser that could support motorists and businesses when oil prices are high; further notes that the Government in addition is taking forward swiftly its commitment at EU level to introduce a pilot scheme that would deliver a discount of up to 5 pence per litre in duty in remote rural areas such as the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly; and further notes that the Chancellor will update the House on all fiscal matters at the time of the Budget.”

We have long recognised on this side of the House—both parties in the coalition Government—that the price of fuel has been a very difficult issue for motorists, businesses and families up and down the country. I know that it is a particular concern for people living in our rural communities, and no doubt many Scottish Members who hope to participate in the debate will make points on behalf of their constituents and echo the concerns set out by the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie). I am sure that other Members representing rural seats will also want to set out their concerns.

There is no doubt that rising oil prices and their impact as they feed through to the petrol pump have been a real concern. In fact, even before we came into office, both coalition parties had committed to looking

at the issues surrounding the cost of the fuel, as the hon. Member for Dundee East has pointed out. Let us be clear, however, that this whole area is something that the last Government chose completely to ignore. They believed that the challenges posed by these problems were too great. When we were talking about alternatives to help families, hauliers and motorists, they said that it was all too difficult and that the issues were way too complex.

Let me state at the outset that we would be interested to hear from the Opposition whether they stand by the fuel duty escalator—the one that they put in place before the election; it is a bit like reaching from the political grave into taxpayers’ pockets. Or do they believe that that policy was a mistake? Are we to be treated to the spectacle of Labour Members arguing not only against the Government’s measures across a whole range of areas, but against the measures they put in place before being booted out of office? We have taken a very different approach to fuel prices to that of the last Government.

**Mr Weir:** I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady and it is not my place to defend the Labour party, as we spent much of the last Parliament attacking the Labour Government and their fuel policy, which was disgraceful. It is interesting to see that so few Labour Members are here today. However, the Economic Secretary is now in government: what is she going to do and when is action going to come? The problem is getting worse by the day, and unless action is taken soon, it will be too late for many businesses in rural Scotland.

**Justine Greening:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall set out our approach to policy in this regard in the run-up to the Budget in my further comments, but we need to recognise that the fuel duty escalator was put in place by the last Government. They have, I believe, a blank piece of paper that is called their economic policy, and they owe the House the honesty of being transparent about whether they believe that putting that policy in place was the right or the wrong thing to do.

**Mr MacNeil:** Far be it for me to draw it to the hon. Lady’s attention, but since last May she has been in government. We want to know—in Lewis, in Harris, in North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra—what she is going to do about the price of fuel.

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased, as I have looked at the Scottish National party website today and seen the letter he wrote to voters last April, in which he said that it was the SNP who first called for this “derogation” for fuel areas. I can assure him that I am getting on with that very policy.

**Mr MacNeil** *rose*—

**Justine Greening:** Presumably, the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene again to welcome the efforts of the coalition Government.

**Mr MacNeil:** I will welcome those efforts when they bear some fruit. We had four years of shilly-shallying from Labour—and I do not want to hear any more shilly-shallying from any Government from the Treasury Dispatch Box.

**Justine Greening:** In that case, I can tell the hon. Gentleman how he can help. It would be helpful if his party wholeheartedly supported the Government's proposal to the European Union and the European Commission as we go through the process of securing the derogation. I assure him that we will be more powerful if we adopt a cross-Government, cross-devolved-Administration approach.

**Stewart Hosie:** The Minister is asking the Scottish National party and our friends to support the Government's efforts in Europe. Will she please tell us whether the Chief Secretary has finally managed to write to the European Commission asking for the derogation?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the derogation will come about as the outcome of a process. He seems to be asking me whether we are getting on with that process, and how much progress we have made. I trust that if I explain what the process is, what we have done so far and what will happen next, he will have been given so much information that he will find it necessary to take a more considered approach.

Let me explain the timing involved in the process leading to European Union and Commission clearance. We must begin by undertaking informal talks with the Commission about the implementation of the scheme. That will give us a better chance of presenting a proposal that it will agree is, as it were, right first time. As Members have pointed out, similar schemes exist in other countries. It is sensible for the Government to engage in a process that includes talking informally to the European Commission about those schemes, and about the ways in which our scheme may resemble or differ from them.

**Mr MacNeil:** Will the Minister tell us how long it has taken other Governments to proceed from the informal talks stage to implementation of a rural fuel derogation, and how long she thinks it will take this Government to do so? Time is of the essence.

**Justine Greening:** Obviously it will not be a short process involving a few weeks, but I think that the hon. Gentleman and his party know from their experience of the process involved in calling for the derogation that the route that we are taking can provide real support for motorists in rural areas.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) *rose*—**

**John Thurso *rose*—**

**Justine Greening:** I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), because he tried to intervene earlier.

**John Thurso:** I think I heard the Minister quote from a letter from members of the SNP saying that they had thought of the derogation first. In fact, it was first raised in the House of Commons in 2000 by my predecessor in the constituency, now Lord MacLennan. I fleshed it out in a debate that I held in Westminster Hall in 2001, and I think I have raised it every year since then. Given that the matter was raised over a period of 12 years, is it not commendable that this Government have done more in six months than the last Government did in those 12 years?

**Justine Greening:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I too remember his party, before it joined the coalition Government, making the case for a rural fuel rebate.

I now give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who tried to intervene earlier.

**Robert Halfon:** I welcome the debate, because hard-pressed constituents of mine, especially small businesses and families, are suffering hugely as a result of high fuel costs. May I make a special plea? National health service workers in my constituency who have to use their cars to visit patients receive tiny fuel allowances—in some cases, only 12p per mile—which remain the same regardless of the price of fuel. Will my hon. Friend consider changing the guidelines so that NHS workers need not suffer in that way?

**Justine Greening:** I shall ensure that I respond to my hon. Friend on that issue. A variety of concerns about the cost of motoring have been expressed in constituencies throughout the country in recent years.

I hope I can reassure Opposition Members that we are getting on with the process of requesting a derogation by trying to arrange some pilot schemes. I am sure they will be pleased to learn that, although we are still considering the exact scope of the pilots, we have announced our intention of including the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly, should we be given the necessary dispensation. I assure Members that we are pressing ahead as fast as we can, and we should appreciate their support in helping us to complete the process. I hope that they will be able to overcome any political barriers, do the right thing and back up the coalition Government as we go through this process over the coming months.

We recognise the importance of fuel prices to motorists and businesses. While we are looking at options in the run-up to the Budget, which I will discuss this afternoon, we can have one of two debates today: we can continue to argue about the problem and waste the opportunity presented by today's debate by scoring points, or we can have a frank and open debate about how to reach the best solution and how we can find common ground. For instance, do we agree that the price of fuel and the affordability of motoring are important for motorists? The answer is yes. Do we agree that the unpredictable way in which the oil price fluctuates can create difficulties for households and businesses when it comes to budgeting? The answer is yes, although the Labour party never recognised that point in government, and I doubt whether it recognises that point in opposition—if it does, perhaps the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) will explain why it has suddenly changed its mind after having been booted out by the electorate.

**Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab):** I am pleased that the Economic Secretary wants to have a constructive debate this afternoon and does not want to engage in party political point scoring. Given that conciliatory approach, will she confirm that a Conservative Government were the first to introduce the fuel duty escalator at 3% in the March 1993 Budget, which they increased to 5% in the November 1993 Budget?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady wants to go back into history. The previous Labour Government left a huge fiscal deficit, and we have to get to grips with those ginormous debts, so the position is entirely different.

[*Justine Greening*]

The previous Labour Government left not only debts and deficit, but tax rises that will unfold over the coming years. In opposition, the Lib Dems and the Conservatives discussed helping motorists, and we still want to see what we can do to help them. Given the state of the public finances when they were handed over to us, the Labour party in opposition should be thoroughly ashamed. We have waited in vain for an apology to the British people for the state of the public finances, and I suspect that we will have a long wait before we hear any of them say, "Sorry."

The most depressing thing is that the main adviser to the former Chancellor and former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), is now shadow Chancellor. It is like returning the car keys to the man who crashed the car in the first place, which is the worst thing for the British electorate.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): The issue is not about going back into pre-history to discuss what a previous Conservative Government did 18 years ago. Her Majesty's Opposition are not willing to make it clear where exactly the 20% public expenditure cuts would come from to pay for their opposition to tax rises. Is that not the real issue? We are paying £120 million a day in debt interest because of their debt legacy.

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is right. We do not even know whether the Opposition think that going ahead with the fuel duty rise, which they planned, is a good idea. We know that they rejected calls from Opposition parties to look at alternatives when they were in power. Perhaps the hon. Member for Bristol East will explain her party's position today.

My hon. Friend is also right to point out the difficult challenges that the current Government face. He has rightly pointed out that the level of deficit and debt that we have been left as a country costs the British taxpayer £120 million every single day. To put that in the context of a 1p a litre rise in fuel duty, which is worth £500 million, the British taxpayer will pay as much in debt interest over the course of four or five days as they will pay in fuel duty, if fuel duty is subject to a 1p a litre rise. That demonstrates two things, the first of which is the importance of tackling the deficit. Clearly, this country cannot continue to pay this expense of £120 million a day and it has to be tackled, because we are spending more on servicing our debt than on transport. The challenge for this country is that if we do not get this £500 million of real money from fuel duty, it has to come from somewhere else. The Government have made it clear that they want to try to protect key spending, for example, on the NHS—the Labour party did not want to do that—and schools.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be unfair for the disproportionate burden of that tax to fall on people in rural and remote areas?

**Justine Greening:** As I have said, the Government recognise the particular pressures that motoring costs put on people living in rural areas, which is one of the

reasons why we want to try to get a derogation and undertake pilot schemes in some of those areas to see whether we can implement a rural fuel rebate. I hope that the hon. Lady acknowledges that we recognise those challenges.

**Naomi Long** (Belfast East) (Alliance): Does the Minister recognise that this is about not only the significant issue of rurality but remoteness from the marketplace? In Northern Ireland, it can be incredibly difficult, even in urban constituencies such as mine, for those who wish to trade to reach the marketplace; added costs can be involved, reaching from Northern Ireland on to the UK mainland.

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady is right in that few Members in this House would not have their own particular reasons for raising the issue of the cost of motoring with government. This issue is clearly a real challenge, which is why the Conservative party acknowledged it in opposition and said that we wanted to examine how we could tackle some of the key issues.

The hon. Lady also referred to the impact of fuel duty on businesses. That is one of the reasons why our emergency Budget introduced a package of corporation tax reductions for companies, as she will recall. Small companies will now face a corporation tax rate of 20% whereas they were facing a rise to 22% under the previous Government. We also introduced reductions in national insurance, getting rid of the worst effects of the proposed jobs tax. We can support businesses in a number of ways to help them through a very challenging economic situation created by the previous Government.

**Mr Weir:** I reiterate a point that I made in last week's debate about the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: the Government keep saying that they have reduced corporation tax and although that is welcome for small companies, very many small businesses in our areas do not pay corporation tax. They are single traders or partnerships that pay income tax, so they are not being helped by these measures and being hammered by the VAT rises and the fuel cost rises.

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman will know that alongside those measures to support companies, particularly small ones, I could have mentioned the regional growth fund and the regional reduction in national insurance for new start-up companies creating new jobs. He will also be aware of the rise in the personal allowance, which has removed about 880,000 people from paying income tax altogether. We have also raised the threshold for national insurance, which means that employers no longer have to pay employer national insurance for thousands of employees. Across the board we are doing what we can, despite the challenging financial deficit left to us. We are doing what we can to make sure that we tackle the overriding priority of sorting out the deficit—that is what we have to do. For motorists, companies, families and unemployed people wanting to get back into the employment market and get a job, we have to get the economy back on its feet and public finances back on a sustainable footing. At the same time, we understand the pressures and challenges for motorists.

As things stand, there are alternatives for the devolved Administrations. I have to challenge hon. Members representing the Scottish National party in Scottish constituencies on whether they have considered using some of the devolved Administration budget to fund their own grant scheme to support motorists in their areas. They have taken different decisions on tuition fees to those taken in England and there is now additional scope for them to see this issue as a priority for their spending, as well as for the national Government to consider how we might be able to help in terms of tax policy.

**Mr MacNeil:** I want to ensure that the hon. Lady is aware of the importance of what the devolved Scottish Government—in what is an independent Parliament without the powers of independence—have done for the Outer Hebrides. We have introduced road equivalent tariff pilots, which have substantially reduced transportation costs, but the difficulty is that when the Scottish Government produce schemes that stimulate and grow the economy, the tax revenue goes not to our Government but down to Westminster. We are doing good work, but there is a double whammy: as we stimulate the economy, Westminster benefits, and then it comes and sticks on a fuel tax—thank you!

**Justine Greening:** I think the hon. Gentleman is taking the debate slightly wider than the wording in the motion. However, I will say to him that the measures we are taking are designed to get our economies in his part of the United Kingdom and the rest of it back on their feet. I hope that he welcomes the tax reductions we are bringing forward.

**Stewart Hosie:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Justine Greening:** I will give way one last time, and then I shall make a little progress. I have been generous in taking interventions.

**Stewart Hosie:** The hon. Lady has been very generous indeed. She asks us to welcome the actions that the Government have taken in terms of a deficit consolidation plan. I like and respect her, but I will never welcome a £1.3 billion cut to the Scottish budget this year and a £3.2 billion cut to the Scottish block over the next four years. That is the wrong thing to do in terms of stimulating economic growth and growing our way out of the recession. If we could focus on the fuel duty, that would be particularly helpful, unless of course she wants to devolve the duty to Scotland, in which case I would be absolutely delighted as we could take all the right decisions.

**Justine Greening:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the Goodison review and that the Scotland Bill is passing through Parliament right now. We are making some changes on tax, and I think he will welcome those measures to strengthen the devolution settlement.

I shall now, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would like me to, address my comments to the measures we have been talking about and what we are considering. Only this Government have been looking at how best to help drivers, including those in Scotland and Wales. We have demonstrated our concerns about these issues both before and since coming into government. Indeed,

one of the first things that the coalition Government did was to get the Office for Budget Responsibility to look at how oil prices affect the economy and feed into public finance.

This is a complex issue, and we have to make sure that whatever we do is not only fair but affordable. It would not be right of me to pre-empt the Chancellor or the Budget, but, as we promised in the June Budget, we are considering a range of options. We have already discussed the rural fuel duty rebate. The Government understand the challenges faced by people in rural areas in relation to fuel costs, which those of us in city and urban areas perhaps do not face. I know that those people cannot easily shop around nearby petrol stations to get the best deal in the way that other people can. I understand the arguments about the lack of public transport as an alternative and that the car is often the most realistic mode of transport. That is precisely why we are working towards getting a derogation so that we can get on with putting in place pilots to look at how a rural fuel rebate would work.

**Dr Whiteford:** Is it intended that at a future date the derogation pilots should extend to other rural and remote parts of Scotland not included in the current pilot scheme?

**Justine Greening:** We have yet to decide the exact scope of the pilots. I assume from her question that the hon. Lady would like her area to be included. No doubt she will write to me formally. I will take her comments on board. As I said, we are already working towards putting in place the pilots for a rural fuel duty rebate which will reduce the cost of fuel in the most remote areas of Britain. As with trying to tackle the feed-through of unpredictable oil prices to the pump prices, the previous Government rejected that outright, but the coalition Government are committed to getting it under way.

As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary announced in October, we wish to conduct a rural fuel duty pilot and look at how a rural fuel duty rebate could work in practice. We want to examine the underlying issues and see how that could be applied. The initial pilot could deliver a duty discount of up to 5p per litre on all petrol and diesel. That would save some drivers in rural areas upwards of £500 a year.

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): As part of the derogation, will my hon. Friend please make sure that the definition of “rural” is a great deal more scientific than it has been in previous attempts? Will she also make sure that the interests of Wales are not left out?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend makes a relevant point. One of the reasons that our initial discussions with the European Commission are so important is that they are an opportunity to scope properly any rural fuel duty rebate, why we would introduce it, where it would apply and the basis on which it would take place. In other countries, specific arguments have been made for the particular areas where such rebates were allowed by the European Commission. The benefit of going through the process, as we are doing, is that it maximises the chance that any proposal that we make will be given the go-ahead.

**Mr Stewart Jackson:** I thank the Minister, who is being very generous. The House will forgive me if I do not join in the excitement of our Scottish colleagues at the largesse of my English taxpayers footing the bill for their constituents. Will my hon. Friend take representations from areas such as mine, which is a travel-to-work area and essentially urban, but where there are pockets of social deprivation and low wages, such as the fens? In future, will she and her colleagues perhaps consider that such areas also require some support and assistance from the Treasury with significant increases in fuel duty, which have an impact on working life there too?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend, as ever, represents his constituents powerfully. The point I would make to him and to the House is that we have inherited a huge fiscal deficit and eye-watering levels of debt, and we have to get the public finances back on to a sustainable footing. We must make sure that the economy is back on a sustainable footing too, creating long-term jobs, and that the economy is balanced so that it is less exposed to the peaks and troughs of economic winds than it was, perhaps, over the past decade.

That is the best way to help people across our country so that they are less reliant on Government giving them this, that and the other, and so that they can be reliant on themselves and choose where they spend their money and what they spend it on, instead of being reliant on somebody from Whitehall telling them.

**Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** Does the Minister recall that when the fuel duty escalator first came in, it was meant to be a green tax? The environment was meant to benefit from the imposition of that year-on-year tax. As far as I know, it has not benefited the environment. It has just been a nice little earner, and now it is terribly heavy on rural dwellers and in the urban context as well. I, for one, appreciate the fact that Government are looking at the issue, and I hope they come up with a fair solution.

**Justine Greening:** There is undoubtedly an environmental aspect to how fuel duty changes over time, because people do change their driving behaviour. The hon. Gentleman's point is that clearly we are all concerned about the affordability of motoring, which has been an issue in the past few years, and particularly today. In the long term, of course, the best move is to help people not to have cars that are so dependent on petrol and diesel and therefore prey to the fluctuations in the oil price market in the first place, but that is a debate for another day. That ties in to his earlier points about the environment.

Let me wrap up my remarks, because hon. Members wish to speak and I do not want to take up any more time. We are considering the exact scope of the rural fuel rebate scheme, and Members from Scotland will welcome the fact that the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly will certainly be included. It is not quite as simple as people suggest; there is complexity, so we are taking some time to work through it.

**Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab):** The Minister has taken a number of interventions, which we are grateful for. I have written to her about part of my constituency, the Isle of Arran, where fuel prices are

often the highest in Scotland. There has been a great deal of debate about what criteria will be used to choose the pilots being considered. Arran already does badly as a result of the equivalent scheme brought in by the SNP Administration in Holyrood, so will she look at Arran when considering these issues and perhaps expand on the criteria that will be used, either today or at a future opportunity?

**Justine Greening:** I can only reiterate what I have just said, which is that we are considering the exact scope of the scheme, but it is helpful to hear some of the issues that Members have in their constituencies. We are pressing ahead and will need European approval.

**Kerry McCarthy:** Will the Minister give way?

**Justine Greening:** I will give way one last time.

**Kerry McCarthy:** The Minister is being very generous. I am slightly confused, because my understanding was that it was Conservative party policy to look at the fuel duty stabiliser and Liberal Democrat policy to look at the rebate and the rural derogation. She has spoken for more than half an hour and focused almost totally on the rural derogation, so will she, before concluding her remarks, tell us the current position on the fuel duty stabiliser?

**Justine Greening:** I think that I have been very clear on that. In opposition and in government, we have always recognised the impact on motorists of the unstable oil price, which feeds through to pump prices. In setting up a stabiliser, we need to ensure that it works as intended, so the first step was to ask the Office for Budget Responsibility to look at how oil prices feed into the economy and affect public finances. We have commissioned that work, as the hon. Lady will know, and now need to take on board its outcomes before looking at how it feeds into policy making. It would not be right to pre-empt the Budget. Indeed, when the hon. Member for Dundee East was asked for further details, he said that he needed some time, which indicates that this is a complex policy area—too complicated for the Labour party when it was in government.

In conclusion, we want to treat motorists fairly, but we must also act responsibly by ensuring that we tackle our record national debt and the financial deficit, which will not be easy. I will not hide from the House the fact that that is a difficult balance to strike, so difficult that the previous Government chose to ignore it completely. That is also the approach they have adopted for tackling the deficit, offering no credible alternatives to our policies and, in the case of fuel duty, no viable alternatives to their own policies, because it is their fuel duty escalator that is causing the problems.

Once again, it has been left to the coalition Government to clear up the mess left by the Labour Government and look at how we can reach a fair resolution on fuel duty, get our economy back on its feet and support our businesses, families and, in this case, motorists. I look forward to the rest of the debate and hope that we can have an open and honest discussion on the problems faced by motorists across the country and possible solutions. I look forward to hearing from Members in the run-up to this year's Budget what they think is the best way forward.

5.35 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) on making a powerful case on behalf of his constituents—along with the interventions from his colleagues—about the impact that people living in remote rural areas can feel as fuel prices go up. He did make a very powerful case on behalf of his constituents, and Labour Members do understand the impact that motorists are feeling as fuel prices go up. I might represent an urban seat, but as a Member of Parliament in the south-west I am very much aware of the issues that are faced.

**Stewart Hosie:** I thank the hon. Lady for saying that I made a powerful case, but Dundee East is very much an urban seat. It has a rural hinterland of course, but my constituency is half the city. I know where Bristol is; a wee bit of geography would be great.

**Kerry McCarthy:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. He was speaking on behalf of his colleagues in the more remote parts of Scotland, obviously, rather than on behalf of his own constituents. I thought that perhaps his constituency stretched a little further than the city boundaries.

For Governments, when considering fuel duties there is always a difficult balance to be struck between the need to raise revenue and balance the public finances; the need to address environmental concerns about increasing road traffic and emissions, to which there has not been much reference in this debate; and the need to ensure that the motorist and especially people who have to rely on their cars—people who do not have a choice in the matter because of where they live and the environment in which they live—are not disproportionately penalised. The previous Labour Government endeavoured to strike that balance, despite the points that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury made. That was why, for example, in years when fuel prices rose, Labour chose to put the fuel duty escalator on hold—to help motorists meet those rising costs. It is a tricky balance to strike, however, as today's debate demonstrates, and there are no easy answers.

**Justine Greening:** To clarify matters, is the formal Labour party position that the fuel duty rise should now go on hold?

**Kerry McCarthy:** If I can adopt the mantra that the hon. Member for Dundee East first used and the Minister then picked up on, I should say that that is a matter for us to discuss when we get round to the Budget negotiations. Today, we are here to discuss the two main proposals to ameliorate the impact of rising fuel prices, particularly on rural areas. We are talking about rural areas, rather than about fuel duty prices across the board.

The dog that has not barked during this debate—the thing that was most noticeably missing from the Minister's speech—is the fact that motorists are being hit hard by the increase in VAT to 20%, which has helped push petrol prices up to their current record levels.

**Stewart Hosie:** It suddenly strikes me that, when the Labour Government had their fiscal stimulus policy, they cut VAT by 2.5 percentage points and increased fuel duty by 2.5 percentage points to compensate, but

that, when VAT went back to 17.5%, the fuel duty rise was maintained. Does Labour now regret not reducing fuel duty in line with the increase in VAT?

**Kerry McCarthy:** Those matters were also affected by fuel prices at the time, but it is not my position to apologise for, or to express an opinion on, what my predecessors did.

The VAT rise now is the important thing. VAT went up at the beginning of the year from 17.5% to 20%. According to the Library, the VAT rise increases the cost of a litre of petrol by about 2.6p, assuming that it is passed on in full. That compares with the fuel duty increase in January of 0.76p per litre, so the VAT rise to 20% is hitting the motorist harder and people in rural areas, who rely on their cars most and have to travel longer distances, particularly hard.

**Mr MacNeil:** Is there any tinge of regret among Labour Members that for at least four years the previous Government did absolutely nothing on a rural fuel derogation?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I will deal with the rural fuel derogation and the problems that we see in implementing it later in my speech, if I may.

The VAT rise did not have to be imposed. It flew in the face of all the warm words that Conservative politicians uttered before the election about ending the war on motorists, helping hard-hit families and keeping fuel costs down, but now it has been done and motorists are paying the price.

Let me turn to the fuel duty stabiliser, or regulator, which the Minister glossed over very quickly.

**Mr MacNeil:** If we are talking about glossing over, I feel that the hon. Lady glossed over my question. Will she take this opportunity to apologise for her Government doing nothing for four years on the rural fuel derogation?

**Kerry McCarthy:** As I said, I am coming on to the derogation, but it is not my place to express such opinions.

In principle, on paper, the fuel duty stabiliser sounds like a fairly simple, reasonable proposition—as oil prices go up, fuel duty goes down, and as oil prices drop, fuel duty goes up, so the motorist pays more or less the same for fuel and the Exchequer gets more or less the same in revenue. However, economics are not that simple.

The idea of the regulator has been floated for some time. During the debate on the 2008 Finance Bill, the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Dundee East, suggested that a statutory instrument should implement an automatic mechanism so that as additional income from VAT receipts came in, it could be used to offset fuel duty in direct proportion. However, the regulator was based on rises in oil prices, not on rises in VAT receipts. It was assumed that one would flow from other—the hon. Gentleman reiterated that assumption today—but that is not necessarily the case, as the Office for Budget Responsibility has said.

**Stewart Hosie:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I would like to make some progress.

[Kerry McCarthy]

There are other concerns about the stabiliser. The then Liberal Democrat spokesman, who is now Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, said at the time of the 2008 Finance Bill debates that the idea of a fuel duty regulator was “unbelievably complicated and unpredictable”. He said that the Exchequer would have to predict the net windfall, and then:

“May I suggest that there might not be any net windfall at all?”—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2008; Vol. 479, c. 339.]

The OBR has now confirmed that.

Labour’s then Chief Secretary to the Treasury said:

“In the face of a world slowdown, to take any one tax in isolation and claim that there is a windfall available to spend is economically illiterate, irresponsible or just disingenuous.”—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2008; Vol. 479, c. 331.]

She was basically saying—this was echoed by the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne), who was the junior Liberal Democrat spokesman at the time—that we cannot consider these revenues in a silo. Yes, oil revenues might go up, which might provide a boost to the nation’s finances—although I stress the word “might”, because it does not necessarily follow that increased revenues come from increased oil prices—but other things might happen that affect revenue flows, and it is irresponsible not to look at everything in the round. Hypothecation can box us into a corner and hamper our choices, and that is a real problem in the case of the stabiliser.

**Justine Greening:** Was the Chief Secretary who referred to economic illiteracy the same Chief Secretary who left us, as an incoming Government, a note saying that there was no money left?

**Kerry McCarthy:** No, I was referring to my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). The Minister may have got the hint when I said “She”.

If a stabiliser were introduced, there is the question of whether the cut in duty would be passed on to the consumer at the pump. That would very difficult to achieve without further Government enforcement and interference. I am not sure how that would square with the Government’s purported dearly held belief in the free market and dislike for state interference in the operation of the free market.

**Mr Reid:** Yes, that issue must be considered, but the whole point of a pilot scheme is to enable us to work out whether the cuts are being passed on, which the Government would monitor. The hon. Lady’s argument is no case for not having a pilot scheme.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I am talking about the fuel duty stabiliser. I appreciate his confusion, because that has not been discussed much in this debate. The rural derogation is a separate issue. I am talking about how a stabiliser would be enforced.

Despite the concerns about a fuel duty stabiliser that were raised during the 2008 Finance Bill debates and afterwards, and the obvious difficulties in implementing one, the Conservatives could not resist dangling the prospect of reduced petrol prices before motorists’ eyes.

They published a consultation document in July 2008, which proposed the stabiliser:

“when fuel prices go up, fuel duty would fall. And when fuel prices go down, fuel duty would rise”.

That continued to be Conservative party policy until polling day. A week before polling day, the Prime Minister told voters on a visit to a Coca-Cola plant that

“we’d be helping with the cost of living by trying to give you a flatter and more constant rate for filling up your car”.

It was suggested by Conservative politicians in the media that it would be included in the new Government’s first Budget.

Before the election, this Government made all the right noises about tackling high petrol prices. They led the public to believe that they would take action to slash fuel duty and bring down the price of petrol at the pumps. Since then, they have done nothing. Actually, that is not quite true. They have done nothing to implement the fuel duty stabiliser, which they made such a song and dance about before the election, but they have hit the motorist by whacking up VAT to 20%. They have increased petrol prices, not cut them.

Even the Office for Budget Responsibility, set up by this Government to give independent, impartial advice, has said that the fuel duty stabiliser would not work. The underlying economics of the stabiliser contain a simple, basic assumption that when oil prices rise, the Government receive an unexpected windfall from taxes on North sea oil production. The OBR said that that is not the case, at least not in the long term. In “Assessment of the Effect of Oil Price Fluctuations on the Public Finances”, which was published on 14 September last year, the OBR reported that a temporary rise in the oil price would have a negligible effect on the UK public finances, and that a permanent rise would create a loss. The OBR said that it would be difficult for the Government to introduce a fair fuel stabiliser without a significant cost to the Exchequer:

“There is no improvement in the public finances to be used for stabilising the pump price in the case of a permanent shock.”

In fact, a permanent increase in fuel prices would have a negative impact on the public finances after a year, given the effects on demand, inflationary pressures, household income and consumer spending.

**Stewart Hosie:** The hon. Lady seems to be labouring under a misapprehension. The fuel duty regulator would temper spikes. If there is a structural change in the oil price, the baseline figure against which a trigger is measured has to be reset. We have all seen the OBR figures, but the OBR does not say that we should not have a short-term stabiliser to stop spikes; it says that there is no benefit in the long run, as she said. The regulator is designed to smooth out short-term spikes, not to stop structural changes in the oil price.

**Kerry McCarthy:** What I am saying is that a correlation between oil price movements and revenue has not been established by the OBR. In fact, it has said that that is not the case and that in the short term a temporary rise in the oil price would have a negligible impact on revenue. Therefore, the question is what money would be used to offset the stabiliser or regulatory mechanism that the hon. Gentleman’s party wants. If it does not come from the revenue, where does it come from?



**Stewart Hosie:** I remind the hon. Lady that the OBR's press notice was clear that the temporary £10 rise would deliver an overall effect in year 1 of £100 million. That is not insignificant.

**Kerry McCarthy:** The new head of the OBR, Robert Chote, said in an interview about a week ago that its analysis

"suggested that a fair fuel stabiliser would be likely to make the public finances less stable rather than more stable".

If a £10 increase in oil prices was passed through, the assumption is that it would add 7.4p per litre at the pump. To offset that would cost £3.7 billion, which is £1.3 billion more than the consequential rise in oil and gas revenues. It might have been a good idea for the Conservative party to carry out that sort of analysis before making promises that it could not keep. All the Economic Secretary has to say today is that the Government will consider the OBR's report.

I also ask the Economic Secretary what conversations she has had with people in the industry about the impact of fuel prices. I have been contacted by the Retail Motor Industry Federation, which tells me that it has written to the Chancellor and Prime Minister four times about the matter recently, with no response at all. It has stated that the Government have

"made no attempt to engage with industry"

and that it wants the policy of a stabiliser to be dropped, because it would be

"costly and a huge administrative burden".—[*Interruption.*]

Sorry, is the Economic Secretary saying that the RMI has not written to the Chancellor or the Prime Minister?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady says that there has been no engagement, which is completely wrong. Only about three weeks ago, we held a workshop on tax policy in relation to travelling and the environment, at which a range of stakeholders from a variety of sectors of the travelling industry came to the Treasury to talk about their challenges. Many said that it was the first time they had been invited in for any kind of constructive discussion.

**Kerry McCarthy:** The Economic Secretary says that as though I were the one saying that there had been no engagement. I am not, it is the RMI that states that the Government have

"made no attempt to engage with industry".

Perhaps she could place in the Library a copy of the response from either the Chancellor or the Prime Minister to the letter that the RMI says it has sent four times, and copy me in. That would confirm whether there has been an attempt to have a dialogue.

I turn to the other proposal under active consideration, the rural derogation. As we have heard, the Government are planning to pilot it in the inner and outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly, although from what the Economic Secretary said I am not sure whether those are the definite areas for the pilot or whether the matter is still under consideration. My understanding is that there would be a maximum 5p per litre discount on petrol and diesel sold in those areas.

Will the Economic Secretary elaborate on just how far the informal conversations with the European Union have gone? Have they been about just the pilot scheme,

or have there been discussions about introducing the scheme to a significant proportion of the British isles at some time in the future?

Following on from the question that my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark) asked, will the Economic Secretary explain on what basis the islands in question were chosen for the pilot as opposed to other remote rural areas? Does she not think that it will be difficult to extrapolate from pilots carried out in island areas how such a scheme would work in remote mainland areas, particularly those from which it is not so far to travel to urban areas where petrol is in greater supply? Will she explain why the pilot scheme is to be so limited, rather than a larger pilot that could have more evidential benefit and be used to show how the scheme would work across the country?

We have a number of other concerns about the rural derogation. There is a long-standing principle that excise duties are charged on a universal basis, and it would set quite a precedent to depart from that practice. As has been said, the scheme would be difficult and expensive to administer, because at the moment duty is levied when oil leaves the refinery, not at the point of retail sale. That takes us back to the point that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr Reid) made when I was talking about the stabiliser. How would the system be policed if there were to be differential duty at the point of sale? It sounds like a complex administrative system would be required.

**Justine Greening:** I am trying to follow the hon. Lady's argument, but it is not clear to me. Will she confirm whether she supports the Government's attempt to get a derogation in place by introducing pilots?

**Kerry McCarthy:** It is up to the Economic Secretary to answer the questions. We are certainly interested in the conversations that she is having with the EU, but we have major concerns about whether it is practical to take the proposal forward. We would like more information to be convinced that it will solve the problem.

The rural rebate proposal was, of course, a Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment, and it seems that the Government are now taking it up. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) referred to the fact that he has raised the matter on many occasions over the past 12 years, and when he was his party's transport spokesman he proposed a duty differential based on the Scottish Government's method of having eight categories to distinguish between urban, rural and remote areas. Again, that could become quite complex. It would be quite easy to calculate rebates in the case of geographically isolated, sparsely populated areas, but in southern Scotland, where there is more of a patchwork of those categories, it could be difficult.

**Dr Whiteford:** For clarity, will the hon. Lady tell us whether her party is saying no to a derogation and no to a stabiliser?

**Kerry McCarthy:** Again, it is for the Economic Secretary to tell us what her policy is on the stabiliser and so on. We are quite happy to discuss and consider proposals for tackling the problem of increased fuel prices in rural areas. However, when the OBR is telling us that the fuel

[Kerry McCarthy]

duty stabiliser would cost the public purse huge amounts of money and be difficult to administer, and when real and valid concerns are being raised about whether rural derogation pilot could be transposed over to mainland Britain, we are right to ask questions and require answers before we decide whether we can support the proposal.

**Dr Whiteford** *rose*—

**John Thurso** *rose*—

**Kerry McCarthy:** I want to conclude now. I have taken quite a lot of interventions, and hon. Members will have the opportunity to pose as many questions as they like in their own speeches.

Finally, I ask the Economic Secretary to confirm several things. Has the Conservative party dropped the fuel duty stabiliser policy in the light of the OBR's fairly clear and damning verdict on its practicability? Is the policy now restricted to the rural derogation, and what time scale does she think would be appropriate for its introduction? It will take some time to get it through the EU, and considerably longer to roll it out to the UK as a whole. In the meantime, is she actively considering the impact of the VAT increase on fuel prices? That is something that is hitting people now, not an issue for the future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. This has proved to be a popular debate, and nine Members have indicated that they wish to participate in the short space of time that we have left. To be as fair as we possibly can, and to try to get everybody in, we are going to introduce a seven-minute time limit, with the usual injury time for two interventions.

5.57 pm

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I will keep it short, Mr Deputy Speaker.

We all know why we are having this debate today—the extortionate increases in fuel duty brought in mainly by the last Government, which were made worse by three increases introduced in the last Labour Budget that the new Government have to implement or find revenue from elsewhere.

My argument has always been that our top priority must be to cut the deficit, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is doing. We have a national and moral duty to do so. After that, we need to start considering ways to cut the burden of tax and get our country moving again—excuse the pun. When that process begins, fuel duty should be our top priority.

On Friday I was called by a haulier in my constituency, Mick Gorry, who claims that despite turning over £4.5 million from his 41 trucks in Morecambe, he made just £19,000 profit in the last financial year. To unpick that, we need to understand that of that £4.5 million turnover, £2.2 million was spent on fuel. As prices rise, it is easy to see how that small profit could disappear.

This is an Opposition day debate, but let us not delude ourselves: this problem was created by the last Labour Government, and we must work out how to clear it up. Mr Gorry is convinced that the solution to

the essential user rebate is a fuel stabiliser. He makes the point, rightly in my view, that haulage costs are pushed up by prices in the shops, which in turn causes the risk of inflation, which we must avoid in an economic downturn. But let us not be unrealistic. As I said at the outset, our top priority is to cut the deficit. Thirteen years were spent telling everyone that we could pay for everything—we must never fall into that trap again. As a coalition supporter, I can look my constituents in the eye and tell them honestly that we do not have a bottomless pit of money, but that we can and will cut tax when the public finances are in a better position.

It benefits no one to have a bankrupt United Kingdom—everyone agrees about that. If we had continued down the old path, we would be in that position. My constituency looks to the House and the Government to show leadership on the matter. We showed ourselves at our best by being honest about the challenges and trying to find solutions. Without the reckless spending of the past, Mr Gorry would not be spending £2.2 million a year on fuel every year.

I support our Chancellor wholeheartedly. I support a proposed fuel stabiliser and any forthcoming rebates. I have yet to hear any detail from the Opposition about how they would try to get us out of the mess into which they got us.

6 pm

**Paul Murphy** (Torfaen) (Lab): I welcome the debate, and the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) made a powerful speech. It is relevant that it arises on a Supply day motion from the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, because the issue is also of particular concern to Northern Ireland, and the hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long) is in her place. All devolved Administrations have a voice to raise and a point to make about the fuel increases in their countries. Hon. Members will know that a joint ministerial Committee meeting took place last week in London, when the First Ministers of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland jointly asked the Government to ensure that there would be no increase in fuel prices in the Budget in April. I hope that that will be the case.

I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) about some of the detail of the derogation for rural areas. I support the idea of a pilot, but it should include at least one part of Wales, and to confine it to islands would make such a study rather artificial. I appreciate that there are particular problems in rural parts of the United Kingdom and it is important to consider that, but confining the pilot to islands would be a mistake.

**Naomi Long:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if there were a pilot, it would be helpful if a part of Northern Ireland were included in it, given that there are specific problems due to the geographical separation between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom?

**Paul Murphy:** Indeed. When I was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the point was always made to me that it is the only part of the United Kingdom that has a border with another country—the Republic of Ireland—

and the problems of fuel prices in Northern Ireland are particularly acute. It would be a good idea to have a pilot there, too.

The Economic Secretary spent much of her time telling us that it was all the Labour Government's fault, and then she said that she wanted to be conciliatory. If I may say so, she is slightly schizophrenic about what she wants. Let me emphasise to her that, for the 24 years that I have been in the House of Commons, whether in opposition or in government, the Treasury has always won its case. It has won it on the basis that it wanted the money from fuel—a Conservative Government as much as a Labour Government argued for fuel regulators. There is no point in trying to say that one side or the other is responsible because all Governments in the past three decades have done precisely that.

There is a difference now—and we will differ fundamentally about the reasons for it. Given that we are post banking crisis and have to deal with the deficit, of course the world has changed and we must therefore consider imaginatively ways in which to deal with the fuel prices that our businesses and our families have to pay. However, the Economic Secretary must recognise the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East made: the single, most devastating reason for fuel price rises in the past few months is the increase in VAT. It is as simple as that. Petrol and diesel are more expensive because VAT has gone up. As all Opposition parties have argued, we should rethink the VAT increase.

The effect of the fuel prices on small businesses in Wales is calamitous. The difference in Wales, as in Scotland, Northern Ireland and parts of England, is that so much of our economy is now based on the success of small and medium-sized businesses. If they are to suffer—it has been shown that they will if fuel prices increase—special attention should be paid to them. The Federation of Small Businesses in Wales has already said that it is disappointed with the Government's treatment of fuel prices. The Economic Secretary is right to say that devolved Administrations have a part to play in that the Government and the devolved Administrations should work closely with small businesses to see how they can tackle the matter.

Small businesses also deal with other pressures. In south Wales, the Severn bridge is undoubtedly a problem for them. Someone who has a large vehicle such as a lorry and crosses from England to Wales has to pay £17 each time. That is a big disincentive to small businesses in Wales. Earlier, the Prime Minister rightly pointed out that he, like me and every hon. Member, wants banks in our countries to lend more regularly, more frequently and more effectively to small businesses.

The debate is important—so important that hon. Members from all parts of the United Kingdom are taking part in it to ensure that the Government's mind is bent to trying to find a solution. I fear that the Economic Secretary was right when she said that the fuel stabiliser was a problem—doubtless the Government are looking at it—but there are serious issues, which could have a knock-on effect unless they are tackled effectively and carefully.

In the past couple of days, I went to my local Sainsbury's petrol station to fill up. Like many supermarkets, it offers diesel and petrol at much cheaper rates than smaller, independent petrol stations. I paid just over £1.30 a litre for diesel. Compared with some of the

prices, which we have heard today, in parts of rural Scotland and Wales, the price in my part of the world, although quite high, is lower.

It particularly struck me, when considering the reasons for taking part in the debate, that Shell was making £1.6 million an hour in profits. I know that that is not all on fuel. However it strikes me as incongruous that, when the citizens and businesses of our country have to face huge, inflationary rises because of increases in fuel duty, large oil companies are making those enormous profits. Perhaps the Government can consider that. They were supposed to look at how the banks share out their profits and pay their bonuses. They have not done well on that. Perhaps they should look at some oil companies, too.

Whatever the Government do, they should understand that there is real and justified concern from all Members about the fuel increases. I hope that they will listen.

6.7 pm

**Mr Alan Reid** (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Representing a sparsely populated rural constituency, I am only too aware of the severe impact of the high fuel price on motorists and local businesses. It is important to remember that, in remote areas, a car is an essential, not a luxury.

Let us consider the purpose of high fuel duty. Two arguments are often advanced: the green argument and the tax-raising argument. The green argument does not stack up in rural areas, because it is based on encouraging people out of their cars and on to public transport. That fails completely in the highland and islands of Scotland, where buses are few and far between. Indeed, there would be no point in rural councils in remote areas subsidising buses that run with only one or two passengers to try to reduce carbon emissions. Clearly, one or two people taking a car will cause far fewer carbon emissions than one or two people on a bus.

I represent many of the islands of the Inner Hebrides, and the price of fuel is far higher there than on the mainland. On the larger islands, such as Mull and Islay, the price of a litre of fuel is typically 15p higher than in a city. On the smaller islands, such as Coll and Colonsay, the price is often about 30p a litre higher. I was therefore delighted when the Government announced their intention to pursue a pilot scheme under which there would be a 5p fuel duty discount on many islands, including the Inner Hebrides. I realise that they must get EU permission to go ahead with that scheme, but since other EU countries operate a similar scheme for islands, I see no reason why permission will not be granted. It takes time to take such projects through the EU, and it is important that the Government get their proposals right, but I plead with them to take their proposals through as quickly as is humanly possible.

**Mr MacNeil:** When does the hon. Gentleman hope to see the rural fuel derogation in action on the Inner Hebrides?

**Mr Reid:** I hope that the scheme will be implemented as soon as possible, and that it can be extended to remote parts of the mainland once the pilot schemes are proven to be successful, as I am sure they will be.

Any argument that fuel duty must increase yet further in order to deter car use is complete nonsense. The high price of fuel already deters car use, and simply increasing

[Mr Reid]

the duty further will have no effect on the environment. As other hon. Members have said, increasing the duty will simply harm the rural economy.

I recognise that fuel duty brings in a lot of money for the Treasury, and that the Budget must be balanced. We face an enormous budget deficit, which was inherited from the previous Government, but I put it to the Chancellor that yet another fuel duty increase in the coming Budget will harm the economy, particularly in rural areas, and urge him to find another way of raising that money. Fuel duty discriminates against rural areas in a way that no other tax does. Almost any other tax increase to replace an increase in fuel duty would therefore be an improvement.

We have debated the stabiliser previously, particularly during proceedings on the Finance Act 2009, when the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) proposed one. The crucial decision is on the amount around which the price should be stabilised. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne), who was a Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman at the time, pointed out that the proposal from the hon. Member for Dundee East would mean that the fuel duty would have been 4.5p higher if it had been introduced in the 2008 Budget. I am disappointed that in the intervening two years, the hon. Gentleman has not come forward with a detailed, workable proposal.

**Katy Clark:** I recall the debate and vote on that proposal. Parts of my constituency are similar to the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Does he agree that the technical and practical problems of introducing a nationwide derogation would need to be looked at very seriously? When those on the Treasury Bench consider the detail, they might find that a nationwide scheme is impossible. Does he therefore agree that we need to consider introducing a scheme in specific communities in specific parts of the country, like the pilot scheme?

**Mr Reid:** Yes, I agree with the hon. Lady. I hope that a stabiliser formula for the whole country can be found and made to work, but I remain sceptical. It is important that the Government consider that idea, but it is also important that no idea is put into practice without careful consideration of all possible negative effects. Any rigid formula could have such unforeseen effects, such as the 4.5p increase that would have resulted in 2009. I am convinced that a rural fuel derogation could be made to work in a specific area. I have no argument whatever against a stabiliser pilot scheme, but I remain sceptical. It would be great if a stabiliser could be made to work—the Government ought to consider it—but we must be very careful. The way forward is definitely a rural fuel discount.

The Budget is only a few weeks away. It is important that the Chancellor exercises restraint and that he does not increase fuel duty in the Budget, when the fuel price is already so high. However, rather than having a rigid stabiliser formula, which could have unforeseen side effects, it is important that he acts sensibly.

Under the previous Labour Government's policy in their last Budget—the fuel escalator—the tax on fuel would increase by more than 4p a litre in April. I hope

that the Government do not follow Labour's policy. That would be grim news for a rural economy that is already struggling under the burden of a high fuel price. I urge the Chancellor to heed the warnings he has received on the impact that another 4p per litre increase would have, and I plead with him to cancel the proposed fuel duty increase in the Budget.

6.15 pm

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I have listened with great interest to this afternoon's debate. I intend to limit my remarks to aspects of it that relate most to the area that I represent. That part of rural Aberdeenshire and Banffshire has no railway stations and very limited public transport options—there are far fewer bus services than hon. Members will find in urban areas. This is therefore an urgent issue not just for individuals, but for businesses in remote and rural areas, and I am glad that Members on both sides of the House take it seriously.

It almost goes without saying that people who live in the more remote and rural parts of Scotland, Wales and other parts of the UK have to travel further to access the most basic amenities, whether post offices, shops, schools, places of work or doctor's surgeries. Inevitably, they incur extra costs in doing so, yet as other hon. Members have pointed out, people in rural and remote areas pay higher prices. In parts of my constituency, they pay £1.36 per litre for fuel. That might not be quite as high a price as is paid in some of the island communities, but it is nevertheless well above the average.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The hon. Lady is quite right to point out that those in peripheral or rural areas pay more because their need for the car is greater. In addition, those people need larger cars, and there is a big difference between the costs of petrol and diesel—many diesel vehicle owners are hit harder. We are talking not about Chelsea tractors, but essential means of transport in rural areas.

**Dr Whiteford:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I live in rural Aberdeenshire, and at this time of year, I fully appreciate the need for vehicles that are suitable for the roads on which they travel and the driving conditions.

There is a huge irony in this situation for people in my constituency, who have had an oil terminal on their doorstep for many years. People who live at the heart of Europe's oil and gas industry pay among the highest prices for petrol and diesel in Europe. That irony is certainly not wasted on folk in my part of the world. Nearly 62% of what we pay at the pumps goes directly in tax and duty to the Treasury. My concern—this is the chief point that I want to make this evening—is that that is a disproportionate tax on people who live and work in rural and remote areas.

**Jim McGovern** (Dundee West) (Lab): May I say that I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I was not here at the beginning of the debate? I was in Dundee for the launch of the Scottish Affairs Committee inquiry into the video games industry. The hon. Lady is a member of that Committee, so I am sure she will understand.

Does the hon. Lady agree that while figures suggest that fuel duty puts 1p on the price of a litre of petrol or fuel, VAT puts somewhere in the region of 3p a litre on

it? Should we not attack the coalition Government for increasing VAT instead of looking for fuel duty regulators? I see that she is being advised by her colleagues on that.

**Dr Whiteford:** Had the hon. Gentleman been here earlier, he would have heard that point addressed in previous contributions. Both VAT and duty have a part to play. The previous Government's record on this was shameful in not allowing motorists to benefit from the falls in VAT at the beginning of the recession. The key point is that the disproportionate tax on rural parts of these islands does not only harm individual motorists, but inhibits our business growth and the development of our rural economies.

**Katy Clark:** I support what the hon. Lady says about islands and remote communities, and I support a fuel duty discount for such areas. However, the bigger picture is how much we tax fuel in this country, and Britain has decided to have a high level of tax on petrol, diesel and other fuels. Does she support that?

**Dr Whiteford:** We have heard a lot this afternoon about the need for the Treasury to balance its books, and about the role of tax in that, but the fundamental underlying question is: why should people have to pay more and disproportionate tax just because they do not have access to public transport or happen to live in a rural area? I am all for tax, so long as it is fair, proportionately applied, and people are not discriminated against for living and working in a rural area.

The impact is felt particularly by businesses. As other Members have said, goods and services have to be moved into and out of parts of rural Scotland by road, and in many areas we already have to overcome significant challenges arising from our distance from markets. The area I represent has strong food processing, farming and fishing sectors and a great deal of manufacturing, but companies in northern Scotland have to cover the extra costs they incur and the extra taxes they pay, but nobody else has to, in order to make viable business plans. We have come through difficult times but are still struggling to emerge from the recession, and the fluctuating price of oil causes great instability and uncertainty for business. Big and small businesses alike struggle with that. Big businesses can sometimes buy fuel while in greater debt, but small businesses, which are often the greater engine of growth in our communities, really struggle with the unpredictability caused by fluctuating prices.

In conclusion, I urge the Government to honour their commitments before the election. I cannot over-emphasise the urgency and immediacy of this issue in rural Scotland. I urge them to consider the matter seriously. We have heard a lot about the derogation. I hope that not just island communities will be included in that, but that, notwithstanding the difficulties, other rural and remote parts will be included too. I also hope that much more attention will be given to the stabiliser, which, ultimately, will create fairness in the system and proportionality in the taxation on fuel.

6.23 pm

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): This has been an interesting debate for a number of reasons. However, I begin by apologising to the hon.

Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) for missing the opening part of his remarks in introducing the debate.

The issue of fuel costs touches not only those living in regions that the devolved Administrations are largely responsible for governing, but many rural constituencies across the country, and certainly my constituents and members of the public across Lincolnshire. The reason is that it costs—and has done for a long time—a great deal of money to run a car, given the current fuel prices. However, a car is not a luxury to my constituents and people living not only in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland but in rural parts of England. In those places, a car is a necessity. Owing to the state of public transport, people cannot live their lives without at least one car—certainly, they could not do so without great difficulty.

Much of my constituency is made up of rural areas dotted with small villages and farms, which means that I live in a beautiful part of the country. However, it also means that it takes a great deal of time to get to the doctor's, the supermarket or anywhere else that one needs to get to in order to live one's ordinary life. Public transport has got worse over the past few years, and will continue to get worse owing to the state of the deficit left by the previous Government and the need for this Government to deal with it. That will not be conducive to better public transport over the next few years, and will exacerbate the problems caused by high fuel prices.

I would like to echo a point made by the Economic Secretary. The Labour Government left us with the worst possible fiscal position. The simple fact is that we are paying debt interest of £120 million a day in circumstances where 1p on fuel raises only £500 million. It does not take a very good mathematician to work out that were we not paying that debt, we would not need the level of fuel duty or VAT that we do—with all that that has meant for the current fuel crisis. I heard no apology in the remarks of the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) or explanation of why we have been left with this debt legacy and of what it means, in the context of this debate, for my constituents and others all over rural Britain who are paying the price for the previous Government's failure, *inter alia*, through the cost of fuel.

**Guy Opperman** (Hexham) (Con): Does my hon. and learned Friend think that it was right for the leader of the Labour party to indicate that he would not have implemented the previous two fuel rises in the current circumstances?

**Stephen Phillips:** I have not seen the comments made by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). However, he was at the heart of the previous Administration, with all that that meant for the legacy inherited by this Government. Whatever opportunism Labour Members pursued—we saw it last week during the forestry debate from a party that sold off 25,000 acres of forest without any guarantees of rights of public access—we understand that it is the duty of the Opposition to oppose. However, I do not understand many of his policies, and I do not expect that I understand this one any better than any of the others.

We have heard about two mechanisms that might serve to address some of the difficulties associated with current high fuel prices. The first is the derogation. The Government have done more to take that forward during

[Stephen Phillips]

the few short months they have been in office than the previous Government did during the entire time they were in office. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) and his predecessor who have done so much work on this matter. It is gratifying that we at last have a Government who are beginning to take this issue seriously and to negotiate on it in Europe. I hope that in due course we will see this derogation.

On behalf of my constituents, I would like to hear from the Exchequer Secretary that the pilot, whatever that might be, is rolled out not just in the remote rural areas referred to in the amendment—the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly—but in areas of England affected by high fuel prices.

**Heather Wheeler** (South Derbyshire) (Con): Could my hon. and learned Friend expand on the rural areas in England suffering with high fuel prices? It would be helpful for the Exchequer Secretary. Certainly in South Derbyshire we are seeing prices as high as £1.36 a litre. We are suffering too, and if that could be borne in mind when he sums up, it would be superb.

**Stephen Phillips:** I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will take into account the views from Derbyshire. I do not want to take up too much time dealing with that, however, because there are a number of other people who want to contribute to the debate.

What I want to hear from the Government Front Bench is that the pilot will be rolled out not just in island communities in Scotland or elsewhere, but in England. There are areas, such as the constituency that I represent, where it costs people an enormous amount just to live their ordinary lives, which is effectively a piece of discrimination via the tax system. We deserve the piloting of such a break, in just the same way as those areas of the United Kingdom where the pilot will take place deserve it.

This is not the subject of today's debate, but a lot of my postbag is taken up with correspondence from constituents expressing concern about the Barnett formula and the way it effectively sends a subsidy—they would say at their expense—to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. That is one of the issues that this Government will have to grapple with, at the same time as explaining to my constituents why the derogation will mean that there may be lower prices in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I have not yet dealt with the other limb to what is proposed—it is something that I understand the Government are looking at, and they must consider it carefully—namely, the fuel duty stabiliser. The fuel duty stabiliser, which we talked about in the election, is designed to smooth out, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) said, the spikes in prices that harm our constituents so much. To those who have read it, it is clear that the Office for Budget Responsibility report indicated that, although difficult, introducing the fuel duty stabiliser would not make that much difference to the revenue going to the Exchequer.

I did not understand the position of the hon. Member for Bristol East on that issue, as on so many other things. I am sure that in due course there will be some

intolerant tweets about what I am saying about her across the Chamber, as that is her general way of dealing with me. I did not understand her or her party's position on the fuel duty stabiliser, because she was unable properly to tell the House what it was, and I certainly did not understand her party's position on the derogation from Europe. If the Opposition are to oppose in a responsible way, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, it would help if the Government and Members in all parts of the House know what the Opposition's position is, because at the moment, on this issue as on so many others, we do not.

Let me say a word about the question before the House. The difficulty with the motion, as the Government's proposed amendment recognises, is that it does not take into account the concerns of constituencies other than those in the devolved Administrations. The motion is focused, no doubt for perfectly good political and tactical reasons, on those constituencies, not ours. It is for that reason, among many others, that I will not be supporting it, although I will of course support the amendment that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary moved.

6.33 pm

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I shall try to be brief to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr Weir) to get in.

Simply put, fuel in my constituency costs a ridiculous amount, at £1.45 a litre. What we want, in essence, is to pay the same tax as elsewhere. We are only looking for fairness. A rural fuel derogation would not achieve fairness, but it would take us to the foothills of fairness and would be a big step in the right direction, reducing the price from £1.45 a litre to £1.40. I have sympathy with those in South Derbyshire; I only wish I was enjoying the prices that they are currently burdened with. We have to remember that, at the back of this debate, we want to look at fuel distribution throughout the country, which is often a difficulty to do with refineries—part of the excuse that some of the companies use as well.

Remoteness is often blamed, but I discovered recently that while we pay £1.44 a litre, those in the Faroe islands pay 94p a litre for diesel and £1.10 for petrol. For those who do not know, the Faroe islands are halfway between the Hebrides and Iceland, where petrol and diesel are £1.10 a litre. We do not need to go too far back to remember the difficult economic situation that Iceland faced. It has a big debt, although its deficit is not in the same situation as the UK's, but it clearly understands that high fuel costs choke recovery. Iceland is not making that mistake; indeed, in the last quarter, Icelandic GDP grew far more than the UK's. The Government here can talk of the deficit, but if they carry on like this, they will choke the recovery and will not see revenues flowing into their coffers, as they should and would like to.

The price is painful for us. As I left Benbecula this morning, the fuel concerns of Mr Alec MacIntosh, who works at Benbecula airport, were ringing in my ear, and small wonder, as he had just bought some fuel at £1.46 a litre. I think that his week's wages had just about gone in filling up his vehicle. Those at Stornoway airport attacked my other eardrum on the issue. There is scarcely a place I can go without people seeing me as a telegraph to relay to the Treasury the pain that people are feeling.

That pain is real, and I hope that that is taken on board. Indeed, it is not just pain; it is anger, because people know that more tax is flooding from my constituency to London than from just about any other constituency. We have the highest fuel poverty in the UK, and small wonder. The islands really need a rural fuel derogation, and they need it quickly. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark) spoke earlier, and I have sympathy with those on Arran, too. Indeed, I saw the MSP for Arran, Kenny Gibson, on the television vociferously calling for a rural fuel derogation.

The high cost has an impact on a whole raft of other budgets. Local councils are haemorrhaging cash because they can run their vehicles only by paying higher fuel costs—again, the money goes directly to the Treasury—as are our health boards, and our police, fire, coastguard and ambulance services. They are all having to deal with budgetary cuts every time they fill up their vehicles, because of the cost of fuel. Businesses are losing too, and less money is circulating locally. Indeed, so vexed was one constituent of mine—Erica MacDonald—that she started a petition a few months ago and came to the Treasury. She is now wondering whether the EU's rural development policy—€96 billion over a number of years—can be used. I do not think that it can, but such is the level of research being done by individual voters in rural and island Scotland, who are looking for solutions and hoping that the Treasury will listen to some of them.

Talking of solutions, we certainly listened to the Labour party earlier. We heard a repetition of what I would call the Pontius Pilate approach. The Labour party seemingly has no view on a rural fuel derogation or a fuel duty stabiliser, and no other plans or suggestions. Indeed, if those on the Labour Front Bench have a concrete plan or suggestion, I would ask them to tell us what it is. We definitely heard no apology for the years we spent in this place listening to the previous Government's excuses for doing absolutely nothing, leaving places such as the Outer Hebrides with shockingly high fuel costs.

**Stewart Hosie:** My hon. Friend talks about the dearth of opinion on the Labour Front Bench. Might that be a consequence of the Labour leader saying recently that Labour found it difficult to implement a fuel duty regulator when in power, when in fact Labour voted against every single attempt to introduce one?

**Mr MacNeil:** Absolutely. Labour was against a fuel duty regulator, a rural fuel derogation and anything else that would have helped people in the Hebrides.

**Mr Reid:** What the hon. Gentleman is saying about the previous Labour Government is perfectly correct, but does he not have it within himself to congratulate the coalition Government? He knows that, time after time, I, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) and other Liberal Democrats, put forward proposals in debates on Finance Bills for rural fuel derogations, and the Labour party rejected them. This Government are going to implement that. Will he not have the decency to recognise that and congratulate the Government?

**Mr MacNeil:** I certainly do have the decency to recognise that. I am very pleased that that announcement was made in the autumn. In fact, I think I text messaged the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to say how delighted

I was. My only fear is that Liberal Members have lost the fierce urgency that they used to have in opposition, and are not really looking for a date on which we will see a rural fuel derogation. By Christmas we had heard that nothing formal had happened—that was one of the lines that came out. We want things to happen, and we genuinely need them to happen. The coalition agreement mentioned the rural fuel derogation. It did not mention the VAT rise, but hey, that was put in place quite quickly—by new year—yet we have not seen the rural fuel derogation.

The European Commission has been blamed, so I wrote to the Commission asking for the timetable, to see whether things are indeed being held back. However, the European Commission being the European Commission, it probably does not feel very accountable to democratically elected citizens in the member states of the EU. That is a matter for the European Commission. I hope that it is listening and will respond quickly, because we need action now. I need to know from the Government whether the formal stage has started. Just when will we see a rural fuel derogation? How long has it taken to get a rural fuel derogation in other countries? Those are the questions that I am being asked when I go back to the Hebrides, and I need answers from the Treasury now.

The rural fuel derogation is not at all like Christmas, because Christmas has come and gone, but where is the rural fuel derogation? I acknowledge that progress has been made, and I am pleased to see that. There are good intentions behind it, but thus far, it has been as effective only as the progress made by Labour. I hope that, in a year's time, the situation will be very different. I hope that we will not have to debate the issue again in a year's time, but I fear that we will. The Labour Government were famous for the ridiculous, obstinate answers that they gave us over the years—they were against giving any help at all to the islands—and my worry is that the Liberals have really lost the urgency of now. They should remember that there are elections in May, and that if there has been no action by then, the voting will hurt them.

6.40 pm

**George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con):** I am grateful for this opportunity to speak in the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) and his colleagues on raising this matter. I, for one, could listen to their wonderful brogue all afternoon.

**Stewart Hosie:** May I just say to the hon. Gentleman that I do not have a brogue or an accent? It is he who has the accent.

**George Freeman:** We can debate that another day.

The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues spoke eloquently about the needs of the rural economy, and I know that he will want to send his best wishes to one of the most exciting businesses in Norfolk, the English Whisky Co., which is doing great trade. As in so many debates, most of the suggestions that he and his colleagues made would lead to an increase in expenditure by the Exchequer, and, representing an English constituency, I find myself thinking, "English tax for Scottish voters." His points on the rural economy were good ones, however, and I want to touch on the impact of fuel prices on that economy and offer some thoughts on how the Government might like to tackle the issue.

[George Freeman]

Fuel costs hit rural areas particularly hard, not only in Scotland but in England and Wales. In my constituency, where I am lucky enough to have four towns, 110 villages and a 130-mile boundary, the rurality is extreme. Fuel currently costs 130p a litre, which means that the average family are paying £70-odd to fill up their car. That is not a matter to be taken lightly. Families are hit particularly hard, especially those on low incomes who, it has been pointed out, tend to drive older, less efficient cars. Another group that is hit hard by high fuel costs is one by which the coalition has set so much store—namely, the people who are working hard to get out of welfare and into work. Small businesses are also affected, especially those in remote rural areas. They are crucial to the revitalisation of the rural economy.

The public sector is also affected by fuel costs. Many rural councils are hit very hard by their dependence on fuel, and this is another area in which rural councils in England have received particularly unfair treatment. Farmers are also hard hit, especially those growing commodity crops such as sugar beet and potatoes that require long-distance haulage. Hauliers are affected too, especially smaller, self-employed hauliers, who tell me that they are hit by the unfairness of the lack of a level playing field on which to compete with their European competitors.

**Rory Stewart** (Penrith and The Border) (Con): May I make a plea to my hon. Friend to include a mention of dairy and livestock farmers, as they are also hit very hard by fuel prices in Cumbria?

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

On the wider economy, fuel inflation in rural areas not only affects rural communities but hinders our national economic growth. This goes to the heart of two of the coalition's laudable objectives: the rebalancing of the economy and promotion of economic growth outside the City of London and our main metropolitan centres; and the attempts to help those sectors of the economy that do more than operate in the service, retail and housing industries—namely, the sectors that make things, transport things and sell things. Those sectors are hit particularly hard and we need to do all that we can to help them.

The reality that those on the Opposition Benches—particularly the Labour Benches—do not want to face is the fact that we have inherited a chronic legacy in our public finances that is costing £120 million a day in interest, which represents £20,000 of debt for every man, woman and child in the country. If we had not tackled the debt crisis, the interest payments would have been heading towards £70 billion a year. I repeat these figures because they need repeating to those on the Labour Benches. It ill behoves a serious party of government to come to the House, as those on the Labour Front Bench did today, and show no recognition of its part in causing this fiscal crisis. Labour Members have made no serious analysis of the rural economy and rural communities—[*Interruption.*] I wish that they would listen to what I am saying, rather than talking over it. They had no positive suggestions for how we might tackle the problem.

Fuel inflation risks strangling the economic recovery in our most marginal rural communities, but we cannot afford to do what we would like to do to address that. I therefore urge the Government, in accepting the constraints under which they are operating, to look carefully at the options.

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need a sustainable solution, one that will work in bad times as well as good, rather than a knee-jerk reaction to what is clearly a problem for many rural constituencies, including my own?

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is vital that we should not go for some short-term gimmick, and that we make a sustainable, serious commitment to helping rural communities and the rural economy.

My constituents and many in other rural constituencies have been encouraged by the Prime Minister's continued espousal of the benefits of a fair fuel stabiliser. I defer to Ministers and experts in the Treasury on determining the right mechanism for that. We have a duty to make some gesture towards ameliorating this problem, and my plea to the Ministers and Treasury experts is that, whatever mechanism we go for, we focus on two groups in most urgent need: the rural small businesses on which we rely for economic growth and for the jobs in the rural economy on which we all ultimately depend; and the very lowest-paid employees who are struggling to get on and make something of their lives by earning a living. In my constituency, the average income is £17,500, and such people are hit hardest by this serious problem. I urge Ministers to do all that they can in the forthcoming Budget.

6.47 pm

**Mr Mike Weir** (Angus) (SNP): There has been a change since the general election. We spent the last Parliament trying to persuade the Labour Government to do something about this problem, and they steadfastly refused to do so. Now, we hear warm words from the new Government, but unfortunately we have yet to see any real action. That is the problem. Those on both Front Benches talked about the practicalities of this or that measure, and how they would have to look into them further, and I could hear the sound of things being thrown furiously at television screens up and down the country by people who are suffering now because of high fuel prices. It will be no good if it takes a year for any action to be taken, because, in that time, many of the businesses that are suffering now will no longer be in operation. That is important to the local economies of the areas concerned.

The Minister and others have talked about the need to pay down the deficit and to encourage growth. That is all true, but the growth in rural areas comes through small and medium-sized enterprises—the very businesses that are suffering most, as a result not only of fuel duty but of higher VAT and all the other factors affecting the economy. High fuel costs are strangling small businesses which have to transport goods into and out of their businesses by road, as there is no alternative. People have talked about transporting goods by rail, but in many areas such as my own, there is no realistic prospect of that happening. I have a rail line in my constituency;



it goes up the whole of the east coast. Unfortunately, however, there are no freight depots on it. It is therefore impossible to use it for those purposes, and those businesses have to use the roads.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. Does he agree that those same areas are also being hard hit by the rise in domestic oil prices? Are they not facing a double whammy in that regard?

**Mr Weir:** Indeed; I will come to that point later if I have time.

It is not only the businesses but their employees and the other people who live in the rural areas who are suffering in many ways. My constituency comprises small towns and villages, and many people have to travel to get to work. They have to use their cars to do so.

**Guy Opperman** *rose*—

**Jim McGovern** *rose*—

**Mr Weir:** I will not give way at the moment.

Many of my constituents have to travel to work, and they have no alternative to their car. There are bus services, but if we look at how people work today—many work split shifts and might have one or two jobs to make ends meet—we see that it is very difficult for them to get to their work places by bus. This places a great deal of pressure on family budgets. If we are talking about creating work and getting people back into it, we must make it easier for people to travel.

**Jim McGovern:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way on this point?

**Mr Weir:** I want to finish the point; I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

As I mentioned in an intervention, *The Guardian* this morning features an article saying that bus routes are about to be slashed, and I understand that the rural bus rebate given to local authorities is also going to go. All that will cut back even further people's ability to get to work by bus. I will now give way to the hon. Member for Dundee West (Jim McGovern) before he jumps up again.

**Jim McGovern:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I must say first that I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) criticised me for repeating a point and for not having been here earlier. I did explain why I was not here, but my main point is for the hon. Member for Angus (Mr Weir). I am sure he is aware that Stagecoach, a company owned by Brian Souter and one of the biggest donors to the Scottish National party, has said that the fuel price increases will help its business.

**Mr Weir:** The hon. Gentleman is bringing irrelevancies into this; we are talking about the real problems that rural areas face, and I am sorry that he does not understand that.

There is another problem with cars. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) made the point that many people in rural areas have old

vehicles and cannot afford to buy new ones. That brings several problems. Those vehicles are not only less reliable, but use more petrol than modern vehicles do and cost more to maintain and more to run in road tax and other things. People are suffering seriously by having to travel to work by car.

The right hon. Member for Torfaen (Paul Murphy) talked about what the devolved Administrations could do. The devolved Scottish Administration has introduced a business bonus to help with the costs of running small businesses. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the ending of the Severn bridge toll. There is a huge cost in fuel for transportation, which is really hitting small businesses.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr Reid) mentioned the green argument, and I would like to address some of the related issues. Strangely enough, I agreed with a lot of what he had to say—I shall surely not make a habit of it!—but it seems to me that there is nothing green about strangling local economies in rural areas. Some say that people can move on to drive electric cars. I would like to see an electric car that would take me around my Angus constituency, never mind Argyll or Caithness and Sutherland, but the range is simply not available.

**Jim McGovern:** Does the hon. Gentleman have time to give way again?

**Mr Weir:** No, I do not.

There are real problems with fuel prices and they are strangling business in rural areas. They are an attack not only on the business itself, but on the family budget.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), who is no longer in his place, mentioned home fuel oil. I appreciate that it is taxed differently from petrol, so it is a different issue, but he is quite correct to say that throughout rural Scotland, the escalating price of home fuel oil—used in many hard-to-treat homes that are otherwise unable to get central heating or any heating at all—is a huge problem, which is also hitting many people. These costs are devastating the rural economy.

The right hon. Member for Torfaen also mentioned supermarkets giving discounts on petrol, but in some ways this is a somewhat insidious practice. The Minister talked about people going to petrol stations, but in many rural areas such stations have ceased to exist. One of the hidden costs of living in rural areas is that people often have to travel many miles to fill up their vehicles with petrol in the first place. Cars cannot be driven right until the orange light comes on; if they are, they are unlikely to get to a petrol station for a fill-up and will be stranded somewhere along the line. If supermarkets offer discounts, people travel long distances to get there to fill up their cars, which has a knock-on effect on business in rural areas.

The key point is that the fuel issue is at the centre of the rural economy. Unless we sort this problem out, there will be no rural economy. We will not see a recovery of businesses that are strangled by rising fuel prices. Businesses will not survive for much longer if the price continues to rise as it has recently.

I think it was the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) who talked about the Barnett formula. Frankly, that is completely

[Mr Weir]

irrelevant to this argument. If we had a fuel duty stabiliser, it would apply throughout the country. [Interruption.] The hon. and learned Gentleman is thinking about the derogation, which is a completely different matter: we are talking about two different systems here.

We have pushed for a fuel duty stabiliser to give certainty about the price, to allow hauliers, for example, to be able to quote in advance for a contract and know what the fuel prices are going to be. This will also allow people to look at their family budgets and know what they have to spend to get to work on a weekly or monthly basis. We need to remember that our constituents are not getting pay rises—in some cases, they are getting pay cuts—so they cannot cope with these rising prices, which impact directly on family budgets. For all those reasons, we need action now. It is all very well to talk about the problem and to look at the practicalities, but if this drags on into next year, I am afraid that many businesses will fail to survive.

6.56 pm

**John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): There are two issues in the debate, which I would like to try to disaggregate. One is the high premium paid in rural areas and the specific circumstances that apply to it. The other is the general high cost of fuel in the country. Let me deal with the two separately.

Briefly, on the derogation for rural areas, it exists because there is a premium to be paid in those areas. Many Members have provided the arguments, so I will not go over them all again. However, I would point out that it exists not simply because there is a premium. I have researched the issue over many years, so I can tell hon. Members that I have often found that a certain petrol station in Sloane avenue is in the top three or four for prices. That shows that it is not simply a matter of high prices; the problem is that there is high price, a premium and a lack of public transport, coupled with the other deprivation typically seen in the more remote rural areas. It is not high prices alone, but the combination of all those factors that counts.

Secondly, as a number of hon. Members mentioned, I wrote a paper on this subject and it dealt with all the elements that cause worry—imperfectly, I am sure, but the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), who was the Exchequer Secretary at the time, took it seriously and her officials looked at it, so it was reasonable enough. I would like to think that the imperfections contained in that scheme are currently being ironed out and that we will shortly know what the Government intend to put forward.

I want to deal more fully with the other question of the generally high price of fuel. I commend to anyone who has not yet had a chance to read it the note produced for this debate by the Library. Among other things, it contains some very interesting facts. For example, it points out that for a number of years, the cost of motoring has actually gone down in this country in real terms, whereas the cost of public transport has by comparison gone up. One of my successors as Liberal Democrat transport spokesman often used to point that out.

It is also interesting to look at the percentage of tax take. It has varied from a high of about 89% at one point in the '90s down to the high mid-50s and now back up to 63%. That is the total tax take percentages. The tax take in real terms today is about equivalent to that of 1997-98. We need to get our facts right and look at the issue in perspective.

We need to take account of some of the external factors. They must include the fluctuation in the oil price, which has once more hit \$100 a barrel. A number of economists believe that that is merely a resumption of the upward trend that existed before the recession. It is entirely possible that the price will rise further, in which event we shall have to deal with the consequences of a high fuel price for our economy.

I congratulate the Government on giving thought to the introduction of a fuel stabiliser, although I have some doubts about the practicalities. There is only one thing worse than a stabiliser that works, and that is a stabiliser that does not work, so if we are to have one, let us ensure that it works. However, we might consider how the Government could, as it were, be removed from the equation. There are a number of possibilities, and I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to investigate them.

The first possibility involves VAT. When the last Government reduced it to 15% they also increased duty by 2p, and that remained when VAT rose again. Thus a relationship was established between VAT and duty. I suggest that the reverse should apply: that VAT on fuel should be 5%, in line with VAT on heating fuel, and that the duty should be altered to an amount that the Government considered appropriate. That would remove the variability that comes from the market. It would not affect the Treasury, and it would not have some of the deficiencies of the stabiliser. It is an imperfect mechanism, but it would be of some small comfort to know that when the price at the pump rose, it would be largely a result of what the oil companies were doing rather than what the Government were doing.

**Albert Owen:** I agree with the principle of a stabiliser. However, the Government talk of having “inherited” the duty increase. In 1997, the Labour Government inherited a Conservative proposal to raise VAT on domestic fuel and then “disinherited” it. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting, as I am, that the Conservatives should “disinherit” the duty increase? That would help people in his area and in mine.

**John Thurso:** I am, in fact, presenting the Minister with a novel suggestion which I hope he will consider in the Treasury, and which might benefit us all.

Let me make another point about the current regime. It happened to note that if the escalator were introduced, it would be based on the retail prices index. Perhaps the Minister would consider basing it on the consumer prices index, which would be in line with the rest of Government thinking.

Finally, let me express a view on an issue that I studied in some detail when I was my party's transport spokesman. I believe that the whole way in which we tax fuel is wrong. In my opinion we should not tax it at all, but should adopt a proper method of variable road user charging. Through that mechanism, we could both raise the amount of money that we wish to raise and incorporate

all the fairness that we seek. It would require those who are most able to find alternatives, and who use the most congested roads, to pay the most, while allowing those with the most need—most of whom live in the least congested areas—to pay the least, and it has been suggested by most academics in the field of transport.

I have a funny feeling, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when I first raised the issue of road user charging in a Westminster Hall debate in 2001, it was you who responded from the Dispatch Box. I hope that the Government will seriously consider introducing such a system, because it would enable us to escape from the groundhog day of the fuel duty debate which comes round at least once a year, and adopt a sensible method of charging for road use that would be both green and economically efficient.

7.4 pm

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am delighted to have the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Plaid Cymru and SNP group. Our combined parties have campaigned on this issue for a number of years, not least in tabling amendments to Finance Bills in 2005 and 2008. It is somewhat disappointing that, in our first Opposition day debate of the Session, we must once again highlight the need for Government intervention to stabilise fuel prices.

Fuel prices are driven by the global price of oil and by domestic taxation. In the case of global oil prices, the trajectory is likely to go in only one direction, as oil is a finite resource. It is already being traded at over \$100 a barrel. As the world economy recovers, the price will rise further as a result of increasing demand, especially from the emerging countries and, in particular, China. Volatility will only be exacerbated as we reach peak oil. Oil prices will also inevitably increase as a result of the long-term deflationary policies of the United States Government. Oil is traded in dollars, and a weakening dollar pushes up oil prices as producer countries try to make up for the shortfall of a currency whose value lessens. I echo the call of the French President, Mr Sarkozy, for a long-term agreement between oil-producing and consumer countries to offer more stability on prices.

Fuel prices are obviously influenced by domestic taxation, and it is with that element that we are concerned today. Duty on fuel in the UK represents about 65% of the price of fuel at the pump, if my sums are correct. Clearly, the higher the price of wholesale oil, the higher the tax receipts raked in by the Treasury. As is shown by an excellent House of Commons Library research paper, petrol duty in the UK is the second highest in the European Union, and the duty on diesel is by far the highest. While most other countries impose different levels of duty on road petrol and diesel, the UK's rates are exactly the same, which means that the UK's diesel prices are far higher than those of our European partners.

There are three general reasons for the need for a mechanism to stabilise fuel prices via control of duty. First, the volatility of fuel prices has far-reaching social and economic consequences, and we therefore need a mechanism to dampen the peaks and troughs. Secondly—as we have heard in a number of notable speeches today—surges in prices have a disproportionate effect on some sectors of the economy, some sections of society, and some geographical parts of the state. Thirdly, green

taxes must be linked to clear environmental criteria, because otherwise the public will believe they are just another cash cow and there will be a loss of support for environmental taxation. That would be a disaster, in view of the challenges that we face as a nation and, of course, throughout the world.

Let me stress that we are not arguing for the introduction of something new and untested. Many OECD countries have mechanisms to regulate the price of fuel. France has a fuel regulator, and Canada even has a regional fuel stabiliser. If we were to adopt a similar system in the United Kingdom, I should like to advance a special case for south-west Wales.

In adopting our policy following the Finance Act 2008, the Conservative party's 2010 general election manifesto stated:

“We will consult on the introduction of a ‘Fair Fuel Stabiliser’. This would cut fuel duty when oil prices rise, and vice versa. It would ensure families and businesses and the whole British economy are less exposed to volatile oil markets, and that there is a more stable environment for low carbon investment.”

I could not agree more, and I look forward to the support of hon. Members who stood for election on the basis of that manifesto commitment when the House divides later this evening.

We have had a very interesting debate, featuring many positive and informative contributions. The hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), in his usual ultra-detailed opening remarks, made a comprehensive case for the need for a stabilising mechanism. I urge those who missed the beginning of the debate to read his speech, and I hope one day to be able to rival his knowledge of these matters. He made the specific point that rising fuel costs constituted a significant economic head wind. Given the recent deliberations about the Government's lack of a growth strategy, I humbly suggest that that is one idea that they should fully embrace.

The Minister defended the Government's position admirably by blaming the previous Administration, but while we welcomed her comments about the rural derogation pilot and look forward to further progress her suggestion that the devolved Governments could intervene to reduce the burden on families was somewhat weak. Much as I should like the Welsh Parliament to have the taxation powers that would enable it to intervene, this is a matter for the United Kingdom Government. They need to take the necessary responsibility and introduce proposals of their own, rather than blaming the previous Administration and placing the onus on the devolved Governments without giving them any power. That seems to have developed into a growing theme in recent months.

The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) confirmed that the Labour party opposes any stabilising mechanism. I am sure that colleagues who will fight Welsh Assembly elections and Scottish parliamentary elections in a few months' time will remind electors of Labour's policy.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) noted the problems that small companies—notably the haulage industry—face in his constituency.

As usual, the right hon. Member for Torfaen (Paul Murphy) spoke with great authority. He concentrated on the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises

[Jonathan Edwards]

to the Welsh economy. I echo his views and look forward to his support in the Lobby later.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr Reid) highlighted the specific problems faced by communities in the Scottish islands, and I thank him for his contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) made a strong case for the food processing industry in her constituency. She discussed the added burden that that industry faces as a result of spikes in the price of oil.

The hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) made a staunch defence of the Government's position. We would welcome a derogation pilot in England, as he suggested, because if it worked in remote parts of England it would work in Wales and mainland Scotland, too.

**Albert Owen:** The hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) is not in his seat, but he said that only areas with devolved Administrations have been proposed for the pilot. The Isles of Scilly are, as we all know, in England. Wales has been left out, but surely the Isle of Anglesey would be the ideal place to experiment with such a derogation.

**Jonathan Edwards:** The hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. I am sure that the Assembly Member for his area, who is a member of my party, agrees with his comments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) discussed how fuel prices in his constituency have reached the £1.50 a litre mark. Having visited his beautiful constituency last week as a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee, I can inform my hon. Friend that his effort on that issue is appreciated.

The hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) highlighted how the rising fuel price hinders economic growth, especially outside south-east England and in those sectors of the economy that the UK Government are depending on, if they are serious about their stated aim of rebalancing the economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr Weir) highlighted the huge problems caused to small businesses in his constituency. He pointed out the impact on disposable income for working families in his valid contribution.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) made an informative speech. He made a powerful argument about changing the VAT rate for fuel, and I hope that Ministers will consider his ideas.

In their joint economic declaration last week, the devolved Administrations specifically called on the UK Government to take action to counteract rising fuel and transport costs. The Governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all highlighted how rising fuel costs form a significant economic headwind that undermines efforts to rebuild after the recent downturn. The declaration called for the postponement of the proposed duty increase planned for April this year. I am sure that all the Celtic Governments support the need for a fuel duty stabiliser.

In closing, I want to refer to those bodies that have contacted us to support our motion. We have received overwhelming support from many diverse organisations, such as the Farmers Union of Wales, NFU Cymru, the Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Countryside Association. That diversity reflects our point that ordinary families, businesses and workers across the UK acutely feel the effects of volatile fuel prices, although rising fuel duty will inevitably hit rural communities hardest.

Gareth Vaughan, president of the FUW, has written to say how "grossly unfair" it is that we in the UK pay more than any other country for our fuel, because of the "extortionate level of tax" imposed by the UK Government. He added that

"bearing in mind that there is a difference of as much as five pence per litre between rural and city garages in Wales already, the added fuel duty coupled with rising oil prices will be devastating to rural communities all over the UK."

Jack Semple, director of policy at the Road Haulage Association, has stated:

"The Road Haulage Association welcomes Plaid's and the SNP's support for a fuel duty stabiliser"

since

"the volatility of fuel prices is a major issue for hauliers and, increasingly, for their customers."

John Walker, the FSB's national chairman, has also endorsed our approach, reminding us that

"Every extra penny spent at the pumps is a penny not being spent elsewhere in the economy... Small businesses want to grow... and create employment but the cost of fuel puts the brakes on their ability to drive the recovery."

Finally, the FTA has stated:

"Lives and livelihoods up and down the country are suffering in the face of unsustainable and crippling fuel costs. This cost is unsustainable and... as part of the Fair Fuel UK Campaign, the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, along with backing from the RAC, are asking government principally to scrap the fuel duty rise planned in April and introduce a methodology for stabilising fuel prices."

It is not only organisations and individuals outside this place who have backed our campaign. In introducing his plans for a fuel stabiliser in 2008, the then shadow Chancellor—the current Chancellor—described the stabiliser as

"a common sense plan to help families, bring stability to the public finances and help the environment by making the price of carbon less volatile".

In the light of those comments, people across the UK will ask why his Government oppose our motion today.

7.15 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** This has been an interesting debate, and I thank all hon. Members who have contributed. Fuel prices are undoubtedly of significant concern to hon. Members and the wider population.

It is fair to say that the issue is not new. My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) has referred to this debate being like "Groundhog Day". He is a long-standing participant in debates on this subject, and he is influential in setting out the arguments for a rural derogation, to which I shall turn later. He also set out further proposals that may influence this debate in the years to come.

At the moment, there is a particular concern about fuel prices. We have heard today from hon. Members from all parties and from all parts of the United Kingdom about the difficulties that their constituents face because of rising fuel prices. It appears to cost more every time that people fill up the car, and the public understandably want us to do something about that.

**Mr Binley:** I have a message for the Economic Secretary from hauliers in my constituency, such as Wrefords and Butts. They understand what the Government need to do to put the deficit right, but they urge him to do something that was in our manifesto, namely bring forward a stabiliser. They do not understand why we have not done it already.

**Mr Gauke:** I will turn to the stabiliser in a moment. My hon. Friend has touched on a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) also raised, which is the deficit that we face. It is only by coming up with a credible plan to balance the books that we have managed to create the confidence needed for a recovery. To get there, we have had to make some tough decisions, such as raising certain taxes, including VAT, and cutting public expenditure in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party to all our plans.

One of the few things that we inherited that would reduce the deficit were the previous Government's plans to increase fuel duty. We heard quite a lot from the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), about VAT. It is worth pointing out that the Labour Budgets of 2009 and 2010 involved the following increases in fuel duty: in September 2009, there was a 2p increase; in 2010, there was a 2.76p increase; and there are 1p increases in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. In total, the increase is about 9p a litre. We cannot dismiss those increases without knowing how we can fund any shortfall.

As the Prime Minister said over the weekend, we "would love to see tax reductions...but when you're borrowing 11% of your GDP, it's not possible."

So although I sympathise with the points made by hon. Members from all parts of the House, our decisions on tax must be viewed in that context, where every penny we increase fuel duty by raises an additional £500 million and if we cut fuel duty, that money will have to come from somewhere else.

**Dr Whiteford:** I ask the Minister the question that I have asked repeatedly in this debate: why should people who live in rural areas pay a disproportionate share of fuel taxation?

**Mr Gauke:** The two particular areas we have debated today are the fuel stabiliser and the rural fuel duty rebate, which this House has debated on a number of occasions and is clearly of close interest to a number of hon. Members. The Government have made no secret of the fact that we are considering such a rebate. People in rural areas do face particular challenges on petrol and diesel, as fuel prices there tend to be more expensive because of relatively high transport costs—a number of hon. Members have made that point. A lack of alternatives means that people in rural communities have little or no

choice but to use the car, which is why we have announced our intention to introduce a rural fuel duty pilot. It will deliver a duty discount of up to 5p a litre on all petrol and diesel which, as the Economic Secretary said at the start of today's debate, would save some drivers in rural areas upwards of £500 a year.

**Mr MacNeil:** The hon. Gentleman knows that I really welcome the rural fuel derogation and hope it comes soon. Will he give us any idea of when that might be?

**Mr Gauke:** As the Economic Secretary stated, the Government are engaged in informal conversations with the European Commission and we hope to be able to bring together our representations in a formal submission to take this forward, but this matter is not as simple as the hon. Gentleman might like it to be. We are considering the exact scope of the scheme, although the inner and outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly will certainly be included. May I say to him, and to other hon. Members such as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham and my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler), that we can go ahead only when we have got clearance from the European Union? It is important to set out proposals that will achieve that clearance and we can then obtain the unanimous support of the 27 EU member states, which is what we require. Productive discussions are ongoing and we will of course update the House whenever we have any further progress. I hope that we will be able to provide a further update at the time of the Budget. Hon. Members should note, as, to be fair, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) did, that at least this Government are trying to make progress on this area. The hon. Member for Bristol East did not even make it clear today whether she supports our even trying to do something on this issue, and that is a remarkable position.

The fuel stabiliser proposal was raised by a number of hon. Members, and the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), in particular, has taken a close interest in it for many years. There is an argument that higher oil prices will automatically lead to higher tax revenues. The Conservative manifesto said that the Office for Budget Responsibility would seek to review this policy to see what we could do in this area. We did ask the OBR to examine how the oil price affects our economy in order to determine how the Government could share the burden of high oil prices and see whether a fair fuel stabiliser could work in practice. The OBR's assessment was that increases in tax revenue received from oil and gas production can be easily offset by things such as higher inflation, which would lead to higher benefit payments and a further drain on the Exchequer. The reality, as set out by the OBR, is that there is no sudden windfall for the Exchequer as a consequence of higher oil prices. None the less, we recognise the strains that this situation causes and we continue to examine a range of options, including the fair fuel stabiliser. It is right that we must ensure that whatever we do is not only fair, but affordable.

This Government understand the problems people are facing and are taking every action possible to help those most in need, but we also know that we have to act responsibly and ensure that we tackle the record

[Mr Gauke]

national debt. The increases in fuel duty result from the previous Government's proposals. Some people argue that we could abandon those proposals, but it is not clear whether that is the position of the Labour party. We need to strike a difficult balance, but our priorities are clear. We must get the economy back on its feet and we must have a private sector leading the recovery and creating new jobs. In contrast to our predecessors, we are seeking to address the genuine concerns that exist about rising fuel prices and we are determined to settle on a proposal that is fair, sustainable and fiscally responsible.

*Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)),* That the original words stand part of the Question.

*The House divided:* Ayes 14, Noes 303.

**Division No. 191]**

**[7.26 pm**

**AYES**

Clark, Katy  
Cryer, John  
Davidson, Mr Ian  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Hosie, Stewart  
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn  
Long, Naomi  
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
Owen, Albert

Robertson, Angus  
Roy, Lindsay  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Weir, Mr Mike  
Wishart, Pete

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Dr Eilidh Whiteford and**  
**Hywel Williams**

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Alexander, rh Danny  
Amess, Mr David  
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Bagshawe, Ms Louise  
Baker, Norman  
Baker, Steve  
Baldry, Tony  
Barclay, Stephen  
Barker, Gregory  
Baron, Mr John  
Barwell, Gavin  
Bebb, Guto  
Beith, rh Sir Alan  
Benyon, Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Bingham, Andrew  
Binley, Mr Brian  
Birtwistle, Gordon  
Blackman, Bob  
Blackwood, Nicola  
Blunt, Mr Crispin  
Boles, Nick  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bradley, Karen  
Brady, Mr Graham  
Brake, Tom  
Brazier, Mr Julian  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Mr Steve  
Brooke, Annette  
Browne, Mr Jeremy  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buckland, Mr Robert

Burns, Conor  
Burns, Mr Simon  
Burrowes, Mr David  
Burstow, Paul  
Burt, Alistair  
Burt, Lorely  
Byles, Dan  
Cable, rh Vince  
Cairns, Alun  
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Carmichael, Neil  
Cash, Mr William  
Chishty, Rehman  
Chope, Mr Christopher  
Clappison, Mr James  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Colvile, Oliver  
Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, Stephen  
Crockart, Mike  
Crouch, Tracey  
Davies, David T. C.  
(*Monmouth*)  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Philip  
de Bois, Nick  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen  
Dorries, Nadine  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Duddridge, James  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
Ellis, Michael

Ellison, Jane  
Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
Elphicke, Charlie  
Eustice, George  
Evans, Graham  
Evans, Jonathan  
Evennett, Mr David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fallon, Michael  
Farron, Tim  
Featherstone, Lynne  
Field, Mr Mark  
Foster, rh Mr Don  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Fuller, Richard  
Gale, Mr Roger  
Garnier, Mr Edward  
Gauke, Mr David  
George, Andrew  
Gibb, Mr Nick  
Gilbert, Stephen  
Glen, John  
Goldsmith, Zac  
Goodwill, Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, Mr James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Damian  
Greening, Justine  
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
Gummer, Ben  
Halfon, Robert  
Hames, Duncan  
Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, Matthew  
Hancock, Mr Mike  
Hands, Greg  
Harper, Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hart, Simon  
Harvey, Nick  
Heald, Mr Oliver  
Heath, Mr David  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Hemming, John  
Henderson, Gordon  
Hendry, Charles  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hinds, Damian  
Hoban, Mr Mark  
Hollingbery, George  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Mr Adam  
Hopkins, Kris  
Horwood, Martin  
Howarth, Mr Gerald  
Howell, John  
Hughes, rh Simon  
Huhne, rh Chris  
Huppert, Dr Julian  
Jackson, Mr Stewart  
Javid, Sajid  
Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, Joseph  
Jones, Andrew

Jones, Mr David  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kelly, Chris  
Kirby, Simon  
Laing, Mrs Eleanor  
Lamb, Norman  
Lancaster, Mark  
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew  
Latham, Pauline  
Laws, rh Mr David  
Lee, Jessica  
Lee, Dr Phillip  
Leech, Mr John  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, Mr Edward  
Leslie, Charlotte  
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
Lewis, Brandon  
Lewis, Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lidington, rh Mr David  
Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
Lloyd, Stephen  
Lopresti, Jack  
Loughton, Tim  
Lumley, Karen  
Main, Mrs Anne  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
McPartland, Stephen  
McVey, Esther  
Menzies, Mark  
Mercer, Patrick  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Miller, Maria  
Mills, Nigel  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Moore, rh Michael  
Mordaunt, Penny  
Morgan, Nicky  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Mosley, Stephen  
Mowat, David  
Mulholland, Greg  
Mundell, rh David  
Munt, Tessa  
Murray, Sheryll  
Murrison, Dr Andrew  
Neill, Robert  
Newton, Sarah  
Nokes, Caroline  
Nuttall, Mr David  
Offord, Mr Matthew  
Ollerenshaw, Eric  
Opperman, Guy  
Paice, rh Mr James  
Parish, Neil  
Patel, Priti  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, Mike  
Penrose, John  
Percy, Andrew  
Perry, Claire  
Phillips, Stephen  
Pickles, rh Mr Eric  
Pincher, Christopher  
Poulter, Dr Daniel

Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pugh, John  
 Randall, rh Mr John  
 Reckless, Mark  
 Redwood, rh Mr John  
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob  
 Reeve, Simon  
 Reid, Mr Alan  
 Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm  
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew  
 Robertson, Hugh  
 Rogerson, Dan  
 Ruffley, Mr David  
 Russell, Bob  
 Rutley, David  
 Sanders, Mr Adrian  
 Sandys, Laura  
 Scott, Mr Lee  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Shepherd, Mr Richard  
 Simmonds, Mark  
 Simpson, Mr Keith  
 Smith, Miss Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Soames, Nicholas  
 Soubry, Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mr Mark  
 Stanley, rh Sir John  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Mr Graham  
 Stunell, Andrew  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swales, Ian

Swinson, Jo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Tapsell, Sir Peter  
 Teather, Sarah  
 Thurso, John  
 Timpson, Mr Edward  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Truss, Elizabeth  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew  
 Uppal, Paul  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Walter, Mr Robert  
 Ward, Mr David  
 Watkinson, Angela  
 Weatherley, Mike  
 Webb, Steve  
 Wharton, James  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Willetts, rh Mr David  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Williams, Roger  
 Williams, Stephen  
 Williamson, Gavin  
 Willott, Jenny  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wright, Simon  
 Young, rh Sir George  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mark Hunter and**  
**Mr Philip Dunne**

Burns, Conor  
 Burns, Mr Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burstow, Paul  
 Burt, Alistair  
 Burt, Lorely  
 Byles, Dan  
 Cable, rh Vince  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Campbell, rh Sir Menzies  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cash, Mr William  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Choqe, Mr Christopher  
 Clappison, Mr James  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, Stephen  
 Crockett, Mike  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, David T. C.  
*(Monmouth)*  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Philip  
 de Bois, Nick  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Jonathan  
 Evennett, Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, Michael  
 Farron, Tim  
 Featherstone, Lynne  
 Field, Mr Mark  
 Foster, rh Mr Don  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Gale, Mr Roger  
 Garnier, Mr Edward  
 George, Andrew  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gilbert, Stephen  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Damian  
 Greening, Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic

Gummer, Ben  
 Halfon, Robert  
 Hames, Duncan  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, Matthew  
 Hancock, Mr Mike  
 Hands, Greg  
 Harper, Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Harvey, Nick  
 Heald, Mr Oliver  
 Heath, Mr David  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Hemming, John  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Hendry, Charles  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoban, Mr Mark  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Horwood, Martin  
 Howarth, Mr Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Hughes, rh Simon  
 Huhne, rh Chris  
 Huppert, Dr Julian  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 Javid, Sajid  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kelly, Chris  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor  
 Lamb, Norman  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Laws, rh Mr David  
 Lee, Jessica  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leech, Mr John  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Mr Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Patrick

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),*  
 That the proposed words be there added.

*The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 135.*

**Division No. 192]**

**[7.40 pm**

**AYES**

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Alexander, rh Danny  
 Amess, Mr David  
 Arbuthnot, rh Mr James  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bagshawe, Ms Louise  
 Baker, Norman  
 Baker, Steve  
 Baldry, Tony  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Beith, rh Sir Alan  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake

Bingham, Andrew  
 Binley, Mr Brian  
 Birtwistle, Gordon  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Mr Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brake, Tom  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Mr Steve  
 Brooke, Annette  
 Browne, Mr Jeremy  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Mr Robert

Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, Maria  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, rh Michael  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mosley, Stephen  
 Mowat, David  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Munt, Tessa  
 Murray, Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Mr Matthew  
 Ollerenshaw, Eric  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paice, rh Mr James  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pugh, John  
 Randall, rh Mr John  
 Reckless, Mark  
 Redwood, rh Mr John  
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob  
 Reeve, Simon  
 Reid, Mr Alan  
 Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm  
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew  
 Robertson, Hugh  
 Rogerson, Dan  
 Ruffley, Mr David  
 Russell, Bob  
 Rutley, David  
 Sanders, Mr Adrian  
 Sandys, Laura  
 Scott, Mr Lee  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Shepherd, Mr Richard

Simmonds, Mark  
 Simpson, Mr Keith  
 Smith, Miss Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Soames, Nicholas  
 Soubry, Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mr Mark  
 Stanley, rh Sir John  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Mr Graham  
 Stunell, Andrew  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swales, Ian  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Tapsell, Sir Peter  
 Teather, Sarah  
 Thurso, John  
 Timpson, Mr Edward  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Truss, Elizabeth  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew  
 Uppal, Paul  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Walter, Mr Robert  
 Ward, Mr David  
 Watkinson, Angela  
 Weatherley, Mike  
 Webb, Steve  
 Wharton, James  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, Mr John  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Williams, Roger  
 Williams, Stephen  
 Williamson, Gavin  
 Willott, Jenny  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wright, Simon  
 Young, rh Sir George  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Bill Wiggin and  
 Mark Hunter

#### NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Anderson, Mr David  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Bain, Mr William  
 Balls, rh Ed  
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin  
 Bayley, Hugh  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Begg, Dame Anne  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Benton, Mr Joe  
 Berger, Luciana  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta  
 Blomfield, Paul

Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Burden, Richard  
 Burnham, rh Andy  
 Campbell, Mr Alan  
 Clark, Katy  
 Clarke, rh Mr Tom  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Crausby, Mr David  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cryer, John  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 Danczuk, Simon  
 David, Mr Wayne  
 Davidson, Mr Ian  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Dobbin, Jim  
 Docherty, Thomas  
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.  
 Doyle, Gemma  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Ffello, Robert  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gilmore, Sheila  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glendon, Mrs Mary  
 Goggins, rh Paul  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Hain, rh Mr Peter  
 Hamilton, Mr David  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harris, Mr Tom  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hilling, Julie  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hood, Mr Jim  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Irranca-Davies, Huw  
 Jamieson, Cathy  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Llwyd, Mr Elfyn

Long, Naomi  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis  
 Mactaggart, Fiona  
 Mann, John  
 McCann, Mr Michael  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McClymont, Gregg  
 McDonnell, John  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McGovern, Jim  
 McKechin, Ann  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 Meale, Mr Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miller, Andrew  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 (*Easington*)  
 Munn, Meg  
 Murphy, rh Paul  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nash, Pamela  
 O'Donnell, Fiona  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Owen, Albert  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Robertson, Angus  
 Robertson, John  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Roy, Lindsay  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Seabeck, Alison  
 Sheridan, Jim  
 Shuker, Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Smith, Angela  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, David  
 Wright, Mr Iain

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Mr Mike Weir and  
 Jonathan Edwards

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*The Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes the dramatic increase in the world oil price to over \$100 per barrel; further notes that there has been a significant impact on fuel prices in the UK as a result; recognises the impact this has on households and business; notes that the previous administration's rises in fuel duty that have taken effect



during the past year have further increased prices; further notes that the Government inherited the largest deficit in UK peacetime history, that the previous administration had no credible plan to deal with the deficit, that the Government has been clear that everyone will make a contribution to tackle the deficit but that the most vulnerable will be protected, and that the Government is considering a fair fuel stabiliser that could support motorists and businesses when oil prices are high; further notes that the Government in addition is taking forward swiftly its commitment at EU level to introduce a pilot scheme that would deliver a discount of up to 5 pence per litre in duty in remote rural areas such as the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and the Isles of Scilly; and further notes that the Chancellor will update the House on all fiscal matters at the time of the Budget.

**The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to you for your ruling earlier this afternoon that the phrase “rank hypocrisy” is unparliamentary language. I should therefore like to withdraw the phrase, which I used earlier today, and apologise to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who may have felt that it was directed at him. Under no circumstances would I wish to accuse him of any activity that was in any way covered by the use of unparliamentary language.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the Secretary of State and thank him, on behalf of the House, for the apology he has given. As far as I am concerned, that is the end of the matter.

**Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Rumours are rife in the Press Gallery, and more widely, that the Government are planning to announce the result of their talks with the banks on bonuses and lending, otherwise known as Project Merlin, to TV stations and via a press release this evening. Do you agree with me that if the Government are doing private deals with the banks, they should have the courage to come to the House, that the House should be the first to hear about it and that announcing the outcome behind the backs of Members of this House would be totally unacceptable?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for both her point of order and her advance notice of it. The Procedure Committee published its report on ministerial statements only last week, reaffirming the principle that important statements should be made first to this House. As a former Minister, and indeed an experienced parliamentarian, she will be aware of her options for taking up the matter. The Table Office will be open until the rising of the House, and it will not have escaped her notice that the Leader of the House is in his place and has heard what she has said.

## Registration of Members' Financial Interests

7.53 pm

**Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That—

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Tenth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, on Registration of income from employment (HC 749); and

(2) accordingly the resolution of the House of 30 April 2009 relating to the Registration of Members' Financial Interests be amended, by leaving out paragraph (2) and inserting:—

“(2) That such a payment shall be registered

(a) where its value exceeds one tenth of 1 per cent. of the current

Parliamentary salary; or

(b) where the total value of payments from the same person, organisation or company in a calendar year exceeds 1 per cent. of the current Parliamentary salary.”

Hon. Members will recall that the Leader of the House is one of my predecessors as Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee. I know that he will be as pleased as I am that time has been found to take forward two sets of proposals in which he played an important part in a former life, particularly as one of them was agreed in the 2008-09 Session.

The more recent of the two reports seeks to make a simple but welcome change to the rule requiring Members to register each payment they receive for work carried out outside the House. As we note in the report, it might not have been the intention of the House when it agreed the original resolution in April 2009 to require Members to register bottles of wine or bunches of flowers, but that has been the effect. The problem is that when a Member receives a bottle of wine, a bunch of flowers or maybe even a ballpoint pen as a thank you for giving a speech or hosting an event, it might be intended as a gift, but it has the characteristics of a payment. A gift is given in its own right, without the expectation of anything in return. Where something is given in return for a service rendered, however, it is a payment, and therein lies the difficulty. As we state in our report, the Committee considered whether it might be possible to draw a line between the circumstances in which the bottle of wine or bunch of flowers is clearly a gift, and those in which it is clearly a payment. We concluded that, wherever such a line is drawn, the distinction is unlikely to be sufficiently clear and so the risk that Members would unintentionally fall foul of the rule would remain.

The Committee therefore favours a threshold, but to preserve confidence in the register we propose that it should be set at quite a low level. The level we propose is 0.1% of a Member's salary for individual payments, which is £66, and 1% of a Member's salary for the cumulative total of payments from the same source in the same year, which is £660, which we think is proportionate. By linking it to Members' pay, the House will ensure that we do not have to keep resetting it.

I want to emphasise that we do not take issue with the intention behind the resolution of April 2009, which was that the public should be able to know how much MPs are paid for other employment and who pays them. We simply want to make the rules more workable

[Mr Kevin Barron]

and to catch only the sorts of payments that are relevant to the central purpose of the register, which is to show whether a Member has received a material benefit that might reasonably be thought by others to influence his or her actions, speeches or votes.

There are, of course, other recommendations that we could have made, two of which are particularly worth mentioning. The first is the requirement to register the hours worked. I know that that requirement has not been universally popular in the House, but any proposal to amend it would require proper consideration. I will of course listen to any comments made in today's debate and discuss them with my colleagues in the Committee. The second requirement, which is mentioned in the report, relates to the threshold that applies for gifts. The threshold is currently 1% of the salary, or £660, and was set in 2001. I think that the Committee needs to consider whether that remains the right level and intend to invite it to do so later in the Session.

**Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con):** I should declare an interest, as I speak quite a lot for colleagues, although so far I have never been given anything—I am not sure what to make of that. The right hon. Gentleman is not only Chair of the Committee, but a long-standing member of it, so he has considerable experience of these matters. On a serious point, does he not agree that if we all lose sight of common sense when it comes to declaring interests, we really will run out of road. We really must return to some form of understanding that, although codification of these matters is now deemed necessary, because of events that we all deeply regret, it does nothing for the standards of this House or for what it might think of itself if we have to codify the value of a gift given to a Member who makes a speech on behalf of a colleague.

**Mr Barron:** I will not say whether I agree or disagree with the hon. Gentleman. I have said that I will bring all points made in the debate to the Committee's attention, and we will decide on that basis whether to look into these matters.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before the right hon. Gentleman continues, I note that he has referred to matters that are in motion 3. I make no complaint about that, but it leads me to think that, for the purposes of his speech, he is conflating the two separate motions. As I say, I make no complaint about that. No request was made that the motions be taken together, but if it is for the convenience of the House, the Chair is very happy that they be taken together. [HON. MEMBERS: "Aye."] I get the impression that that is the position. I am grateful. So we shall also consider the following:

That—

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Eighth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges of Session 2008-09, on All-Party Groups (HC 920); and

(2) accordingly the resolution of the House of 17 December 1985, as amended on 10 March 1989 and 29 July 1998, be further amended by leaving out paragraph 3 and inserting:—

"3. Groups whose membership:

• is open to all Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords, and

• includes at least 20 Members (each of whom must be a Member of the House of Commons or House of Lords), comprising: at least 10 Members who are from the same political party as the Government, and at least 10 who are not from the Government's party (of whom at least six must be from the main opposition party), and

• includes at least one officer who is a Member of the House of Commons be required to register the following information on the Register of All-Party Groups:

(a) The full title of the group. If persons other than Members of the Commons or Lords are allowed full membership (i.e. voting rights) the term 'Associate Parliamentary Group' must be included in the group's title. If such persons are not allowed full membership the term 'All-Party Parliamentary Group' must be included instead. The rest of the group's title should simply reflect the group's subject so that the latter is obvious from its title alone.

(b) A brief summary of the group's main purpose.

(c) The names of the group's officers. At least one officer must be an MP; each of the other officers must be a Member of the House of Commons or House of Lords.

(d) The names of exactly 20 qualifying Members (each of whom must be a Member of the House of Commons or Lords), comprising: 10 Members who are from the same political party as the Government, and 10 who are not from the Government's party (of which at least six must be from the main opposition party).

(e) The contact details of the group's registered contact, who must be both an officer of the group and a Member of the House of Commons, and is the person ultimately responsible for the group's compliance with the rules of the House.

(f) Any relevant gainful occupation of staff to the group who hold a parliamentary pass (relevant gainful occupation means any occupation that is advantaged by the privileged access afforded by the pass).

(g) The source and extent of any financial benefit (e.g. donations) and the source and nature of any non-financial material benefit (e.g. provision of goods or services) received by the group from a single source outside Parliament, if the value of the benefit equals or exceeds the financial threshold for registration (currently £1,500) in a calendar year. Once the group has made that initial registration, any further donation received from the same source in the same calendar year should be registered if its value exceeds £500.

(h) The website address of any organisation registered as the group's secretariat.

(i) If a consultancy is registered as the group's secretariat, the names and website of the consultancy plus the name of any client of theirs who is specifically paying the consultancy to act as the secretariat must also be registered. The consultancy must either publish on its website its full client list or agree to provide such a list on request, otherwise it is not allowed to act as the group's secretariat.

(ii) If a charity or not-for-profit organisation is registered as the group's secretariat, the former's name and website must also be registered. The charity or not-for-profit organisation must agree to make available on request a list citing any commercial company which has donated either as a single sum or cumulatively more than £5,000 in the course of the 12 months prior to the month in which the request is made, otherwise it is not allowed to act as the group's secretariat.

(i) The address of the group's website, if it has its own website.

(j) The date of the group's inaugural election of officers and of any Annual General Meeting held thereafter.

(k) Affiliation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, if the group is affiliated to either or both."

I call Mr Kevin Barron, dealing with the two motions.

**Mr Barron:** I now turn to the report on all-party groups, published in July 2009. The proposals set out in the report are a package, most of them originally

recommended by the previous Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Philip Mawer, to whom I pay tribute. In summary, the proposed changes will require each group to register the website address of any organisation acting as its secretariat, where the secretarial assistance is more than £1,500 a year; in the case of a charity providing such support, require the charity to make available on request a list of commercial donors who have donated more than £5,000 to it in the previous 12 months; in the case of a consultancy providing such support, require the consultancy to publish on its website its full client list or provide such a list on request; require groups to register their website address; require groups to include on their website details of their sponsors and providers of secretarial services; and require each group to nominate an MP, who must also be an officer of the group, to act as the main point of contact for the group and also as the person who is ultimately responsible for ensuring its compliance with the rules.

In my view, those are sensible tidying-up changes that will increase public confidence in the Register of All-party Groups. The Committee's report also proposes tightening the rules for the registration of all-party groups by aligning them with those for inclusion on the separate approved list maintained by the Commissioner's office. This means that groups will no longer qualify for inclusion on the register unless they comply with the more extensive requirements of the approved list, such as the need to provide the names of 20 qualifying Members.

Taken as a whole, the changes should improve the scheme's operations, providing clearer rules for those running the groups and those compiling the register, and greater transparency and ease of use for those who wish to consult the register.

**Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):** I am just interested in knowing the right hon. Gentleman's general approach. Does he not realise that we had the least corrupt system of any Parliament, perhaps in the world? The more rules and regulations we bring in, the more the registry office will be snowed under. The absurd rule that it has to register every payment is, frankly, ridiculous; it cannot cope at present. The more rules we have, the more people will break them and the more corruption will be driven underground. We should have a general approach, because the public want to know broadly what we earn when that might affect our behaviour—in other words, a fairly large sum. That is where we should be—with as deregulatory an approach as possible.

**Mr Barron:** As I said earlier, I shall invite the Committee to look into those matters to see whether any changes ought to be made.

I just spoke about the Committee report of July 2009 on making all-party groups more transparent, so that we know exactly who runs those organisations and what moneys go into them. That seems to be an obvious thing for us to do. The report has been waiting for our attention since July 2009, and I hope that the House will commend both reports, so that they can go ahead and make us better at what we do. We might want to look at the issues that were raised in the two interventions, and if we do, we will ask the House and individual Members for their view. On that basis, I commend the reports to the House.

8.3 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) on securing this debate about two modest but important improvements to the rules on the registration of Members' financial interests and on the registration of all-party groups. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, as the new rules relating to all-party groups were produced under his chairmanship of the Standards and Privileges Committee back in July 2009.

The Committee's proposal to reintroduce a sensible de minimis threshold for the registration of income from employment will remedy a problem that arose with the rule changes that the House agreed to on 30 April 2009. Under those new rules, Members are required to register every single payment they receive for remunerated employment of any kind, however small its value. The problem is that, for the House's purposes, "remunerated employment" means any benefit of any kind which a Member might receive in exchange for providing a service.

The test is not whether there is a formal employment relationship in law, or whether there is some kind of contractual obligation on either side, but whether the Member would have received the benefit if he or she had not provided some kind of service. This includes any small gift to a Member who addresses a school assembly, opens a village fete or makes, as the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) said, a speech at a constituency function. I am very sad to hear that he has never received any sort of thank you—not even a meal, from the sound of it. I find it extraordinary that he should go so unrewarded for his labours, but nevertheless any gift—

**The Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household (Mr Mark Francois):** A gift would be cheaper!

**Mr Heath:** The right hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that "a gift would be cheaper" than providing a meal. I cannot believe that in the case of the hon. Member for Mid Sussex.

Anyway, any small gift received under those circumstances must be registered, and that has led to a large number of registrations of things that most of us would regard as gifts—tokens of thanks for some small service. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) has been commendably thorough in her registrations, which include a Scottish Bible Society cloth bag worth £2.95, some branded pens and pencils from a local recycling company worth £5 and a Girl-Guiding centenary pencil to the value of 35p. No one will honestly feel that her judgment has been clouded by the generosity of those gifts, but nevertheless she has complied with the strict requirements that the House places on us all.

My examples would not be complete if I did not mention that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has registered a gift of a pair of hand-knitted, yellow socks, which I am very sad to see he is not wearing today. He was given them when he opened a wool shop in his constituency, and I understand that the owners even went to the trouble of contacting his office to establish his shoe size.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): I am quite awed by the thoroughness of many right hon. and hon. Members, but will the hon. Gentleman help me? I do not drink wine—I tried it once and did not much care for it—but when I addressed *The Spectator* dinner just before Christmas the organisers sent me half a dozen bottles of wine. I have not the faintest idea how much they are worth, so how does one find the price if not of a Scottish Bible Society bio-recyclable-degradable bag, then of things like a bottle of wine? Can the hon. Gentleman give some advice or assistance to those of us who are innocents in the area?

**Mr Heath:** The rather straightforward and dull response to the hon. Gentleman is, consult the registrar if in doubt. The registrar has an omniscience that transcends any normal Member, in that they know the value of all things. They will I am sure be able to find out the value of that wine gift, which I suspect, being from *The Spectator*, is a rather fine half case of wine. I am sure he fully deserved to be paid in such kind.

**Nicholas Soames:** The hon. Gentleman is himself beginning to stray—I am sure without realising it—into an area where common sense has completely departed. Surely it is important that common sense is exercised in all such matters, but it is absolutely impossible to codify the situation without it looking completely ridiculous.

**Mr Heath:** It is because there is a danger of the situation looking completely ridiculous that the right hon. Member for Rother Valley and his Committee have come up with the proposed changes. There clearly is a gradation. If the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) were, in response to his speaking at an event for *The Spectator*, given several cases of Chateau de Quem, it might well be considered that that would have an effect on his judgment, whether he consumed them or not—but a half bottle of Newcastle Brown Ale might not be considered to have the same effect.

There is a need for common sense. That is precisely why the right hon. Gentleman has come forward with the proposal for a sensible de minimis requirement worth about the £65 mark. Most people can judge whether what they have received is likely to be in that region. Judging from my experience, I am very rarely given a token that comes to anything like that value. I think that if I were given something of more than that value, it would suggest that I was involved in paid employment of some kind—doing it for some remuneration—and that it should be declared. One must use a level of common sense.

I do not want this debate to become merely an insight into the life of a constituency MP. The purpose of the register is to provide information about any material benefit that a Member receives and which might reasonably be thought by others to influence his or her conduct in the House. The trivial nature of these registrations and the effort and expense involved in registering them does nothing, I would suggest, to contribute to the purpose of the register. I welcome the Committee's proposal to introduce a sensible de minimis threshold of 0.1% of a Member's salary, which currently works out at about £65. That is a sensible compromise between ensuring clarity and accountability while not over-encumbering the register with things that are frankly of little or no concern to any reasonable member of the public.

Turning to the rules on all-party groups, this motion implements recommendations made by the Committee in July 2009. I will not repeat the details of the rule changes, which the right hon. Member for Rother Valley has already outlined to the House. The Government welcome these proposed changes. The House will be aware of the valuable work that is done by all-party groups on a vast range of issues—for example, the armed forces, the BBC, beer and cider, clean water, underground space and shipbuilding. There can scarcely be a country in the world, nor—as the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) told a debate in Westminster Hall last week—a condition of the human body that is not covered by an all-party group. As the House will be aware, some groups are campaigning bodies, some are concerned with building relationships with other countries, and some are essentially social groups. The examples that I have here suggest that the parliamentary choir and the rugby club might fall into the latter group, although I have my doubts as to whether they do not also, to an extent, have a campaigning purpose.

I would not wish for one moment to frustrate the work of these groups or to place unnecessary obstacles in their way. However, it is important for the House to have robust registration requirements in place in order to protect its reputation, the reputations of hon. Members, and those of the groups themselves.

**Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): Although the recommendations are entirely worthy and should be supported, the one issue that remains—the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) may be able to reflect on it when he winds up—is that groups often appear to be overlapping or duplicating, and we are always spawning more groups than we can manage properly to attend or service. Might it be possible, informally if not formally, for the registrar to ensure, when somebody seeks to register a group, that the activity is not already covered somewhere else, so that we do not end up duplicating activities?

**Mr Heath:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. He is absolutely right to say that there is a degree of overlap and proliferation among all-party groups. It would certainly be helpful if the registrar were able to give guidance on where there is any likely overlap. I would not be happy for the registrar to be in a position to veto the formation of a new all-party group that might have a different view or complexion as regards a particular matter, but knowing that somebody already deals with a specific subject might be helpful at an early stage in a group's formation in order to prevent duplication.

**Mr Denis MacShane** (Rotherham) (Lab): I declare an interest in that I am chairman of the all-party group on Georgia, having been asked to take it over from my good friend Bruce George, the former right hon. Member for Walsall. Apart from that, I am not really active in any of these groups. Several colleagues are, however, and they have to overlap; otherwise, the group dies because if it does not have its officers it ceases to exist. Yet they are pilloried in the press as junketeers and all the rest of it. Is there any mechanism that allows them to send a statement to these reptiles that in fact an all-party group for no-man's land somewhere can be of

importance—that these groups can help our ambassadors, chambers of commerce and investment? How do we push back this endless sneering that any involvement with any country outside Britain is something that no right hon. or hon. Member should take part in?

**Mr Heath:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. All-party groups that deal with overseas countries are often of huge value in increasing understanding and maintaining contacts with parliamentarians in those countries and, indeed, their civil societies. He mentioned that Members are often members of several different groups. That, to me, is not duplication. It is not an obstacle; it is simply showing a breadth of interest. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) was referring to the situation where more than one all-party group has an overlapping interest, which is not quite the same thing.

All-party groups, particularly some of the overseas groups, are of value. But—and there is a but—there is a need for transparency in the way that they operate and the degree to which they may or may not provide benefit to Members. First, many, but by no means all, groups provide a forum for commercial interests and campaign groups to lobby hon. Members. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that in a free society, and lobbying is one of the routes by which hon. Members can come to a better understanding of some of the policy issues that confront us in this House. However, the public rightly expect to know who is lobbying whom, and on whose behalf and with what outcome. That is the crucial aspect. That is why the Government are working towards increasing transparency and openness in the activity of lobbyists by introducing a statutory register. These proposals also contribute to that objective.

Secondly, as the right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr MacShane) said, Members receive hospitality, including in some cases overseas travel, through some of the groups. Of course, Members are still under a duty to register any registrable interest personally, but there is a legitimate public interest in the publication of full details about the groups under whose auspices such benefits may be received.

Finally, although all-party groups are independent of the House, they carry something of its brand. They can use the word “parliamentary” in their titles, and they have access to the facilities of the House. I am sure that in the public mind, the distinction between an all-party group and a Committee of this House is unclear, at best. The House therefore has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the groups observe the highest standards of transparency.

I should like finally to touch on an issue of drafting. The motion refers to Members who are from the same political party as the Government and those who are not from the Government's party—singular. I have been advised by the Clerks that this is already being interpreted in motions relating to all-party groups, as it is in other resolutions of the House, as meaning all those parties making up the Government in the situation of a coalition. This is the advice that has been given to Members since the start of the Parliament by those operating the system, and it is working without any problem to date. While it would have been possible to amend the motion so that it reflected more accurately

the current position of the coalition Government, it would have put it at odds with other resolutions in use around the House. For that reason, the motion is not being amended and is being put to the House in a form consistent with other resolutions of the House.

On behalf of the Government, I thank the right hon. Member for Rother Valley and other members of the Standards and Privileges Committee for their work. I am pleased to support the motions and commend them to the House.

8.18 pm

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): I begin by thanking members of the Standards and Privileges Committee, both past and present, for the work they have done to bring these two motions before the House. We have heard from Members about the need for common sense in our procedures. The motions are an attempt to introduce some consistency and common sense into our registration procedures. It is very easy for the House to set out general principles, but it is often quite tricky to bring forward the motions that put those principles into practice. In this case, the Committee has done a good job, and I support the proposals.

One of the motions deals with the registration of all-party groups. I must declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on stroke and as secretary of the parliamentary friends of CAFOD—the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development—group.

It is interesting to look back on how the Committee's consideration of these matters arose. Originally, there was a report on lobbying and all-party groups by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. The Committee rightly looked at his recommendations to work out how they could be put into practice and which it was most sensible to put into practice. Having looked back at the original suggestions, I am bound to say that some of them were unworkable.

The Committee has attempted to make the way in which assistance to groups is registered transparent and to prevent the register from increasing to such a volume that it is unusable or that it requires corrections every other day. Hence, it suggests that we stick to the current principle that benefits worth less than £1,500 in a calendar year are not registrable. The onus is put on consultancies that work with all-party groups to be transparent about their clients, either through a published list on their website or by making such a list available to people who ask for it. It also places requirements on charities.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): Perhaps this is a question that I should have asked the Deputy Leader of the House. How does the hon. Lady envisage the £1,500 limit working for people who give pro bono advice to parliamentary groups? Will they have to compute a value for that advice, or will it be taken on face value that it is not charged and therefore is not declarable?

**Helen Jones:** The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting question. It is quite easy to put a value on secretarial support and staff time. Pro bono advice is a more difficult area, and I cannot give him an answer on that off the top of my head. He is right to raise it, and it needs to be discussed, perhaps by the Standards and Privileges Committee and the Registrar of Members' Interests.

[Helen Jones]

I am grateful to the Committee for considering how charities should operate in this regard, and for making it clear that it does not want to put an insupportable burden on charities that work with all-party parliamentary groups. The Committee does ask charities to make available lists of commercial companies that have donated more than £5,000. That is a sensible proposal.

As we have heard, there are proposals on making websites available. There are also recommendations to align the rules relating to the Register of All-party Groups with the rules relating to the approved list, so that only groups that meet the criteria for inclusion on the approved list should be permitted to register. The Opposition believe that those suggestions are sensible and proportionate. They meet the requirement of transparency, while not imposing unnecessary burdens, particularly on charities.

The House tried in 2009 to deal with the registration of income from employment, when it decided that all income from other employment should be registered, whether or not it exceeded 1% of the parliamentary salary in any year. The then Standards and Privileges Committee said that the rule would probably have to be reviewed in this Parliament. In particular, it suggested that there be consideration of a *de minimis* rule. Members who were in the House at the time will remember that there was a debate on whether, for instance, a bottle of wine given to someone after a speaking engagement would become registrable as remuneration for employment. The then Chair of the Committee thought that it would, and the Minister replying thought that it would be counted as a gift or hospitality and therefore would be subject to the *de minimis* rule for gifts. That difference was not over the intention of the rule, but about how it would be interpreted in practice.

It is clear that the advice given to Members has led to the registration of things such as pots of honey and bunches of flowers. I do not believe that such things would be regarded by any of our constituents as remuneration for employment. Frankly, if anyone is working for a pot of honey, I dread to think how many employment laws are being broken in the process. I will not even try to enumerate them, because it is so long since I practised law.

I also think that the registration of such things is perceived as an insult to those who gave them, who simply thought that they were making a generous gesture or rewarding hospitality; they did not in any sense think that they were rewarding a Member of Parliament. It has been common for my constituents to load me with flowers—I am sure that other hon. Members are given flowers wherever they go. My constituents do not believe that they are paying my wages in doing so. They believe that they are making a kind and thoughtful gesture. That is how it should be dealt with.

The Committee has recommended that registration should apply only to payments of more than 0.1% of the parliamentary salary and of more than 1% of the parliamentary salary for multiple payments from a single source. There are Members who think that the registration threshold is still too low. I suggest that we will have to consider that in the future. I understand why the Committee made this recommendation.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady; she is being very generous in giving way, and I do not want to prolong this debate. I have a feeling that the threshold may be too low, particularly as parliamentary salaries are likely to be frozen or have very small increases in the coming years, whereas the inflation on gifts will be 4% or 5%. The fiscal drag of bringing registration into the system will become greater and greater. If we are not careful, it will lead to the situation that she described of the register becoming too full to be used.

**Helen Jones:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point.

I understand why the Committee made these recommendations: they are simple, easy to operate and do not need constant updating. I suggest that the House needs to let the rules bed in and then see how they are working. We have to get to a situation where what we register is what can reasonably be thought to influence hon. Members. I argue strongly that if anyone in this House can be influenced by the gift of a pencil, a pot of honey or a bag, they probably should not be here. I do not think that any of our constituents believes that we can be influenced by such things. We can look again at the operation of the rules over time, but for the moment, they are the sensible way forward. I thank the Committee for its work and I commend the motions to the House.

8.27 pm

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** The report by the Standards and Privileges Committee on all-party parliamentary groups makes three reasonable suggestions that I support. First, a list of commercial companies that donate more than £5,000 to an APPG should be available on request. However, I see the case for a lower threshold—possibly £500—to ensure that APPGs are as transparent as possible. Secondly, a charity that supports an APPG should have its website listed on the Register of All-party Groups so that people can access relevant information. Thirdly, publications by APPGs should carry the names of their authors and the organisations that provide secretariat services to the group, plus the names of any relevant client or sponsor. Parliament should be transparent and I believe that these reforms will help us to move in that direction. However, I am concerned about which organisations can become an APPG's secretariat and the parliamentary access that it affords.

Last week at business questions, I asked the Leader of the House for an urgent statement on iEngage, an extremist group that seeks to influence Government and discredit moderate Muslims. It has been appointed secretariat to the new APPG for Islamophobia. It defends mosques that host terrorist preachers, schools that teach anti-Semitism and homophobia, individuals such as Daud Abdullah who have pressed for terrorist attacks on the British Navy, and the invitation of hate preachers to Britain. When those revelations emerged, the elected chair of the APPG, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins), and the vice-chair Lord Janner, stood down in protest.

**Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con):** I am sorry to trouble my hon. Friend, but perhaps I can give him notice that I will make a passing comment on that matter if you call me to speak later in the debate, Mr Deputy Speaker. There may be more than one side to this.

**Robert Halfon:** I look forward to it, and I had a feeling that that was the case from the e-mail that my hon. Friend sent me. Because he is counter-intuitive on so many issues, I urge him to be counter-intuitive on this one and not to go along with the tide of taking the soft way on Islamism.

I received a letter from the Serjeant at Arms today informing me that iEngage has not yet been issued with a parliamentary pass. I am grateful to her and her office for their prompt and professional response on the matter, but at the same time, there is still some confusion in the House records, as the register of APPGs on the parliamentary website on Friday 4 February, last week—I have it here—was still indicating that iEngage's head of research, Shenaz Bunglawala, had been granted a Commons pass in her capacity as the secretariat to the all-party group on Islamophobia.

**Simon Hughes:** To follow up on what the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) said, I am sure that the hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) has done his research and understands that I remain an officer of that group. I will therefore seek to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, because it is important that the latter's comments, which are his opinion, are not necessarily regarded as factually and objectively accurate. I am very happy to engage in the debate, but there are certainly at least two sides to the story, if not more.

**Robert Halfon:** My later remarks will show that I am not just giving an opinion, I am giving hard facts. I urge my right hon. Friend, who is a progressive individual, to look at the organisation in question properly and support progressive Islamic groups that do not hold the views that iEngage does. We should judge organisations by the company they keep. Just as he would condemn somebody who spent their time supporting fascism, even if they did not commit fascist acts, he should not support Islamist groups that support extremism.

**Stephen Pound:** I am listening with great interest and, I have to say, with very little knowledge of the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes. The subject to which he is speaking seems so important that I ask him whether it would not be more appropriately addressed in a full and separate debate of the House rather than in the context of the motions before us.

**Robert Halfon:** I did ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for a debate and a statement last week, and he suggested that I bring the matter up in this debate. As this matter is about the secretariat of an APPG, I think the current debate is the right forum for bringing it up.

The online records on the parliamentary website state that iEngage

“acts as the group's secretariat”,

a role that involves taking minutes of its meetings and heavily influencing its reports and speaker programme. The Serjeant at Arms has clarified to me in absolute terms that no pass has been issued. In an e-mail to me a few hours ago, she stated:

“We have spoken to the ex-Chairman and ex-Deputy Chairman of the APPG. It was iENGAGE who claimed they had a Parliamentary pass, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support this claim. As I said before, no application has been made and no pass issued for anyone connected to iENGAGE.”

**Mr MacShane:** I think it is appropriate for this matter to be discussed in the debate, because it is a great worry to many people that an organisation with a very clear ideological purpose should be seeking to infiltrate the House of Commons and act as a secretariat. My Muslim constituents are worried about that. I do not know Mrs Bunglawala, but I have certainly heard Mr Bunglawala say at a meeting that he cannot condemn the lapidation—stoning to death—of women, because thus it is written in the Koran. He is entitled to that point of view, but I do not think it should be propagated. As the Prime Minister rightly says, and as I have been saying for some time, we have to keep ultra-Islamist ideologues out of our campuses and keep them from poisoning young minds. If there is even a hint of suspicion—and there is more than that—that it is now the secretariat of an all-party group, it is quite appropriate for the matter to be raised tonight.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I think that we are in danger of straying into security matters. I would like us try to keep to the motion. I know that it is broad, but we are in danger of going down an avenue that could possibly lead to security matters about who is and who is not issued with a pass. I would therefore appreciate it if we stuck to the general motion.

**Robert Halfon:** I will do my best, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr MacShane) for his remarks. As he does so often on the issue that we are considering, he hits the nail on the head. The Prime Minister's comments at the weekend fit very much with his line of thinking.

I oppose Islamophobia in all its forms as vehemently as I oppose anti-Semitism, chauvinism or any bigotry. I was recently on an all-party group delegation to northern Iraq in the predominantly Muslim state of Kurdistan, which is a beacon for the prosperity and security that can be achieved when Christians, Muslims and Jews live harmoniously together. I am an active member of the APPG on Kurdistan and secretary of the APPG on Azerbaijan because I want to support progressive Muslim nations.

However, the problem with iEngage and its aggressive approach is that the views that it publishes and defends and the well documented history of its officers and trustees undermine any attempt to tackle anti-Muslim bigotry. Indeed, iEngage supports precisely the sort of extremist groups that fuel prejudice and anti-Muslim hatred, and grossly misrepresent Islam.

Shortly after my request for an urgent statement on iEngage, I was attacked online in what appeared to be a co-ordinated effort. That included a verbal assault from Inayat Bunglawala, who until recently was iEngage's head of policy and research.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I understand that the hon. Gentleman wants to get things on the record, but we are dealing with a motion, and I think that we are straying away from the relevant points to which we should be sticking, and getting into issues about individual groups. The motion is about the future of all-party groups, and I am not sure where the connection is. I understand that the hon. Gentleman wants to make his points, but we are in danger of straying way off where we should be.

**Robert Halfon:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I had originally planned to make a point of order about the subject this afternoon, but the Speaker's Office asked me whether I still wanted to do that, given that I would be raising the matter tonight, and I said no. The Speaker's Office was therefore well aware that I intended to raise the issue, and because it is about an APPG and its secretariat, I feel that it is relevant to tonight's debate.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Comments must relate to the motion. I understand the advice that has rightly been given, but speeches must relate to the motion.

**Sir Peter Bottomley:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. For us to stick to the terms of the motion, passing references to individual matters may be fine, but if we are induced—rather than “provoked”—into going into such issues in detail, the debate will change its character and its usefulness. If the advice to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) was that he could mention the subject, that is fine, but to go on at great length will lead to the rest of us trying to do the same thing.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is quite right. Hon. Members could start raising other issues, and I am therefore frightened that the debate will not be the one that we should hold, and that we will be drawn into other subjects. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the issue that he needed to raise, but the debate must not stray from the motion.

**Robert Halfon:** I need to raise the issue because we are discussing APPGs under the motion.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. You may wish to raise the issue, but you cannot. We must stick to the motion. I am trying to be as helpful as I can, but we are being tested. Please, if you can relate the matter directly to the motion, do that, then we can continue, rather than drawing other Members into a subject that we should not be discussing tonight.

**Simon Hughes:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I remain an officer of the group, and there is an issue about who should comprise the secretariat. There will be a meeting for colleagues in both Houses to discuss the matter, which will be reviewed. I hope that that will be an appropriate forum for discussing the way in which the group will be looked after, and that we can take the subject away from the wider debate to an appropriate place for people who have an interest.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I welcome the point of clarification, which certainly clarifies matters to the House. I thank the right hon. Gentleman.

**Robert Halfon** *rose*—

**John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Is not one of the key issues that the hon. Gentleman highlights the dilemma of whether a group of Members of Parliament, as an APPG, appoints a secretariat, and the danger that, in some instances, a secretariat—particularly a professional one—can essentially scout around for Members of Parliament to create the all-party group that the secretariat wishes to run? Should not Members of Parliament appoint a secretariat, not the other way around?

**Robert Halfon:** Yes. The hon. Gentleman is exactly right. There should be proper security procedures and vetting for organisations that become secretariats of all-party groups.

The right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) said that what I said was just my opinion. If I am not allowed to continue in that vein, I cannot answer his query and those of others on why I said what I have said. I need to give evidence to show why I am so worried that the proper procedures have not been adhered to in relation to secretariats of that particular group. I therefore hope you will allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker to elaborate a little bit.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am not going to be tempted down that avenue. We have said that we have a debate before us, and I want to make sure that everybody is aware that we stick to it. The motions are about the new rules and the future of groups. We are talking about an issue that has happened, and I believe that that discussion ought to take place in another forum—the appropriate forum. The detail that we are getting down to is not for here, tonight. This debate is not about that.

**Mr MacShane:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The motion is widely drafted. It states:

“If a charity or not-for-profit organisation is registered as the group's secretariat, the former's name and website must also be registered.”

It also states that such an organisation must announce what it is and tell us about the details of its website. One cannot argue a general case without adducing evidence and examples, and the hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) is doing exactly that. There really is no point in debating these things—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is not a point of order. I have got to say that the debate must relate to the motion before us, but it is not at the moment. As much as advice might be given from right hon. and hon. Members, I am making the ruling. The debate must be related to the motion before us—that is the end of that. If the hon. Member wishes to continue on the motion before us or to relate the two motions together, that is fine.

**Robert Halfon:** In conclusion, although I support all-party parliamentary groups, I call on members of the all-party group on Islamophobia to think seriously about their choice of secretariat and the message that that sends. I ask the Standards and Privileges Committee and the Serjeant at Arms to consider how the House might vet the secretariat of APPGs—perhaps by a special committee—before they are placed on the approved list, especially when there are security concerns.

8.42 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I commend the hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) for bringing an important matter to the attention of the House. I am sure that many will want to pursue the issues that he raised in many different places, not least the right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes). I want to correct the hon. Gentleman on just



one word that he used. He referred inadvertently to the all-party parliamentary group “for” Islamophobia, but I think it is the all-party group “on” Islamophobia. Sometimes even prepositions are important.

I confess that motion 2 is on the Order Paper perhaps because several right hon. and hon. Members think that I got the matter wrong when I was a Minister. I see the Leader of the House winking at me now, possibly because he agrees that I got it wrong. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) for his stewardship of the Standards and Privileges Committee. The hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) said earlier how important it is that my right hon. Friend is not only a long-standing Member of the House but a long-standing member of that Committee, and that that is an important element in his work. For that matter, he was also the Chair of another Select Committee.

The answer that we have come up with in the motion is, I believe, the wrong answer. I do not intend to press it to a Division, but I believe that we have the wrong answer, and I shall explain why. There is no great problem with the rules as they are currently drafted. The Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House disagree with me, as they did when I was a Minister, but I believe that they have presented the nature of the problem wrongly.

The Deputy Leader of the House was absolutely right about the entry of the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson). There was no need for her to record the receipt of Girlguiding centenary merchandise, flower festival flowers and all the rest of it. Nor was it necessary for the Leader of the House himself to record that he was presented with a bottle of 2008 Beaujolais Villages valued at approximately £10—incidentally, it can be bought in most places in Rhondda for about £6.50—after he spoke at Bishop Wordsworth’s Church of England grammar school for boys for 45 minutes. If that was honestly the advice that hon. Members were given by the registrar, I think it was inappropriate advice.

A distinction should be made to identify clearly those cases in which a reasonable person would think that somebody was being given remuneration for providing a service, and in none of those cases would it seem to a reasonable person that somebody was being remunerated. I would use this rule: if I had not been given that bottle of wine, pen or whatever, would I still have made the speech? Would I still have opened the Girlguiding centre or whatever? The honest truth is yes, I would. It would not have made the blindest difference to me. That is the rule that a reasonable person would follow. I know the registrar, I have always followed her advice and I respect her enormously, but she might have used a legalistic understanding of the rules that would not in all honesty be followed by any of our constituents.

Let us imagine for the moment that the registrar is right and that all those cases should have been registered. Has it done any great harm that they have been registered? I do not believe it has done any harm to anybody. There is a greater sense of transparency, and I do not think that that is a problem. However, let us say for argument’s sake that we should not make a distinction between gifts and remuneration. There is an argument for that. It could be argued that any gift we receive for doing something—after speaking at a meal, for example—whether

to the value of £400, £500 or whatever should be considered in exactly the same way. However, that is not the proposition before us this evening. The proposition is that a gift should be registered if it has a value in excess of 1% of salary, and that remuneration should be registered if it has a value in excess of one tenth of 1%. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee is disagreeing with me. If he wants to intervene, I am happy to give way—but he does not. I can see an argument for not making a distinction at all and for having exactly the same level for gifts and remuneration. However, I cannot see an argument for introducing a new concept at £65.

**Simon Hughes:** The hon. Gentleman might have just answered my point. To people reading and listening, talking in money terms is as relevant as percentages and tenths of percentages. Out there, people just want to know how much money we are getting or what the monetary value is.

**Chris Bryant:** That is another good point. To be honest, I think it makes more sense to have a fixed amount. The old rule used to be £125 for registration. At the moment, the limit is zero, but if the motion is passed tonight, it will move to something in the region of £65 or £66. I would prefer the number to be fixed, so that it is perfectly intelligible to every member of the public.

We all use a layer of common sense. I am chair of the all-party group on Russia. As hon. Members might know, I have adopted a very hawkish attitude towards the Russian Federation. I believe that there are many abuses in Russia and, as chair of the all-party group, I have tried to advance that argument. Now, I must confess that I was given a bottle of vodka by the Russian embassy at Christmas. I did not believe it to be a remuneration for the questions I had asked or the tenor of the debate I had conducted in the House, so I did not even bother to ask the registrar whether I should have registered that bottle of vodka. I have always been a bit suspicious about some gifts so, as it happens, I have not even opened that bottle of vodka, which is still sitting precisely where I put it when it arrived. I suspect that I will probably not get any more bottles of vodka from the Russian embassy.

If one pursued the Deputy Leader of the House’s logic, one could argue that if a Member is invited to dinner by an embassy and, somehow or other, they speak at that dinner—whether or not they are actually the speaker at the dinner—that is remuneration. However, I just do not think that that meets the common-sense test. I honestly believe that the proposition before us this evening is the wrong proposition. I can see an argument for perfect equality between gifts and remuneration, but I cannot see the argument for what is before us this evening.

Finally, on all-party groups, I agree with the hon. Member for Harlow in that when I became the chair of the all-party group on Russia, a large number of people suddenly started ringing me offering to work in the secretariat. I am sure that some did so with perfectly good intentions; I am also sure that some did so with not-so-pure intentions, because they wanted to grind an axe in relation to Britain’s attitude towards Russia. The more that all-party groups can assert some genuine

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independence, the better. That is why the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it is important to look at the process for providing an all-party group with a secretariat.

8.51 pm

**Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con):** If an example were needed of why we need these rule changes, it is that we are having a short debate today in which a number of Members have already disagreed about what the existing rules actually are. A de minimis level is sensible, because it takes one beyond what is arguable. Members of Parliament do not want to go to bed at night wondering whether they should or should not have declared something, whether it be a box of chocolates or a pencil sharpener. The fact that the level is £65 makes things fairly clear. It also removes some of the burden placed on the registrar and her staff, who are put under quite a lot of pressure by this House because of the rules that have had to be applied. Indeed, if we are not careful, we will fill the Register of Members' Financial Interests with a lot of extraneous rubbish and people will not be able to see the wood for the trees. De minimis levels are therefore sensible. I hope that what the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) has brought to the House today will be the first of a number of such thoughts on a number of issues that we have to clear up, because we have gone from having too liberal a position to making a rod for our own backs and creating difficulties for the registrar. I welcome this resolution and commend the Standards and Privileges Committee for bringing it to the House.

The issue of all-party groups is one that ought to receive a lot more scrutiny. We all know of examples of all-party groups that are run by particular organisations. Sometimes public affairs companies are employed by charities or other organisations to run a group. I am a member of a number of all-party groups, including some that I do not think I have ever joined, but which claim me. I think that we are all in the same situation. Sometimes people say, "You haven't been to the all-party group meeting," and I wonder which one it is, when I joined it and how I can get out. It is a little bit like joining the mafia, Mr Deputy Speaker: once you give a half-hearted "Well, possibly" to somebody, you get put on a list and you are there for evermore. If I sat down and honestly listed all the all-party groups of which I think I am a member and all those of which I actually am a member, I am perfectly sure that they would be very different lists.

One thought for the Chairman of the Committee is this. Having to put in writing the fact that we were going to join an all-party group might be one way of testing the numbers joining such organisations. Realistically, we know that Members put friends, colleagues, neighbours or anybody they can find in a weak moment on to all-party groups, but the attendance for some of them is very poor. What the motion says about declarations is perfectly right. They should be transparent. We should see who is behind all-party groups and their grand titles, but if we are going to take them seriously, we should have some way of registering the real interest of Members of Parliament. If, God forbid, we made it mandatory to publish which members of an all-party group had attended its meetings, nobody would join them, because none of us has any time to go to any of them. Whenever I get the

all-party "Whip" and I read about all the all-party groups, I think that anybody who was a member of even half of them would not have time to do anything else if they went to all the meetings. So there has been some inflation in that area. Certain organisations use the authority of an all-party group to produce campaigns. My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) made a serious point, and I hope that the Chair of the Committee will take that back. Perhaps an Adjournment debate would be a legitimate forum in which colleagues could pursue that issue.

We know that all-party groups have grown rapidly, and that they now exist for all body parts and all parts of the globe, as the Deputy Leader of the House said. There ought to be a much stronger test for an all-party group. We ought to be able to see who its members are, and the resolution before the House will mean that any provision of secretarial support, finance or back-up—whether in the form of champagne receptions or anything else—should find its way into the register so that we know what is going on. I welcome what has happened, and I hope that this is the start of a process whereby we can get some common sense back into the rules.

8.55 pm

**Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD):** I welcome this short debate, and I thank the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) for his work and that of his Committee. I also thank the Leader of the House, who started the work on this subject earlier. I support both the motions. I made my first point during an intervention on the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). It was that, in due course, we might want to talk about payments in sums rather than percentages, for the sake of greater transparency. I am happy that we are starting where we are, however. The proposal will create a reasonable division between the more substantial gift and the single gift—the bottle of wine, the pair of socks—given as what the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) described as a courteous thank you. I had visions of her making a kind of royal procession round Warrington with her arms full of flowers—all, I am sure, gratefully given and received. Also, we should not over-regulate. There is a balance to be struck, and we seem to be going in the right direction.

I want to make two further points, about all-party groups. The first follows the theme pursued by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms). I, too, have always felt that there was a danger that these groups could proliferate. We can sign up 20 people relatively easily, but getting them to come to meetings is a wholly different ball game. Of course it is right that there should be an all-party group with an interest in Russia. It is a very important country for us to take an interest in, and elections are held to decide who the officers of that group will be. For example, I am a member of various all-party groups, and I have served as an officer in many of them. I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group on Ukraine, which is next to Russia. It is a very big, important country—the second largest European country—and we have a duty to take an interest in such a developing democracy. It is relevant not only to democratic issues but to energy issues and the like. There are all kinds of different all-party groups.

Secondly, on the subject raised by the hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), we have had an all-party group to deal with anti-Semitism for many years, and rightly so, because it is a plague and a scourge on our country. It is therefore unsurprising that there is now a newly formed group on Islamophobia. The hon. Member for Rhondda rightly pointed out that it is a group “on” Islamophobia, not a group “for” it. Islamophobia is also a scourge. The Prime Minister spoke about it only this weekend in his speech in Munich. Whatever we might think about the tenor and balance of that speech, this is a real issue in many of our constituencies. I see the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), nodding. His city, as well as mine, has seen faith-based prejudices that are directed at other faiths, and there are other prejudices that we also need to counter.

All the proposals in the motion are reasonable.

“The contact details of the group’s registered contact”

should be made public, so that there can be an accountable person.

“Any relevant gainful occupation of staff to the group who hold a parliamentary pass”

should be publicised, so that if any pass holder is paid by someone else, we would know who they are.

“The source and extent of any financial benefit (e.g. donations) and the source and nature of any non-financial material benefit (e.g. provision of goods or services) received by the group from a single source outside Parliament”

above a certain amount will have to be publicised, so that people will know exactly where the servicing is funded from. That is absolutely right. The hon. Member for Rhondda made the perfectly good point that, because these groups have a certain status, and because they can use parliamentary logos such as the portcullis, there is an interest in being associated with them. The Chairman of the Committee also knows that very well.

Lastly, the website address should be publicised. The rules are much more explicit than in the past, so if a consultancy or a for-profit organisation is acting as the secretariat, we must know what the consultancy is and what it does—it must supply the information. Similarly, if it is a charity or a not-for-profit organisation, the rules are explicit that it

“must agree to make available on request a list citing any commercial company which has donated either as a single sum or cumulatively more than £5,000 in the course of the 12 months prior to the month in which the request is made”.

We will have a much better system: I do not think it will be perfect, but it will be much better.

Given your clear rulings earlier, Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope I have already made a helpful intervention to calm the House. A group has been set up—properly—on Islamophobia. In a meeting at which I was not present, a secretariat was appointed. I had agreed to be elected as an officer; other officers have now resigned. The secretariat has been a controversial issue and there are campaigns on both sides of the argument. My office has been in touch with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow to ask for information to back up what he is saying, although I have not yet received it. I will be happy to receive it. There will be a meeting for all colleagues who wish to come. I have no prejudice in favour or against a particular organisation being the secretariat, and I now regard it as my duty to try to

proceed carefully and with consensus, but I am not going to allow myself to be bullied into having or not having a particular organisation because it might have some views that are difficult for others to accept.

All parties are debating how to manage organisations that deal in these difficult areas of faith-based issues, which apply in your constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker, as in mine. Some people think we should go to meetings or events with people whose views we may disagree with or who might have more extreme views than we would normally tolerate. I have been to some such events. I attended a Global Peace and Unity event last year in order to speak on behalf of my party, and a Minister attended to speak on behalf of the Government. The co-chairman of the Conservative party was asked not to go, because it was not thought that a Conservative representative would be appropriate. These sort of debates will carry on.

We have to take advice and to act in the best interests of Parliament and the wider community. All I hope I can do is to assure those who take an interest in our proceedings that agreement to tonight’s motions will lead to better procedures. All-party groups will not lack controversy, just as our debates on the Floor of the House do not lack it. It is right that there is a place for controversial issues to be discussed, but I hope that they will be discussed on the basis of facts and an understanding of the severity of some of the issues dealt with by all-party groups. I hope that this debate has pointed people in the right direction. I hope that the last group I mentioned will know where it will go next—legitimately, properly and appropriately. More generally, I hope that people will understand that we have processes for these issues and that the processes are good ones.

Finally, my understanding, like that of many colleagues who have been involved with these matters, is that all pass holders are security checked for this House. Whatever their status, all staff and anybody who comes in must be checked, and not just by the House authorities, as the matter is then referred outside. That provides the protection. I assume that any colleague who has any worries about any pass holder in any organisation will follow the appropriate procedures, which are well known to Members. The inquiries must be made. Passes have been removed if people have held them inappropriately; and people have been prevented from being here if it is inappropriate for them to work here. We have to assume that the authorities continue to do a good job. We have not had problems regularly in the past. I trust the authorities to be vigilant; that is what we pay them to do. I think they serve us well in doing that.

9.3 pm

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), the right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) and others. I am not certain that security vetting solves all problems. The number of people who have been assassinated by their own bodyguards suggests that there might be a weakness in that.

**Chris Bryant:** It is worth bearing it in mind that the person working as the secretary for the all-party parliamentary group on Russia, prior to my becoming

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the chairman, is supposedly being thrown out of the country by the Government, yet managed to get a security pass here.

**Sir Peter Bottomley:** I recall that about 25 years ago, the London representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation was assassinated for being too moderate. Many people who take part in public affairs are at risk, which is one of the risks that an open society faces in peacetime just as it does at times of war.

Let me say to the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) that, although I do not intend to try to divide the House on the first motion, I think it would be better to specify 0.2% or 0.3% of the parliamentary salary. A long time ago, when I was a Minister, I visited a country in south-east Asia and was presented with a tin bowl. I saw the same bowl in a shop priced at the equivalent of £130 in local currency, so I gave it to my private secretary. At the airport on my way home, I saw it again priced at £65, so I asked for it back. [Laughter.]

There will be boundary problems of that kind whatever limit is set, but my general view is that a limit of £130 or £180 would be better, and that it would even better to make the limit the same as that applying to gifts presented to Ministers. As for the question of Members' including on their websites gifts whose value was below the minimum, the Registrar could advise us if we tried to include details that were not required according to the interpretation of the rules.

In view of your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall not add to what has already been said about the motion on all-party groups. If it is possible for me to attend the meeting of the all-party group that has been mentioned, I will happily do so.

Let me, in passing, pay tribute to some people in my constituency. When I was involved with students from the Three Faiths Forum, I was delighted that the senior Jewish woman in my constituency was willing to meet us, as were representatives of the local Islamic society and mosque, the Salvation Army and the Worthing Churches Homeless Projects. It was immensely valuable that people were able to share that experience, and learn along with members of other faiths and people with different views. I also pay tribute to members of my local mosque, who have been pleased to attend the holocaust memorial event in Worthing. I hope that its organisers will at some stage focus on the massacre at Srebrenica. It should be borne in mind that the most recent modern massacre in Europe was a massacre of Muslims, both secular and otherwise, by people claiming membership of other religions.

I have no strong views on the issue of all-party groups, but there seems to have been a bit of "creep". Paragraph 13(b) on page 5 of the All-Party Groups report by the Committee on Standards and Privileges, the eighth report of Session 2008-09, HC 920, states that in future such groups should have to

"register any commercial company with a direct interest in the work of the APG which contributes materially (say more than £5,000 or 5%, whichever is the lower) to meeting the central costs of the charity."

According to the motion,

"The charity or not-for-profit organisation must agree to make available on request a list citing any commercial company which has donated either as a single sum or cumulatively more than £5,000".

Perhaps the Minister who replies to the debate will tell us whether the movement from the requirement for a "direct interest" to no qualification was deliberate, and, if it was not, whether it could be considered when the resolutions are before the House.

Let us suppose that, for instance, the Army Benevolent Fund were to provide the secretariat for an issue-based all-party group. I am not saying that it should do so. Given that it has raised millions of pounds for our armed forces, I think that it would be going too far to have to list every commercial company that has given it money for that purpose, whether by gift aid or otherwise. At one stage I was chairman of the Church of England children's society. A fair amount of money was donated to us by commercial companies for events and other purposes. I think that we might be putting a burden on some charities and not-for-profit causes if the resolution followed the motion—which will obviously be accepted—rather than the committee's report.

Let me return briefly to the issue of earnings as opposed to gifts. For a number of years I have tried to avoid having any outside earnings. I failed in the current year, because I wrote an obituary for a friend and, rather to my surprise, received a cheque from the newspaper that kindly published it. I have given the money away, but it clearly constituted earnings, and I think that I am obliged to declare it. I believe that the sum was £300. A long time ago, between 1979 and 1984, I was personnel director of a fairly major commodities trading company. I should have been very prepared to declare the salary that I received for that.

On another occasion, I was an adviser to the International Fund for Animal Welfare. I gave it advice that it did not take and did not want, but its founder asked whether I would do more work for it, which I did, although it did not take any notice of what I said. That relationship came to an end in time.

What is clearly employment or something done for the purposes of an organisation for which one is paid should be declared, and what one is doing outside ought to be. However, I have a warning. Let us suppose that Peter Thurnham, who was a colleague at one stage in this House and who bought two machine tools when he was unemployed and set up an engineering business, entered the House of Commons when the business was on its feet. How would he calculate the time that he was putting into the business? That seems to be a very difficult thing to do. When James Callaghan was a farmer after being Prime Minister, how much time did he put into it? When Michael Foot was writing his biography of the founder of the health service, how much time did he put into it? If I, for example, had to put in the number of hours that I spent on the obituary, I would have to guess. It is obvious that we have to be prepared to put down rough and ready figures, which will not be easy.

The key point is to back a system where people will feel embarrassed if they know that they are doing something wrong, rather than having an enormous box-ticking exercise. I hope that when we ask the Committee on Standards and Privileges to review the matter and it conducts a consultation, more people will agree that 0.1% is too low and could be at least doubled or trebled without disadvantage to the House or to the interests of the public.

9.11 pm

**Mr Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley) (Lab): The vast majority of hon. Members who have spoken agree that these motions should go through tonight and that we should alter the arrangements.

The hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) raised the issue of the limit of 0.1% of a Member's salary. We have tried to find a seer in public life to tell us what the approximate worth of a gift should be. Some local authorities have a level as low as £25, and some have no levels at all. It seems to us that £66—some people interpret the figure as £65—is about right. We will reconsider the matter, if we feel that it is not working in future.

On all-party groups, it would clearly be a matter for the House to consider the provision, if it is a burden on some all-party groups. The aim is to find out who is behind the secretariats of all-party groups and not necessarily their motivations, which is a point that has been raised tonight. We need the situation to be transparent if a commercial organisation is effectively funding all-party groups. I am not saying that that would necessarily be wrong—I am not sure whether the House would say that that is necessarily wrong—but it is right that we know exactly who the secretariat are and how they operate.

The right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) discussed duplication and overlap. I once considered setting up an all-party group on all-party groups to see how many members we could get to join. I chair all-party groups, which are an effective aid to legislation. This House should practise a wider democracy, and people with knowledge about individual issues come and talk to us on a regular basis—there is nothing wrong with that in my view. However, the situation needs to be transparent, so it is clear what has motivated them to do that and what is motivating us to make arguments on the Floor of the House.

The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) raised the issue of pro bono advice to an all-party group rather than secretarial support. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) said from the Front Bench, we need to consider that matter, but it should not take us away from making improvements tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said that any reasonable person knows the difference between a gift and remuneration, but, as Members of Parliament, we do not always deal with reasonable people. I have had 27 years in this place and on the odd occasion I have dealt with people who are not reasonable. [*Interruption.*] I was talking not only about people outside here, but some in here too. The Committee has said:

“A Member who chooses to treat as a gift the bottle of wine he or she receives after making a speech exposes him- or herself to an allegation that he or she has failed to register a payment received for a service provided.”

That is the reality of the situation. It might be that people have seen someone receive a bouquet of flowers, a declaration has not been made and nobody has made a complaint, but an unreasonable person might think that that is open to investigation and might write in, and that would start an investigation. We are trying to stop that happening and that is what we are going to do.

**Sir Peter Bottomley:** I am aware that I slightly bounced the right hon. Gentleman with my question about paragraph 13(b). If he is not able to say tonight whether the reference to

“a direct interest in the work of the APG”

was taken out deliberately, could he ask someone to let me know whether it was deliberate or whether it was just one of those things?

**Mr Barron:** I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman gets that information.

The Committee also said:

“The trivial nature of some of these payments and the disproportionate effort involved in recording and then registering them has called into question the utility of the rule. The February 2010 edition of the Register contained over 100 more pages than the June 2008 edition.”

The figures were 264 pages as opposed to 157. If what we have heard is correct, it is clear that the many hon. Members who have not registered bouquets of flowers, pots of honey and so on could eventually find that they are outwith the register. Given those circumstances, we need to address this area.

**Chris Bryant:** But the main change was that previously we had to register remuneration in our capacity as a Member of Parliament and we did not have to register things all the way down. We have introduced much greater transparency, which has meant that we now know about earnings of hon. Members that have nothing to do with their membership of the House.

**Mr Barron:** I accept that, although I believe that my hon. Friend said that he saw no real difference between gifts and remuneration. It seems to me that if I make a speech to a company and am given a £500 gift, it is more likely that that is remuneration, it is declarable and should be declared in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. As I said in my opening speech, this is a grey area and we are trying to make things as clear as we can. Both these motions will help the House and I hope that the House will support them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That—

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Tenth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, on Registration of income from employment (HC 749);

and

(2) accordingly the resolution of the House of 30 April 2009 relating to the Registration of Members' Financial Interests be amended, by leaving out paragraph (2) and inserting:—

“(2) That such a payment shall be registered

(a) where its value exceeds one tenth of 1 per cent. of the current Parliamentary salary; or

(b) where the total value of payments from the same person, organisation or company in a calendar year exceeds 1 per cent. of the current Parliamentary salary.”

## ALL-PARTY GROUPS

*Resolved,*

That—

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Eighth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges of Session 2008-09, on All-Party Groups (HC 920); and

(2) accordingly the resolution of the House of 17 December 1985, as amended on 10 March 1989 and 29 July 1998, be further amended by leaving out paragraph 3 and inserting:—

“3. Groups whose membership:

- is open to all Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords, and

- includes at least 20 Members (each of whom must be a Member of the House of Commons or House of Lords), comprising: at least 10 Members who are from the same political party as the Government, and at least 10 who are not from the Government's party (of whom at least six must be from the main opposition party), and

- includes at least one officer who is a Member of the House of Commons be required to register the following information on the Register of All-Party Groups:

(a) The full title of the group. If persons other than Members of the Commons or Lords are allowed full membership (i.e. voting rights) the term 'Associate Parliamentary Group' must be included in the group's title. If such persons are not allowed full membership the term 'All-Party Parliamentary Group' must be included instead. The rest of the group's title should simply reflect the group's subject so that the latter is obvious from its title alone.

(b) A brief summary of the group's main purpose.

(c) The names of the group's officers. At least one officer must be an MP; each of the other officers must be a Member of the House of Commons or House of Lords.

(d) The names of exactly 20 qualifying Members (each of whom must be a Member of the House of Commons or Lords), comprising: 10 Members who are from the same political party as the Government, and 10 who are not from the Government's party (of which at least six must be from the main opposition party).

(e) The contact details of the group's registered contact, who must be both an officer of the group and a Member of the House of Commons, and is the person ultimately responsible for the group's compliance with the rules of the House.

(f) Any relevant gainful occupation of staff to the group who hold a parliamentary pass (relevant gainful occupation means any occupation that is advantaged by the privileged access afforded by the pass).

(g) The source and extent of any financial benefit (e.g. donations) and the source and nature of any non-financial material benefit (e.g. provision of goods or services) received by the group from a single source outside Parliament, if the value of the benefit equals or exceeds the financial threshold for registration (currently £1,500) in a calendar year. Once the group has made that initial registration, any further donation received from the same source in the same calendar year should be registered if its value exceeds £500.

(h) The website address of any organisation registered as the group's secretariat.

(i) If a consultancy is registered as the group's secretariat, the names and website of the consultancy plus the name of any client of theirs who is specifically paying the consultancy to act as the secretariat must also be registered. The consultancy must either publish on its website its full client list or agree to provide such a list on request, otherwise it is not allowed to act as the group's secretariat.

(ii) If a charity or not-for-profit organisation is registered as the group's secretariat, the former's name and website must also be registered. The charity or not-for-profit organisation must agree to make available on request a list citing any commercial company which has donated either as a single sum or cumulatively more than £5,000 in the course of the 12 months prior to the month in which the request is made, otherwise it is not allowed to act as the group's secretariat.

(i) The address of the group's website, if it has its own website.

(j) The date of the group's inaugural election of officers and of any Annual General Meeting held thereafter.

(k) Affiliation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, if the group is affiliated to either or both.”—(*Mr Barron.*)

## **Business without debate**

### **COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

*Ordered,*

That Clive Efford be discharged from the Communities and Local Government Committee and Steve Rotheram be added.—(*Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

## Supermarket Acquisitions (Tyne and Wear)

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

9.18 pm

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): The title of this debate says that it is about supermarkets, but it is really about people. It is about the town of Birtley, where I live, which is in the south-east of my constituency. The town has a long history of being resilient and has dealt with hard knocks. Its situation is post-industrial, like many other towns in northern England, and it has gone through tough times with the loss of its brickworks and the running down of its chemical factory, and it is also a former coal mining area and there was a lot of engineering in the town. Birtley has kept strong and has developed. The town has a lot of high-tech engineering; a big car sales place; three separate bodies selling caravans and motor homes; an aluminium processing factory; and a cable factory. The key to the town is the shopping area, which is on what was the old great north road—the old A1.

That shopping area has developed over many years since there was a huge Co-operative store there. After that store ceased operating long ago, its role was taken over by two supermarkets—a medium-sized one and a smaller one—the ownership of which changed over the years. Until two years ago, the medium-sized one was operated by Somerfield and the smaller one was operated by a company called Netto, which has a number of supermarkets across the north of England and has about 1% of the supermarket share in this country. Between them they helped to support a huge array of small retail businesses—one-man, two-man and three-man businesses such as hairdressers, greengrocers, butchers, bakers, newsagents, pharmacies, opticians, a shop selling cards and pictures, a post office, a number of banks, a launderette, a huge array of fast-food outlets, coffee shops, travel agents, estate agents, florists, a pet shop, a carpet store, a general dealer and public houses. If I have missed any of the businesses there, I apologise to the good people of Birtley. The key point is that all those operations were quite small and that what really drew people to Birtley was the supermarkets, particularly the one run by Somerfield.

Two years ago, we got the news that Somerfield was going to be taken over by Co-op and we thought that that was good news, but then we heard, sadly, that our store was not going to be taken over by Co-op. In these situations, the Office of Fair Trading usually has a role to play in ensuring that a huge takeover by a big group does not allow the creation of a monopoly. The Somerfield store in Birtley was not identified by the OFT as being one that Co-op had to get rid of. However, Co-op did have to get rid of 25 stores and it decided, in its wisdom, to divest itself of 38 stores. I found this hard to believe, but it put them up for sale as a package, telling potential buyers that they must buy all 38 or none.

When we in Birtley heard that Morrisons was buying the 38 stores, we were quite pleased because it has a good reputation in the north-east as a successful operator with good-quality stores that have a lot of fresh food and a good deal of business. So we thought it would be really good for the area—until 27 April, two years ago,

when Morrisons took over. On that same day, it announced that the Birtley store was not going to open and the staff in the store were moved to other stores in the Morrisons network. It did that because—I found this hard to grasp—it had bought the store as part of the package of 38 without actually seeing it. However, it had run the store 20 years previously. Further down the line, I met the manager who made the final decision and he told me that he had been the manager of that same store 20 years before and that hardly any money had been spent on its infrastructure, so it was little wonder that it needed major refurbishment.

The people of Birtley went from being very happy that a good-quality supermarket was coming in, which could only be good for the town centre, to the current situation in which that building has stood empty for two years, deteriorating and sticking out like a sore thumb on the middle of our main street. The really sad part of what has happened is the impact on local businesses. Many people have had to stop doing all their shopping in Birtley because the town cannot support that kind of shopping any more. People used to go to Somerfield for 70-80% of what they wanted and then use the hairdressers, post office and other stores. Everybody was making a living then, but Somerfield's closure had a negative impact on the town. Many businesses closed, many people moved out of town, and those who stayed have been hit hard. Netto upped its game. I give credit to the people working there—they have done really well in filling the gap, but the Netto offer is not what Somerfield was or what, sadly, Morrisons could have been.

About 12 months ago we had some good news. Asda, which is one of the biggest stores in the country, was going to buy the Netto chain. We thought that was tremendous because, even though we still had the Somerfield store standing empty, we believed that Asda could come into Birtley, give us a real lift and recreate some of the business that had gone when Somerfield went. That would lift the town up again, business would come back, and more people would come and shop in Birtley. We saw Asda as a premier league team. I mean no disrespect to Netto, but if Netto was a football team, it certainly would not be in the premier league, despite the great work that it has done.

We found out late last month that the Office of Fair Trading, in its wisdom, had decided yet again that Asda would not be allowed to take over the number of stores that it wanted to take over, in the same way as the OFT had decided previously that the Co-op would not be allowed to do that. The issue for me, and the reason that I am holding the debate tonight, is that that decision was made public on 29 September last year. It was announced in an internal press release, which was only brought to my notice through the local council some three weeks ago.

There are many people who could have been informed. I will discuss with the Minister later how we can improve this so that people learn from the mistakes that were made. We have a very positive community partnership in Birtley, which is run by some great people, such as Dean and Jean Cox and Peter Cowie. We have committed local councillors and an enormous number of businesses looking every day at what is going to happen in the town. We have a strong economic development team in Gateshead council, who have worked night and day to try and make sure that Birtley can survive and improve.

[Mr David Anderson]

The team did tremendous work with Morrisons to try and improve the offer on a site that had not yet been developed. The chief executives of the council had a hands-on approach to what was going on in Birtley.

I would have been massively interested if, four months ago, I had been made aware of what was going on. If any of the people who have collared me in the past three weeks had known about that four months ago, they would have come and said to me, "David, what's happening?" and none more so than my wife. She shops in Birtley all the time. She does not drive so she has to get a bus three miles to another town, then come back and wait for the groceries to be delivered. That is not an effective way of doing business. People like her need shops on the doorstep that work for the community.

As I said, we got a copy of the press release last week and contacted the OFT. I have read the press release and the information that has been sent since. It seems to me that the OFT runs a system based on those in the know telling other people in the know about the business that they know. They decide on closures by projecting the cost of a box of cornflakes in two shops a few miles apart. If a store two miles away is going to sell 1,000 boxes of cornflakes a week at 10p less than the store where we live, the nearer one will have to close.

The OFT and the businesses concerned fail to connect the dots between the real life of people on the ground, who are directly affected by such decisions—older people, people without transport, people who are less able to travel, those with disabilities, those who like the security of their own place. I have a good old friend who was severely affected when the supermarket that she went to every day of her life was, in effect, taken away. She became seriously unwell and disoriented by what was going on. She was not eating properly and went through some real problems, which thankfully have now been resolved.

When I found out about the OFT decision, around 28 January, my office made contact with the OFT, which sent me a number of documents about the process. I shall refer to them now and try to speak a little more slowly, for the sake of *Hansard*. In a letter dated 20 January, Timothy Geer, who was the officer in charge at the OFT, wrote:

"In September 2010 the Office for Fair Trading (OFT) announced that it was minded to refer the acquisition by ASDA stores Limited... to the Competition Commission... unless Asda gave suitable undertakings to address our competition concerns. While the OFT concluded that the acquisition would not give rise to competition concerns at a national level, we were concerned that competition could be substantially reduced in around one in four of the local areas where there are overlapping stores."

To me, that means that the OFT realised back in September that there was a problem, not at a national level, but in certain areas. It should have flagged up that situation so that it could be addressed.

The OFT's letter goes on to explain the methodology used to reach that decision. I will read the paragraph about what it did before deciding whether to go ahead with the transfer:

"The local areas in which the OFT found cause for concern were identified following the application of two tests. First, we applied a fascia counting test. If the merger reduced the number of relevant supermarket operators (by fascia) to three or fewer in the local area, the area moved to the next stage of testing. This

next stage comprised Asda hiring a professional market research firm to undertake consumer surveys at the relevant Netto and Asda stores in order to gauge how close local rivalry was between them."

I have spoken with many people at the Netto store in Birtley and no one, not the manager or the staff, are aware of any survey being done at that store, which is what the OFT's letter mentions. It continues:

"The OFT then coupled this information with profit margin data and used an analytical method called the 'illustrative price rise' to identify those areas in which a realistic prospect of a substantial lessening of competition arose. More information on these methods can be found in Annexe A of our report."

I read Annexe A, and I only wish that our good colleague Sir Patrick Cormack, the former Member for South Staffordshire, were here today, because he would have a wonderful time with the paragraphs that I am going to read out. The OFT has what it calls a stage one filter for deciding whether the process should go ahead. Paragraph A.4 of Annexe A states:

"To identify overlaps, the filter used a 'maximum reach' isochrone"—

I do not have a dictionary to find out what an isochrone is, but perhaps the Minister knows.

"The 'maximum reach' isochrones, centred on the Netto stores, were based on that used in *CGL/Somerfield*".

Therefore, in the process that happened two years earlier in Birtley, the OFT had used the same process, so again I make the point that it ought to have been aware of the impact on us. The Annexe states that those isochrones

"offered a conservative approach to capturing overlaps between the parties (and bearing in mind the asymmetric constraints imposed of each other by the merger parties)... A local area was deemed to be unlikely to present competition concerns if at least three other (non-merging) fascia were present in the primary isochrone. What is more, an asymmetric constraints approach was adopted."

I hope that the Minister is keeping up with this. Paragraph A.9 states:

"In addition to the primary isochrone filtering (centred on the Netto stores), the stage one filtering exercise also replicated the primary isochrone filtering but re-centred on census output areas where Asda measured whether 10 per cent or more of the local population would see a reduction in fascias as a result of the proposed merger. Census output areas allow for the stage 1 analysis to be carried out at as fine a level of detail as practicable."

I think that that is a pretty fine example I have given. I could go on, but I will not, because there is just more and more gobbledegook.

As I read that, I was reminded of another thing related to Birtley. One of the things the town takes great pride in is being a centre for English folk music. There is a folk club in the town that was pulled together back in the late '50s and early '60s by a man called Jack Elliot, and anyone who knows anything about English folk music will have heard of the Elliots of Birtley. That tradition continues today, personified by his daughter, Doreen Henderson, who every Wednesday night in the Birtley Catholic club still hosts the folk club, where everyone is welcome. You would be more than welcome, Mr Speaker—I know that you can do a song or two—and the Minister would be welcome too. One of the people who came through that same culture was a gentleman called Alex Glasgow, who sang a song in the 1970s called "Standing at the Door". These are the words that came to my mind when I read those paragraphs that I have just related: "Nowadays we have a craze, to follow



clever Keynesian ways, while computers measure economic growth, we've got experts running round, writing theories on the pound, caring little whether we can buy a loaf." That says it all: people at a high level are discussing issues about computer modelling and facts and figures without any real cognisance of what is happening on the ground. That would be bad enough if we had not been hit two years ago with something that really tore the heart out of our town, and we are determined not to let that be repeated over the next few months.

The OFT made a decision last September, but it should have been much more up-front and proactive with people on the ground. We believe that the conclusion was flawed, because the relationship between the ASDA store, which would have been in Birtley, and the one that the OFT compared it to, which is about 3 miles away in Washington, bears no resemblance to fact. The one in Washington is a huge superstore; the one in Birtley would have been very small—effectively like a Tesco Extra, which Members might be aware of.

The OFT has not given any consideration to the viability of Birtley as a community, particularly given the underlying problems of Morrisons' decision two years ago not to acquire and open a store on the Somerfield site. The procedure that was supposed to protect the public and consumer interest has done exactly the opposite.

I have a number of requests that I hope the Minister can respond to positively. I know that there might be limits to what he is allowed to do with the OFT, but will he, if at all possible, ask it to review the decision and go and do a real survey on the ground? I am more than happy to make myself available, and I am sure that local people, business people, the community partnership, the council leadership, the office of the council and local councillors will be there to help the OFT see the error of its ways, but it is massively important to confirm that, whatever happens, that store on the Netto site will remain open. Perhaps it will not do so under ASDA or Netto ownership, but if the store is allowed to close, it will really put those other businesses, which are struggling now, in real jeopardy.

Going forward, can I suggest that the Minister sits down with his colleagues in the OFT and asks them to re-evaluate how they do their work? This is a real-life situation where, if there had been a dialogue, we might have come to a different conclusion. If nothing else, they should have spoken to people much earlier, because, if we had not been made aware of the consultation in time, we would not have been able to respond to it. The consultation closed on 2 February; we did not find out about the decision until around about 18 or 19 January. If we had been able to get involved earlier, we might have had a different situation, and many people, who had many sleepless nights, might have been much more reassured.

I am particularly proud to have this debate this week, because a year ago this week a very close friend of mine, Ian Caddy, was given the MBE by the Queen. Ian was the man who drove the community partnership in Birtley, and on 12 February last year I was proud to be with him at Buckingham palace, when he was awarded that medal. He walked up to Her Majesty and stood there, ramrod straight like the serviceman he was, and she gave him that medal. He actually invited her to Birtley to see the community partnership; we did not invite her to the folk club, but she is more than welcome as well.

I say this, because three weeks later Ian Caddy died of cancer. He knew he was dying, and he was there that day not as Ian Caddy MBE, but as Ian Caddy the people's representative at the court of Queen Elizabeth. In his memory, I hope we can resolve the matter tonight and help the people of Birtley to get on with their lives.

9.39 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr Mark Prisk):** Let me begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) on securing the debate. I am replying on behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr Davey), who sadly is unable to attend.

The hon. Gentleman rightly set out his concerns about the way in which competition policy set at a national level can have a genuine impact on local high streets and their communities. His concerns and those of his constituents have been heightened by the fact that not just one store but two are involved in this problem. Birtley had already lost its local Somerfield store, which closed back in the spring of 2009 following, as he said, the acquisition by Morrisons. I gather that recently there have been more positive discussions about that site, and I will turn to that in a moment. Nevertheless, I entirely understand that local people and local small businesses will have felt that their town is suffering. He described that very well and put across his constituents' concerns accurately and vigorously.

Open competition is good for the economy and for consumers. At the same time, however, arms of government, at whatever level, have a responsibility to take careful note of the effects of their policies, and how they consult, on local communities. It is not just a question of a simple national identity. The hon. Gentleman accurately parodied some of the nonsense that occurs in some official documents, which does not relate to most people's real-world existence. I certainly understand that the loss of a local supermarket greatly affects a local town and community. Clearly, it will mean that that community attracts fewer customers, and that is bad for the small shops and for the other traders. It can also be a problem, as the hon. Gentleman accurately described, for older people who do not have their own form of transport. For them it means that they have to travel further just to get the basics, and the costs rise on each occasion.

To establish the facts in this instance, my officials have been in direct contact with the Office of Fair Trading. The OFT's role is to examine and adjudicate on mergers to ensure that they do not substantially reduce competition, which would harm the ability of consumers to shop around. That is an important role. It, together with the Competition Commission, which investigates mergers that have prompted concern, is of course fully independent. I should emphasise that Ministers can play no role in this whatsoever and have no powers to make any decision where a live case is in hand. That is probably right, because otherwise there is a danger that decisions will not be based on the evidence or will not necessarily be perceived as being free from political interference.

On this particular case, Asda announced in 2010 that it had struck a deal to acquire 194 Netto stores in this country. The OFT then acted on its legal duty to

[Mr Mark Prisk]

investigate the proposed merger. In September 2010, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the OFT announced its findings—that in 47 areas, Netto was the main competition to Asda and that in those areas consumers' interests would be harmed by the proposed merger. As a result of that, the OFT has a legal duty to refer the merger to the Competition Commission for a full six-month investigation unless a solution can be found. But in this case, Asda has offered to sell the Netto stores in those 47 areas, including the one in Birtley. It is true that Asda does not need to have found a buyer before the OFT will accept that undertaking, but—this is in direct answer to one of the points that the hon. Gentleman raised—it is legally obliged to keep the Netto store open until a purchaser is found. Any purchaser must also convince the OFT that it will operate a grocery retail shop capable of mounting local competition, and Asda must ensure that it makes real efforts to ensure that workers will keep their jobs afterwards. Those matters relate to the substance of the issue with regard to the OFT and Asda. I hope that that provides the hon. Gentleman and his constituents with some reassurance.

The hon. Gentleman rightly went on to question how the consultation process really worked. The OFT has advised me that it did indeed commission a research company to survey about 12,000 Asda and Netto shoppers throughout the UK, and it tells me that that included Birtley. However, the House will have noted, you will have noted, Mr Speaker, and I have noted that that is not the experience of the hon. Gentleman. I trust that the OFT will have noted that that is his view. When we get into some of the complex language and processes that often deter people from being able to get involved in these surveys, it is important that officials, at whatever level, understand the need to check not only that they have followed due process but that they have thought carefully about whether what they are doing has been explained carefully to the people they are affecting. I trust that that will be made clear to the officials involved.

**Mr Anderson:** I was in no way having a go at the OFT, but this matter is of serious importance in Birtley. People in Birtley may well have been surveyed, but what information were they given when that happened? Things would have been different had they been told that the store might not reopen. That is the key issue. That is why I said that perhaps we could discuss whether there is a different way of doing things that is in everybody's interests.

**Mr Prisk:** Absolutely; that leads to the point that I was about to come to. I understand that the OFT is now talking to the hon. Gentleman, which is good. However, he is right to say that we should always be prepared to

listen and learn on these issues. That is why I am pleased to tell him and the House that the Government are preparing to look carefully and consult broadly and thoroughly to improve the efficiency of the regime and the robustness of the decision making. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will ensure that his views are known, and I am sure that he will. This instance is a good one, from which all of us can listen and learn.

I will briefly record Morrisons' acquisition of 38 stores from the Co-operative Group in 2009, which included Somerfield stores such as the one in Birtley. Based on the representations I have received from Morrisons, I understand that the company took ownership of the site in April 2009. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, it undertook a review after the purchase of the store's commercial potential. Three months later, Morrisons concluded that the store was not viable as a Morrisons-branded outlet. Instead, it decided to seek a purchaser or tenant for the store, and it was marketed for sale or to let in July 2009.

In August 2010, with the property still on the market, Morrisons reached an agreement with Gateshead council to market the store jointly with the council's land to the rear of the site as a combined development opportunity. In October 2010, the joint site was advertised in the press. I believe that it is still being marketed, either for sale or to let. Encouragingly, I understand that that has recently led to a number of offers, including from other food retailers. Morrisons and Gateshead council are now considering the feasibility of those bids. The company has reassessed its commitment to work not only with the council, but with the hon. Gentleman to find a viable solution. I hope that that progresses well and that it will be felt that the town centre has a more positive future than has been the case over the past 18 months.

We all recognise that there have to be strong rules over free and fair competition. That is the role of the OFT and the Competition Commission. However, as this debate has shown, central Government agencies must have clear regard to the impact that that policy has on local high streets and local people. The hon. Gentleman has rightly raised the concerns of his constituents about the effect on Birtley. I restate that Asda is legally obliged to keep the Netto store open until a buyer is found, and that purchaser must convince the OFT that it will operate a grocery outlet capable of competing with neighbouring stores. Although I appreciate that the situation is far from perfect, I hope that those two statements from the OFT will give some comfort to the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, whom he has so ably represented this evening.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.48 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 7 February 2011

## TREASURY

### Barlow Clowes International

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban):** The Barlow Clowes group of companies collapsed in 1988, following the misappropriation of investors' funds, which had been routed through approximately 50 related companies and entities in 16 jurisdictions. In the same year the Le Quesne report was published on regulatory functions in this matter. In 1989, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration published the report "The Barlow Clowes Affair", which criticised the Department of Trade and Industry for maladministration in the handling of Barlow Clowes.

The Government disputed the main findings in the report but made a decision to make substantial ex gratia payments to Barlow Clowes investors. This was based on an exceptional combination of circumstances and was not to be regarded a precedent. At the same time the Government gave a clear assurance to Parliament to try and recover the cost of the ex gratia payments. The Government subsequently paid £153 million in ex gratia payments to 14,250 investors who suffered a loss as a result of the collapse of the Barlow Clowes group.

Since 1988, successive Governments have followed a policy of vigorously pursuing all claims in relation to the Barlow Clowes companies which showed any prospect of cost-effective recovery, in order to reduce the cost to the taxpayer of the ex gratia payments scheme.

The court-appointed receivers and liquidators to the Barlow Clowes companies have now concluded the last outstanding litigation in this case and will take no further action.

On 9 December 2010 the Supreme Court of Gibraltar granted the release of the receivers and liquidators of the various offshore portfolios previously promoted by Barlow Clowes International Limited, with effect from 6 January 2011. This brings to an end the Barlow Clowes affair.

As at 19 January 2011, from the recovery of assets and proceeds of legal action, the Government have recovered £120 million and £36 million was recovered and paid to investors. In total the investors, including the Government under their assigned rights, have been repaid £156.5 million, net of all costs.

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Local Government Finance

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill):** Further to my statement on Monday 31 January on the local government finance settlement, I am announcing that

I will be making a technical change to the provisional formula grant allocations for 2012-13 increasing the overall total for formula grant by £11.3 million.

I have today placed in the Library of the House revised tables which reflect this change. Copies are available from the Vote Office and should be referred to in place of those issued on Monday 31 January which related to the 2012-13 settlement. All local authorities have been notified directly today of this change.

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Plutonium Stocks

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Charles Hendry):** The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) will publish on 7 February a consultation on the long-term management of UK-owned separated civil plutonium.

Currently the UK's plutonium is stored in facilities designed to meet high standards of safety and security, however there is a need to consider how it should be managed in the long term. This consultation sets out for public scrutiny Government's preliminary view on the long-term management of the UK's plutonium. In particular the consultation covers the security and proliferation sensitivities associated with continued storage of plutonium, and also how we can best manage it in the interests of future generations.

Copies of the consultation have been placed in Libraries of both Houses or can be obtained from the DECC website.

<http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/open/open.aspx>

### Feed-in Tariffs

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Chris Huhne):** I am today announcing the start of the first review of the feed-in tariffs (FITs) scheme for small-scale low-carbon electricity generation.

Decentralised renewables are vital to green growth and the FITs scheme has proved highly successful at stimulating growth, driving innovation, creating jobs and cutting carbon.

Since the scheme began last year more than 21,000 installations have registered to date. The vast majority of these are domestic installations, including solar panels, wind turbines and micro-hydro installations. The scheme is working well. The take-up of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels under FITs has been a success with 20,000 installations now registered. However there is room for improvement. I am concerned about the impact of super-size solar installations. I am also disappointed at the lack of farm-based anaerobic digestion plants currently accessing FITs.

In light of the economic and fiscal situation, inherited by the coalition, it is imperative that we take a more responsible and efficient approach to public subsidy, including where this subsidy is funded through energy

bills. Specifically, the spending review committed to improving the efficiency of FITs and finding £40 million of savings, around 10%, in 2014-15.

Since the spending review, I have become increasingly concerned about the prospect of large-scale solar PV projects under FITs, which was not fully anticipated in the original scheme and could, if left unchecked, take a disproportionate amount of available funding or even break the cap on total funding. Several large solar installations have already received planning permission. Industry projections indicate there could be many more in the planning system. In light of this uncertainty, and the risk that such schemes could push FITs uptake off trajectory and may make the spending review savings difficult, I have decided to end the potential for damaging speculation and bring forward the review of the scheme to look at ways of correcting these early teething problems.

I recognise that industry needs a long-term plan for investment in which it can have full confidence. Today I am announcing a comprehensive evidence-based review of the FITs scheme and, to provide further certainty to the renewables industry, I can confirm that we also hope to publish next month measures to support renewable heat within the envelope agreed at spending review.

The FITs review will:

Assess all aspects of the scheme including tariff levels, administration and eligibility of technologies;

Be completed by the end of the year, with tariffs remaining unchanged until April 2012 (unless the review reveals a need for greater urgency);

Fast-track consideration of large-scale solar projects (over 50kW) with a view to making any resulting changes to tariffs as soon as practical, subject to consultation and parliamentary scrutiny as required by the Energy Act 2008.

Alongside the fast-track review of large-scale solar PV, we will also undertake a short study into the take-up of FITs for farm-based anaerobic digestion plants. Only two such projects have been accredited so far and by this point at least six were expected. We are looking again at the tariff rates inherited from the previous Administration to see if they are enough to make farm-based anaerobic digestion worthwhile.

Broad terms of reference for the review are available from [www.decc.gov.uk/FITS](http://www.decc.gov.uk/FITS) and we are seeking views on specific issues to be considered. The Government will not act retrospectively and any changes to generation tariffs implemented as a result of the review will only affect new entrants into the FITs scheme. Installations which are already accredited for FITs at the time will not be affected.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Antisocial Behaviour

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Brokenshire):** Today I am launching, “More effective responses to anti-social behaviour”, which sets out the key findings of the Home Office’s review of the current tools and powers to deal with antisocial behaviour, as well as proposals to simplify and improve them.

Reducing the everyday crime and disorder that is described as antisocial behaviour—from vandalism and graffiti to drug dealing and harassment—is a high priority for the public, and for the Government. It is corrosive, blights communities and neighbourhoods and has a huge impact on the quality of life of millions of people. The unprecedented response by the public to the launch of street-level crime information earlier this month illustrates just how concerned they are about the issue.

Our aim is to ensure that where a community or victim is suffering antisocial behaviour—particularly the sort of targeted, persistent harassment apparent in a number of high-profile recent cases—the police and other local agencies take the problem seriously, take the necessary steps to stop it permanently, and protect vulnerable victims.

Our reforms to local crime and policing will take us some way towards meeting that objective. The introduction of elected police and crime commissioners, street-level crime information and regular neighbourhood beat meetings will make police forces more accountable for the way they deal with the issues that matter to local people. Helen Newlove is highlighting ways the public can get involved in making their communities safer. And we announced earlier in January that eight police forces are, with local partners, trialling a new approach to handling calls from the public that will ensure repeat and vulnerable victims of antisocial behaviour get a better service.

However, the police and other professionals also need an effective toolkit to deal with antisocial behaviour; one that is quick, practical, easy to use and provides a real deterrent to perpetrators.

Our review of the current tools and powers found that there are too many of them, with practitioners tending to focus on the measures they are most familiar with. And the bureaucracy and cost associated with some of the court orders (especially the antisocial behaviour order) may encourage some practitioners to use informal or voluntary tools to deal with serious incidents instead. At the same time, the growing number of people who breach their ASBO suggests the potentially serious consequences are still not deterring a persistent minority from continued antisocial behaviour. Finally, the tools that were designed to help perpetrators deal with the underlying causes of their antisocial behaviour are rarely used.

In response we propose a radical streamlining. Instead of providing a specific tool to deal with every problem, we aim to introduce a handful of faster, more flexible and more effective tools that allow practitioners to protect victims and communities and get to the root of the problem. Specifically, we propose to:

repeal the ASBO and other court orders for antisocial individuals, and replace them with two new orders that bring together restrictions on future behaviour and support to address underlying problems—a criminal behaviour order that can be attached to a criminal conviction, and a crime prevention injunction that can quickly stop antisocial behaviour before it escalates;

ensure there are powerful incentives on perpetrators to stop behaving antisocially—for example, by making breach of the new orders grounds for eviction from social housing;

bring together many of the existing tools for dealing with place-specific antisocial behaviour, from persistent litter or noisy neighbours, to street drinking and crack houses, into a community protection order;

bring together existing police dispersal powers into a single police power to direct people away from an area for antisocial behaviour;

make the informal and out-of-court tools for dealing with antisocial behaviour more rehabilitative and restorative; and introduce a community trigger that gives victims and communities the right to require agencies to deal with persistent antisocial behaviour.

Copies of the consultation document will be placed in the House Library. The consultation, which runs until 3 May, is open to everyone to have their say and details can be found on the Home Office website at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/asb-consultation](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/asb-consultation).

## PRIME MINISTER

### Release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** On 20 July 2010 I asked the Cabinet Secretary to conduct a review of Government papers relating to the release of the Lockerbie bomber. The purpose of this review was to ensure that all paperwork that could be published was

published in order to address as fully as possible the continued concerns that were being expressed over this release, including from victims' families.

The Cabinet Secretary has completed that review. I have placed his report and the further papers that are being released in the Libraries of both Houses.

The review assessed all material across Government. The Cabinet Secretary was assisted in this task by the former Information Commissioner and current Chairman of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council, Richard Thomas. He has provided independent validation of this process and confirms the report and the documents now being published are consistent with all the materials he has reviewed and provide a fair and accurate account of events.

Under the convention covering papers of a previous administration, the Cabinet Secretary consulted former Ministers and the former Prime Minister about publication of additional papers.

All decisions on the declassification and publication of papers belonging to the previous Administration were taken by the Cabinet Secretary. He is clear that any information not published does not alter or contradict his report in any way.



# Written Answers to Questions

Monday 7 February 2011

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ENCAMS

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the future funding of the Keep Britain Tidy campaign. [38053]

**Richard Benyon:** The environmental charity, Keep Britain Tidy, is DEFRA's delivery partner on litter and local environmental quality issues. Details of the

Government's continued grant to Keep Britain Tidy for the spending review period can be found on the DEFRA website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/what/documents/defra-alb-allocations-101220.pdf>

### Forestry Commission: Land

**Mr Hollobone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of each type of land owned by the Forestry Commission in each parliamentary constituency in Northamptonshire has been (a) sold or (b) leased in each of the last 10 years; and what public access conditions were stipulated in each case. [38561]

**Mr Paice:** The information on land sales is held at County level. The following table shows those areas of land sold by the Forestry Commission in Northamptonshire in the last 10 years, its status, and where access on foot has been dedicated under the provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

	<i>Name of woodland sold</i>	<i>Area (Ha)</i>	<i>Status and access</i>
2007	A43 Bypass, Hazelborough Wood	4	No access, part of a road improvement scheme.
2009	Cuckoo Pen and The Linches, Lilford	51	Leasehold open market. No CRoW access.
2009	Parke Copse, Wicken Rd	18	Leasehold, open market. No CRoW access.
2009	Maidford Wood, Towcester	14	Freehold. Dedicated for access under CRoW.
2009	Seawell Wood, Maidford	25	Freehold. Dedicated for access under CRoW.
2010	Priesthay Wood, Brackley	6	Freehold. Dedicated for access under CRoW.
2010	Wicken	79	Leasehold offered back to freeholder.

### Pesticides

**Zac Goldsmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on conducting a review under the Chemicals Regulations Directive of data on the effects of neonicotinoid pesticides on honey bees. [37558]

**Mr Paice:** Neonicotinoid insecticides are authorised through the rigorous EU pesticides approval process. Products are authorised in the UK after a national risk assessment. The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) concluded that the 2009 Buglife report highlighted a need for data on the impacts of neonicotinoid pesticides on overwintering of bees in the risk assessment process. This issue had already been identified by regulators and is being addressed through changes to the EU regulatory data requirements. Government scientists have continued to keep up to date with emerging findings and we are supporting further work in this area.

The Government have regularly considered the available evidence in this area and there is no need for an additional review.

### Shale Gas

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether (a) guidance and (b) regulations issued by the Environment Agency have been modified to take into account the use of hydraulic fracturing for shale gas and coal bed methane. [37890]

**Richard Benyon:** Based on experience to date in the UK, we do not consider there is a need to modify any formal guidance or regulations, but this will be kept under review.

The Environment Agency is the statutory body responsible for operating the robust regulatory regime that is in place in England and Wales to ensure that any environmental risks from the activities listed are controlled. This regime is backed up by both Government and Environment Agency guidance. The Environment Agency has produced a web page which explains its role in regulating these activities.

### Water Supply: Housing

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the installation of trickle valves in household water pipes and systems by water companies in England. [38515]

**Richard Benyon:** Trickle valves would have the same health and social risks that underpin the ban on disconnection of household water supplies. We will not allow companies in England to use them.

### PRIME MINISTER

#### BSkyB: News Corporation

**Mr Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether he has discussed Newscorp's proposed acquisition of BSkyB with James Murdoch on or since 21 December 2010; [38788]

(2) whether he has discussed Newscorps' proposed acquisition of BSkyB with the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport since 23 December 2010. [38874]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 3 February 2011, *Official Report*, column 885W.

### Sustainable Development

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will appoint a Minister for Sustainable Development in the Cabinet Office as recommended by the Environmental Audit Committee; and if he will make a statement. [38168]

**The Prime Minister:** The Government will announce details of their approach to sustainable development across government in the coming weeks.

A formal response to the Environmental Audit Committee's report will be made in due course.

## JUSTICE

### Translation Services

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what criteria are applied to determine the languages for which translation services are offered in the criminal justice system. [38153]

**Mr Blunt:** Both interpretation services—which relate to the spoken word—and translation services—which relate to the written word—are made available as soon as an apparent need is identified, irrespective of the language involved. Additionally, in relation to criminal proceedings in or having a connection with Wales, interpretation and translation into and from Welsh is provided in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993.

It is for each justice agency to decide into which languages it translates standard written material such as leaflets and posters.

### Children in Care: Prosecutions

**Ann Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people have been prosecuted under section 49 of the Children Act 1989 for illegally removing, keeping away, assisting or otherwise encouraging a child to run or stay away from a care placement in the last five years. [38336]

**Mr Blunt:** The following table shows the number of persons proceeded against at the magistrates court under section 49 of the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales for 2005 to 2009 (latest available).

Data for 2010 are planned for publication in the spring of 2011.

*Number of persons proceeded against at the magistrates court under section 49 of the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales, 2005-09<sup>1,2,3</sup>*

Statute	Offence description	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Children Act 1989 s.49	Taking, keeping, inducing, assisting or inciting a child away from the person having responsibility for care under a care order, emergency protection order or police protection	25	21	25	41	44

<sup>1</sup> The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

<sup>2</sup> Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice

### Courts: Damages

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what recent progress he has made in amending the discount rates that courts apply to the award of damages; [38093]

(2) what his most recent assessment is of progress in amending the discount rates applied by courts in respect of the award of damages; and if he will make a statement. [38331]

**Mr Djanogly:** The Lord Chancellor is in the process of reviewing the discount rate. The review will be completed on as timely a basis as possible and an announcement will be made in due course.

### Courts: Fines

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average collection rate of court fines was in (a) England and (b) Hendon constituency in each of the last five years. [38058]

**Mr Djanogly:** The payment rate is the official measure of the collection of financial penalties. The payment rate for Hendon constituency cannot be provided as HMCS systems do not have this level of detail. Hendon is part of the London region so the payment rate for that region is set out in the following table, as is the payment rate for England.

	England only		London region		Percentage
	Payment rate	Payment rate excluding value of admin cancellation	Payment rate	Payment rate excluding value of admin cancellation	
2005-06	82	80	58		58
2006-07	91	79	88		65



	England only		London region		Percentage
	Payment rate	Payment rate excluding value of admin cancellation	Payment rate	Payment rate excluding value of admin cancellation	
2007-08	94	78	85	65	
2008-09	84	71	79	54	
2009-10	85	74	73	56	

### Employment Tribunals Service

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many employment tribunals have awarded costs to the respondent because a claim was deemed to be frivolous or vexatious in each region in each of the last five years. [37949]

**Mr Djanogly:** The Tribunals Service is currently collating this information. I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

### European Court of Human Rights

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much has been paid in legal aid and other funds from the public purse to support persons taking action in the European Court of Human Rights against (a) the Government and (b) other public bodies in the UK in each of the last five years. [38776]

**Mr Djanogly:** Legal aid in England and Wales is administered by the Legal Services Commission (LSC). The LSC does not fund any cases before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), although it may fund matters before the courts of England and Wales which may eventually conclude in the ECtHR.

Legal aid for Scotland and Northern Ireland is a devolved matter.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many cases against the UK are pending judgment at the European Court of Human Rights; [38777]

(2) how much the UK has paid in compensation as a consequence of judgments made against the UK by (a) the European Court of Human Rights; and (b) the European Court of Justice in each of the last 10 years; [38778]

(3) what the cost to the public purse in (a) legal and (b) other costs was of the UK being a party to an action in (i) the European Court of Human Rights and (ii) the European Court of Justice in each of the last 10 years. [38779]

**Mr Djanogly:** It will be necessary to make further inquiries and some of the information may not be available in the form requested without incurring disproportionate costs. I will write to the hon. Member with the information that is available as soon as inquiries have been made.

### Judiciary: Equality

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what training is offered to immigration judges on gender and equality issues; and if he will make a statement. [38145]

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** The content of training for the tribunals judiciary is the responsibility of the senior president of tribunals, not the Government. The Tribunals Service provides resources for the training. All immigration judges receive specific training on diversity and equal treatment issues before sitting, as part of their induction courses. The training focuses on four elements:

Understanding the issues.

The Judicial Studies Board's Equal Treatment Bench Book as a source of information.

Developing judicial skills appropriate to fair treatment and equal treatment issues.

The duty to challenge unacceptable behaviour.

Specific diversity training has been provided to all immigration judges as part of continuation training events and residential refresher training events. Diversity training has now become an integral part of the immigration jurisdictions' training methodology, rather than being treated as an isolated topic.

In response to the 2010 Stonewall report "No Going Back" together with the Supreme Court judgment in HJ (Iran) (FC) (Appellant) and HT (Cameroon) (FC) (Appellant) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent) and one other action, training on lesbian, gay and bisexual people and the asylum system has been incorporated into the training delivered to all immigration judges. This training uses materials which have been prepared with the input of both Stonewall and the United Kingdom Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group.

### Legal Aid: Employment

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment his Department has made of the effects of a withdrawal of legal aid for employment law cases on the economy of (a) Merseyside, (b) the North West and (c) England and Wales. [37997]

**Mr Djanogly:** There is no intention to conduct such an assessment. Impact assessments will be published alongside the Government response to the legal aid consultation later this year, however these are unlikely to contain any detailed geographic analysis of impacts.

### Legal Aid: Homelessness

**Mr Slaughter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 564W, on legal aid: homelessness, whether he plans to make legal aid available to appellants against homelessness application decisions made by local authorities. [38292]

**Mr Djanogly:** As I stated in the answer to which the hon. Member refers, we propose that legal aid would continue to be available for those who are homeless or

threatened with homelessness and are seeking accommodation from the local authority under their statutory obligations. This would include appeals under sections 204 and 204A of the Housing Act 1996.

#### Offenders: Ex-gratia Payments

**Mr Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much his Department and its agencies have paid in ex-gratia payments to those convicted of a criminal offence to settle cases prior to litigation in each of the last three years; and how many of those who have been convicted of a criminal offence in each of the last three years have not received such a payment. [38781]

**Mr Blunt:** The following table details the total amount of compensation aid to prisoners over the last three completed financial years as a result of civil claims, by way of out of court settlement. The figures exclude the associated legal costs, private establishments and compensation paid locally through the internal complaints procedures for lost/damaged property.

	£
2007-08	1,452,309
2008-09	1,648,045
2009-10	3,257,892

Compensation figures paid locally are not collated centrally and to provide these would entail the checking numerous files and would incur disproportionate cost. For purposes of litigation, NOMS does not distinguish between convicted and non convicted prisoners.

Records of claims for compensation where a settlement has not been made, either through the service successfully defending a case at trial, a claim being struck out by a court or withdrawn/abandoned by the claimant, do exist centrally. To collate these details for the last three years would involve disproportionate cost due to the number of such cases and the various categories into which they are broken down.

#### Prisoners' Transfers

**Robert Halfon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether (a) Ministers and (b) officials of his Department (i) met and (ii) corresponded with officials or representatives of BP on the proposed prisoner transfer agreement with Libya between September 2007 and February 2008. [11640]

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** As the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs set out in his letter to the US Senate, there were three telephone discussions between BP and the then Justice Secretary (Mr Straw) or his office between October and November 2007. The Ministry of Justice has no record of any correspondence between Ministers or officials and BP during that period on the proposed prisoner transfer agreement. However, there is a record of an e-mail from BP to the then Justice Secretary's office of 2 November 2007 in response to a request for information from the Justice Secretary's office. In addition, the then Justice Secretary (Mr Straw) wrote to Tony Hayward on 11 February 2008 in response to an invitation from Tony Hayward dated 30 January, though this was not about the prisoner transfer agreement.

#### Prisons: Expenditure

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much the Prison Service spent in London on transporting inmates to hospital in each of the last five years. [38077]

**Mr Blunt:** It is not possible to supply information about Prison Service spending on transporting prisoners to hospitals in London, without it being at a disproportionate cost. This is because the cost of transporting prisoners to hospital is not calculated discretely but forms part of wider costs for hospital escorts and bedwatches which are divided between the relevant prison and the relevant primary care trust. These costs consist of both the actual vehicle cost (a taxi, ambulance or prison vehicle) and staffing costs (staffing levels for escorts to hospital are determined based on the risk posed by the prisoner).

#### HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

##### Electronic Equipment

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, what consideration the House of Commons Commission has given to (a) reducing the House of Commons output of printed documents and (b) facilitating use of electronic devices in the Chamber and Committees. [38293]

**John Thurso:** The information is as follows:

(a) At its meeting on 13 December 2010, the House of Commons Commission agreed a range of initial savings to be made across the House and PICT in 2011-12 as part of its commitment to reduce the costs of the House Service by at least 17% in real terms by 2014-15. This included recurring annual savings of £1.8 million in the production of printed documents—primarily, the Questions Book, the weekly compendium of early-day motions and some Select Committee written evidence—and will save about 12.5 million printed pages in 2011-12 and thereafter in subsequent years. In some cases, these changes reduce duplication of information which will continue to be printed in another document. The information no longer printed is, and will continue to be, available on the website at:

[www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

in most cases before 6 am on the day of publishing. Work is under way, through the procedural data and other programmes, to improve the quality and accessibility of parliamentary material on the web and to shift the emphasis from print to web.

(b) This is a matter for the House itself but the hon. Member may be aware that the Procedure Committee is currently consulting all Members on whether the rules should be updated to reflect technological developments since 2007 and the hon. Member could express his views to that Committee.

##### Housing

**Robert Flello:** To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, what residential accommodation is provided to officers of the House in the form of (a) flats and (b) houses; and how many bedrooms there are in each property. [38784]

**John Thurso:** Residential accommodation is provided to Officers of the House as follows:

(a) *Flats:*

2a Canon row—two bedrooms

(b) *Houses:*

2 Parliament street—three bedrooms

3 Parliament street—three bedrooms

4 Canon row—four bedrooms

### Pay

**Robert Ffello:** To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, how much funding the House of Commons Commission allocated to salary costs for the senior management team of the House in the latest period for which figures are available; and how many individuals are included in that team. [38783]

**John Thurso:** The Administration's senior management team is the Management Board, which has seven members. Details of the salaries paid to the seven individual members of the Management Board can be found in the Remuneration Report included in the House of Commons: Administration 2009-10 Resource Accounts (HC 365). The total funding of salaries for the board for 2009-10 was £804,000.

### Speaker's Office

**Robert Ffello:** To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission, how much funding the House of Commons Commission has allocated to the provision of services directly and indirectly to the Speaker's Office. [38786]

**John Thurso:** The budget funding allocated to the Speaker's Office for 2010-11 for direct services, which includes the salary cost of support staff, is £704,000. Indirect expenditure of around £67,000 is forecast to be incurred on providing office accommodation, security and corporate services.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

### Females: Employment

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what assessment she has made of the effects of reductions in levels of public expenditure on levels of employment of women. [38170]

**Lynne Featherstone:** The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) was formed in May 2010 to make independent assessments of the public finances and the economy for each Budget and pre-Budget report; this includes an assessment of employment levels. The OBR has forecast that employment will rise in each year over the spending review period, reaching 30 million in 2015. The OBR does not breakdown its employment forecasts by gender.

### Pay: Equal Opportunities

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities (1) what plans her Department has to bridge the pay gap between male and female employees in small businesses should employers choose not to engage in voluntary equality reporting; [38544]

(2) what estimate the Government Equalities Office has made of the number of small businesses engaging in voluntary equality reporting. [38545]

**Lynne Featherstone:** On 2 December 2010, Government announced that employers will be asked to help tackle the gender pay gap by publishing equality data about their work force on a voluntary basis. This will increase transparency and help employers identify any equality issues and take appropriate action.

The proposal is aimed at all private and voluntary sector employers, but particularly those with 150 or more employees. As the details of these arrangements are being discussed with partners, we have made no assessment of the number of small businesses likely to engage in reporting.

The Government are also committed to wider measures to address the barriers that women face in the workplace, including women working for small businesses. These include making pay secrecy clauses unenforceable, extending the right to request flexible working to all employees and consulting on a new system of parental leave. We are also taking strong action where there is evidence of discrimination, for example on equal pay.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### National Lottery: Operating Costs

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport when he expects the results of the report commissioned by the Minister for Tourism and Heritage on the international benchmarking of national lottery administration costs to be published; and if he will make a statement. [37787]

**John Penrose:** Officials at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) carried out a comparative study of the administrative costs of some UK-based charities which informed my decision about the level of the administrative cost caps I have set. I have shared this material with the lottery distributors and will be publishing it on the DCMS website shortly.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what consultations he has undertaken with lottery funding distributors on the reduction in his Department's expenditure on their running costs. [37788]

**John Penrose:** None, because the administrative costs of distributing lottery funding are funded from the lottery rather than from departmental expenditure. However, the relevant distributors were consulted both directly and through the lottery forum about our plans to reduce their running costs overall.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what consultation he has undertaken with community and voluntary groups on the reductions in his Department's expenditure on running costs of lottery funding distributors. [37789]

**John Penrose:** I do not expect any impact on voluntary and community groups from the agreement achieved with the lottery distributors on administrative cost reduction. Since the administrative costs of distributing lottery funds are themselves funded by the lottery, the aim is to provide more money for the good causes which should benefit all categories of grant recipient.

### Sport

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what information his Department holds on trends in participation in each sport funded by his Department in each of the last 10 years; [38465]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of levels of participation in sporting activity (a) in each region, (b) by each ethnic group, (c) by each socio-economic group, (d) by each sex and (e) by each age group; and if he will make a statement; [38502]

(3) what estimate he has made of the 10 sports that experienced the largest (a) increase and (b) reduction in participation over the last 10 years. [38504]

**Hugh Robertson:** The Department makes a regular assessment of participation in sport and active recreation using the Taking Part and Sport England's Active People surveys. The Taking Part survey provides national and regional estimates of sport participation, while Active People provides local level estimates.

The Taking Part survey is a continuous face-to-face survey of adults and children in England. It has been run since 2005 and collects data on many aspects of leisure, culture and sport in England. Findings from the 2009-10 survey were published in August 2010. The report includes detailed analysis of sports participation since 2005, participation by individual sport, region, ethnic group, socio-economic group, sex and age. The full report, along with various other outputs from the Taking Part survey can be found on the DCMS website at:

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/7386.aspx>

The current Active People survey can be found at the following link:

[http://www.sportengland.org/research/active\\_people\\_survey/active\\_people\\_survey\\_4.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey/active_people_survey_4.aspx)

This survey includes participation by individual sport compared with results from the previous two Active People surveys; this provides detail on participation increases and decreases.

Prior to the 2005-06 Active People and Taking Part surveys the Office for National Statistics carried out the General Household Survey questions on sport (in 2002 and 1996).

You may also be interested in the national governing bodies whole sport plans. These explain where investment is going within individual sports:

[http://www.sportengland.org/funding/ngb\\_investment/ngb\\_whole\\_sport\\_plans.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/funding/ngb_investment/ngb_whole_sport_plans.aspx)

### Sport: Finance

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what his Department's budget was for increasing participation in sport in each of the last 10 years; and what plans he has for such budgets in each of the next five years. [38466]

**Hugh Robertson:** The Department provides grant in aid funding to Sport England, who are responsible for investing this funding, as well as their lottery income, in organisations and projects that will grow and sustain participation in grassroots sport and create opportunities for people to excel at their chosen sport.

Grant in aid allocations that have been made to Sport England in the last 10 years can be found in the following table.

	Grant in aid received (£000)
2000-01	38,323
2001-02	43,162
2002-03	80,324
2003-04	44,572
2004-05	74,456
2005-06	80,971
2006-07	102,500
2007-08	113,296
2008-09	130,163
2009-10	134,422

The Department set out in the comprehensive spending review the grant in aid expected to be allocated to Sport England from 2011-12 to 2014-15. These figures and the current estimate for 2010-11 can be found in the following table.

	Grant in aid proposed (£000)
2010-11	<sup>1</sup> 124,305
2011-12	95,391
2012-13	93,690
2013-14	87,692
2014-15	85,896

<sup>1</sup> As at Winter Supplementary Estimate

It is estimated that Sport England's lottery income will rise by over £50 million from 2012-13, as a result of the Government's lottery reforms and the end of transfers to the Olympic Lottery Distribution Fund.

### Tennis: Expenditure

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what funding his Department has provided for the development of tennis in each of the last five years; and what criteria his Department uses to assess the value for money derived from such expenditure. [38064]

**Hugh Robertson:** Through Sport England the Department has provided the funding shown in the table to the Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) Whole Sport Plan (WSP) to support the development of grassroots tennis over the last five years.

## Total WSP funding

	£ million
2006-07	1. 2,000,048
2007-08	1. 2,159,750
2008-09	1. 2,267,750
2009-10	6,717,768
2010-11	6,717,768

<sup>1</sup> Figures do not include Community Club Development Programme, Club and Coach funding or any awards made to the LTA through community strands, including the National Sports Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Includes Whole Sport Plan core revenue funding and Whole Sport Plan funding specific for delivery of the UK Coaching Certificate and Coaching.

<sup>3</sup> Includes Whole Sport Plan core revenue funding and Whole Sport Plan PESSYP funding.

In addition the LTA was also paid £122,928 as part of the WSP from 2006-09 for delivery of tennis projects in London following the winding-up of the London Active Partnership. Total funding provided to the LTA by Sport England for the 2005-09 WSP was £21,311,844.

Sport England holds formal reviews with the LTA every six months and maintains regular contact with them throughout that period. Their progress is measured against a set of specific outcomes which can be found in The Whole Sport Plan for the Lawn Tennis Association on the Sport England website:

[http://www.sportengland.org/funding/ngb\\_investment/ngb\\_whole\\_sport\\_plans.aspx?sortBy=alpha&pageNum=2](http://www.sportengland.org/funding/ngb_investment/ngb_whole_sport_plans.aspx?sortBy=alpha&pageNum=2)

### Tourism: National Quality Assessment Scheme

**Mr Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what recent assessment he has made of the (a) accuracy and (b) impartiality of tourist accommodation reviews on websites in developing his plans for the future of the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38395]

(2) what criteria will be used to assess the eligibility and suitability of proposed tourism developments for government grant assistance following the implementation of his plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38396]

(3) what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the devolved Administrations on his plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38397]

(4) whether he has had recent discussions with the (a) Secretary of State for Wales, (b) Secretary of State for Scotland and (c) Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on his future plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38398]

(5) whether he has had discussions with the (a) Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and (b) third sector organisations on the ability of (i) elderly people and (ii) economically disadvantaged groups to access information on tourism accommodation in formulating his plans for the future of the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38399]

(6) whether he has had discussions with the Trading Standards Institute on redress and evidential issues that may arise in respect of trade descriptions of holiday accommodation following the implementation of his plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38400]

(7) whether he has assessed the potential effects on international perceptions of the UK as a tourist destination of his future plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38401]

(8) whether he plans to bring forward proposals to amend the provisions of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 for the purposes of implementing his plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme; [38402]

(9) what measures he plans to use for benchmarking against international standards following the implementation of his Department's plans for the National Quality Assessment Scheme. [38405]

**John Penrose:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 February 2011, *Official Report*, column 819W.

### SCOTLAND

#### Ballots

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies his Department has made of spoilt ballots in Scottish elections related to the use of a new electoral system; and if he will place in the Library a copy of each such study. [38156]

**David Mundell:** The Scotland Office has not produced its own study into spoilt ballot papers at Scottish elections as any such study is the responsibility of the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission normally produces a report after each set of elections and these reports may include information on spoilt ballot papers. Following the May 2007 elections, the Electoral Commission commissioned Ron Gould to carry out an independent external review of those elections. The Gould report, 'Scottish Elections 2007: The independent review of the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections 3 May 2007', did include an analysis of spoilt ballot at the May 2007 elections. This report is available on the Electoral Commission's website.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs his Department has incurred in respect of (a) secure storage, (b) maintenance and (c) staff training associated with Scottish ballot-counting machinery. [38158]

**David Mundell:** The combined Scottish Parliament and local government elections in May 2007 were electronically counted. For those elections the necessary equipment was hired from an outside contractor. There were therefore no storage and maintenance costs. Staff training in the use of the electronic counting machinery was provided either under that contract or by the relevant returning officer, however specific training in the use of the e-counting equipment is not separately identified.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies his Department has undertaken of failures in machine reading of ballots in Scottish elections; and if he will place in the Library a copy of each such study. [38159]

**David Mundell:** The Scotland Office has not undertaken its own studies into machine reading of ballots in Scottish elections. The Gould report, 'Scottish Elections 2007: The independent review of the Scottish parliamentary and local government elections 3 May 2007', included

an analysis of the electronic count and counting procedures at the May 2007 elections. This report is available on the Electoral Commission's website.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of each consultancy report commissioned by his Department on the (a) efficacy and (b) reliability of machine ballot-counting in Scotland. [38160]

**David Mundell:** The Scotland Office has not commissioned any reports into machine ballot counting in Scotland. However, the Gould report, 'Scottish Elections 2007: The independent review of the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections 3 May 2007', included an analysis of the electronic count and counting procedures at the May 2007 elections. This report is available on the Electoral Commission's website.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs his Department has incurred in respect of the provision of information to the electorate on the (a) operation of and (b) voting system for the Scottish Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [38161]

**David Mundell:** The provision of information to voters on the voting system for the Scottish Parliament is the responsibility of the Electoral Commission and Returning Officers.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Bill of Rights

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will initiate a formal process to take forward consideration of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [38269]

**Mr Swire:** The Government believe that it is important to develop support across the community for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The process envisaged in the Good Friday agreement to determine the scope for a Bill was taken forward by the previous Government and led to a public consultation. It was clear from this process that there is not as yet agreement on a way forward. The Government will continue to explore next steps.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Terrorism: Sentencing

**John McDonnell:** To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions he has appealed on the grounds of leniency against a sentence handed out to an individual convicted for offences relating to terrorism since 1 January 2001. [38120]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Law Officers are able to refer cases they believe to be unduly lenient to the Court of Appeal for consideration. Statistics are published annually on the AGO website:

<http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk/ULS/Pages/default.aspx>

The data show the offence rather than the circumstances of the offence. They show that the sentences of four offenders convicted of offences contrary to the Terrorism Acts have been referred to the Court of Appeal since 2001.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Afghanistan

**Mr Ellwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials of his Department allocated work on Afghanistan were based in (a) the UK, (b) Kabul and (c) Helmand province in the latest period for which figures are available. [38563]

**Alistair Burt** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) on 25 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 155W. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does not hold figures on the number of staff in London allocated work on Afghanistan. The FCO records staff activity according to the overall FCO foreign policy priority staff are working towards, as listed, rather than according to geographical priority:

Safeguard Britain's national security by countering terrorism and weapons proliferation, and working to reduce conflict.

Build Britain's prosperity by increasing exports and investment, opening markets, ensuring access to resources, and promoting sustainable global growth.

Support British nationals around the world through modern and efficient consular services.

### Anti-Semitism

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received from the Co-ordination Forum for Countering anti-Semitism on the level of anti-Semitism worldwide; and if he will make a statement. [38035]

**Mr Jeremy Browne:** We have received no direct reports from the Co-ordination Forum for Countering anti-Semitism. The Community Security Trust (CST), a British charity focused on protecting the Jewish community, contributes to the forum and published their nationwide 2010 Anti-Semitic Incidents Report on 3 February 2011 which will be circulated to the Government and the Police.

The UK is committed to fighting racial discrimination and intolerance. Combating all forms of racism remains an important part of the Government's human rights policy. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's overseas missions have a responsibility to monitor and raise human rights in their host countries and routinely raise our concerns with host Governments. Where possible our embassies take action on individual cases where persecution or discrimination has occurred and lobby for changes in discriminatory practices and laws.

We have also recently published the Government's first progress update report on our work to take forward the recommendations of the 2006 All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism.

### BBC External Services

**John McDonnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact assessment he has undertaken of his proposed changes to funding for the BBC World Service. [37952]

**Mr Jeremy Browne:** I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, columns 13-14WS, which sets out some of the impact of the changes to the BBC World Service budget. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend, gave his authority for the closure of five language services, following discussion with the World Service.

The BBC World Service have managerial and editorial responsibility and they have decided to make further changes. These decisions are under their control.

### Burma: Politics and Government

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will work with his international counterparts to inform the Government of Burma of concerns about the Burmese Parliament's rules on freedom of speech and scrutiny. [38946]

**Mr Jeremy Browne:** The Government are deeply concerned by reported restrictions on freedom of speech and scrutiny in Burma's Parliament. It has been reported:

(i) that the Speaker of the Lower House can reject parliamentary questions that he judges will affect international relations, or which undermine the interests of the state;

(ii) that it is a criminal offence, punishable by at least two years in prison, to publish or disclose information relating to parliamentary business.

Our ambassador to Rangoon raised the issue directly with the Burmese Minister for Agriculture on 26 January 2011.

We have raised our concerns over the restrictive and undemocratic nature of the regime's political process with our international partners, including in recent weeks with China, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. We will again underline our concerns at the forthcoming session of the Human Rights Council in March.

### China: Human Rights

**Dr Huppert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take following the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue on the issue of human rights in China and Tibet. [38192]

**Mr Jeremy Browne:** We will take a number of steps to follow up the 13-14 January 2011 UK-China human rights dialogue. We will work to develop the links built between UK and Chinese policymakers and experts at the dialogue. We will proactively explore opportunities for follow-up work on the dialogue's two themes, "the role of police in criminal trials" and "minority languages in education". And we will continue to press China to make progress on specific human rights issues, including the situation in Tibet.

The human rights dialogue is just one strand of our continuing engagement with China on human rights. Our project work on human rights in China received £1.5 million of funding in the period 2008-11. This has covered a range of issues, including criminal justice reform and the death penalty. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have all raised human rights in their meetings with Chinese Ministers since assuming office, and we will continue to take forward dialogue at this level.

### Departmental Procurement

**Jon Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what single tender contracts his Department has awarded since his appointment; and what the monetary value is of each contract above the EU public procurement threshold. [36185]

**Alistair Burt:** Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) policy is to avoid single tender contracts wherever possible and to tender competitively. However in some overseas locations we may be limited to one supplier with the specialist knowledge and expertise to carry out the works required or provide goods and/or services. This may include security related activities in conflict zones or urgently required provisions at posts. Details of all single tender contracts across the FCO network could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In the period requested, the FCO has not awarded any single tender contracts which exceed the prevailing EU public procurement thresholds.

### Departmental Travel

**Gregg McClymont:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has spent on ministerial travel since May 2010. [36092]

**Alistair Burt:** I refer the hon. Member to my response to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) of 27 July 2010, *Official Report*, column 968W.

As set out in the ministerial code, Departments will publish, at least quarterly, details of all travel overseas by Ministers. Information for the third quarter will be published as soon as it is ready.

All travel is undertaken in accordance with the ministerial code.

### Egypt: Travel Information

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the British embassy in Egypt is taking to ensure the most accurate travel advice is given; and what steps the embassy is taking to overcome recent communication difficulties. [38944]

**Alistair Burt:** Our primary concern during recent political unrest in Egypt has been the safety of British nationals. We have kept travel advice under constant review and have made factual updates at least daily. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London is in close contact with colleagues at the embassy who have

been monitoring the situation in Cairo and receiving regular updates from contacts elsewhere in Egypt, including Alexandria, Suez, Luxor and Sharm el Sheikh.

Our embassy used a number of means of communication, including satellite telephones, radios and landlines in order to stay in touch with staff, honorary consuls, wardens and other contacts such as tour operators and British companies, where others have not been available.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's internal telecommunications network (FTN) has not been affected by Egyptian Government restrictions on the internet and mobile phones.

#### Iran: Sanctions

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the effectiveness of international sanctions programme against Iran; and if he will make a statement. [38043]

**Alistair Burt:** The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I have had discussions on the international sanctions programme against Iran with many of our counterparts. It is clear that sanctions are having an impact. Iran is finding it increasingly difficult to acquire access to goods of proliferation concern and is also finding it hard to access international finance, restricting its ability to fund its nuclear programme. We believe these sanctions and other pressures brought Iran back into talks with the EU 3+3 but its disappointing failure to engage on the substance of international concerns mean that pressure will now need to increase.

#### Kashmir

**Simon Danczuk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 10 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 227W, on Kashmir, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Indian military presence in Kashmir on the human rights situation in the region. [37307]

**Alistair Burt:** We are aware of human right abuses on both sides of the line of control including allegations that Indian security forces have used excessive force against violent protestors during the unrest last summer. Prime Minister Singh issued a statement that violations of human rights abuses by security forces in Kashmir would not be tolerated. We have been closely following the initiative of the Indian Government to appoint three interlocutors to help resolve the situation in Indian administered Kashmir. They have made a number of recommendations to the Government including the release of prisoners held without charge, allowing peaceful protest and exercising proper crowd control.

Officials in our high commissions in Islamabad and New Delhi regularly discuss the situation in Kashmir with the Indian and Pakistani Governments and with our contacts in Indian and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. During these discussions, we call for an end to external support for violence in Kashmir and an improvement in the human rights on both sides of the line of control. We also continue to encourage a lasting solution that

takes into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. But the UK cannot prescribe a solution nor mediate in finding one.

#### Lebanon: Arms Trade

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received of the transport of weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon; what recent discussions he has had with the government of Iran on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [R] [38116]

**Alistair Burt:** We remain concerned by reports of weapons transfers to Hizballah, including Hizballah's own claims that it possesses significant military capabilities.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary during his recent visit to Syria made clear and firm representations to President Assad and Foreign Minister Muallem on the dangers to the stability of the region in allowing the smuggling of weapons to Hizballah. Our officials continue to raise UN Security Council resolution 1701 and the smuggling of weapons to Hizballah at the highest level during our regular dialogue with Syrian counterparts.

We remain concerned that Iran is undermining regional peace and stability, including through weapons transfers. We continue to call on Iran to play a constructive role in the region, including through restoring international confidence in its nuclear programme. We continue to make our views clear through interventions at the UN on UN Security Council resolutions 1701 and 1559.

#### Lebanon: Politics and Government

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the political situation in Lebanon since December 2010; and if he will make a statement. [R] [38115]

**Alistair Burt:** Following the withdrawal of the opposition from the Government of National Unity on 12 January, President Sleiman has appointed Najib Mikati as Prime Minister and asked him to form the next government.

We want to see a government formed in accordance with Lebanon's constitution, which commands the broadest possible support of the people of Lebanon and upholds its international obligations including the Special Tribunal and an end to impunity for assassinations. It is important that any new government is committed to restraint and the principle of non-violence as well as a sovereign and independent future for Lebanon.

#### Middle East: Peace Negotiations

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what his most recent assessment is of progress in the Middle East Peace Process; what recent discussions (a) he, (b) Ministers in his Department and (c) officials in his Department have had with (i) the US State Department, (ii) the US Secretary of State, (iii) the government of Israel, (iv) the Palestinian Authority and (v) EU counterparts on the Middle East Peace Process; and if he will make a statement; [R] [38047]



(2) what assessment he has made of the political situation in the West Bank since December 2010; and if he will make a statement; [R] [38048]

(3) what assessment he has made of the political situation in the Palestinian Territories since December 2010; and if he will make a statement. [R] [38114]

**Alistair Burt:** The Middle East Peace Process remains among the Government's highest foreign policy priorities. I have recently returned from a visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I underlined our views to both Israeli and Palestinian Ministers and saw for myself the impact of the occupation.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in the House on 1 February 2011, negotiations are the only way to achieve the national aspirations of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. We are deeply concerned about the breakdown in talks, and are working closely with the United States and the European Union to see a return to direct negotiations.

We hope that the Quartet meeting on 5 February 2011 was clear that negotiations must resume quickly. The entire international community, including the United States, should support 1967 borders as being the basis for resumed negotiations. The result should be two states, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both, and a fair settlement for refugees.

We are in regular contact with the key players at ministerial and official level. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met with Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman on 24 January 2011 and spoke with Baroness Ashton on 29 January 2011 and US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton on 30 January 2011 about the Middle East Peace Process.

### Occupied Territories: Housing

**Simon Danczuk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the number of (a) new Israeli settler homes built in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and (b) Palestinian homes demolished in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [37190]

**Alistair Burt:** Figures for settlement construction during 2010 are not yet available. However 1,175 constructions were completed in the first three quarters of 2010. It is not yet clear at this point what number were houses and what were other buildings.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, said on 17 January 2011 following reports that Israel is considering building 1,400 new apartments in East Jerusalem:

“We have always been clear that settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. Pushing ahead with this plan would be a deeply unhelpful move and hinder efforts to resume talks between the two parties leading to a two-state solution to this conflict, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of the two states living side by side in peace and security.”

Regarding demolitions, we are concerned at what appears to be a sharp increase in the level of demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem and Area C (Palestinian territory under Israeli military and civilian control). According to UN statistics, 431 structures, including

137 homes, were demolished in 2010, affecting 594 people, including 299 children. These figures represent a 60% increase in demolitions compared to 2009.

### Palestinians: International Assistance

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 1 December 2010, *Official Report*, columns 830-31W, on Palestinians: international assistance, to what non-governmental organisations in Israel other than in the west bank or Gaza his Department has provided funds in each year since 2003; and for what purposes such payments were made. [36577]

**Alistair Burt:** Between 2003-04 and 2009-10 financial years, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has provided nearly £3.8 million to non-governmental organisations in Israel (other than in the west bank or Gaza). Final funding for the current financial year cannot be confirmed.

Our funding supports our strategic policy priorities to:

- (a) help manage or mitigate conflicts;
- (b) monitor and promote human rights, access to justice and social welfare; and
- (c) strengthen the bi-lateral relationship.

The following non-governmental organisations have received funding from the Middle East and North Africa Conflict Pool or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

- Abraham Fund;
- The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI);
- Bimkom;
- Birax;
- Breaking the Silence;
- B'Tselem;
- Council for Peace and Security (CPS);
- Economic Co-operation Foundation (ECF);
- Gisha;
- Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME);
- HaMoked;
- Hand in Hand;
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC);
- International Palestinian Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI);
- Ir Amim;
- Itach-Makki;
- Local Government Association (LGA-UK Organisation);
- Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development (NISPED);
- No Legal Frontiers;
- Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI);
- Peace Now;
- Women for Human Rights;
- Yesh Din.

### Palestinians: Politics and Government

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what reports he has received on the economic situation in Gaza since December 2010; and if he will make a statement; [38038]

(2) what assessment he has made of the level of arms smuggling into Gaza since December 2010; what discussions he has had with his UN counterparts on this issue; and if he will make a statement; [38039]

(3) what assessment he has made of the political situation in Gaza since December 2010; and if he will make a statement; [38040]

(4) what assessment he has made of the level of presence of al-Qaeda in the Gaza Strip since December 2010; what recent discussions he has had with the government of Israel on this topic; and if he will make a statement. [38041]

**Alistair Burt:** Although we no longer assess that there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza we have long been clear that the status quo is a tragedy, unsustainable and counterproductive. It hurts the people of Gaza, holds their future hostage, and undermines work to drive reconstruction, development and economic empowerment. At the same time the blockade empowers Hamas through the tunnel economy and damages Israel's long-term security through its corrosive impact on a generation of young Palestinians.

While we welcomed an increase in the quantity and variety of goods entering Gaza more needs to be done to speed up the approvals process for dual-use items so that UN reconstruction projects can get underway. Israel's announcement on exports was also welcome. It is now important that we see real progress on the ground. We will be working with Israel to help it achieve its stated aim of reaching pre-2007 levels of exports this year.

We are aware of reports that Hamas continues to acquire and test a variety of weapons. We have long made it clear that the arming and funding of Hamas, and other Palestinian Rejectionist Groups, is unacceptable. We have received no credible reports that al-Qaeda is operating in Gaza, though clearly there are other extremist groups present in Gaza in addition to Hamas, including those involved in rocket attacks against Israel. We have underlined the need for all groups, including Hamas, to end rocket attacks on Israel.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised these issues with Prime Minister Netanyahu when he visited Israel in November. I discussed Gaza at length with the Israeli Co-ordinator for Government Activity in the Territories (COGAT), General Dangot, when he visited the region on 16-19 January 2011.

### **Somalia: Politics and Government**

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the government of Somalia on the need for further steps to safeguard safety of international travellers. [38945]

**Mr Bellingham:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against all travel to Somalia due to the ongoing violence, dangerous levels of criminal activity and general internal insecurity. The Government are working with the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) and regional administrations to return stability and peace to the country and to tackle external threats to international travellers. An effective security sector is vital to achieve this and should be embedded in the wider political strategy.

### **Tunisia: Politics and Government**

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has offered assistance to Tunisia as a result of the political situation in that country. [37326]

**Alistair Burt:** The main focus of our response has been in Brussels. We have agreed an EU Options Paper on assistance for Tunisia which offers an increase in financial support; technical support to Tunisia's planned electoral process; trade concessions for agricultural products; and the freezing of assets misappropriated by members of the former regime. In parallel with this, the UK has given its political support to the measures announced by the new interim Government to liberalise the country's political system.

I met the Tunisian ambassador on 2 February 2011 and personally assured him of the UK's willingness to support and assist in Tunisia's move towards democracy including through capacity building and parliamentary contact.

### **Western European Union**

**Mr Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which organisation will guarantee the pensions of former employees of Western European Union (WEU) after the closure of WEU in 2011. [38775]

**Mr Lidington:** The Western European Union (WEU) Council, of which the UK is a member, is responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for the transfer of the administration of its residual responsibilities—including payment of pensions to former WEU staff—following closure of the WEU later this year.

**Mr Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the open market value of the Western European Union premises on Avenue President Wilson in Paris; what share of the value will accrue to the UK when the premises are sold; and when he expects the sale to be completed. [38834]

**Mr Lidington:** A number of independent valuations are being sought for the market value of the Western European Union (WEU) premises in Paris. The UK share of the value of the premises is approximately 14%. The premises have to be sold back to the French Government, which already owns one-fifth of the premises outright, with the remainder shared among all 10 WEU Council members based on the level of their contribution to the WEU (which reflects gross national income). There is no firm date for the sale to be completed, but we hope it could be done within a year from now.

### **DEFENCE**

#### **Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations**

**Mr Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what planning his Department has completed in relation to the composition of British forces in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of combat troops; and if he will make a statement. [38844]

**Nick Harvey:** As the Prime Minister has previously stated, we will not have troops in a combat role after 2015 or in the numbers they are currently, although we expect to have troops in training roles beyond that date as part of a broader bilateral relationship.

The Ministry of Defence is necessarily focused on how best we can achieve the transfer of security to the Afghan National Security Forces by the end of 2014. As part of this work we are considering the scope and shape of the UK's enduring relationship with Afghanistan and what the likely role and composition of forces should be beyond 2015. This advice will be presented to the National Security Council in due course.

#### Air Force: Military Bases

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 24 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 20W on air force: military bases, what the outcome was of the 2010 planning round before it was re-costed. [37531]

**Nick Harvey:** It is not the Ministry of Defence's practice to publish detailed forward plans, including those in relation to the estate, as to do so would prejudice commercial interests.

#### Armed Forces: Education

**Thomas Docherty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pupils received the continuity education allowance for each year of study in the latest period for which figures are available. [38602]

**Mr Robathan:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Mike Crockart) on 10 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 391W.

#### Armed Forces: Recruitment

**Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of armed forces recruits in each age group withdrew from training before the end of phase two in each of the last five years. [37938]

**Mr Robathan:** The following table shows the UK regular forces, tri-service rates of outflow from the untrained strength for the past five financial years (FY):

	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	Percentage FY 2010-11
Total	33.3	29.0	21.4	21.8	18.2
<i>Age</i>					
Under 18	43.7	49.5	43.2	33.2	26.9
18-19	42.1	37.9	24.0	25.9	23.8
20-24	26.3	21.6	16.0	18.4	15.3
25-29	21.1	14.8	10.8	16.1	13.2
30-34	14.3	13.0	12.9	12.5	13.9
35+	19.6	7.4	7.2	11.1	8.1

Due to ongoing validation of data, statistics from FY 2007-08 onwards are provisional and subject to review. Outflow rates for the current financial year are projected figures based on actual outflow for the financial year to date.

#### Armed Forces: Young People

**Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice he has received on the disparity in minimum service periods for a recruit who enlists at the age of 16 compared with a recruit who enlists at age 18 or above. [37946]

**Mr Robathan:** Legal advice was provided by Ministry of Defence lawyers regarding the different arrangements that apply to those who enlist before the age of 18 compared to those aged 18 or above.

**Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice he has received on the retention of an armed forces recruit who no longer wishes to be bound by the enlistment contract he or she entered into while a minor. [37947]

**Mr Robathan:** In developing the provisions as to a person's enlistment and terms of service, the policy teams worked closely with the Ministry of Defence's in-house legal team and received ongoing advice.

A recruit who was under 18 years of age at the time of enlistment and who wishes to end their service may give at least 14 days' notice to their commanding officer. Such notice can take effect when the recruit has completed 28 days' service and is within six months of enlistment. Additionally, after this time, but before the recruit has attained the age of 18 and three months, a recruit who has made their unhappiness known would not be stopped from leaving the service should they wish to do so. After the age of 18 years and three months, the usual procedures for leaving the relevant service would apply.

**Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice he has received on the retention of an armed forces recruit aged under 18 if his or her parent withdraws consent after attestation. [37948]

**Mr Robathan:** In developing the provisions as to a person's enlistment and terms of service, the policy teams worked closely with the Ministry of Defence's in-house legal team and received ongoing advice.

Provision was made in the Armed Forces (Enlistment) Regulations 2009 for the situation when an appropriate person, such as a parent, did not give or withdrew consent to the enlistment of a person under the age of 18. Such a parent may apply within three months of the enlistment to the Defence Council for a determination that the enlistment is invalid, even if the enlisted person has since attained the age of 18. However, if all necessary consents were obtained prior to the enlistment of a person under the age of 18, and that consent is subsequently withdrawn after the valid enlistment of the person, the enlistment will remain valid.

However, it still remains the case that before any recruit has attained the age of 18 years and three months, they would not be stopped from leaving the service if they were to make their unhappiness known.

### Departmental Pay

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department paid in bonuses to civil servants in 2009-10; how many bonuses were paid; what the aggregate monetary value of those bonuses was; and what the highest bonus paid was. [37331]

**Mr Robathan:** Officials in the Ministry of Defence are currently collating the information requested. I will write to the hon. Member.

### Fleet Air Arm

**Nicholas Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the remaining (a) establishment and (b) structure of the Fleet Air Arm is in terms of (i) manpower and (ii) aircraft. [38839]

**Nick Harvey:** After implementing the decisions taken in the strategic defence and security review, the Fleet Air Arm will operate the following helicopters:

- 30 anti-submarine Warfare Merlins;
- 28 Maritime Wildcats;
- 25 Commando Merlins; and
- six Battlefield Wildcats.

In addition, some second line aircraft will be used for training purposes. It will employ 1,179 officers and 3,186 ratings.

The Fleet Air Arm remains the Ministry of Defence's Maritime Aircraft Operating Authority and is a joint partner in the Joint Combat Aircraft programme.

### Military Aircraft: Helicopters

**Mr Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department plans to revise the Rotary Wing Strategy in the light of the conclusions of the Strategic Defence and Security Review. [38845]

**Nick Harvey:** Yes. The Rotary Wing Strategy is being revised following the Strategic Defence and Security Review, as part of the Ministry of Defence's annual planning round.

### RAF Menwith Hill

**Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the legal status is of his Department's ownership of the buildings, fixed assets and site infrastructure at the US base at RAF Menwith Hill. [37945]

**Nick Harvey:** The site and all buildings, fixed assets, as well as the infrastructure at RAF Menwith Hill are held by the Ministry of Defence on a freehold basis.

### HOME DEPARTMENT

#### Animals: Smuggling

**Mary Creagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees of the UK Border Agency were engaged in the enforcement of anti-smuggling controls in respect of products of animal origin in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11. [38007]

**Damian Green:** The United Kingdom Border Agency employed 8,115 frontline officers in 2009-10. As of December 2010, the staffing figures for 2010-11 show that we employ 7,954 frontline officers.

All frontline UK Border Agency staff are deployed to tackle a range of risks at the border and most work on a multi functional basis.

Deployment decisions are based on an assessment of the risk. Officers are also supported in their anti-smuggling activities, including those for products of animal origin (POAO), by detector dogs and x-ray technology.

The agency works closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to ensure that our POAO border targeting is responsive to the changing threats that our borders may face.

#### Anti-terrorism Control Orders

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people of each nationality have been subject to a control order since such orders were introduced; [32929]

(2) how many of those against whom a control order has been issued since 2005 were foreign nationals; and how many of these returned to their country of origin subsequent to the issuing of such an order; [32930]

(3) how many provisional orders she and her predecessors have made; and on what date each such order was made since 2005; [33080]

(4) how many control orders there are in place; [33084]

(5) how many control orders have been issued since such orders were introduced; [33085]

(6) how many requests for a control order have been refused since such orders were introduced; [33132]

(7) how many times she and her predecessors have applied for a control order since such orders were introduced; and how many times such applications have been granted; [33136]

(8) how many of those subject to a control order are also subject to an anonymity order; [33143]

(9) how many times the Government has sought a control order requiring a derogation of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights since such orders were introduced. [33144]

**Nick Herbert:** The Secretary of State for the Home Department reports to Parliament on the exercise of her powers under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 on a quarterly basis, and additionally on an ad hoc basis if required. The most recent report, published on 16 December 2010, sets out that at 10 December 2010, the most recent date covered by the report, there were eight control orders in force, all of which were in respect of British citizens.

48 individuals have ever been subject to a control order; 20 British nationals and 28 foreign nationals. 10 of the foreign nationals were subject to a control order only until the necessary arrangements were in place to begin deportation proceedings, nine of these 10 had previously been subject to immigration detention under Part 4 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.

No derogating control order has ever been applied for or made.

All of the individuals currently subject to a control order, and most of those who have ever been subject to a control order, are also subject to a court-imposed anonymity order. This prevents the publication of information that would identify, or would tend to identify, an individual as being subject to a control order. I am therefore not able to confirm how many of the 28 foreign nationals were returned to their country of origin subsequent to their control order being made. Nor can we confirm the number of individuals of each nationality other than British.

Section 3(1) of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 provides that (other than in cases of urgency) the Secretary of State must make an application to the High Court for permission to make a non-derogating control order, which the court may give:

‘unless it determines that the decision (of the Home Secretary that there are grounds to make that order) is obviously flawed’.

I have taken ‘applications’ and ‘requests’ for a control order to refer to such applications to the court. I am not able to confirm how many such applications the Secretary of State has made for permission to make a control order, or how many of these have been granted, as this information has not been collated.

I have taken ‘provisional orders’ to mean orders that were made for a contingency but not served. The quarterly reports to Parliament confirm the making and revocation, expiry or quashing of control orders, and now routinely note where an order has been made and not served. I refer the right hon. Member to the statements dated:

16 December 2010  
16 September 2010  
21 June 2010  
16 March 2010  
15 December 2009  
16 September 2009  
15 June 2009  
12 March 2009  
15 December 2008  
15 September 2008

12 June 2008  
13 March 2008  
12 December 2007  
17 September 2007  
21 June 2007 (two statements)  
24 May 2007  
22 March 2007  
16 January 2007  
11 December 2006  
11 September 2006  
12 June 2006  
13 March 2006  
12 December 2005  
10 October 2005  
16 June 2005

The reports do not confirm why the orders were not served, including whether the order was made on a contingency basis, given the national security sensitivity of such cases and the need to preserve the anonymity of individuals against whom a control order has been made. I am not therefore able to confirm the numbers of contingency control orders that have been made or the dates on which they were made.

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people on control orders absconded in the latest period for which figures are available; and how many of these were subsequently caught; [32931]

(2) how many control orders have been breached since such orders were introduced; and what penalty was imposed as a result of each such breach. [33141]

**Nick Herbert:** The Secretary of State for the Home Department reports to Parliament on the exercise of her powers under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 on a quarterly basis, and additionally on an ad hoc basis if required. No individuals absconded from a control order in the latest period (11 September 2010 to 10 December 2010).

Seven individuals have absconded from control orders since the regime’s introduction in 2005, with the most recent abscond taking place in June 2007. One individual handed himself in to the police following his abscond. In relation to the locations and status of the other six individuals who absconded, I refer the right hon. Member to written ministerial statements published on:

11 December 2006;  
16 January 2007;  
22 March 2007;  
24 May 2007;  
21 June 2007 (two statements);  
17 September 2007; and  
13 March 2008.

These statements give as much information as the Government can provide about the individuals concerned given the national security sensitivity of these cases and the need to avoid publishing any information that could lead to the identification of an individual who is subject to a court-imposed anonymity order.

The written ministerial statements give as much information as can be provided about breaches of control orders and, where applicable, action taken. The information

given is limited for national security reasons and in order to avoid prejudicing any law enforcement interests. In addition to the statements referred to above I refer the right hon. Member to the statements published on:

16 December 2010;  
 16 September 2010;  
 21 June 2010;  
 16 March 2010;  
 15 December 2009;  
 16 September 2009;  
 15 June 2009;  
 12 March 2009;  
 15 December 2008;  
 15 September 2008;  
 12 June 2008;  
 12 December 2007;  
 11 September 2006;  
 12 June 2006;  
 13 March 2006;  
 12 December 2005;  
 10 October 2005; and  
 16 June 2005.

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate she has made of her Department's expenditure on legal matters relating to control orders since such orders were introduced; [32932]

(2) how much the Government have spent defending legal challenges to control orders since such orders were introduced; [33083]

(3) what estimate she has made of the cost to her Department of enforcing each current control order in the latest period for which figures are available. [33134]

**Nick Herbert:** The amount spent by the Home Office on legal matters associated with control orders in each financial year starting from April 2006 until the end of March 2010 is set out in the following table. These figures include the costs of the Home Office's own legal representation and advice, the costs of the special advocates and the Special Advocates Support Office and meeting the legal costs of the controlled persons where this has been ordered by the court. The figure for the financial year 2006-07 is based partially on estimates. All figures are rounded to the nearest £100.

*Amount spent by the Home Office on legal matters relating to control orders*

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>£</i>
2006-07	1,530,900
2007-08	3,766,200
2008-09	1,837,300
2009-10	2,254,400
Total	9,388,900

It is not possible to provide the amount spent on legal matters relating to control orders in the financial year 2005-06 (the year in which control orders were introduced) because of the way the costs have been accounted for. The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The enforcement of control orders is carried out by the police. The cost is managed from within each police force's overall budget, which includes specific funding for counter-terrorism policing. The Home Office does not have an estimate of the cost of enforcing each control order for each police force. I refer the right hon. Member to the written ministerial statements on the allocation of counter-terrorism funding for police authorities for each financial year from 2005-06 to 2010-11 which were published on, respectively:

2 December 2004;  
 5 December 2005;  
 28 November 2006;  
 6 December 2007;  
 26 November 2008;  
 26 November 2009; and  
 13 December 2010.

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of those currently subject to a control order have lodged an appeal against their order; [33082]

(2) how many control orders have been challenged since such orders were introduced; and how many such challenges have been (a) upheld and (b) rejected; [33137]

(3) how many court hearings relating to control orders were (a) open and (b) closed sessions in the latest period for which figures are available; [33140]

(4) how many times a control order has been subject to judicial review since such orders were introduced; and in what proportion of such reviews the challenge was (a) upheld and (b) rejected. [33142]

**Nick Herbert:** Under section 14 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 (PTA) my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is required to report to Parliament on a quarterly basis on the exercise of the control order powers during that period. This quarterly update includes the number of appeals lodged under the PTA and the outcome of court judgments in relation to control orders.

Every time a control order is imposed by the Secretary of State, the individual concerned is entitled to an automatic review by the High Court. Section 3(10) of the PTA provides that at such a hearing the court must review (a) the Secretary of State's decision that the requirements for making an order were met and (b) her decision on the imposition of each of the obligations in the order. The individual may request the discontinuance of these proceedings, but otherwise the hearing under section 3(10) of the PTA will proceed. This means that individuals who have been subject to more than one control order may have had more than one court review under section 3(10) of the PTA, and as a result some individuals are included more than once in the following figures.

11 control orders have been upheld by the Court at the review under section 3(10) of the PTA and 14 have been quashed or revoked. Of the 14 that have been quashed or revoked, four were found to have been properly imposed but no longer necessary at the time of the hearing.

The combined total number of orders upheld, quashed and revoked (25) is lower than the total number of individuals subject to control orders (48 as of 10 December 2010, the last date covered by the most recent written ministerial statement published on control orders) for a number of reasons. These include the fact the figure (25) does not include cases where the section 3(10) hearing has yet to be heard, cases where the controlled individual either discontinued their proceedings or absconded from the control order before the hearing took place or cases where the Secretary of State conceded that she could not make sufficient disclosure to comply with her obligations under article 6 and so revoked the control order.

The judgments of these reviews under section 3(10) of the PTA have frequently been subject to appeal to the higher courts by both the individual subject to the control order and the Secretary of State. The numbers given refer only to the final outcome of a review, so, for example, if a control order was upheld by the High Court but revoked on appeal, it is recorded as having been revoked. Where a High Court decision has been made and that decision is subject to an appeal (which has yet to be heard), the decision of the High Court is reflected in the figures.

The figures recorded above also exclude those cases where the original decision has been overturned and the case has been remitted to the High Court to be heard again and this hearing has yet to take place. The Secretary of State has revoked a small number of historical control orders rather than make damaging disclosure required under article 6 (right to a fair trial), and these have not been included as having been upheld or rejected by the courts because the reviews were not completed. (The figures also exclude interim procedural hearings that have taken place, such as case management and disclosure hearings—at which no substantive decision on the control order was made).

Section 10 of the PTA makes provision for an individual to appeal against (a) the renewal of a control order, (b) a modification to an obligation in a control order made without the individual's consent, (c) the decision to refuse an individual's request for the modification of an obligation and (d) the decision to refuse an individual's request for the revocation of a control order.

As reported in the quarterly written ministerial statements, 77 appeals have been lodged under section 10 of the PTA since it came into force on 11 March 2005. Some individuals have submitted more than one appeal under section 10 which means that the total number of appeals lodged does not match the total number of individuals who have ever been subject to a control order (48). These appeals were in many cases heard at the same time as the review under section 3(10) of the PTA and the outcome recorded in a single judgment; in other cases several section 10 appeals have been heard together where they have related to the same individual. For this reason, it is not possible to provide separate figures for the outcome of each section 10 appeal.

As set out above, the PTA makes provision for the automatic review of a control order by the High Court, and for appeals against various control order decisions. Exceptionally, two individuals made applications for judicial review against modifications to their control

order (rather than pursuing an appeal under section 10 of the PTA). Both were refused permission to bring a Judicial Review.

Each Court review of the decision to impose a control order and each section 10 appeal begins with an open session. In addition, there is usually a closed session during which sensitive information, which it would be contrary to the public interest to disclose in open, can be examined by the Court with the assistance of the special advocates representing the interests of the individual. Following the June 2009 House of Lords judgment in *Secretary of State for the Home Department v. AF & Others* [2009] UKHL 28, an individual subject to a control order must be given sufficient information about the allegations against him for him to give effective instructions to the special advocate.

The Home Office does not hold figures for the number of hearings relating to control orders that were held in (a) open and (b) closed as movement from open into closed and back again is often fluid and can depend on issues that arise during the course of a hearing, or even a single session.

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many control orders issued since such orders were introduced have included an element of (a) house arrest and (b) curfew; [33133]

(2) what specific conditions were attached to each control order issued since 2005. [33135]

**Nick Herbert:** The obligations a person subject to a control order is required to adhere to can change throughout the life of the control order and are tailored to the circumstances of the individual case at the time they are in place. In order to protect individuals' court-imposed anonymity and for reasons of national security we cannot provide full details of obligations in each case. I refer the right hon. Member to Lord Carlile of Berriew's annual reports on the operation of the control order powers dated:

2 February 2006;  
19 February 2007;  
18 February 2008;  
3 February 2009; and  
1 February 2010.

These reports, copies of which can be found in the House Library, contain a significant amount of anonymised information about the obligations to which controlled individuals have been subject.

Further information on obligations in individual cases may be found in open court judgments in respect of the cases. Most open judgments can be found on:

[www.bailii.org](http://www.bailii.org)

Of the 48 individuals ever made subject to a control order, 43 have been subject to a curfew for some or all of the time their order was in force. The longest curfews ever imposed were 18 hours per day; these were put in place before the courts judged in 2006 and 2007 that curfews of this length amounted to a deprivation of liberty. The longest curfew that can currently be imposed under a non-derogating control order is 16 hours per day. Where curfews have been imposed, not all of them have been or are of that length. The curfew imposed in any case depends on the particular risk posed by the

individual concerned. Some individuals have had curfews of only two or three hours per day imposed. Most curfews have been or are between these two extremes.

**Mr Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been subject to a control order since the implementation of the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005; and how many of those were subsequently charged with acts relating to terrorism; [33326]

(2) when she plans to answer question 33326 tabled on 10 January 2011 for answer on 13 January 2011. [37273]

**Nick Herbert** [*holding answers 13 and 31 January 2011*]: 48 individuals have ever been subject to a control order. All of the individuals currently subject to a control order, and most of those who have ever been subject to a control order, are also subject to a court-imposed anonymity order. This prevents the publication of information that would identify, or would tend to identify, an individual as being subject to a control order. Since clarifying the number of those who have subsequently been charged would—together with information already in the public domain about individuals who have been charged with such offences—tend to breach the court-imposed anonymity order, it is not possible to provide this information.

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the costs to her Department of (a) administering control orders and (b) defending legal actions in relation to control orders since their introduction. [37322]

**Nick Herbert:** The cost to the Home Office of administering control orders and defending legal actions in relation to control orders in each financial year starting from April 2006 until the end of March 2010 is set out in the following table.

The legal costs include the costs of the Home Office's own legal representation and advice, the costs of the special advocates and the Special Advocates Support Office and meeting the legal costs of the controlled persons where this has been ordered by the court. The cost of administering control orders includes the cost of accommodation, subsistence, council tax, telephone and utility bills for controlled persons; and the staff and administrative costs to the Home Office of staff working on control orders. The figure for the financial year 2006-07 is based partially on estimates. All figures are rounded to the nearest £100.

It is not possible to provide the amount spent on matters relating to control orders in the financial year 2005-06 (the year in which control orders were introduced) because of the way the costs have been accounted for. The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total <sup>1</sup>
Cost to the Home Office of administering control orders	409,400	849,400	870,300	941,000	3,070,000
Legal costs to the Home Office	1,530,900	3,766,200	1,837,300	2,254,400	9,388,900

<sup>1</sup> 2006-07 to 2009-10

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her policy is on the renewal of expired control orders. [37324]

**Nick Herbert:** The framework for the making, expiry and renewal of control orders is set out in the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005. The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend, may not renew an expired control order but can renew an order before it expires. She may also make a new control order against the subject of a previously expired order. The Secretary of State takes decisions in individual cases in accordance with the statutory framework.

#### Association of Chief Police Officers

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she has made an assessment of the accountability and transparency of the Association of Chief Police Officers. [36283]

**Nick Herbert:** As made clear in the 'Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting Police and the People' consultation document, the Secretary of State for the Home Department has made accountability and transparency key considerations in determining the future role of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

ACPO itself recognises that it has to improve these areas, which includes it being more open about its activities and how it is using the public money it receives in the most efficient way possible. This is vitally important for ACPO as its role evolves in relation to providing the professional leadership of the police service. To that end the Government are working constructively with ACPO to agree the most appropriate structure for it to succeed.

#### Asylum

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maximum period of detention is for a stateless person in an immigration detention centre. [38756]

**Damian Green:** Immigration Act powers of detention are not time limited. However, detention must be kept to the minimum period reasonably necessary for the purpose for which it was authorised and must not be unduly prolonged. The length of those periods will vary between individual cases depending on their particular circumstances. Where a person seeks to frustrate their removal from the UK their detention may be prolonged as a consequence; the courts have upheld this position.



**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people classified as stateless were held in immigration detention centres on the most recent date for which figures are available.

[38758]

**Damian Green:** As at 30 September 2010, the latest date for which National Statistics have been published, five people (figure rounded to the nearest five) classified as stateless were detained solely under Immigration Act powers, in UK Border Agency Immigration Removal Centres and Short Term Holding Facilities. The Home Office publishes National Statistics on the number of persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers on a quarterly and annual basis which are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html)

**Kate Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the UK Border Agency unit dealing with older unresolved asylum cases is on schedule to resolve all such cases by its target date of summer 2011.

[38759]

**Damian Green:** The agency provides regular updates on performance, including a breakdown into grants, removals and "other" cases such as duplicates or errors, to the Home Affairs Select Committee and is next due to report in the spring.

On 1 November the agency reported to the Home Affairs Select Committee that it had concluded 334,500 cases and is on track to conclude the legacy backlog by summer 2011.

### Bomb Disposal: Armed Forces

**Bob Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been (a) investigated and (b) arrested on suspicion of exporting ADE-651 bomb detectors and similar devices to Afghanistan since January 2010;

[38346]

(2) how many people have been (a) investigated and (b) arrested on suspicion of exporting ADE-651 bomb detectors and similar devices to Iraq since January 2010.

[38349]

**Nick Herbert** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: The information requested is not collected centrally.

### Convictions: Arrests

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been (a) arrested, (b) charged and (c) convicted following police operations using undercover officers in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these were environmental protestors.

[36280]

**Nick Herbert:** The information requested is not collected centrally by the Home Office.

The arrests collection held by the Home Office is based on aggregated data and covers persons arrested for recorded crime (notifiable offences) only, by age group, gender, ethnicity, police force area and main offence group, for example violence against the person,

sexual offences, robbery, burglary and drugs offences. There is no information about the circumstances behind the arrests and so it is not possible to separately identify what arrests were made as a result of undercover police operations.

Data held centrally on the Ministry of Justice Court Proceedings Database do not include information about the circumstances behind each case other than which may be identified from a statute. It is therefore not possible to separately identify those offences proceeded against resulting from police operations using undercover police officers or how many of the defendants were environmental protestors.

Court proceedings data for 2010 are planned to be published in the spring of 2011.

### Departmental Official Cars

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ministerial cars have been used by her Department since May 2010.

[36641]

**Damian Green:** To allow contracts entered into by the previous Government to be terminated, six ministerial cars remained allocated to the Home Office from May 2010 to September 2010. In line with the new Ministerial Code, since 6 September two cars have been allocated for ministerial use, one of which is provided by the Metropolitan police for the Home Secretary.

### Departmental Press: Subscriptions

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department has spent on newspapers and magazines since May 2010.

[37577]

**Damian Green:** The Home Office purchases all newspapers, periodicals and trade profession journals via a framework agreement, which is in place for Home Office headquarters and the UK Border Agency. The spend from May 2010 for headquarters is £21,952.82.

It should be noted that occasionally business areas purchase individual copies of particular newspapers or magazines to meet urgent business needs. These are funded from devolved budgets for which figures are not available, and they are therefore not included.

### Departmental Public Appointments

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what public appointments she has made since her appointment; and to what payments each person so appointed is entitled;

[35426]

(2) how many (a) women and (b) men have been appointed to public duties by her Department since May 2010.

[35404]

**Nick Herbert:** Since her appointment as Home Secretary, the following appointments and reappointments have been made:

<i>Body</i>	<i>Name of appointee</i>	<i>New appointment/reappointment</i>	<i>Payments</i>
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Professor Les Iversen (chair)	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Ms Annette Dale-Perera	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Dr Paul Dargan	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Ms Sarah Graham	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Judge Kyrie LI James	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Mr Nigel Kirby	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Mrs Jo Melling	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Dr Hans-Christian Raabe	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Professor Fabrizio Schifano	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Dr Harry Sumnall	New appointment three years	No remuneration, travel and subsistence only
Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner	Suzanne McCarthy (commissioner)	Reappointment five years	Remuneration of £66,226 (three days a week). Entitled to reimbursement of expenses necessarily incurred in the course of official OISC business.
National Policing Improvement Agency	Peter Holland (chair)	Reappointed until 31 March 2012	£72,000 per annum (average of three days per week). Entitled to claim travel and subsistence actually and necessarily incurred in the course of official business, including rail travel between home and office. BBA (Broadly By Analogy) pension to CSPS.
Migration Advisory Committee	Professor David Metcalf (chair)	Reappointed three years	£41,943 (96 days per year on MAC business). Travel expenses.
Migration Advisory Committee	Jonathan Wadsworth	Reappointed three years	No remuneration but able to claim £275 per day (plus travel expenses) on MAC business
Migration Advisory Committee	Dr Martin Ruhs	Reappointed three years	No remuneration but able to claim £275 per day (plus travel expenses) on MAC business
Migration Advisory Committee	Diane Coyle	Reappointed two years	No remuneration but able to claim £275 per day (plus travel expenses) on MAC business
Migration Advisory Committee	Professor Rob Wilson	Reappointed two years	No remuneration but able to claim £275 per day (plus travel expenses) on MAC business
Serious Organised Crime Agency	Trevor Pearce (interim director general)	Appointed for a term to be decided	£142,478 pa plus £3,162 London Location Allowance. Reimbursement of expenses in line with SOCA policy. Use (not exclusive) of car and occasional overnight accommodation necessarily incurred in the course of SOCA business.
Forensic Science Regulator	Andrew Rennison	Reappointed three years (starting February 2011)	£98,252 (includes non-pensionable remuneration for his role as Interim CCTV regulator)
Independent reviewer of terrorism legislation.	David Anderson QC	Appointed (starting early 2011)	Daily fee. Reimbursed for any expenses incurred in the carrying out of the role and provided with a small fixed allowance for research purposes.
Independent Advisor for Criminality information	Sunita Mason	Reappointed until September 2011	Details of remuneration not publicly available.

### Deportation: Northern Ireland

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are made for families resident in Northern Ireland awaiting removal for immigration reasons. [38271]

**Damian Green:** The UK Border Agency encourages all families to leave the UK voluntarily and offers help and support to do so. However, where they refuse we will seek to ensure return. We are currently in the

process of implementing the new approach to family returns that was announced on 16 December 2010 that will apply across the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, from 1 March 2011. Full details of this new process are on the UK Border Agency website:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/consultations/26-end-child-detention/child-detention-conclusions.pdf>

### Detention Centres: Northern Ireland

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements she plans to put in place for the children of adults detained in the planned immigration detention facility in Northern Ireland. [38270]

**Damian Green:** The UK Border Agency will always first seek to achieve voluntary departure of illegal migrant families. In those cases where it is necessary to detain a parent in an immigration removal centre who has a child in the community, the UK Border Agency will seek to facilitate contact between the parent and child, subject to the wishes of the family, and in liaison with the local authority, where appropriate.

### Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

**Dr Huppert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will assess the effect on the economy of a (a) 10 per cent., (b) 50 per cent. and (c) 100 per cent. reduction in the number of international students studying in England. [38101]

**Damian Green** [*holding answer 3 February 2011*]: A consultation on the student immigration system closed on 31 January. The consultation sought the views of all respondents on the effect of the proposals. The results of the consultation and an impact assessment will be published in due course.

### Extradition

**Nicola Blackwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are held in the UK awaiting extradition to (a) EU countries and (b) non-EU countries. [37490]

**Nick Herbert:** The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service for Scotland are the designated UK authorities responsible for processing European arrest warrants (EAWs). The EAW governs extradition arrangements between member states of the EU.

As of 31 January 2011, according to SOCA records, there are 215 people remanded in custody in the United Kingdom at varying stages of the EAW extradition process.

55 people are currently in detention pursuant to extradition requests received by the Home Office from non-EU countries. This figure includes England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It does not include extradition requests made directly to Scotland.

**Lorraine Fullbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost to her Department in each cost category was of responding to requests for extradition in each year since 2006. [37689]

**Nick Herbert:** Many agencies and Departments are involved in the extradition process. These include HM Courts Service, the Metropolitan police service, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office. It is not possible to provide a complete or accurate breakdown

of the costs borne specifically by the Home Office or to distinguish the cost of responding to extradition requests made to the UK apart from those made by the UK.

There are a number of categories of costs incurred by the Department including the staffing and other costs of the Home Office Extradition Section; the staffing and other costs of obtaining legal advice on extradition requests; and the costs to the wider Home Office, including those involved in border control and counter-terrorism. In each agency and category, extradition requests made to the United Kingdom form part of the overall and larger judicial co-operation work load, and it is not possible with any accuracy or without disproportionate cost to stipulate the cost of responding to requests made to the United Kingdom.

**Lorraine Fullbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for extradition from the UK in (a) 2006, (b) 2007, (c) 2008, (d) 2009 and (e) 2010 (i) were granted, (ii) were denied and (iii) remain outstanding. [37692]

**Nick Herbert:** The following table gives the year in which the person concerned was actually extradited or the request denied; the request for their extradition may have been made in a previous year. These do not include figures for Scotland.

It is not possible to provide figures for the number of outstanding cases for each year. However, there are currently 73 extradition requests under the 2003 Extradition Act which have not been completed.

The figures do not include requests received from countries with which the UK does not have extradition relations.

Miscellaneous refers to a number of reasons, including, a warrant not being issued; the person being arrested in another country and the death of the subject of a request.

<i>Incoming requests</i>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Requests received	64	49	57	81	86
Surrendered	45	29	17	38	27
Discharged (by courts)	19	12	10	10	8
Refused (Secretary of State)	5	5	4	1	4
Withdrawn by requesting state	14	10	4	7	5
Not returned (miscellaneous)	4	20	13	14	11

### Identity Cards: Lost Property

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign workers' identity cards have been lost while in transit between the office of the UK Border Agency and the individual in the last year for which figures are available. [38213]

**Damian Green:** In 2010, of the 213,000 Biometric Residence Permits issued, eight were lost in transit and 21 were signed for by someone at the address but not passed to the intended recipient. All 29 permits were subsequently cancelled.

### Industrial Health and Safety

**Alok Sharma:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress her Department has made on reviewing the health and safety regulations for which it is responsible since her appointment. [36973]

**Nick Herbert:** The Home Office's Health and Safety Team monitors and reviews the Department's health and safety policy by audit and inspection to ensure compliance against legislation set by the Health and Safety Executive.

A review of health and safety regulations, as they relate to policing, has been progressed as part of Lord Young's review of the operation of health and safety laws and the growth of the compensation culture. His report was published on 15 October 2010 and we have agreed in principle with his recommendation that police officers should not be at risk of investigation or prosecution under health and safety legislation when engaged in the course of their duties if they put themselves at risk as a result of committing a heroic act. We have agreed to work with the Health and Safety Executive, the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the Crown Prosecution Service to consider further guidance to put this principle in to effect.

### Judiciary: Equality

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Justice on the training offered to immigration judges on gender and equality issues; and if she will make a statement. [38146]

**Damian Green:** The Secretary of State for the Home Department has regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Justice to discuss matters of shared interest. These discussions have not focussed specifically on the training offered to immigration judges on gender and equality issues.

### Members: Correspondence

**Mr Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she plans to reply to the letter of (a) 23 November, (b) 20 December and (c) 21 December 2010 regarding the comprehensive spending review. [35836]

**Nick Herbert** [*holding answer 24 January 2011*]: I refer my hon. Friend to my letter of 30 January 2011. A copy will be placed in the House Library.

**Amber Rudd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she plans to reply to the letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions of 15 October 2010 transferred to her Department by the Ministerial Correspondence Unit (ref POS(31)11222/0049). [36473]

**Nick Herbert:** I wrote to my hon. Friend on 30 January 2011. A copy will be placed in the House Library.

### Passports

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the (a) procedure and (b) time frame is for activating a residency permit in a passport which grants temporary or permanent right of abode in the UK. [38180]

**Damian Green:** All immigration permits issued in the UK are immediately activated upon issuance whether they grant temporary or permanent settlement. Visas which are issued overseas are usually activated upon issue although there is a discretion for the commencement date to be delayed by up to three months from the date of issue.

### Police: Complaints

**Alok Sharma:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will review the provisions of Police Reform Act 2002 relating to the body which hears complaints from former police officers for the purposes of ensuring independence and transparency. [37534]

**Nick Herbert:** I have no current plans to do so.

It is open to former police officers or members of police staff to make a complaint to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in the same way as any other member of the public, except where any allegation relates to conduct which took place while they were still a serving member of a police force, and occurred when they were on duty, or relates to the conduct of another member of the same police force.

### Police: Finance

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she expects the review by Tom Winsor into pay and conditions in the police service to result in cost savings for the purposes of reducing financial pressures on police authorities. [37029]

**Nick Herbert:** The review's full terms of reference have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

### Police: Retirement

**Mr Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will review the use of rule A19 to require experienced police officers to retire involuntarily from police services. [38583]

**Nick Herbert:** The use of regulation A19 is a matter for individual chief officers, working with their police authorities. There are no plans to review regulation A19 specifically. Tom Winsor is leading an independent review of remuneration and conditions of service for police officers and staff. He has indicated that, as part of the review, he will be looking at the ways that officers currently leave the service.

### Police: Tasers

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information her Department holds on the (a) number of X12 Tasers and (b) quantity of ammunition for such devices held by each police force. [37615]

**Nick Herbert:** No X12 Tasers or ammunition are currently held by police forces in England and Wales for operational use. The X12 Taser is not approved for police use in England and Wales.

Pro-Tect Systems Ltd's authority to supply Taser was withdrawn on 28 September 2010. Northamptonshire police, the force area where Pro-Tect are based, removed the seven X12 Tasers and ammunition held by Pro-Tect. These are currently held by Northamptonshire police awaiting destruction.

**Dr Huppert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason her Department has ceased regular publication of statistics on police use of Taser weapons; when data from the fourth quarter of 2009 and from 2010 will be published; whether routine publication will resume; and if she will take steps to provide timely and informative statistics in future publications. [37972]

**Nick Herbert [holding answer 3 February 2011]:** The next set of figures on the reported and recorded uses of Taser by police forces in England and Wales since introduction in April 2004 up to 31 March 2010 are being validated and will be published in the spring.

The Government are committed both to transparency on the use of Taser and to reducing data burdens on police forces and is currently reviewing the future collection and publication of Taser statistics.

### Police: Training

**Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans she has for future arrangements for police training; and if she will make a statement; [37203]

(2) what recent discussions she has had with the police on future arrangements for police training. [37208]

**Nick Herbert:** I meet regularly with police representative bodies to discuss matters of interest, including the professional development of the police service.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department has asked Chief Constable Peter Neyroud to review police leadership and training.

**Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans she has for the future of Hendon Police Training Centre; and if she will make a statement; [37204]

(2) what assessment she has made of the implications of the closure of Hendon Police Training Centre for the quality of policing in the future. [37209]

**Nick Herbert:** Plans for the future of Hendon Police Training Centre are a matter for the Metropolitan police service and the Metropolitan police authority.

### Special Constables

**Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there were in each police authority area in (a) 1995, (b) 2000, (c) 2005 and (d) 2010. [37206]

**Nick Herbert:** The requested information is given in the following table.

The latest provisional police service strength statistics relate to 30 September 2010 and were published on 27 January 2011. They are available at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/policeorg1.html>

Full annual statistics for 31 March 2011 are expected to be published in July 2011.

*Total strength<sup>1</sup> for special constables by police force area, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010*

Police force area	As at 31 March each year			
	1995 <sup>2</sup>	2000	2005	2010
Avon and Somerset	651	459	396	449
Bedfordshire	189	151	209	210
Cambridgeshire	279	274	199	167
Cheshire	321	350	192	300
Cleveland	212	128	66	238
Cumbria	241	176	126	115
Derbyshire	434	282	369	302
Devon and Cornwall	1,142	870	582	592
Dorset	221	298	230	300
Durham	200	157	91	131
Essex	674	483	363	682
Gloucestershire	320	206	146	167
Greater Manchester	768	457	380	400
Hampshire	598	615	369	449
Hertfordshire	320	216	226	344
Humberside	427	246	328	341
Kent	569	436	338	310
Lancashire	608	382	319	470
Leicestershire	356	247	181	240
Lincolnshire	322	195	179	163
London, City of	83	56	52	79
Merseyside	384	476	259	446
Metropolitan Police	1,550	758	697	3,177
Norfolk	345	285	253	266
Northamptonshire	303	199	242	180
Northumbria	506	332	240	178
North Yorkshire	381	217	173	184
Nottinghamshire	552	411	333	298
South Yorkshire	452	205	204	227
Staffordshire	725	482	409	334
Suffolk	409	391	267	328
Surrey	238	175	289	327
Sussex	527	352	200	240
Thames Valley	679	472	375	408
Warwickshire	352	260	190	212
West Mercia	582	476	263	233
West Midlands	818	680	959	591
West Yorkshire	777	484	417	421
Wiltshire	318	173	174	250
Dyfed-Powys	302	202	167	171
Gwent	126	119	144	144
North Wales	288	247	124	193

Total strength<sup>1</sup> for special constables by police force area, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010

Police force area	As at 31 March each year			
	1995 <sup>2</sup>	2000	2005	2010
South Wales	477	267	198	248
Total 43 forces in England and Wales	20,026	14,347	11,918	15,505

<sup>1</sup> Total strength is based on headcount figures.

<sup>2</sup> Strength figures for special constables were collected by HMIC for between 1985-95. Home Office Statistics have been collecting and publishing this data since 31 March 1996. Figures published prior to March 1996 are considered to be less reliable and are therefore not directly comparable with figures published after this date.

### Terrorism: Bail

**Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her policy is on the granting of pre-charge bail to terror suspects. [37323]

**Nick Herbert:** The policy on granting pre-charge bail to terror suspects, and pre-charge detention more generally, is set out in the findings from the review of counter-terrorism and security powers which were published on 26 January

2011. A copy has been placed in the House Library and is available on the Home Office website. The review found that pre-charge police bail was unlikely to be a substitute for extended pre-charge detention. While the review considered that there could be merit in granting bail to terrorist suspects before charge, there would be risks for public safety in releasing terrorist suspects when the nature and extent of their involvement in terrorism was still being investigated. We are not, therefore, intending to enable bail to be granted to terrorist suspects before charge.

### UK Border Agency: Manpower

**Mary Creagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people the UK Border Agency employed in (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10 and (c) 2010-11; and what forecast she has made of the equivalent figure in each of the next four years. [38051]

**Damian Green:** The number of people that the UK Border Agency employed in 2008-09 and 2009-10 is set out in the following table:

End of financial year	Employees who are full-time equivalent (FTE), civil servants	Workforce including agency workers and others such as loans from other Government Departments and those who are engaged locally overseas (FTE)
(a) 2008-09	16,878	17,532
(b) 2009-10 <sup>1</sup>	22,389	24,467

<sup>1</sup> This figure is higher than the previous year, following Machinery of Government changes, which joined together part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office known as UK Visas as well as the Detection part of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to make the UK Border Agency. The transfers of workforce to UKBA were: (a) 4,705 from HM Revenue and Customs and (b) 2,254 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The forecast for (c) is that there will be a workforce of around 23,200 (FTE) staff in the agency at the end of the year 2010-11 and by 31 March 2015 we expect there to be around 18,000 staff working for the agency. This means a reduction of around 5,200 posts from 31 March 2011.

A detailed breakdown of staff numbers year on year is not yet available.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Africa: Roads

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to encourage better road safety on African roads; and if he will make a statement. [38135]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** Approximately 1.3 million people are killed and 50 million injured in road accidents each year, 85% from low and middle income countries. This means that road accidents kill more people annually than malaria and just less than TB. Ministers will shortly be considering UK policy on this area.

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to encourage investment in Africa's North-South Corridor road network; and if he will make a statement. [38136]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** The COMESA-EAC-SADC (the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)) Tripartite, representing 26 countries, is leading the promotion and co-ordination of investment along the North-South Corridor (NSC).

The UK is supporting investment in the NSC through the TradeMark Southern Africa Programme which works directly with the Tripartite. The Department for International Development (DFID) is contributing £100 million up until 2014, for the construction and improvement of roads and to support the establishment of an infrastructure project preparation and implementation unit to oversee and accelerate infrastructure investment and projects. This unit and DFID's wider efforts will be instrumental in leveraging further financial investment in the NSC from the wider international community.

In addition to our support to the NSC, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr O'Brien) launched the £78 million TradeMark East Africa programme on 1 February, which will support infrastructure development and trade facilitation across East Africa.

### Africa's North-South Corridor Road Network

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the state of Africa's North-South Corridor road network; and if he will make a statement. [38134]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** The latest assessment of the state of Africa's North South Corridor (NSC) road network in 2010 found that of the total 8,599 kilometre road network: 28% or 2,403 kilometre of roads are in good condition and require nothing more than routine maintenance; 60% or 5,156 kilometre of roads will be in good condition for the next two to five years, but will require upgrading or rehabilitation design to start in the short to medium term; and 12% or 1,041 kilometre of roads require immediate rehabilitation or upgrading.

The UK is supporting investment in the NSC through the TradeMark Southern Africa Programme, contributing £100 million up until 2014. In addition to our support to the NSC, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr O'Brien), launched the £78 million TradeMark East Africa programme on 1 February 2011, which will support infrastructure development and trade facilitation across East Africa.

#### **New Framework for Results, Choices for Women: Planned Pregnancies**

**Mark Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development with reference to his Department's New Framework for Results, Choices for Women: planned pregnancies, safe births and healthy newborns, what mechanism his Department plans to put in place to reach the poorest 40 per cent. of women in the countries where it has programmes. [38173]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** No single mechanism, instrument or approach alone is sufficient to reach the poorest women; action across the four pillars of the Framework for Results is necessary. Country offices are currently in the process of developing programmes to meet this plan and will identify the most appropriate mechanisms for reaching the poorest women in the context in which they are working.

Ensuring that the poorest are benefiting is essential. That is why we will be monitoring regularly to confirm we are achieving the right results.

#### **World Trade Organisation**

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the World Trade Organisation's initiative on aid for trade; and if he will make a statement. [38137]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** The World Trade Organisation's (WTO) initiative on aid for trade has made good progress, both in raising awareness about the support the poorest countries need to trade more effectively, and by encouraging the integration of trade into the national development strategies of developing countries. While donors have increased aid for trade support substantially over the last five years, what is needed now is a stronger focus on achieving results on the ground. The Government's trade policy unit will be supporting WTO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to prepare for the Global Aid for Trade Review in July 2011. This will be a key opportunity to assess progress to date and agree how to pursue a more rigorous approach to achieving results in the future.

## **CHURCH COMMISSIONERS**

### **Church of England: Pay**

**Mr Frank Field:** To ask the hon. Member for Banbury, representing the Church Commissioners, pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 505W, on Church of England: employment, what the policy of the Church Commissioners is on the payment of a living wage to salaried or waged employees of (a) the Church of England and (b) Church of England parishes who are not clergy. [38601]

**Tony Baldry:** Employees of the seven Church of England National Church Institutions (NCI's) include all staff working at Lambeth Palace, Lambeth Palace Library, Bishopthorpe Palace in York, the Archbishops Council, the Pensions Board, the National Society for Promoting Religious Education and the Church Commissioners. All salaried and waged employees working for the above institutions on full-time, part-time and casual contracts working for the NCI's earn not less than £9.95 per hour as of 1 July 2010. This rate was negotiated with the relevant trade union representatives as part of the standard salary review procedures of the NCI's. The NCI's are not responsible for the setting of pay scales for the individual dioceses of the Church of England and each diocese therefore sets their own local rates negotiated when appropriate with recognised union representatives.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **A11: Repairs and Maintenance**

**Matthew Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he expects work to begin on improvements to the A11. [37434]

**Mike Penning:** The Secretary of State's statement of 26 October 2010, *Official Report*, columns 177-79, on Investment in Highway and Local Transport Schemes identified the A11 Fiveways to Thetford scheme as one on which the Highways Agency would start works before 2015, subject to the completion of statutory processes.

### **Aviation**

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on disruption of air travel; and if he will make a statement. [37260]

**Mrs Villiers:** The Department for Transport has received 128 items of correspondence in relation to the effects of December's severe weather on air travel.

### **Aviation: EC Action**

**Nadine Dorries:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received on the European Aviation Safety Agency's proposals to standardise flight time limitations across the EU; [37353]

(2) whether he plans to commission studies into the likely effects on UK airspace safety of the European

Aviation Safety Agency's proposals to standardise flight time limitations across the EU. [37381]

**Mrs Villiers:** I have received a number of letters from MPs and pilots who are concerned about the proposals contained in the consultation document issued by the European Aviation Safety Agency.

The Civil Aviation Authority is currently reviewing the proposals and we will seek to ensure that the final requirements maintain a high level of safety for UK airlines.

#### Aviation: Safety

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the extent to which pilot fatigue affects aviation safety; and if he will make a statement. [37409]

**Mrs Villiers** [*holding answer 1 February 2011*]: It is recognised that pilot fatigue can impact on aviation safety. UK airlines are therefore required to have robust flight time limitation schemes to prevent the onset of fatigue. These have to be approved by the Civil Aviation Authority.

The CAA reviews all available information, including newly available research, on the effects of fatigue in aviation and maintains an advisory group with its stakeholders to discuss the effect of crew fatigue on aviation safety.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the likely effects on travel safety of implementation of the European Aviation Safety Agency's recent proposals for legislation; and if he will make a statement. [37410]

**Mrs Villiers** [*holding answer 1 February 2011*]: The European Aviation Safety Agency has published draft legislation for consultation. The Civil Aviation Authority is currently reviewing the proposals and we will seek to ensure that the final requirements maintain a high level of safety for UK airlines.

#### Big Society Initiative

**Charlie Elphicke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department has taken as part of the Government's big society initiative since May 2010. [37895]

**Norman Baker:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 3 February 2011, *Official Report*, columns 876-77W.

#### Biofuels: Garages and Petrol Stations

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential effect of greater use on rural petrol stations of biodiesel made from used cooking oil. [37878]

**Norman Baker:** Biofuel use in transport fuels is mandated through the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation (RTFO). The RTFO requires the percentage of biofuel supplied,

by obligated transport fuel suppliers, to increase from 3.5% this year to 5% in 2014-15. Details on the RTFO are available at:

[www.renewablefuelsagency.gov.uk](http://www.renewablefuelsagency.gov.uk)

I have commissioned work to assess the capacity of the UK's transport infrastructure for biofuels, and research into the cost effective deployment of biofuels through to 2050. Both of these reports will consider biofuel use in rural petrol stations and the second will also specifically consider the availability of used cooking oil biodiesel. Both research projects are due to complete this spring and will be published on the Department's website.

#### Crossrail: Public Appointments

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what timetable he has set for the appointment of a new chief executive for Crossrail. [35200]

**Mrs Villiers:** Finding Rob Holden's successor is a matter for Crossrail Ltd, but we have been assured that the proper process to identify a successor is in hand.

Mr Holden has given six months' notice of his departure from Crossrail Ltd and is therefore expected to remain in post until early summer. My understanding is that the Board of Crossrail Ltd hopes to have appointed a successor prior to Mr Holden's departure.

#### Cycling

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of commuters who cycle to work. [38552]

**Norman Baker:** The Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey estimates the number of people usually travelling to work by cycle in Great Britain in October-December 2009 as 704,000. This represents 3% of all adults in employment.

#### Departmental Carbon Emissions

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent steps his Department has taken to reduce its carbon emissions to meet the target of reducing central Government carbon emissions by 10% by June 2011. [36609]

**Norman Baker:** The Department for Transport is committed to achieving the 10% carbon reduction target announced by the Prime Minister on 14 May 2010, and I have had discussions with relevant officials to progress this. I will be having further such discussions shortly.

The Department has developed, revised and published, through the Efficiency and Reform Group's Centre of Expertise in Sustainable Procurement, a plan that aims to deliver the savings required by the target. The latest data on performance, to the end of November, are publicly available on the [data.gov.uk](http://data.gov.uk) website:

<http://data.gov.uk/departmental-performance-co2-emissions-reduction-date>

Performance data are reported monthly, within four weeks of the month end. The next data release (to the end of December 2010) will be available by the end of January 2011, and similarly published on the [data.gov.uk](http://data.gov.uk) website.



Details on the reduction projects the Department for Transport is implementing or considering for implementation is also available on the data.gov.uk website:

<http://data.gov.uk/departamental-performance-co2-emissions-reduction-date>

This work programme will lead to reductions in our emissions from electricity, gas and fuel oil used on our office estate over the target period.

In addition to those initiatives listed the Department is looking at ways of maximising the shutdown of its offices over the upcoming bank holiday weekends. This follows a similar exercise undertaken over the Christmas period which resulted in a saving of 31% (43 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>) over a similar period in December in the Department's offices at Marsham street. We also continue to work with our facilities management providers to identify any further opportunities to make carbon savings within the target window. It is also our intention to use Climate Week to trial different ways of controlling the heating and cooling of our main buildings, to demonstrate what savings can be made if we change the way buildings are operated. Any additional initiatives will concentrate primarily on behavioural change due to the close proximity of the target end date.

#### Departmental Communication

**Alok Sharma:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he has undertaken to reduce jargon and promote plain English in Departmental communications. [35789]

**Norman Baker:** The Department for Transport and its agencies make every effort to reduce jargon and to use plain English in their communications. The central Department has published advice for staff on plain English drafting, and five of our agencies also publish their own guidelines. The Driving and Vehicle Standards Agency has gained the Plain English Crystal mark of approval on more than 100 of its forms.

#### Departmental Pay

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department holds on the number of sub-contracted staff servicing his Department who were not paid at a rate equivalent to or above the London living wage in the latest period for which figures are available. [34809]

**Norman Baker:** I regret that this information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

#### Departmental Working Conditions

**Mike Freer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's policy is on (a) the space provided per employee, (b) home working and (c) hot desking; how many employees it has on average per desk; and how much space on average there is per employee. [34598]

**Norman Baker:** The information is as follows:

(a) The Department's policy is to meet the current space standard of 10 square metres per person.

(b) The Department's home working policy as stated in the Staff Handbook is as follows:

You may apply to work at home on a regular basis (for at least one working day per week, with provision of ICT and/or furniture by the Department).

Where it has been agreed that you will work at home on a regular basis Human Resources will issue a variation to your individual contract of employment (see Part A of this Staff Handbook—Chapter 1—Introduction). This contract variation will state:

1. the location at which you will be 'regularly working at home';
2. the days of the week you will 'regularly work at home';
3. the office which will be regarded as the place of work for your post were you not home working.

For pay purposes, your place of work will be the office where your post would be located if you were not home working.

The Department is committed to promoting alternatives to travel within the Department and a cross Government, increase the use of ICT to reduce or move the need to travel. This includes encouraging the take-up of home working, which has the potential to benefit both staff and employers through improved work-life balance and increased productivity.

(c) The Department for Transport has exercised a lease break on approximately one third of its main London Headquarters building and that part of the building will cease to be occupied by the Department from the end of 2012. Currently one desk is provided per person in an open plan environment. This will still be the case following the current staff reorganisation and restack of the adoption of non-territorial working.

As reported in the State of the Estate report the Department for Transport reported occupancy, excluding operational properties, of 12.7 square metres per person in 2008-09. Data for 2009-10, including average desks per employee, are currently being collated.

#### Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Ophthalmology

**Mr Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many opticians in Christchurch constituency have applied to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for authorisation to provide services in connection with vehicle licensing; how many such applications were (a) successful and (b) unsuccessful; and for what reasons each application which was unsuccessful was rejected. [38433]

**Mike Penning** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: Information relating to the number of opticians that have applied to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to carry out visual field testing is not recorded.

There are currently 15 opticians in the county of Dorset, three of which are in Christchurch, registered to carry out visual field testing on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. Five other practices in the Dorset area are on the waiting list. No figures are available regarding the number of opticians who have applied but were unsuccessful.

**Mr Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what opticians in Christchurch constituency are authorised by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to provide services in connection with vehicle licensing. [38434]

**Mike Penning** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: There are 15 opticians in the county of Dorset who are registered to carry out visual field testing on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. Three opticians are situated in Christchurch and are shown as follows:

1. Howie and Tickner Opticians
2. Raxworthy (Christchurch) Ltd.
3. Ron Johnsen Optometrist

The others in Dorset are:

1. Robert Frith Optometrists, Shaftesbury
2. Robert Frith Optometrists, Gillingham
3. M J B and J Jones Optometrists, Blandford Forum
4. Ferndown Medical Centre, Ferndown
5. Christine H Webster Opticians, Wareham
6. G B Hayden, Lyme Regis
7. Andrew Care Opticians, Dorchester
8. Eyestyle Centre Opticians, Ferndown
9. Optique 200 Opticians, Wimborne
10. Peacock and Murphy Opticians, Verwood
11. Eyestyle Centre Opticians, Shaftesbury
12. Specsavers Opticians, Bridport.

**Mr Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria the Driver and Vehicles Licensing Agency applies in selecting opticians to carry out eye tests for the purposes of driver licensing; and whether the Agency has assessed any optician as unable to meet such criteria. [38488]

**Mike Penning** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: Prior to being selected practices must demonstrate they have the necessary equipment (binocular Humphrey, Dicon and Medmont perimeters, each measuring 120 points, and Henson perimeter measuring 112 points) and are able to carry out an Esterman binocular visual field test within the specified timescale.

Opticians are not registered if they do not have the acceptable equipment or cannot meet the specified time scale. Information relating to the number of opticians not able to meet the criteria is not recorded.

#### **Electric Vehicles: Marketing**

**John Woodcock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to promote the use of hybrid vehicles. [37670]

**Norman Baker:** The recent spending review announced that the Government have made provision of over £400 million for measures to promote the uptake of ultra-low carbon vehicle, including hybrid technologies. These measures include support for consumer incentives, development of recharging infrastructure, and a programme of research and development work.

#### **First Capital Connect: Franchises**

**Gavin Shuker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which franchise obligations First Capital Connect was found to have contravened in September 2009. [37001]

**Mrs Villiers** [*holding answer 31 January 2011*]: As a matter of course, Department for Transport officials monitor compliance under the terms of the franchise

agreement to which First Capital Connect are party. In September 2009, First Capital Connect were found to be in contravention of its obligations in respect of its obligation to install ticket vending machines at Blackfriars station and its obligation in respect of its annual updated business plan.

**Gavin Shuker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the agreed management provisions for franchise performance during each four-week period of First Capital Connect's rail franchise. [37008]

**Mrs Villiers** [*holding answer 31 January 2011*]: The Department for Transport places copies of the franchise agreements on its website:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/passenger/publicregister/current/>

Schedule 13 of the National Rail franchise terms sets out the management information requirements for First Capital Connect along with the frequency of reporting. Schedule 11, Paragraph 4 sets out the agreed management provisions relating to each four weekly railway period.

**Nadine Dorries:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received from customers of rail services operated under the First Capital Connect rail franchise. [37270]

**Mrs Villiers:** The Department has received 51 items of correspondence from First Capital Connect customers since the beginning of December 2010. These have been either directly from customers of First Capital Connect or via their Members of Parliament.

**Nadine Dorries:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions of its franchise agreement First Capital Connect had contravened by September 2009. [37382]

**Mrs Villiers:** As a matter of course, Department for Transport Officials monitor compliance under the terms of the franchise agreement to which First Capital Connect are party. In September 2009, First Capital Connect were found to be in contravention of its obligations in respect of its obligation to install ticket vending machines at Blackfriars station and its obligation in respect of its annual updated business plan.

#### **Heathrow Airport: Night Flying**

**Zac Goldsmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what criteria will be used in the review of restrictions on night flights at Heathrow Airport after October 2012; [37553]

(2) what timetable he has set for the consultation on restrictions on night flights at Heathrow Airport after October 2012. [37556]

**Mrs Villiers:** An announcement about proposals for post 2012 arrangements will be made in due course. Any proposals will be subject to public consultation.

There have been strict controls on night flights at Heathrow for many years. This recognises that noise from aircraft at night is widely regarded as the least acceptable aspect of aircraft operations and a key concern

for local residents. In considering criteria for a new regime, it will be particularly important that very great care is taken to strike a fair balance between local disturbance and the economic benefits of night flights.

### HM Coastguard

**Mrs Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what risk assessments were carried out in respect of the proposals in his Department's document *Protecting our Seas and Shores in the 21st Century: Consultation on proposals for modernising the Coastguard 2010*; and if he will publish the assessments. [38943]

**Mike Penning:** HM Coastguard is an emergency service; sensitivity to operational risk is at the forefront of its approach.

The assessment of risk is an integral part of all policy development. In developing these proposals the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has at all stages assessed every element against the systemic risks to delivery of our national coastguard service.

A risk assessment covering the overall UK delivery operation will be published later this week.

### London and Southeastern Railway: Fares

**Sir John Stanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether Southeastern's rail fare increases for 2011 were approved by Ministers; and if he will make a statement. [37743]

**Mrs Villiers** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: The increases applied by Southeastern to its regulated rail fares in January 2011 complied with the relevant provisions of the franchise agreement, the terms of which were set in 2005 by the previous Government.

### Motor Vehicles: Insurance

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he (a) has had and (b) plans to have with the motor insurance industry on the (i) availability and (ii) cost of motor insurance to younger drivers. [37683]

**Mike Penning:** I am keen to explore developing new insurance products which offer discounts to those newly qualified drivers who have chosen enhanced training or who are happy to accept restrictions from their insurer (for example no night time driving or "pay as you go" initiatives). I have raised this with the insurance industry and I am seeking to arrange an early meeting to discuss the issues in detail.

### National Air Traffic Services

**Gavin Shaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much revenue he expects to receive from the sale of the Government's remaining share of National Air Traffic Services. [37002]

**Mrs Villiers** [*holding answer 31 January 2011*]: No decision has yet been made as to whether to sell all, part or none of the Government's shareholding in NATS. It

was announced in the spending review (October 2010) that decisions on how and whether to proceed with a sale will be taken by Budget 2011.

We are currently in discussions with other shareholders over future ownership of NATS. If a decision is made to sell Government shares, the value will depend on the market conditions and decisions of other shareholders. No formal valuations have been prepared and indicative valuations can not be disclosed on the grounds of commercial sensitivity.

### Railways: Weather

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he plans to take to ensure that rail services are not disrupted in the event of severe weather; [36000]

(2) what steps he plans to take to ensure that train operating companies are prepared for severe weather. [36001]

**Mrs Villiers:** Officials within the Department for Transport closely monitor the performance of train operating companies, including during periods of severe weather. When disruption takes place, train operating companies maintain regular contact with the Department. Train operators and Network Rail work together to plan for disruptive events, including bad weather. This includes discussions about which key services to prioritise and setting emergency timetables to be deployed if required.

### Sea Rescue: Closures

**Ann McKechnie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has undertaken an impact assessment of the proposed closure of the Coastguard Centres in Stornoway, Shetland, Clyde or Forth. [38423]

**Mike Penning** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: Each aspect of the reforms detailed in the consultation document "Protecting our Seas and Shores in the 21st Century" issued on 16 December 2010 was reviewed in relation to their impact on our ability to provide UK search and rescue (SAR) co-ordination. It was concluded that location is not key factor.

The factors that were considered in determining the proposed location of coastguard centres are set out on pages 20-23 of the consultation document which is available in the Libraries of the House and on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency website:

[www.mcga.gov.uk](http://www.mcga.gov.uk)

### Transport

**Karl McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage active travel. [37718]

**Norman Baker** [*holding answer 1 February 2011*]: The Government are keen to promote sustainable travel initiatives, including cycling and walking. The recent White Paper (Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon) includes specific measures to encourage active travel. We anticipate that the recently announced 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' will support a wide range of measures, including packages that support the promotion of walking and cycling.

We have also allocated £11 million for Bikeability training in schools in 2011-12 and are committed to funding Bikeability training for the remainder of the Parliament. In addition, in 2011-12 we are funding £13 million for Links to Schools, Bike Club, Bike IT and walking to school initiatives.

### Transport: Scotland

**Cathy Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Minister for Transport in the Scottish Government; and what matters were discussed. [36354]

**Mr Philip Hammond:** I spoke with the Minister for Transport in the Scottish Government regularly during December 2010 as part of the Ministerial Resilience Committee to discuss the response to the severe weather. The last meeting was on 23 December 2010. My ministerial colleagues have also discussed a range of issues including high-speed rail and road safety with the Minister for Transport in the Scottish Government.

## EDUCATION

### School Standards

18. **Stephen Metcalfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of school standards in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency. [38235]

**Mr Gibb:** In 2010, at key stage 2, 73% of pupils in South Basildon and East Thurrock achieved level 4 or above in English and maths combined, compared with 73% in England. In 2010, at key stage 4, 51.4% of pupils in maintained schools in South Basildon and East Thurrock achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C, including English and maths, compared with 55.2% in maintained schools in England as a whole.

### Pupil Funding

19. **Dr Huppert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the average level of funding per pupil in (a) Cambridgeshire and (b) England will be in 2011-12. [38236]

**Sarah Teather:** For 2011-12, Cambridgeshire will receive a guaranteed unit of funding per pupil of £4,643.51. The average guaranteed unit of funding per pupil for England will be £5,082.53.

We have kept the 2010-11 per pupil funding for each local authority in England and then added the per pupil level of grants that they received on top of this. The combined amount is the new guaranteed unit of funding for each local authority for 2011-12.

### Building Schools for the Future

21. **Mrs Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of the status of the Building Schools for the Future programme in Liverpool. [38240]

**Mr Gibb:** We have stopped the wasteful Building Schools for the Future programme, including 25 projects in Liverpool. Five Liverpool schools are continue to receive BSF capital investment. Capital has been allocated to two academy projects.

After the capital review reports in a few weeks time, we will establish the approach to capital spending on schools for April 2012 onwards. Maintained schools capital allocations for 2011-12 were announced on 13 December.

### Teacher Protection

22. **Claire Perry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to protect teachers from false allegations made by pupils. [38241]

**Mr Gibb:** The Education Bill introduces reporting restrictions to prevent the publication of information that would identify teachers when allegations are made by or on behalf of a pupil until they are charged with a criminal offence. We will also revise guidance to highlight the fundamental importance of eradicating unnecessary delays in investigations, clarify that suspending teachers should never be an automatic response and emphasising the support that teachers are entitled to expect when facing such action.

### Standards: Secondary Schools

23. **Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to improve standards of achievement in secondary schools. [38242]

**Mr Gibb:** The Schools White Paper set out our plans to raise standards in education, including a real focus on raising standards of behaviour in our schools. We are also encouraging more high quality graduates into teaching, particularly in the shortage subjects of mathematics and science. We are reforming the National Curriculum and qualifications to ensure that children gain the knowledge they need to progress further. And we are promoting school autonomy, with more schools taking up the advantages of Academy status and the creation of more free schools.

### Academies

**Nia Griffith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of his Department's capacity to oversee the governance of academies. [38234]

**Mr Gibb:** Academies are publicly funded independent schools and are required to ensure that they have sound governance procedures in place. We are satisfied that the Department has the capacity in place to oversee this.

### Social Work: Children

**Andrea Leadsom:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress is being made in reducing the burden of administration in social work with children. [38239]

**Tim Loughton:** The coalition Government are committed to freeing up more time for social workers to use their professional judgment to help children. This is an important focus of Professor Munro's review of child protection. Her interim report, published on 1 February 2011, proposes areas for potential reform to allow professionals to re-focus on the needs of the child rather than bureaucratic compliance. I welcome this and look forward to her final recommendations in April to which we will respond.

### Booked Up Scheme

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children have received books from the Booked Up scheme in (a) England, (b) West Midlands and (c) Dudley Borough in each year since 2004. [33044]

**Sarah Teather** [holding answer 12 January 2011]: The number of children who received books from the Booked Up scheme is as follows:

	Booked Up scheme		
	England	West midlands	Dudley borough
2004-06	1	1	1
2007	636,330	66,893	3,975
2008	666,945	71,273	4,248
2009	660,603	68,580	4,138
2010	655,630	67,722	4,156

<sup>1</sup> No packs given before 2007

### Bookstart Scheme

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children have received books from the Bookstart scheme in (a) England, (b) West Midlands and (c) Dudley borough in each year since 2004. [33043]

**Sarah Teather** [holding answer 12 January 2011]: The number of children who have received books from the Bookstart scheme are as follows:

	Bookstart		
	England	West Midlands	Dudley borough
2004	487,200	65,136	3,610
2005	608,000	63,079	7,656
2006	1,084,504	189,760	10,022
2007	1,710,802	192,297	10,600
2008	1,725,000	198,239	10,580
2009	1,788,887	197,058	11,364
2010	1,817,425	201,810	10,656

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 29 November 2010, *Official Report*, column 513W, on the Bookstart programme: finance, how much funding he has allocated to Bookstart for 2011-12. [36559]

**Sarah Teather:** Following the joint public statement issued with Booktrust on 26 December, the Department for Education has been working with Booktrust on developing a new book gifting programme. A decision will be made soon on the funding that will be allocated to Bookstart for the 2011-12 financial year.

### Booktime Scheme

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children have received books from the Booktime scheme in (a) England, (b) West Midlands and (c) Dudley borough in each year since 2007. [33042]

**Sarah Teather** [holding answer 12 January 2011]: The number of children who have received books from the Booktime scheme are given as follows:

	Booktime		
	England	West Midlands	Dudley borough
2007	663,862	62,386	3,699
2008	674,177	71,824	4,077
2009	666,792	72,223	4,050
2010	670,225	70,954	4,043

### CAFCASS: Finance

**John McDonnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the outturn budget for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in England (a) was in each year from 2007-08 to 2010-11 and (b) is expected to be for 2011-12. [33796]

**Tim Loughton:** The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service's (CAFCASS's) funded expenditure for each year from 2007-08 to 2009-10 was:

	Expenditure (£ million)
2007-08	108.550
2008-09	120.627
2009-10	132.449

These figures comprise CAFCASS's grant in aid funding from the Department and additional funding for specific activities. In this spending review period (2008-11), this additional funding has been for Contact Point and Family Contact Services.

CAFCASS's allocated programme resource budget for 2010-11 is £140.7 million, including a one-off allocation of £10 million for service improvement and funding for Contact Point and Family Contact Services. CAFCASS's budget for 2011-12 has not yet been finalised.

### Departmental Manpower

**Gregg McClymont:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many officials his Department has appointed on a fixed-term contract since 7 May 2010. [16788]

**Tim Loughton:** The Department for Education was established on 12 May 2010. The Department has appointed 14 staff on fixed-term contracts since that time.

**Bill Esterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the (a) names and (b) salaries are of each senior civil servant who has (i) joined, (ii) moved posts within and (iii) left his Department since May 2010. [35370]

**Tim Loughton** [holding answer 21 January 2011]: Information for Department's senior civil service (SCS) since May 2010 is set out in the following tables:

## SCS joiners

Name (directorates only for individuals in the SCS below director level)	Gross basic salary
Simon Parkes	£135,000-£139,999
David Hawker	<sup>1</sup> n/a
Infrastructure and Funding	£55,000-£59,999
Education Standards	£55,000-£59,999
Private Office	£80,000-£84,999
Finance and Corporate Services	£65,000-£69,999
Education Standards	£65,000-£69,999
Children, Young People and Families	£80,000-£84,999
Children, Young People and Families	£80,000-£84,999
Infrastructure and Funding	£65,000-£69,999
Education Standards	£70,000-£74,999
Finance and Corporate Services	£60,000-£64,999

<sup>1</sup> Seconded from the Welsh Assembly.

## SCS transfers within the Department

Name (directorates only for individuals in the SCS below director level)	Gross basic salary
Mela Watts	£80,000-£84,999
Andrew McCully	£105,000-£109,999
Jon Coles	£135,000-£139,000
David Hawker	<sup>1</sup> n/a
Education Standards	£65,000-£69,999
Infrastructure and Funding	£65,000-£69,999
Education Standards	£65,000-£69,999
Finance and Corporate Services	£65,000-£69,999
Finance and Corporate Services	£85,000-£89,999
Children, Young People and Families	£65,000-£69,999
Finance and Corporate Services	£80,000-£84,999
Infrastructure and Funding	£7. P,000-£74,999
Infrastructure and Funding	£65,000-£69,999
Education Standards	£70,000-£74,999
Education Standards	£70,000-£74,999
Infrastructure and Funding	£75,000-£79,999
Children, Young People and Families	£65,000-£69,999
Children, Young People and Families	£100,000-£104,999

<sup>1</sup> Seconded from the Welsh Assembly.

## SCS leavers

Name (directorates only for individuals in the SCS below director level)	Gross basic salary
Michael Hearty	£105,000-£109,000
Ian Taylor	£130,000-£134,999
Finance and Corporate Services	£80,000-£84,999
Schools	£70,000-£74,999
Young People	£65,000-£69,999
Corporate Services	£90,000-£94,999
Schools	£80,000-£84,999
Young People	£65,000-£69,999
Young People	£60,000-£64,999

## Education Maintenance Allowance

**John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the effects of the operation of the education maintenance allowance on the number of young people from deprived backgrounds undertaking further education. [32998]

**Mr Gibb:** Department for Education analysis, based on the evidence from evaluation of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) pilots which ran from 1999 to 2004 in England, indicated that:

around 18,000 young people participated in education at 16 in 2004/05 because of EMA—8% of the total number of 16 year old EMA recipients; and

around 16,000 young people participated at 17 in 2005/06 because of EMA—9% of the total number of EMA recipients.

These findings support and are consistent with the findings from more recent research which suggests that around 90% of recipients would have stayed on after 16 even if they had not received EMA. We are replacing EMA with an enhanced learner support fund.

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to announce the funding for the replacement to education maintenance allowance (EMA); and what alternatives to EMA he is considering. [34253]

**Mr Gibb [holding answer 17 January 2011]:** We plan to announce the allocations for the new funds in early spring.

We are replacing EMA with an enhanced learner support fund. We will take account of the views of schools, colleges and training organisations, and the advice of the right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes), as Advocate for Access to Education, regarding arrangements for the new fund.

## Family Rights Group Kinship

**Jason McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the allocation of funding by his Department to the Family Rights Group Kinship helpline in the next three years. [33685]

**Sarah Teather:** The Department opened a new procurement process on 6 December 2010 to fund family support telephone helplines and online services from April 2011. One of the aims of the family services procurement is to support children and young people in England through supporting their parents and families, with a particular focus on early intervention support for the most disadvantaged parents and families. The Family Rights Group was eligible to submit an application under this process.

For commercial reasons, I cannot comment on any applications we have received from individual organisations until the outcome of the procurement process has been completed. I will write to the hon. Member to let him know the outcome once the procurement process is completed.

## Languages: Classroom Assistants

**Mr Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the future of the British Council's language teaching assistantship scheme. [36513]

**Mr Gibb [holding answer 27 January 2011]:** The Language Assistants programme, which is managed for the Department by the British Council, will continue. The programme supports departmental and Government priorities by exposing pupils in our schools to mother-tongue speakers of other languages through the intake of foreign language assistants; and provides an opportunity for undergraduates from our universities to immerse themselves in a foreign language while working as an English language assistant in a school abroad.

### Mature Students

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on maintaining present levels of access for mature students to higher education courses. [38615]

**Mr Willetts:** I have been asked to reply.

Access to higher education is based on ability not age. Latest figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show that almost two thirds of the student population are mature students. This Government are introducing reforms to the system of higher education (HE) funding aimed at producing a more sustainable environment to support access for those who can most benefit from all ages and backgrounds. We will provide up-front funding for tuition costs to those eligible first-time undergraduates who can secure a university place—both young people and mature students. For the first time, we are making loans available to eligible part-time students, living in England. Our National Scholarship Programme will be open to disadvantaged students with potential, irrespective of age.

### Missing Persons: Children

**Ann Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he plans to take steps to replace national indicator 71 on missing children and adults. [38351]

**Tim Loughton:** Final decisions are yet to be made on future data collections.

**Ann Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education which local authorities have in place those procedures and protocols on the actions to be taken when children in care go missing or run away recommended in the statutory guidance published in July 2009. [38352]

**Tim Loughton:** This information is not collected centrally. However, all local authorities should be following statutory guidance.

**Ann Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information his Department holds on the number of return interviews with children who had gone missing which were carried out in each local authority area in the latest period for which figures are available. [38353]

**Tim Loughton:** This information is not collected centrally.

**Ann Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to improve the collection of national data on children who run away or go missing; and if he will make a statement. [38354]

**Tim Loughton:** The Department collects information on the number of looked after children absent for more than 24 hours from their agreed placement. However, it is the responsibility of local authorities to safeguard and promote the well-being of children in their care, and they will hold more detailed information on each child who has gone missing from their care. They are expected to use this to inform their processes and

procedures, and the training of staff and carers, to minimise the risk of children going missing from local placements.

**Ann Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what procedures are in place in his Department to monitor the implementation by local authorities of the statutory guidance of July 2009 on children who run away or go missing from their home or care; and if he will make a statement. [38355]

**Tim Loughton:** All local authorities should follow statutory guidance. The Department does not propose to monitor implementation. “Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away and Go Missing from Home or Care” requires local authorities to collect information about missing from care incidents. Local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols set out the arrangements for sharing this information with the police to make sure that action is taken to locate the child and minimise the likelihood of their going missing in future. Local authorities should make regular reports to council members with responsibility for “corporate parenting” on patterns of children going missing from care.

### Pupils: Disadvantaged

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will rank all secondary schools within each local authority area according to the proportion of children eligible for free school meals in January 2010 and indicate the category of school in each such case. [35862]

**Mr Gibb** [*holding answer 24 January 2011*]: The requested information has been placed in the House Libraries.

This information includes full time pupils aged 0 to 15 and part time pupils aged 5 to 15 known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals.

### Schools: Admissions

**Lyn Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what account of birth rates is taken in planning pupil placing; [31583]

(2) what account he takes of existing trends in pupil numbers when determining future projections of pupil numbers in primary and secondary schools in the London borough of Newham. [31585]

**Mr Gibb:** Planning for future provision of school places is the statutory responsibility of local authorities. Ministers play no role in deciding future primary and secondary school provision in individual authorities. It is for each local authority to ensure there are sufficient school places to meet the needs of the population and to review the position regularly.

As part of their strategic responsibility for school provision, local authorities prepare their own pupil number forecasts based on their knowledge of local circumstances. In producing these forecasts, local authorities are best placed to determine which local factors should be taken into account and the sources of information

they use, for example local birth rate information, existing trends in pupil numbers, net migration and housing developments.

#### Schools: Finance

**Julian Sturdy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department has reached a decision on funding for schools in York Outer constituency for the period of the comprehensive spending review; and if he will make a statement. [25800]

**Mr Gibb:** On 13 December, the Department announced the school funding allocations for 2011-12. We have protected school funding in the system at flat cash per pupil, before adding the pupil premium. Flat cash per pupil means that as pupil numbers go up, the overall budget goes up in line. It is now for local authorities to work with their schools forum to produce the 2011-12 budgets for their individual maintained schools.

The funding levels for schools in York and other authorities from 2012-13 and beyond will be subject to review. As we set out in the Schools White Paper—"The Importance of Teaching"—we will consult this spring on developing and introducing a clear, transparent and fairer national funding formula based on the needs of pupils.

#### Schools: Sports

**Simon Danczuk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the effects of his Department's funding settlement for the comprehensive spending review period on expenditure on new school sports equipment. [33267]

**Tim Loughton:** The Schools White Paper, "The Importance of Teaching", sets out the Government's approach to school funding. We believe that the school funding system needs radical reform to make it more transparent, fairer and progressive. We have protected the schools budget in the recent spending review, at a time when cutting the budget deficit is an urgent national priority. It is for schools to decide what to spend on sports equipment, or on equipment for other areas of the curriculum.

#### Students: Finance

**Mr Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he plans to ring-fence within school and college budgets their allocation of proposed enhanced discretionary learner support funds. [34211]

**Mr Gibb:** Under current arrangements discretionary learner support funds are allocated as a discrete budget which can be used only for that purpose. We expect that the enhanced learner support fund will build on these arrangements. We are working with schools, colleges and other stakeholders as we finalise the details of how the enhanced fund will operate. That work will also be informed by the work of the Government's Advocate for Access to Education, the right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes).

## TREASURY

### Carbon Reduction Commitment

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is considering any changes to the Carbon Reduction Commitment beyond those announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [38475]

**Justine Greening:** The Government are committed to simplifying the carbon reduction commitment (CRC) energy efficiency scheme. The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published a consultation paper on a first tranche of simplifications to the CRC last year which included delaying the start of the second phase and removing the requirement to register on information declarers. As previously announced it is DECC's intention to deliver further simplification for the second phase of the CRC and detailed options are being discussed with CRC participants. Decisions about allowance sales and price are a matter for the Chancellor.

### Corporation Tax

**Mr David Davis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies have had outstanding tax liability of more than £100 million forgiven by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in each of the last five years; and what the monetary value was of the liability forgiven by HMRC in each year. [38695]

**Mr Gauke:** HMRC does not "forgive" tax. Where a company is unable to meet its tax liabilities HMRC will seek arrangements to obtain the tax. Tax will only be written off when it is clearly not recoverable.

In seeking to determine tax liabilities HMRC will engage with taxpayers and their advisors to resolve disputes of fact and/or law. Such discussions can be complex and may involve grey areas within the tax system. If HMRC is unable to agree an appropriate settlement it will look to litigation or some form of arbitration.

Under its normal rules of confidentiality HMRC cannot reveal details of individual settlements.

### Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

**Henry Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on payment of compensation to Equitable Life trapped annuitants. [38112]

**Mr Hoban:** The Government have announced that they will cover the full cost of losses to eligible with-profits annuitants. This will be paid through ongoing regular payments.

The Treasury is in the process of preparing a detailed scheme design document that sets out the practical and delivery implications of the scheme. I will make this available for parliamentary scrutiny in the spring. This will allow final preparations for payments to be made. The Government's ambition is to start making payments in the middle of 2011.



### EU Budget: Contributions

**Mr Bone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average daily net financial contribution of the UK to the EU in the latest period for which figures are available. [38745]

**Justine Greening:** The latest figures available on the UK's gross and net contributions in sterling were included in the Table 1.6 of the Public Finances Supplementary Data to the Office for Budget Responsibility's autumn forecast, published on 29 November and available on the OBR website.

The last outturn data on UK's 'Net contribution to the EU budget' (which only takes into account public sector receipts from the EU) refers to the UK budgetary year 2009-10, and is £4.7 billion. This corresponds to a daily net contribution of around £12.9 million.

### Excise Duties: Biofuels

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects on the renewable transport fuel industry of the level of duty for biodiesel produced from used cooking oil. [37887]

**Justine Greening:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend (Norman Baker), on 13 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 509W, to the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). The Government routinely discusses tax matters with industry stakeholders and the Chancellor keeps all taxes under review along Budget timelines.

### Excise Duties: Fuels

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to change the three per cent. taxation rate on diesel fuel. [38274]

**Justine Greening:** The company car tax calculation for diesel powered cars includes a 3% supplement for all but early adopters of Euro 4 clean air emissions technology. The Chancellor keeps all taxes under review along Budget timelines.

### Excise Duties: Gaming Machines

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of respondents to his Department's consultation on a gross profits tax on gaming machines were (a) supportive of and (b) opposed to the proposal. [38511]

**Justine Greening:** The Government's response to the consultation contains further information on the responses received, and can be found online at:

[http://hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/consult\\_gamingmachinestax\\_response.pdf](http://hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/consult_gamingmachinestax_response.pdf)

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many gambling companies have requested meetings with Ministers and officials of his Department to discuss

the implications of a gross profits tax on gaming machines since the publication of the proposal; and how many such meetings there have been. [38512]

**Justine Greening:** Treasury Ministers and officials meet representatives from a wide range of organisations and individuals in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and implementation. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings.

The Treasury publishes a list of ministerial meetings with external organisations, available at:

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister\\_hospitality.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister_hospitality.htm)

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the publication in January 2011 of draft legislation on the imposition of a Machine Games Duty is consistent with his Department's commitment in Tax Policy Making: Draft Tax Consultation Framework, 9 December 2010, Chapter 2, paragraph 6, to (a) publish draft tax legislation at least three months before they are laid before Parliament and (b) provide at least eight weeks for comment on draft tax legislation before it is laid before Parliament. [38513]

**Justine Greening:** The Government's current plan for taking forward machine games duty is to consult on draft legislation by early summer, with the intention of legislating in Finance Bill 2012.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact assessments have been conducted to analyse the potential effect of a machine games duty on the industry by (a) his Department and (b) external consultants; and what assessment has been made of the effect of these proposals on (i) adult amusement centres, (ii) coastal town economies and (iii) the wider tourism industry. [38514]

**Justine Greening:** The Government are seeking further input from industry on machine games duty, and it is intended that a formal consultation will be held by early summer.

### Gaming Machines

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on achieving fiscal neutrality with respect to machines in betting shops. [38154]

**Justine Greening:** Fiscal neutrality is an important principle, requiring that supplies of similar goods or services be treated in the same way for VAT purposes to avoid any distortion of competition.

The VAT treatment in respect of certain gaming machines is currently subject to legal challenge. The Court of Appeal and the Upper Tribunal have both made references to the European Court of Justice seeking advice on the interpretation and application of the fiscal neutrality principle in these specific circumstances.

We await the rulings from the European Court of Justice.

### Income Tax: Bradford

**Mr Ward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Bradford East constituency will no longer pay income tax as a result of the decision to increase the personal allowance by £1,000. [38937]

**Mr Gauke:** The number of persons taken out of income tax as a result of the £1,000 increase in the personal allowance in 2011-12 in the U.K. is estimated to be 880,000.

This estimate is based on 2007-08 Survey of Personal Incomes data projected to 2011-12 in line with the June 2010 Budget assumptions.

It not possible to produce reliable estimates for parliamentary constituencies due to small sample sizes at these levels of geography.

### Income Tax: Tax Rates and Bands

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people paid income tax at the higher rate in each year since 1988. [38094]

**Mr Gauke:** Estimates for the number of higher rate taxpayers for 1990-91 onwards are shown in Table 2.1 'Number of individual income taxpayers' which can be found on the HM Revenue and Customs website at:

[http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/income\\_tax/table2-1.xls](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/table2-1.xls)

Estimates for earlier years are shown in table 2.1a 'Number of taxpayers and income tax liabilities' which can be found on the HM Revenue and Customs website at:

[http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/income\\_tax/table2-1a.xls](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/table2-1a.xls)

These estimates are based on the annual Survey of Personal Incomes. Latest available survey data are for 2007-08, with projections for 2008-09 to 2010-11 based on economic assumptions consistent with the Office for Budget Responsibility's autumn forecast 2010.

### Revenue and Customs: Telephone Services

**Tristram Hunt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bristol East of 21 July 2010, *Official Report*, column 387W, on Revenue and Customs: telephone services, when he expects HM Revenue and Customs to complete its review of its telephone numbering strategy. [38083]

**Mr Gauke:** HMRC initially planned to conclude its review of its telephone numbering strategy by 31 March 2011. Since the review commenced, Ofcom has announced a consultation entitled "Simplifying Non-Geographic Numbers (Improving consumer confidence in 03, 08, 09, 118 and other non-geographic numbers)". The findings from the Ofcom consultation are due in spring 2011 and HMRC will conclude its review once it has considered the findings of the consultation.

### Technology: Derby

**Margaret Beckett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the effects of his economic and fiscal policies on the high technology manufacturing

sector in the City of Derby; and if he will make a statement. [37296]

**Justine Greening:** The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is responsible for producing the official economic and fiscal forecasts. The OBR's Budget forecast does not include a sub-national forecast.

The Treasury is leading a Growth Review, jointly with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, in order to create the conditions for economic growth and to improve the dynamism of the UK business environment. This will cover issues of importance to technology based companies including access to finance, better regulation and competition. In its first phase, the review is focusing on a number of sectors with a high technology content including advanced manufacturing, business and professional services, digital and creative industries, and health care and life sciences. A first report will be made by Budget 2011.

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Audit Commission: Conferences

**Mr Burley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the purpose was of the payment of £4,981 by the Audit Commission to Thomas Telford Ltd in May 2010; how many officials attended the conference to which the payment related; and for what reason. [37536]

**Robert Neill:** This is an operational matter for the Audit Commission and I will ask the chief executive of the Audit Commission to respond to my hon. Friend direct.

*Letter from Eugene Sullivan, dated 7 February 2011:*

Your Parliamentary Question has been passed to me to reply.

The purpose of the payment of £4,981 to Thomas Telford Ltd was for the Audit Commission's 6th Annual Lecture that took place in July 2010.

This event is attended by MPs, Directors from government agencies, Chief Executives of local authorities and health authorities, our contract partners, and trade and professional associations. It provides an opportunity for the Commission to stimulate and promote discussion on topics of interest to the public sector; and to those with an interest in the organisation's work. Previous speakers have included Lord Heseltine and Sir Gus O'Donnell. The guest speaker on this occasion was Professor Anthony King.

One hundred and seventeen people attended this event. Some who indicated that they would attend did not do so.

In July 2010, the Commission decided not to hold any further Annual Lecture events.

### Audit Commission: Expenditure

**Mr Burley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the (a) purpose and (b) cost was of the sundry debtor expenditure incurred by the Audit Commission in September 2010 relating to (i) Brook Green UK, (ii) Dish, (iii) Event Ensembles, (iv) Historic Royal Palaces Enterprises, (v) jwflowers.com and (vi) Leiths At the Centre. [37539]

**Robert Neill:** This is an operational matter for the Audit Commission and I have asked the chief executive of the Audit Commission to write to my hon. Friend

direct. However, I would comment that this illustrates how transparency can highlight wasteful spending. Particularly at a time when the public finances are in such a poor state, it is simply unacceptable for a public body—indeed a spending watchdog—to be using taxpayers' money (intended to be spent on promoting auditing best practice) to subsidise a string quartet and extravagant flower displays.

*Letter from Eugene Sullivan, dated 7 February 2011:*

Your Parliamentary Question has been passed to me to reply.

The purpose of the sundry debtor expenditure incurred by the Audit Commission in September 2010 was for the Eurorai Congress held in October 2010.

Eurorai is a network of over 70 regional audit bodies in Europe that has been in place for nearly 20 years. In 2007, we agreed that we would act as the host and, at the time our abolition was announced, plans had been underway to organise the congress for three years.

Following the Secretary of State's abolition announcement on 13 August 2010, we considered our position and, after discussion with Department for Communities and Local Government officials, we agreed to go ahead with the congress and fulfil our commitment.

The congress was fully funded by Eurorai, and the dinner by a contribution from the Audit Commission and partner agencies, including from the accountancy profession and some private sector audit firms.

The Audit Commission's contribution to the dinner was £5,000 and is not associated with any particular item of expenditure. All other expenses have been refunded by Eurorai or the partner agencies.

Details of the costs are:

<i>Supplier</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Cost (£)</i>
Brook Green UK	Travel—congress	3,795.75
Dish	Catering—dinner	14,060.00
Event Ensembles	String quartet—dinner	550.00
Historic Royal Palaces Enterprise Ltd.	Banqueting House hire—dinner	8,050.00
jwflowers.com Ltd.	Flowers—dinner	1,280.00
Leith's At The Centre.	Catering—congress	6,285.90

### Faithwise Ltd

**Christopher Pincher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 304W, on Faithwise Ltd: contracts, how much his Department has paid to Faithwise Ltd. since the beginning of the original contract. [38382]

**Robert Neill** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: The Department has paid £368,666.14 inclusive of VAT to Faithwise since the beginning of the contract on 1 January 2007.

**Christopher Pincher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 304W, on Faithwise Ltd: contracts, if he will undertake a value for money assessment of the Faithwise consultancy contract. [38383]

**Robert Neill** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: The Faithwise contract has been assessed for value for money on the basis of cost. We have terminated the contract.

### Local Government Association

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on how many occasions he has met representatives of the Local Government Association since May 2010. [38608]

**Robert Neill:** The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and his ministerial team have met representatives of the Local Government Association 47 times.

### Local Government Finance

**Bill Esterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what level of unspecified savings he considers it acceptable for local councils to include when setting their budgets. [38876]

**Robert Neill:** There are many factors to be considered in setting budgets and these factors are best assessed at the local level. Local authorities are responsible for their own finances, and spending and budgeting decisions are for individual councils to make. Local authorities are required to set their budgets in accordance with their legal and fiduciary responsibilities.

### Local Government: Powers

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking to assess the extent to which the Government's localism agenda raises accountability issues; and if he will make a statement. [37760]

**Greg Clark** [*holding answer 2 February 2011*]: The Government are committed to strengthening local democratic accountability for local services and reversing the build up of bureaucratic central burdens that in recent years have increasingly prevented local leaders acting in the best interests of their communities. Increasing accountability goes hand in hand with localism. That is why the Government are, for example:

Replacing the central imposition of council tax caps and instead giving local people the right to veto excessive increases in a referendum;

Providing for directly elected mayors in 12 English cities, subject to approval in a referendum, and introducing directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners to replace unelected police authorities;

Requesting that local authorities publish every item of expenditure over £500, so local residents can more easily hold them to account for their use of taxpayers money.

### Localism

**Mr Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what definition of the term localism his Department uses. [38840]

**Greg Clark:** This Government have been clear that they want to see a radical redistribution of power away from central Government to local communities and people. In December I published "Decentralisation and

the Localism Bill: an essential guide” which sets out the six essential actions required to deliver decentralisation down through every level of government to every citizen.

#### London Assembly

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what costs his Department has incurred in respect of the provision of information to the electorate on the (a) operation and (b) voting system for the London Assembly since the creation of the Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [38151]

**Robert Neill:** It is for the Mayor and London Assembly to determine how much funding from the Greater London authority’s budget should be allocated for the provision of information to the London electorate about the voting system and operation of the Assembly. My Department provides a contribution to the Authority’s budget through a block grant, the General Greater London authority grant, but cannot specify how this funding is spent; the rest of the budget is funded by the Authority’s council tax precept.

#### Mobile Homes

**Natascha Engel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to introduce a fit and proper person test for mobile home owners; and if he will make a statement. [37930]

**Grant Shapps:** Although I have no plans to introduce a fit and proper test for mobile home owners at present; I do intend shortly announce a series of other measures that I have in mind to better protect mobile home occupiers.

#### Parish Councils: Elections

**Jack Dromey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of elections to parish councils that were uncontested in each year since 1991. [38580]

**Robert Neill:** We have made no such estimates.

#### Social Rented Housing: Property Transfer

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which registered social landlords have notified the Tenant Services Authority of an intention to dispose of properties (a) in and (b) after 2011-12; and how many properties and what proportion of housing stock is to be disposed of in each case. [38013]

**Grant Shapps:** Private registered providers (previously known as ‘registered social landlords’) of social housing must apply for consent from the social housing regulator, the Tenant Services Authority, to dispose of property. The Tenant Services Authority collects data through its regulatory statistical return for disposals in previous years. However there is no requirement for providers to inform the Tenant Services Authority in advance of their intention to dispose at some point in the future.

#### Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on how many occasions he has met representatives of the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities since May 2010. [38616]

**Robert Neill:** The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and members of the ministerial team have met representatives of the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities three times.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

#### Atos Origin

**Rosie Cooper:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what date his Department’s contract with Atos Origin is due for renewal. [37665]

**Chris Grayling:** The DWP Medical Services contract was awarded to Atos Healthcare, a division of Atos Origin, in 2005 for a period of seven years, with the option to extend for a further three and then for a further two. In 2009, the Department negotiated an extension to the contract to 31 August 2015 in order to allow for the completion of incapacity benefit (IB) to ESA migration.

#### Cold Weather Payments: Vale of Glamorgan

**Alun Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 21 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 1180W, on cold weather payments, what temperatures were recorded at St Athan Weather Station between 17 December and 23 December 2009. [33067]

**Steve Webb:** Meteorological (Met) Office data for the St Athan weather station for recorded temperatures between 17 December and 23 December 2009 was as follows:

Date	Daily max <sup>1</sup>	Temperature (°C)		
		Daily min <sup>1</sup>	Mean daily NCM <sup>1</sup>	
17 December 2009	5.5	1.7	3.6	
18 December 2009	2.1	-1.3	0.4	
19 December 2009	5.4	-4.6	0.4	
20 December 2009	4.1	-3.2	0.4	
21 December 2009	2.6	-0.8	0.9	
22 December 2009	5.8	-4.0	0.9	

Date	Daily max <sup>1</sup>	Temperature (°C)		Mean daily NCM <sup>1</sup>
		Daily min <sup>1</sup>		
23 December 2009	5.0	-3.5		0.8

<sup>1</sup> 0900-0900.

### Council Tax Benefits

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his estimates of marginal rates of withdrawal in the welfare reform White Paper take account of payments of council tax benefit. [38848]

**Steve Webb:** All analysis presented to date includes the 20% council tax benefit taper when looking at marginal deduction rates in the current tax and benefit system. It also includes council tax support within the universal credit and is subject to the single overall taper of 65% when calculating marginal deduction rates under universal credit.

The Government's announcement that they would give local authorities more say on the administration of council tax benefit will have implications for universal credit. As stated in the recent White Paper, "Universal Credit: Welfare That Works", the Government will work closely with local government and the devolved Administrations to develop the details of the proposal and to ensure that this reform does not undermine the positive impact of universal credit on work incentives.

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people in receipt of council tax benefit are in employment; [38849]

(2) what the average weekly council tax benefit payment was to (a) claimants of working age and (b) pensioners in each local authority area in the latest period for which figures are available; [38850]

(3) what the average weekly council tax benefit payment to recipients in work was in the latest period for which figures are available; [38888]

(4) how many persons in receipt of council tax benefit are in employment in each local authority area; [38889]

(5) what the average weekly council tax benefit payment was for claimants in work in each local authority area in the latest period for which figures are available. [38872]

**Steve Webb:** The information requested regarding the economic status of council tax benefit (CTB) recipients is not available.

A copy of the available information has been placed in the Library.

*Notes:*

1. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.

2. Case load figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Average awards are shown as pounds per week and rounded to the nearest penny.

3. SHBE is a monthly electronic scan of claimant level data direct from local authority computer systems.

It replaces quarterly aggregate clerical returns.

The data are available monthly from November 2008 and October 2010 is the latest available.

4. Data from SHBE incorporate the local authority changes from 1 April 2009.

5. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

6. People claiming council tax benefit not in receipt of a passported benefit are recorded as being in employment if their local authority has recorded employment income from either the main claimant, or partner of claimant (if applicable), in calculating the housing benefit award. People receiving passported benefits who are working part-time cannot be identified.

7. Age groups are based on the age on the count date (second Thursday in the month), of either:

(a) the recipient if they are single, or

(b) the elder of the recipient or partner if claiming as a couple

8. Those local authorities shown in bold relate to an earlier or later month because of missing or incomplete data.

Numbers differ slightly due to recipients movements between LAs.

9. Housing benefit caseload and average weekly amounts are available at local authority area level and these are published on the Department's website at

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbctb.asp>

*Source:*

Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE).

### Departmental Marketing

**Conor Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost to the public purse was of the manufacture and distribution of Department branded drinks coasters in the last financial year for which figures are available. [37234]

**Chris Grayling:** Nothing has been spent by DWP on Department branded drinks coasters in the current financial year (2010-11) and £1,468.49 was spent in 2009-10.

### Departmental Procurement

**Jon Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what single tender contracts his Department has awarded since his appointment; and what the monetary value is of each contract above the EU public procurement threshold. [36196]

**Chris Grayling:** A total of 50 contracts have been awarded by single tender over the period from 12 May 2010 to present date. The majority are science research and technical support requirements for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and research contracts.

The total number of single tender contracts awarded with an anticipated value above EU public procurement thresholds (taken as £101,000 or €393,000) is 12.

The information has been placed in the Library comprising details of all single tender contracts (50) as specifically requested, and identifying 12 of those contracts as above the relevant threshold.

### Departmental Regulation

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what regulations his Department has removed since 6 May 2010. [37391]

**Chris Grayling:** The Employment and Support Allowance (Transitional Provisions, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) (Existing Awards) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/875) were revoked by the Employment and Support Allowance (Transitional Provisions, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) (Existing Awards) (Revocation) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/1906)

The following regulations were revoked by the Equality Act 2010 (Disability) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/2128):

The Disability Discrimination (Meaning of Disability) Regulations 1996 (S.I. 1996/1455)

The Disability Discrimination (Providers of Services) (Adjustment of Premises) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 2001/3253)

The Disability Discrimination (Blind and Partially Sighted Persons) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 2003/712)

The Disability Discrimination (Employment Field) (Leasehold Premises) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 2004/153)

The Disability Discrimination (Educational Institutions) (Alteration of Leasehold Premises) Regulations 2005 (S.I. 2005/1070)

The Disability Discrimination (Service Providers and Public Authorities Carrying Out Functions) Regulations 2005 (S.I. 2005/2901)

The Disability Discrimination (Private Clubs etc) Regulations 2005 (S.I. 2005/3258)

The Disability Discrimination (Premises) Regulations 2006 (S.I. 2006/887).

The Vaccine Damage Payment (Specified Disease) Order (S.I. 2009/2516) was revoked by the Vaccine Damage Payments (Specified Disease) (Revocation and Savings) Order 2010 (S.I. 2010/1988).

The Transfer of State Pensions and Benefits Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (SR (NI) 2007/286) were revoked by the Transfer of State Pensions and Benefits (Amendment) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/1825).

### Disability Living Allowance: Scotland

**Mr Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in receipt of disability living allowance and aged between 25 and 35 years are resident in (a) Dumfries and Galloway local authority area and (b) Dumfries and Galloway constituency; and how many of these are also in receipt of (i) housing benefit and (ii) local housing allowance. [31535]

**Maria Miller:** The number of people in receipt of disability living allowance and aged between 25 and 35 years (inclusive) resident in (a) Dumfries and Galloway local authority area and (b) Dumfries and Galloway constituency are provided in the following table.

The numbers also in receipt of (i) housing benefit and (ii) local housing allowance are not available. Information is available on the number of housing benefit claimants in receipt of a passporting benefit. However because disability living allowance is not a housing benefit passporting benefit the number of DLA claimants also receiving housing benefit is not available.

	All	Number	
		Age of claimant 25 to 35 (inclusive)	Other
Dumfries and Galloway local authority	10,130	590	9,540
Dumfries and Galloway parliamentary constituency	6,740	430	6,310

#### Notes:

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Figures do not include people with entitlement where the payment has been suspended, for example if they are in hospital.
3. Constituencies used are for the Westminster Parliament of May 2010.

#### Source:

DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, May 2010

### Employment and Support Allowance: Fife

**Mr Gordon Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of claimants of employment and support allowance in Fife local authority area have been judged fit for work since May 2008; how many appeals against such determinations were initiated; and how many such appeals were granted. [37452]

**Chris Grayling:** Employment and support allowance (ESA) was introduced in October 2008. Eligibility for ESA is determined by the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

Between October 2008 and May 2010 (the latest data available), 3,220 or 46% of people who made an application for ESA in the Fife local authority area were found fit for work at the initial WCA.

There have been 890 appeals concluded from people who started their claim for ESA in Fife between October 2008 and November 2009 (the latest data available). These are cases that have been found fit for work at initial WCA, have appealed this decision and had their appeal heard by the Tribunals Service. Of those appeals that have been heard, 390 found in favour of the appellant, meaning their entitlement to ESA was reinstated.

Information on the number of appeals that have been initiated but not yet concluded is not available.

Due to the time it takes for appeals to be submitted to the Tribunals Service and heard, it is likely there are more appeals that have not yet been heard, so the number of appeals is likely to change as more up to date information becomes available. The data presented above come from benefit claims data held by the Department for Work and Pensions, functional assessment data from Atos Healthcare and appeals data from the Tribunals Service. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

The Department regularly publishes official statistics on ESA and the WCA. The latest report was published in January 2011 and can be found on the internet at the following link:

[http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa\\_wca/index.php?page=esa\\_wca\\_arc](http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/index.php?page=esa_wca_arc)

### Employment and Support Allowance: Scotland

**Sheila Gilmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 28 October 2010, *Official Report*, column 432W, on employment

and support allowance: Scotland, what proportion of the 37 per cent. of claimants for employment and support allowance that terminated their claims before their assessment was completed (a) entered employment, (b) claimed jobseeker's allowance and (c) claimed income support between October 2008 and February 2010.

[37355]

**Chris Grayling:** Of people claiming employment support allowance (ESA) in Scotland who ended their claim between October 2008 and February 2010 before their work capability assessment (WCA) was complete, administrative data shows that:

31% claimed jobseeker's allowance; and

4% claimed income support.

Note that for 43% of leavers the destination is not known. Only destinations which occur within six weeks of the end of the ESA claim are recorded. These statistics are based on combining information on people claiming ESA who ended their claim before completing assessment with information on the destination of people leaving benefit.

Statistics on the number of people leaving ESA and going into work are not available from administrative data. However a recent survey on ESA ("Employment and Support Allowance: Findings from a face-to-face survey of customers") recorded that around 41% of participants who left ESA before completing assessment had then moved into some form of employment. This would account for a substantial proportion of the 43% of leavers with an unknown destination. See section 5.3, page 70 onwards of the survey for further details:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep707.pdf>

### **Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment**

**Sheila Gilmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 25 January 2011, *Official Report*, columns 5-6WS, on incapacity benefit reassessment, how many of the incapacity benefit customers reassessed in the trials taking place in Aberdeen and Burnley were (a) placed in the employment and support allowance (ESA) support group, (b) placed in the work-related activity group and (c) found ineligible for ESA; and how many of those found ineligible for ESA have subsequently made a claim for jobseeker's allowance. [37342]

**Chris Grayling:** The IB re-assessment trials have been running in Aberdeen and Burnley since October 2010. In total 1,700 people will go through the IB reassessment process in these areas.

As the trials have not yet concluded, we do not have complete information on the results of the work capability assessments that have been carried out nor their subsequent destinations. Prior to national reassessment, the Department will be examining the available information on outcomes of work capability assessments conducted as part of the trial.

The Department is also conducting research into the views and experiences of customers and staff involved in trial IB reassessment. A report of this will be published in the DWP research report series in spring 2011.

### **Employment: Scotland**

**Mr Gordon Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in (a) Fife local authority area and (b) Scotland have been placed into employment as a result of funding from the Future Jobs Fund in each year since the scheme's inception.

[37450]

**Chris Grayling:** The most recent Young Person's Guarantee statistics were published on 19 January 2011 and are available here:

[http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/jsa/ypg/ypg\\_jan2011.pdf](http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/jsa/ypg/ypg_jan2011.pdf)

Statistics are available on the Future Jobs Fund which covers the period from October 2009 to the end of October 2010. They show that there were 7,740 recorded Future Jobs Fund starts in Scotland. Of which 430 were in the Fife local authority area.

### **Housing Benefit: Disability Living Allowance**

**Barry Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will assess the effects of his proposed cap on the level of household benefits on the number of applications for disability living allowance.

[36431]

**Maria Miller:** Households which include a member who is receiving disability living allowance will be exempt from the impacts of the benefit cap. This is in acknowledgement that DLA recipients face additional costs of every day living.

Claims for disability living allowance will continue to be determined by the assessment process.

We are unable to predict the effects of the benefit cap on the number of applications for disability living allowance.

On 6 December we launched a consultation on the reform of disability living allowance with the key proposal of a new benefit, to be known as personal independence payment, which will be introduced from 2013. The consultation proposed that personal independence payment should be subject to a new, more objective assessment process enabling us to more accurately and consistently assess individuals to determine who will benefit most from additional support.

### **Offshore Industry: Safety**

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 300W, on methane: natural gas, whether the Offshore Installations and Wells (Design and Construction, etc) Regulations 1996 cover (a) onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane and (b) hydraulic fracturing. [37471]

**Chris Grayling:** HSE has regulatory responsibility for the safety of these activities and so as Minister responsible for Health and Safety I am providing a response to this question. I can confirm that well construction and well integrity activities associated with onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane, and hydraulic fracturing, are within scope of the Offshore Installations and Wells (Design and Construction, etc.) Regulations 1996.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 300W, on methane: natural gas, what the legislative and regulatory provisions refer specifically to (a) onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane and (b) hydraulic fracturing; and whether such provisions have been reviewed and amended in the last two years. [37472]

**Chris Grayling:** HSE has regulatory responsibility for the safety of these activities and so as Minister responsible for Health and Safety I am providing a response to this question. I can confirm that no health and safety legislation specifically refers to onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane, or hydraulic fracturing.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and most of the regulations made under the Act apply to these work activities. Some regulations (e.g. Offshore Installation and Wells (Design and Construction, etc) Regulations 1996 and the Borehole Sites and Operations Regulations 1995) place specific requirements on work activities associated with the onshore extraction of petroleum (oil or gas), which includes onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane.

The regulations which place specific requirements on work activities associated with the onshore extraction of petroleum have not been reviewed or amended in the last two years, but the guidance to these regulations was updated in 2008.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer which the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), gave to you on 24 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 67W. This sets out the other regulatory bodies and provisions in place relevant to these activities.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 300W, on methane: natural gas, whether he has had recent discussions at Ministerial or official level on the preparedness of the Health and Safety Executive for onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane using hydraulic fracturing. [37526]

**Chris Grayling:** HSE has regulatory responsibility for the safety of these activities and so as Minister responsible for Health and Safety I am providing a response to this question. The Health and Safety Executive have confirmed to me their preparedness for onshore drilling for shale gas and coal bed methane using hydraulic fracturing.

## Parkinson's Disease

**David T. C. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the suitability of the work capability assessment for people with (a) Parkinson's disease and (b) other long-term fluctuating neurological conditions. [37853]

**Chris Grayling:** The WCA is a functional assessment—it is not based on someone's diagnosis or health condition but on their functional capability. It is based on the principle that a health condition or disability should not automatically be regarded as a barrier to work and aims to identify whether an individual, with the right support, could prepare for a return to suitable work.

The WCA is designed to recognise fluctuating conditions—rather than being a 'snap shot', it looks at capability most of the time: if someone is unable to do something reliably, repeatedly and safely they are considered unable to do it at all.

Having accepted all the recommendations of Professor Harrington's first independent review, we have now appointed him to conduct a second independent review in which he will focus in particular on fluctuating conditions. Professor Harrington will work with organisations representing people with fluctuating conditions to review and recommend improvements to the assessment.

## Social Security Benefits

**Kate Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the likely effect on the number of couples choosing to live apart for financial reasons of his proposed cap on the maximum annual amount of benefits one family can claim. [37094]

**Chris Grayling:** No assessment has been made of the likely effects on the number of families choosing to live apart as a result of the household cap on total benefit income.

## Social Security Benefits: Kirkcaldy

**Mr Gordon Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of the working age population of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath constituency are in receipt of (a) jobseeker's allowance, (b) unemployment allowance, (c) carer's allowance, (d) disability living allowance, (e) widow's or bereavement benefit and (f) other income support. [37454]

**Chris Grayling:** The information is as follows:

*Working age client group split by statistical group in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, May 2010*

<i>Statistical group</i>	<i>Caseload</i>	<i>Percentage of population</i>
All	9,540	16.5
Job seeker	2,940	5.1
Incapacity benefits	3,580	6.2
Lone parents	1,270	2.2
Carer	810	1.4
Other on income related benefits	140	0.2
Disabled	660	1.1



*Working age client group split by statistical group in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, May 2010*

<i>Statistical group</i>	<i>Caseload</i>	<i>Percentage of population</i>
Bereaved	140	0.2

*Notes:*

1. Data are rounded to the nearest 10, percentages to one decimal place.
2. Constituencies used are for the Westminster Parliament of May 2010.
3. Percentage population figures have been calculated using General Register Office for Scotland population estimates as at 2008 for working age claimants, i.e. males aged 16 to 64 and females aged 16 to 59.
4. State pension age: The age at which women reach state pension age will gradually increase from 60 to 65 between April 2010 and April 2020. This will introduce a small increase to the number of working age benefit recipients and a small reduction to the number of pension age recipients. As percentages were required this table has been prepared using males aged 16 to 64 and females aged 16 to 59 and will therefore not match published figures.
5. Statistical group is a hierarchical variable. A person who fits into more than one category will appear only in the top-most one for which they are eligible. For example a claimant of disability living allowance and jobseeker's allowance would appear in "Job seeker", not in "Disabled".
6. Lone parents are defined as claimants on income support with child under 16 and no partner. Lone parent obligations were introduced from 24 November 2008 affecting the age of the youngest child.
7. From November 2008 the "incapacity benefits group" includes employment and support allowance (ESA). ESA replaced incapacity benefit and income support paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claims from 27 October 2008. Prior to this the "incapacity benefits group" referred to claimants of incapacity benefit (including credits only) or severe disablement allowance including people claiming IS on the grounds of incapacity.
8. Caseload figures used for AA, CA and DLA include those cases with entitlement but where payment is currently suspended (for example, because of an extended stay in hospital or an overlapping benefit).
9. The key benefits which are currently included in the working-age client group data are: Bereavement benefit Carer's allowance Disability living allowance Incapacity benefit Severe disablement allowance Income support (including pension credit for males aged 60 to 64) Jobseeker's allowance Widow's benefit.

*Source:*

DWP Information Directorate 100% WPLS. General Register Office for Scotland Mid-Term Population Estimates, 2008.

### Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations

**Dr Whiteford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether staffing levels were increased during the trial of the reassessments of customers receiving incapacity benefit and income support in north east Scotland. [37625]

**Chris Grayling:** Increased provision was made for the additional activities involved in the delivery of the reassessment trial. Approximately 20 benefit centre staff were redeployed for the period of the exercise. No new staff were recruited.

**Dr Whiteford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how long appeals by customers against benefit entitlement reassessments during the trial in north east Scotland took to process on average. [37629]

**Chris Grayling:** The IB reassessment trial is still under way. Due to the end to end length of the customer journey, it is too early to provide information on the number of customers who have asked to appeal against their decision and how long the appeals will take to process.

### Work Capability Assessment

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received on the work capability assessment. [37856]

**Chris Grayling:** We welcome the first Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment, led by Professor Malcolm Harrington. Published on 23 November 2010, it is a thorough review that has reviewed a substantial amount of evidence. To inform the review, Professor Harrington made a call for evidence, to which he had over 400 responses. The responses came from individuals, organisations and representative bodies.

As a result of his review of this evidence, Professor Harrington has come forward with a wide range of far-reaching and challenging proposals which the Government fully support.

We are committed to taking forward the review's recommendations so that we can make the system fairer and more effective. The Government response to Professor Harrington's review sets out how and when we will implement the recommendations of the review, the majority of which will be in place in time for the national roll-out of the incapacity benefits Reassessment programme.

**Natascha Engel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the backlog of work capability assessment claims awaiting hearing of an appeal by the Tribunal Service to be cleared; and if he will make a statement. [37933]

**Mr Djanogly:** I have been asked to reply.

There are always a number of 'live' appeals in the first tier tribunal—social security and child support (SSCS) progressing through the stages of receipt, decision and promulgation. This total level of work in hand cannot be described as a backlog.

As the volume of SSCS receipts has increased significantly and rapidly beyond original forecasts, the capacity of the Tribunals Service to deal with them has also increased in response; the number of employment support allowance and incapacity benefit cases disposed of in the second quarter of 2010-11 were more than double those cleared in the equivalent period the preceding year.

In September 2010, in respect of employment support allowance and incapacity benefit appeals, capacity increases made within SSCS, meant that around a third of the work in hand was in excess of normal levels. As the Tribunals Service capacity continues to increase, it expects to return to normal levels of work in hand for employment support allowance and incapacity benefit cases by summer 2011.

**Natascha Engel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in respect of how many work capability assessments the Jobcentre Plus decision-makers' final decision differed from the initial Atos recommendation in the latest period for which figures are available; and how many of those cases were returned to Atos for reconsideration. [37935]

**Chris Grayling:** Employment and support allowance (ESA) was introduced in October 2008. A key factor in determining eligibility for ESA is the work capability assessment (WCA). The WCA is carried out by health care professionals employed by Atos Healthcare. A report of the WCA is then sent to Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus decision makers (JCP DMs) have to consider all the available information before making a decision on benefit entitlement. Any additional evidence provided by a customer's GP or consultant is important and is fully considered as part of this process.

The Department therefore holds information on both the recommendation made by Atos Healthcare at assessment and separate information on the JCP DM's final decision. We can determine where the decision differs but not why the decision was changed or whether a case was returned for reconsideration. Where the final JCP DM decision differs to the original Atos recommendation we refer to the decision being a result of "at reconsideration" which may or not involve a return of the case to Atos.

The number of people for whom Atos recommended they be placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) and the Support Group (SG) and additional people who were placed in the WRAG or SG based on the JCP DM decision is presented in the following table. Please note that the impact of appeals is not included.

*Table 1: ATOS recommendations of placement in the ESA Work Related Activity Group and additional people placed in the ESA Work Related Activity Group at reconsideration by Jobcentre Plus decision maker*

<i>Claim start month</i>	<i>WRAG—based on ATOS recommendation</i>	<i>Additional people placed in WRAG at reconsideration by JCP DM</i>
<i>2008</i>		
October	1,200	80
November	5,700	370
December	5,420	330
<i>2009</i>		
January	7,450	460
February	6,920	450
March	8,050	580
April	7,750	600
May	7,820	580
June	8,480	690
July	8,690	740
August	8,120	710
September	8,840	840
October	8,160	860
November	7,900	780
December	6,850	660
<i>2010</i>		
January	8,800	830

*Table 1: ATOS recommendations of placement in the ESA Work Related Activity Group and additional people placed in the ESA Work Related Activity Group at reconsideration by Jobcentre Plus decision maker*

<i>Claim start month</i>	<i>WRAG—based on ATOS recommendation</i>	<i>Additional people placed in WRAG at reconsideration by JCP DM</i>
February	8,300	700
March	8,670	700
April	8,020	690
May	7,110	620
Total	148,270	12,230

*Table 2: ATOS recommendations of placement in the ESA Support Group and additional people placed in the ESA Support Group at reconsideration by Jobcentre Plus decision maker*

<i>Claim start month</i>	<i>SG—based on ATOS recommendation</i>	<i>Additional people moved to SG—at reconsideration</i>
<i>2008</i>		
October	670	40
November	2,670	250
December	2,440	240
<i>2009</i>		
January	2,960	300
February	2,660	300
March	3,000	340
April	2,900	320
May	2,970	330
June	3,040	370
July	3,480	350
August	3,030	340
September	3,430	320
October	2,950	350
November	3,030	320
December	2,660	280
<i>2010</i>		
January	3,040	290
February	2,810	260
March	3,150	290
April	2,950	250
May	2,680	230
Total	56,480	5,770

### Work Capability Assessment

**Duncan Hames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many re-assessments of work capability assessments were undertaken within (a) three months, (b) three to six months, (c) six to nine months, (d) 12 to 15 months and (e) 15 to 18 months of the original assessment in each of the last three years. [37673]

**Chris Grayling:** Employment and support allowance (ESA) was introduced in October 2008. Eligibility for ESA is determined by the work capability assessment (WCA).

Following the first WCA, those placed on the benefit will be given a provisional date for reassessment via a further WCA. The timing of this is determined by the nature of their health condition(s).

The table shows the number of initial reassessments via the WCA process that have occurred in the time periods shown, at the national level.

Data are provided for ESA claims starting from October 2008 up to May 2010, the latest data available.

These figures are subject to change as more up to date information becomes available.

Time between initial and 1 <sup>st</sup> repeat WCA	Number of repeat WCA nationally		
	October 2008 to March 2009	Date of ESA claim start	
		April 2009 to March 2010	April 2010 to May 2010
Within 3 months	250	400	60
3 to 6 months	1,130	6,150	620
6 to 9 months	6,010	20,540	60
9 to 12 months	4,660	6,880	0
12 to 15 months	8,380	5,860	0
15 to 18 months	3,660	980	0

Source:

Benefit claims data held by the Department for Work and Pensions

The Department regularly publishes official statistics on ESA and the WCA, the latest report was released in January 2011. The reports can be found on the internet here:

[http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa\\_wca/index.php?page=esa\\_wca\\_arc](http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/index.php?page=esa_wca_arc)

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Apprentices: Newton Abbot

**Anne Marie Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will bring forward proposals to assist employers in Newton Abbot constituency to take on an apprentice. [36519]

**Mr Hayes:** We are committed to expanding the Apprenticeship programme nationally and we are determined to make it easier for employers of all sizes and in all regions to take on apprentices. In England, we have increased funding for Apprenticeships to over £1.4 billion in the 2011-12 financial year. This means we will have funding in place to train over 300,000 apprentices (at all ages).

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has worked closely with South Devon College on a joint initiative to increase the number of new Apprenticeship places in the South Devon area, including Newton Abbot, and is also promoting the local 'Skills Boost' initiative

As part of National Apprenticeship Week (7 to 11 February 2011), the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has arranged a number of local events in the area, including in Newton Abbot, where I understand that my hon. Friend, the Member for Newton Abbot will be meeting local apprentices recruited to the new Building Services framework.

### Carers: Flexible Working

**Dr Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had with (a) employers and (b) carers' organisations on possible changes to flexible working opportunities for carers. [R] [38167]

**Mr Davey:** I have had a number of discussions with employer and employee representative groups, including carers' organisations, to discuss the Government's commitment to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees. This extension will enable more carers, including friends and neighbours, to request flexible working to support their caring responsibilities.

I will shortly launch a full consultation on the extension to the right to request flexible working alongside proposals on flexible parental leave and equal pay.

### Exports

**John Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department is taking to encourage new exports. [36590]

**Mr Prisk:** The Government will shortly publish a Trade and Investment White Paper which will set out the Government's framework for encouraging trade and investment in the UK and internationally.

Linked to this, UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) is developing a new strategy as part of the Government's growth review. This will set out new priorities for trade promotion. It is through these activities this Department encourages businesses new to exporting to discover and seize international opportunities, and more experienced exporters to improve their exporting capability.

UKTI services are delivered through a network of international trade advisers in England, partner organisations in the devolved Administrations and staff in 96 overseas markets. In 2009/10, UKTI provided significant help to some 23,600 exporters generating over £5 billion of added value to the UK economy.

### Higher Education

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the quality of information higher education institutions make available to potential students; and if he will make a statement. [38555]

**Mr Willetts:** The Government's future vision for higher education is a system where students have real choice. As such, a major priority for the Government is to

improve the quality of information available to potential students, so that more informed choices on course and university can be made.

Last year the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned detailed research to identify the key pieces of information which students say they find useful. This has directly informed the development of the proposed Key Information Set (KIS).

The introduction of the KIS is a significant step forward. It will provide a standard set of 17 items of information for each course, to be made available on university websites. However, I see this as just the start of a process to radically increase the quality of information available to students, to present it in much more innovative ways, and to encourage new providers into the student information market.

HEFCE are currently holding a public consultation on the content of the KIS. Final recommendations will be made by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group in spring 2011, and a further statement will be made in the Higher Education White Paper.

### Higher Education: Admissions

**Mr Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what proportion of (a) undergraduate and (b) postgraduate degree starters were (i) men and (ii) women in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [37992]

(2) what proportion of (a) undergraduate and (b) postgraduate degree starts were non-EU students in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [37993]

**Mr Willetts:** The latest available information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is shown in the table. Figures for the 2010/11 academic year will be available in January 2012.

*Proportion of entrants<sup>1</sup> to postgraduate courses<sup>2</sup> and undergraduate degree courses<sup>3</sup> by gender and domicile. UK higher education institutions. Academic year 2009/10*

	Percentage	
	Postgraduate	Undergraduate degree
Female	55	55
Male	45	45
UK	62	86
EU	8	5
Non-EU	29	9

<sup>1</sup> Covers entrants of all domiciles to both full-time and part-time courses.

<sup>2</sup> Covers entrants to all postgraduate courses.

<sup>3</sup> Cover entrants to first degree courses only, therefore excludes other undergraduate courses such as foundation degrees, HND/Cs etc.

*Note:*

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population. Due to rounding, components may not sum 100%.

*Source:*

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

**Charlotte Leslie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many and what proportion of students who were (a) eligible and (b) not eligible for free school meals at the age of 16 years started undergraduate courses in 2010; [38003]

(2) how many and what proportion of students who were (a) eligible and (b) not eligible for free school meals at the age of 16 years began undergraduate courses at Russell Group universities in 2010. [38004]

**Mr Willetts:** The requested information is not available for 2010. The most recent data available for the 2007/08 academic year have been provided in the table and relate to pupils aged 15 rather than age 16. Figures for the 2008/09 academic year will be available later this year.

It is known that not all pupils who are eligible for free school meals claim them. Such pupils would be excluded from these figures. These rounded estimates allow for a small margin of error that arises as result of the matching procedure deployed.

*Estimates of the number and proportion of pupils aged 15 in 2003/04, in English maintained schools, who progressed to HE by age 19 in 2007/08*

		Number	Percentage (%)
Young persons in UK HE <sup>1</sup>	FSM <sup>2</sup>	12,600	15
	Non-FSM <sup>2</sup>	169,500	33
of which Russell Group HEIs	FSM	1,100	1
	Non-FSM	34,000	7

<sup>1</sup> Includes HE level courses at English further education colleges.

<sup>2</sup> FSM and non-FSM indicate receipt and non-receipt of free school meals respectively.

*Note:*

In 2003/04 there were 82,800 maintained school pupils aged 15 claiming free school meals. This represents 14% of all pupils in English maintained schools.

*Source:*

Matched data from the National Pupil Database, the Higher Education Statistics Agency Student Record and the Individualised Learner Record. All figures are estimates and numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100.

### Higher Education: Applications

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether his Department plans to make alternative provision for higher education for university applicants who are unsuccessful in application for university places in the academic years to 2015-16. [37618]

**Mr Willetts:** Entry to university is and should be competitive. Universities offer places on the basis of merit. Inevitably, not all applicants will gain a place. Many of these applicants will, however, be successful in subsequent years. A strong demand for places was expected this year so universities will be able to recruit the same number of new students in 2011 as in 2010. In addition, this Government have already expanded the alternatives to university, by providing 50,000 new places on apprenticeships, for which there is rising employer demand. Our reforms will also make part-time university study more accessible.

### Higher Education: Science

**Dr Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had with higher education institutions on promoting science and innovation; and if he will make a statement. [38710]

**Mr Willetts:** I have had many recent discussions on promoting science and innovation with higher education institutions (HEIs), both individually and through representative bodies. My statement to Parliament on 20 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 135WS, sets out the Government's position.

### Industrial Health and Safety

**Alok Sharma:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what progress his Department has made in reviewing the (a) employment law and (b) health and safety regulations for which it is responsible since his appointment. [36970]

**Mr Davey:** The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is leading the employment law review across Government. This is an ongoing project where Departments with responsibility for employment law, including BIS, are considering their legislation area by area. As part of this, we last week published a consultation on reforming the employment tribunal system, "Resolving Workplace Disputes", which is a major first step in the review.

This Department is not responsible for health and safety at work regulations, which fall to the Department for Work and Pensions.

### Nuclear Power: Training

**John Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department is taking to encourage school leavers to train in nuclear engineering. [36592]

**Mr Hayes:** The UK and global Nuclear New Build industry, together with decommissioning both in the UK and in other markets, represents a huge career opportunity, requiring new entrants. The Government are working with skills partners to ensure career opportunities are realised from this market and employers have the skills they need. Demand is being raised among school leavers through road shows, the children's and adults' careers information services, the STEM ambassadors programme, and the development of new qualifications. There is strong demand for specialist nuclear apprenticeship, further education and degree programmes, as well as for the generic engineering construction skills needed by the industry.

### Overseas Students: Loans

**Esther McVey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what measures are in place to ensure that students from other EU countries studying in the UK repay their student loans after leaving the UK. [38330]

**Mr Willetts:** Student loans in England are only available to those who meet the relevant residence requirements. The Student Loans Company (SLC) applies the same mechanisms to all borrowers who move overseas after leaving their course.

When borrowers move abroad, whether temporarily or because they live in another country, they must give the SLC information about their location and earnings. SLC will determine whether the borrower should be making repayments and if so, gives them a monthly

repayment schedule under the terms of the contract of the loan. The SLC will convert the income into pound sterling and tell the borrower the amount they will need to pay each month in pound sterling.

Where borrowers move overseas and do not notify the SLC, they may be charged penalties which will be added to the outstanding loan amount. They may also have to pay the costs of any trace agents employed by SLC. In some circumstances, they may have to repay the full outstanding amount in a single payment.

Effective collection of student loans across the EU is underpinned by EC regulation 44/2001, which allows the SLC to obtain judgments in UK courts which can be enforced by courts in other EU countries. Borrowers who choose to disregard their obligation will be pursued by SLC and where appropriate, court orders will be sought.

### Overseas Trade: Israel

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the contribution to the economy of trade with Israel. [38604]

**Mr Prisk:** The benefits of international trade to the economy result from greater economic efficiency due to a combination of increased competition in markets, comparative advantages, economies of scale, increased opportunities for learning, and greater incentives for innovation. Due to the difficulty of differentiating between the impact of trade and other factors on growth, it is not possible to quantify precisely the impact of trade with another country on the economy.

The UK exports of goods and services to Israel in 2009 were worth the equivalent of about 0.12% of UK Gross Domestic Product at market prices. Imports from Israel were worth the equivalent of about 0.10% of GDP.

### Part-time Education

**Mr Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) 18 to 24 year olds and (b) over 24 year olds studied on (i) part-time undergraduate degrees, (ii) part-time foundation degrees and (iii) part-time other undergraduate degrees in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [38117]

**Mr Willetts:** The numbers of English-domiciled part-time undergraduate enrolments at UK higher education institutions are shown by age group and level of study in Table 1. Figures are taken from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record and are provided for the 2009/10 academic year. Figures for the 2010/11 academic year will become available from January 2012.

The numbers of English-domiciled part-time undergraduate enrolments at English further education colleges are shown by age group and level of study in Table 2. Figures are taken from the Skills Funding Agency Individualised Learning Record and are provided for the 2008/09 academic year. Figures for the 2009/10 academic year will become available later this year.

Table 1: English-domiciled part-time undergraduate enrolments by age group and level of study UK higher education institutions. Academic year 2009/10

Level of study	Age group			Total
	Under 18	18-24	25 and over	
First degree	225	41,115	130,435	171,770
Foundation degree	40	8,765	27,270	36,080
Other undergraduate <sup>1</sup>	6,765	35,115	205,295	247,180

<sup>1</sup> Includes students enrolled on higher national diplomas (HNDs), higher national certificates (HNCs), diplomas and certificates of higher education, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at undergraduate level and other sub-degree courses.

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, so components may not sum to totals.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record

Table 2: English-domiciled part-time undergraduate enrolments by age group and level of study English further education colleges. Academic year 2008/09

Level of study	Age group			Total
	Under 18	18-24	25 and over	
First degree	5	4,250	3,815	8,065
Foundation degree	160	14,185	42,285	56,625
Other undergraduate <sup>1</sup>	30	6,765	8,580	15,375

<sup>1</sup> Includes students enrolled on higher national diplomas (HNDs), higher national certificates (HNCs), diplomas and certificates of higher education and other sub-degree courses.

Note:

Figures have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, so components may not sum to totals.

Source:

Skills Funding Agency Individualised Learning Record (L05).

### Post Offices

**Caroline Nokes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to ensure post offices are able to provide a variety of services to customers. [38203]

**Mr Davey:** We set out our plans for the future of the post office network, including the variety of services that customers will be able to access, in our policy statement "Securing the Post Office Network in the Digital Age", published on 9 November 2010. This includes our aim to see the post office becoming a genuine front office for Government at both the local and national level, and the expansion of accessible and affordable financial services.

Copies of the policy statement have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Skills and Jobs Retention Group

**Dr Huppert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the membership of the Skills and Jobs Retention Group is; whether it has met since its establishment; and if he will make a statement. [38193]

**Mr Prisk:** The Skills and Jobs Retention Group is an industry-led group created to ensure that high value skills in the defence sector can be effectively redeployed where there are industrial changes as a result of the Strategic Defence and Security Review.

The Group has had two full formal sessions: a teleconference on 17 December 2010 and a meeting on 12 January 2011. There has also been regular discussion between group members, and with other individuals, businesses and organisations to progress work. The Secretary of State met Chairman, Allan Cook, on 31 January 2011 to discuss the activity under way and progress overall. By the end of March 2011, the Group will have developed an action plan to assist redeployment, which will be considered as part of the ongoing work to remove barriers to growth and improve conditions for business success within the Advanced Manufacturing strand of the Growth Review.

### Social Enterprises

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) not-for-profit and (b) community interest companies were registered in each of the last five years. [38462]

**Mr Davey:** Companies House does not differentiate between not for profit and other companies, therefore the information is not available. The number of community interest companies registered in each of the last five years is as follows.

	Number of community interest companies
2007	44
2008	872
2009	1,298
2010	1,596
2011	178

### Student Loans Company: Complaints

**Caroline Nokes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many disputes between the Student Loans Company and individuals in (a) Romsey and Southampton North constituency and (b) England were pending a resolution in the latest period for which figures are available. [38204]

**Mr Willetts:** Disputes raised with the Student Loans Company (SLC) are dealt with under the SLC's complaints handling procedures. The SLC does not organise complaints figures by constituency, but is able to identify complaints raised by individual Members of Parliament.

SLC records show my hon. Friend raised three disputes on behalf of your constituents in Romsey and Southampton North. These were dealt with in July and September 2010 and in January 2011 and there are currently no cases known to be pending a resolution.

As of 3 February, the latest date for which figures are available, a total of 149 complaints were awaiting a response from the SLC. The SLC is not readily able to say how many of these are in relation to English domiciled students.

### Students: Finance

**Mr Robin Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to allocate additional funding for student finance to university courses in (a) early years education, (b) emergency care and (c) other strategically important subjects. [37529]

**Mr Willetts:** The Higher Education Funding Council allocates funding for teaching at the institutional and course level. The Government will set out its proposals on how it sees funding for university teaching operating in future in our forthcoming White Paper. This will include proposals on the future funding of strategically important and vulnerable subjects.

### Students: Loans

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 600W, on overseas students: EU nationals, how many judgments in UK courts secured by the Student Loans Company were being actively enforced through court orders in other EU countries in the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [38558]

**Mr Willetts** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: EC Regulation 44/2001 enables the Student Loans Company (SLC) to obtain judgments in UK courts, which can be enforced by courts in other EU countries. These judgments can be enforced against any borrower who has moved to another EU member state, regardless of nationality. This route would not be available in the event that a graduate tax was implemented.

Tuition fee loans have been available for EU students since 2006/07. The first main cohort of these students commenced their repayments in April 2010, provided that their income was above the appropriate threshold.

In 2009, the SLC successfully raised nine judgments against EU borrowers. The SLC enforced some in Scottish courts and some in other EU countries. This group of borrowers were those who had left their courses and who came into repayment earlier than the first main cohort. We cannot break the information down further as it could compromise the confidentiality of individuals.

### Working Hours: EU Law

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will assess the effect of the operation of the European working time directive on levels of wellbeing. [38386]

**Mr Davey:** The working time regulations give all workers an entitlement to regular rest and annual leave and ensure that workers cannot be forced to work more than 48 hours a week on average but can agree to work beyond this limit.

Many factors contribute to well-being of which one of the most important is that people have access to employment, so it is critical that European employment measures enhance and do not undermine prospects for

employment and for growth. This will continue to be one of the key assessments of any consideration of the European working time directive.

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Carbon Emissions

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he has had discussions with (a) his officials, (b) Ministerial colleagues and (c) industry representatives on the potential effects on (i) carbon reduction targets and (ii) costs to business of changes to the carbon reduction commitment system. [38473]

**Gregory Barker:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have discussed and continue to discuss the CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme with a range of stakeholders, including participants in the scheme. My officials are also meeting a wide range of interested parties. We published a consultation paper on a first tranche of simplifications to the CRC in November last year which was produced in close co-operation with Whitehall and devolved Administration colleagues.

The changes to the scheme announced last year including the initial simplification measures set out in the consultation paper will not impact on the emissions savings potential of this scheme nor the capacity for the UK to meet its carbon budgets.

The cost impact on business of our initial changes to the CRC will depend on the extent to which participants reduce their energy consumption before they are required to purchase and surrender allowances in 2012. As previously announced, it is our intention to deliver further simplification of the CRC and detailed options are being discussed with CRC participants.

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent progress he has made on the implementation of the carbon reduction commitment. [38522]

**Gregory Barker:** The CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme went live on 1 April 2010. To date, 2,772 organisations have registered as full participants and over 12,812 organisations have made information declarations. Participants will need to submit their footprint reports and first annual reports in July this year, to inform the publication of the first Performance League Table in October. Government intend to hold the first sale of allowances, to cover emissions year 2011-12, in 2012 and to begin registration for the second phase of the scheme in 2013.

### Energy Supply

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he has made an estimate of the number of (a) owners of private electricity and gas networks and (b) tenants receiving electricity from private networks who will be affected by the ruling of the European Court of Justice on third party access. [38275]

**Charles Hendry:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on 7 December 2010, *Official report*, column 130W.

### Energy: Meters

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he has received representations on the protection of data gathered from domestic smart meters. [38284]

**Charles Hendry:** As part of the Prospectus consultation on Smart Meters, published in July 2010 we have received a number of responses covering data protection. In addition industry and consumer organisations have also raised this issue in discussions.

DECC and Ofgem are currently preparing the response to the Prospectus consultation, which will cover data protection issues in relation to the rollout of smart meters.

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment his Department has made of the implications of the Data Protection Act 1998 for the use of data gathered from smart meters by energy companies. [38575]

**Charles Hendry** [*holding answer 4 February 2011*]: The Data Protection Act (DPA) establishes a framework of rights and duties which are designed to safeguard personal data. A person who handles data (a data controller) must comply with the DPA.

As part of the Smart Meters Programme there has been a rigorous approach to assessing and managing data privacy issues. We are building on the safeguards already in place, particularly the DPA, to develop a privacy policy framework for smart meters.

The DPA applies to energy consumption data if a data controller is able to identify a living person from the data itself, or other data they may hold, eg address details. This applies to conventional and prepayment meters as well as smart meters.

### Fuel Oil: Prices

**Ms Bagshawe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he is taking steps to increase (a) competition and (b) accountability in the heating oil market. [38687]

**Charles Hendry:** The Government are sympathetic to the plight of many heating oil consumers who were hit hard by high prices and supply issues this winter.

I refer the hon. Member to my written ministerial statement laid before Parliament on 21 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 55WS. I am keen that the reasons for the high heating oil prices and supply issues this winter are thoroughly investigated by an independent authority. I wrote to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in to ask it to bring forward its competition and consumer study into off-grid energy. I also asked the OFT if the study could explore the longer term consumer issues such as lifetime payback, consumer standards and labelling for alternative energy sources or supplies. Such a study

would provide an independent assessment of the off-grid market and establish what further action may be necessary to ensure it works properly.

I welcome the independent assessment of the off-grid market to be made by the OFT, and we look forward to seeing its conclusions in advance of next winter so the lessons from this winter can be learned and any necessary changes made.

### Greenhouse Gas Emissions

**Karen Lumley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps his Department is taking to achieve its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the UK by at least 34 per cent. by 2020. [39059]

**Gregory Barker:** Latest emissions projections, published in June 2010, show that the UK is on track to meet its 2020 target, and has already reduced emissions by over 26% against 1990 levels, taking into account the effects of emissions trading. Additional policies to be implemented by the Government, such as the Green Deal, support for the world's first commercial scale CCS demonstration, and the roll-out of smart meters and a smart grid will build on this progress. Further information on the actions to take forward these policies can be found in DECC's business plan (published November 2010).

### Nuclear Power Stations

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the effects on the timetable for delivery of new nuclear build of his proposal to increase the liability cost per nuclear site on generators to cover the consequences of accidents. [38474]

**Charles Hendry:** A public consultation was published on 24 January, setting out our proposals to implement the amended Paris and Brussels conventions on nuclear third party liability. It included the proposed increase in liability levels that existing nuclear and prospective new build operators would be expected to cover in the event of a nuclear incident. We await responses to the consultation, however, we currently have no evidence to suggest that the proposed increases in liability will affect the pathway to the commercial operation of the first new nuclear power station by 2018.

### Renewable Energy

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment his Department has made of the use of used cooking oil in the provision of renewable and sustainable energy (a) for transport, (b) for heat and (c) in combined heat and power. [37880]

**Charles Hendry:** Figures from the Renewable Fuels Agency and Ofgem for the use of used cooking oil in 2009-10 in renewable energy are as follows:

(a) 43 million litres of biofuel for transport was derived from used cooking oil, representing about 3% of the total volume of biofuels supplied.

(b) data are not collected which would identify the use of used cooking oil in heat only applications.



(c) 960,000 litres have been used in combined heat and power applications, which represents about 70% of used cooking oil in the renewables obligation.

**Alex Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change which energy-from-waste producers and project developers have been contacted by his Department as part of its review of the renewables obligation banding system with regard to the deployment potential and generation costs of renewable electricity targets. [37998]

**Charles Hendry:** The following energy from waste producers and project developers have been contacted by consultants acting on DECC's behalf to collect data on technology costs and deployment potential as part of the current Renewables Obligation Banding Review:

Covanta  
Veolia  
Sita/Cofely  
Viridor  
WRG  
Amey  
Orchid-environmental  
Fichtner

Other organisations with an interest in the Banding Review are welcome to contact DECC, either now or as part of the statutory consultation later this year.

#### Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many installations of (a) solar photovoltaic panels, (b) wind turbines and (c) mini hydro-generators have occurred in (i) Glasgow, (ii) Scotland, (iii) England, (iv) Wales and (v) Northern Ireland since the establishment of the feed-in tariff scheme. [38521]

**Charles Hendry:** Data from Ofgem show that, since the establishment of the feed-in tariffs (FITs) scheme, the number of solar photovoltaic (PV), wind and hydro installations accredited for FITs in Glasgow, Scotland, England and Wales up to 31 December 2010 are:

	Glasgow	Scotland	England	Wales
Solar PVs	11	376	13,662	562
Wind	0	145	194	24
Hydro	0	11	21	13

These exclude schemes transferred into the FITs from the RO which were in operation before 15 July 2009. Information for Glasgow refers to the area covered by Glasgow council local authority. The data also exclude an additional 55 stations for which the location is yet to be identified.

Figures are not provided for Northern Ireland because the FITs scheme applies only to England, Scotland and Wales.

#### Sheffield Forgemasters: Finance

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether any concerns were raised with him by (a) his officials and (b) other individuals and organisations in respect of the likely

effects on the supply chain of the decision to withdraw the loan to Sheffield Forgemasters (i) before and (ii) after the loan was withdrawn. [38472]

**Charles Hendry:** The number of representations received from individuals and organisations on the decision to withdraw the loan to Sheffield Forgemasters were included in my written ministerial statement laid before Parliament on 3 February 2011, *Official Report*, column 49WS.

Officials provide me with advice on a wide range of issues including this.

I meet regularly with energy companies and reactor vendors who have not said that this decision will impact on the plans they have announced for new nuclear in the UK. Ultra heavy forgings for items such as pressure vessels need to be ordered a long time in advance and vendors already have slots booked with existing suppliers to ensure that when they are building reactors around the world the necessary elements are available.

## HEALTH

### Cancer: Screening

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of implementation of the provisions of the Health and Social Care Bill on the time taken by GPs to refer patients for diagnostic tests for cancer. [38107]

**Paul Burstow:** The Department has established a rolling programme of general practitioner (GP) consortium pathfinders to test the different elements involved in GP-led commissioning, such as the commissioning of diagnostic services, and to enable emerging GP consortia to get more rapidly involved in current commissioning decisions. The shadow National Health Service Commissioning Board will produce and publish an analysis of the findings of the pathfinder programme and set out the lessons learned that will be applied as consortia become formally established during 2012-13, subject to the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill 2011.

'Improving Outcomes: A Strategy for Cancer', published on 12 January, set out how the coalition government's reforms of health and care services will improve outcomes for all cancer patients. A copy has already been placed in the Library. To support the NHS to diagnose cancer earlier, we are providing £450 million over the next four years that will give GPs direct access to a range of diagnostic tests to confirm or rule out cancer and fund associated cancer treatments in secondary care. It will be the role of GP consortia to commission these additional tests.

The strategy also confirmed that the current cancer waiting time standards are clinically justified and should be retained. This means patients urgently referred with suspected cancer by their GP should be seen by a specialist within two weeks, and should receive their first treatment within 31 days from the decision to treat being made.

### Carers

**Dr Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had on the provision of carers' services in England; and if he will make a statement. [38165]

**Paul Burstow:** Ministers have had internal discussions, including the Inter-Ministerial Group in July 2010, about future support for carers in addition to meetings with voluntary and statutory sector organisations, and carers themselves. These included: a visit to BT to discuss flexible working in the workplace in August 2010; a visit to a Princess Royal Trust for Carers Centre in the North West in November 2010; a speech and question and answer at the Carers UK National Carers Summit in November 2010; and attendance at the Social Care Reference Group in December 2010, with the next meeting planned for March 2011.

The Standing Commission on Carers (SCOC) is an independent advisory body, which meets quarterly, and provides expert advice to Ministers and the Carers Strategy Cross-Government Programme Board on improving support for carers and on the longer-term strategic challenges. SCOC's membership reflects a broad range of interests and expertise from across the public, professional and voluntary sectors. The Minister plans to attend the next SCOC meeting in March 2011.

In respect of the call for views leading to the development of "Recognised, valued and supported: Next steps for the Carers Strategy", we received responses from 764 individuals and organisations. We took account of these responses when we were drafting the new strategy and deciding on our priorities for carers over the next four years.

#### Cataracts: Medical Treatments

**Mike Weatherley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available for the NHS for eye lens treatments in financial year 2011-12; and if he will make a statement. [38188]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Treatment services for ophthalmic conditions are funded from primary care trusts' (PCTs) general recurrent revenue allocations, in common with most other elements of health care. General allocations are not attributed to specific services centrally. Individual PCTs decide the distribution of resources, after taking account of local and national priorities.

#### Dental Services

**Valerie Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of primary dental care providers had registered with the Care Quality Commission by 31 December 2010. [38217]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Primary dental care providers are required to be registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) from 1 April 2011. To qualify for suspension of the offence of carrying on a regulated activity without being registered if CQC does not reach a registration decision by 1 April, transitional regulations specified that providers should submit their application by a specific date. In the case of national health service providers of primary dental care, CQC sets this date. In the case of independent sector providers, this date was set in the regulations at 31 December 2010. As CQC set the application date for the majority of providers, figures are not available for the numbers of providers who had submitted an application by 31 December 2010.

As at 2 February 2011, 7,005 primary dental care providers had submitted an application for registration. Of the 8,498 primary dental care providers in England invited to apply for registration, 82% have submitted an application to register with the Commission.

#### Doctors: Training

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that junior doctors receive adequate time for training. [38209]

**Anne Milton:** We are aware of the concerns that implementing the European working time directive (EWTD) might have adverse implications for postgraduate medical training. Medical Education England (the Government's independent advisory body on medical education and training) commissioned a report on the impact of EWTD on the quality of training. We welcomed the publication of 'Time for Training' by Professor Sir John Temple, available at:

[www.mee.nhs.uk](http://www.mee.nhs.uk)

and Medical Education England have been asked to take the lead in implementing the changes to improve training practices in line with the recommendations. We will also support colleagues from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in taking a robust approach to future negotiations on the directive to achieve greater flexibility.

**Mr Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the availability of hospital placements for trainee doctors. [38291]

**Anne Milton:** Strategic health authorities (SHAs) are responsible for commissioning training places. SHA plans for specialty medical training posts in hospitals for 2011 were agreed in November 2010, with recruitment commencing in December, taking into account the report from the Centre for Workforce Intelligence "Recommendations for medical specialty training 2011", which can be found at:

[www.cfwi.org.uk/intelligence/projects/recommendation-for-medical-specialty-training-2011](http://www.cfwi.org.uk/intelligence/projects/recommendation-for-medical-specialty-training-2011)

SHA plans are received and reviewed by a joint working group of clinical and service leads who advise the Medical Education England Medical Programme Board.

#### Family Practitioner Services

**Karen Lumley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements his Department proposes for the future of (a) pay and (b) provision for (i) GP practices, (ii) dentists, (iii) opticians and (iv) pharmacists under his proposals to reform the NHS. [37995]

**Mr Simon Burns:** We set out our view on the future of pay and terms and conditions in the NHS White Paper, "Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS". In the short term those staff directly employed by the national health service will be covered by the Government's pay policy for all public sector workers, with a pay freeze proposed for two years from 2011-12 for those earning more than £21,000. In the longer term, the Government believes that pay decisions should be led by health care employers rather than imposed by the Government and

that, in the future, all individual employers will have the right to determine pay for their own staff, as is the case now with foundation trusts.

The majority of general practitioners (GPs) are independent contractors who hold contracts for providing services. Their pay is determined within the Doctors and Dentists Review Body recommendations on their contract values. These contract values have been frozen for two years in line with the Government's pay freeze.

Like GPs, dentists are, for the most part, self-employed contractors, and their pay is determined within the Doctors and Dentists Review Body recommendations on their contract values.

The funding provided for the community pharmacy contractual framework is currently determined by the Department, informed by negotiations with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee.

The level of reimbursement to opticians for NHS sight tests is determined following consultation by the Department with bodies representative of optical providers.

In the longer term, the NHS Commissioning Board will take on responsibility for contracting with all independent sector primary care contractors and through their commissioning decisions will determine fees and reimbursements to these contractors. In doing so, they will continue to be informed by relevant independent pay review bodies.

Staff employed by independent contractors are subject to local pay and conditions as determined by the contractor. It is a matter for the contractor to determine if a contract is offered in line with model recommendations or a separately negotiated pay agreement is made.

### General Practitioners

**Grahame M. Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether (a) civil servants, (b) special advisers and (c) other individuals employed by his Department have had discussions with (i) any private healthcare companies and (ii) Tribal on GP commissioning consortia. [38787]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Senior civil servants and special advisers have had discussions with a wide range of interested parties on general practitioner (GP) commissioning consortia, including GPs, charitable organisations, professional organisations and private companies, including Tribal.

### Health Education

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure his Department has incurred on the Change4Life programme in each of the last five years; and what contributions to the programme were received from private sector organisations in each such year. [38092]

**Anne Milton:** In the past two financial years (2008-09 and 2009-10) for which there are complete records of, approximately £50 million was spent on Change4life by the Department.

The Change4Life 'One Year On' report states that in the 2009-10 financial year the in-kind contributions to the Change4Life campaign by private sector organisations were valued at £7.5 million.

### Heart Diseases: Health Services

**Mr Iain Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make pulse checks a routine procedure within the NHS Health Check programme as a means of identifying arrhythmia; and what steps he is taking to raise awareness of this issue. [38443]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The NHS Health Check programme is a national risk assessment and management programme that assesses people aged 40 to 74 for their risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and chronic kidney disease. Everyone having a NHS Health Check will be supported to manage their risk of these diseases through individually tailored lifestyle advice and support, and appropriate follow up to help them stay well for longer. Those diagnosed with previously undetected disease will receive earlier management, improving their health outcomes for the future.

The modelling undertaken by the Department that underpins the programme shows it to be clinically and cost-effective. A test for atrial fibrillation—the most common arrhythmia—is not currently included as part of the set of tests and measurements for the NHS Health Check programme.

Primary care trusts (PCT) may however decide to extend the range and scope of their programmes to include taking the pulse in older age groups to identify atrial fibrillation. In making this decision, PCTs will need to consider the costs incurred balanced with the potential benefits.

NHS Improvement is undertaking a programme of work to improve the detection and treatment of atrial fibrillation (characterised by a fast and erratic heartbeat).

### Hospices: Children

**Henry Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the future of (a) funding for children's hospices under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 and (b) the Hospice-at-Home Grant. [37837]

**Anne Milton:** The Department is supportive of the children's hospice movement and has given an annual hospice grant to the sector for five years. A review of palliative care funding is being undertaken to make palliative care more equitable and to better enable patients to choose how and from whom they receive their care. This is due to report in the summer. Professor Sir Alan Craft leads on the children's element of this review.

£10 million for 2011-12 has been allocated to support hospices during the transition to this new scheme.

Up to £30 million has been made available to the children's palliative care sector for 2010-11—this funding is directly supporting local services, including hospices.

The Department does provide some grant funding to the voluntary sector, using section 64 powers, principally through the Innovation, Excellence and Service Development (IESD) Fund. The fund is open to organisations who can apply annually, providing they meet the relevant criteria.

### Hospitals: Waiting Lists

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much his Department spent on waiting list initiatives in the latest quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [38103]

(2) how many posts of (a) surgeons, (b) anaesthetists, (c) nurses, (d) consultant surgeons and (e) registrars were funded through waiting list initiatives in the latest quarter for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [38105]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Department has not centrally funded waiting list initiatives in the last quarter. It is for the national health service to agree locally with clinicians any incentive or reward schemes designed to support the overall aim of ensuring that patients receive the care that best suits their needs.

The Department does not collect information on how much has been spent on local waiting list initiatives or on how many posts were funded by such initiatives.

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the future (a) collection and (b) publication of data on waiting times for operations and diagnostic tests. [38206]

**Mr Simon Burns:** I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), the hon. Member for St Helens North (Mr Watts), and the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) on 31 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 630W.

### Infant Foods

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the effects on infant health of (a) synthesised forms of docosahexaenoic acid used in formula milk and (b) docosahexaenoic acid in breast milk. [38516]

**Anne Milton:** The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment assessed the effects of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and other long chain omega 3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (LC n-3 PUFA) on infant health, specifically on early human growth and cognitive function. They concluded that evidence to support a relationship between intake of infant formula supplemented with DHA and other LC n-3 PUFA and cognitive function and behavioural development in healthy full term infants is unclear. A further research study commissioned by the Food Standards Agency in 2004 also reported similar findings that are consistent with these conclusions. The Department has not specifically assessed the effect of DHA in breast milk on cognitive function and development of healthy infants.

### Malaria: Drugs

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the availability of prescriptions for malaria prophylaxis on the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [38057]

**Anne Milton:** Malaria prophylaxis are a travel medicine and are not routinely available for free on the national health service. Anti-malarial medicines are a prescription only medicine and general practitioners (GPs) normally provide access to these medicines by way of private prescriptions. The same drugs that are used for prophylaxis are also used for treatment. In those circumstances, they are available on NHS prescriptions.

### Maternity Services

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent assessment he has made of the take-up of perinatal healthcare by (a) socio-economic group and (b) ethnicity; [37847]

(2) what arrangements are in place to advertise the availability of perinatal care in (a) Haringey, (b) London and (c) England. [37852]

**Anne Milton:** The best measure of take up of maternity services available is from the NHS maternity statistics. Details of hospital deliveries by ethnicity are in the following table. The NHS maternity statistics do not include details of socio-economic status.

<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Number of deliveries<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Percentage of total deliveries</i>
White	463,016	77.6
Asian or Asian British	65,782	11.0
Black or Black British	35,152	5.9
Chinese and Other	21,853	3.7
Mixed	10,492	1.8
Total	596,295	100

<sup>1</sup> Deliveries where ethnic group of mother is unknown have been excluded.

*Source:*

NHS Maternity Statistics 2009-10, NHS Information Centre.

Maternity services are available to women in Haringey via direct access or referral from a general practitioner (GP). Information about direct access to midwifery services is available on hospital trust websites and has been widely disseminated via children's centres, general practice and related services such as contraceptive and sexual health services. GPs are aware of local maternity services as well as the importance of early access, receiving regular training and updates from the maternity and obstetric teams through GP meetings and educational sessions. GPs discuss access to specialised services with women according to need as they progress through the perinatal service. Patterns of provision and advertising of services are local matters but similar patterns exist throughout England.

### Maternity Services: Greater London

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made provision for specialist perinatal healthcare in (a) the London borough of Haringey and (b) Greater London. [37848]

**Anne Milton:** The best measure of take-up of maternity services available is from the NHS maternity statistics. Details of hospital deliveries by ethnicity are in the following table. The NHS maternity statistics do not include details of socioeconomic status.

<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Number of deliveries<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Percentage of total deliveries</i>
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NHS Maternity Statistics 2009-10, NHS Information Centre

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#### Midwives: Manpower

**Simon Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of midwife numbers in (a) Norfolk, (b) the East of England and (c) England. [38164]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Midwives in Norfolk are employed at either the Norfolk and Norwich University hospital

or the Queen Elizabeth hospital, King's Lynn. The numbers of midwives at the two hospitals are as follows:  
*Norfolk and Norwich University hospital*

Establishment: 161.76 whole time equivalent (WTE) midwives.

Vacancies: 2.24 WTE fixed-term vacancies caused by secondments to other organisations

Unfilled vacancies: 1.07 WTE.

Three newly created specialist midwife posts are currently being advertised.

The current ratio of midwives to patients at Norfolk and Norwich University hospital is 1:32, which will improve once the small number of vacancies is filled.

*Queen Elizabeth hospital, King's Lynn*

Establishment: 72 WTE midwives

Vacancies: Two specialist midwives are being recruited.

Once the two specialist midwives have been recruited, the hospital anticipates it will meet the 1:30 ratio.

Information on the number of midwives in the East of England is shown in the following table. The table shows the starting staff in post as at September 2008, the target based on the local Birth Rate Plus (BRP) assessment and the current staff in post numbers as at December 2010. The table also shows the growth achieved so far and further growth required.

<i>Trust</i>	<i>Staff in post, full-time equivalent (FTE)</i>						
	<i>Staff in post FTE census 2008</i>	<i>Required establishment FTE by November 2011 as per BRP</i>	<i>Current staff in post FTE as per the SHA monitoring returns</i>	<i>Growth actual between September 2008 and December 2010</i>		<i>Growth required to achieve BRP target by November 2011 from December 2010</i>	
	<i>September 2008</i>	<i>November 2008</i>	<i>December 2010</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Norfolk and Norwich University hospital	149	216	180	31	21	36	20
Queen Elizabeth hospital	62	75	70	8	14	5	7
James Paget University Hospital Foundation Trust	68	72	77	9	14	n/a	n/a
East of England Total	1,723	2,365	2,054	331	19	311	15

Note:

None of the above figures are Department of Health-verified. Source: DoH census 2008 data sourced by East of England SHA and the SHA's own information.

The latest NHS Workforce census as at 30 September 2009 shows there 26,451 (20,236 FTE) midwives working in the national health service in England. The next NHS Workforce census showing the September 2010 figures will be published in late March 2011.

The number of midwives in training in 2009-10 is 2,482, which is a record level. The planned number of trainees in 2010-11 is 2,493 and we expect this level to be maintained into the future subject to further changes in the forecast birth rate and changes in the way services are delivered.

This will result in a sustained increase in new midwives available to enter the service over the next few years.

**Simon Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacant places there were on midwifery courses in each of the last five years. [38162]

**Anne Milton:** This information is not collected centrally.

The nearest information we have available is the number of midwifery training places commissioned over the last 10 years.

The following table shows the number of national health service midwifery training places commissioned since 1999.

	1999- 2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Degree	395	494	621	709	753	895	1,042	983	1,307	1,945	1,977	1,967
Diploma	620	604	525	724	716	744	517	540	412	0	0	0
Other	757	789	732	677	757	735	661	467	352	328	505	526
Total	1,772	1,887	1,878	2,110	2,226	2,374	2,220	1,990	2,071	2,274	2,482	2,493

Source:

Quarterly Monitoring Returns.

### National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

**Mr Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry on potential changes to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence as proposed in the Health and Social Care Bill. [38886]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Ministers and departmental officials meet frequently with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry and issues relating to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence are often among those discussed.

### NHS Commissioning Board

**Mike Weatherley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an ophthalmic services specialist will be appointed to the proposed NHS Commissioning Board. [38184]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Health and Social Care Bill sets out details about the membership of the NHS Commissioning Board.

The board itself will determine its own appointments but will include people with a range of skills and experience.

### NHS: Contracts

**Grahame M. Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of cancelling operating contracts for (a) 2011, (b) 2012, (c) 2013 and (d) 2014. [38450]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Records are not held centrally for all contracts entered into with other national health service bodies, private sector companies or the voluntary sector for the provision of goods and services in the NHS or estimates of future cancellation costs on these contracts. To collect this information from all local NHS trusts and primary care trusts (PCTs) would incur disproportionate cost.

All NHS trusts and the Department must report all abortive costs over £250,000 in value incurred in abandoned or scaled down projects in their annual report and accounts which are available locally.

### NHS: Finance

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to increase the uptake of personal budgets and direct payments for the purposes of encouraging integration between care services. [38087]

**Paul Burstow:** The “Vision for Adult Social Care: Capable Communities and Active Citizens” sets the context for the future direction of adult social care in England. It states that councils should provide personal budgets, preferably as a direct payment, for everyone eligible, by 2013.

Reflecting the commitments in the vision, the Department has committed to various actions. The Department is planning to issue directions to councils later this year, to strengthen legislation requiring councils to make direct payments in respect of the person securing provision of a relevant service, where the conditions are satisfied, and with the person's consent. Building on this expansion, we want to make it possible to combine personal health budgets with personal budgets in the future, subject to the evaluation of the pilot sites in 2012.

Local government and the provider sector have produced the partnership agreement “Think Local, Act Personal” in January. The agreement, focusing on personalisation of services, consolidates lessons learned over the past three years within a new financial context that requires efficient, effective and integrated service delivery, including personal budgets, across health and social care.

In future, councils will take the lead role in drawing up joint strategic needs assessments, which will shape the commissioning of health, social care and health improvement services. This may include aligning funding streams locally, including personal health budgets and personal budgets.

**Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding he has provided for integration between health services and social care services since May 2010. [38088]

**Paul Burstow:** The Government have announced various policy and legislative changes to support integration between health and social care. The Department has made available a number of new funding streams to support the coalition programme commitment on integration, including as part of the 2010 spending review, which have been allocated to the national health service in order to support social care and improve joint working between the two systems.

Details about this funding have been set out in a letter from David Behan and David Flory to NHS and local authority chief executives, which can be found at:

[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH\\_123460](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_123460)

A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library.

The following table summarises the funding which has been allocated for joint working.

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>2010-11 (£ million)</i>	<i>2011-12 (£ million)</i>	<i>2012-13 (£ million)</i>	<i>How the funding should be used</i>
Development of post-discharge support and re-ablement services	70	150	300	To work with local authorities to develop local re-ablement capacity, according to local plans submitted to strategic health authority in December 2010. Funding may be transferred to local partners or pooled budgets. It is for local discretion the proportion of spend on the NHS and social care.
To support social care services	162	648	622	Funding must be transferred to local authorities, to spend on social care services which also benefit health, primary care trusts (PCTs) and local authorities should jointly agree how the funding should be spent and the outcomes to be achieved.

For 2013-14 and 2014-15, the health system has been allocated £1.1 billion and £1 billion respectively to support social care. Details of how this funding will be allocated will be announced in due course.

The NHS Operating Framework for 2011 reinforces the coalition government's commitment to integration and joint working. It sets out some specific areas where joint working with local authorities is important and where pooled budget arrangements should be considered. It sets out a requirement for NHS organisations to make progress on the National Dementia Strategy including the four priority areas set out in the implementation plan published in September 2010. Recognised, valued and supported: next steps for the Carers Strategy should also be considered, with PCTs pooling budgets to provide carers breaks, as far as possible, via direct payments or personal health budgets. An additional £400 million is being made available over four years for this purpose.

#### NHS: Overtime

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of overtime payments for (a) consultants, (b) surgeons and (c) other NHS staff in the most recent quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [38104]

**Mr Simon Burns:** National health service staff earnings estimates are published by the NHS Information Centre for health and social care. The published information covers earnings of medical staff and only those non medical staff under Agenda for Change contractual arrangements. Reliable information on cost to the NHS of overtime payments for consultants, surgeons and other NHS staff is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

#### NHS: Re-organisation

**Grahame M. Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the future viability of NHS trusts which will become foundation trusts in cases where the trust would not have met the existing criteria of Monitor to do so. [38448]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The coalition government are committed to all national health service trusts achieving foundation trust status by April 2014. The requirements

trusts must demonstrate to achieve the foundation trust status will not be reduced in any way.

For those trusts who for some reason may not be financially or clinically viable as a stand-alone organisation, and thus unable to meet the criteria to achieve foundation trust status, action plans are being developed.

These plans may include organisational change, such as a merger or acquisition with another trust or foundation trust, where this will support the trust achieving foundation status, as part of another organisation, by April 2014.

**Grahame M. Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the likely cost of redundancy payments following the proposed abolition of (a) primary care trusts and (b) strategic health authorities under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Bill. [38449]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Government estimates the redundancy costs as £768 million for primary care trusts and £84 million for strategic health authorities. Fuller details are given in the "co-ordinating document" for the impact assessment for the Health and Social Care Bill, which is available at:

[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsLegislation/DH\\_123583](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsLegislation/DH_123583)

A copy has already been placed in the Library.

#### NHS: Training

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with stakeholder organisations on the potential effects of the (a) Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 and (b) Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 on the NHS Bursary Scheme; and if he will make a statement; [38210]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills on the NHS Bursary Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [38212]

**Anne Milton:** The Secretary of State for Health has had discussions with the Minister of State for Universities and Science and my officials have met with stakeholder organisations about the proposed changes to the funding arrangements for undergraduate education and the impact on students who are eligible for an NHS bursary. We

will continue to work together with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to understand the impact of the changes and consider if the NHS bursary scheme arrangements remain appropriate.

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to make an announcement on the NHS Bursary Review; and if he will make a statement. [38211]

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the existing NHS bursary arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [38581]

**Anne Milton:** The review of NHS student support considered the existing NHS Bursary Scheme arrangements and whether changes to the scheme are required. We plan to make an announcement on the outcome of the review in due course.

### Obesity: Departmental Coordination

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Education and (b) the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport on the effect of activity levels on obesity in children. [38505]

**Anne Milton:** The Secretary of State for Health has met with the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport on 25 November 2010. Following on from this discussion the Department of Health agreed to provide up to £20 million over the next two years to support levels of participation in the School Games by primary schools, and to create further opportunities for those who are least active and to deliver important health benefits associated with physical activity.

### Palliative Care: Drugs

**Stephen Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the NHS takes a systematic and safe approach to the prescribing of terminal care drugs. [37950]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Guidance for prescribers on the appropriate use of medicines for patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment is included in the British National Formulary, which is made available free of charge to national health service prescribers. This includes advice on the medicines that can be used for terminal care patients and the training that staff are required to undertake before administering them.

### Plastic Surgery

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the (a) level of availability and (b) effects on NHS budgets of cosmetic surgery on the NHS in the most recent quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [38055]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Very few, if any, purely cosmetic surgery treatments are undertaken on the national health service. The only information available at national level relates to the total number of treatments by plastic

surgeons, of which the vast majority will be for reasons of genuine clinical need. The information for the most recent available quarters is in the following table.

*Count of finished consultant episodes (FCEs)<sup>1</sup> for consultants in plastic surgery<sup>2</sup>. Provisional data<sup>3</sup> for quarters ending June 2010 and September 2010 and full year 2009-10 (April to March)*

<i>Period</i>	<i>Count of FCEs</i>
April-June 2010 <sup>3</sup>	63,318
July-September 2010 <sup>3</sup>	65,275
2009-10	248,441

<sup>1</sup> FCE

A FCE is a continuous period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which they end. Figures do not represent the number of different patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the same stay in hospital or in different stays in the same year.

<sup>2</sup> Consultant main specialty

The specialty under which the consultant responsible for the care of the patient at that time is registered.

<sup>3</sup> Provisional data

The data are provisional and may be incomplete or contain errors for which no adjustments have yet been made. Counts produced from provisional data are likely to be lower than those generated for the same period in the final dataset; the data shown have not been adjusted to allow for this possible shortfall, which will be most pronounced in the final month of the latest period. It is also probable that clinical data are not complete, which may in particular affect the last two months of any given period. There may also be errors due to coding inconsistencies that have not yet been investigated and corrected.

*Source:*

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care

### Post-natal Depression

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women were diagnosed with post-natal depression in each year since 2000. [37851]

**Paul Burstow:** The majority of women diagnosed with post-natal depression will be treated in primary care. Information is not collected centrally about diagnoses for any condition in primary care, so reliable data is not available about the number of women with post-natal depression. However, the NHS Information Centre's mental health minimum dataset (MHMDS) focuses on adults accessing secondary mental health care. The following table shows the number of women who have been diagnosed with either post-natal mental health problems or post-natal depression in the MHMDS.

	<i>Mental disorders associated with the puerperium (commencing within six weeks of delivery) that do not meet the criteria for disorders classified elsewhere</i>	<i>Depression: postnatal<sup>1</sup>, postpartum<sup>1</sup></i>
2006-07	267	113
2007-08	266	113
2008-09	247	98
2009-10	318	101

<sup>1</sup> Not otherwise specified.

*Source:*

MHMDS annual returns.



### Primary Health Care: North East

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the change in the number of posts in primary care trusts and their successor bodies in the North East following implementation of his healthcare reforms. [38171]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Government estimate that, on average across the country, around 60% of existing staff in primary care trusts and strategic health authorities would transfer to jobs in general practitioner consortia, the NHS Commissioning Board, and other bodies. We do not have a breakdown of the figures by region.

The full assumptions are described in the "co-ordinating document" for the impact assessment for the Health and Social Care Bill, which is available at:

[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsLegislation/DH\\_123583](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsLegislation/DH_123583)

A copy has already been placed in the Library.

### Public Health England: Finance

**Grahame M. Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the likely funding allocation to Public Health England in each of the first five years following its inception; [38846]

(2) what estimate he has made of NHS expenditure on areas which are to be the responsibility of Public Health England in each of the last 10 years. [38847]

**Mr Simon Burns:** We are currently consulting on the functions and services to be funded through the public health budget and commissioning routes in 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: consultation on the funding and commissioning routes for public health'. The responses to the consultation on functions and services will be important in helping determine the future budget for Public Health England.

The Department is working to establish baseline spending on activities that will be funded from the public health budget in the future. Building on the proposed commissioning responsibilities in the consultation document, early estimates suggest that current spend by the Department, its arm's length bodies, strategic health authorities and primary care trusts on areas that are likely to be the responsibility of Public Health England could be over £4 billion. However, this estimate is subject to further significant revision. In particular, as responses to the consultation on the responsibilities to be funded from the public health budget lead to revisions in the design of the service, the estimated spend and future budgets will be revised. Comparable data for earlier years are not available.

### Strokes

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his contribution of 31 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 605, on the Health and Social Care Bill, what the evidential basis is for his estimate that 4,000 lives could be saved every year if NHS outcomes for stroke were as good as the European average; and if he will place in the Library a copy of such evidence. [38746]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The information requested has been placed in the Library.

### Strokes: Health Services

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence to extend the provisions of the Stroke Quality Standard to cover community-based rehabilitation, longer-term support and social care services for stroke patients. [38303]

**Mr Simon Burns:** It is for the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to determine the content and scope of its stroke Quality Standard. It does so after a public consultation and within a remit set by the Secretary of State.

The stroke standard was developed with input from clinicians and patients. Details of the process NICE used can be found on the Institute's website at:

[www.nice.org.uk/aboutnice/qualitystandards](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutnice/qualitystandards)

The current Health and Social Care Bill includes provision to extend NICE'S role to cover social care when it is re-established.

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to ensure that GP consortia are skilled in the commissioning of strategic stroke services. [38304]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The NHS Commissioning Board will support general practitioner consortia in their commissioning decisions. The board will provide leadership for quality improvement through commissioning. This will include setting commissioning guidelines on the basis of clinically approved quality standards developed with advice from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and in the case of stroke, the national stroke strategy, in a way that promotes joint working across health, public health and social care.

Furthermore, the Health and Social Care Bill provides for consortia to work collaboratively on commissioning by, for example, entering into lead commissioner and pooled budgetary arrangements.

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to incorporate the main elements of the National Stroke Strategy into future guidance issued by the National Commissioning Board. [38305]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The NHS Commissioning Board will have a vital role in providing national leadership for driving up the quality of care across health commissioning, including stroke services. The board will do this by supporting general practitioner consortia in a number of ways including:

publishing evidence based commissioning guidance and model care pathways building on the national stroke strategy and the recently published National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence quality standard for stroke as appropriate; and

designing the Commissioning Outcomes Framework and the new quality premium.

It will be for the board to determine the details of its work programme and the content of commissioning guidance.

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that the provision of stroke services remains a priority for the NHS following the implementation of his plans to reform the NHS. [38306]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Stroke remains a priority for the national health service and as such features in the 2011-12 NHS Operating Framework.

Stroke also features in a number of domains of the NHS Outcome Framework. This is the mechanism by which the Secretary of State for Health will hold the NHS Commissioning Board to account when it is established.

These measures will ensure that tackling stroke and improving stroke care will remain firmly on the NHS's agenda.

## CABINET OFFICE

### EU Grants and Loans

**Mark Reckless:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will bring forward proposals to publish details of each UK project in receipt of over £25,000 of EU funds. [35600]

**Mr Maude:** There are currently no plans to bring forward specific proposals to publish details of each UK project in receipt of over £25,000 of EU funds. However we are currently arguing for the domestic principles of transparency, value for money and sound financial management to be applied at EU level.

In the interim, a Consolidated Statement on the use of EU funds in the UK is published annually. Indeed the 2008-09 financial year Consolidated Statement was laid before Parliament on 19 January 2011.

### Gross National Product

**John Stevenson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of gross national product was accounted for by the (a) financial and (b) manufacturing sector in (i) 2008-09 and (ii) 2009-10. [36591]

**Mr Hurd:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

*Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated January 2011:*

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding the proportion of Gross National Product accounted for by the financial and manufacturing sectors in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. [36591]

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has replaced Gross National Product as the main indicator of output of the economy. The figures requested are shown in the table below for the calendar years 2008 to 2010.

	Contribution to total GDP		
	2008	2009	2010
Financial Sector	7.0	7.1	7.7
Manufacturing Sector	14.3	13.3	12.8

## Public Bodies

**Charlie Elphicke:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 26 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 315W, on public bodies, what consideration he gave to including (a) efficiency and (b) value for money as criteria to be applied in the review of public bodies. [37846]

**Mr Maude:** The first stage of the review process was to consider whether the functions currently carried out by public bodies should be delivered by government. Ensuring government do not undertake activities which are not needed must be the first step in delivering value for money. Reducing duplication of effort and simplifying structures, as this review is doing, are also key tenets of efficiency and value for money.

**Charlie Elphicke:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 19 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 827, on public bodies, how much more than £500 million a year he expects to save in each year from 2011-12 to 2014-15. [37861]

**Mr Maude:** Departments are currently working through the estimated costs and savings related to this complex package of reforms with support from HM Treasury and Cabinet Office. These are the most significant reforms of public bodies for a generation and we need to ensure implementation is carried out effectively and systematically.

**Charlie Elphicke:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 19 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 828, on public bodies, what steps he plans to take to make the code for public bodies watertight. [37862]

**Mr Maude:** The Public Administration Select Committee in their report "Smaller Government: Shrinking the Quango State" make a number of recommendations on strengthening the rules relating to public bodies and lobbying. We will respond formally to the committee's recommendations, setting out our proposals in full, in due course.

### Public Sector: Procurement

**Stephen Lloyd:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he has taken to encourage public sector bodies to give priority to local businesses in their procurement policies. [37778]

**Mr Maude:** To safeguard the public purse, procurers are required to seek value for money through fair and open competition. Through our membership of the European Union and as a signatory to international agreements, our contracting authorities are required to treat suppliers from Europe and various other countries on an equal footing with UK suppliers. This is a two-way street, however, as it gives our suppliers access to public procurement markets overseas.

The Government of course want UK companies, including our small businesses, to be successful in public procurement. To that end, I announced on 1 November a series of measures to make it easier for small firms to compete for government business. Details can be found on the Cabinet Office website:

[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/plans-open-government-small-businesses](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/plans-open-government-small-businesses)

### Unemployment: Young People

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many unemployed young people aged 16 to 25 years there were in each region in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of young people this represented in each such month. [38577]

**Mr Hurd:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

*Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated February 2011:*

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many unemployed young people aged 16-25 years there were in each region in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of young people this represented in each such month. (38577)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles unemployment statistics for local areas from the Annual Population Survey following International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions.

Table 1 shows the levels and proportions of young people aged 16-24 years who were unemployed and resident in each government office region. Data has been provided for the most recent APS period, July 2009 to June 2010. APS proportions have been calculated using 16-24 economically active population.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the APS are subject to a margin of uncertainty.

Because the APS only provides an annual figure additionally Table 2 shows the number and proportions of young people aged 16 to 24 claiming Jobseeker's Allowance resident in each government office region during the last 12 months up to the latest period available in December 2010. JSA proportions have been calculated using 16-24 resident population.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Table 1 Number and proportions of people aged 16 to 24 unemployed in each government office region

	July 2009 to June 2010	
	Level (thousand)	Proportion (%)
North East	**47	14.4
North West	*115	13.4
Yorkshire and The Humber	**87	12.7
East Midlands	**66	12.1
West Midlands	**87	13.3
East	**74	11.7
London	**119	13.2
South East	**99	10.4
South West	**67	11.3
Wales	*50	13.7
Scotland	*76	12.4
Northern Ireland	***23	10.2

Note:

Coefficients of Variation have been calculated for the latest period as an indication of the quality of the estimates. See Guide to Quality below.

Guide to Quality:

The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate, the smaller the CV value the higher the quality. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV—for example, for an estimate of 200 with a CV of 5% we would expect the population total to be within the range 180-220.

Key:

\* 0 ≤ CV < 5%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered precise

\*\* 5 ≤ CV < 10%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered reasonably precise

\*\*\* 10 ≤ CV < 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered acceptable

\*\*\*\* CV ≥ 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered too unreliable for practical purposes

CV = Coefficient of Variation

Source:

Annual Population Survey

Table 2 Number and proportions (%) of people aged 16 to 24 claiming jobseeker's allowance resident in each Government office region

2010	North East		North West		Yorkshire and the Humber		East Midlands		West Midlands		East	
	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%
January	28,085	8.4	64,395	7.4	51,145	7.3	36,490	6.6	56,895	8.6	35,180	5.5
February	27,950	8.4	64,820	7.4	52,175	7.4	37,145	6.7	57,385	8.6	35,930	5.7
March	26,800	8.0	61,925	7.1	50,015	7.1	35,715	6.5	55,040	8.3	34,750	5.5
April	25,050	7.5	58,580	6.7	47,690	6.8	33,370	6.1	51,405	7.7	33,135	5.2
May	23,590	7.1	55,195	6.3	45,220	6.4	30,945	5.6	47,745	7.2	30,380	4.8
June	22,995	6.9	52,610	6.0	42,065	6.0	28,820	5.2	45,210	6.8	28,360	4.5
July	23,320	7.0	53,495	6.1	42,480	6.0	29,120	5.3	45,695	6.9	29,160	4.6
August	24,040	7.2	55,505	6.4	43,430	6.2	29,775	5.4	46,900	7.1	30,510	4.8
September	25,065	7.5	56,095	6.4	43,795	6.2	30,045	5.5	47,775	7.2	30,480	4.8
October	24,980	7.5	54,780	6.3	42,900	6.1	29,100	5.3	46,455	7.0	30,110	4.7
November	24,430	7.3	53,070	6.1	41,935	6.0	28,255	5.1	45,490	6.9	28,950	4.6
December	24,375	7.3	51,580	5.9	42,065	6.0	28,635	5.2	45,140	6.8	28,250	4.4

2010	London		South East		South West		Wales		Scotland		Northern Ireland	
	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%
January	54,920	6.0	45,500	4.7	28,920	4.8	28,475	7.6	42,795	6.9	17,715	7.6
February	56,250	6.2	45,990	4.8	29,455	4.8	28,960	7.7	44,335	7.1	17,990	7.7

2010	London		South East		South West		Wales		Scotland		Northern Ireland	
	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%
March	54,935	6.0	44,085	4.6	27,930	4.6	27,875	7.5	43,335	7.0	17,805	7.7
April	51,605	5.7	41,395	4.3	25,375	4.2	26,190	7.0	40,885	6.6	17,210	7.4
May	49,265	5.4	37,255	3.9	22,990	3.8	24,070	6.4	39,360	6.3	16,925	7.3
June	46,975	5.2	34,215	3.6	21,350	3.5	22,300	6.0	39,320	6.3	17,380	7.5
July	48,825	5.4	34,555	3.6	21,675	3.6	22,895	6.1	42,230	6.8	18,505	8.0
August	51,350	5.6	35,940	3.7	22,640	3.7	23,755	6.4	43,270	6.9	19,105	8.2
September	52,865	5.8	35,895	3.7	22,830	3.6	23,815	6.4	38,355	6.2	19,165	8.2
October	61,775	5.7	34,845	3.6	22,555	3.7	23,290	6.2	37,345	6.0	18,255	7.8
November	50,020	5.5	34,290	3.6	22,840	3.8	23,145	6.2	37,520	6.0	17,575	7.6
December	47,830	5.3	33,820	3.5	22,700	3.7	23,375	6.3	38,290	6.1	17,345	7.5

Note:

Data has been rounded to nearest five.

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

### Written Questions: Government Responses

**Jon Trickett:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he plans to reply to questions 33786 and 33787 tabled on 11 January 2011 for ordinary written answer.

[37049]

**Mr Maude:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 27 January 2011, *Official Report*, column 447W, and on 4 February 2011, *Official Report*, column 978W.

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