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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**  
**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 7 May 2025**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 7 May 2025*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

*The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—*

#### **Violence against Women and Girls**

1. **Jo Platt** (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help tackle violence against women and girls. [904014]

2. **Jen Craft** (Thurrock) (Lab): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help tackle violence against women and girls. [904015]

10. **Alison Taylor** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help tackle violence against women and girls. [904025]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips):** The Government have set out an unprecedented mission to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, and we have already set out a number of transformative measures to overhaul the policing response to these terrible crimes. This includes announcing a £13 million investment in the new national centre for violence against women and girls and public protection, and we will publish the new violence against women and girls strategy before the summer recess.

**Jo Platt:** Recent figures show that sexual offences recorded by Greater Manchester police have quadrupled since 2010, with the Wigan borough seeing the most domestic abuse call-outs. Although the domestic abuse protection order trial in Wigan is welcome, more must be done to ensure that women and girls are safe. Does the Minister agree that broader societal action is needed, and can she outline how the Government will work across Departments, public services and local authorities to address this crisis?

**Jess Phillips:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The Victims Minister and I chair the violence against women and girls cross-government board, which meets very regularly. It has led to our violence against women and girls strategy, which sits within that. It is an expert group that helps us on policy. It includes local government, the voluntary sector, the police and other members of civil society. She is absolutely right to say that this policy will involve everybody.

**Jen Craft:** In November, a report by the child safeguarding practice review panel found that a focus on child sexual abuse in the home has been lost in the past 20 years. Its key finding were: that there were systematic failings across the board in identifying and responding to signs of child sexual abuse; that there is an over-reliance on the criminal justice system; and, crucially, that children's voices are not being heard. How will the Minister ensure that a focus on in-home child sexual abuse is built into the Government's violence against women and girls strategy, and that it will have children's voices at its heart?

**Jess Phillips:** We are working with Cabinet Office colleagues and others across Government on the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse. It is vital to ensure that any strategy includes therapeutic and other support for child victims, so that they can take action, and we can ensure justice.

**Alison Taylor:** Will the Minister please give consideration to women's safety in and around railway stations? Will she focus on unmanned railway stations? I have many in my constituency.

**Jess Phillips:** Women travelling alone at night should not feel afraid, yet many do. We are committed to the safer streets mission, and to halving violence against women and girls in the next decade. We will continue to work closely with the rail industry, including the British Transport Police, to do that. Work being done includes a review of the secure station scheme, which ensures that train operators meet a set of standards for security at stations; and we are taking measures that support personal safety.

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): My constituent Keith Levell was sexually abused at school, and was referred to as a number, not a name, during the investigations. He has been holding out for the redress scheme for victims of child sexual abuse, and for a written apology for the life-changing experiences to which he was subjected. On behalf of Keith and many others in his situation, why have the Government reportedly scrapped the Conservative plans for a redress scheme in England and Wales?

**Jess Phillips:** I pay tribute to the hon. Lady's constituent, and to the many others who came forward during the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, but what I would like to tell him is that when I came to office, there was absolutely no plan on this issue, other than a sentence to say that something would be done around the redress scheme. I have updated the House fully on the IICSA recommendations, and can tell the hon. Lady that the plan is still in train.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the Minister meet me to discuss the issues faced by women with no recourse to public funds who are fleeing domestic violence? As they may not be eligible for support with housing, they may struggle to find refuge places. I would appreciate a meeting to discuss this issue.

**Jess Phillips:** I will absolutely meet the hon. Lady to discuss those issues. The migrant victims of domestic abuse concession applies to all migrant victims, regardless

of the type of visa that they are on, and it should be providing that support, but I am more than happy to meet her.

**Carla Lockhart** (Upper Bann) (DUP): The Minister is doing sterling work on this issue. She will know that my passion is for Northern Ireland to be utterly in step with the rest of the UK when it comes to protecting women and girls against violence. Does she agree that Northern Ireland, its authorities, organisations and employers should implement the recent Supreme Court ruling, and will she join me in calling on the Irish Football Association to be in step with the English and Scottish Football Associations when it comes to the protection of women, on and off the pitch?

**Jess Phillips:** I thank the hon. Lady, and absolutely pay tribute to her work on this issue, which I have seen directly in Northern Ireland. What I would say, as I am sure anyone would at this Dispatch Box, is that I would always encourage everybody to follow the laws in our country in step.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Three years after Baroness Kennedy's groundbreaking review on tackling misogyny in law, late on Friday, the SNP said that it would scrap its planned Bill to tackle widespread misogyny and hatred against women. Plans to tackle misogynistic harassment, the stirring up of hatred, and sending threatening or abusive communications to women, and an aggravated offence of misogyny—all scrapped in favour of a watered-down amendment to the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. Women across the United Kingdom need action, and reassurance that politicians will root out the attitudes that lead to hatred against women in public life. If the SNP will not do it, will this Government act to give women the support that they need?

**Jess Phillips:** The hon. Lady makes an impassioned point. It will be a fundamental part of the violence against women and girls strategy to get to the exact reason why we have ended up with an epidemic of violence against women and girls in all the nations of the United Kingdom, and to root it out. For too long, we have sought to put ever-bigger plasters on the problem, rather than finding the reason for it and preventing it from happening.

#### **Government Mission on Opportunity: Equality**

3. **Juliet Campbell** (Broxtowe) (Lab): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to promote equality as part of the Government mission entitled “break down barriers to opportunity.” [904016]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Bridget Phillipson):** This Government are clear that equality and opportunity are at the heart of our programme of national renewal and economic growth. The opportunity mission is all about creating a fairer Britain, giving every child the best start in life through our plan for change, building skills for the future and ultimately driving up household incomes. Just last month, we rolled out the first 750 new free breakfast clubs, to give children the best start to their school days and families more choice at work.

**Juliet Campbell:** Under the previous Government, there was an increase in inequality and in the attainment gap, and lower performance in core subjects such as maths and science. Dyslexic students and students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in my constituency of Broxtowe have been further disadvantaged by delays and misdiagnosis. What steps is the Minister taking to support young people with dyslexia and ADHD to ensure that they succeed?

**Bridget Phillipson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important issue, which I know will be of concern to Members across the House. The Government know that all too often, children with special educational needs and disabilities do not have the good educational outcomes that we would all want for them. It is really important that we do more to support neurodivergent children and young people, including those with dyslexia and ADHD. That is why we have established a neuro-divergence taskforce—an expert group that will support us to deliver better mainstream inclusion, while ensuring that we have more specialist provision for children who need it. In order to strengthen the evidence base, we have commissioned work from University College London on the most effective tools and strategies to support children with a wide range of needs.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): My constituents repeatedly raise with me the lack of affordable childcare as a key factor driving the gender pay gap. To give families real choice in those crucial early months, will the Government consider increasing paternity pay to 90% of earnings, with a cap for higher earners?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The hon. Lady will recognise that this Government have expanded workers' rights, and are making sure that new mums and dads can spend more precious time with their young family. As she says, it is important that high-quality early years education and childcare is available for parents, so that they have good work choices. That is why we have expanded childcare provision and more than doubled the early years pupil premium. We are also rolling out new primary-based nurseries in schools across the country.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): We all want to break down barriers to opportunity. However, it seems that one sizable part of our workforce is being ignored, and that is women. Women missing work due to endometriosis, ovarian cysts and other complications cost the economy £11 billion a year. Fixing this would save more than double the amount that is to be spent on the unpalatable proposed welfare cuts for disabled people. Does the Minister agree that improving women's health will break down a huge barrier to work, and if so, how is she working with other Departments to fix this?

**Bridget Phillipson:** I agree with my hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee, and I pay tribute to her for all her campaigning work in the important area of women's health. The Government recognise the terrible impact that these conditions can have on women's ability to work and live their lives as they should. That is why we are committed to implementing a women's health strategy as part of the 10-year plan, and I know that the

Health Secretary is determined to bring down waiting lists, which have all too often affected women, including those with conditions such as endometriosis. We are making progress, but there is much more to do.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): East Sussex Hearing is a charity in Eastbourne that supports people with hearing disabilities to break barriers to opportunity through provision of life-changing hearing equipment and support. It is keen to work with the local hospital trust and integrated care board to take its services to more people. Will the Minister back its efforts to engage with the trust and ICB to help bring its charitable services to more people with hearing disabilities in Eastbourne and beyond?

**Bridget Phillipson:** That sounds like a sensible and constructive suggestion. I will ensure that the views of the hon. Gentleman's constituents are shared with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care, so that they can provide further advice on how that might best be taken forward.

### Grooming Gangs

4. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help protect girls from sex-based violence by grooming gangs.

[904017]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips):** The Government are taking unprecedented action to improve the response to these heinous crimes, so that we get more perpetrators behind bars and get justice for victims and survivors. We are increasing investment in the taskforce, and every police force has been asked to review cases that were closed with no further action taken. Arrests are increasing. We are expanding victims' rights to review. Crucially, we are introducing the new, long-overdue mandatory reporting duties, and the new statutory aggravating factor for grooming offences.

**Bob Blackman:** In previous Parliaments, the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee held inquiries on Rochdale, Rotherham and other towns where sex grooming was taking place. We now know that this is a nationwide problem. We heard from Baroness Casey—then Dame Louise Casey—that there was a problem with Pakistani men and their culture, and that the victims were predominantly white girls in council care. We have evidence that council staff, councillors, social workers and possibly the police have been complicit, or have at least turned a blind eye to the issue, so local inquiries will not be good enough. Will the Minister call for a national, judge-led inquiry, in which witnesses are required to give evidence under oath, so that those who turned a blind eye can be brought to justice?

**Jess Phillips:** To answer the hon. Gentleman's final point, to be clear, national statutory inquiries do not send anyone to prison. He rightly mentioned Baroness Casey and her work in Rotherham, and others' work in Rochdale. The reason why we know about some of the terrible behaviours is because of the brilliant local inquiries undertaken in those towns. Louise Casey is undertaking a national audit that will report shortly.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Mims Davies** (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Despite what the Prime Minister said, speaking out for rape victims is not jumping on a far-right bandwagon. Yesterday, it was reported that No. 10's interim spokesperson said it was "obviously disappointing" to see people "weaponising" rape gangs for "political point scoring". How does that square with the harrowing personal testimony from Jade, Chantelle, Scarlett, Erin and Steph in Anna Hall's Channel 4 documentary aired last week, where concerning questions continued to arise about councils, police, schools, social workers and children's homes? It was reported that in up to 50 communities, vulnerable girls who were under age—exploited children—were unbelievably labelled as promiscuous or child prostitutes.

**Jess Phillips:** The hon. Lady points out the terrible things that have gone on historically, and that continue to be a concern across our country. That is exactly why the Government are investing in the taskforce, which is working across the country with police forces to ensure that people can be arrested and girls can be kept safe. Arrests have gone up. Absolutely everybody thinks this issue is terrible. I remind the hon. Lady that she gladly served as Women and Equalities Minister under a Prime Minister who said that looking into these historical cases was

"spaffing money up the wall."

**Mims Davies:** As a child, Jade got a criminal record during her abuse and exploitation, and now she cannot attend her children's school trips. Chantelle rightly said, "We are not the problem. The men are the problem."

Although there are plenty of good women on the Front Bench, I have to ask: are this Government simply more interested in protecting their own than staying true to their manifesto pledge? That pledge says,

"We will use every...tool to target perpetrators".

Yet Labour is turning its back on that once again; you can hear it. The Leader of the House called this "dog whistle" politics on national radio. Why will the Minister and her Front-Bench colleagues not commit to delivering a proper, national, statutory public inquiry, and finally put victims first?

**Jess Phillips:** I will absolutely protect my own in this. My own are the women in our country, who, for the last 14 years, have seen no efforts made. People say terrible things, and the Leader of the House was right to apologise. I wonder how many of those on the Opposition Front Bench asked the former Prime Minister to apologise for saying that looking into the lives of the girls we are talking about, through a statutory inquiry that had already happened, was spaffing money up the wall. Where was the outrage?

### Access to Venture Capital: Women

5. **Sonia Kumar** (Dudley) (Lab): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on access to venture capital for women.

[904018]

**The Minister for Equalities (Seema Malhotra):** A £250 billion boost could be added to the UK economy if women were given the same opportunity as men to start and scale their business. That is why it is a priority



for this Government to increase access to capital for women-led businesses, and to continue to work, as the Chancellor has also outlined, with the Women's Business Council and the invest in women taskforce, and on supporting the FTSE Women Leaders programme. We have backed the invest in women taskforce, which launched an initial £255 million fund, and there is a £50 million commitment from the British Business Bank to investment via female investors in women-led businesses.

**Sonia Kumar:** For every £1 of equity funding, only 2p goes to fully female-funded business—a figure that has barely shifted in recent years. Closing that gap could unlock up to £250 billion for the UK economy. Will the Minister outline what further steps the Department will take in collaboration with the Treasury and the Department for Business and Trade to address that persistent inequality and support female entrepreneurs in scaling their businesses?

**Seema Malhotra:** My hon. Friend is right; for too long, innovative women-led start-ups have been held back due to a lack of finance, with the proportion of equity capital investment going to all female-founded firms stuck at around 2% in the UK for the last decade. Alongside the invest in women taskforce, the Department for Business and Trade is leading on the investing in women code, and working with finance providers to increase access to finance, resources and networks for women-led businesses. I want to see us use the talents of all business leaders to support female entrepreneurs, which is right not just for women but for the whole economy.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In my constituency of Strangford, many women have started their own businesses, but there has been a problem in getting access to the finance to make that happen. Venture capital will make that happen. To ensure that ladies and women have the same opportunities as men—just because they are a different sex, does not mean that they are any less able to do the job—will the Minister ensure that venture capital will be available in Northern Ireland, for ladies and women in Strangford and in Northern Ireland?

**Seema Malhotra:** The funding will be available to women-led businesses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is right that we continue to support the work of the Women's Business Council and others, and look at all we can do to support women in businesses, and those who are coming forward to start their own enterprises.

### Topical Questions

T1. [904028] **Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Bridget Phillipson):** The Government are taking decisive action to deliver our plan to make work pay, putting more money back into people's pockets. The Office for Equality and Opportunity recently launched a public consultation on mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting, and a call for evidence on other measures to improve security at work for everyone and tackle unequal pay. We will work in partnership with business to deliver this Government's plan for change.

**Olly Glover:** Many constituents have written to me to express their concern on the recent UK Supreme Court ruling relating to the legal definition of a woman. It has left the already vulnerable members of the trans community feeling uncertain about how they will be able to go about their day-to-day lives. What steps is the Minister taking to work with her colleagues in other Departments to provide further guidance and clarity on what the judgment means in practice?

**Bridget Phillipson:** You will know, Mr Speaker, that I made a statement to the House setting out the Government's position where we welcomed the clarity of the Supreme Court ruling. I should also stress that, of course, everyone within our country deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and compassion, and trans people continue to enjoy protection from harassment and discrimination under the law. We are working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission on its code of practice, which it will set out in due course following consultation.

T2. [904029] **Frank McNally** (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know of the growing concerns around social media algorithms increasingly promoting misogynistic and harmful content to children, particularly using the hook of dangerous online influencers. What steps is she taking working with Cabinet colleagues to protect young people from such destructive influences?

**Bridget Phillipson:** My hon. Friend raises a concern shared by many across the House, and it is crucial that we root out misogyny, whether it is online or offline. I am working with colleagues across Government to tackle those dangerous attitudes. For example, through the Department for Education, we are looking at bringing forward updated relationships, health and sex education guidance to ensure that it prevents and tackles misogyny. Alongside that, I know the Science, Innovation and Technology Secretary is determined to go further and faster to ensure that children are protected online.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Saqib Bhatti** (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): I am a great believer in Britain being one of the greatest meritocracies in the world, where—at least in our party—people can rise to the very top, irrespective of race, religion or gender. The Government's consultation on reforming equality law is a litany of activist demands and bureaucratic burdens, with no proof that any of the measures would reduce inequality. Why are the Government so determined to put people into boxes on the basis of race, instead of promoting equality of opportunity for all?

**Bridget Phillipson:** This Labour Government are determined to break the link between background and success, so that where someone is from does not determine what they can go on to achieve and so everyone has the chance to get as far as their hard work and talent will take them. It is important that we tackle the unacceptable gaps we see around access to employment and pay for people from minority ethnic communities and disabled people, too. That is why we are consulting on this, working with business, and we want to get this right.

T3. [904030] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): The Tories shamefully left the gender pay gap persistently high. Does the Secretary of State agree that Labour's childcare expansion, free breakfast clubs and new nurseries will drive up women's incomes and work choices, who are disproportionately more affected by caring responsibilities?

**Bridget Phillipson:** I agree with my hon. Friend. This Labour Government are determined to ensure that all women have choices when it comes to balancing work and family life. That is why we are expanding access to childcare through new free breakfast clubs and new primary-based nurseries, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend's constituents will benefit from one of those new free breakfast clubs.

T6. [904033] **Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Perpetrators hanging around school, malicious contact with customers, and rat poison being sent to my constituents' homes are all frightening experiences faced by victims of domestic abuse, but police responses are inconsistent, even when perpetrators are on bail. What is the Secretary of State doing to work with other Departments to ensure that everyone in the system, from call handlers to Crown Prosecution Service workers, has training on forms of non-violent abuse to ensure that children and women are protected?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The hon. Lady raises some incredibly important points and shines a light on the experiences of victims in her constituency. This Government are determined to halve violence against women and girls. That is why, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls set out earlier, we are taking a range of actions right across Government. We are of course always happy to consider further areas where action is needed, so that all women and girls are able to live free from abuse and intimidation within our society.

T4. [904031] **Dr Beccy Cooper** (Worthing West) (Lab): This week we celebrate the International Day of Midwives. Midwives are an essential part of ending inequity in maternal health, delivering lifesaving community-based care. Will the Minister please commit to working with the Minister for Health to ensure that our 10-year health strategy and the NHS workforce plan put adequate resources into the overstretched maternity units in many, often deprived, parts of our country?

**Bridget Phillipson:** Yes, I am happy to give my hon. Friend that commitment. I know how seriously the Health Secretary takes this issue, because he knows, as I do, that too many women have been failed by poor maternal care and during traumatic experiences, and that all women deserve safe, compassionate care in those often quite difficult times that they can experience. That is why we are committed to training thousands more midwives and, through our NHS 10-year plan, we will ensure that there is equitable access right across the country for all women as they experience pregnancy and childbirth.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [903960] **Matt Bishop** (Forest of Dean) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 7 May.

**The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer):** Rising tensions between India and Pakistan will be of serious concern for many across Britain. We are engaging urgently with both countries as well as other international partners, encouraging dialogue, de-escalation and the protection of civilians.

Britain will fall silent tomorrow to mark the anniversary of VE Day. It is a day to remember our greatest generation, whose courage and selflessness won a victory over tyranny and evil. Past and present, the service of our armed forces defends our freedom, protects the values that we stand for, and makes this country so proud.

The landmark deal we have secured with India is a huge win for working people in this country. After years of negotiation, this Government have delivered in months, slashing tariffs, boosting wages and unleashing opportunities for UK businesses. It is the biggest trade deal the UK has delivered since we left the EU.

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

**Matt Bishop:** In 2018 my constituent, Richard Wellington, was diagnosed with a glioblastoma and given just 12 months to live. Against the odds, he is still with us today. He knows his time is limited, however, and is determined to leave a legacy by improving brain cancer treatment for others. His courage is inspiring and he shows extraordinary resilience, but patients with brain tumours fell through the cracks in our healthcare system under the Conservatives, and this must end. Will the Prime Minister set out how Labour will speed up cancer diagnosis and improve treatment times for brain tumour patients such as Richard as we go further with our plan for change?

**The Prime Minister:** I send my best wishes and, I am sure, those of the House to Richard and to every family living with cancer for their courage and fortitude. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) for her work to raise awareness of the devastating impact of brain cancer. I am really proud that our plan for change has already delivered faster diagnosis for more than 80,000 cancer patients. We are rolling out Cancer 360, which has groundbreaking new technology that will slash treatment delays across the NHS, as well as investing in more scanners, surgical hubs and radiotherapy machines. It is important work that is only happening because of our decision to make a record investment in the NHS, opposed by every other party.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (North West Essex) (Con): Can I echo the Prime Minister's comments? It was an honour to meet veterans at the VE Day parade on Monday and to commemorate the sacrifice of that generation. I look forward to marking VE Day at Westminster Abbey tomorrow.

Does the Prime Minister now admit that he was wrong to remove the winter fuel payment from millions of pensioners?

**The Prime Minister:** The No. 1 job of this Government was to put our finances back in order after the last Government lost control and to deal with the £22 billion black hole that they left. Because of our action, we have stabilised the economy, invested record amounts in the NHS, made a payment out to the 3 million lowest paid, and of course we are committed to the triple lock, which improved pensions by £470 last year. Because of the work that we have done, we are a country that countries such as India want to do deals with, because of the messages and the work that we have done.

**Mrs Badenoch:** The only black hole is the one the Prime Minister is digging. This issue affects some of the poorest and most vulnerable pensioners. His Mayor in Doncaster says it is wrong; his First Minister in Wales says it is wrong; even his own MPs are saying it is wrong. He has refused to listen to me on this, so will he at least listen to his own party and change course?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me spell this out. All the opposition parties would take this country back to where it was a few years ago: broken public finances, interest rates through the roof, and NHS waiting lists at an all-time high. No other party in this House is prepared to say how they would put the finances straight; no other party is saying how they would invest in our NHS and public services; no other party is focused on the long-term prosperity of Britain. No one on the Labour Benches is denying how big are the challenges that we face, but no one on the opposition Benches is even prepared to take those challenges on.

**Mrs Badenoch:** We would not balance it on the backs of pensioners. Pensioners are poorer and colder because of his decisions. All the while, energy has got more expensive for everyone. Why has the Prime Minister broken his promise to cut energy bills by £300?

**The Prime Minister:** The way to bring energy bills down for good is to deliver cheap, clean, home-grown energy. In the meantime, we have extended the warm home discount to 6 million households—one in five families—and that is £150 off their bills next winter. What will not bring energy bills down is the Leader of the Opposition's policy, leaving us hooked on fossil fuels and at the mercy of dictators like Putin. I will tell you what else will not bring bills down: the Conservatives blocking every piece of infrastructure that is needed in their own backyards. They balanced the books and crashed the economy on the backs of millions of working people in this country—that is why those people delivered the verdict that they did at the last general election.

**Mrs Badenoch:** The Prime Minister talks about clean energy. We have the second highest amount of renewables on the grid in Europe, and yet we still have the highest energy bills. This is not about clean energy. The Prime Minister has broken another promise. He will not admit it, but is the truth not that he cannot cut energy bills because of his net zero policy?

**The Prime Minister:** Energy bills based on fossil fuels have fluctuated massively in the last three years because we are exposed to the international markets. The only

way to get bills down is to go to renewable energy, which is something that the Leader of the Opposition used to believe in. In the words of the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Central Devon (Sir Mel Stride), the shift to net zero

“must now happen as a matter of urgency. It is no longer simply an environmental issue—energy independence should be viewed as part of our national security.”

He must have our lines, Mr Speaker.

What about the Leader of the Opposition herself? This is what she said:

“We believe that green trade and investment will be the future-proofing force that will help us create a better tomorrow”.

She went on to say

“it's long-term investment in nuclear and renewables that will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and keep down consumer costs.”

She has a reputation, apparently, for straight talking: she was right then, wasn't she?

**Mrs Badenoch:** This approach to net zero is “irrational”; it is “doomed to fail”. Those aren't my words; they are Tony Blair's. If the Prime Minister wants to throw words about, he should speak to him. The truth is that the Prime Minister is on another planet. His net zero plans mean ever more expensive energy. Across this country, jobs are disappearing. Last week, a ceramics factory in Stoke closed because of energy costs. This morning, 250 more job losses have been announced in the North sea, and yet the amount of gas the UK is importing is doubling, so why is he shutting down the North sea rather than getting our oil and gas out of the ground and making energy cheaper?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said many times, oil and gas will be part of the mix for many decades to come, but net zero is an opportunity to be seized. We have had over £43 billion invested in clean energy since July of last year, which is good for the economy, for business, for jobs, for apprentices and for growth. The global race is on for the jobs of the future, and I believe Britain can win that race. I do not think that the Leader of the Opposition is yet a climate denier, but she is a climate defeatist: she does not believe in Britain's ability to win the race for our economy, businesses and jobs. They have never backed Britain, and there is nothing patriotic about that.

**Mrs Badenoch:** The Prime Minister has got no answer. He could not even bring himself to say something to the 250 people who found out this morning that they have lost their job. The fact is that pensioners are poorer and people are being laid off. From winter fuel to net zero, his energy policy is a disaster, and everyone knows it. We know it, the public know it, the unions know it, his MPs know it, and even Tony Blair knows it. The Prime Minister's only answer is to go further and faster in the wrong direction. Why should we all suffer because he will not admit he has got this wrong?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course, nobody wants to see job losses, but the Leader of the Opposition should address her comments to the tens of thousands of men and women in this country who are working on renewables for the future of our country, and tell them that she does not want them. That is anti-growth, anti-jobs and



anti-working people. Every week, she comes along to talk the country down and carp from the sidelines; she cannot even bring herself to celebrate the deal we have done with India. The Conservatives spent eight years fiddling around and got absolutely nothing. We have delivered the best deal since we left the EU—the most ambitious deal for India—which will be measured in billions of pounds into our economy and thousands of jobs in this country. The Leader of the Opposition should be welcoming that.

**Q3. [903962] Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab):** The UK automotive sector faces major challenges, and Trump's tariffs are the latest crisis to hit the industry. Investment and jobs are now on the line, from Mini to McLaren, Aston Martin, Jaguar Land Rover and many others. Will the Prime Minister continue to make those companies' case in his talks with the US regime and remain a champion for this vital sector, unlike the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage), who believes that Jaguar deserves to go bust?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We are backing British car companies such as JLR, and our India trade deal will see tariffs slashed for car sales, which is good for British jobs. The criticism of the double taxation is incoherent nonsense. It is a benefit to working people; it is in the agreements that we already have with 50 other countries. If the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) or the Leader of the Opposition are seriously suggesting that they are going to tear up agreements with 50 other countries, creating a massive hole in our economy, they should get up and say so.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

**Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** As we celebrate 80 years since Britain led our allies to victory over fascism, I pay tribute on behalf of the Liberal Democrats to all those who struggled and sacrificed so much for our freedoms today. I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks about the conflict in Kashmir and, with him, urge restraint and de-escalation on both sides.

Among the messages that voters sent to Ministers last week, one stood out: bring back the winter fuel payment for millions of struggling pensioners. People will therefore be disappointed that the Prime Minister failed to do so today. He says that he wants to "go further and faster" to clean up the mess left by the Conservatives, but on social care, which is so crucial for our NHS, he is going slower and slower. Not only will the Casey commission take three years, we learned on Friday that the Government plan to take an extra seven years to implement it—it will not be implemented until 2036. Will the Prime Minister rip up that timetable, make sure that he does not repeat the mess made by the Conservatives, and get on with fixing social care this year?

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are taking this in two stages. We are already taking measures to increase support for social care—quite right too—while doing the long work to reform it and make sure we put a system in place. However, I say to the right hon. Gentleman once again that he comes to the Chamber every week saying that we should spend

more money, while at the same time saying that he does not want to pay for any of the measures to raise that money. That is nonsense.

**Ed Davey:** I am disappointed by that answer, and I will keep coming back to hold the Prime Minister to account.

People also want a Government who will stand up for our country against Donald Trump. First, he came for our steelworkers and our car makers with his outrageous tariffs. Now, Donald Trump is coming for our world-leading British film industry. Will the Prime Minister work with our allies in Europe and the Commonwealth and make it clear to President Trump that if he picks a fight with James Bond, Bridget Jones and Paddington Bear, he will lose?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman really should listen to the sectors that he thinks he is championing. They do not want us to abandon the work we are doing to try to get an agreement with America; they want that agreement to reduce tariffs. That is the sensible, pragmatic way to protect our national interest. It is not sensible or pragmatic to choose between the US and the EU, to abandon the work we are doing on trade with the US and to leave the tariffs exactly where they are. That is the most damaging thing that could possibly be done.

**Q4. [903963] Jack Abbott (Ipswich) (Lab/Co-op):** I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. For young people in Ipswich, there is no shortage of ambition, just a need for greater opportunities. That is why last autumn I was proud to sign an agreement with Sizewell C to guarantee 500 jobs for people in my town, alongside additional investment for Suffolk New college's courses on welding, engineering and fabrication, so that kids in my town can access the well-paid, secure, skilled jobs on offer. May I therefore urge the Prime Minister to support a final investment decision for Sizewell C, not just for our country's energy security, but for the once-in-a-generation opportunities for young people in Ipswich and Suffolk?

**The Prime Minister:** It is good to see a local Labour MP fighting for jobs in his constituency and achieving excellent results. We will make our final investment decision at the spending review. It is something that the Conservatives failed to deliver in 14 years. We are unashamedly pro-nuclear, pro-growth and pro-jobs. That is why we are making it easier to build small modular reactors and scrapping absurd rules that left vital projects tangled up in needless paperwork. We are doing the work that they failed to do in 14 years.

**Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP):** Prior to the election, the Prime Minister promised that energy bills would come down; they continue to rise. He promised that he would save the refinery at Grangemouth; it is shut. He promised that he would unleash a generation of secure energy jobs in my city of Aberdeen. Today, Harbour Energy—the largest independent player in the North sea—has announced that it is about to shed 25% of its workforce. That is 250 jobs in my constituency gone in the blink of his eye. Do you know who they

blame, Mr Speaker? They blame the policies of the Labour party. May I ask the Prime Minister—in fact, may I invite him to come to Aberdeen and explain to my constituents why he is willing to move heaven and earth to save jobs in Scunthorpe, while destroying jobs in Scotland?

**The Prime Minister:** Nobody wants to see job losses, but I remind the right hon. Member that before we came into office 10 months ago, the Scottish National party Government in Holyrood, alongside the Conservative Government, did absolutely nothing for projects such as Grangemouth. We have committed £200 million to secure the future of the site; we have delivered a £100 million deal; and we are helping with the training guarantees that are needed. Like his First Minister, the right hon. Gentleman will raise anything to distract from the SNP's disastrous record, with almost one in six Scots stuck on an NHS waiting list, poor standards and violence in Scottish schools, and more than £1 billion cut from local government. We gave the Scottish Government the biggest settlement since devolution. They have been in power for nearly two decades; they have absolutely nowhere to hide their appalling record.

Q7. [903966] **Michelle Scrogam** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for recently visiting the now royal port of Barrow in my constituency to lay the keel for the new Dreadnought-class submarines. He will have seen how proud we are to build our nuclear deterrent, which keeps us safe. As we move forward with our plan for change, does he agree that Barrow and Furness could provide a blueprint for the whole country, with defence investment creating jobs, growth and prosperity in communities across the UK?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The royal port of Barrow provides a model for how defence can be a catalyst for skilled, well-paid jobs throughout the United Kingdom. I was proud and humbled to be able to thank the crew of the Vanguard submarine that was returning home after months away, with four of those on board returning to their newborn children. That is the change that will come from our spending 2.5% of GDP on defence, for the first time since the last Labour Government. Extra investment in Barrow has been made possible by my hon. Friend and this Government; those in the Conservative party made promises, but, as usual, they never, ever set the money aside.

Q2. [903961] **Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): Ahead of the 80th anniversary of VE Day, may I thank the Prime Minister for his Government's recognition of the highly dangerous and clandestine work of the 1,746 pilots and navigators who formed the RAF's photographic reconnaissance squadrons, and the 635 Buckinghamshire-based photographic interpreters—often forgotten—whose service will be marked with a national memorial near the Churchill war rooms? They had a death rate of nearly 50% and a life expectancy of only two and a half months, but they nevertheless captured 26 million images of enemy operations, providing daily, up-to-date intelligence, via the interpreters' analysis, to the strategists in the Cabinet war rooms, for all our armed forces.

May I ask the Prime Minister to join me when that national memorial is unveiled so that we can pay our respects to the likes of the late Captain Wilfred Bruce Tilley DFC, of Axbridge in my constituency, and the other amazing young men and women whose work was so critical to the safety of millions of people in this country and elsewhere?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising that very important issue. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House would support a memorial to the service and sacrifice of those veterans. The bravery and service of individuals such as Captain Tilley, and others in the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit and the photographic interpretation units, saved the lives of many servicemen and servicewomen and, of course, civilians, and—as the hon. Lady rightly pointed out—the cost was the many casualties in those units. As we mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, we will remember those who helped to secure our greatest victory.

Q9. [903968] **Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The London borough of Hackney spends £54 million a year, and rising, on temporary accommodation. Not only is that costing the taxpayer dear, but it is wrenching families apart. Communities are being rent asunder, schools are closing, and families are living in hostels in overcrowded rooms or in far-flung areas outside London. I welcome our pledge to build 1.5 million new homes, but will the Prime Minister reassure my constituents that social housing is a priority for him?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right: families are desperate for the security of their own homes, and we are delivering the biggest boost to affordable and social housing in a generation, backed by £2 billion of additional investment. That, and our reforms, will fulfil our ambition to build 88,000 new homes in areas across London, including my hon. Friend's constituency. At the same time, we are tackling the root causes of homelessness, and, of course, scrapping section 21 evictions.

Q5. [903964] **Dr Roz Savage** (South Cotswolds) (LD): Under the Conservatives, inequality has surged. More than 14 million people—including 2,000 children in my constituency—now live in poverty, while the richest 1% see their incomes soar. Of the developed countries, ours is now the ninth most unequal. Will the Prime Minister listen to the Liberal Democrats, the public and many of his own Back Benchers and commit himself to reversing changes involving, for instance, the personal independence payment, the winter fuel allowance and the two-child benefit cap, and will he introduce clear poverty reduction targets to ensure that any economic growth benefits those who need it most?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady is right to mention the appalling record of the last Government, which saw 900,000 more children in poverty. We are already delivering 750 free breakfast clubs and boosting the minimum wage for more than 3 million people—the lowest-paid workers in our country—and the child poverty taskforce is looking at every lever that can be pulled. I am proud of the last Labour Government's record on tackling poverty, and we will continue to do that in this Government.

Q11. [903970] **Elaine Stewart** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Last month's data showed that NHS waiting lists in Wales fell for three months in a row. In England, the waiting lists have fallen for six months in a row. In Scotland, after nearly 20 years in charge, the SNP Government have left our NHS on its knees. Instead, remarkable acts of charity from rock legend Rod Stewart are helping people to get the care they need. Does the Prime Minister agree that Scotland needs a new direction so that my constituents in Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock do not rely on charity for their healthcare?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. The contrast, as she points out, is stark. In England and Wales, waiting lists are falling, with over 3 million extra appointments already delivered. In Scotland, the SNP Government have just introduced their fifth NHS recovery plan in just four years. They have had the biggest Budget settlement since devolution and nearly two decades in power. They still have no idea how to fix the NHS, and they have run out of excuses.

Q6. [903965] **Siân Berry** (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): VE Day marked the end of horror in Europe. Afterwards, our post-war expansion of welfare benefits was something truly principled from Labour. Given the real fear felt by disabled people in Brighton Pavilion and across the nation, does the Prime Minister agree that now is the time to be principled again and restore their support, not make his MPs vote to restrict it?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising the record of the post-war Labour Government—a great reforming Government. The principles remain the same: those who need support and protection should have that support and protection, those who can be supported and helped into work should be helped and supported into work—something that is not happening under the system as it is—and those who can work should work.

Q13. [903972] **Connor Naismith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Crewe in my constituency has a proud rail heritage, with Crewe station boasting unrivalled 360° connectivity to all four corners of our country. When the Conservative Government took the decision to cancel the second leg of HS2, it was a great betrayal of my constituents, taking a sledgehammer to our town's prospects for regeneration and prosperity. Will the Prime Minister look kindly upon proposals to extend High Speed rail north of Birmingham, which would utilise Crewe's unique strategic value to the rail network and bring opportunity and prosperity to the north of England?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of stronger and more reliable rail connections in improving journeys and driving economic growth. The Conservative party utterly failed to grip delivery on HS2. Costs went through the roof, and timelines were shredded. There were false promises and a total failure. We are reviewing the position that we inherited, and we are committed to improving rail connectivity across the north. We have already announced £450 million extra for the key trans-Pennine route upgrade, which will slash journey times and deliver growth and more reliable modern services for passengers.

Q8. [903967] **Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): This week, the Israeli Government approved a plan to officially conquer Gaza. Just yesterday, Minister Smotrich vowed that Gaza will be "entirely destroyed" and that the Palestinians will have to

"leave in great numbers to third countries."

This follows the extermination of over 50,000 Palestinian men, women and children, and the simultaneous expansion of illegal settlements in the west bank—something I witnessed with my own eyes last week. Will the Prime Minister now finally acknowledge that ethnic cleansing is under way and end all UK military co-operation with Israel, especially the illegal provision of F-35 fighter jet parts, or will he risk making Britain complicit in war crimes and be the Prime Minister to see Britain answer at The Hague for its role in this atrocity?

**The Prime Minister:** Most of what the hon. Gentleman says is simply not right, but I want to address the position in Gaza and the west bank, because it is increasingly intolerable. I am deeply concerned, particularly with the lack of aid getting in and the impact that that is having on hundreds of thousands of individuals. That concern is something I recently reaffirmed to the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, where I asserted again that a two-state solution is the only viable approach for peace. Our focus is on delivering peace for Palestinians and Israelis, returning to the ceasefire, getting the hostages out, and getting in the humanitarian aid that is desperately needed in greater number and more quickly.

Q14. [903973] **Maureen Burke** (Glasgow North East) (Lab): As a result of a relationship breakdown, my constituent Martin and his three children ended up homeless. They have gone from living in a hotel to temporary accommodation. Martin feels abandoned because Glasgow city council has not been in contact for months. The months of uncertainty have disrupted all their lives, but Martin is especially worried about the impact on his children's education. Like any father, he wants stability for his family, but the lack of social housing means they are stuck in complete limbo. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that every child, no matter where they live, deserves a safe home and access to a good education, and that in every part of the UK we need to build more social housing in order to end homelessness?

**The Prime Minister:** I am deeply sorry to hear about Martin's case, and I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's comments about every family deserving a safe and a secure home. In England, that is why we are investing an additional £2 billion to help deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable house building in a generation. But in Scotland it is, frankly, disgraceful that over 10,000 children have no fixed home to call their own after nearly 20 years of an SNP Government. That is the highest level ever and shows why Scotland desperately needs a new direction.

Q10. [903969] **Matt Vickers** (Stockton West) (Con): Last week I was talking to Jason, a pub landlord, and he told me that he has heard a rumour about the Prime Minister. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ooh!"] Not that one, not that one. He has heard that there is a reason why the Prime Minister hates Britain's pubs. Landlords such as Jason are being battered by Labour's jobs tax and the



slashing of small business rate relief, meaning that as many as half of Britain's pubs could be closed by 2030. Why does he hate Britain's pubs, and if he does not, why is he taxing them into extinction?

**The Prime Minister:** Nobody likes pubs better than me, and we support them. This is the same old nonsense: the Opposition say they do not want the rise in national insurance contributions, but they do not have the courage to say they would reverse it, because they know that if they did say that, they would be unable to say where the money is coming from. That is how we got into the problem in the first place.

Q15. [903974] **Kirsteen Sullivan** (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): Few things are more harrowing than a parent's desperate and repeated attempts to access the mental health support their child needs. Organisations such as Smile, a counselling service supporting young people in my constituency, are stepping into the breach while young people languish on waiting lists without the help they need. Over the past decade, Smile has been a lifeline for thousands. Will the Prime Minister join me in wishing Declan and the team at Smile a very happy 10th birthday, and thank them for their invaluable work in supporting our young people and families?

**The Prime Minister:** I join my hon. Friend and commend all the staff at Smile for their vital work. Far too many young people are left without the support they need, and that is why we are recruiting an additional 8,500 mental health workers, providing access to specialist mental health professionals in every school and funding talking therapies across the country to bring down waiting times and get people the care they need.

Q12. [903971] **Aphra Brandreth** (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): With the so-called EU-UK reset summit less than two weeks away, will the Prime Minister reassure the House that he will not hand over any British sovereign powers, particularly the hard-won controls over our UK fishing waters, in backroom deals with Brussels?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Member knows, we have committed to resetting the relationship with the EU. We think there is a better deal that can be had. I am

not going to provide a running commentary. What I can say is this: we will act only, as we always do, in the national interest. We have secured a very good deal with India, we are talking to the US and we are going for a reset with the EU to boost our economy.

**Torcuil Crichton** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): As you know, Mr Speaker, I am alarmed by news that the Press Association, which assiduously covers our exchanges here, may cut back its dawn-to-dusk coverage through redundancies. *Hansard* faithfully records our words, but it is reporters in the Press Gallery who bear witness to the human drama here, and no amount of AI will replace the human eyes in the Press Gallery. Will the Prime Minister join me and my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Paul Waugh) in calling on the newspapers and media outlets that fund the Press Association to hold the front page and reconsider these rash moves?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises a really important point. We enjoy a free press and independent journalism in this country. Across the world, journalists risk their lives, and lose their lives, doing what they do best: independently pursuing the truth. On many occasions I have been at award ceremonies, usually on a yearly basis, where the names of those journalists who have lost either their lives or their freedom is read out, and it is always a humbling reminder of the really important work that they do.

**Mike Wood** (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, Parliament has banned the charging of electric vehicles in its underground car park because of safety concerns. Yet local authorities around the country often feel powerless to stop the construction of battery energy storage systems near people's homes and near our rivers and canals, despite three fires already this year. Will the Prime Minister look again at his Planning and Infrastructure Bill to make it easier, rather than harder, for local communities to have a meaningful say?

**The Prime Minister:** I am really proud that on planning and infrastructure we are taking the action that has not been taken for years to drive our economy, and I remind the hon. Gentleman that that was signalled by the Office for Budget Responsibility as the single biggest driver of growth over the coming years.



## United States Film Tariff

12.36 pm

**Stuart Andrew** (Daventry) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister if he will make a statement on the potential implications for the UK film industry of the United States's proposed 100% tariff on foreign-produced films.

**The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant)**: As the House will be aware, President Trump announced on Sunday that he had authorised the Department of Commerce to initiate tariffs on all movies produced in foreign lands. He has made other comments since. This is a very fluid situation and we will continue to take a calm and steady approach. I spent most of Monday talking to UK and US film makers and the general secretary of Bectu, among others, and I can tell the House that we are already in active discussions with the top of the US Administration on this subject.

We are working hard to establish what might be proposed, if anything, and to make sure our world-beating creative industries are protected. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the film industry can continue to thrive and create good jobs right across the UK. UK film and high-end television generated production spend of £5.6 billion in 2024, and we want to work with our domestic industry and international partners to continue to build on that success.

We are absolutely clear that the deep ties between the US and UK film industries provide mutual benefits to both countries. Productions are, by their very nature, international partnerships, which are often developed and created across different countries and locations. Indeed, US movies are often multinational precisely because US movies earn far more overseas than they do domestically in the United States. The UK and the US both benefit when the likes of "Star Wars" and "Mission Impossible" are filmed in the UK, just as we both benefit from the close working relationship between our producers, talent and crew.

Our countries have a long history of working together to drive the growth and creative success of our film and television sectors. From Cary Grant to Hugh Grant, and from Alfred Hitchcock to Christopher Nolan, British talent has often been at the forefront of the US sector, and I am absolutely sure this will continue in the years ahead. I was once told by a film producer, "Never judge a film by the first 10 minutes." I think we can say the same of this.

**Stuart Andrew**: I thank the Minister for his answer. As he rightly says, we learnt over the weekend that the President's Administration intend to impose a 100% tariff on all films produced outside the US. It is understood that he has directed the US Government to begin implementing the policy immediately.

I welcome the fact that the Minister recognises the film industry in this country as a jewel in our crown of world-leading creative industries. I also point out that the sector alone is worth £1.96 billion here, and supports 195,000 jobs up and down the country. It shows off our great British culture and values, the talent we have, and some of the most amazing settings for so many films of different genres.

I am glad that the Government are working to ensure that all is done to give confidence to our directors, actors, screenwriters and producers that they are thinking about them, because for both independent film makers and major studios this action could result in cancelled projects, lost investment and a significant decline in UK film exports, which is especially hard given that they are still recovering from the covid pandemic. But I have to say that it is disappointing the Government failed to start the negotiations with President Trump's team for five months after the election and fired Britain's top trade negotiator. It is difficult not to wonder whether a different approach could have led to a different outcome.

None the less, the priority is to protect our film industry, so what assessment has the Minister made of the potential impact on the UK film sector? What immediate steps are the Government taking to engage with the US and ensure that the investment in UK facilities by many US businesses, which would be affected, is highlighted? What contingency plans has he prepared in the event that no exemptions can be secured? Finally, what assessment have the Government made of the potential drastic cut in BBC Studios' profits from sales to the US market, and what impact could that have on the licence fee?

**Chris Bryant**: First, may I, on a co-operative note, say that one reason we have a very strong film and high-end television sector in the UK is the joint policy, adopted across several years by both Conservative and Labour Administrations, to ensure we have very competitive tax credits. I pay tribute to the work done by the previous Government, which we were able to enhance when we brought in two new tariffs—I mean two new tax credits—in the Budget just before Christmas. No, we are not in favour of bringing in tariffs. I think I am right in saying that in 1947 the Labour Government did bring in tariffs on US films, because we thought too many US films were being shown in British cinemas. That strategy did not go very well: the Americans simply banned the export of US films and we ended up watching "Ben Hur" repeatedly in every cinema, as well as a film called "Hellzapoppin'" which I do not think anybody has watched since. However, the successful bit of what we did in 1947 and 1948 was that we invested in the British film production system, which led to films such as "Hamlet" and "Kind Hearts and Coronets". That is the pattern we still want to adopt.

Let me be absolutely clear: we believe that there are mutual benefits to both of us if we continue on the path we have selected. I am not sure precisely what is intended: I do not know what a tariff on a service would look like and I do not know whether the intention is for it to be on movie theatres. The danger is that the US already has two major problems with its film industry: one is distribution costs, so if the US went down that route, it could lead to heavy problems for the industry; and the other is the very high cost of making movies in the US.

Most films these days are an international collaboration of some kind, and we want to maintain that. Even the British production of "Paddington"—I am looking at the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) only because I suspect he is about to mention it; and he has just given me a Paddington hard stare—was made by StudioCanal, which is, of course, part of Canal+. It had Spanish actors as well as British actors. This is just

[Chris Bryant]

a fact of modern films: they are multinational and that is one of their strengths. Incidentally, I do not think that Paddington ever went to Peru—I do not think they filmed any of it in Peru. I am also told by my Peruvian friends that there aren't any bears in Peru.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister's measured and thoughtful response to President Trump's latest announcement and his full-throated support for the British film industry. He will be aware that my constituency is very much a filming venue for both film and television. In his discussions with the United States, will he ensure that he is also championing high-end television, as I think he briefly mentioned, which is often filmed, produced and made in Hackney? I also make a plea for all the creative industries in my constituency that feed into the film industry. Can the Minister ensure there is good communication from the Government on these negotiations? This is creating a great deal of uncertainty.

**Chris Bryant:** I know Hackney very well; as my hon. Friend knows, I used to be a councillor there. It is not just London that is a phenomenal place to make a movie, but the whole United Kingdom. We have some of the best scenery and some of the best buildings. It is not only Bath, which gets used endlessly in lots of films—when I was there a couple of weeks ago, I heard about a long list of them. My hon. Friend is also right about television. What is the difference between making “Bridgerton” and making a movie? In fact, the pattern is very similar; international collaboration is important because it delivers international audiences, and we want to maintain that.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): British film really is the marmalade sandwich in the lunchbox of our creative industries; it has given us Bond, Paddington, Harry Potter and Monty Python. Donald Trump clearly thinks he is a god-like figure, but on the Lib Dem Benches, we are clear that he is not the messiah—he's a very naughty boy. If he had his way, we would be watching “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Alcatraz”, or perhaps “Harry Potter and the Executive Order of the Phoenix”. Will the Minister confirm that all options will be on the table to protect our film industry, including working with allies such as Canada and Australia, which have shown strength in recent weeks by voting anti-Trump? Will he commit to immediately meeting film industry leaders in the UK to co-ordinate a response in this area, and will the Government back our world-leading creatives by doing the right thing on AI and copyright?

**Chris Bryant:** I could have predicted half the hon. Gentleman's question, because I knew Paddington would get in there. On a serious note, I am meeting industry representatives tomorrow afternoon, and I look forward to understanding their precise concerns, in addition to the obvious concerns that we all share.

I want to caution slightly against a word that has been used three times now, I think, with Members saying that President Trump has “announced” something. A clear policy has not been announced—I think we need

to be careful about that. As I said earlier, it is difficult to see how a tariff would be imposed on a service or on films in this way. I want to be careful and precise in the way we move forward on this.

I have been asked what we are doing: we have already had people in Washington DC talking with people in the Trump Administration at the highest level, and we will progress that. Of course, we want to do everything we can to preserve the strength of the industry.

**Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): I declare an interest, as one of my little sisters works in the UK film and TV industry; I am immensely proud of her. I urge the Minister to look at how we bolster home-made film and TV as part of the soon-to-be published creative industries sector plan, particularly in Northumbria, where we have some of the most wonderful landscapes; a couple of years ago we sadly lost Sycamore Gap, which provided a memorable backdrop, but we also have Hadrian's wall. We also have a fantastic workforce, but too often I see young people having to leave the north-east to get creative opportunities elsewhere in the UK.

**Chris Bryant:** That is an extremely well-made point, and I would add to it something I said when I appeared before the Select Committee—from whom I suppose we might hear in a moment—which is that I am very keen on having a mixed economy in the British film industry. Sometimes we will be making films for other markets; sometimes we will be making films that tell predominantly British stories about the way we are in this country and selling them around the world, but where the intellectual property remains with British production companies. That is the mix that we need to achieve.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) referred to our relationship with the US. I should also say that the Secretary of State was in India last week; both she and I want to ensure that we also have a much stronger relationship with India, which is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. We think we can do a great deal more in that film production space as well.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): There is no doubt that this speculation will cause huge worry to those working in British film production, but, as the Minister says, it highlights once again the importance of bolstering the British screen sector. We recommended steps to deliver that in a recent Select Committee report, yet within days of publishing it, his Department had already asked for an extension to the time in which it would respond. This weekend we heard rumours that the whole Department is up for the chop under his Government—I am not sure if that is before or after he has sacrificed our creative industries on the altar of AI. The Minister is a brilliant communicator, and I know that deep in his heart he cares passionately about this issue, but when will he show some grit and action on behalf of our world-leading creative industries, in particular our screen sector?

**Chris Bryant:** I hope the hon. Lady accepts that there are areas where I have taken very deliberate action on the back of recommendations from her Committee, not least in relation to a levy on gig and arena tickets to

fund support for small music venues—but I take her point. I was not aware that we had asked for an extension. We will get on with providing a response to her as fast as possible. It was an excellent report; I have read it. It contains lots of good things that I want to take forward, but we probably will not be able to do everything in it.

It is really important that we focus on skills in the UK screen industry; that has been raised repeatedly with me. I want every kid in the country to have a chance to work in the creative industries, including in film and high-end television. Many would not even think that that was a possibility, so we need to transform the whole pathway into those industry skills; I know that that is one of the things that the hon. Lady's Committee has raised.

**Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): Whether it is because of the fantastic, state-of-the-art Shinfield Studios just up the road, access to fantastic filming locations such as Swinley forest on the Crown Estate, or our incredible transport links, Bracknell Forest is increasingly becoming a go-to location for the film industry. As the Minister has already touched on, we need to see more emphasis placed on home-grown skills, so that young people in Bracknell can access the fantastic opportunities that the film sector offers. Will he say a bit more about what this Government will do to break down the barriers to opportunity in the film industry?

**Chris Bryant:** We have already invested significant amounts of money in the skills sector, and more came as a result of the Budget. My hon. Friend is quite right that his patch is a go-to area for film production. One reason that US companies—and, for that matter, companies from many places around the world—come to the UK to make films is for our skills; we have some of the best cinematographers, technical experts and designers, as well as the acting talent, which means that it is possible to make a very convincing film in the UK more effectively and cheaply than in many other places. We are determined to ensure that the UK remains the best place in the world to make movies.

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): Film studios are a really important part of our economy in Hertfordshire and give opportunities, jobs, apprenticeships and work experience to people in my constituency. As the Minister has recognised, it is not remotely clear yet how the tariffs will operate, and many have said that they are unworkable, but if America goes ahead and we have to take action in this country to ensure that our film industry is competitive, I urge him to look at the business rates regime with the Treasury. Sky Studios Elstree near my constituency has seen its business rates go up by more than 600%—they now account for 30% of its operating costs. I encourage the Minister to look at tackling that regime, as one measure to ensure that we protect our creative industries and the film sector here in the UK.

**Chris Bryant:** The hon. Lady makes a good point, which has been raised with me by several other Members. We made special provision in the Budget to ensure that the business rates for studios are protected until 2034, and I think that is a good measure. I know that some of the very large studios are finding it more difficult, and

I am happy to continue looking at the issue. Let me read some statistics that may be helpful. According to a report published in January by the Motion Picture Association of the United States of America, in 2023 the US earned \$22.6 billion in film and television exports, and its services trade surplus was \$15.3 billion, or 6% of the total US trade surplus in services. It is mutually beneficial for the US and the UK to remain with the system we have, without tariffs.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): As you will be aware, Mr Speaker, Harlow is the birthplace of Rupert Grint, Jo Joyner and Rik Mayall. I have to mention Leila Khan too, because I used to teach her and she is an up-and-coming star. Harlow has also recently doubled as Paris in an episode of “The Crown”. Does the Minister agree that Harlow, as well as the rest of the UK, has a huge amount of talent and that, far from relying on US film imports, we produce some fantastic films in this country and our film industry is growing? What can this Government do to support it to continue to grow and thrive?

**Chris Bryant:** My hon. Friend is quite right about Harlow. I would argue that many different parts of the UK that have never yet managed to get into films need to up their game. Local authorities can play a role in ensuring that their area is considered as a potential place to make a film. It is often about whether other facilities are available in the local area that can contribute to that. He makes a fair point on behalf of Harlow, and if there is a film, he will be starring in it.

**Sir Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): I may be able to help the Minister: Paddington Bear actually lives in Borehamwood, because the movie “Paddington” was produced in my constituency at Elstree Studios, which sits alongside Sky Studios Elstree as a jewel in the crown of the British industry. It is no surprise that Donald Trump is jealous because, by many accounts, more film and television content is produced in Hertfordshire than in Hollywood.

As the Minister rightly said, the current situation is of mutual benefit to our two nations. There is one thing that he could do right now, though, and for once I agree with the Minister—sorry, I meant to say the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper); I will get my facts right in a moment. The key point is that business rates are proving to be crippling for many of our studios, including Elstree, so I urge the Minister to have another go at the Treasury. I remember a similar situation with the culture recovery fund; the Treasury is resistant to begin with, but if he keeps going, he will get some further movement. That would be a huge fillip to the industry and would help it to withstand whatever shocks it may face.

**Chris Bryant:** I am very confused about who is and is not a Minister these days. I accept the point: it is clearly an issue. I remember that when we were in opposition, I was regularly knocking on the door of the now shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Daventry (Stuart Andrew), trying to get him to do something to persuade the Treasury to do something about business rates. I am fully on board, and I understand the problem. I look forward to the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Sir Oliver Dowden) assisting me in more endeavours in the future. Hugh Bonneville told me that



[Chris Bryant]

he was slightly upset when he signed up to “Paddington in Peru”, because he thought that he would be filming in Peru, but he only got as far as Borehamwood.

**Alex Mayer** (Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard) (Lab): The economy is set to benefit from a £50 billion boost from the Universal theme park in Bedfordshire, which will star Paddington Bear; all Members will welcome that. Does the Minister agree that stars like Paddington Bear have an enormous amount of soft power? We have heard that in the Chamber today. What can the Minister do to reassure me that he will ensure that we protect and support the next generation of Great British storytellers?

**Chris Bryant:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I am delighted that the theme park will happen; it will be transformational for the British tourism industry, apart from anything else, and it will be the largest theme park across the whole of Europe. I am very grateful to my colleagues in the Treasury, who certainly delivered when it was necessary in relation to that. I emphasise how important not just our film industry, but our high-end television—and, for that matter, the very existence of the BBC and stuff produced by ITV and many others—is as part of our soft power, although I think Paddington probably counts as hard power.

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): Shinfield Studios in Wokingham borough has brought hundreds of jobs to my constituents and to many across Berkshire. It is a very important part of our local economy and a symbol of the UK’s creative strength. We must not forget that Berkshire is the Hollywood of Britain, and it must be protected from Donald Trump’s reckless tariffs. Will the Minister condemn these harmful tariffs and work with the film industry to ensure that the UK remains the world’s premier destination for film investment?

**Chris Bryant:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We want to maintain the UK as the premier destination for international investment from not just the United States of America, but India, which I have already referenced, and Nigeria; I would like to see a lot more co-production between the UK and Nigeria. It is worth bearing in mind that 51% of our movie exports go to the European Union, so this is a genuinely open market, and my belief is that free trade is better than tariffs.

**Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab): The Minister will know that the UK has a world-leading film and TV workforce that flies the flag for collaboration, British talent and economic growth around the world. But he will also know that much of our film workforce is freelance and that they will be watching this news with anxiety, particularly as many of them are still recovering from the impact of the recent US industrial action. I thank the Minister for his hard work. I am pleased that he has spoken to Phillipa Childs, the head of Bectu. The union Bectu is a fearless champion for our industry in the UK. Will he join me in reassuring Bectu members and our film workforce that we are on their side and that, whatever happens, we will help protect film talent in the UK?

**Chris Bryant:** I shall make two points in reply to that question. First, there have been difficulties over the past couple of years in the UK film and high-end television

industry because of what happened in the United States of America. That makes the point about the mutuality between the US and the UK film industry all the stronger. The truth is that I would like the US movie industry to be strong, because if it is strong, our industry will be strong as well. There are net benefits for both of us, and there is a win-win situation.

The second point is about freelance work. I have often worried that so much of the creative industries relies on freelance workers. In many cases, that is great, because people want that kind of career, but they also need some degree of security if they are to be able to take out a mortgage and plan their economic future. That is definitely one of the things that we will look at in relation to the industrial strategy, which we hope to be publishing soon.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): The film industry is enormously important to the Buckinghamshire economy. Pinewood Studios is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), but many of my constituents are supported in jobs not just at the studios themselves, but in the many supply-chain businesses that feed into them. Pinewood goes over and above most other businesses I know in providing opportunities for young people through its Futures Festival, which showcases every single career that can be had in the film industry. Much of that success is actually achieved on American money, because companies such as Disney and Amazon use Pinewood out of choice. Therefore, on top of what the Minister has said about working with the Trump Administration to try to avoid these tariffs, can he assure us that he is working with companies such as Disney and Amazon to ensure that those American brands are speaking up to say why they are choosing Pinewood and other UK studios?

**Chris Bryant:** I think the first text message that I received early on Monday morning was from Pinewood. So, yes, I am on that case as well, but it is not just about Amazon and Disney; it is also about the streamers and a whole series of other such organisations making their product here in the United Kingdom. Of course, Pinewood is the home of Bond, which also makes the point, because historically the distribution rights for Bond were, I think, with an American company, but the production rights were with Barbara Broccoli and her relatives. All of that is now with the US, but let me put it this way: I am very hopeful that Bond will still always be British.

**John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): I am glad that the Minister mentioned the phrase “win-win”, because in international trade in the film industry and the creative industries, it has to be about win-win rather than zero sum. When I discussed this industry with Fabien Riggall, the founder of Secret Cinema, it became absolutely clear that we have such incredible innovators in our creative industry, and in the film sector specifically. For them to flourish, we need to retain that sense that it is a win-win situation internationally and for the UK, not zero sum.

**Chris Bryant:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. I will, if I might, just leap off the word cinema to make the point that film is not just about production, but about finding audiences. One of my concerns in the UK is about how we make sure that



cinemas—or movie theatres as they are known in the US—can flourish as well. They can be a really important part of dignity in a town. A town that has a cinema is likely to be a place that has respect for itself, and I would like to ensure that that continues into the future.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Scotland is now one of the most sought after film destinations in the world, and US film companies regularly base their operations in Scotland. We have featured in everything from Batman to Indiana Jones to “World War Z”. All of that, as well as developing the film sector in Scotland, will be put at risk if there is any concept of tariffs at all. Will the Minister work closely with the Scottish Government in his response to the US? Will he state quite clearly that such a move would be mutually self-destructive, and that all parties are set to lose if the US proceeds with anything approaching tariffs?

**Chris Bryant:** I have already made the point that we think there is a win-win situation. A strong US movie industry will benefit a strong UK movie industry. I believe in fair trade and free trade. In fact, over recent years, it has been worrying that more and more countries have wanted to put up protectionist measures around a whole series of industries. It has tended not to happen in services, and to be more about goods, which is one of the other issues. The hon. Member is right about Scotland. I am very keen on working with all the devolved Administrations to make sure that we remain the best place in which to make films and high-end television. I do not know whether anybody has watched “Havoc”—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, I was not referring to the Conservative party. Returning to my point, “Havoc” was all filmed in Wales, but it looks as if it is an American dystopian city.

**Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): Warner Brothers Studios Leavesden is in my constituency and a genuinely world-class film and TV production centre. It provides thousands of jobs, generates significant wealth for the UK economy, and earns South West Hertfordshire the reputation of Hollywood in Hertfordshire. Major international blockbusters, including “Barbie”, “Mission: Impossible”, “Paddington” and the Harry Potter franchise have been filmed there, and the recently confirmed HBO Harry Potter TV series is set to be filmed there this summer.

Leaving aside the decisions that the Chancellor has made and the impact that they have had on the economy, can the Minister reassure us that he will continue to update the House and the industry more widely about how the Government will mitigate these tariffs if they come to fruition?

**Chris Bryant:** We are working on making sure that we have a proper trade deal that would not just mitigate the tariffs, but mean that we would not end up in the situation that the hon. Gentleman has just described. I know Leavesden well, and, for that matter, Warner was in touch very quickly—actually I think I was in touch with it very quickly on Monday morning. I am very hopeful that it will be part of our discussions when I gather the industry together tomorrow afternoon, but the hon. Gentleman makes a good point none the less.

**Caroline Voaden** (South Devon) (LD): Unlike many others in the House, I cannot say that my area—Totnes—has film studios, or that a major movie has been made in my constituency, but we do have a lot of creatives living in our community, from writers to musicians and producers. We also have a costume maker, who happens to be my daughter. I am very proud of her and she is entering this industry—an industry that we should all be proud of. If these tariffs materialise, they will deal another blow to the UK film industry following the strikes that we have already seen. Will the Minister assure us that he is ready to protect and insulate the UK film industry and all the jobs that it sustains, particularly freelance jobs, by pushing for either tax credits or business rate adjustments?

**Chris Bryant:** I find it difficult to believe that there has not ever been a film made in Devon, but if that is the case, one of my major aims must be to make sure that in the next few years a film is made in Devon. Perhaps we will be able to get the hon. Member a bit part. I will, if I may, just refer back to Cheltenham. One of the films made in Cheltenham many, many years ago was “If”, which is wonderful and was directed by Lindsay Anderson. The word “if” is a very important one at the moment, because we are talking about if these tariffs were to be imposed.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): On Sunday, the President of the United States said:

“WE WANT MOVIES MADE IN AMERICA, AGAIN!”

Does the Minister agree that the key to making great movies is to ensure artistic freedom and expression and to grow the necessary skills? With that in mind, would he visit Tech Trowbridge in my constituency, which is doing a good job in upskilling young people in multimedia?

**Chris Bryant:** Yes.

**Steff Aquarone** (North Norfolk) (LD): As a one-time producer of a British-made film, I am proud that North Norfolk has been the backdrop for many great films, including “Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa”. It is no wonder that President Trump would want to dissuade such a film from coming to America, as Steve Coogan himself has said that

“the only person on Earth who’s more Alan Partridge than Alan Partridge is Donald Trump.”

Can the Minister assure the blossoming creative sector in North Norfolk that he values its contributions to our economy, and can he give reassurance that the Government will do everything they can to protect the sector from another Trump trade tantrum?

**Chris Bryant:** The hon. Member refers to some things I have already spoken about, but why did he not make his film in Devon? He has obviously not got the message from his party colleagues. There are lots of great British films that will be watched in American cinemas over the weeks to come, and I am certain that no President would want to say, “Don’t watch British films”. One of the films I enjoyed most over the last few months was “Conclave”, which was a phenomenal success and remarkably timely.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): The film industry is important in Northern Ireland; the Executive have poured a considerable amount of money into Northern Ireland Screen, and the internationally successful “Game

[Sammy Wilson]

of *Thrones*” was filmed in Northern Ireland, much of it in my constituency. We can see the benefits of that, as tens of millions of pounds have been poured in for building sets, for costumes and for catering, and even now thousands of tourists come every year to see where the filming was, so there is a long legacy.

I welcome the way in which the Minister is dealing with this situation. Tariffs are speculation at the moment, but before they become policy it is important that we get the message over to the Administration. Will he ensure that in constructing his arguments he consults with the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that Northern Ireland’s voice is heard in these discussions?

**Mr Speaker:** A rather “Lawrence of Arabia” question.

**Chris Bryant:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I have already had discussions on other matters relating to the creative industries with Members of the Executive in Northern Ireland, and I think I have another call next week, so I will of course make sure they are consulted. He makes a very good point about tourism. An awful lot of tourists who come to the UK want to see the places where some of their favourite movies and television series were made. That is one of the things that VisitBritain is capitalising on at the moment with its “Starring GREAT Britain” campaign.

**Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): I very much enjoy discussing the British film industry, because Members across the House stand up and say that they have the Hollywood of Hertfordshire or Bedfordshire and everywhere else. I am blessed in Spelthorne to have Europe’s biggest film studios and the second biggest in the world in Shepperton—interestingly, it is second not to Hollywood but to China. There is a certain amount of nervousness in Spelthorne as a result of the posting on Truth Social that the Minister has come here to talk about. I agree with him that it is incredibly difficult logistically and technically to unpick the US-UK intellectual property in a film, and I think it will prove to be so. I therefore commend him for his considered run at this; I think it is the right thing to do.

A couple of weeks ago I visited Cineco, one of our many British film support companies, which makes sets and props. One point it made on skills is that the apprenticeship model does not work terribly well for industries that have so many freelancers and such lumpy work schedules. As a sidebar to the Minister’s meeting with industry leaders tomorrow, would he please raise and discuss that with industry leaders?

**Mr Speaker:** Another “Lawrence of Arabia” question.

**Chris Bryant:** Interestingly, I was at the Bad Wolf studios in Cardiff last week, and one thing Jane Tranter raised with me was how important the security of knowing that they have a number of projects in their studios has been to taking on apprentices in the company. They have been making not just “Doctor Who” but “His Dark Materials”, and “Industry” is being filmed there at the moment. There are a whole series of different projects, and that enables the studios to take people on not just on a daily basis. We need to change the

apprenticeship levy in the UK so that it works better for the film industry and so that the industry can make long-term commitments to people’s future careers.

**Zöe Franklin** (Guildford) (LD): I appreciate the Minister’s comments this afternoon. I am a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, and we have heard over and over again how important UK film tax credits are to the industry and about the tangible difference they make to film makers across the UK. Can the Minister say whether the Government are considering increasing or adjusting them in any way to maintain competitiveness with US and other international markets, given the context we are now working within?

**Chris Bryant:** I have always said that I support film tax credits. Labour first introduced them under Gordon Brown. They were continued by the Conservative Government, and then we introduced two new ones. Incidentally, I think that the independent £15 million movie tax credit will make a significant difference to the UK, particularly at this point. I note that some documents produced around the semi-announcement in the United States of America have praised the way that we have done things in the UK, and other parts of the world want to mirror it. I will take praise wherever I can get it.

**Robin Swann** (South Antrim) (UUP): The uncertainty of President Trump’s comments puts an unsettledness in the industry, especially in Northern Ireland, where we have the Titanic Studios and Northern Ireland Screen working away. Titanic Studios is already working on “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms”, which is a prequel to “Game of Thrones”, so there is a lot of activity going on in the industry. Will the Minister consider including Northern Ireland Screen in his meeting tomorrow with the industry, rather than leaving it another week to engage with it?

**Chris Bryant:** That is a very fair point; I am happy to do that.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): I am deeply proud that St Margarets in my constituency has been home to Twickenham Film Studios for over 100 years. The studios have been involved in production and post-production work for big-name films including “The Italian Job” and “Ghandi”, and most recently they did the Oscar-winning sound production for “Top Gun: Maverick”. However, they have been beset by financial challenges, from the US writers’ strike to the sky-rocketing business rates mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper). The tariffs could deal a fatal blow to studios such as Twickenham. Can I urge the Minister, as others have, to work with the Treasury and the Valuation Office Agency on bringing down the rateable value of film studios? Can I also invite him to follow in the footsteps of Tom Cruise and come to St Margarets to visit Twickenham Film Studios?

**Chris Bryant:** The thing is, Tom Cruise does all his own stunts, doesn’t he? I am a little bit nervous about being dangled off the back of a helicopter or dumped in a vat of—I don’t know. [Interruption.] The shadow Minister says he will happily arrange it. Well, then, I invite him to see the Rhondda tunnel; we can dangle him down a hole as well.

The hon. Lady is making a point that has been made several times. Tom Cruise is one of the biggest investors in the UK because of all the movies that have been made here, and we are very grateful to him. The British Film Institute will be honouring him next week, and I think that is really good. As I say, we are the best place in the world to make movies, and we want to continue that.

I feel very left out, not having a studio in my constituency, but we have produced some of the best actors in the world, including Sir Stanley Baker. I think one of his best films—you will know this, Mr Speaker—was “Sodom and Gomorrah”.

**Mr Speaker:** I was thinking of a different film.

**Chris Bryant:** What film were you—hang on, we are not meant to do this, are we? Order, order. As I was saying, I am also very proud of the young actor Callum Scott Howells, who is doing phenomenally well.

**Mr Speaker:** For the final episode, I call Jim Shannon.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Never the final episode—still a wee bit to go yet. I thank the Minister very much for his answers, and for the energy he displays on behalf of the sector. In a question in the Chamber yesterday to the Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security, I highlighted the £330 million income for the film industry in Northern Ireland since 2018. The importance of USA films to that cannot be overstated; they include epics such as “Blade Runner”, to say nothing of “Game of Thrones” and “Star Wars”. So many films use our highly skilled studios and work, due to the cost-effectiveness of this option. The Trump tariffs will negate much of this benefit. I am quite confident of the Minister’s response, but how can he emphasise the need to give consideration to our film sector, which is an integral part of this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**Chris Bryant:** I thought the credits were already rolling, and then up comes the hon. Gentleman. It may be just that I am an optimistic person by nature, but I feel very optimistic about where all these negotiations will end up. I am hopeful that we will end up with some kind of deal. I also passionately believe that wherever that deal ends up, the UK film industry will succeed, because we have always been a great nation at telling stories that people want to watch all around the world. We have some of the greatest actors. We may be a small nation, but we manage to dominate on screens all around the world because we are just talented, and everybody will still want to keep on buying that talent, whatever the deal may be.

## India-Pakistan: Escalation

1.20 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on India and Pakistan. The whole House will have been closely following developments in recent weeks following the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam on 22 April, which left 26 tourists dead. Last night, soon after 21.00 British summer time, Indian forces launched missile strikes against nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. The Government of India have described their actions as

“measured, non-escalatory, proportionate and responsible”,

and deliberately targeted at terrorist infrastructure. Following India’s actions last night, a military spokesperson for Pakistan stated that 26 Pakistanis have died and 46 were injured, including civilians and children. The Pakistani Government, at a meeting of their national security council earlier today, stated that they reserve the right to respond in a manner of their choosing.

This is an incredibly delicate moment in an evolving and fast-moving situation. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister noted just now, rising tensions between India and Pakistan are a serious concern. The Government have been monitoring the situation closely and staying in close contact with all the key partners. Since the developments overnight, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been in contact with both the Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, and the Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Dar. Our high commissioners in Delhi and Islamabad have also been in close contact with their hosts. This morning, I met the Pakistani Finance Minister Aurangzeb. The Foreign Secretary has also been co-ordinating closely with other partners, notably the United States and the Gulf.

Our consistent message to both India and Pakistan has been to show restraint. They need to engage in dialogue to find a swift, diplomatic path forward. The UK has a close and unique relationship with both countries. It is heartbreaking to see civilian lives being lost. If this escalates further, nobody wins. We clearly condemned the horrific terrorist attack last month, which was the worst such attack in Indian-administered Kashmir for many years. Now, we need all sides to focus urgently on the steps needed to restore regional stability and ensure the protection of civilians. The UK will continue to work closely with our international partners in pursuit of short-term de-escalation and longer-term stability. The Foreign Secretary will have a chance to discuss the situation with EU Foreign Ministers in Warsaw today. He and the whole Government will stay in close touch with the Governments of India and Pakistan, as well as with those with influence in the region.

De-escalation is of the utmost importance, not least given the large number of British nationals in the region. The safety of British nationals will always be our priority. Overnight, we issued factual updates to our travel advice for both India and Pakistan, updating British nationals on military activity and potential disruption to flights in the region. British nationals in both India and Pakistan should stay up to date with our travel advice and follow the advice of the local authorities.



I am acutely aware that for many communities across the UK, and indeed Members across the House, this is a personal and sensitive situation. The British-Pakistani and British-Indian communities make a huge contribution to this country. We recognise that this will be a difficult time for many. We look to all community and faith leaders to spread the message that now is a time for coming together across religious and ethnic differences. We now need to see calm heads. Britain will continue to play its full part for de-escalation and diplomacy. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

1.24 pm

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): On 22 April, terrorists brutally killed 26 tourists in Pahalgam in a barbaric and savage act of violence. Most victims were killed at point blank range by gunshots to their head. My thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by that murderous, violent terrorism in Pahalgam. It was an act of terrorism, and we must reflect on the fact that Pahalgam has joined Mumbai, New Delhi and other places in India in being forever scarred by an act of terror.

This is clearly a precarious moment. We want to see tensions ease between India and Pakistan. We want to avoid state-on-state military escalation. We are also clear that India has the right to take reasonable and proportionate steps to defend itself, and to dismantle the vile terrorist infrastructure that has caused death and continues to threaten it.

Terrorists based in Pakistan threaten India and western interests—it was the country that Osama bin Laden was hiding in—and because of the long history of violence being inflicted by terrorists on India, the UK has in place long-standing security co-operation agreements with India. In fact, last week in the House, I reminded the Government of those agreements, why they exist, and why they should matter to us in the UK. Given those links, the UK Government should be at the forefront in working with our friends and allies to tackle the terrorist threats that we face collectively. The Minister will not be able to speak about intelligence sharing between the UK and India, but will he at least confirm whether our intelligence and security services have been in contact with India about the incidents that took place, and whether they are supporting its investigations? Have the Government provided any specific security assistance to India in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Kashmir? Could Britain offer specific support that might help avert escalation?

Does the Minister agree with India's assessment that the Resistance Front, which claims responsibility for the 22 April attacks, is a front for the proscribed Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which has a clear history of committing acts of terror against India, and has reported links to Hamas? There are reports that Hamas representatives met it earlier this year. Will the Minister confirm whether the UK Government are aware of any co-operation and links between Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hamas? I asked him that last week, and he did not respond, so I would welcome an answer on that important point today. Does he know which terror groups are currently operating in Pakistan, and their links to other terrorist groups that threaten our interests?

Last week, the Minister said:

"We are playing our role to try to ensure that tensions do not escalate."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2025; Vol. 766, c. 176.]

The British Government have a role to play, and need to leverage their influence to help ease tensions. What direct discussions have been taking place between the India and Pakistan Governments since those attacks two weeks ago? Was the UK informed in advance of the actions being undertaken? Does the Minister have a plan to support easing those tensions?

The Minister referred to the Foreign Secretary's calls with counterparts and his engagement. Will he give more evidence of those discussions? Have Ministers undertaken an assessment of the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan? Has he had discussions with the Pakistan Government on this matter? Can Ministers give assurances that there are sufficient measures in place to ensure that no British aid to Pakistan, either bilaterally or through multilateral sources, ends up in the wrong hands?

The diaspora communities in the UK have strong links to both India and Pakistan, as the Minister said, so can he give an update on the actions that will be taken to prevent the escalation of tensions affecting communities in our country? Can he give details of extra consular capacity and support that the UK will give to the high commissions in both countries for British nationals in Pakistan and India? Finally, will the Minister now be more forthcoming with the House about the Government's assessment of who carried out the terror attack in Kashmir and whether they were working with any other malign actors? Is he working through the security implications for the UK?

**Mr Falconer:** The right hon. Lady asks important questions. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms. Our thoughts are still with those affected by the despicable acts of 22 April, their loved ones and the people of India. The Prime Minister spoke with Prime Minister Modi on 24 April and the Foreign Secretary spoke with his counterpart on 27 April. We are all, as the right hon. Lady would expect, in regular contact with our counterparts. As she may know, the Foreign Secretary is travelling and I am not privy to his very latest contacts, but I know that they are ongoing.

The right hon. Lady asks important questions about community relations in this country. I am working closely with my Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government counterparts, who are talking to affected communities across the country and recognising the sensitivities that she points to. I can confirm that I have had extended discussions with my Pakistani counterparts about the terrorist threats within Pakistan and the efforts that need to be made to address that. That is a terrorist threat that affects Pakistan herself, which, even in recent months, has suffered significant terrorist attacks.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): The reality is that India's air strikes in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir have seen the killing and injury of dozens of civilians, including children, and led to a massive escalation in the real threat of war between two nuclear powers. That follows two weeks of bulldozer tactics and thousands of mass arrests in Kashmir, the unilateral withdrawal from the Indus treaty effectively threatening collective



punishment on millions of Pakistanis and now this act of aggression, all in complete contradiction of international law.

The Minister is right to say that the international community must now focus on de-escalation and stability, but that cannot be achieved in full without addressing the central issue of Kashmir, an issue close to the hearts of many hon. Members. Indeed, the plight of the Kashmiris has been raised by me in this Chamber over the last decade. Does the Minister accept that the UK has a moral, historical and legal duty and responsibility to end this 80-year period in which UN resolutions on Kashmir have, frankly, sat gathering dust? Will he act so that the sons and daughters of Kashmir get their birthright of self-determination, promised to them decades ago?

**Mr Falconer:** It is well known to this House that there are, of course, a range of wider issues between India and Pakistan, and Kashmir is one of them. However, on this most delicate of days, it is important that the House remains focused on the importance of de-escalation. That is my key message from the Dispatch Box today.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD):** I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement.

The terrible terrorist attack last month brought death to 26 civilians and rightly shocked and appalled many. Yesterday's military strikes by India and the subsequent exchange of artillery fire in Kashmir mark a deeply concerning escalation. The prospect of New Delhi and Islamabad engaging in further tit-for-tat military action risks destabilising the entire region and leading to more civilian deaths. Their status as nuclear powers also generates severe global risks. It is vital, therefore, that both Governments work to de-escalate the current crisis.

Maintaining open lines of communication is key to preventing escalation and enabling a diplomatic off ramp for both Governments. Will the Minister therefore provide more detail on the conversations that he says have taken place overnight with Government representatives in New Delhi and Islamabad? What steps are the Government taking to help maintain an open dialogue between both Governments? Will he also confirm whether additional resources are being provided to support British nationals in Pakistan and India to ensure their safety?

Given our shared history, and now as a Commonwealth partner to India and Pakistan, the UK has a particular responsibility to support efforts at mediation and to help prevent retaliatory actions that could contribute to more deaths on both sides. Will the Minister describe what plans the Government have to engage international partners at the UN to support mediation efforts?

Yesterday's strikes follow a series of escalatory measures taken by India and Pakistan over the past week, in addition to the cessation of military activity. It is vital that these countermeasures are wound back. Will the Minister confirm what, as part of mediation efforts, the Government are doing to press India to reinstate the Indus Waters treaty and Pakistan to reopen its airspace?

Indian and Pakistani communities across the UK will be very worried by these new developments, and it is vital that they are fully supported. In addition to the

remarks the Minister has already made, will he provide more detail on what steps the Government are taking across all Departments to support communities here in the UK?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions, which I will try to take in turn. I can confirm that the Foreign Office is taking action to ensure that the best possible consular service is available to British nationals in India and Pakistan. There have been a number of changes in relation to airspace even over the course of the last 24 hours, so I encourage Members of this House and anybody watching at home to keep Foreign Office travel advice as the central place for information. This is a fast-moving situation and options for air travel may change—indeed, they have changed over the last 24 hours—so please do keep updated on that. I confirm that my Department is taking steps to try and ensure that our call centres are open, and those who are concerned should get in direct touch.

As I said earlier, we are in direct touch with both Governments, and I was with the Pakistani Finance Minister shortly before coming to this House. I will not comment in great detail about the substance of those discussions, other than to say that my key message in those engagements was the same message that I just repeated to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), which is that now is a time for de-escalation.

**Tahir Ali (Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley) (Lab):** India's record on Kashmir is not something to be proud of: it has been ethnic cleansing Kashmiris for over 78 years. Modi's record on human rights—from an individual who once was barred from coming to this country—is not forgotten. Kashmir has a history that spans over 4,000 years. It has never been part of India and never will be, so that can remain a distant dream of Modi's. Does the Minister agree that now is the time to de-escalate, but also to make sure that the promises of a plebiscite for the Kashmiri people are also delivered so that this issue can be resolved once and for all?

**Mr Falconer:** My hon. Friend is right to focus on de-escalation. That is my focus this afternoon from the Dispatch Box. Our position on Kashmir remains unchanged, but the focus for now must be on ensuring that there are no further threats to regional stability.

**Sir Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con):** The Minister has rightly underlined the fact that we face an incredibly dangerous moment, but that Britain has a uniquely deep, historical and influential relationship with both these great countries, which we must now deploy with great energy and skill. Does he agree that the Government of Pakistan must take more action against the terrorist organisations that operate from their soil? Does he also understand the outrage that Indian people, including the diaspora in Royal Sutton Coldfield, feel at these dreadful events?

**Mr Falconer:** I recognise the right hon. Gentleman's long-standing attention to these issues. As Secretary of State for the Department for International Development, he sent a young DFID official to Pakistan in 2010, and I remember his commitment then. He is right that Pakistan has been plagued by terrorist threats within its

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own borders. It is a plague that has been of concern to its neighbours, but also most acutely to many Pakistanis, as we have seen devastatingly in recent months. They must do more to seek to tackle that threat and I have discussed that with Pakistani Ministers through the course of my ministerial duties.

India is, of course, right to feel outrage at the terrible attack of 22 April. There are now civilian casualties on both sides, and it is vital that we focus on de-escalation and trying to restore calm and regional stability.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall and Bloxwich) (Lab): I thank the Minister for coming to the House so soon. Could he confirm when he or his Department last met the ambassadors of India and Pakistan, and will he ensure that the dialogue continues with them?

**Mr Falconer:** I can confirm to my hon. Friend that the dialogue will continue. Of course, the Prime Minister was in touch with Prime Minister Modi just yesterday, and I was with the Pakistani Finance Minister and, indeed, the Pakistani high commissioner in London just an hour or two ago.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Following the terrible terrorist atrocities on 22 April, as the Minister has outlined, India took diplomatic action and further actions to penalise Pakistan. Pakistan then retaliated. But it was made clear at the time by India that either Pakistan removes the terrorist spaces along the line of control, or India would remove them. Last night, nine sites were hit. Those were terrorist bases where terrorists were being trained to commit further atrocities in India. [Interruption.] Will the Minister call on Pakistan to ensure that those terrorist bases are removed once and for all?

**Mr Falconer:** The situation remains incredibly delicate and fast-moving, and we have seen rival accounts through the course of the morning about events. We will of course track these events very carefully. I responded to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir Andrew Mitchell) on the question of the terrorist groups in Pakistan, which pose a threat to Pakistan as well as others. We will of course continue to monitor events very closely. There is still much that is disputed, but it is absolutely obvious that for regional stability to be restored, we need to have direct, urgent contact between India and Pakistan and calm heads prevailing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. Members need to temper their language and not use statements such as “misleading the House”.

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): Twenty six people lost their lives in the Pahalgam terrorist attack, and now 26 people lost their lives in yesterday's attack. The truth remains that no evidence has been presented to anybody—any national or international partners—to say that Pakistan was, indeed, responsible for the attack on Pahalgam. I thank the Minister for coming so soon to the House and for all his efforts in trying to de-escalate. But to actually get de-escalation, and if India is so certain,

does he agree that India should share that evidence with the world to justify this barbaric attack killing 26 people and attacking mosques in the middle of the night?

**Mr Falconer:** As I said in the previous answer, there is clearly a considerable amount of debate about the facts of what has happened just in the last few hours. I do not wish to focus, and it would indeed be inappropriate for the UK to speculate, on those exact facts. We need to focus from this House on de-escalating the risks to regional stability that we see today.

**Ayoub Khan** (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): There is enormous distrust between both nations, which stems from the dispute over Kashmir. Immediately after those terrorist events in India last month, India was quick off the mark to blame Pakistan. In response, Pakistan made it plain that it had nothing to do with it. Pakistan's position is, how can armed terrorists travel 230 km over devastating terrain by foot, assassinate people and then return by foot into Pakistan in an area that is the most militarised zone on this planet? It is somewhat incredulous that blame was put on Pakistan virtually within an hour of this atrocity. Will the Minister commit to leveraging our diplomatic influence to encourage an environment that is conducive to open dialogue? Does he agree that there is an ever-growing imperative to normalise relations and address underlying issues, from territorial disputes to acts of violence, to have peaceful negotiations and mutual understanding?

**Mr Falconer:** The hon. Member is right to finish his remarks focusing on the importance of direct dialogue, which I of course support. I will not seek to adjudicate from this Dispatch Box on the competing claims about the facts.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): After the recent terrorist attack, as tensions on the subcontinent sadly escalate and videos of the destruction circulate, many of my Slough constituents of Indian and Pakistani heritage are extremely worried about the safety of their loved ones as bullets fly and bombs drop. That is especially the case for those of Punjabi and Kashmiri heritage because they already have been, and will be, impacted the most by the death and injury of their family and loved ones. While sending condolences to all affected and recognising the UK's historical ties and responsibilities, will the Minister assure Parliament that our Government will be at the forefront of efforts to de-escalate tensions between the two nuclear armed nations and that we will ensure that negotiations are enabled to chart a path to peace and prosperity?

**Mr Falconer:** I can assure my hon. Friend that we are very much involved in the efforts to try to encourage de-escalation. I encourage Members with constituents and their families who are concerned by developments to point them towards our travel advice, which we will keep updated as and when the situation requires.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): The barbaric terrorist attacks in Kashmir on innocent Indian and Nepali tourists caused deep distress in my constituency, which is home to many Indian nationals and those of Nepali nationality. I welcome the Minister's tone about de-escalation—he is getting the tone just about right—but

may I also urge him to ensure that none of the escalation of tensions in that part of the world happens here in the UK, and that Hindu temples in particular are offered the same funding and security given to mosques around the country?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his measured and reasonable question. I will take away the issue he raises. I have been in regular contact with the Minister for Faith, Communities and Resettlement in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We are discussing these issues closely, recognising the sensitivity in constituencies like the hon. Gentleman's and many others that have been mentioned.

**Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):** The Minister will know that our British constituents with strong links to Kashmir are both horrified by the terrorist attack and terrified by the escalation of violence that we have seen overnight, as well as by the online hatred being fomented. Two weeks ago, I asked the Minister about the possibility of missiles being used in escalation. We have now heard from the Indian Foreign Secretary that they believe there are further terrorist acts planned, and the Pakistani Prime Minister has called last night's events an "act of war". The Minister will be aware of the UN Security Council meeting planned for Monday. What words of comfort can he offer our constituents who are horrified about what might happen in the next couple of days that this Government will push not just for de-escalation but a long-term solution that guarantees the peace and security of everybody in Kashmir?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank my hon. Friend for conveying the concerns of her constituents so effectively. Regional stability is in the interests of India and Pakistan, and indeed the UK, and it will be to those ends that our diplomacy will be focused. As she acknowledges, my focus this afternoon is on de-escalation, but of course we will engage with both Governments on the full range of the interests engaged.

**Stephen Gethins (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP):** I thank the Minister for his statement. We also condemn the abhorrent terror acts and abhor any loss of civilian life. We do have two nuclear armed states, though, who are setting up with one another. There has been a diminishing of the international rules-based system. In his approach, can he assure me that he will be stressing the importance of that rules-based system when it comes to mediating between the two parties?

**Mr Falconer:** I can assure the hon. Member that the UK remains committed in all our interactions to emphasising the pre-eminent importance of international humanitarian law and the rules-based international order.

**Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op):** The murder of 26 civilians in Pahalgam was truly horrific, but India's airstrikes have resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. This cannot be a bizarre, macabre game of tit-for-tat where the only people who suffer are civilians on both sides. Can the Minister reassure my Rochdale constituents, many of whom are concerned about family members, that the Government are doing everything they can through their consular access and also at diplomatic level to de-escalate the

situation and to make it crystal clear to India that water cannot be used as a weapon of war against the wider people of Pakistan and Kashmir?

**Mr Falconer:** My hon. Friend is right, of course. Civilians must be protected. For British nationals concerned by developments, I would encourage them to refer to our travel advice, as I said earlier. This is obviously a fast-moving situation and we will not always be in a position to update our latest advice from this Dispatch Box, so constituents should please look there first and foremost for advice from the British Government about how to ensure their safety. My hon. Friend refers to some of the wider issues that we discussed last week, including the Indus water treaty, which I understand is in abeyance rather than being repealed. Some of these longer-term issues will of course need to be discussed, but the first priority must be de-escalation.

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** What role does the Minister envisage the Commonwealth playing as an honest broker in discussions between India and Pakistan? Will he also assure the House that, given the fact that the trade deal with India was signed just yesterday, there will be a clear demarcation of Government response and the Government will not feel in any way fettered, as a result of that trade deal, in acting as an honest broker between the two countries? This is an important matter and I hope that he can assure the House on it.

**Mr Falconer:** Our priority is to ensure direct contact between India and Pakistan and to ensure that those tensions are directly de-escalated. We are of course very proud that we are Commonwealth members with both India and Pakistan, and that Commonwealth membership reflects a deep and unique history between the UK and India and the UK and Pakistan. We welcome the free trade agreement that was announced yesterday, and of course these are close, deep friendships between both the countries involved. We will, in all our efforts, seek to restore regional stability and we will do that with both our friends.

**Jas Athwal (Ilford South) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your advice on tempering our language in here, because words have consequences. I thank the Minister for his statement and the Foreign Secretary for all the work that they are doing in the background. Yesterday in this House, we celebrated the end of world war two and I commended the role of the British Indian troops—now known as India and Pakistan—who fought shoulder to shoulder, with their shoulder to the wheel, to ensure that we, the allied troops, won and world war two was ended. As someone with Indian heritage, born in India and whose parents were born in Pakistan, I know only too well that neither nation will take a backward step, so what can the Minister do to assure me and my residents in Ilford South that we will do everything possible to bring both the superpowers to the negotiating table to restore peace to this volatile part of the world?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank my hon. Friend for the sensitive and personal tone that he brings to his remarks. I, too, have seen the Commonwealth war graves in Pakistan and India, which are a tribute to the service of many



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from the British Indian forces that fought in world war two. I can assure him and his constituents that we will do everything we can to play our full diplomatic role.

**Ellie Chowns** (North Herefordshire) (Green): Given the significance and frightening ramifications of further tensions and instability between these two nuclear-armed neighbours, I agree with the Minister that de-escalation and diplomacy are the absolute priority. Can he tell the House whether he has sought assurances that UK-manufactured weapons and military equipment have not been used in attacks against civilians? Can I ask him now to explicitly rule out supplying any UK-made weaponry to either side, in a bid to increase the pressure on all parties to engage in much-needed dialogue?

**Mr Falconer:** We have some of the toughest arms export rules in the world, and they will be fully adhered to in this case. I do not intend to make further announcements from the Dispatch Box about that regime now, but I am sure that in due course I can return to the House to provide a further update.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Ten days ago, this House stood united in condemning the attacks on civilians on both sides of the conflict, yet since then, the violence has tragically escalated, with more innocent lives lost overnight as a result of an Indian attack on civilians in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. While we all want to see an immediate de-escalation of military action to prevent further loss of life, does the Minister agree that lasting peace in the region cannot be achieved until the core issue of Kashmir is resolved and the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination under the UN resolution is recognised and upheld?

**Mr Falconer:** I recognise my hon. Friend's long advocacy on these questions. Today we are calling for de-escalation, and our position on Kashmir remains unchanged. I am sure I will return to this House to discuss the longer-term issues between India and Pakistan in the fullness of time.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): May I welcome the Minister's statement? Of course terrorism, wherever it occurs, should be condemned. On behalf of my constituents, many of whom are of Pakistani heritage and Indian heritage, may I join the Minister in calling for de-escalation and for dialogue between India and Pakistan? Ahead of the meeting in New York next week, what more can the UK do, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to ensure that the United States is fully engaged in that process?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his tone and for his question. I can confirm that the Foreign Secretary and other members of the Government are in direct touch with other permanent members of the Security Council, including the United States.

**Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): This is a delicate moment, and it is in no one's interest to see further escalation, so of course I condemn the loss of civilian life, both in the terror attacks and in the ongoing military strikes. I join the right hon. Member for The

Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) in saying that it is really important that we work with our international allies and partners to try to de-escalate the situation. I was contacted by a constituent in the region who is concerned about himself and his family, so may I ask what role the FCDO is playing with British nationals in the region?

**Mr Falconer:** My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for her constituents. We have been updating the travel advice and I can confirm that my Department has taken steps to be able to respond as fully as possible to the concerns of our collective constituents who are in the region. Foreign Office travel advice will be the first and best place for constituents across the country to be looking.

**Iqbal Mohamed** (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I thank the Minister for his statement, and I associate myself with all Members of the House in the condemnation of the terror attack in Pahalgam. I want to express my concern at the military escalation between nuclear-armed neighbours, which has already resulted in the killing of 26 innocent people. I have thousands of Kashmiri and Indian constituents—I myself am of Indian heritage—and they are absolutely terrified by what they saw last night. They have been glued to their screens worrying about their loved ones. The Minister has already explained what diplomatic steps the UK is taking to de-escalate the situation, but will he reassure my constituents that those steps will be neutral and impartial, will not favour one country over the other, and will prioritise peace and stability in the region?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and for his acknowledgment of the importance of de-escalation. I confirm that we will prioritise regional stability, the reasonable interests of both countries and, indeed, the UK's interest in the region, which includes stability between two great friends of this country.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I wholeheartedly support the Minister in his calls for de-escalation. I reiterate my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones in the attacks last month and overnight. About 20% of my constituents have Pakistani-Kashmiri heritage but, for our common humanity, we should extend our condolences to anyone of any religion or origin, from either side of the line of control, who has lost a loved one. Will the Minister confirm which international allies he has been working with to de-escalate tensions? Has the Minister been in contact with the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, which was established back in 1951 and has extensive intelligence in the region? If so, what has been said?

**Mr Falconer:** As well as the direct contact with India, Pakistan and the variety of other nations that I have mentioned, I can confirm that we will continue to be in wide touch, including with colleagues in the Gulf, and I am due to speak shortly to my Saudi Arabian counterparts. As the House would expect, we will be in regular and intense dialogue with all those with an interest in the region, and we will be sharing with them our calls for de-escalation.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that whether it is the Nile, the Indus or anywhere else, weaponising water is wrong and



particularly affects the world's poorest? Does he share my disappointment at the suspension of the 1960 Indus water treaty? Does he further share my concern that were India tempted to exploit that suspension, China might decide to interfere with the headwaters of the Brahmaputra?

**Mr Falconer:** The Indus river system is of enormous importance to both India and Pakistan, and it will be vital that all actors and international partners work towards its long-term sustainability.

**Naushabah Khan** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement on this deeply concerning matter. Given that he has already highlighted the friendship that this country enjoys with both Pakistan and India, will he provide reassurances that it is in that manner that ongoing conversations with both countries will be conducted? Will he detail which conversations have already happened or are planned with our international allies to de-escalate the situation?

**Mr Falconer:** I can confirm that it will be in that spirit that we conduct our diplomatic efforts. Many hon. Members have alluded to their own family connections with India or Pakistan. As I said earlier, I lived in Pakistan during my first lengthy overseas posting. I know that many hon. Members from across the House feel our friendship with both India and Pakistan very deeply, and it is in that spirit that we will conduct our work.

**Mr Will Forster** (Woking) (LD): My heart goes out to the families of the 26 tourists who were killed last month, but my heart also goes out to the 26 civilians and children who were killed in Pakistan last night. I urge the Government to do all they can to de-escalate the situation. Will the Minister confirm when our Prime Minister will speak to the Indian and Pakistani Governments, in particular Prime Minister Modi?

**Mr Falconer:** The Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Modi yesterday, before these events. We have been in touch overnight and throughout the day with the Indian Government, and I have been in touch throughout the course of the day with the Pakistani Government as well.

**Sojan Joseph** (Ashford) (Lab): Everyone in this House knows that India has suffered a number of terrorist attacks over the years, including one on the Indian Parliament. Just last month, 26 innocent lives were lost following a devastating act of terrorism in Pahalgam. Although India has a right to defend itself and its people, does the Minister agree that war is not good for both sides, and that it is time for de-escalation and for Pakistan to work with India to eradicate terrorism from the region?

**Mr Falconer:** I agree with my hon. Friend that de-escalation is vital, and it is to that end that our efforts are dedicated.

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion Preseli) (PC): I commend the Minister and the Foreign Secretary for their efforts to maintain dialogue with both countries and, in conjunction with international allies, to de-escalate the situation. Given the urgency for de-escalation, is there a reason

why this matter cannot be taken to the UN Security Council for a more urgent discussion than is currently planned?

**Mr Falconer:** The agenda of the UN Security Council is agreed in New York, and when we are in a position to update the House on what that agenda looks like, we will of course do so.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South and Walkden) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Pakistan.

My constituency is home to people of Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage. They were all absolutely gutted when they heard about the incident that took place two weeks ago and about what happened last night, and my condolences go to the families of all those who have died. India's decision to launch strikes without providing clear evidence of Pakistan's involvement in recent attacks is reckless and deeply irresponsible. Pakistan, despite routinely being blamed, has actually suffered more from terrorism in the past 10 to 15 years than any country in the world. There was a terrorist attack there as recently as March. Pakistan has responded very carefully to what is happening. Will the Minister urge India to stop escalating tension and to press for credible evidence and dialogue, instead of aggression?

**Mr Falconer:** Our focus from the Dispatch Box is on de-escalation and regional stability. My hon. Friend, who has a long-standing commitment to these issues, is right to focus on the damage that the scourge of terrorism has caused Pakistanis, as well as others, and that has been the subject of many discussions between me and my Pakistani equivalent. Pakistan herself would most benefit from the eradication of the scourge of terrorism within her borders.

**Mr Adnan Hussain** (Blackburn) (Ind): Every day we witness the collapse of international limits on force, diplomatic norms, humanitarian law and institutions built by nations after two world wars to secure a more peaceful world. Now, with two nuclear powers clashing and an escalation that could easily trigger a third world war, I ask the Minister to confirm the UK's unwavering and unconditional commitment to international law, and to condemn the Indian state's offensive against its sovereign neighbour, which has claimed the lives of 26 civilians, including children. I understand the views of Members across the House, but I wish to emphasise the paramount importance and urgency of settling the long-standing issue of Kashmir through multilateral means and under the mediation of international bodies, such as the UN, so that lasting peace can finally take root in the region.

**Mr Falconer:** As I am sure will be clear to all Members, I am focused on de-escalation and regional stability. The UK continues to stand by the importance of international humanitarian law and a rules-based international order. International humanitarian law governs the actions of all states towards necessity and proportionality, and we expect all of our friends, and indeed every nation state, to abide by them.

**Jacob Collier** (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): I represent a large Pakistani and Kashmiri community in Burton who are watching in horror and fear at the risk of further military escalation. Many have family and extended family in the region, and are understandably anxious about their safety and wellbeing. What assurances can the Minister offer to my constituents that the UK is actively engaging with all international partners to support de-escalation, protect wider regional stability and protect civilian lives?

**Mr Falconer:** I recognise the concerns that will be felt in my hon. Friend's constituency, as they are felt in Lincoln and elsewhere. I can assure him and the whole House that we will use our full diplomatic weight to try to ensure de-escalation in the region.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement. Like other Members, all my heart is with the innocent lives that have been lost, and my condolences go to all those who grieve today. It is a salient reminder of what the pastor told us at my Baptist church in Newtownards a few weeks ago: there are 67 wars in the world, so this really is a world at war. With news reports this morning that up to five Indian air force planes may have been shot down, the escalation of this situation is clear and incredibly worrying. Does the Minister believe that we can successfully intervene and negotiate peace, and what assessment of nuclear capacity has been carried out to ensure global security?

**Mr Falconer:** The hon. Gentleman asks important questions. The UK's goal is de-escalation to try to ensure that we return to regional stability. The other issues between India and Pakistan—which have long been discussed in this House—are important questions to which we can return, but today the focus must be on de-escalation.

**Matt Turmaine** (Watford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement and the sympathy he has shown to those affected by these tragic events. Residents in my constituency, which has a large Pakistani and Kashmiri community, are looking for leadership from the Government. They have family and friendship networks in the areas attacked last night that are deeply affected. We all recognise how sensitive and delicate the situation is, and the need for calm thinking and dialogue. Will the Minister outline in a little more detail the actions that the Government are taking to help reduce tensions and de-escalate the risks in this situation?

**Mr Falconer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for the concern he shows for his constituents in Watford. As I have said, we are in regular touch with all those states that have an interest and with the two parties themselves, and we will continue to be so.

## Points of Order

2.11 pm

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This morning we learned that Labour's choice of football regulator, David Kogan, made personal donations to both the Prime Minister and the Culture Secretary. We believe that the Government's decision not to disclose that fact when Mr Kogan's appointment was announced constitutes a potential breach of the governance code on public appointments, and represents a clear discourtesy to both this House and the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. This appointment clearly puts cronies over clubs and favours over fans, and brings major risks to English football. Can you please advise me on the best way to ensure that this House is able to scrutinise such appointments and ensure that all rules were followed by the Government?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving notice of his intention to make this point of order. The Chair is not responsible for public appointments or for the pre-appointment hearing process, but the hon. Member has put his point on the record. He might also like to raise it with the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), who chairs the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and who is in the Chamber.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The *Financial Times* reported this morning that the Paymaster General has confirmed that the UK is looking to set up a youth mobility scheme with the EU. This directly contradicts the answer he gave in response to a question I asked in this Chamber just 13 days ago. On that occasion, he said:

"A youth mobility scheme is not part of our plans. We have always said that we will listen to sensible EU proposals, but we will not go back to freedom of movement."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2025; Vol. 765, c. 1201.]

That is only the most recent example, because he has previously told me that there were no plans for a youth mobility scheme on 5 December, on 6 February, on 6 March in answer to oral questions, on 21 January in response to a written question, and on 29 January in a Westminster Hall debate.

The *FT* article states that the Paymaster General "has confirmed publicly for the first time that Britain is looking at setting up a youth mobility scheme as part of a new 'strategic partnership' with the EU".

He can be in no doubt about the keenness of Members of this House to be kept up to date on the progress of this issue. As such, why has this announcement been made to the media, rather than to Members directly?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member will be aware that that is not a matter for the Chair—we are not responsible for the statements that Government Ministers make. However, she has put her point on the record, and no doubt those on the Treasury Front Benchers are listening and will pass on her concerns.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### VICTIMS AND COURTS

#### *Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Shabana Mahmood, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Yvette Cooper, Secretary Angela Rayner, Secretary Liz Kendall, Secretary John Healey and Secretary Peter Kyle, presented a Bill to make provision about the experience of victims within the criminal justice system; about the functions of the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses; and about procedure and the administration of criminal justice.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 233) with explanatory notes (Bill 233-EN).*

### IMMIGRATION AND VISAS

#### *Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Chris Philp, supported by Matt Vickers, Katie Lam, Harriet Cross, Sarah Bool, Nick Timothy, Jack Rankin and Sir Ashley Fox, presented a Bill to make provision about the disapplication of the Human Rights Act 1998 in relation to immigration law; to make provision about certain immigration statuses; to require the Secretary of State to set an annual limit on the number of people entering the United Kingdom through non-visitor visa routes; to make provision about the removal from the United Kingdom of certain persons including foreign national offenders; to create exemptions from the Data Protection Act 2018 provisions relating to illegal migration; to make provision about age assessments for immigration law purposes; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May, and to be printed (Bill 234).*

## Assets of Community Value (Sports Facilities)

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

2.15 pm

**Emma Foody** (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Localism Act 2011 to provide for automatic designation of sports facilities as Assets of Community Value; and for connected purposes.

Whether for fun, fitness or friendship, sport plays an important role for many of us. Indeed, a visitor to many of the villages and towns across my constituency, or across the country, who asks a local what they are most proud of in their area will often be told that it is a local sports team. It might be the football team we played for, that we coached, that a family member competed with, or that we follow on journeys from heartbreak to victory. In other parts of the country, it is the same set of extreme emotions, but for local rugby league, rugby union or cricket clubs. People will move to the other side of the world and still ferociously support their home team—it is part of our shared identity.

Our local sporting facilities, football pitches, swimming pools and leisure centres are vital for wellbeing. Whether it is the swimming baths where we teach our kids to swim or a green space that is clean and safe, people should have access to all of these things in our communities. They are not just physical infrastructure; they help ensure that we stay healthy, both physically and mentally—but more than that, they are places to come together. They provide a sense of local pride and belonging.

The journey of even the best professional sportspeople starts at home. Take Alan Shearer, who played for local boys' team Cramlington Juniors on his path to premier league and international stardom, becoming Newcastle United's record goal scorer along the way. Cramlington Juniors have hundreds of children playing at all standards who know that they are treading the path of a local legend. Not to be outdone, New Hartley Juniors have seen three of their alumni go on to lift the league cup. Of course, the most recent is big Dan Burn—a literal giant, who scored the first goal in Newcastle's league cup final victory this year. The thing is, Madam Deputy Speaker, you'll never ever beat Dan Burn: he's from Blyth. He cut his teeth playing locally before pushing trollies at Asda, working his way through the leagues to make his England international debut this year. While today's Bill is not to make Dan an asset of community value in his own right, I would support any amendment to do so.

The contribution of local sports clubs goes far beyond their role in producing international sports stars—although, to be clear, they do. Cramlington Town football club have stepped in during school holidays to ensure that local kids get a day of activity, as well as a hot meal, and Killingworth Juniors provide a space for Gaelic football to be played by the local Irish community. West Allotment provide value both on and off the pitch through their fan-owned model, Bates Cottages cricket club do walking cricket for those over 50, and Concordia leisure centre takes on local children with special educational needs through supported internships.



In countless ways, sports facilities are making our communities better, day in and day out, but in far too many communities, those vital facilities have slowly disappeared. Across the country, hundreds of swimming pools, leisure centres and sports clubs have shut their doors. This does not just leave empty buildings or an abandoned pitch; it leaves a gap in the lives of local people, forcing them to travel miles from home to access sports in the next town over, or simply to do without. The disappearance of sporting facilities can be devastating, often leaving scars in places that do not heal.

There is a better way. Community ownership gives people the opportunity to save the local assets that we value most by bringing them into community hands and running them in the interests of local people. There are already many community-owned sporting facilities of all kinds that are not just managing to survive, but truly thriving, because they are uniquely attuned to the needs and wants of local people.

Labour has already committed to introducing a new community right to buy, which will give communities a much better chance at ownership when these assets are available, giving them first right of refusal. However, to be eligible for that right, assets need first to be listed as assets of community value. That is an important process, but it is also complex, inconsistent and time-consuming for groups of volunteers. I believe that some assets are so important to local communities that they should be able to bypass that process and instead automatically be designated as assets of community value. That is why, with the Co-operative party, I am campaigning to do just that, ensuring that sporting facilities are automatically eligible for community ownership so that they can be safeguarded not just now, but for generations to come. The Bill would not just make the process significantly more straightforward for communities wishing to own their local sporting facilities, but would send a clear message from Government that these assets—assets that keep people healthy, provide opportunities and bring people together—matter and are worth protecting.

Most fundamentally, community ownership is about ensuring that the assets that people and places value cannot just be taken away, that communities have all the things they deserve and that make them unique. Local places made up of local assets owned by local people: this can be our vision that shapes communities that are better, stronger and truly stand the test of time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Emma Foody, Michael Wheeler, Chris Vince, Sally Jameson, Anneliese Midgley, Dame Karen Bradley, Ellie Chowns, Joe Morris, Gareth Snell, Andrew Pakes and Alex Sobel present the Bill.

Emma Foody accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May, and to be printed (Bill 232).*

## Data (Use and Access) Bill [Lords]

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

*[Relevant documents: Correspondence between the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms, on the Data (Use and Access) Bill [Lords], reported to the House on 30 April, 13 April and 26 February.]*

### New Clause 16

#### ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

“(1) The Secretary of State must, before the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed—

(a) prepare and publish an assessment of the economic impact in the United Kingdom of each of the four policy options described in section B.4 of the Copyright and AI Consultation Paper, read with relevant parts of section C of that Paper (policy options about copyright law and the training of artificial intelligence models using copyright works), and

(b) lay a document containing the assessment before Parliament.

(2) The document may include an assessment of the economic impact in the United Kingdom of policy options which are alternatives to the options described in subsection (1)(a).

(3) An assessment included in the document must, among other things, include assessment of the economic impact of each option on—

(a) copyright owners, and

(b) persons who develop or use AI systems,

including the impact on copyright owners, developers and users who are individuals, micro businesses, small businesses or medium-sized businesses.

(4) In this section—

‘AI system’ means a machine-based system that, from the input it receives, can infer how to—

(a) generate predictions, digital content, recommendations, decisions or other similar outputs, or

(b) influence a physical or virtual environment,

with a view to achieving an explicit or implicit objective;

‘the Copyright and AI Consultation Paper’ means the command paper ‘Copyright and AI: Consultation’, numbered CP1205, published on 17 December 2024;

‘copyright owner’ has the same meaning as in Part 1 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988;

‘develop’ an AI system means carry on an activity involved in producing the system, such as (for example) designing, programming, training or testing the system (and related terms are to be interpreted accordingly);

‘digital content’ means data which is produced and supplied in digital form;

‘medium-sized business’ means a business with at least 50 but fewer than 250 staff;

‘micro business’ means a business with fewer than 10 staff;

‘small business’ means a business with at least 10 but fewer than 50 staff;

‘use’ an AI system means instruct an AI system to generate outputs or to influence an environment (and related terms are to be interpreted accordingly).”—  
(Chris Bryant.)

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to prepare, publish and lay before Parliament an assessment of the economic impact in the UK of the policy options described in section B.4 of the government’s recent consultation paper on Copyright and Artificial Intelligence.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2.22 pm

**The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 17—*Report on the use of copyright works in the development of AI systems.*

New clause 1—*Age of consent for social media data processing—*

“(1) The UK GDPR is as amended as follows.

(2) In Article 8 of the UK GDPR (Conditions applicable to child’s consent in relation to information society services)

After paragraph 1 insert—

“(1A) References to 13 years old in paragraph 1 shall be read as 16 years old in the case of social networking services processing personal data for the purpose of delivering personalised content, including targeted advertising and algorithmically curated recommendations.

(1B) For the purposes of paragraph 1A “social networking services” means any online service that—

(a) allows users to create profiles and interact publicly or privately with other users, and

(b) facilitates the sharing of user-generated content, including text, images, or videos, with a wider audience.

(1C) Paragraph 1B does not apply to—

(a) educational platforms and learning management systems provided in recognised educational settings, where personal data processing is solely for educational purposes.

(b) health and well-being services, including NHS digital services, mental health support applications, and crisis helplines, where personal data processing is necessary for the provision of care and support”.

*This new clause would raise the age for processing personal data in the case of social networking services from 13 to 16.*

New clause 2—*Compliance with UK copyright law by operators of web crawlers and general-purpose AI models—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision (including any such provision as might be made by Act of Parliament), requiring the operators of web crawlers and general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) models whose services have links with the United Kingdom within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Online Safety Act 2023 to comply with United Kingdom copyright law, including the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, regardless of the jurisdiction in which the copyright-relevant acts relating to the pre-training, development and operation of those web crawlers and general-purpose AI models take place.

(2) Provision made under subsection (1) must apply to the entire lifecycle of a general-purpose AI model, including but not limited to—

(a) pre-training and training,

(b) fine tuning,

(c) grounding and retrieval-augmented generation, and

(d) the collection of data for the said purposes.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (1) within six months of the day on which this Act is passed and the regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure.”

*This new clause requires web crawlers and general-purpose AI models with UK links to comply with UK copyright law across all stages of AI development.*

New clause 3—*Transparency of crawler identity, purpose and segmentation—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring operators of web crawlers and general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) models whose services have links with the United Kingdom within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Online Safety Act 2023 to disclose information regarding the identity of crawlers used by them or by third parties on their behalf, including but not limited to—

(a) the name of the crawler,

(b) the legal entity responsible for the crawler,

(c) the specific purposes for which each crawler is used,

(d) the legal entities to which operators provide data scraped by the crawlers they operate, and

(e) a single point of contact to enable copyright owners to communicate 35 with them and to lodge complaints about the use of their copyrighted works.

(2) The information disclosed under subsection (1) must be available on an easily accessible platform and updated at the same time as any change.

(3) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring operators of web crawlers and general-purpose AI models to deploy distinct crawlers for different purposes, including but not limited to—

(a) web indexing for search engine results pages,

(b) general-purpose AI model pre-training, and

(c) retrieval-augmented generation.

(4) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring operators of web crawlers and general-purpose AI models to ensure that the exclusion of a crawler by a copyright owner does not negatively impact the findability of the copyright owner’s content in a search engine.

(5) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under this section within six months of the day on which this Act is passed and the regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure.”

*This new clause requires operators of web crawlers and AI models to disclose their identity, purpose, data-sharing practices, and use separate crawlers for different functions.*

New clause 4—*Transparency of copyrighted works scraped—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring operators of web crawlers and general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) models whose services have links with the United Kingdom within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Online Safety Act 2023 to disclose information regarding text and data used in the pre-training, training and fine-tuning of general purpose AI models, including but not limited to—

(a) the URLs accessed by crawlers deployed by them or by third parties on their behalf or from whom they have obtained text or data,

(b) the text and data used for the pre-training, training and fine-tuning, including the type and provenance of the text and data and the means by which it was obtained, and

(c) information that can be used to identify individual works, and (d) the timeframe of data collection.

(2) The disclosure of information under subsection (1) must be updated on a monthly basis in such form as the regulations may prescribe and be published in such manner as the regulations may prescribe so as to ensure that it is accessible to copyright owners upon request.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (1) within six months of the day on which this Act is passed and the regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure.”

*This new clause mandates transparency about the sources and types of data used in AI training, requiring monthly updates accessible to copyright owners.*

### New clause 5—*Enforcement*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring the Information Commission (under section 114 of the Data Protection Act 2018) (‘the Commissioner’) to monitor and secure compliance with the duties by an operator of a web crawler or general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) model whose service has links with the United Kingdom within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Online Safety Act 2023 (‘a relevant operator’), including but not limited to the following—

- (a) the regulations must provide for the Commissioner to have the power by written notice (an ‘information notice’) to require a relevant operator to provide the Commissioner with information that the Commissioner reasonably requires for the purposes of investigating a suspected failure to comply with the duties;
- (b) the regulations must provide for the Commissioner to have the power by written notice (an ‘assessment notice’) to require and to permit the Commissioner to carry out an assessment of whether a relevant operator has complied or is complying with the duties and to require a relevant operator to do any of the acts set out in section 146(2) of the Data Protection Act 2018;
- (c) the regulations must provide that where the Commissioner is satisfied 15 that a relevant operator has failed, or is failing to comply with the duties, the Commissioner may give the relevant operator a written notice (an ‘enforcement notice’) which requires it—
  - (i) to take steps specified in the notice, or
  - (ii) to refrain from taking steps specified in the notice;
- (d) the regulations must provide that where the Commissioner is satisfied that a relevant operator has failed or is failing to comply with the duties or has failed to comply with an information notice, an assessment notice or an enforcement notice, the Commissioner may, by written notice (a ‘penalty notice’), require the person to pay to the Commissioner an amount in sterling specified in the notice, the maximum amount of the penalty that may be imposed by a penalty notice being the ‘higher maximum amount’ as defined in section 157 of the Data Protection Act 2018; and
- (e) the regulations may provide for the procedure and rights of appeal 30 in relation to the giving of an information notice, an assessment notice, an enforcement notice or a penalty notice.

(2) The regulations must provide that any failure to comply with the duties by a relevant operator shall be directly actionable by any copyright owner who is adversely affected by such failure, and that such copyright owner will be entitled to recover damages for any loss suffered and to injunctive relief.

(3) The regulations must provide that the powers of the Commissioner and the rights of a copyright owner will apply in relation to a relevant operator providing a service from outside the United Kingdom (as well as such one provided from within the United Kingdom).

(4) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing the regulations under this section within six months of the day on which this Act is passed and the regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure.”

*This new clause grants the Information Commissioner enforcement powers to ensure compliance with AI and web crawler transparency rules, including penalties for breaches.*

### New clause 6—*Technical solutions*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must conduct a review of the technical solutions that may be adopted by copyright owners and by the operators of web crawlers and general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) models whose services have links with the United Kingdom within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Online Safety Act 2023 to prevent and to identify the unauthorised scraping or other unauthorised use of copyright owners’ text and data.

(2) Within 18 months of the day on which this Act is passed, the Secretary of State must report on such technical solutions

and must issue guidance as to the technical solutions to be adopted and other recommendations for the protection of the interests of copyright owners.”

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to review and report on technical measures to prevent unauthorised data scraping by web crawlers and AI models.*

### New clause 7—*Right to use non-digital verification services*—

“(1) This section applies when an organisation—

- (a) requires an individual to use a verification service; and
- (b) uses a digital verification service for that purpose.

(2) Where it is reasonably practicable for an organisation to offer a non-digital method of verification, the organisation must—

- (a) make a non-digital alternative method of verification available to any individual required to use a verification service; and
- (b) provide information about digital and non-digital methods of verification to those individuals before verification is required.”

*This new clause would create a duty upon organisations to support digital inclusion by offering non-digital verification services where practicable.*

### New clause 8—*Data Vision and Strategy*—

“Within six months of Royal Assent of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish a ‘Data Vision and Strategy’ which outlines—

- (a) the Government’s data transformation priorities for the next five years; and
- (b) steps the Government will take to ensure the digitisation of Government services.”

### New clause 9—*Departmental Board Appointments*—

“(1) Within six months of the day on which this Act is passed—

- (a) Government departments;
- (b) NHS England; and
- (c) NHS trusts

shall appoint to their departmental board or equivalent body at least one of the following—

- (i) Chief Information Officer;
- (ii) Chief Technology Officer;
- (iii) Chief Digital Information Officer;
- (iv) Service Transformation Leader; or
- (v) equivalent postholder.

(2) The person or persons appointed as under subsection (1) shall provide an annual report on the progress of the department or body towards the Government’s Data Vision and Strategy.”

*This new clause would require digital leaders to be represented at executive level within Government departments and other bodies.*

### New clause 10—*Data use in Public Service Delivery Review*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, every 12 months, lay before Parliament a ‘Data use in Public Service Delivery Review’.

(2) The Data use in Public Service Delivery Review shall include, but is not limited to assessment of the steps being taken to—

- (a) improve the Government’s use of data in public service delivery over the previous 12 months;
- (b) expand the use of data to support increased and improved digital services in public service delivery;
- (c) improve expertise and digital talent within Government departments to help expand the use of data for public service delivery; and
- (d) facilitate and regulate for better use of data in the delivery of public services.”

*This new clause would require an annual assessment by the Secretary of State to examine the steps being taken to facilitate and regulate the use of data in the delivery of public services using digital and online technologies.*



**New clause 11—Access to a deceased child's social media data—**

“(1) Where a person under 18 years of age has deceased, a parent or legal guardian (the ‘requestor’) may request from any internet service provider (ISP) the child’s user data from up to 12 months prior to the date of death.

(2) The ISP must provide a copy of the requested data, or direct account access, upon verification of the requestor’s identity and relationship to the deceased person, and no court order shall be required for such disclosure.

(3) ‘User data’ includes all content, communications, or metadata generated by or associated with the deceased person’s online activity, including stored messages and posts, except where the deceased person had explicitly directed otherwise prior to death.

(4) The ISP may refuse or redact specific data only where—

- (a) disclosure would unduly infringe the privacy rights of another individual,
- (b) the deceased person had explicitly opted out before death,
- (c) there is a conflicting court order, or
- (d) a serious risk to public safety or national security would result.

(5) In providing data under this section, the ISP must comply with data protection legislation.

(6) This section constitutes a lawful basis for disclosure under Article 6 of the UK GDPR.

(7) The Secretary of State may, by regulations subject to the affirmative resolution procedure—

- (a) provide guidance on verifying parent or guardian status,
- (b) clarify any additional grounds for refusal, and
- (c) prescribe safeguards to protect third-party confidentiality.

(8) For the purposes of this section—

‘internet service provider (ISP)’ includes any provider of social media, messaging, or other online platforms; and

‘data protection legislation’ has the meaning given in section 51 of this Act.”

*This new clause would allow parents of a deceased minor to obtain that child's social media data without a court order, subject to privacy safeguards for third parties.*

**New clause 12—Raising the minimum age at which users can consent to processing of personal data—**

“(1) The UK GDPR is amended in accordance with subsection (2) of this section.

(2) (2) After paragraph 1 of Article 8 of the UK GDPR (Conditions applicable to child’s consent in relation to information society services) insert—

“(1A) References to “13 years old” and “age of 13 years” in paragraph 1 shall be read as “16 years old” and “age of 16 years” in the case of processing of personal data.

(1B) Paragraph (1A) does not apply to—

- (a) platform systems and services operated where the primary purpose of processing of personal data is for the advancement of a charitable purpose as defined in the Charities Act 2011;
- (b) publicly owned platform systems and services operated for the primary purpose of law enforcement, child protection, education, or healthcare;
- (c) cases in which the Secretary of State determines it is in the best interests of the child for an operator to accept the child’s own consent.”

*This new clause would raise the age for processing personal data from 13 to 16 years old with certain exceptions for charitable purposes and child safety.*

**New clause 13—Code of practice for the use of children's educational data—**

“(1) Within 6 months of the passage of this Act, the Information Commissioner must prepare a code of practice which contains such guidance as the Information Commissioner considers appropriate on the processing of children’s data in connection with the provision of education.

(2) Guidance under subsection (1) must consider—

- (a) all aspects of the provision of education including learning, school management, and safeguarding;
- (b) all types of schools and learning settings in the development of guidance;
- (c) the use of AI systems in the provision of education;
- (d) the impact of profiling and automated decision-making on children’s access to education opportunities;
- (e) children’s consent to the way their personal data is generated, collected, processed, stored and shared;
- (f) parental consent to the way their children’s personal data is being generated, collected, processed, stored and shared;
- (g) the security of children’s data;
- (h) the exchange of information for safeguarding purposes.”

*This new clause requires the Information Commissioner to produce a code of practice for accessing children's educational data.*

**New clause 14—Transparency of business and customer data used in training Artificial Intelligence models—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring operators of general-purpose AI models to disclose upon request information about business data and customer data processed for the purposes of pre-training, training, fine-tuning, and retrieval-augmented generation in an AI model, or any other data input to an AI model.

(2) Business data and customer data must include, but is not limited to, the whole or any substantial part of a literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work, sound recording, film or broadcast included in any text, images and data used for the purposes set out in subsection (1).

(3) Information disclosable under subsection (1) must include but is not limited to:

- (i) Digital Object Identifiers and file names;
- (ii) Details of how the work was identified, including metadata;
- (iii) The source from which it was scraped or otherwise obtained; and
- (iv) The URLs accessed by crawlers deployed by operators, or by third parties, to obtain the data.

(4) The owner of rights in any individual work identifiable in information disclosed under subsection (1) must be provided upon request to the relevant operator with information as to whether and how they have complied with the laws of the United Kingdom in respect to that work.

(5) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (1) within six months of the day on which this Act is passed and the regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure.”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to set out transparency provisions requiring generative AI developers to provide information to enable individuals and creative businesses to determine whether their data, works and other subject matter have been used in training datasets.*

**New clause 15—Complaints procedure for vulnerable individuals—**

“(1) The Data Protection Act 2018 is amended in accordance with subsections (2) to (4).

(2) After section 165(3) insert—

“(3A) For complaints under subsection (2), the Information Commissioner must provide appropriate complaints-handling procedures for—

- (a) victims of modern slavery,
  - (b) victims of domestic abuse,
  - (c) victims of gender-based violence, or
  - (d) data subjects otherwise in a position of vulnerability.
- (3B) Procedures under subsection (3A) must include—
- (a) appropriate support for vulnerable individuals;
  - (b) provision of specialised officers for sensitive cases;
  - (c) signposting to support services;
  - (d) provision of a helpline;
  - (e) de-escalation protocols.
- (3) After section 166(1)(c) insert—
- ‘(d) fails to investigate a complaint appropriately or take adequate action to remedy findings of inadequacy.’
- (4) After section 166(2)(b), insert—
- ‘(c) to use formal powers as appropriate to investigate a complaint and to remedy any findings of inadequacy, unless the request from the data subject is manifestly unfounded or excessive.’”

*This new clause would require the Information Commission to introduce a statutory complaints procedure for individuals in a position of vulnerability and new grounds of appeal to an Information Tribunal.*

**New clause 18—Report on the introduction of a public interest test for allowing access to NHS data by third-parties and companies—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must within six months of the passing of this Act—

- (a) prepare and publish a report examining the need for a specific statutory public interest test to determine and safeguard access to NHS data by third-parties and companies.
  - (b) within 28 days of a report being laid under subsection (1) the Government must schedule a debate and votable motion on the findings of the report in each House.
- (2) The report must consider—
- (a) whether and in what situations it would be necessary, proportionate and lawful to share NHS data with third-parties and companies when the interests and risks to both the individual and/or public is considered.
  - (b) when it would be in the public interest and in the best interests of patients and the NHS to allow access by third-parties and companies to NHS data in relation to the provision of health care services and for promotion of health.”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to produce a report on the introduction of a public interest test for allowing access to NHS data by third-parties and companies and then to schedule a debate on it in each House.*

**New clause 19—Secretary of State’s duty to review the age of consent for data processing under the UK GDPR—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of Royal Assent of this Act, have conducted a review and published a report into the operation of Article 8 (Conditions applicable to child’s consent in relation to information society services) of the UK GDPR in relation to the data processed by social media platforms of children under the age of 16.

(2) As part of this review, the Secretary of State must consider—

- (a) the desirability of increasing the digital age of consent under the UK GDPR from 13 to 16, taking into account the available evidence in relation to the impact of social media platforms on the educational, social and emotional development of children; and

- (b) the viability of increasing the digital age of consent under Article 8 of the UK GDPR in relation to specific social media platforms which are shown by the evidence to be unsuitable for use by children under the age of 16.

(3) Within six months of the publication of the report under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must lay a plan before Parliament for raising the digital age of consent to 16 through amendments to Article 8 GDPR, unless the review concludes that such changes are unnecessary.”

**New clause 20—Duties of the Secretary of State in relation to the use by web-crawlers and artificial intelligence models of creative content—**

“The Secretary of State must—

- (a) by 16 September 2025, issue a statement, by way of a copyright notice issued by the Intellectual Property Office or otherwise, in relation to the application of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to activities conducted by web-crawlers or artificial intelligence models which may infringe the copyright attaching to creative works;
- (b) by 16 September 2025, lay before Parliament a report which includes a plan to help ensure proportionate and effective measures for transparency in the use of copyright materials in training, refining, tuning and generative activities in AI;
- (c) by 16 September 2025, lay before Parliament a report which includes a plan to reduce barriers to market entry for start-ups and smaller AI enterprises on use of and access to data;
- (d) by 1 July 2026, publish a technological standard for a machine-readable digital watermark for the purposes of identifying licensed content and relevant information associated with the licence.”

**New clause 21—Directions to public authorities on recording of sex data—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the passage of this Act, issue regulations relating to the code of practice set out in section 49 of this Act which require public authorities to—

- (a) collect, process and retain sex data only where it is lawful to do so in accordance with data protection legislation;
- (b) request and record sex data accurately, in every circumstance where sex data is collected, in accordance with following category terms and definitions—
  - (i) ‘Sex’ meaning male or female only based on ‘sex at birth’, ‘natal sex’ or ‘biological sex’ (these terms carrying the same meaning and capable of being used interchangeably); and,
  - (ii) in addition, where it is lawful to do so in accordance with data protection legislation and the Gender Recognition Act 2004, ‘Acquired Gender’ meaning male or female only, as recorded on a gender recognition certificate issued in accordance with the Gender Recognition Act 2004;
- (c) have updated relevant organisation guidance to stipulate that, where sex data is collected, this must be done in accordance with the definitions set out by subsection (1)(b) within three months of these regulations coming into force;
- (d) have conducted a review of the accuracy of data held in relation to the sex of data subjects to ensure that the data is accurate in recording sex at birth and, where relevant and collected lawfully, acquired gender as recorded on a gender recognition certificate within 12 months of these regulations coming into force;
- (e) have taken every reasonable step to ensure that any data held in relation to the sex and, where relevant and collected lawfully, acquired gender as recorded on a gender recognition certificate of a data subject

that is found to be inaccurate is rectified or erased within 18 months of these regulations coming into force; and

- (f) have produced and submitted to the Secretary of State a report setting out the findings of its review in relation to the matters set out by subsection (1)(d) and, where relevant, a description of the steps taken to ensure that the data held by the relevant public authority is accurate within the definitions set out subsection (1)(b) with 18 months of these regulations coming into force.

(2) The Secretary of State may, on receipt of a report in accordance with subsection (1)(f) instruct a public authority to take any further remedial steps within a specified timeframe reasonably necessary to ensure the accuracy of the sex and acquired gender data held by the relevant public authority.

(3) The Secretary of State must, within one month of the passage of this Act, establish and maintain a register of public authorities approved to act as sources of data relating to the attribute of sex for persons providing digital verification services.

(4) The register in subsection (3) must be published on the website of the Office for Digital Identities & Attributes or any successor body.

(5) Until such time as a public authority is added to the register under subsection (3), persons providing digital verification services may only obtain data on the sex of an individual requesting the provision of digital verification services from the record of births held by the General Register Office in accordance with subsection (6).

(6) Information supplied by the General Register Office pursuant to subsection (5) must specify sex as recorded at birth, as well as any subsequent corrections to the register in the field marked 'Sex'.

(7) The Secretary of State may, from time to time, add public authorities to the register as under subsection (3) only upon being satisfied on the basis of a report issued under subsection (1)(f), or satisfaction of such further steps required by the Secretary of State under subsection (2) that the data held by the relevant public authority in relation to sex and, where relevant, acquired gender as recorded on a gender recognition certificate, as defined in subsection (1)(b), is accurate."

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to issue regulations relating to the code of practice in section 49 requiring public authorities to record sex data in line with these regulations when data are collected. This clause is linked to amendments 39 and 40.*

**New clause 22—Recording of ethnicity data for the purposes of public service delivery—**

"(1) The Secretary of State must make regulations which make provision for the collection of individual ethnicity data in the process of public service delivery and associated data collection.

(2) The regulations set out by subsection (1) must make provision for ethnic classifications to include Jewish and Sikh categories.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under this section within six months of the day on which this Act is passed which will be subject to the affirmative procedure."

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to make statutory provision for individual ethnicity data to be collected in the process of public service delivery.*

**New clause 23—Recording of ethnicity data on the Register of Births and Deaths—**

"(1) The Secretary of State must make regulations which make provision for the collection of individual ethnicity data during birth and death registration.

(2) The regulations set out by subsection (1) must make provision for ethnic classifications to include Jewish and Sikh categories.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under this section within six months of the day on which this Act is passed which will be subject to the affirmative procedure."

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to make statutory provision for individual ethnicity data to be able to be collected during birth and death registration.*

**Government amendments 11 to 32.**

**Amendment 39, in clause 45, page 42, line 30, at the beginning insert—**

"Save in respect of data relating to sex,".

*This amendment is consequential on NC21.*

**Amendment 40, page 43, line 15, at end insert—**

"'gender recognition certificate' means a gender recognition certificate issued in accordance with the Gender Recognition Act 2004."

*This amendment is consequential on NC21.*

**Government amendments 1 to 8.**

**Amendment 37, in clause 67, page 75, line 24, at end insert—**

"(2A) For the purposes of paragraph 2, 'scientific research' means creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humankind, culture and society, and to devise new applications of available knowledge.

(2B) To meet the reasonableness test in paragraph 2, the activity being described as scientific research must be conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards."

*This amendment incorporates clarifications to help reduce potential misuse of the scientific research exception. The first is a definition of scientific research based on the Frascati Manual. The second is a requirement that research be conducted in line with frameworks and standards in the UKRI Code of Practice for Research.*

**Amendment 41, in clause 80, page 95, line 19, at end insert—**

"3. For the purposes of paragraph 1(a), a human's involvement is only meaningful if they are a natural person with the necessary competence, authority and capacity to understand, challenge and alter the decision."

*See explanatory statement for Amendment 44.*

**Amendment 45, page 96, line 2, at end insert—**

"5. Consent in accordance with paragraph 2 cannot be given by persons under the age of 18 where—

- (a) the automated decision-making is likely to produce legal or similarly significant effects on the child, or
- (b) the processing involves the profiling of a child to determine access to essential services, education, or other significant opportunities.

6. The controller shall not be obliged to maintain, acquire or process additional information in order to identify the age of a data subject for the sole purpose of complying with this Regulation.

7. A significant decision may not be taken based solely on automated processing, if the data subject is a child or may be a child unless the provider is satisfied that the decision is in, and compatible with, the best interests of a child, taking into account their rights and development stage, authorised by law to which the controller is subject, and after suitable measures to safeguard the data subject's rights and freedoms and legitimate interests are made publicly available.

8. Profiling or solely automated processing of children's data may not occur for the purposes of targeted advertising or behavioural analysis."



*This amendment ensures that automated decision-making cannot take place in circumstances where it would affect a child's access to significant opportunities or would not be in their best interests, as well as protections against practices such as behavioural analysis.*

Amendment 46, page 96, leave out lines 13 to 19 and insert—

- “(a) communicate to the data subject before and after the decision is taken the fact that automated decision-making is involved in the decision, the extent of any human involvement, and the availability of safeguards under this Article;
  - (b) provide the data subject with information about decisions described in paragraph 1 taken in relation to the data subject including meaningful information about the logic involved, the significance and the envisaged consequences of such processing for the data subject, and a personalised explanation for the decision;
  - (c) enable the data subject to make representations about such decisions;
  - (d) enable the data subject to obtain human intervention on the part of the controller in relation to such decisions;
  - (e) enable the data subject to contest such decisions.
3. For the purposes of paragraph 2(b), a personalised explanation must—
- (a) be clear, concise and in plain language of the data subject's choice in a readily available format;
  - (b) be understandable, and assume limited technical knowledge of algorithmic systems;
  - (c) address the reasons for the decision and how the decision affects the individual personally, which must include—
    - (i) the inputs, including any personal data;
    - (ii) parameters that were likely to have influenced or were decisive to decision or a counterfactual of what change would have resulted in a more favourable outcome;
    - (iii) the sources of parameters and inputs;
  - (d) be available free of charge and conveniently accessible to the data subject, free of deceptive design patterns.
4. Where the safeguards apply after a decision is made, the controller must give effect to data subject requests as soon as reasonably practicable and within one month of the request.
5. The controller must ensure the safeguards are fully in place and complete a data protection impact assessment under Article 35 before a decision under Article 22A is taken, documenting their implementation of the safeguards in addition to the requirements of that Article.
6. The controller must publish details of their implementation of the safeguards and how data subjects can make use of them.”

*This amendment would ensure that data subjects are informed of automated decisions made about them in a timely way, and that that explanation is personalised to enable them to understand why it was made. It also ensures processors are incentivised to put the safeguards in place before commencing automated decision-making.*

Amendment 42, page 96, line 23, after “Article 22A(1)(a),” insert

“and subject to Article 22A(3)”.

*See explanatory statement for Amendment 44.*

Amendment 43, page 97, line 19, at end insert—

- “(3) To qualify as meaningful human involvement, the review must be performed by a person with the necessary competence, training, authority to alter the decision and analytical understanding of the data.”

*See explanatory statement for Amendment 44.*

Amendment 44, page 98, line 31, after “and 50C(3)(c),” insert “and subject to 50A(3)”.

*This amendment and Amendments 41, 42 and 43 would make clear that in the context of new Article 22A of the UK GDPR, for human involvement to be considered as meaningful, the review must be carried out by a competent person who is empowered to change the decision in practice.*

Amendment 9, in clause 81, page 100, line 7, at end insert—

“Age assurance

1C. Information society services which are likely to be accessed by children must use highly effective age verification or age estimation measures for the purpose of delivering on children's higher protection matters.”

*This amendment requires services which are likely to be accessed by children to use highly effective age verification measures.*

Amendment 38, in clause 86, page 103, line 22, at end insert—

- “(2A) Where personal data is processed for the purposes of scientific research under section 87(4) of the 2018 Act (‘reuse’), the processor or controller must publish details of the data sources used.
- (2B) These details must as a minimum include a description of the scientific research, the provenance and method of acquisition of the personal data being reused, the original lawful basis for processing, the number of data subjects affected, and whether the data subjects have been notified of the reuse.
- (2C) The processor or controller must notify the Information Commission when processing data for the purposes of scientific research under section 87(4) of the 2018 Act with the same details.”

*This amendment ensures transparency for the use of scientific research exemptions by requiring those reusing personal data to publish details of that reuse and notify the Information Commission of that reuse.*

Government amendments 33 and 34.

Amendment 10, in schedule 7, page 201, line 5, at end insert—

- “(1B) A third country cannot be considered adequate or capable of providing appropriate safeguards by any authority where there exists no credible means to enforce data subject rights or obtain legal remedy.
- (1C) For the purposes of paragraph 1A, the Secretary of State must make a determination as to whether credible means are present in a third country.
- (1D) In making a determination regarding credible means, the Secretary of State must have due regard to the view of the Information Commissioner.
- (1E) Credible means do not exist where the Secretary of State considers that any of the following are true:
  - (a) judicial protection of persons whose personal data is transferred to that third country is insufficient;
  - (b) effective administrative and judicial redress are not present;
  - (c) effective judicial review mechanisms do not exist; and
  - (d) there is no statutory right to effective legal remedy for data subjects.”

*The amendment would prohibit personal data transfer to countries where data subject rights cannot be adequately upheld and prohibit private entities from using contracts to give the impression that data security exists.*

Government amendments 35 and 36.

**Chris Bryant:** Earlier I appeared as a Department for Culture, Media and Sport Minister, and now I appear as a Department for Science, Innovation and Technology Minister. I hate to embarrass Members, but they will

get two bouts of me today. I will start with the Government amendments, and then once I have heard the arguments from Members advancing other amendments, I will speak to those later in the debate. If I do not cover subjects in this initial speech, I will get back to them later.

**Sir John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con) *rose*—

**Chris Bryant:** The right hon. Gentleman is enticing me. I hope he will be nicer to me than the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) was earlier.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** I am sure that the Chair of the Committee and I will always be nice to Minister. I was only going to say that I have experienced the slight schizophrenia he has referred to in holding roles in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and in DCMS at the same time. Although he is appearing as a DSIT Minister this afternoon, can he assure the House that he will not forget his responsibilities as a DCMS Minister for the creative industries?

**Chris Bryant:** I model myself in all things on the right hon. Gentleman, apart from the fact that I left the Tory party many years ago, and it is about time that he came over to the Labour Benches.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): It is not too late.

**Chris Bryant:** No, the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) could come over here; I am not going back over there.

The point I was going to make is that I am fully cognisant of my duties. I think the right hon. Gentleman was referring to the artificial intelligence copyright issues that we will be addressing fairly shortly. I like the fact that I am in both Departments, because it means I can bring the knowledge of both sectors to bear on each other. If we are lucky, and if we work hard at it, I hope that I will be able to persuade him that we can come to a win-win solution. As he knows, this is not easy. When I had my first meeting with him after I was appointed in the post, he said, “This is not an easy area to resolve.” I hope I am not breaking a confidence—but he is smiling.

I have a large number of topics to cover, and I am conscious that many Members will think this is the data Bill, when we will actually be dealing with an awful lot of subjects this afternoon that do not feel as if they have anything to do with the measures in the original version brought forward by the right hon. Gentleman and previously. I hope that Members will bear with me. I intend to address the Government’s amendments as follows: first, AI and copyright; secondly, deepfakes; thirdly, the national underground assets register; and then smart data and other minor and technical amendments.

I will start with AI and intellectual property. As Members know, it was never the Government’s intention to legislate on that issue at all in this Bill. It is a complex and important issue, which is why we have consulted on a package of measures. That consultation had more than 11,500 responses, which we are still considering. Several hon. Members have said to me, “Will you remove the opt-out clause in the Bill?” I need to make it

absolutely clear that no such opt-out clause is in the Bill. We never laid one in the Bill, so there is not an opt-out clause to remove.

As Members will also know, the Lords inserted a set of amendments on AI and copyright, which we removed in Committee. They reappear on the amendment paper today as new clauses 2 to 6, tabled by the hon. Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins). A similar measure has been tabled as new clause 14 by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel).

We oppose all these new clauses for several reasons. First, they pre-empt the results of the consultation. It must surely be better to legislate on this complex subject in the round rather than piecemeal. The amendments are also unworkable. New clause 5, for instance, would make the Information Commissioner the regulator of transparency requirements, but the Information Commissioner’s Office has neither the skills nor the resources to perform that function. Obviously, transparency requirements without an effective enforcement mechanism are worse than useless, which means the other clauses on transparency are also unworkable in this context. The new clauses also fail to address some of the most important questions in this area. They effectively legislate piecemeal rather than in the round. Whenever Parliament has done that in the past, it has rued the day, and I think the same is true today.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Does the Minister not understand the urgency? Generative AI is ingesting our whole creative catalogue as we speak. We need something in place now. We cannot wait a year for reports or three years for legislation; we need action now. Does he not understand that something needs to be brought forward here today? These amendments offer that.

**Chris Bryant:** I do not think the amendments do offer that, because I do not think they work. We need to legislate in the round, as I say, and not piecemeal. I point out to the hon. Member that there is something of a two-edged sword here. I have been repeatedly told—and I understand the point—that there is no legal uncertainty as to the copyright status of works that are being scraped. At the same time, people are saying they want legislative change. Those two things cannot be true at the same time. I am determined to get us to a better place on this, as I will perhaps explain in a couple of moments.

I think there is an intention to push new clause 2 to a vote later, which I urge hon. Members not to do, although I do not always get my way. New clause 2 basically says that people should comply with the law. I mean, it is a simple fact: people should comply with the law. We cannot legislate to tell people that they should comply with the law; the law is the law. If none of these amendments is passed today, the law will remain as it is today and copyright law in the UK will be robust and clear.

For the absolute avoidance of doubt, some people have talked to me about text and data mining exceptions, which, as Members will know, exist, for instance, in the European Union. There is a text and data mining exception already in UK law. It was introduced in 2014 via a statutory instrument, which added section 29A to

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the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. However, it is an exception for the sole purpose of non-commercial research. I think that that is absolutely clear in law, and I do not think it needs any clarifying.

**Ms Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I understand the point that the Minister is making about existing copyright law, but, as he has said, the Government opened a consultation that has, for many of our constituents who work in the creative industries, prefigured a substantial change in copyright when it comes to AI. Does he see the merit that many of us see in making it clear that the principles behind copyright from which our creative constituents should be able to benefit, and which should protect their own works, are what is at stake here? Having said that the existing law stands, will he at least make a commitment that that is what the Government want as well? I think he can understand why people are concerned, and the source of the concerns that have merited these amendments.

2.30 pm

**Chris Bryant:** I completely understand and, in large measure, share those concerns. We wanted to ensure, in this fast-changing world, that the creative industries in the United Kingdom could be remunerated for the work they had produced. We are not in the business of giving away other people's work to third parties for nothing: that would be to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage, to use a term from an old translation of the Bible, and we are determined not to do it. As my hon. Friend—and several other Members—will have heard me say many times before, we would only proceed with the package of measures included in the consultation if we believed that we were advancing the cause of the creative industries in the UK, rather than putting them in danger or legal peril.

I think that some of the things I will say in a moment will be of assistance. We want to reach a point at which it is easier for the creative industries—whether they are large businesses with deep pockets and able to use lawyers, or very small individual photographers or painters—to assert and protect their rights, and to say, if they wish, “No, you cannot scrape my material for the purpose of large language model learning, unless you remunerate me.” That remuneration might happen via a collective licensing scheme, or it might happen individually. Either way, we want to get to more licensing rather than less. As, again, I have said several times at this Dispatch Box, we have looked at what has happened in the European Union and what is happening in the United States of America, and we believe that although the EU said that its package was designed to deliver more licensing, it has not led to more licensing or to more remuneration of the creative industries, and we want to avoid that pitfall.

As I have said, I take the concerns of the creative industries seriously, both as a DSIT Minister and as a DCMS Minister; of course I do. I agree—we, the Government, agree—that transparency is key. We want to see more licensing of content. We believe that the UK is a creative content superpower, and we want UK AI companies to flourish on the basis of high-quality data. I have spoken to a fair number of publishing companies, in particular UK companies such as Taylor &

Francis, a largely academic publisher. As Members will know, the UK is the largest exporter of books in the world. Those companies are deliberately trying to get all their material licensed to AI companies, for two reasons: first, they want to be remunerated for the work that they have provided, and secondly, just as importantly, they want AI to come up with good answers. If you put dirty water into a pipe, dirty water will come out at the other end, and if you put good data into AI, good answers will come out of AI. That is an important part of why we want to ensure that we have strong AI based on high-quality data, and much of that is premium content from our creative industries.

We also agree that the Government must keep an open mind, and must take full account of the economic evidence. That is why we have tabled new clauses 16 and 17, which set out binding commitments to assess the impact of any and all proposals and to consider and report on the key areas raised in debate. That includes any and all of the options that were involved in the consultation that we published after the amendments were tabled in the House of Lords. As the Government take forward the commitments made by these amendments, they will consider all potential policy options. I must emphasise that the Government have not prejudged the outcome of the consultation, and take the need to consider and reflect on the best approach for all parties very seriously.

Members will, I am sure, have read new clause 17; it requires the Government to report on four matters. First, there is the issue of technical solutions that would enable copyright owners to control whether their copyright works could be used to develop AI.

**Victoria Collins** (Harpden and Berkhamsted) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

**Chris Bryant:** Will the hon. Lady just let me finish this paragraph, because it might read better in *Hansard*? Actually, I have now added that bit, so it is ruined, and I might as well give way to her.

**Victoria Collins:** The question of technical solutions is very important, but my challenge is this. I have spoken to representatives of some of the big tech companies who are pushing for that, and who are saying that it is hard for them to do it at scale but creatives can do it. Why can the tech companies not be leading on an opt-in system for creatives? Let me hand that back to the Minister.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I should point out that the hon. Lady, as the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrat party, will be speaking very shortly.

**Chris Bryant:** I know, but she is wonderful, so we will let her—or you will let her, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This is a really important point. Surely it cannot be impossible for us to find a technical solution. People who can develop AI—and they are now developing AI on their laptops, especially following DeepSeek; they do not need massive computers—should be able to develop a very simple system, as I have said before, whereby all creatives who are copyright owners are able to assert their rights, very simply, across all platforms, without any great exertion. That is what I want to achieve.



The hon. Lady was quite right to raise that question, so what are we going to do next? We say in new clause 17 that we will report in 12 months' time. If we were to report in 12 months' time that we had done absolutely nothing, I think that everyone would rightly rant and rave at us. It is our intention that the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will together co-ordinate a special taskforce specifically to consider how we can facilitate, incentivise and enable the development of these technical solutions. I suspect that, if we can get there, opt-out will look remarkably like opt-in.

The second matter on which new clause 17 requires us to report is access to data for AI developers to train AI systems in the UK, the third is transparency, and the fourth relates to measures to facilitate the licensing of copyright works for AI training. The publication will be required within 12 months of Royal Assent, and will of course be laid before Parliament. New clause 16 supplements these reports with a full economic impact assessment that will go further than previous assessments, and will present an analysis of the economic impact of a range of policy options available in this context, supported by the additional evidence that the Government have received in response to their consultation. The reporting requirements are important: they mean that we will have to engage with each of these issues apace and in depth, and we will do that. We are determined to find and incentivise technical solutions that support our objectives, and I believe that if we do that we can be a world leader. As I said earlier, the two Secretaries of State will convene working groups to tackle each of these issues.

I have heard people say that we are legislating to water down copyright, but that is simply not true. If Members support the Government's position today, the UK's copyright law will remain precisely as robust tomorrow as it is today. For activities in the UK, people will, in law, only be able to use copyright material if they are permitted and licensed to do so or if a copyright exception allows it, such as the existing copyright exceptions for education, public libraries and non-commercial work.

**Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

**Chris Bryant:** I thought that that might engender something.

**Alice Macdonald:** It was a pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee. May I take up the point about timelines in the new clause? The Minister has said that the reports must be made before the end of a period of 12 months, but, as other Members have said, there is a great deal of concern about what may happen. Does he expect this to take a year, or might it be possible to work faster so that more reassurance can be given? I accept that there will need to be further consultation, and examination of the responses.

**Chris Bryant:** Obviously, a series of different things will happen. We will have to respond to the consultation at some point, and I guess that the Culture, Media and Sport Committee will want to respond as well. In the meantime, we will be running a working group. I am very happy to keep the House updated on how that work progresses, but I do not want to commit to producing

something within 12 months without being absolutely certain that I can do so. If new clause 17 is carried today, it will be a requirement by law that we produce a response within 12 months.

I fully get the point about urgency. As the right hon. Member for Maldon knows well, this issue has been hanging around for a considerable period of time. We in the UK have perhaps been a little slow, but I want to make sure that we get it right, rather than legislate piecemeal.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): I apologise if I have missed this, but has the Minister outlined when the Government will respond to the consultation?

**Chris Bryant:** No, I have not—my hon. Friend has not missed anything. Obviously, we want to respond as soon as possible, but we have 11,500 consultation responses to consider.

Some issues have hardly been referred to in the public debate on this matter. One issue that Equity is understandably pursuing, and that we referred to in the consultation, is about personality rights, which exist in some states in the United States of America. That is quite complicated to legislate for, which is one of the reasons we have consulted on it.

We have also consulted on the question—again, nobody has referred to this in the public debate—of whether a work that is generated by AI has any copyright attached to it. If so, who owns that copyright? It is slightly moot in British law. One could argue that British copyright law has always presumed that copyright applies only where a work is the expression of an individual, so it does not apply to AI-generated material, but there are other elements. Section 9(3) of the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988 says that machine-generated material can have copyright attached to it, which is one of the other issues that we want to address.

As I said earlier, one of the issues to which nobody has yet come up with an answer is how we will provide proper enforcement of whatever transparency requirements we propose. I am conscious that in discussions I have had with our European counterparts, including my Spanish counterpart and members of the European Commission, there has been some concern about precisely what they will do by virtue of transparency. This issue is made more complicated by the advent of DeepSeek—for a whole series of different reasons, which I am happy to explain at some other point—but we need to end up with a transparency system that is both effective and proportionate. Simply dumping a list of millions and millions of URLs that have been visited on the internet is neither effective nor proportionate, so we will have to come up with something.

**Jonathan Davies** (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): Does the Minister envisage that any model of enforcement around transparency will be compulsory and not a voluntary system?

**Chris Bryant:** By its nature, enforcement would have to be compulsory, but we are running ahead of ourselves, because nobody has actually come up with a system that has an enforcement mechanism. Who would do it? What body would do it? How would that body be resourced? That is one of the things that we need to look into, and it is one of the elements of the consultation.

[Chris Bryant]

I will move on to another subject: the issue of purported intimate images. Government amendment 34 deals with the creation of intimate images or deepfakes. Earlier in the Bill's passage, my colleague Lord Ponsonby added a new offence of creating purported intimate images without consent or reasonable belief in consent, and I am sure all hon. Members agree that this is a really important addition. In Committee, we introduced the offence of requesting the creation of purported images without consent or reasonable belief in consent, as hon. Members who were on the Public Bill Committee with me will know. It seems axiomatic that the courts should have the power to deprive offenders of the image and anything containing it that relates or is connected to the offence. This is already the case for the creating offence, which was introduced in the House of Lords. Government amendment 34 amends the sentencing code to achieve that for the requesting offence. It ensures that the existing regime of court powers to deprive offenders of property also applies to images and devices containing the image that relate to the requesting offence.

We have tabled a series of amendments to clauses 56 to 59 to reflect our discussions with the devolved Governments on the national underground asset register. The amendments will require that the Secretary of State to obtain the consent of Welsh Ministers and the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, rather than merely consult them, before making regulations in relation to the provisions. Co-operation with the devolved Governments has been consistent and constructive throughout the Bill's passage. We have secured legislative consent from Scotland, and the Senedd in Wales voted in favour of granting the Bill legislative consent only yesterday. We regret that for procedural reasons, the process with Northern Ireland has not yet reached the stage of legislative consent. We are, however, working constructively with the Department of Finance to ensure that we can make progress as quickly as possible. We continue to work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to secure legislative consent, and to ensure that citizens and businesses of Northern Ireland feel the full benefits of the Bill.

Before I finish, I turn to our amendments to help ensure that smart data schemes can function optimally, and that part 1 of the Bill is as clear as possible. Amendments to fee charging under clauses 11 and 15 follow extensive stakeholder engagement, and will maximise the commercial viability of smart data systems by enabling regulations to make tailored provision on fee charging within each smart data scheme. For example, amendments 19 to 21 enable the fees charged to exceed expenses where appropriate. This is necessary to fulfil the commitment in the national payments vision to establish a long-term regulatory framework for open banking. Outside smart data, Government amendment 35

"adds references to investigating crime to existing references in the Data Protection Act 2018 to detecting or preventing crime", which will bring these references into line with other parts of the legislation.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): It is a privilege to respond to this debate on behalf of His Majesty's official Opposition, and to speak to the

new clauses and amendments. This is an ambitious piece of legislation, which will enable us to harness data—the currency of our digital age—and use it in a way that drives the economy and enhances the delivery of public services. Since its original inception under the Conservatives in the last Parliament, the Bill has also become the platform for tackling some of the most pressing social and technological issues of our time. Many of these are reflected in the amendments to the Bill, which are the subject of debate today.

I start with new clause 20. How do we regulate the interaction of AI models with creative works? I pay tribute to the work of many Members on both sides of this House, and Members of the other place, who have passionately raised creatives' concerns and the risks posed to their livelihoods by AI models. Conservative Members are clear that this is not a zero-sum game. Our fantastic creative and tech industries have the potential to turbocharge economic growth, and the last Government rightly supported them. The creative and technology sectors need and deserve certainty, which provides the foundation for investment and growth. New clause 20 would achieve certainty by requiring the Government to publish a series of plans on the transparency of AI models' use of copyrighted works, removing market barriers for smaller AI market entrants and digital watermarking and, most important of all, a clear restatement of the application of copyright law to AI-modelling activities.

I cannot help but have a sense of déjà vu in relation to Government new clause 17: we are glad that the Government have acted on several of the actions we called for in Committee, but once again they have chosen PR over effective policy. Amid all the spin, the Government have in effect announced a plan to respond to their own consultation—how innovative!

What is starkly missing from the Government new clauses is a commitment to make it clear that copyright law applies to the use of creative content by AI models, which is the primary concern raised with me by industry representatives. The Government have created uncertainty about the application of copyright law to AI modelling through their ham-fisted consultation. So I offer the Minister another opportunity: will he formally confirm the application of copyright law to protect the use of creative works by AI, and will he provide legal certainty and send a strong signal to our creative industries that they will not be asked to pay the price for AI growth?

**Chris Bryant:** Yes.

**Dr Spencer:** I thank the Minister for making that statement at the Dispatch Box. As he knows, we need to have that formally, in writing, as a statement from the Government to make it absolutely clear, given that the consultation has muddied the waters.

**Chris Bryant:** I am sorry, but I said that in my speech, and I have said it several times in several debates previously.

**Dr Spencer:** I would therefore be grateful if the Minister said why there remains uncertainty among creatives about the application of copyright in this area. Is that not why we need to move this forward?

I now turn to Government amendment 34 and others. I congratulate my noble Friend Baroness Owen on the tremendous work she has done in ensuring that clauses criminalising the creation of and request for sexually

explicit deepfake images have made it into the Bill. I also thank the Government for the constructive approach they are now taking in this area.

**Chris Bryant:** I should have said earlier that, as the shadow Minister knows, in Committee we changed the clause on “soliciting” to one on “requesting” such an image, because in certain circumstances soliciting may require the exchange of money. That is why we now have the requesting offence.

**Dr Spencer:** I thank the Minister for his clarification and reiteration of that point, and again for his work with colleagues to take forward the issue, on which I think we are in unison across the House.

New clause 21 is on directions to public authorities on recording of sex data. One does not need to be a doctor to know that data accuracy is critical, particularly when it comes to health, research or the provision of tailored services based on protected characteristics such as sex or age. The accuracy of data must be at the heart of this Bill, and nowhere has this been more high-profile or important than in the debate over the collection and use of sex and gender data. I thank the charity Sex Matters and the noble Lords Arbuthnot and Lucas for the work they have done to highlight the need for accurate data and its relevance for the digital verification system proposed in the Bill.

**Samantha Niblett** (South Derbyshire) (Lab): The recent decision by the Supreme Court that “sex” in the Equality Act 2010 refers to biological sex at birth, regardless of whether someone holds a gender recognition certificate or identifies as of a different gender, has already left many trans people feeling hurt and unseen. Does the shadow Minister agree with me that any ID and digital verification service must consider trans people, not risk making them more likely to feel that their country is forgetting who they are?

**Dr Spencer:** I thank the hon. Member for her intervention, and I will shortly come on to the impact on all people of the decision of the Supreme Court. Our new clause’s focus and scope are simple. The Supreme Court ruling made it clear that public bodies must collect data on biological sex to comply with their duties under the Equality Act. The new clause ensures that this data is recorded and used correctly in accordance with the law. This is about data accuracy, not ideology.

New clause 21 is based in part on the work of Professor Alice Sullivan, who conducted a very important review, with deeply concerning findings on inaccurate data collection and the conflation of gender identity with biological sex data. She found people missed off health screening, risks to research integrity, inaccurate policing records and management through the criminal justice system, and many other concerns. These concerns present risks to everyone, irrespective of biological sex, gender identity or acquired gender. Trans people, like everyone else, need health screening based on their biological sex. Trans people need protecting from sexual predators, too, and they have the right to dignity and respect.

The Sullivan report shows beyond doubt that the concerns of the last Government and the current Leader of the Opposition were entirely justified. The Government have had Professor Sullivan’s report since September

last year, but the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has still not made a formal statement about it or addressed the concerns raised, which is even more surprising given its relevance to this Bill. The correction of public authority data on sex is necessary and urgent, but it is made even more critical by the implementation of the digital verification services in the Bill.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): I appreciate that the shadow Minister is making an important point on the Sullivan review and the Supreme Court judgment, but there are conversations in Government and with Labour Members to ensure that the Supreme Court judgment and the Sullivan review are implemented properly across all Departments, and I hope to work with the Government on that.

**Dr Spencer:** I thank the hon. Member for her intervention, and for all the work that she and colleagues on both sides of the House are doing in this area. I hope that the findings of the Sullivan report are implemented as soon as possible, and part of that implementation would be made possible if Members across the House supported our new clause.

For the digital verification services to be brought in, it is important that the data used to inform them is accurate and correct. Digital verification could be used to access single-sex services, so it needs to be correct, and if sex and gender data are conflated, as we know they are in many datasets, a failure to act will bring in self-ID by the back door. To be clear, that has never been the legal position in the UK, and it would conflict with the ruling of the Supreme Court. Our new clause 21 is simple and straightforward. It is about the accurate collection and use of sex data, and rules to ensure that data is of the right standard when used in digital verification services so that single-sex services are not undermined.

New clause 19 is on the Secretary of State’s duty to review the age of consent for data processing under the UK GDPR. What can or should children be permitted to consent to when using or signing up to online platforms and social media? How do we ensure children are protected, and how do we prevent harms from the use of inappropriate social media itself, separate from the content provided? How do we help our children in a world where social media can import the school, the playground, the changing room, the influencer, the stranger, the groomer, the radical and the hostile state actor all into the family home?

Our children are the first generation growing up in the digital world, and they are exposed to information and weaponised algorithms on a scale that simply did not exist for their parents. In government, we took measures to improve protections and regulate harmful content online, and I am delighted to see those measures now coming into force. However, there is increasing evidence that exposure to inappropriate social media platforms is causing harm, and children as young as 13 may not be able to regulate and process this exposure to such sites in a safe and proportionate way.

I am sure every Member across the House will have been contacted by parents concerned about the impact of social media on their children, and we recognise that this is a challenging area to regulate. How do we define and target risky and inappropriate social media platforms,



[Dr Ben Spencer]

and ensure that education and health tech—or, indeed, closed direct messaging services—do not fall within scope? How effective are our provisions already, and can age verification be made to work for under-16s? What ids are available to use? What will the impact of the Online Safety Act 2023 be now that it is coming into force? What are the lessons from its implementation, and where does it need strengthening? Finally, how do we support parents and teachers in educating and guiding children so they are prepared to enter the digital world at whatever age they choose and are able to do so?

The Government must take action to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place for our children, not through outright bans or blanket restrictions but with an evidence-based approach that takes into account the recent legal changes and need for effective enforcement, including age verification for under-16s. Too often in this place we focus on making more things illegal rather than on the reasons for lack of enforcement in the first place. There is no point in immediate restrictions if they cannot be implemented.

3 pm

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): I agree with all the points the shadow Minister is making about keeping our children safe online, so why does new clause 19 only commit to a review of the digital age of data consent and raising the age from 13 to 16 for when parental consent is no longer required? Why does he not support the Liberal Democrats' new clause 1 that would start to implement this change? We can still, through implementation, do all the things the hon. Gentleman proposes to do, so why the delay?

**Dr Spencer:** There are a few issues with new clause 1. One is the scope in terms of the definition of networking services and ensuring platforms such as WhatsApp are not captured within it. Looking at new clause 19, there are challenges to implementing in this area. There is no point in clicking our fingers and saying, "Let's change the age of digital consent," without understanding the barriers to implementation, and without understanding whether age verification can work in this context. We do not want to create a system and have people just get around it quite simply. We need the Government to do the work in terms of setting it up so that we can move towards a position of raising the age from 13 to 16.

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): The press have obviously been briefed by Conservatives that the Conservatives are pushing for a ban on social media for under-16s, but it seems that what is actually being suggested is a review of the digital age of consent with a view to perhaps increasing it to 16. The two positions are very different, and I wonder whether the tough talk in the press matches what is actually being proposed by the Opposition today.

**Dr Spencer:** I have been very clear on this, and it is important in such a complex area to look at the detail and nuance of the challenges around—(Interruption.) Well, it is very easy to create a new clause where we click our fingers and say, "Let's make this more illegal; let's bring in x, y or z restriction." As a responsible Opposition, we are looking at the detail and complexities around

implementing something like this. (Interruption.) I have been asked a few questions and the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) might want to listen to the rationale of our approach.

One question is how to define social media. Direct messaging services such as WhatsApp and platforms such as YouTube fall in the scope of social media. There are obviously social media platforms that I think all of us are particularly concerned about, including Snapchat and TikTok, but by changing the age of digital consent we do not want to end up capturing lower-risk social media platforms that we recognise are clearly necessary or beneficial, such as education technology or health technology platforms. And that is before we start looking at whether age verification can work, particularly in the 13-to-16 age group.

**Chris Bryant:** Sorry, I am getting a bit lost. Does the Minister think, and does the Conservative party think, that the digital age of consent should rise from 13 to 16 or not?

**Dr Spencer** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. I point out to Mr Bryant that Dr Ben Spencer is the shadow Minister.

**Dr Spencer:** I think that was wishful thinking by the Minister in this debate.

Our new clause says that we need to look at the desirability of raising the digital age of consent for data processing from 13 to 16 in terms of its impact particularly on issues such as the social and educational development of children, but also the viability of doing so in terms of the fallout and the shaking out of the Online Safety Act and with regard to age verification services. Should there then be no evidence to demonstrate that it is unnecessary, we would then raise the digital age of consent to 13 to 16. It might be the case that, over the next six months, the shaking out of the Online Safety Act demonstrates that this intervention is not necessary. Perhaps concerns around particular high-risk social media platforms will change as technology evolves. We are saying that the Government should do the work with a view to raising the age in 18 months unless there is evidence to prove the contrary. (Interruption.) I have made this crystal clear, and if the Minister would choose to look at the new clause, rather than chuckling away in the corner, he might see the strategy we are proposing.

**Max Wilkinson:** I thank the shadow Minister for giving way. As ever, he is extremely polite in his presentation and in his dealing with interventions, but I am not sure that he dealt with my intervention, which was basically asking whether the Conservative party position is as it has briefed to the press—that it wishes to ban social media for under-16s—or that it wishes to have a review on raising the age of data consent. It cannot be both.

**Dr Spencer:** I say again that the position is that, following a careful look at the evidence regarding the desirability and validity of doing so—taking into account findings regarding the impact and implementation of the Online Safety Act and age verification and how one defines social media, particularly high-risk platforms—unless there is direct evidence to show that raising the age from 13 to 16 is unnecessary, which there may be,

then we should raise it from 13 to 16. If that has not provided clarity, the hon. Gentleman is very welcome to intervene on me again and I will try and explain it a third time, but I think Members have got a grasp now.

This new clause will also tackle some of the concerns at the heart of the campaign for Jools' law, and I pay tribute to Ellen Roome for her work in this area. I am very sympathetic to the tragic circumstances leading to this campaign and welcome the additional powers granted to coroners in the Bill, but I know that they do not fully address Ellen Roome's concerns. The Government need to explain how they can be sure that data will be retained in the context of these tragedies, so that a coroner will be able to make sure, even if there are delays, that it can be accessed. If the Minister could provide an answer to that in his winding-up speech, and detail any further work in the area, that would be welcome.

On parental access to children's data more broadly, there are difficult challenges in terms of article 8 rights on privacy and transparency, especially for children aged 16 to 17 as they approach adulthood. Our new clause addresses some of these concerns and would also put in place the groundwork to, de facto, raise the digital age of consent for inappropriate social media to 16 within 18 months, rendering the request for parental access to young teenage accounts obsolete.

I urge colleagues across the House to support all our amendments today as a balanced, proportionate and effective response to a generational challenge. The Bill and the votes today are an opportunity for our Parliament, often referred to as the conscience of our country, to make clear our position on some of the most pressing social and technological issues of our time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): I would like to thank colleagues in the other place and in this House who have worked so hard to improve the Bill. By modernising data infrastructure and governance, this Bill seeks to unlock the secure, efficient use of data while promoting innovation across sectors. As a tech evangelist, as well as the Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, I welcome it, and I am pleased to see colleagues from the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner) and the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), here for this debate.

Having spent many unhappy hours when working for Ofcom trying to find out where British Telecom's ducts were actually buried, I offer a very personal welcome to the national underground asset register, and I thank the Minister for his work on this Bill as well as for his opening comments.

I agree with the Minister that there is much to welcome in this Bill, but much of the Second Reading debate was consumed by discussion on AI and copyright. I know many Members intend to speak on that today, so I will just briefly set out my view.

The problem with the Government's proposals on AI and copyright are that they give all the power to the tech platforms who—let us be frank—have a great deal of power already, as well as trillions of dollars in stock

market capitalisation and a determination to return value to their shareholders. What they do not have is an incentive to design appropriate technology for transparency and rights reservation if they believe that in its absence they will have free access to our fantastic creators' ingenuity. It is essential that the Minister convinces them that if they do not deliver this technology—I agree with him that it is highly possible to do so—then he will impose it.

Perhaps the Minister could announce an open competition, with a supplier contract as the prize, for whichever innovative company designs something. The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, sitting with the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, heard from small companies that can do just that. The tech giants might not like it, but I often say that the opposite of regulation is not no regulation—it is bad regulation. If the tech platforms do not lead, they will be obliged to follow because the House will not allow the copyright of our fantastic creators to be put at risk. The Minister knows that I think him extremely charismatic and always have done, but I do not believe that "Chris from DSIT" can prevail against the combined forces of Björn from Abba and Paul from The Beatles.

The prospects for human advancement opened by using data for scientific research are immense. As a world-leading science powerhouse, the UK must take advantage of them. That is why, despite being a strong advocate of personal data rights, I welcome the Bill's proposals to allow the reuse of data without consent for the purposes of scientific research. I am concerned, however, that the exemption is too broad and that it will be taken advantage of by data-hungry tech companies using the exemption even if they are not truly advancing the cause of scientific progress but simply, as with copyright, training their AI models.

Huge amounts of data is already collected by platforms, such as direct messages on Instagram or via web-scraping of any website that contains an individual's personal data such as published records or people's public LinkedIn pages. We know it can be misused because it has been, most recently with Meta's controversial decision to use Instagram-user data to train AI models, triggering an Information Commissioner's Office response because of the difficulty users encountered in objecting to it. Then there is the risk of data collected via tracking cookies or the profiling of browsing behaviour, which companies such as Meta use to fingerprint people's devices and track their browsing habits. Could the data used to create ads also be freely reusable under this exemption? The US tech firm Palantir has the contract for the NHS federated data platform. Amnesty International has already raised concerns about the potential for patients' data being mishandled. Does the Bill mean that our health data could be reused by Palantir for what it calls research purposes?

**David Davis** (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): Before the hon. Lady moves on from Palantir, I think the House should know that it is an organisation with its origins in the American security state—the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency—and I cannot understand for the life of me why we are willing to commit the data of our citizens to an organisation like that.

**Chi Onwurah:** I thank the right hon. Member for that intervention. I will leave it to the Minister to address his point.

The concern that is probably of most interest to my constituents is reflected in the recent report by *The Sunday Times* that Chelsea football club claims research and development tax credits. Will the Minister confirm that if Chelsea were to collect data on Newcastle United fans attending an away match at Stamford Bridge, it could be reused for whatever research it is undertaking as a consequence of the exemption?

My amendments 37 and 38 would incorporate into the Bill two clarifications to help reduce the potential misuse of the scientific research exemption. I thank the Ada Lovelace Institute for its help in drafting the amendments. Amendment 37 proposes placing in the Bill a basic definition of scientific research based on the “Frascati Manual” used by the ICO, enabling the “reasonably described” test to be assessed against an objective standard.

3.15 pm

Amendment 38 is a requirement that such research be conducted in line with relevant frameworks and standards, based on the UK Research and Innovation code of practice for research, ensuring transparency for the use of scientific research exemptions. Researchers would have to publish—for example, on their website—a short statement with details of what they are reusing and send it to the ICO. This is a minimal, proportionate amount of information that researchers should already have to hand, meaning that over time we get a picture of how much people’s data is being reused and for what kinds of research, so that there is some transparency here.

When the Minister responds, could he please engage with the examples I have given? His letter to me of 17 April, which was perhaps drafted by his officials, seemed to say that the exemption is okay because we can trust companies to understand our undefined understanding of scientific research, and that the ICO would act if that were not the case. One problem with that suggestion is that we will not know how the data is being used for scientific research, because there are no transparency requirements on algorithms in general and on this exemption in particular.

Science in this country is respected—it is more respected than politicians and big tech. We must not allow that respect to be contaminated by uses that are not truly scientific. I have a real fear that if we allow this exemption to be abused, we will undermine public trust in data sharing and in science.

I will briefly speak to other parts of the Bill and amendments. On new clause 21, I hope the Government will set out how definitions of sex and gender will be consistent and appropriate to the need for which the data is being collected and verified under the digital verification provisions.

**Marsha De Cordova:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and for the speech she is making. We all know the importance of data. Does she agree that it is right that when we are recording sex, it is based on what the Equality Act 2010 determines as sex, being biological sex?

**Chi Onwurah:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The Minister referred to that briefly, describing it, in relation to AI, as a pipeline where bad data in would mean bad data out. My hon. Friend knows that the definition of sex and gender has been controversial and contested. The Supreme Court brought some clarity and it is important that data collection reflects consistency and clarity. If we have bad data definitions, we will undoubtedly have bad consequences. As I said, it is important that we have consistency and definition when it comes to the collection of data for these purposes, and I look forward to hearing how that will be achieved.

I also want to speak briefly in support of clause 125, which introduces rules allowing researchers to access data from online services for online safety research. The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee’s inquiry into social media algorithms in misinformation heard considerable evidence on the role of algorithms in pushing misinformation generally, and particularly to children. I very much welcome this clause, which will increase transparency, but could the Minister clarify that it will fully cover the recommender algorithms used by social media platforms, which drive new content to users?

My constituents often feel that advances in technology are done to them rather than with them and for their benefit. Critically, our constituents need to feel that they have agency over the way data impacts their lives. Rather than feeling empowered by digital innovation, too many feel the opposite: disempowered, undermined, dehumanised, tracked and even attacked. Delivering the improvements promised by the Bill must therefore go hand in hand with respecting the rights of citizens to control and manage their data and driving innovation and scientific research benefits to them.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Victoria Collins:** Thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker, and for your patience regarding my earlier intervention. I am very passionate about all elements of the Bill.

On Second Reading, I said:

“Data is the new gold”—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2025; Vol. 762, c. 302.]

—a gold that could be harnessed to have a profound impact on people’s daily lives, and I stand by that. With exponential advances in innovation almost daily, this has never been truer, so we must get this right.

I rise today to speak to the amendments and new clauses tabled in my name specifically, and to address two urgent challenges: protecting children in our digital world and safeguarding the rights of our creative industry in the age of artificial intelligence. The Bill before us represents a rare opportunity to shape how technology serves people, which I firmly believe is good for both society and business. However, I stand here with mixed emotions: pride in the cross-party work we have accomplished, including with the other place; hope for the progress we can still achieve; but also disappointment that we must fight so hard for protections that should be self-evident.

New clause 1 seeks to raise the age of consent for social media data processing from 13 to 16 years old. We Liberal Democrats are very clear where we stand on



this. Young minds were not designed to withstand the psychological assault of today's social media algorithms. By raising the age at which children can consent to have their data processed by social media services, we can take an important first step towards tackling those algorithms at source. This is a common-sense measure, bringing us in line with many of our European neighbours.

The evidence before us is compelling and demands our attention. When I recently carried out a safer screens tour of schools across Harpenden and Berkhamsted to hear exactly what young people think about the issue, I heard that they are trapped in cycles of harmful content that they never sought out. Students spoke of brain rot and described algorithms that pushed them towards extreme content, despite their efforts to block it.

The evidence is not just anecdotal; it is overwhelming. Child mental health referrals have increased by 477% in just eight years, with nearly half of teenagers with problematic smartphone use reporting anxiety. One in four children aged 12 to 17 have received unwanted sexual images. We know that 82% of parents support Government intervention in this area, while a Liberal Democrat poll showed that seven in 10 people say the Government are not doing enough to protect children online.

**Freddie van Mierlo** (Henley and Thame) (LD): I welcome new clause 1, tabled by my hon. Friend. Does she agree that raising the age of consent for processing personal data from 13 to 16 will help reduce the use of smartphones in schools by reducing their addictiveness, thereby also improving concentration and educational performance in schools?

**Victoria Collins:** That is exactly what is at the heart of this matter—the data that drives that addictiveness and commercialises our children's attention is not the way forward.

Many amazing organisations have gathered evidence in this area, and it is abundantly clear that the overuse of children's data increases their risk of harm. It powers toxic algorithms that trap children in cycles of harmful content, recommender systems that connect them with predators, and discriminatory AI systems that are used to make decisions about them that carry lifelong consequences. Health Professionals for Safer Screens—a coalition of child psychiatrists, paediatricians and GPs—is pleading for immediate legislative action.

This is not a partisan issue. So many of us adults can relate to the feeling of being drawn into endless scrolling on our devices—I will not look around the Chamber too much. Imagine how much more difficult it is for developing minds. This is a cross-party problem, and it should not be political, but we need action now.

Let me be absolutely clear: this change is not about restricting young people's digital access or opposing technology and innovation; it is about requiring platforms to design their services with children's safety as the default, not as an afterthought. For years we have watched as our children's wellbeing has been compromised by big tech companies and their profits. Our call for action is supported by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 5Rights, Healthcare Professionals for Safer Screens, Girlguiding, Mumsnet and the Online Safety Act network. This is our chance to protect our children. The time to act is not 18 months

down the line, as the Conservatives suggest, but now. I urge Members to support new clause 1 and take the crucial steps towards creating a digital world where children can truly thrive.

To protect our children, I have also tabled amendment 45 to clause 80, which seeks to ensure that automated decision-making systems cannot be used to make impactful decisions about children without robust safeguards. The Bill must place a child's best interests at the heart of any such system, especially where education or healthcare are concerned.

We must protect the foundational rights of our creators in this new technological landscape, which is why I have tabled new clause 2. The UK's creative industries contribute £126 billion annually to our economy and employ more than 2.3 million people—they are vital to our economy and our cultural identity. These are the artists, musicians, writers and creators who inspire us, define us and proudly carry British creativity on to the global stage. Yet today, creative professionals across the UK watch with mounting alarm as AI models trained on their life's work generate imitations without permission, payment or even acknowledgment.

New clause 2 would ensure that operators of web crawlers and AI models comply with existing UK copyright law, regardless of where they are based. This is not about stifling innovation; it is about ensuring that innovation respects established rights and is good for everyone. Currently, AI companies are scraping creative works at an industrial scale. A single AI model may be trained on thousands of copyrighted works without permission or compensation.

The UK company Polaron is a fantastic example, creating AI technology to help engineers to characterise materials, quantify microstructural variation and optimise microstructural designs faster than ever before. Why do I bring up Polaron? It is training an AI model built from scratch without using copyright materials.

**David Davis:** I am emphatically on the hon. Lady's side in her intent to protect British creativity, but how does she respond to the implicit threat from artificial intelligence providers to this and other elements of the Bill to effectively deny AI to the UK if they find the regulations too difficult to deal with?

**Victoria Collins:** We have a thriving innovation sector in the UK, so those companies are not going anywhere—they want to work with the UK. We actually have a system now that has a fantastic creative industry and we have innovation and business coming in. There are many ways to incentivise that. I talk a lot about money, skills and infrastructure—that is what these innovative companies are looking for. We can make sure the guardrails are right so that it works for everyone.

By ensuring that operators of web crawlers and AI models comply with existing UK copyright law, we are simply upholding established rights in a new technological context. The UK led the world in establishing trustworthy financial and legal services, creating one of the largest economies by taking a long-term view, and we can do the same with technology. By supporting new clause 2, we could establish the UK as a base for trustworthy technology while protecting our creative industries.

[Victoria Collins]

Finally, I will touch on new clause 4, which would address the critical gap in our approach to AI regulation: the lack of transparency regarding training data. Right now, creators have no way of knowing if their work has been used to train AI models. Transparency is the foundation of trust. Without it, we risk not only exploiting creators, but undermining public confidence in these powerful new technologies. The principle is simple: if an AI system is trained using someone's creative work, they deserve to know about it and to have a say in how it is used. That is not just fair to creators, but essential for building an AI ecosystem that the public trust. By supporting new clause 4, we would ensure that the development of AI happens in the open, allowing for proper compensation, attribution and accountability. That is how we will build responsible AI that serves everyone, not just the tech companies.

On the point of transparency, I will touch briefly on a couple of other amendments. We must go further in algorithmic decision making. That is why I have tabled amendment 46, which would ensure that individuals receive personalised explanations in plain language when an automated decision system affects them. We cannot allow generic justifications to stand in for accountability.

**Pete Wishart:** I will support the hon. Lady's new clause 2 tonight, if she pushes it to a vote, and I encourage her also to push new clause 4 to a vote. This is a most important issue. We must ensure that transparency is available to all artists and creators. Does she agree that there is no good technological barrier to having transparency in place right now?

3.30 pm

**Victoria Collins:** That has been my challenge to the tech companies, which I absolutely support in innovating and driving this—but if they are saying that it would be easy for creatives to do this, why is it not easy for big tech companies with power and resources to lead the way?

Amendments 41 to 44 would ensure that the decisions made about people, whether through data profiling, automated systems or algorithms, are fair. They would clarify that meaningful human involvement in automated decision making must be real, competent and capable of changing the outcome, not just a box-ticking exercise.

The amendments before us offer a clear choice to protect our children and creators or to continue to delay while harm grows—the choice to build a future in which technology either builds trust or destroys it. We have the evidence and the solutions, and the time for action is now. Let us choose a future in which technology empowers, rather than exploits—one that is good for society and for business. I urge all Members to support our amendments, which would put people and the wellbeing of future generations first.

**Samantha Niblett:** I am pleased to speak in this debate in support of new clause 14, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), to which I have added my name. The clause would give our media and creative sectors urgently

needed transparency over the use of copyright works by AI models. I am sure that my speech will come as no surprise to the Minister.

I care about this issue because of, not in spite of, my belief in the power of AI and its potential to transform our society and our economy for the better. I care because the adoption of novel technologies by businesses and consumers requires trust in the practices of firms producing the tech. I care about this issue because, as the Creative Rights in AI Coalition has said:

“The UK has the potential to be the global destination for generative firms seeking to license the highest-quality creative content. But to unlock that immense value, we must act now to stimulate a dynamic licensing market: the government must use this legislation to introduce meaningful transparency provisions.”

Although I am sure that the Government's amendments are well meant, they set us on a timeline for change to the copyright framework that would take us right to the tail end of this Parliament. Many in this House, including myself, do not believe that an effective opt-out mechanism will ever develop; I know it is not in the Bill right now, but it was proposed in the AI and copyright consultation. Even if the Government insist on pursuing this route, it would be a dereliction of duty to fail to enforce our existing laws in the intervening period.

Big tech firms claim that transparency is not feasible, but that is a red herring. These companies are absolutely capable of letting rights holders know whether their individual works have been used, as OpenAI has been ordered to do in the Authors Guild v. OpenAI copyright case. Requiring transparency without the need for a court order will avoid wasting court time and swiftly establish a legal precedent, making the legal risk of copyright infringement too great for AI firms to continue with the mass theft that has taken place. That is why big tech objects to transparency, just as it objects to any transparency requirements, whether they are focused on online safety, digital competition or copyright. It would make it accountable to the individuals and businesses that it extracts value from.

The AI companies further argue that providing transparency would compromise their trade secrets, but that is another red herring. Nobody is asking for a specific recipe of how the models are trained: they are asking only to be able to query the ingredients that have gone into it. Generative AI models are made up of billions of data points, and it is the weighting of data that is a model's secret sauce.

The Government can do myriad things around skills, access to finance, procurement practices and energy costs to support AI firms building and deploying models in the UK. They insist that they do not see the AI copyright debate as a zero-sum game, but trading away the property rights of 2.4 million UK creatives—70% of whom live outside London—to secure tech investment would be just that.

There are no insurmountable technical barriers to transparency in the same way that there are no opt-outs. The key barrier to transparency is the desire of tech firms to obscure their illegal behaviour. It has been shown that Meta employees proactively sought, in their own words,

“to remove data that is clearly marked as pirated/stolen”

from the data that they used from the pirate shadow library, LibGen. If they have technical means to identify

copyright content to cover their own backs, surely they have the technical means to be honest with creators about the use of their valuable work.

I say to the Minister, who I know truly cares about the future of creatives and tech businesses in the UK—that is absolutely not in question—that if he cannot accept new clause 14 as tabled, he should take the opportunity as the Bill goes back to the Lords to bring forward clauses that would allow him to implement granular transparency mechanisms in the next six to 12 months. I and many on the Labour Benches—as well as the entire creative industries and others who do not want what is theirs simply to be taken from them—stand ready to support the development of workable solutions at pace. It can never be too soon to protect the livelihoods of UK citizens, nor to build trust between creators and the technology that would not exist without their hard work.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con):** I rise to support new clauses 2 to 5 in the name of the hon. Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins); to pay tribute to Baroness Kidron, who has driven forward these amendments in the other place; and to speak in favour of new clause 20 in the name of the official Opposition.

I am beginning to sound a bit like a broken record on this matter, but our creative industries are such a phenomenal UK success story. They are our economic superpower and are worth more than automotive, aerospace and life sciences added together, comprising almost 10% of UK registered businesses and creating nearly 2.5 million jobs. More than that, our creative industries have so much intrinsic value; they underpin our culture and our sense of community. Intellectual property showcases our nation around the world and supports our tourism sector. As a form of soft power, there is simply nothing like it—yet these social and economic benefits are all being put at risk by the suggested wholesale transfer of copyright to AI companies.

The choice presented to us always seems, wittingly or unwittingly, to pit our innovative AI sector against our world-class creative industries and, indeed, our media sector. It is worth noting that news media is often overlooked in these debates, but newspapers, magazines and news websites license print and content online. In turn, that helps to support high-quality and independent journalism, which is so vital to underpinning our democratic life. That is essential considering recent news that the global average press freedom score has fallen to an all-time low.

I want to push back against the false choice that we always seem to be presented with that, somehow, our creative industries are Luddites and are not in favour of AI. I have seen time and again how our creators have been characterised by big tech and its lobbyists as somehow resistant to technological progress, which is of course nonsensical.

**Chris Bryant:** I want to knock on the head the idea that any Government Minister thinks that the creative industries are Luddites. As I said in the debate in Westminster Hall—I know that the hon. Lady was not able to be there—many creative industries use all sorts

of technical innovations every single day of the week. They are not Luddites at all; they are the greatest innovators in the country.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage:** I thank the Minister for that reassurance. I did take part in a Westminster Hall debate on this matter a couple of weeks ago, but one of his colleagues was responding. I made the same point then. Quite often in the media or more generally, AI seems to be pitted against our creative industries, which should not be the case, because we know that our creative industries embrace technology virtually more than any other sector. They want to use AI responsibly. They do not want to be replaced by it. The question before us is how lawmakers can ensure that AI is used ethically without this large-scale theft of IP. We are today discussing amendments that go somewhere towards providing an answer to that question.

**David Davis:** On this issue of Luddites, surely one of the problems for English language creators is that what they create is of more value because of the reach of the English language over others. Therefore, they are more likely to have their product scraped and have more damage done to them.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage:** My right hon. Friend makes a very good observation, but the fact is that so much content has already been scraped. Crawlers are all over the intellectual property of so many of our creators, writers and publishers—so much so that we are almost in a position where we are shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. Nevertheless, we need to do what we can legislatively to get to a better place on this issue.

New clause 2 would simply require anyone operating web crawlers for training and developing AI models to comply with copyright law. It is self-evident and incontrovertible that AI developers looking to deploy their systems in the UK should comply with UK law, but they often claim that copyright is not very clear. I would argue that it is perfectly clear; it is just that sometimes they do not like it. It is a failure to abide by the law that is creating lawsuits around the world. The new clause would require all those marketing their AI models in the UK to abide by our gold-standard copyright regime, which is the basis that underpins our thriving creative industries.

New clause 3 would require web crawler operations and AI developers to disclose the who, what, why, and when crawlers are being used. It also requires them to use different crawlers for different purposes and to ensure that rights holders are not punished for blocking them. A joint hearing of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee heard how publishers are being targeted by thousands of web crawlers with the intention of scraping content to sell to AI developers. We heard that many, if not most, web crawlers are not abiding by current opt-out protocols—robots.txt, for example. To put it another way, some developers of large language models are buying data scraped by third-party tech companies, in contravention of robots.txt protocols, to evade accusations of foul play. All this does is undermine existing licensing and divert revenues that should be returning to our creative industries and news media sector. New clause 3 would provide transparency over who is scraping copyrighted works and give creators the ability to assert and enforce their rights.



[*Dame Caroline Dinenage*]

New clause 4 would require AI developers to be transparent about what data is going into their AI models. Transparency is fundamental to this debate. It is what we should all be focusing on. We are already behind the drag curve on this. California has introduced transparency requirements, and no one can say that the developers are fleeing silicon valley just yet.

New clause 20, tabled by the official Opposition, also addresses transparency. It would protect the AI sector from legal action by enabling both sides to come to the table and get a fair deal. A core part of this new clause is the requirement on the Secretary of State to commit to a plan to help support creators where their copyright has been used in AI by requiring a degree of transparency.

New clause 5 would provide the means by which we could enforce the rules. It would give the Information Commissioner the power to investigate, assess and sanction bad actors. It would also entitle rights holders to recover damages for any losses suffered, and to injunctive relief. Part of the reason why rights holders are so concerned is that the vast majority of creators do not have deep enough pockets to take on AI developers. How can they take on billion-dollar big tech companies when those companies have the best lawyers that money can buy, who can bog cases down in legislation and red tape? Rights holders need a way of enforcing their rights that is accessible, practical and fair.

The Government's AI and copyright consultation says that it wants to ensure

"a clear legal basis for AI training with copyright material".

That is what the new clauses that I have spoken to would deliver. Together they refute the tech sector's claims of legal uncertainty, while providing transparency and enforcement capabilities for creators.

Ultimately, transparency is the main barrier to greater collaboration between AI developers and creators. Notwithstanding some of the unambitious Government amendments, the Opposition's amendments would provide the long-overdue redress to protect our creative industries by requiring transparency and a widening of the scope of those who are subject to copyright laws.

The amendments would protect our professional creators and journalists, preserve the pipeline of young people looking to make a career in these sectors themselves, and cement the UK as a genuine creative industries superpower, maintaining our advantage in the field of monetising intellectual property. One day we may make a commercial advantage out of the fact that we are the place where companies can set up ethical AI companies—we could be the envy of the world.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to support the Bill and speak to new clauses 22 and 23 tabled in my name. The measures in the Bill will unlock the power of data to grow the economy, to improve public services and make people's lives easier. By modernising the way in which consumers and businesses can safely share data, the Bill will boost the economy by an estimated £10 billion over the next decade. The Bill will also make our public services more efficient and effective, saving our frontline workers from millions of hours of bureaucracy every year, which they can use to focus on keeping us safe and healthy.

3.45 pm

I welcome the Minister's mission to update Government for the modern digital age. Any responsible Government must use data to build an accurate picture of who they are serving. It is because I recognise the incredible power of data that I tabled my probing new clauses on the need to record ethnicity data for Sikhs and Jews. If some communities are invisible to public bodies, how can we expect them to be served equally? I tabled these new clauses to put right a wrong. The ethnicity data that public bodies collect is often patchy and incomplete, and for Sikhs and Jews specifically data is not collected at all.

Jews and Sikhs have been legally recognised as ethnic groups for over 40 years, since the *Mandla v. Dowell Lee* case in 1983. That was reaffirmed in the Equality Act 2010, where they are considered as both religious and ethnic groups. As those are protected characteristics, we would expect public bodies to be instructed to collect information on Jews and Sikhs routinely—especially when public bodies use ethnic categories only to deliver public services—but they are not. That is why this really matters.

Jews and Sikhs therefore face discrimination, which was further evidenced by the 2017 race disparity audit that found no data on Sikhs in the 340 datasets assessed across Government. In recent years, Jews and Sikhs have been recorded only in religion data. However, that data is rarely collected to a good standard—if at all—it excludes secular and non-practising Jews and Sikhs, and is not used by public bodies to monitor and reduce inequalities or provide public services. How are we meant to tackle discrimination and inequality if Jews and Sikhs are invisible to policymakers? New clause 22, in my name, would therefore make it a statutory requirement for public bodies to collect ethnicity data and ensure that, within that, they collect data on Jews and Sikhs who are currently excluded.

New clause 23 is on a more specific but no less important point: the health inequalities that persist as a result of inadequate data. It would specifically target the provisions in the Bill about the register of births and deaths. In order for that data to be meaningful, surely the Minister will agree that Jewish and Sikh deaths matter. If they are not included, what message is that sending to both those groups?

The pandemic revealed the tragic consequences of failing to recognise health inequalities among different ethnic groups. Many experts in public health now accept that we were too slow to recognise that some ethnic groups were dying at a far higher rate than others. The Office for National Statistics belatedly started analysing covid-related deaths data by religious group—a short-term exercise that has since been discontinued—and found that Sikhs died disproportionately from covid, even after adjusting for other factors. Not only that; it showed that Sikhs were affected at a different rate from other predominantly south Asian groups, demonstrating the inadequacy of the existing ethnic categories.

The same goes for Jews, who are often missing from data that the NHS collects, as acknowledged in a report from the NHS Race and Health Observatory published in December. British Jews also died from covid at almost twice the rate of the rest of the population, and certain genetic conditions also have a higher prevalence among Jewish people, such as breast cancer in Ashkenazi

Jewish women. The new clause would take forward one of the Race and Health Observatory's key recommendations, to mandate the inclusion of Jewish as an option for ethnicity, allowing us to collect essential data for tracking health outcomes. It is of course right that we do the same for the Sikh community. Will the Minister commit to accepting these new clauses, given the significance of the arguments in their favour?

England and Wales are behind other countries on this issue. The United States Department of Health and Human Services has recorded ethnicity on death certificate records for decades, and Scotland has recorded ethnicity as part of the deaths registration process since 2012. In October 2020—during the pandemic—the previous Government announced plans to adopt the measure in England, too, but despite warm words from the then Minister for Equalities, the right hon. Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch)—now the Leader of the Opposition—no action was taken.

I am pleased that the Government are taking forward important changes to ethnicity data collection within the deaths registration process, but as it stands, the process would pretty much replicate the in-built bias against Jews and Sikhs who do not have their own specific categories in ONS-designed ethnicity questionnaires. They simply rely on existing recorded information for ethnicity. My new clauses would change that, making it mandatory for public bodies to collect ethnicity data for Jews and Sikhs. After all, it is not religious differences that make Ashkenazi women more susceptible to breast cancer. The distinction between recording ethnicity versus religion is the difference between Jewish and Sikh communities being counted and not. Good quality data saves lives. That is why I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on the issue in the House last year, and my campaign had wide support from both the Jewish and Sikh communities.

I do not intend to press my new clauses to a vote, but I hope the Government will bring forward changes that mandate the inclusion of Jewish and Sikh ethnicity categories for the purposes of public service delivery. I fully support the Bill's mission to unlock the power of data to transform lives. That data must be fair. Sikhs and Jews must no longer be invisible to policymakers.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** I rise to speak in support of amendment 10 tabled by the hon. Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), in my name and that of others. I congratulate him on the amendment, as it is worth talking about.

The amendment is quite simple, in a way, as its key point is that it prevents the transfer of UK user data to jurisdictions where data rights cannot be enforced and there is no credible right of redress. The core principle of data protection law is accountability, yet current UK law allows UK companies to transfer user data to their international partners in jurisdictions where there is no credible appeals process and no predictable rule of law. That basically puts power in the hands of those who have signed contracts containing standard data protection clauses. Those contracts create the illusion of protection, but in reality the data transfer is unsafe, either because the prospect of state interference is real or because the conditions for protection of data transfer simply are not present. We rely too much on the idea that, somehow,

contract law in the UK will protect the data being transferred across to other countries, but this is about countries where such rules do not apply.

Transferring data to regimes such as China, for example, is not just a threat to UK citizens' privacy but a national security risk. British citizens' personal information, health records, financial details, biometrics, genomics or location data could be accessed under China's national intelligence law, which compels organisations to co-operate with state intelligence work in secret. That is not speculation; it is the well-known and established law in China.

This is not only about China, but I use that country as a good example because it is a regular abuser of data. We have been unbelievably stupid across the board, in companies and so on, in assuming straightaway that the rules would apply to Chinese companies and they would enforce them. They cannot, because under the national intelligence law, they are told, "You will provide data as and when we require it from whatever source you have access to."

The situation right now in Ireland is interesting. The Irish Data Protection Commission recently fined TikTok the not inconsiderable sum of €530 million and found that the company had illegally transferred data from users in the European economic area to China. The commission determined that Chinese law offers no essential equivalent to protection on GDPR due to state surveillance laws and the lack of judicial oversight.

That is not a lone example. I have written on a number of occasions about the stupidity of the contract law covering things such as pregnancy tests and covid tests, which were dominated by a Chinese company called BGI. It is the biggest genomics company in the world and it was allowed to hold about 15% of the data gathered for tests for use back in China. We now know that China is using that data, working with AI companies, to develop tests and to reference weaknesses in certain ethnic groups. We see what is already going on in Xinjiang, where a troublesome ethnic group is being deliberately targeted through genocide to get rid of it, but it is also looking at areas and weaknesses in Europe that may well in turn be usable. We have allowed it under this contract to have that data presuming that it would be protected. It is not protected at all; it has simply been transferred and is now being used for military purposes.

Those are just two examples, but it is interesting that Ireland has already taken action. Let us not forget the Shanghai police database leak in 2022 in which the personal data of over 1 billion Chinese citizens, including criminal records and biometric details, was left openly accessible online for over a year without any enforcement action or Government accountability.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on tabling the amendment, because it goes to the heart of what it means to be a democracy that values the rule of law, privacy and the dignity of the individual. It rightly states that no third country can be considered adequate if it lacks credible means for judicial protection, administrative redress or statutory legal remedy. It aligns closely with the high threshold set by the Schrems II judgment, and it ensures that the standards do not fall below those we uphold, and are upheld among our friends in the European Union.

**David Davis:** My right hon. Friend makes a formidably important point. The amendment highlights one of the extraordinary weaknesses of the Bill, which is that it in effect reverses GDPR on a large number of citizen protections. To reiterate the point he gently made, that enormous fine will not stop TikTok, because it operates under legal compulsion. Even though it paid £450 million, it will continue to commit the criminal offence for which it has just been convicted.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** I agree with my right hon. Friend: that is the peculiarity. The Minister knows only too well about the nature of what goes on in countries such as China. Chinese companies are frankly scared stiff of cutting across what their Government tell them they have to do, because what happens is quite brutal.

We have to figure out how we protect data from ill use by bad regimes. I use China as an example because it is simply the most powerful of those bad regimes, but many others do not observe data protection in the way that we would assume under contract law. For example, BGI's harnessing of the data it has gleaned from covid tests, and its dominance in the pregnancy test market, is staggering. It has been officially allowed to take 15% of the data, but it has taken considerably more, and that is just one area.

Genomics is a huge and vital area right now, because it will dominate everything in our lives, and it populates AI with an ability to describe and recreate the whole essence of individuals, so this is not a casual or small matter. We talk about AI being used in the creative industries—I have a vested interest, because my son is in the creative industries and would support what has been said by many others about protecting them—but this area goes a whole quantum leap in advance of that. We may not even know in the future, from the nature of who they are, who we are talking to and what their vital statistics are.

This amendment is not about one country; it is about providing a yardstick against which all third countries should be measured. If we are to maintain the UK's standing as a nation that upholds privacy, the rule of law, democracy and accountability, we must not allow data to be transferred to regimes that fundamentally do not share those values. It is high time that we did this, and I am glad to see the Minister nodding. I hope therefore that he might look again at the amendment. Out of old involvement in an organisation that he knows I am still part of, he might think to himself that maybe this is worth doing or finding some way through.

**Chris Bryant:** I do not resile from my views just because I have become a Minister, just as the right hon. Member did not when he became a Minister. He makes an important set of points. I do think, however, that they are already met by the changes in the schedule to article 45B, which is not an exhaustive list of things that the Secretary of State may consider. The points he refers to are certainly things that the Secretary of State could—and should, I would argue—consider.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** I am grateful to the Minister, and I hope that that might find its way on to the face of the Bill with a little more description, but I understand that and I acknowledge that he does as well.

4 pm

Although we will not press this to a vote, I hope that the Government realise that we sometimes have no comprehension of how big and important the powers we are up against are, or of how they dominate their own producing companies in every international market. We must wake up to that and understand the real threat, not just to the ability to create but to the ability to exist as who we are. At that point we may come to terms with this. Having listened to the Minister—we have worked together on many issues to do with both Russia and China—I hope the Government will think again and come up with a slightly tighter version in line with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel).

**Jon Trickett** (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): I have tabled new clause 18, which is about health and instituting a new public interest test. There is an existing test, but it is not very accessible or useful nowadays. I will explain why. Probably the largest—or the most sensitive—database in the United Kingdom is the one held by the NHS. Almost every human being in our country is on a file somewhere, hopefully for beneficial and clinical reasons, in the NHS. I have had a series of medical issues in the last few months, and I am astonished by how much data is held about me. That will be the same for all of us, I guess.

That database is filled with the most vital, private and intimate details about all our lives, and if it is going to be sustained, it is important that it retains the confidence of patients and of citizens as a whole. The truth is that the Information Commissioner is not convinced that the Bill goes far enough in protecting us and the NHS data, and if the Minister has time at the end, I hope he will be able to comment on whether he is persuaded by the Information Commissioner that we should move further.

This data, which is intimate and private, as I have just said, can also be the basis of major advances in human welfare. We can imagine all sorts of ways that our interests as human beings are being advanced by the use of that data every day. I am thinking, for example, of the search for a covid vaccine, which was led by a British scientist and partly based on the data that was available from the NHS. We should be celebrating that—that scientific research is essential—but there is a threat to this database as well, and in my view it comes from two separate sources. First, there are hostile—or even friendly—state actors. Secondly, there are private interests who want to use the data not for human welfare, though that might be a fig leaf that they use, but for private profit. That cannot be right, given what that data has been created for.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Data can be susceptible and its breach is a breach of privacy. Does he agree that one danger in new clause 21, about the data on individuals' sex at birth, is that it risks breaching someone's privacy if they have kept that fact private and that data becomes public knowledge through the means being discussed?

**Jon Trickett:** I thank the hon. Member for making that important point, and of course she is right.



I go back to this question of the threats to the database, which are not simply the product of my imagination; they are real. First, all data can be monetised, but this database is so large that huge commercial interests are now trying to get access to that health data. I do not want to cause offence to any hon. Members, all of whom I know follow the rules, but it is interesting that nearly £3 million from the private health sector was made available to over 150 different Members of Parliament. I do not suggest that any Member has done anything inappropriate—that would be wrong of me—but one wonders how almost £3 million was found by a private sector that has no commercial interest in pursuing those investments.

Secondly, on commercial interests, will the Minister confirm that at no stage will any data or any other aspect of the NHS be up for sale as part of negotiations with the United States on a trade deal? Will the Government provide some guidance on that? If the House reflects on private sector interests—which are not necessarily in the best interests of humanity—and how they make money, there is an interesting thought about health insurance. A party represented in the House is led by an individual who has suggested that we should end the way that we fund the NHS and replace it with an insurance system. If the insurance industry got access to the data held on all of us by the NHS, they would be able to see the genome of each person or of groups of people, and provide differential rates of insurance according to people's genetic make-up. That is a serious threat. I do not think the party that has recently entered the House has thought that through, but companies providing insurance could commercialise that data. That is one reason we must never follow the track towards a national insurance system to replace the NHS.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care told the House that we will not be privatising the NHS, and I welcome that statement. Reference has already been made to Palantir—the right hon. Member for Goole and Pocklington (David Davis) mentioned it earlier—and the contract that we inherited from the previous Government. It is extraordinary that Palantir, a company that has deep roots in the United States defence establishment, should be handling the data of millions of people, when its chair has said that he is completely opposed to the central principle of the NHS and that he effectively wants a private health system in the UK. How could a £500 million contract to handle our personal data have been handed over to such a company, led by a person whose purpose seems to be to destroy the principles of our NHS? How our data is handled should be our decision, in the United Kingdom.

The Information Commissioner says that it is important that this precious and vital data, which is personal to each of us, should be protected against any possibility of cyber-attacks. However, there has already been a cyber-attack. Qilin—the way I am pronouncing it makes it sound as if someone is trying to commit murder, but there may be another way of saying it—is a Russian cyber-criminal group that obtained access to 400 GB of private information held by a company dealing with pathology testing. That is an enormous amount of data. Qilin attempted to extort from the company that held the data a financial interest. I do not know whether enough provision is made in the Bill for the protection of our data, so I suggest that there should be a new

public interest test, with a report to Parliament within six months, which we can all debate and then examine whether the legislation has gone far enough.

Finally, the Information Commissioner says three things. First, the database must retain public confidence. Media discussions and opinion polling show that people are losing confidence that their personal data is secure, and I understand why that should be the case. Secondly, data should be properly protected and built from the beginning with proper safeguards against cyber-attacks. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the Bill refers to an effective exemption for scientific research. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West (Chi Onwurah) said, private companies, and perhaps US companies, might use the idea of promoting scientific research as a fig leaf to hide their search for profit from the precious commodity—data—that we have because we created our NHS. That is a very dangerous thought, and the Information Commissioner says he is not convinced that the definition of scientific research in the Bill is sufficiently strong to protect us from predatory activity by other state actors or private companies.

**David Davis:** The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech and some very perceptive points. I remind him that previous attempts by the NHS to create a single data standard have all failed, because the GPs did not believe that the security levels were sufficient. It is not just the Information Commissioner; the GPs refused to co-operate, which highlights the powerful point that the hon. Gentleman is making.

**Jon Trickett:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that very serious point. When the clinicians—whose duty is to protect their patients—say they are not convinced about the safety of data being handed over to a central database, we have to listen to their reactions.

I do not intend to press my new clause to the vote, but it is important that we continue to debate this matter, because this enormous database—which can contribute to the general welfare of all humanity—must be protected in such a way that it retains confidence and ensures the security of the whole system. With that, I leave the discussion to continue on other matters.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call Pete Wishart.

**Pete Wishart:** Thank you ever so much, Madam Deputy Speaker—other matters we shall attend to.

I speak in support of new clauses 2 to 6 and new clause 14, which I enthusiastically support. I believe that those new clauses represent our very last chance to guarantee at least a bit of security for our creative industries in the face of what can only be described as the almost existential threat posed by generative AI. This is critical. I listened to the Minister very carefully, but this lackadaisical approach and the progress he is intending do not properly reflect the scale of the threat and challenge that our creative industries are currently confronted with. I accept that we have come a long way in this debate, and I accept the positive tone the Minister tries to take when dealing with these issues. I believe that he is sincere about trying to find a solution—he wants to get to a place where both the AI companies

[Pete Wishart]

and the creative industries are satisfied. I am not entirely sure that we will get to that place, but I wish him all the best in those efforts.

We have certainly come a long way since the first statement we had in this House. I am sure that hon. Members will remember the belligerent way in which the Secretary of State presented that first statement—I am surprised that he is not here today. He was almost saying to the creative industries that they had to take it on the chin in order to satisfy this Government's attempts to find some economic growth—which they have so far found elusive—in the shape of unfettered artificial intelligence, and that we should just get on with that agenda.

**Alison Bennett** (Mid Sussex) (LD): Yesterday, I spoke to a local author in Mid Sussex, Chris Bradford. He has written a number of brilliant children's books, including the "Young Samurai" series, which my own children enjoyed a few years ago. Going back to the point made by the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), Chris told me that he is not against AI—he can see that it has uses—but that what we are seeing is blatant theft. Does the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) agree that the creative industries are part of the answer to growing our economy?

**Pete Wishart:** I agree with the hon. Lady, and I will give her a personal example—I should have declared my interests, as set out in the register. Throughout at least the past five decades, artists have worked with the technology that is available. It is the first thing they turn to when going to the studio to make a new recording. The first thing they do in the film industry is to look for all sorts of innovation. It is absurd to suggest that somehow people who work in the creative sector will not embrace this new technology and use it for all its worth, so I fully accept what she said.

4.15 pm

I want to refer to the public campaign, because I am sure I am not alone in having an inbox full of correspondence from concerned constituents. Our constituents are right with our artists in the creative sector when it comes to this issue. Members will know that I have been evangelising on the value of copyright and intellectual property rights for at least two decades, and I always felt I was having quite a job in getting through and reaching our constituents, but by God have they got it now. They understand and appreciate that our gold-standard copyright regime underpins our success in the creative sectors right around the world. It is our IP rights and copyright that ensure that the artists our constituents love, and on whose behalf they write, are properly rewarded for the works they produce and recognised for the wonderful things they bring forward.

Is it not ironic that just at the point when our constituents are starting to get it and see the value of copyright, we have a Government who are moving away from the central principles of that copyright regime and are maybe at the point of watering it down, when it has given us sustained success over all these years? I want to thank the campaign and the artists for doing this, because it has moved the Government on significantly.

We have now seen them abandon their preferred opt-out mechanism when it comes to their consultation, and we welcome that. Instead of resolving the debate, it seems that the Government are kicking it into the long grass, to this no man's land of economic assessments, reports and consulting with the sector. That might take years, and we have not got years. We have artificial intelligence, in the form of the bots and training machines, hoovering up all our cultural heritage at this very moment. The matter is pressing, and we need solutions now.

The Government have introduced new clauses 16 and 17, and I do not think anybody has any problem with them—it is good to see that they have finally put a brake on some of their ambitions with the opt-out. What we need is real action. Let us hear more about the dynamic licensing and rights enforcement system that the Minister continually goes on about. If we have to have legislation, it has to be done quickly. We have not got years left to do all this. It could take up to 12 months just to get the reports that the Government mention in their amendments. Beyond that, legislation has to be designed, presented to Parliament and debated here, and then it has to be implemented. We have not got the years to do that. Every day that we delay, more of our cultural heritage is scraped, reused and monetised by tech giants. We cannot afford to sit back and wait for years. Our creators deserve protection now, not after irreversible harm has been done.

The amendments that we have before us today offer that protection. That is what the creative sector wants, and I hope that the Government will take the amendments seriously. Our creators simply ask to be treated fairly and compensated for all the work that they do, and they want to have the right to control how their work is used.

Transparency is where we now hoist our flag, and it is the hill we fight on. It is the most practical solution, and there is no technical reason why we cannot have full transparency. There is no reason why artists, creators and inventors should not know that their work is being scraped by generative AI bots. There is no reason why we cannot make sure that we deal with this and make sure that all our musicians have the right to assert their rights. The only thing stopping that is a fear of angering the tech lobbyists, but we must take seriously the property rights of 2.4 million creatives who contribute £126 billion to the UK economy every year.

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): The right hon. Gentleman has rightly referred to creatives throughout the debate. As I have said in earlier debates, I am the secretary of the parliamentary group of the National Union of Journalists, and we have expressed our concern about journalists and photographers, whom we also represent. The union position is very straightforward, espousing adherence to copyright but also to openness and transparency, and regulation of the mechanisms that will be used in future for scraping in particular. This is now having an impact on the quality of journalism, on which our democracy rests.

**Pete Wishart:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to remind us about journalism. What has been notable, along with the clumsy way in which the Government have approached these issues, is the unity that exists throughout the creative sector, taking on board what is happening in journalism. We have seen some fantastic

coalitions of interests emerging from all this. That is another positive development, and I just hope that the Government are satisfied when they see the outcomes.

AI and creativity can work together. I gave an example of that to the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Alison Bennett). We have all been encouraged to think that there is a divergence between the position of those in the creative sector, such as artists, and the position of those who are involved in the tech sector and, in particular, AI. There should be an approach that works for everyone involved. The AI companies know that our content is immensely valuable. They refuse to pay for anything at present, not because they do not understand the value but because they have spotted an opportunity to hoodwink Governments around the world into believing that they should not have to pay for an essential resource.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): One of my colleagues had a conversation with representatives of the AI sector. She was very enthusiastic about the idea that there would be an enormous amount of growth in this country if they were able to adopt what they wanted, so she asked, “What would you like?” They replied, “We want the BBC archive, for free.” In circumstances of this kind, we need to think not only about transparency but about the second stage, which is licensing. Without the opportunity for small creators to have the power to permit and therefore to be paid, all this will be for nothing.

**Pete Wishart:** The hon. Lady is spot on. The Minister continues to go on about licensing arrangements, and I think that is the territory we want to move this on to. We need to hear more about the Government’s ambitions right now, and about what they are planning to do. The hon. Lady should have a look at the submissions to the consultation from the big tech companies such as OpenAI—it is a horror show. An opt-out is even too far for them.

I have enjoyed working with Labour colleagues during these debates. They have said all the right things, and I think that, as usual, they recognise some of the difficulties in the sector, but I appeal to them now to support, in particular, new clause 2, if it goes to a vote. It is no good just saying all the right things; this is about voting in the right direction. There is no other chance, because this is the only opportunity. We must offer some protection to our creative sector over the next few years, because nothing else will appear during that time. We will all become involved in the consultation and we will all be taking part in the legislation when it comes here, but that is years away. This is the only thing that we can do to offer some support to the creative sector, and I urge everyone to support the new clauses.

**Dr Allison Gardner** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Bill and to address some of the amendment proposed, particularly Government new clauses 16 and 17.

New clause 17 is entitled “Report on the use of copyright works in the development of AI systems”. I am pleased to note, in subsection (3)(b), that the report will

“the effect of copyright on access to, and use of, data by developers of AI systems (for example, on text and data mining)”.

I also note that “developers” are specifically broken down into

“individuals, micro businesses, small businesses or medium-sized businesses”.

It is right to provide for that level of granularity. Similarly, I note that the report will

“consider, and make proposals in relation to... the disclosure of information by developers of AI systems about”

their use of copyright data to develop AI systems and “how they access” that copyrighted data,

“for example, by means of web crawlers”.

I am pleased to see discussions of licensing included in the report, and an exploration, again in granular detail, of the impact of a licensing system on all levels of developers. However, I would have liked to see an equal level of granularity for copyright owners to understand the effects of proposals outlined in subsection (3). Subsection (4) states that

“In preparing the report, the Secretary of State must consider the likely effect of proposals, in the United Kingdom, on... copyright owners”

as well as developers and users of AI systems. Although I note that new subsection (4) refers to individuals, microbusinesses and so on, I feel that there is a little vagueness as to whether this level of granularity is afforded to copyright owners as well.

**Chris Bryant:** That is not intentional. It is exactly the same level of granularity that we will go into in our reporting.

**Dr Gardner:** Well, I will just throw the rest of my speech away, then. I shall persevere. Will the report explore the effects of the proposed solutions and the resulting protections on individual creators?

**Chris Bryant:** Yes.

**Dr Gardner:** Micro creative businesses?

**Chris Bryant:** Yes.

**Dr Gardner:** And small publishers?

**Chris Bryant:** Yes.

**Dr Gardner:** Right, so can I push it further?

**Chris Bryant:** No.

**Dr Gardner:** There seem to be an awful lot of David Attenborough TikTok videos, but it is not him. I wonder whether this measure will apply to personality rights, and about the definition of a “small rights owner”. I will just squeeze that in.

**Chris Bryant:** Personally, I am in favour of doing something about personality rights, but it is one of the things that is in the consultation, to which will we respond. It is one of the things for which we will need to legislate in the round.

**Dr Gardner:** Perfect.

I asked the Secretary of State what reassurances can be given that smaller creatives, including microbusinesses and small creative businesses, will be considered in the report so that they can have confidence that the systems finally applied will work for them, particularly when we



[Dr Gardner]

consider an individual's early career—think of Ed Sheeran strumming away in his bedroom in his pre-fame days—and how they can protect their copyrighted works against the global tech giants.

New clause 16 addresses the economic impact on both copyright owners and AI developers, and I want to switch from talking about copyright owners to trying to defend the AI industry. If we do not get the controls right, we risk the mid and long-term success of the AI industry. If we do not get a fair solution for the creative and AI industries, we risk a reduction in the quantity, and potentially in the quality, of human-created data and an increase in AI-generated creative data.

I will briefly segue, because we are developing a lot of AI-created content that might be subject to copyright. A report recently pointed out that 18% of Spotify content is now AI-generated. People might remember the big hoo-ha when an AI-generated image won a photographic competition, which caused a lot of disturbance, but a lot of creative skill was involved in how the photographer developed and produced that image. No, it was not a photograph, but it is in a category of its own. I feel that is also creative content and copyrighted data, so there is a grey area.

If we start to generate more and more AI-created data and less and less high-quality human-generated data, because of the challenges to the creative industry, there is a danger that AI models will start scraping and training on AI-generated data, potentially leading to a reductive spiral into mediocrity, with some even suggesting that this could result in model collapse. On new clauses 16 and 17, I encourage the House to consider the impact of not employing proposals such as licensing and protecting the generation of new human-created content, given the risks posed to AI models and developers in the long term.

I will briefly comment on amendments 37 and 38, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West (Chi Onwurah). She ably outlined the reasons for the amendments, so I will not go into a lot of detail, but I want to point out that getting the definitions correct will prevent a loophole whereby AI companies can misuse personal data by claiming that their commercial development is scientific research. The amendments would provide transparency on the use of data by researchers in order to maintain confidence in this country's ethical, legal and professional high standards in academic research. I hope the Minister will give careful consideration to the points I have raised.

I am now going to give my Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), a heart attack because I am going to refer to amendments 41 to 46 to clause 80 on article 22 of the UK GDPR, which is close to my heart. She is not to worry, though; I read those amendments with great interest and I understand the back-up they would provide, but although I am a newbie MP, as I read them—in my understanding, given the little work I did in my previous job with a regulator—I felt that they were more like secondary legislation. They could be considered for the future, particularly amendment 46, which includes some very welcome additions. However, when it comes to primary legislation, I feel that the Bill works better as it stands.

4.30 pm

I want to go off-piste a little bit more to support my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) in trying to make sure that we have accurate data and fill in the gaps that exist in databases. It is important that we address that issue, and her new clauses 22 and 23 are worthy of consideration.

Equally, I approached new clause 21 with an open mind, because it is vital that we collect biological sex data to protect women and trans people, but as I read it I had a developing sense of unease—because how does the determination of accuracy of data impact on the individual, and if we start looking at those two protected characteristics, what about the others? I feel it is a little bit of a slippery slope; I wonder if I would have to go around with my baptism certificate to prove my religion, and how would I prove my sexuality? I am afraid I developed a growing unease about that new clause, but I support the idea of accurate data collection for both gender identity and biological sex, which is very important.

I will not bore the House with information about where the alcohol dehydrogenase enzyme sits in male and female bodies, but there is a reason why men do not get drunk, or rather why women get drunk more easily. Oh, I am going to tell everyone, because I have started to do so—I will make it relevant. ADH in men is located and primarily active in the stomach, while in women it tends to be in the liver, so in men, alcohol gets broken down before it even gets into the bloodstream; it has nothing to do with body mass ratio. Understanding biology in that way highlights the importance of getting accurate data for health and scientific research, and with that extra knowledge about alcohol dehydrogenase enzymes, I will leave it there.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** Order. From the next speaker, there will be a five-minute time limit.

**Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD):** As many Members will be aware, my constituent Ellen Roome knows only too well the tragedies that can take place as a result of social media. I am pleased that Ellen joins us in the Gallery to hear this debate in her pursuit of Jools' law.

In 2022, Ellen came home to find her son Jools not breathing. He had tragically lost his life, aged just 14. In the following months, Ellen battled the social media giants—and she is still battling them—to try to access his social media data, as she sought answers about what had happened leading up to his death. I am grateful to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), for raising this in his speech. In her search for answers, Ellen found herself blocked by social media giants that placed process ahead of compassion. The police had no reason to suspect a crime, so they did not see any reason to undertake a full investigation into Jools' social media. The inquest did not require a thorough analysis of Jools' online accounts. None of the social media companies would grant Ellen access to Jools' browsing data, and a court order was needed to access the digital data, which required eye-watering legal fees.

The legal system is unequipped to tackle the complexities of social media. In the past, when a loved one died, their family would be able to find such things in their possession—perhaps in children's diaries, in school books

or in cupboards. However, now that so much of our lives are spent online, personal data is kept by the social media giants. New clause 11 in my name would change that, although I understand that there are technical and legal difficulties.

The Minister and the Secretary of State met Ellen and me this morning, along with the hon. Member for Darlington (Lola McEvoy), and we are grateful for the time they gave us. My new clause will not go to a vote today, but we will keep pushing because Ellen and other parents like her should not have to go through this to search for answers when a child has died. I understand that there are provisions in the Bill that will be steps forward, but we will keep pushing and we will hold the Government's and all future Governments' feet to the fire until we get a result.

**Chris Bryant:** It was great to meet this morning, although I am sorry it was so late and so close to Report stage; I wish it had been earlier. We were serious in the meeting this morning: we will do everything we possibly can to make sure that coroners understand both their powers and their duties in this regard, and how they should be operating with families and the prosecuting authorities as well if necessary. We will also do everything we can to ensure that the technical companies embrace the point that they need to look after the families of those who have lost loved ones when they are young.

**Max Wilkinson:** I thank the Minister for his intervention. He is absolutely right. There are clear issues of process here. There are differential approaches across the country—different coroners taking different approaches and different police forces taking different approaches. The words of Ministers have weight and I hope that coroners and police forces are taking note of what needs to happen in the future so that there are proper investigations into the deaths of children who may have suffered misadventure as a result of social media.

On related matters, new clause 1 would gain the support of parents like Ellen up and down this country. We need to move further and faster on this issue of social media and online safety—as this Government promised on various other things—and I am pleased that my party has a very clear position on it.

I will now turn to the issue of copyright protections. I held a roundtable with creatives in Cheltenham, which is home to many tech businesses and AI companies. The creative industries in my town are also extremely strong, and I hear a lot of concern about the need to protect copyright for our creators. The industry, is worth £124 billion or more every year, remains concerned about the Government's approach. The effects of these issues on our culture should not be understated.

We would be far poorer both culturally and financially if our creatives were unable to make a living from their artistic talents. I believe there is still a risk of the creative industry being undermined if the Government remove protections to the benefit of AI developers. I trust that Ministers are listening, and I know that they have been listening over the many debates we have had on this issue. If they were to remove those protections, they would tip the scales in favour of AI companies at the cost of the creative industry. When we ask AI companies and people in tech where the jobs are going to come from, the answers are just not there.

The amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins) would reinstate copyright protections at all levels of AI development and reinforce the law as it currently stands. It is only fair that when creative work is used for AI development, the creator is properly compensated. The Government have made positive noises on this issue in multiple debates over the last few months. That is a positive sign, and I think that in all parts of this House we have developed a consensus on where things need to move—but creatives remain uneasy about the implications for their work and are awaiting firm action.

Ministers may wish to tackle this issue with future action, and I understand that it might not be dealt with today, but our amendments would enable that to happen. They also have an opportunity today: nothing would send a stronger signal than Government support and support from Members from across the House for my hon. Friend's amendments, and I implore all Members to back them.

**Jonathan Davies** (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): I rise to speak to new clauses 4, 16 and 17, but first let me say that this is a very ambitious and weighty piece of legislation. Most of us can agree on sections or huge chunks of it, but there is anxiety in the creative industries and in the media—particularly the local media, which have had a very torrid time over the last few years through Brexit and the pandemic. I thank UK Music, the News Media Association and Directors UK for engaging with me on this issue and the Minister for his generosity in affording time to Back Benchers to discuss it.

AI offers massive opportunities to make public services and businesses more effective and efficient, and this will improve people's lives. However, there is a fundamental difference between using AI to manage stock in retail or distribution, or for making scientific breakthroughs that will improve people's health, and the generative AI that is used to produce literature, images or music. The latter affects the creative industries, which have consistently seen faster and more substantial growth than the overall economy. The creative industries' gross value added grew by over 50% in real terms compared with the overall UK economy, which grew by around a fifth between 2010 and 2022. That is why the Government are right to have identified the creative industries as a central plank of their industrial strategy, and it is right to deliver an economic assessment within 12 months, as outlined in Government new clauses 16 and 17. I welcome all that.

I know it is not the Government's intention to deal with copyright and licensing as part of the Bill, but because of the anxiety in the sector the issues have become conflated. Scraping is already happening, without transparency, permission or remuneration, in the absence of a current adequate framework. The pace of change in the sector, and the risk of tariffs from across the pond, mean it is imperative that we deal with the threat posed to the creative industries as soon as possible. We are now facing 100% tariffs on UK films going to the USA, which increases that imperative.

I welcome the Government's commitment to engage with the creative industries and to implement a programme to protect them, following consultation. I would welcome an overview from the Minister in his summing up about

[Jonathan Davies]

progress in that regard. The more we delay, the worse the impact could be on our creative sector. I am also concerned that in the Government's correct mission to deliver economic growth, they may inadvertently compromise the UK's robust copyright laws. Instead, we should seek to introduce changes, so that creatives' work cannot be scraped by big AI firms without providing transparency or remunerating the creatives behind it. Failure to protect copyright is not just bad for the sector as a whole, or the livelihoods of authors, photographers, musicians and others; it is bad for our self-expression, for how robust the sector can be, and for how it can bring communities together and invite us to ask the big questions about the human condition. Allowing creators to be uncredited and undercut, with their work stripped of attribution and their livelihoods diluted in a wave of synthetic imitation, will disrupt the creative market enormously. We are not talking about that enough.

It is tempting to lure the big US AI firms into the UK, giving the economy a sugar rush and attracting billions of pounds-worth of data centres, yet in the same breath we risk significantly draining economic value from our creative industries, which are one of the UK's most storied pillars of our soft power. None of this is easy. The EU has grappled with creating a framework to deal with this issue for years without finding an equitable solution. I do not envy what the Government must navigate. However, I ask the Minister about the reports that emerged over the weekend, and whether the Government are moving away from an opt-out system for licensing, which creatives say will not work. Will that now be the Government's position?

Harnessing the benefits of AI—economic, social and innovative—is not diametrically opposed to ensuring that the rights of creatives are protected. We must ensure transparency in AI, as covered in new clause 4, so that tech companies, some of which are in cahoots with some of the more troubling aspects of the US Administration, do not end up with the power to curate an understanding of the world that reflects their own peculiar priorities. Big AI says transparency will effectively reveal its trade secrets, but that need not necessarily be the case, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Samantha Niblett) said. A simple mechanism to alert creators when their content is used is well within the abilities of these sophisticated companies. They just need the Government to prod them to do it.

The Government are working hard. I know that they care passionately about the sector, and the economic and social value it brings. I look forward to hearing how they will now move at pace to address the concerns I have outlined, even if they cannot do so through the Bill.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** The Minister referred, in his opening remarks, to the fact that the Bill has been a long time in its gestation. It is very nearly two years since the first meeting of the Bill Committee, which I attended, to take through what was pretty much an identical Bill. At that time, it was uncontroversial and the Opposition supported it—indeed, I support it today. There are a lot of measures we have not discussed because they are universally accepted, such as the national underground asset register, smart data provisions and the relief on some of the burden of GDPR.

I congratulate Baroness Kidron, who very successfully attached to the Bill amendments to address a different, but vital issue: protection of the creative industries with respect to copyright. Therefore, I support new clauses 2 to 6, which are essentially Baroness Kidron's amendments that were passed in the House of Lords. The Minister said that it was not the intention to legislate at this time, that the Government want to wait and are consulting, and that they have tabled two amendments. However, one of the measures is to conduct an economic impact assessment, which the Government would always have had to do anyway, and the other is to commission a report into such things as technical standards and transparency. As the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) has pointed out, that will simply delay things even longer, and this is an issue that must be addressed now, because generative AI models are currently scraping and using material.

In our view, the law is clear. The Minister asks why we need new clause 2 if all it says is that people should obey the law, and if we also believe the law is clear. One of the reasons it is so important is that we can enforce the law only if we know that it is being broken. That is why transparency is absolutely vital; it is only with transparency that rights owners can discover the extent to which their content is being used by generative AI, and then know how to take action against it.

I absolutely agree that it is not that the creative industries are against artificial intelligence. Indeed, a lot of creatives are using it; a lot of them are developing licensing models. However, for some, it is an existential question.

4.45 pm

**Iqbal Mohamed** (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): On the point about transparency, the law is the law—it already exists. However, the law can be enforced, and people can be punished, only if actions that break our current laws come to light. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this is another reason that new clause 2 is essential?

**Sir John Whittingdale:** I completely agree. The hon. Gentleman has stated the case: in order to enforce the law, we have to know who is breaking it.

There are all sorts of legal actions already under way, but this issue is about the extent to which scraping is going on. I agree with the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) on the importance of newspapers and the press. The press face the particular problem of retrieval-augmented generation—a phrase I did not think I would necessarily be introducing—which is the use of live data, rather than historic data; if historic data is used, it often produces the wrong results. The big tech companies therefore rely on retrieval-augmented generation, which means using current live data—that which is the livelihood of the press. It is absolutely essential for publishers that they should know when their material is being used and that they should have the ability to license it or not, as they choose.

**John McDonnell:** The issue the right hon. Gentleman is addressing is the immediacy of the threat within the journalistic sector at the moment. I missed the opening



remarks by both Front Benchers because I was in the debate on the personal independence payment, but I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister was as eloquent as ever in advocating for the Government amendments; he is a very persuasive fellow. However, those amendments are merely about publishing a report in 12 months' time—that is all. There will be parts of the journalistic sector that will no longer exist in 12 months' time as a result of this legislation.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** I completely agree. I do not doubt the Minister's sincerity in wanting proper close examination, but this matter is urgent. New clause 2 and the associated measures simply state the law as it currently stands and give rights owners the essential ability to know when their material is being used, so that they can choose whether they wish to license it, and, if they do not, to take action against its use.

There is only one other point I want to raise today, as a number of speeches have been made in this debate that have very eloquently set out the case for each of the new clauses, including by the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins), and indeed by the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage). For the other concern that I want to raise, the Minister will need to put his other hat back on for a moment. Earlier in the day, he was speaking as the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism about the threat from the possibility of tariffs on the film industry. Obviously, we are concerned about the general question of US tariffs, and there is talk about trying to achieve a trade deal—in the President's words, a “beautiful trade deal”—which would mean that the UK was protected. However, we are told that one of the prices that could be attached to such a deal could be relieving the burden of regulation on tech companies.

I am afraid that we know how the tech companies define burdensome regulation. In their view, copyright is a burdensome regulation, not a legal obligation or moral right of rightsholders. I hope the Minister will make it clear that we will not sacrifice the rights of creative industries and copyright owners in order to obtain a trade agreement and that, at the same time, we will not dilute other, very important digital legislation, such as the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, which I understand is also potentially on the table.

I will not speak any longer, because the case has already been made. I will say only to the Minister that although it is clear that new clauses 2 to 6 command quite a lot of support on both sides of the House, I have no doubt that the Government will defeat them if they choose to do so tonight. However, he will be aware that they were originally made in the House of Lords, and he may find it harder if that House chooses to push the amendments through. I would not like to be back here next year once again trying to put through a data Bill because this one has failed.

**Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab):** I rise to support the Government's amendments and new clauses, particularly new clause 16, which addresses the relationship between artificial intelligence and copyright and which I strongly welcome. By slightly broadening the scope of the Bill,

the amendments demonstrate Ministers' attention to this pressing detail and reflect some of the comments by colleagues and the creative sector.

The existing legal framework with regard to copyright is not fit for purpose in the face of new and developing AI technologies. Colleagues who have much greater expertise and knowledge than me have contributed to this debate, but I want to offer a reflection and draw attention to the experience of an individual—one of my constituents—as I believe it highlights the real human impact that big tech companies can have in running rampant over copyright laws.

My constituent, Susan, is an author. She has had 32 of her books and, she calculates, more than 1 million published words used by Meta without her consent. The pirating of material has serious human impacts on those in the creative industries. Susan's life work and source of income was downgraded and devalued almost instantaneously. Her intellectual property was accessed without her permission and used to inform an AI system designed to mimic her work. Susan described that to me and said that she felt violated, as if someone had come into her house and stolen her things, and she is not alone.

I have been contacted by other professionals in the creative industries in my constituency who have also had published material used without their consent by AI. A local author has had their works harnessed through an online library of pirated books, and a local illustrator said that her work was scraped to train an AI model with images and videos taken from websites and social media without her permission. That practice is widespread and plainly wrong, even to a lay observer who is not versed in technical expertise, yet rightsholders are often impotent against big tech companies and their sizeable financial and legal assets.

**Ms Billington:** I observe that there is an issue of territoriality here. We have actually managed to get carve-outs and protect this country from deepfakes, for example; if something is made abroad, it cannot be used in this country. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be able to have similar carve-outs for creatives, such as her constituent and my constituents, so that if AI-generated material is made elsewhere, it cannot be deployed in this country, in order to preserve a proper legislative framework to protect the rights of our creatives?

**Jen Craft:** My hon. Friend highlights a very strong issue. I agree that our current copyright laws are basically being infringed on and people who are rightsholders are unable to seek the recourse that they fully deserve under the law. There should be a carve-out, so that if there is illegal content in this country, people should have recourse to the law and be able to protect their own copyrighted material. I am pleased to see the Government commit to action on this complex issue. I hope that time will be allowed in the House for us to scrutinise this issue and to investigate properly the impact of policy options, which will be considered as part of the consultation.

I understand the complexities of legislating in this area, but those in the creative industries want to see action now, which is understandable. We must create a system that can feasibly and effectively enforce existing copyright law, bring transparency in the use of materials by AI systems, and remunerate rights holders. I support

[Jen Craft]

the Government's plans to do this through primary legislation with proper scrutiny of the measures, rather than through an addendum to a broader piece of legislation. However, I appreciate that there is a balance to be struck—where growth is supported in both the creative and tech industries—but creatives must never be expected to forfeit their rights to serve that purpose.

As my constituent is at pains to point out, real people and real livelihoods are already being impacted by unregulated AI. It is crucial that we get this right, and provide much needed legal certainty to protect intellectual property in the creative industries. This must happen soon, because, while infringements of copyright law go unaddressed, it is those in our vital creative industries who are losing out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** Order. Many people wish to speak in this debate, so before I call the next speaker I ask Members please to be mindful when taking interventions. I will now impose a four-minute time limit.

**Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): We live in a rapidly changing world. Like everyone else, I am sure that I am guilty of handing my data to organisations every hour of every day, oblivious to the impact on my privacy. I am also guilty of absorbing and using content assuming that it is trustworthy and that it has been obtained fairly.

On the other hand, my generation has been fortunate to have seen the introduction of social media and the online world, and to have experienced the time before it, which perhaps provides us with a level of scepticism about what we see, and an ability to switch it off and distance ourselves from the onslaught to our senses that digital content can provide.

Like other interventions of the past, we are now at a crossroads where we must pause and not simply plough on. The Bill gives us the opportunity to make it clear to the tech giants that we are not giving them everything that we have created, that they cannot own our children, and that we value our data as part of our identity.

Some of the amendments give us a great opportunity to improve the Bill—to make the most of this moment in time and to make sure that we do not leave people behind. We know that children's brains continue to develop until they are in their early 20s. We know that young people's development leads them to be risk takers in their adolescence and teenage years, and, as adults, we sometimes have to take decisions to curtail their fun to protect them. My own children have enjoyed social media from the age of 13, but, as the sector develops, and our understanding of its addictive nature improves, it is critical that we reflect that in law. Lifting the age of consent for social media data collection, as in new clause 1, will help to protect our children at the time they need it.

It is unimaginable to lose a child and to do so in the circumstances where the reasons behind their death are unclear, which is why I signed new clause 11 tabled my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson), which would allow bereaved parents access to their child's

social media content. This should not be necessary given that GDPR and privacy rights do not apply to those who have died. The fact that we even need such legislation calls into question the motivation of tech giants and tells us where their interests lie. I urge the Government to support this and welcome the assurance today that more work will be done.

Trust is at an all-time low not only in the Government but in other authorities such as the NHS. As AI changes how we interact with the state, commerce and each other, the public should have a right to know how and when AI is involved in the decisions made. Transparency matters, which is why I am supporting the new clauses proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins). We know that if we use each other's content we must pay for it, or at least credit it if we are not profiting from it. We know that if we do not, we infringe that copyright, so why should tech giants, probably based in some far-flung place, have a right to scrape that content without knowledge or payment? The idea that they even need to train their systems off the backs of people who have used their talent and time and made their living through creativity is obscene.

I really must speak strongly against new clause 21. I have been overwhelmed by the scale of distress brought about by this awful proposal. It is cruel and it completely undermines the privacy of people who are transgender at a time when they are already feeling victimised.

Those who have transitioned socially, medically or surgically are protected in law, and we were told that the Supreme Court decision last month does not change that. But new clause 21 does. If it were passed, sex at birth would be recorded on a driving licence or passport, outing every trans person whenever they buy an age-restricted product, change their job, travel abroad, or even come to Parliament to visit their MP. Not only is this a fundamental breach of privacy, but it is potentially dangerous. They would be prevented from travelling to countries with poor records on rights, and they would be at higher risk of suicide and self-harm than they already are. A constituent said,

"This is a direct attempt to erase me from the public record."

Please reject this new clause 21.

5 pm

**Ms Creasy:** In the short time available to me, I want to speak to four amendments. On two of them, I would like to urge the Minister to think again. On one, I am in total agreement with the Minister that we should oppose it; the other is one that I want to draw to the House's attention.

First, I join the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), the Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West (Chi Onwurah), my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Samantha Niblett) and the indomitable Baroness Kidron, who joins us today from the Gallery, in encouraging the Minister to look again at amendments on AI and copyright. We know that this problem will come back and that we need to move at pace.

I represent Walthamstow, the home of William Morris, the creators and makers—and creatives abound. At least William Morris could protect his wallpaper patterns.

With the AI technologies we see now moving so quickly, unless we stand up for British copyright technology, we will be in a very different place. The Minister says that if we do not pass new clause 2, we will still have copyright law tomorrow, and he is right, but we will not have the tools to deal with the technology we are dealing with now.

This issue is about not just the Elton Johns, the Ed Sheerans, the Richard Osmans or the Jilly Coopers, but the thousands of creators in our country—it is their bread and butter. Nobody is opposing technology, but they are saying that we need to act more quickly. I hope to hear from the Minister what he will do in this area. New clause 14, which has not been selected, is about the question of transparency and will help creatives exercise their rights.

Briefly, I want to support what the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Vikki Slade) said about new clause 21. I have always supported the appropriate collection of data, but this is not an appropriate collection of data. It is a targeting of the trans community, which is deeply regressive.

I praise the Government for what they are doing with schedule 11—and I wager that nobody else in this Chamber has looked at it. The Victims and Prisoners Act received Royal Assent in May 2024. Section 31 of the Act provides a mechanism to delete data that has been created as part of a malicious campaign of harassment. Schedule 11 is a technical amendment to GDPR laws that will make that Act, which got cross-party support, possible to enact.

For parents and carers, the thought that someone who disagrees with them might use the auspices of social services to try to remove their children because of that disagreement is impossible to comprehend. It is a nightmare that I have lived through myself. Thanks to my local authority, I am still living through it, because the record created by the person who did this to me remains on the statute book, along with the allegation that I am a risk to my children because of the views that I hold.

The primary intent of the man who made this complaint was to trigger an investigation into my private life. The judge who convicted him of harassment said that it was one of the worst examples of malicious abuse in public life that he had seen. The judge demanded that the file be stricken, as did I when it first came to light and when the man was subsequently convicted of harassment. However, Waltham Forest council continue to argue that they have to retain that data to protect my own children from me. This is an example not of how data is used to safeguard but how data can be used to harm by its existence. It is not a benign matter to have such a record associated with one's name. Anyone who has ever been to A&E knows that the question, "Is your child known to social services?" is not a neutral inquiry. Not having a way of removing data designed to harass will perpetuate the harassment.

My local authority has not labelled the fathers who are MPs in my borough in the same way, but it argues that it must retain this data about me under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, regarding children who might reasonably be considered at risk of harm from an individual. To add insult to injury, the council has not offered to delete this data but told me that I can add to it a note to dispute the claims by the person who has

been convicted of harassing me about my fitness to be a parent, and then the council might consider including the note—add more data to a file, therefore, rather than remove it. That will keep the link between me, my family, these allegations and the gentleman who harassed me in the first place. I have never received any form of apology or acknowledgement.

There have always been strong grounds and legal processes to remove malicious records. It is also right that we set a high bar, as the 2024 Act did. This consequential amendment in the Bill should now mean that the Government can use the affirmative resolution to make that law a reality. We cannot delete the misogyny at the heart of Waltham Forest council's response, but we could finally delete the records and those of others like them and move on with our lives—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** Order. I call Steff Aquarone.

**Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD):** My new clause 7 would ensure that, alongside the creation of a digital verification framework, there would be a right to use non-digital ID. Digital exclusion is a major challenge for many communities around the country, including in North Norfolk. Part of the answer is to improve digital education and bring those numbers down, but, as Age UK rightly says,

"it will never be possible to get everyone online."

The progress we make in the digital age must ensure provision for those who will not be supported by it, or that they are not left behind or excluded.

Older people are not the only ones who struggle with digital exclusion—poverty is also a significant driver. A study in 2021 showed that more than half those who are offline earned less than £20,000 a year. The Government told the Lords that if it turned out that people were being excluded, they could consider legislating, but how many people earning less than £20,000 a year will be taking a business through the courts—perhaps as far as the Supreme Court—to secure their rights? Why are we waiting for it to go wrong, placing the onus on vulnerable people to generate test cases and legal precedent when we could put this matter to bed once and for all with this simple addition to the Bill?

I will also speak in support of new clause 1. It has become abundantly clear to us all that we cannot trust the social media giants to keep our children safe. In fact, I would go as far as to say that they have very little interest in keeping children safe. The algorithms that drive these platforms, which are designed to keep users scrolling for as long as possible to maximise ad revenue, can be deeply damaging to children and young people. It is important to emphasise just how pervasive the content stream can be. Not every hon. Member may have experienced it, but pervasive, targeted content is not the same as a child seeing something distressing on the news. Once seen—if only fleetingly—there is the potential for them to be exposed to unsubstantiated, misleading or even traumatic content, or versions of that content, over and over again every few swipes as the algorithm realises it can suck them in, keep them scrolling and make profit for its social media giants. That is not what social networks set out to do, but it is what they have become.



[Steff Aquarone]

Whatever the social media giants told the Government or the Opposition, whether “It is too complex,” “It would cost too much,” or, “The flux capacitor is not big enough,” that is just rubbish. If we simply removed the right to process personal data for under 16s, we would remove the algorithms’ ability to target them with content based on what they say and do. If the social networks cared about children’s wellbeing, they would have done that already. I hope that today we will finally take the action necessary to protect the next generation.

Overall, my views on the Bill remain broadly similar to the frustrations I expressed months ago on Second Reading. There is important, commendable and sensible stuff in the Bill, and I welcome that, but what is not in the Bill is more frustrating, as it could have put it in a much better position to harness the power of data. We could have addressed the litany of failures in public sector data use that the Government’s own review outlined just months ago. We could be equipping our civil service and public sector with the talent, culture and leadership to make us a global trailblazer in data-driven government. It is really frustrating that the Bill does not contain any of the steps necessary to make those improvements.

If we use data better, we do government better. I am sure that the whole House and all our constituents are keen to see that.

**James Naish** (Rushcliffe) (Lab): As all hon. Members in the Chamber know, data is the DNA of our modern life. It drives our economy, our NHS and our public services, often silently but ultimately powerfully. For too long, outdated data infrastructure across the British state has held us back, costing us billions and draining frontline resources. This ambitious Bill sets out to change that, so it should be welcomed.

For our NHS, the Bill will mean faster and safer care. More transferable and accurate patient data could save 140,000 hours of staff time annually, reduce duplicate lab tests, prevent up to 20 deaths each year from medication errors and improve overall patient safety and outcomes—that is real impact. It will also free up 1.5 million hours of police time, letting officers spend more time on our streets, not behind desks. The national underground asset register, as has been mentioned, could bring £4 billion to our economy by preventing costly infrastructure delays and accidents. The Bill will seek not just to cut red tape, but boost research, protect personal data and allow scientists and online safety experts to better access information to keep us all safer. I welcome that.

On Government amendment 16 on artificial intelligence and the creative industries, we have all seen the potential of AI, but that promise must not come at the expense of those who create. In that regard, I thank the dozens of constituents who have contacted me about their concerns. I welcome the Government’s recognition of the complex intersection between AI and copyright, and the need to get this right. It is clear that we must tread carefully and base any changes on robust evidence. I am therefore pleased that the Government are committed to publishing a full economic impact assessment and reporting to Parliament on key concerns, such as how AI developers access copyrighted materials, the transparency of their methods and licensing. I will also continue to support Equity with its work on the principle of personality rights.

New clause 21 proposes mandatory recording of sex at birth across all public authorities. The new clause would require all public authorities, whether the NHS, which I could potentially understand, or the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which I certainly could not, to record and retain people’s sex at birth even when someone has a gender recognition certificate. The new clause would seemingly require that regardless of context, purpose or relevance. That feels neither proportionate nor respectful of existing legal frameworks or the trans community at this difficult time.

It is important that we acknowledge that transgender, non-binary and intersex people already face considerable barriers in public life, and many of my constituents have shared with me in recent weeks just how much fear and uncertainty they are experiencing. Rushed amendments and changes, without dialogue with those impacted, are not in any way welcomed and could have very negative consequences.

Finally, on the theme of privacy, proportionality and protecting vulnerable people, will the Minister say whether any steps will be taken by his Department to end the collection and sharing of sensitive personal data when people use police, public, university or other websites to report crimes or abuses and the subsequent sharing of that data with third parties through tracking pixels? The use of such tools means people inadvertently share information with advertisers. I hope the Government will look into that and take it seriously.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): I was glad to add my name to new clauses 1 to 6, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins).

I speak to new clause 1 on the age of data consent. Currently in the UK, the minimum age of digital consent—the age at which children can consent to having their data processed—is 13. The new clause would raise the minimum age for social media data processing to 16, meaning social media companies would not be able to process the data of children for their algorithms. I hope that that would allow children to enjoy many of the educational benefits and relevant services that social media can offer, as well as continuing to enjoy the freedoms of engaging with friends but without the risks of addictive algorithmic content.

The mental health issues associated with social media use in young people, particularly children, should be treated as a public health crisis. The Government are missing a vital opportunity with this legislation to reform how social media is used by not including provisions around children’s online safety. The Bill offers an important opportunity to start the process of removing harmful social media mechanisms and, as such, I urge the Minister to support the new clause.

New clauses 2 to 6 would ensure transparency in how AI systems are trained and give rights holders more control over the use of their works. Concerns about the impact of AI on the creative industries have been raised hundreds of times by my constituents and I have been raising those concerns in Parliament for years. In my Westminster Hall debate back in February 2023 on artificial intelligence and intellectual property rights, I raised my concerns about the bypassing of copyright laws in relation to AI and intellectual property with the former Conservative Government. However, the former

Minister blamed the lack of the former Government's action to introduce regulation for creatives, associated with the rise of AI, on the political turmoil in the Tory leadership at that time, and their neglectful attitude towards leadership was mirrored in their attitude towards introducing protection for creatives in this space.

Their conclusion from my Westminster Hall debate was “not to legislate in periods of political turmoil”—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2023; Vol. 727, c. 163WH.]

and the need for “more deep consultation”, which did not materialise. I think we can all be glad that the chaos of that Government is in the past. However, we are yet to see the introduction of thorough and robust copyright laws relating to artificial intelligence, which is fundamental to the success of the UK's world-leading creative industries. I hope this Government will act upon that today by accepting the new clauses.

I wish to reiterate the importance of these new clauses in ensuring that AI models are bound by existing copyright law, increasing data and identity transparency for crawlers and models, and empowering creators to take legal action against developers who fail to comply. The creative industry, like all sectors, will have to adapt to accommodate AI, but the industry is capable of and already making progress with that. Creatives have largely accepted that AI-generated content will have its place in the market, and they are already using AI to enhance their work by driving efficiencies and extending their reach to new markets. However, a solid regulatory framework, which could be created with the addition of these amendments, is essential to protect their rights and ensure that they can take part in value creation and retain control over their work. My colleagues and I believe that existing copyright law should be enforced to protect the UK's creative industries, which are a world-leading British export.

5.15 pm

It was recently revealed that nearly 200,000 YouTube videos, including material created by globally recognised British musicians, news channels and artists, had been scraped into a dataset used to train AI models. Content from over 40,000 creatives has been found in that dataset, yet consent was not sought from a single impacted creator to use their copyrighted works. This is not a unique case. I asked 200 creatives about their experiences with AI and copyright. I heard repeatedly of negative experiences, including one individual who had 600 images taken to train AI models without their knowledge. It is clear that AI offers a fantastic opportunity for our economy. However, it must supplement and grow industries, rather than replace them wholesale.

**Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): I am delighted to be called to speak on Report of the Data (Use and Access) Bill. I draw Members' attention to my membership of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. Before I entered this place, I worked as a freelance screenwriter, creating dramas for adults and children. I might add that children are the hardest audience to please—it used to be that we had five minutes to hook them, but now it is more like five seconds. Speed is the subject of my contribution today.

I warmly welcome the Minister's engagement on how best to protect our peerless creative industries. In that spirit, I am pleased to see new clauses 16 and 17 and the

commitment to addressing the fundamental issue of transparency. At the moment, AI companies do not have to tell anyone what they are stealing from the internet, from whom they are stealing and why they are stealing it. Although I appreciate the Government's position that they want more time, I worry that in the gap between this Bill becoming law and a new Bill that addresses transparency and copyright coming forward, everything that can be scraped will be scraped. Twelve months is a long time, and plenty of time for AI companies to continue crawling over original copyrighted material without a care in the world. For some parts of the creative industries, 12 months will be 12 months too long. Necessity is the mother of invention, and without a legal instruction for AI companies to reveal what they are using free of charge, there is surely no incentive for the AI industry to come up with the solutions to make it simple for original creators and collecting societies to assert their rights.

New clauses 2 to 6 include calls for the operators of web crawlers and AI models to legally disclose what they are doing right now. Although I understand why the Government may not support the new clauses, will the Minister at least commit to placing a clear power to regulate in the Bill? The creative industries are nervous, spooked by the previously stated preference for an opt-out model, and such a move would calm nerves and indicate that the Government understand the pace at which the situation is developing and recognise the need for action.

Recently, here in Westminster, Björn from ABBA spoke in favour of clear transparency. Perhaps the saddest ABBA song is “The Winner Takes It All”, inspired by break-ups in the band between the As and the Bs. We must ensure that this is not a divorce of two industries that leads to the creative partner being left with the equivalent of the coffee table and the dog. The tech industry needs us more than we need it, so it should be honest, tell us what it is doing behind our backs and pay up. When all is said and done, this Government need to send a message now that we have the backs of our creative industries and that legal protections are our absolute priority.

**Siân Berry** (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I rise to speak to new clause 15, but I also want to associate myself with the many right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken up for our creative industries. Our most talented and creative minds have not been getting fair representation from the Government up to now, and this has been a very interesting, well informed and, hopefully, influential debate today. New clause 15 is about privacy, safety and providing a dedicated complaints procedure for individuals including victims of modern slavery, domestic abuse, gender-based violence and for others at risk of serious harm if their personal data is mishandled.

This is not a theoretical question. Last November, *The Independent* reported on Lola, a domestic abuse victim whose home address was leaked to her ex-partner by a company that obtains restraining orders. She said that she was left fearing for her life. As the Open Rights Group has laid out in its briefing, the Information Commissioner's Office is not functioning as it should be in cases such as this. I have many examples—including how Charnwood district council sent details of the new

[Siân Berry]

address of an abused woman directly to her abuser at her former address, so that her abuser knew where she lived—yet people placed at risk in this way currently have no means of challenging the Information Commissioner’s Office if it fails to take the right action, which happens too often. New clause 15 simply proposes dedicated procedures to support vulnerable people making complaints and a right to appeal to the Information Tribunal, a route currently available to large tech firms but not to the people harmed by their practices. I hope that Ministers will take these proposals up.

On other amendments, I fully back the Liberal Democrats on new clauses 2 to 6, which I am signed up to. I personally will abstain from voting on the Liberal Democrats’ new clause 1 and on the Conservatives’ new clause 19. This is because, although I am minded to increase the age of digital consent from 13, given the wider implications of harmful content and data that can be collected and used to do harm, my discussions locally with parents and young people in Brighton Pavilion have led me to want to properly include both groups in any decision on what that new age should be, given that it would cut people off from social media. We must have rapid and real processes of deliberation on this issue as soon as possible that are not just consultative but collaborative.

Finally, new clause 21 is of serious concern to my constituents, and I agree with them and TransActual that it would constitute a gross violation of privacy rights by creating a mass outing of trans people. Subsection (1)(d) of this new clause even goes so far as to seek to revert historical changes made to someone’s gender marker. I urge the Government to reject this and to act further to protect trans rights more broadly.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak to my new clause 14 and amendment 10. Furthermore, I would like to make note of my steadfast opposition to new clause 21, which does not simply change data collection. It proposes to mark and track individuals based on “sex at birth”, regardless of their lived reality, legal recognition or consent. No one—not a Government, not a public authority, not a politician—has the right to define who another person is; only the individual can do that. This is a fundamental principle of dignity and respect that transcends political views and legal debates. We must reject new clause 21.

Moving on to my new clause 14, it is widely accepted that AI has already ingested everything on the internet, whether it be music, films or books, yet there is no legal requirement on these companies to disclose what they have used, making it difficult for musicians and authors to enforce their rights and, crucially, to be paid for their work. So I urge the Minister to give a commitment to legislating for transparency to protect the creative industries.

I note the Government’s new clauses 16 and 17 as a starting point, but we both know that we want to see a thriving licensing market between content creators and AI developers. A transparency commitment today would enable that licensing market as creators would be in a position to enforce their rights and demand fair pay. There would be certainty for AI developers, removing the risk of mitigation in the future. Without transparency,

there is no incentive for AI firms to reach agreements with creators, and billionaire-owned tech firms will continue to rip off musicians, filmmakers and authors.

**Chris Hinchliff** (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that new technology should be a tool to improve lives, not just a mechanism for funnelling more wealth and power into the hands of already super-rich corporations? Does he agree that the Bill would benefit from going even further in providing greater transparency?

**Alex Sobel:** My new clause 14 would do that, so I hope the Government are taking note.

This debate is not just about economic rights. Last week I learned about the holocaust survivor Renee Salt, whose book “A Mother’s Promise” was ripped by AI, with similarly named books appearing online days after the original was released. There can be no starker contrast than Renee sharing her most traumatic experiences for the benefit of others, and a computer algorithm stealing from a Holocaust survivor to profit from her suffering. We must stand up for the human creativity that helps us to process the world we live in, or the world will become a much darker place.

I tabled amendment 10, which relates to safe data transfer, in order to confront a glaring weakness in our current data protection regime through the continued transfer of UK user data to jurisdictions that cannot and do not provide basic legal protections or enforceable rights. The need for the amendment is not theoretical. Under current rules, companies often rely on a set of contracts—international data transfer agreements—as proof that data transfers will be adequately protected. However, that assumption is increasingly proving to be false.

The Irish Data Protection Commission fined TikTok €530 million after an in-depth inquiry into its transfers of European Economic Area user data to China. The Irish authorities found that TikTok had failed to adequately assess whether Chinese law provided a level of protection “essentially equivalent” to that guaranteed under GDPR—the General Data Protection Regulation. The ruling was possible because there are no credible legal remedies in China. Laws such as the national intelligence law, the cyber-security law and the anti-terrorism law compel organisations to provide access to data without judicial oversight or meaningful recourse for individuals. China is unable to provide a level of protection “essentially equivalent” to that guaranteed in the Data Protection Act 2018 and in this Bill.

Contracts alone do not protect users when the legal system of the receiving country is incompatible with fundamental rights. This amendment introduces a clear rule: where there is no meaningful enforcement of data rights, no independent judiciary, no administrative remedy or no legal path to challenge unlawful access, such countries will be deemed unsafe for UK data transfers. The Bill must address this critical blind spot. Contracts alone cannot ensure user rights in jurisdictions that offer no legal safeguards. This amendment provides a principled, legally sound and urgently needed response to a real-world threat. I hope that the Minister, given his background, will take these issues seriously and meet me to look further at how we can close this loophole.



**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): Our nominal minimum age for social media usage in this country comes from a well-meaning piece of American legislation originally passed in 1998. The age did not have to be 13. Back in 1998 it was going to be 16, but it was changed to 13. With the birth of GDPR, the age did not have to be 13: the default was 16. Various countries, including Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland, selected 16, but we selected 13. That means that at the age of 13 people can sign up to social media, have their behaviour tracked for the purpose of targeting content and ads, start their own channel, have multiple IDs and make decisions about what details of their private life they share.

Many people believe that, because of brain development, 13 is too young to make some of those decisions reliably, and that there are real downsides, risks and dangers from the combination of social media and the ready availability of a handheld electronic device. For children, there are addictive features, an effect on sleep, an ease of making unwanted content, rabbit holes to fall down and corrosive content that plays on the insecurity of adolescence.

Objections to raising the age to 16 are normally centred around worries that pro-social applications will be hit and that there will be unintended consequences, such as children not being able to seek help if they in an abusive family, or to find information about contraception or whatever else they may need to know. Indeed, those were some of the reasons why, back in 1998, the age of 16 became 13, and those reasons came up again here in the debates over GDPR. As such, I worded new clause 12 to demonstrate how we could do it without losing anything, by having very broad categories of exemption. However, even with those exemptions, the Government would still be able to say—I am sure they will, and will say some of the same things about new clause 1 shortly—that new clause 12 is technically inadequate, worded badly and contains the wrong exemptions, and that there would be unintended consequences. New clause 19, though, which was tabled by the official Opposition, is almost impossible to argue against, because it contains the default position that these exemptions will change; under its provision, those changes would be subject to review, which would ensure that all those considerations were taken into account.

5.30 pm

I want to speak briefly to amendment 9, which I will not move, but which deals with age checks. Whatever the nominal age might be, it is irrelevant if nobody actually enforces it. The Online Safety Act 2023 says that social media companies should enforce their own age limits, but that is often done through very simple methods of self-declaration that are easy to circumvent. There is a question about how we interpret the wording of that Act, which says that age checks must be done “consistently”.

**Iqbal Mohamed:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that self-regulation just does not work in many industries? We can look at sewage reporting in the water industry, or at the AI and tech companies, which will use our data and not tell the regulators that they are doing so. There is a real need to strengthen the regulation.

**Damian Hinds:** The hon. Gentleman tempts me to broaden the debate, which I do not think you would encourage me to do at this late stage, Madam Deputy

Speaker. However, he makes a very important point about self-regulation in this sector. The public, parents, and indeed children look to us to make sure we have their best interests at heart.

The Online Safety Act may only say that age minima should be enforced “consistently” rather than well, but I do not think the will of this Parliament was that it would be okay to enforce a minimum age limit consistently badly. What we meant was that if the law says right now that the age minimum is 13, or if it is 16 in the future—or whatever other age it might be—companies should take reasonable steps to enforce it. There is more checking than there used to be, but it is still very limited. The recent 5Rights report on Instagram’s teen accounts said that all its avatars were able to get into social media with only self-reported birth dates and no additional checks. That means that many thousands of children under the nominal age of 13 are on social media, and that there are many more thousands who are just over 13 but who the platform thinks are 15, 16 or 17, or perhaps 18 or 19. That, of course, affects the content that is served to them.

Either Ofcom or the ICO could tighten up the rules on the minimum age, but amendment 9 would require that to happen in order for companies to be compliant with the ICO regulation. The technology does exist, although it is harder to implement at the age 13 than at 18—of course, the recent Ofcom changes are all about those under the age of 18—but it is possible, and that technology will develop further. Ultimately, this is about backing parents who have a balance to strike: they want to make sure that their children are fully part of their friendship groups and can access all those opportunities, but also want to protect them from harm. Parents have a reasonable expectation that their children will be protected from wholly inappropriate content.

**Caroline Voaden** (South Devon) (LD): I rise to speak to new clauses 1 and 11, and briefly to new clause 2. The Liberal Democrats believe that the Government have missed a trick by not including in this Bill stronger provisions on children’s online safety. It is time for us to start treating the mental health issues arising from social media use and phone addiction as a public health crisis, and to act accordingly.

We know that children as young as nine and 10 are watching hardcore, violent pornography. By the time they are in their teens, it has become so normalised that they think violent sexual acts such as choking are normal—it certainly was not when we were teenagers. Girls are starving themselves to achieve an unrealistic body image because their reality is warped by airbrushed images, and kids who are struggling socially are sucked in by content promoting self-harm and even suicide. One constituent told me, “I set up a TikTok account as a 13-year-old to test the horrors, and half a day later had self-harm content dominating on the feed. I did not search for it; it found me. What kind of hell is this? It is time we gave our children back their childhood.”

New clause 1 would help to address the addictive nature of endless content that reels children in and keeps them hooked. It would raise the minimum age for social media data processing from 13 to 16 right now, meaning that social media companies would not be able to process children’s data for algorithmic purposes. They would still be able to access social media to connect

[Caroline Voaden]

with friends and access relevant services, which is important, but the new clause would retain exceptions for health and educational purposes, so that children who were seeking help could still find it.

We know that there is a correlation between greater social media use among young people since 2012 and worsening mental health outcomes. Teachers tell me regularly that children are struggling to concentrate and stay awake because of lack of sleep. Some are literally addicted to their phones, with 23% of 13-year-old girls in the UK displaying problematic social media use. The evidence is before us. It is time to act now—not in 18 months and not in a couple of years. The addictive nature of the algorithm is pernicious, and as legislators we can do something about it by agreeing to this new clause 1.

It is time to go further. This Bill does not do it, but it is time that we devised legislation to save the next generation of teenagers from the horrors of online harm. Ofcom's new children's code provides hope that someone ticking a box to say they are an adult will no longer be enough to allow access to adult sites. That is a good place to start; let us hope it works. If it does not, we need to take quick and robust action to move further with legislation.

Given the nature of the harms that exist online, I also support new clause 11 and strongly urge the Government to support it. No parent should have to go through the agony experienced by Ellen Roome. Losing a child is horrific enough, but being refused access to her son's social media data to find out why he died was a second unacceptable agony. That must be changed, and all ISPs should be compelled to comply. New clause 11 would make that happen. I heard what the Minister said about coroners, but I strongly believe that legislation is needed, with a requirement to release data or provide access to their children's account for any parent or guardian of someone under 18 who has died. There is, as far as I can see, no reason not to support this new clause.

Briefly, I echo calls from across the House to support new clause 2 in support of our creatives. Creativity is a uniquely human endeavour. Like others, I have been contacted by many creators who do not want their output stolen by AI companies without consent or permission. It is vital that AI companies comply with copyright legislation, which clearly has to be updated to meet the requirements of the brave new world of tech that we now live in.

**Iqbal Mohamed:** I rise to confirm my agreement with new clauses 1 and 12, and I associate myself with the speech of the hon. Member for South Devon (Caroline Voaden). I have had several emails on the protection of copyrighted information and revenue streams for artists, including from Yvonne, who contacted me recently. It is essential that the creative arts and intellectual property are protected and that artists are properly compensated if their output is used in AI.

On new clauses 1 and 12, the case for raising the age of consent for data processing from 13 to 16 has been well made across the House, so I will not repeat the points made, but I will say that it is essential that we

give our children their childhoods back. They need to be protected from the toxic content to which they are being exposed by social media and online.

New clauses 3 to 6 and new clause 14 would place transparency requirements on AI companies to report on what information and data they have used, from where, and with what permission. That is essential to holding the AI companies to account and to ensuring that content holders and data owners are informed and have adequate channels of redress for misuse of their information.

I am sure that new clause 7 was spoken about while I was out of the Chamber, but let me say now that the right for our citizens to use non-digital verification is key. My mother—who is in her late 60s, bless her—would not have a clue what to do if she did not have family to help her with her benefits claims, doctors' prescriptions, appointments and so on. We cannot exclude millions of our citizens who may choose not to have smartphones and not to be exposed to toxic content online, or who are simply not tech-literate. I urge the Government to ensure that we do not exclude millions of our citizens. I also strongly support new clause 11, but I will defer to earlier speakers in that regard.

As for new clause 18, many constituents have written to me or spoken to me, expressing concern about sharing their NHS and other private data with third parties such as Palantir. It is essential for this new Government to adopt a posture of supporting ethical, transparent business practices for all suppliers who provide services in our country. We have already heard about the background of Palantir. I do not know how true this is, but some of my constituents believed, or had read, that during the Prime Minister's first visit to the US, after meeting Donald Trump he visited Palantir's headquarters, or one of its offices. I urge the Government to protect—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

**David Chadwick** (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): I rise to speak in strong support of new clauses 1 and 2.

New clause 1 seeks to raise the age of consent for social media data processing from 13 to 16. As the father of two young boys, I am deeply concerned about the way in which tech platforms engineer addiction, manipulate attention, and shape childhood in ways that parents and even Governments cannot easily counter. This is not hypothetical; it is the reality that our children are living every day. Children aged 13 to 15 are especially vulnerable. Those social media algorithms do not just show content. They shape beliefs, reinforce insecurities and amplify harm. Whether it is body image filters, content promoting self-harm or endless scrolling, these platforms are designed for engagement, not wellbeing.

The new clause would not ban young people from using social media. It simply says that their data should not be exploited for commercial gain without genuine, informed consent. By raising the age to 16 for these specific practices, we align with international best practice and the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. With clear exemptions for education and health platforms, this is a targeted and proportionate reform that prioritises children's mental health.

New clause 2 deals with copyright compliance and AI. As we all know, the AI revolution is here, but just as we would not let a factory operate by stealing its raw materials from others, we should not let AI models train on copyrighted work, such as books, music or journalism, without permission or payment. The new clause makes one clear demand: if an AI system operates in the UK, it must respect UK copyright law, regardless of where the servers are based. We are standing up for our creators—for the authors, musicians, film-makers and developers whose work gives AI its power. In Wales alone, the creative industries turned over £1.5 billion in 2023, employing more than 37,000 people. Let us not wait for lawsuits or damage to our industries. The new clause provides legal clarity, defends creators, and affirms that Parliament, not silicon valley, writes the rules.

These Liberal Democrat new clauses are principled, practical and long overdue, and I urge all Members to support them.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the shadow Minister.

**Dr Spencer:** It has been a pleasure to hear the speeches of Members from across the House. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), who spoke with passion about the protection of copyright in AI. I suspect that my right hon. Friend is looking forward to seeing the back of the Bill, and hoping that it does not return in a future iteration. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) spoke of the importance of ensuring that data does not fall victim to hostile states and hostile state actors. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) spoke with knowledge and authority about this important issue, and the challenges and practicalities involved in ensuring that we get it right for our children.

I will return to the three themes that we have put forward. The Minister has repeatedly given assurances on the application of copyright with regard to AI training, but the Secretary of State created uncertainty by saying in the AI copyright consultation:

“At present, the application of UK copyright law to the training of AI models is disputed.”

When we create that level of uncertainty, we need at least an equal level of clarity to make amends, and that is partly what our new clause 20 calls for: among other things, a formal statement from the Intellectual Property Office or otherwise. I do not see why it is a challenge for the Government to put that forward and deliver.

5.45 pm

Our new clause 19 focuses on the use of inappropriate social media services by under-16s, and on protections for children. For those watching online, I will summarise the three positions that I have heard. It seems that the Government position is, “We don’t want to think about it, so let’s leave things as they are.” The Lib Dem position is, “We don’t want to think about it, but let’s bring in a blanket ban.” Our position is very much, “Think about it, get it into a workable and effective position, and then improve the protections for our children.”

**Victoria Collins:** I would just like to clarify that we have thought long and hard about this Bill, along with many organisations and charities, to get it right.

**Dr Spencer:** That is good to hear.

**Max Wilkinson:** I will try a third time, because we tried earlier. The Conservatives have clearly briefed the press that they are angling for a ban on social media for under-16s—it has been reported in multiple places. Can the shadow Minister confirm whether that is the Conservatives’ position or not?

**Dr Spencer:** For the fourth time, and as I have said, new clause 19 would effectively create a de facto position whereby there are restrictions on the use of inappropriate social media services by children. It seeks to tackle the challenges of implementation, age verification and the scope of social media. It says that there needs to be work to make sure that we can actually do so and that, when we can, we should move in that direction, unless there is overwhelming evidence that it is not needed, such as with the shaking out of the Online Safety Act.

Finally, I return to new clause 21. Sadly, it has been widely misrepresented. The laws in this area are clear: the Equality Act puts in place obligations in relation to protected characteristics. The Supreme Court says that “sex” means biological sex, and that public authorities must collect data on protected characteristics to meet their duties under the Equality Act. The new clause would put that clear legal obligation into effect, and build in data minimisation principles to preserve privacy. There would be no outing of trans people through the new clause, but where public authorities collect and use sex data, it would need to be biological sex data.

**Chris Bryant:** As ever, it is good to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. If I do not manage to get to any of the individual issues that have been raised, and to which people want answers, I am afraid that is because of a shortness of time, and I will seek to write to them. I thank the officials who helped to put the Bill together, particularly Simon Weakley—not least because he not only did this Bill, but all the previous versions in the previous Parliament. He deserves a long-service medal, if not something more important.

I will start with the issues around new clauses 1, 11, 12 and 13, and amendment 9. The Government completely share the concern about the vulnerability of young people online, which lots of Members have referred to. However, the age of 13 was set in the Data Protection Act 2018—I remember, because I was a Member at the time. It reflects what was considered at the time to be the right balance between enabling young people to participate online and ensuring that their data is protected. Some change to protecting children online is already in train. As of last month, Ofcom finalised the child safety codes, a key pillar of the Online Safety Act. Guidance published at the same time started a three-month period during which all in-scope services likely to be accessed by children will be required to assess the risk of harm their services pose to them.

From July, the Act will require platforms to implement measures to protect children from harm, and this is the point at which we expect child users to see a tangible, positive difference to their online experiences. I wish



[Chris Bryant]

it had been possible for all this to happen earlier—I wish the Act had been in a different year—but it is the Act it is. The new provisions include highly effective age checks to prevent children encountering the most harmful content, and adjusting algorithms to reduce the exposure to harmful content. Services will face tough enforcement from Ofcom if they fail to comply.

The Act very much sets the foundation for protecting children online. The Government continue to consider further options in pursuit of protecting children online, which is why the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology commissioned a feasibility study to understand how best to investigate the impact of smartphones and social media on children's wellbeing. This will form an important part of our evidence base.

**Damian Hinds:** Will the Minister give way?

**Chris Bryant:** I am going to come to the right hon. Member's amendment in a moment.

The study is being led by Dr Amy Orben of Cambridge University, and it is supported by scientists from nine of the UK's premier universities, all with established expertise in this field. The study will report to the Government this month on the existing evidence base, ongoing research and recommendations for future research that will establish any causal links between smartphones, social media and children's wellbeing. The Government will publish the report along with the planned next steps to improve the evidence base in this area to support policy making. Considering the extra work we are doing, I hope Members will not press their amendments.

**Munira Wilson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Chris Bryant:** I am afraid that I will not give way.

On new clause 13, tabled by the hon. Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins), we share the concern that children's data in education must be safeguarded. We have already committed to instructing the Information Commissioner's Office to produce a statutory code of practice on the use of children's data by edtech services once the findings of their audits have been published. We believe that defining the scope of the code in legislation now or imposing a six-month deadline for its publication risks undermining that evidence-led process.

Amendment 9, tabled by the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), seeks to ensure that platforms adopt strong age-assurance mechanisms when designing their services under the new children's higher protection matters duty in clause 81. Of course, we subscribe to that policy aim, but the clause already strengthens UK GDPR by requiring providers of information society services to take account of how children can best be protected and supported when they are designing their processing activities. The ICO's age-appropriate design code will be updated to provide clear and robust guidance on how services can meet these obligations, including through proportionate risk-based age assurance, where appropriate. I will take the right hon. Member's intervention if he wants—he asked first—but I am afraid I have to be very careful because I have a lot of questions to answer.

**Damian Hinds:** Very quickly, I want the Minister to confirm that the Ofcom children's codes, to which he has referred, are all about the 18 age threshold. They are a very welcome move to filter out wholly inappropriate content that is designed for over-18s and other very harmful content, but they do not do anything for the initial threshold—the age minimum—at age 13.

**Chris Bryant:** The right hon. Member makes a fair point.

**Munira Wilson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Chris Bryant:** I am terribly sorry, but I do need to crack on because I have very little time.

I have not yet mentioned new clause 21 and amendments 39 and 40. Let me start by saying that the Government accept the Supreme Court ruling, but it is paramount that we work through this judgment carefully, with sensitivity and in line with the law. We cannot simply flick a switch; we must work through the impacts of this judgment properly, recognising that this is broader than data used by digital verification services. I reflect the comment made earlier by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), when he said that data accuracy is important.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Trans people and trans-led groups have been very concerned by new clause 21 tabled by the Opposition. They have rightly described it as an attack on trans people's rights and their privacy. Can the Minister offer some reassurance that, as well as opposing this amendment today, the Government will not seek to introduce similar legislation via other means in the future?

**Chris Bryant:** We are opposing the amendment and are not intending to introduce similar legislation.

As I said, data accuracy is important. That is equally true for any data used in a digital verification service. That is why the Government are already engaged in an appropriate and balanced range of work on data standards and data accuracy. We are already developing data standards on the monitoring of diversity information, including sex, via the Data Standards Authority. Following a review, the Office for Statistics Regulation published updated guidance on collecting and reporting data and statistics about sex and gender identity last year, and all Government Departments are now considering how best to address the recommendations of the Sullivan review, which we published. That is the first reason why we will not be supporting this new clause or the amendment today. Simply, we believe the concerns regarding the way in which public authorities process sex and gender data should be considered holistically, taking into account the effects of the Supreme Court ruling and the specific and particular requirements of public authorities. By contrast, the new clause and the amendment would undermine the work the Government are already doing. Giving the Secretary of State a new regulatory rule would undermine the existing processes that ensure compliance with the UK's data protection.

Secondly, the new clause is misplaced because the Bill does not alter the evidence which can be relied upon to prove sex or gender. Indeed, it does not seek to alter any

of the content of data used by digital verification services. Instead, the Bill enables people to do digitally what they can presently do physically, and it is for organisations to consider what specific information they need to verify in their particular circumstances. Any inconsistency between what they can do digitally and what they can do physically would obviously sow further division.

Thirdly, the new clause is unnecessary, because it is very unlikely that digital verification services would be used in many, if not all, of the cases specifically raised by or with hon. Members, such as within the NHS to gain access to single-sex wards or for screening or to enter other female-only spaces. We expect digital verification services to be used primarily to prove things such as one's right to work, or one's age, address or professional or educational qualifications, which are not matters where sex or gender is relevant at all.

Fourthly, the new clause goes significantly further than the findings of the Supreme Court. Finally, the proposals have the potential to interfere with the right to respect for private and family life under the Human Rights Act by requiring public authorities to record sex as biological sex in all cases regardless of whether it is justified or proportionate in that given circumstance. In addition, the amendment does not take account of the fact that the Gender Recognition Act 2004 gives those with gender recognition certificates a level of privacy and control over who has access to information about their gender history. As for amendment 39, it will create further uncertainty as it appears to prevent use of clause 45 in all cases involving sex.

As I have set out, while I understand the reason for tabling these amendments, I fear they would create legal confusion, uncertainty and inconsistency. I also note that they were not part of the previous Government's version of this Bill, in which in nearly all respects this part of the Bill was identical to ours. Given the narrow scope of digital verification service measures, the need to consider this area holistically to ensure alignment with existing legislation, and upcoming EHRC guidance and the breadth of work already being carried out, I hope the new clause and amendments will be withdrawn.

There was one other amendment referring to digital verification services: the Liberal Democrats' new clause 7. I completely share their concerns about digital inclusion, which were also mentioned by the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed). We have published our own digital inclusion action plan, but such obligations could be particularly challenging for businesses currently operating solely in the digital sphere—for example, online banks. Taking a blanket approach in the way proposed would not be proportionate, so I urge that the amendment be withdrawn.

On scientific research, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West (Chi Onwurah) tabled amendments 37 and 38. Amendment 37 adds further conditions to the definition of scientific research. I understand her concern and we want to prevent misuse. However, the Bill does not expand the meaning of scientific research and already contains safeguards, such as in clause 86. Moreover, the amendment replicates wording from two external documents—including the Frascati document—neither of which were intended to be legally binding or to define scientific research. I am

very happy to continue having these conversations with my hon. Friend, but I urge her not to press her the amendment.

On access to NHS data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton and Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) raised, let me just answer his direct question about the sale of NHS data. The Secretary of State for Health has said categorically that the NHS is not for sale and that patients' data is not for sale—end of story. I hope we can put that one to bed.

On ethnicity data, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) made valid points that we intend to pursue. Public bodies usually collect ethnicity data in line with the Office for National Statistics' harmonised standards. The ONS is currently reviewing that and I am sure she will want to feed into that process.

I am afraid that I have not had time to refer again to AI and copyright, but this country is a—

6 pm

*Debate interrupted (Programme Order, 12 February)*

*The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.*

*Question agreed to.*

*New clause 16 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

*The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).*

## New Clause 17

### REPORT ON THE USE OF COPYRIGHT WORKS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AI SYSTEMS

“(1) The Secretary of State must, before the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed—

- (a) prepare and publish a report on the use of copyright works in the development of AI systems, and
- (b) lay the report before Parliament.

(2) The report must consider—

- (a) the four policy options described in section B.4 of the Copyright and AI Consultation Paper, read with relevant parts of section C of that Paper (policy options about copyright law and the training of artificial intelligence models using copyright works), and
- (b) such alternative options as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(3) The report must consider, and make proposals in relation to, each of the following—

- (a) technical measures and standards (for example, measures and standards concerned with metadata) that may be used to control—
  - (i) the use of copyright works to develop AI systems, and
  - (ii) the accessing of copyright works for that purpose (for example, by web crawlers);
- (b) the effect of copyright on access to, and use of, data by developers of AI systems (for example, on text and data mining), including the effect on developers who are individuals, micro businesses, small businesses or medium-sized businesses;

- (c) the disclosure of information by developers of AI systems about—
  - (i) their use of copyright works to develop AI systems, and
  - (ii) how they access copyright works for that purpose (for example, by means of web crawlers);
- (d) the granting of licences to developers of AI systems to do acts restricted by copyright, including the granting of licences by and to individuals, micro businesses, small businesses and medium-sized businesses.

(4) In preparing the report, the Secretary of State must consider the likely effect of proposals, in the United Kingdom, on—

- (a) copyright owners, and
- (b) persons who develop or use AI systems,

including the likely effect on copyright owners, developers and users who are individuals, micro businesses, small businesses or medium-sized businesses.

(5) In preparing the report, the Secretary of State must have regard to, among other things, the Consultation Paper responses.

(6) The Secretary of State may comply with this section by preparing and publishing two or more reports which, taken together, satisfy the requirements in this section.

(7) In this section—

“Consultation Paper responses” means responses to the Copyright and AI Consultation Paper received by the Secretary of State on or before 25 February 2025;

“copyright” means the property right which subsists in accordance with Part 1 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988;

“copyright work” has the same meaning as in Part 1 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988;

“web crawler” means a computer program that obtains data from websites in accordance with instructions and that can autonomously determine which websites to visit.

(8) Terms used in this section and in section (Economic impact assessment) have the same meaning in this section as they have in that section.”—(*Chris Bryant.*)

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

### New Clause 1

#### AGE OF CONSENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA DATA PROCESSING

“(1) The UK GDPR is as amended as follows.

(2) In Article 8 of the UK GDPR (Conditions applicable to child’s consent in relation to information society services)

After paragraph 1 insert—

“(1A) References to 13 years old in paragraph 1 shall be read as 16 years old in the case of social networking services processing personal data for the purpose of delivering personalised content, including targeted advertising and algorithmically curated recommendations.

(1B) For the purposes of paragraph 1A “social networking services” means any online service that—

- (a) allows users to create profiles and interact publicly or privately with other users, and
- (b) facilitates the sharing of user-generated content, including text, images, or videos, with a wider audience.

(1C) Paragraph 1B does not apply to—

- (a) educational platforms and learning management systems provided in recognised educational settings, where personal data processing is solely for educational purposes.

- (b) health and well-being services, including NHS digital services, mental health support applications, and crisis helplines, where personal data processing is necessary for the provision of care and support.”—(*Victoria Collins.*)

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 76, Noes 295.*

### Division No. 187]

[6.1 pm

#### AYES

Adam, Shockat  
Amos, Gideon  
Anderson, Lee  
Aquarone, Steff  
Babarinde, Josh  
Bennett, Alison  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Brewer, Alex  
Brown-Fuller, Jess  
Cane, Charlotte  
Chadwick, David  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Chambers, Dr Danny  
Chowns, Ellie  
Coghlan, Chris  
Collins, Victoria  
Cooper, Daisy  
Dance, Adam  
Darling, Steve  
Davey, rh Ed  
Davies, Ann  
Dean, Bobby  
Dillon, Mr Lee  
Doogan, Dave  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eastwood, Colum  
Farron, Tim  
Flynn, rh Stephen  
Foord, Richard  
Forster, Mr Will  
Franklin, Zöe  
Gethins, Stephen  
Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)  
Glover, Olly  
Goldman, Marie  
Gordon, Tom  
Green, Sarah  
Harding, Monica  
Heylings, Pippa  
Hussain, Mr Adnan

Jardine, Christine  
Jarvis, Liz  
Jones, Clive  
Khan, Ayoub  
Lake, Ben  
Law, Chris  
Maguire, Ben  
Martin, Mike  
Mathew, Brian  
Maynard, Charlie  
McMurdock, James  
Medi, Llinos  
Mierlo, Freddie van  
Mohamed, Iqbal  
Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)  
Morello, Edward  
Morrison, Mr Tom  
Olney, Sarah  
Perteghella, Manuela  
Pochin, Sarah  
Ramsay, Adrian  
Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shannon, Jim  
Slade, Vikki  
Smart, Lisa  
Sollom, Ian  
Stone, Jamie  
Taylor, Luke  
Thomas, Cameron  
Voaden, Caroline  
Wilkinson, Max  
Wilson, Munira  
Wishart, Pete  
Wrigley, Martin  
Young, Claire

#### Tellers for the Ayes:

Susan Murray and  
Tessa Munt

#### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)  
Abbott, Jack  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
Aldridge, Dan  
Al-Hassan, Sadik  
Ali, Tahir  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Anderson, Callum  
Arthur, Dr Scott  
Asato, Jess

Asser, James  
Athwal, Jas  
Atkinson, Lewis  
Bailey, Olivia  
Baines, David  
Baker, Richard  
Ballinger, Alex  
Bance, Antonia  
Barker, Paula  
Barron, Lee  
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
Baxter, Johanna  
Beales, Danny



Beavers, Lorraine  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Irene  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Carden, Dan  
 Carns, Al  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Craft, Jen  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eccles, Cat  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Ellis, Maya  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Falconer, Mr Hamish  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia

Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumar, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex

McAllister, Douglas  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, James  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Payne, Michael  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reid, Joani  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt

Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry (*Proxy vote cast by Adam Jogee*)  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Ward, Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Gen Kitchen and  
 Anna McMorris

*Question accordingly negated.*

## New Clause 2

### COMPLIANCE WITH UK COPYRIGHT LAW BY OPERATORS OF WEB CRAWLERS AND GENERAL-PURPOSE AI MODELS

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision (including any such provision as might be made by Act of Parliament), requiring the operators of web crawlers and general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) models whose services have links with the United Kingdom within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Online Safety Act 2023 to comply with United Kingdom copyright law, including the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, regardless of the jurisdiction in which the copyright-relevant acts relating to the pre-training, development and operation of those web crawlers and general-purpose AI models take place.

(2) Provision made under subsection (1) must apply to the entire lifecycle of a general-purpose AI model, including but not limited to—

- (a) pre-training and training,
- (b) fine tuning,
- (c) grounding and retrieval-augmented generation, and
- (d) the collection of data for the said purposes.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a draft of the statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (1) within six months of the day on which this Act is passed and the regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure.”.—(*Victoria Collins.*)

*This new clause requires web crawlers and general-purpose AI models with UK links to comply with UK copyright law across all stages of AI development.*

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 88, Noes 287.*

**Division No. 188]**

**[6.14 pm**

### AYES

Adam, Shockat	Duffield, Rosie
Allister, Jim	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Amos, Gideon	Eastwood, Colum
Anderson, Lee	Farron, Tim
Aquarone, Steff	Flynn, rh Stephen
Babarinde, Josh	Foord, Richard
Begum, Apsana ( <i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Zarah Sultana</i> )	Forster, Mr Will
Bennett, Alison	Franklin, Zöe
Berry, Siân	Gethins, Stephen
Blackman, Kirsty	Gibson, Sarah ( <i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Wendy</i> <i>Chamberlain</i> )
Brewer, Alex	Glover, Olly
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Goldman, Marie
Cane, Charlotte	Gordon, Tom
Chadwick, David	Green, Sarah
Chamberlain, Wendy	Harding, Monica
Chambers, Dr Danny	Heylings, Pippa
Chowns, Ellie	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Coghlan, Chris	Jardine, Christine
Collins, Victoria	Jarvis, Liz
Cooper, Daisy	Jones, Clive
Dance, Adam	Khan, Ayoub
Darling, Steve	Lake, Ben
Davey, rh Ed	Law, Chris
Davies, Ann	Maguire, Ben
Dean, Bobby	Malthouse, rh Kit
Denyer, Carla	Martin, Mike
Dillon, Mr Lee	Mathew, Brian
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Maynard, Charlie
Doogan, Dave	

McDonnell, rh John  
McMurdock, James  
McVey, rh Esther  
Medi, Llinos  
van Mierlo, Freddie  
Mohamed, Iqbal  
Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast*  
*by Zöe Franklin*)  
Morello, Edward  
Morrison, Mr Tom  
Olney, Sarah  
Perteghella, Manuela  
Pochin, Sarah  
Ramsay, Adrian  
Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shannon, Jim  
Slade, Vikki

Smart, Lisa  
Smith, rh Sir Julian  
Sollom, Ian  
Stone, Jamie  
Sultana, Zarah  
Taylor, Luke  
Thomas, Cameron  
Voaden, Caroline  
Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
Wilkinson, Max  
Wilson, Munira  
Wishart, Pete  
Wrigley, Martin  
Young, Claire

### Tellers for the Ayes:

Tessa Munt and  
Susan Murray

### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane ( <i>Proxy</i> <i>vote cast by Bell</i> <i>Ribeiro-Addy</i> )	Carden, Dan
Abbott, Jack	Carns, Al
Abrahams, Debbie	Champion, Sarah
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Charalambous, Bambos
Aldridge, Dan	Collier, Jacob
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Collinge, Lizzi
Ali, Tahir	Collins, Tom
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Conlon, Liam
Anderson, Callum	Coombes, Sarah
Arthur, Dr Scott	Cooper, Andrew
Asato, Jess	Cooper, Dr Beccy
Asser, James	Costigan, Deirdre
Athwal, Jas	Cox, Pam
Atkinson, Lewis	Coyle, Neil
Bailey, Olivia	Craft, Jen
Baines, David	Crichton, Torcuil
Baker, Richard	Curtis, Chris
Ballinger, Alex	Daby, Janet
Bance, Antonia	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Barker, Paula	Dalton, Ashley
Barron, Lee	Darlington, Emily
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Davies, Jonathan
Baxter, Johanna	Davies, Paul
Beales, Danny	Dean, Josh
Beavers, Lorraine	Dearden, Kate
Bell, Torsten	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Betts, Mr Clive	Dickson, Jim
Billington, Ms Polly	Dixon, Anna
Bishop, Matt	Dixon, Samantha
Blake, Olivia	Dodds, rh Anneliese
Blake, Rachel	Dowd, Peter
Bloore, Chris	Downie, Graeme
Blundell, Mrs Elsie	Eagle, Dame Angela
Bonavia, Kevin	Eccles, Cat
Botterill, Jade	Edwards, Lauren
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Edwards, Sarah
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Efford, Clive
Brickell, Phil	Ellis, Maya
Bryant, Chris	Elmore, Chris
Buckley, Julia	Esterson, Bill
Burgon, Richard	Evans, Chris
Burke, Maureen	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Butler, Dawn	Farnsworth, Linsey
Byrne, Ian	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Byrne, rh Liam	Ferguson, Mark
Caliskan, Nesil	Ferguson, Patricia
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Fleet, Natalie
Campbell, Irene	Foody, Emma
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Fookes, Catherine
	Foster, Mr Paul
	Foxcroft, Vicky

Francis, Daniel  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat

McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisan  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, James  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Oureshi, Yasmin  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Payne, Michael  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Race, Steve  
 Reader, Mike  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogam, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat

Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry (*Proxy vote cast by Adam Jogee*)  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl

Turner, Laurence  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Ward, Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Anna McMorin and  
 Gen Kitchen

*Question accordingly negated.*

### New Clause 19

#### SECRETARY OF STATE'S DUTY TO REVIEW THE AGE OF CONSENT FOR DATA PROCESSING UNDER THE UK GDPR

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of Royal Assent of this Act, have conducted a review and published a report into the operation of Article 8 (Conditions applicable to child's consent in relation to information society services) of the UK GDPR in relation to the data processed by social media platforms of children under the age of 16.

(2) As part of this review, the Secretary of State must consider—

- (a) the desirability of increasing the digital age of consent under the UK GDPR from 13 to 16, taking into account the available evidence in relation to the impact of social media platforms on the educational, social and emotional development of children; and
- (b) the viability of increasing the digital age of consent under Article 8 of the UK GDPR in relation to specific social media platforms which are shown by the evidence to be unsuitable for use by children under the age of 16.

(3) Within six months of the publication of the report under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must lay a plan before Parliament for raising the digital age of consent to 16 through amendments to Article 8 GDPR, unless the review concludes that such changes are unnecessary.”—(*Dr Spencer.*)

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 160, Noes 294.*

**Division No. 189]**

**[6.26 pm**

#### AYES

Adam, Shokat  
 Allister, Jim  
 Amos, Gideon  
 Anderson, Lee

Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Aquarone, Steff  
 Argar, rh Edward



Atkins, rh Victoria  
 Babarinde, Josh  
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
 Bennett, Alison  
 Bool, Sarah  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Brandreth, Aphra  
 Brewer, Alex  
 Brown-Fuller, Jess  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Cane, Charlotte  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Chadwick, David  
 Chamberlain, Wendy  
 Chambers, Dr Danny  
 Chowns, Ellie  
 Cleverly, rh Sir James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Coghlan, Chris  
 Collins, Victoria  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Cooper, John  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Dance, Adam  
 Darling, Steve  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Mims  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Dewhurst, Charlie  
 Dillon, Mr Lee  
 Dinanage, Dame Caroline  
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Farron, Tim  
 Foord, Richard  
 Forster, Mr Will  
 Fortune, Peter  
 Franklin, Zöe  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)  
 Glen, rh John  
 Glover, Olly  
 Goldman, Marie  
 Gordon, Tom  
 Grant, Helen  
 Green, Sarah  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harding, Monica  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heylings, Pippa  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, rh Sir Jeremy  
 Hussain, Mr Adnan  
 Jardine, Christine

Jarvis, Liz  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Jones, Clive  
 Jopp, Lincoln  
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
 Khan, Ayoub  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Lamont, John  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Maguire, Ben  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Martin, Mike  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Maynard, Charlie  
 McMurdock, James  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 van Mierlo, Freddie  
 Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew  
 Mohamed, Iqbal  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)  
 Morello, Edward  
 Morrison, Mr Tom  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Munt, Tessa  
 Murray, Susan  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Pochin, Sarah  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
 Robertson, Joe  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Simmonds, David  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, rh Sir Julian  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stride, rh Sir Mel  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Thomas, Cameron

Timothy, Nick  
 Trott, rh Laura  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Voaden, Caroline  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wild, James  
 Wilkinson, Max

Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Jerome Mayhew and  
 Ben Obese-Jecty

## NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)  
 Abbott, Jack  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asato, Jess  
 Asser, James  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Bance, Antonia  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barron, Lee  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beales, Danny  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Irene  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Carden, Dan  
 Carns, Al  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam

Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Craft, Jen  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eccles, Cat  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Ellis, Maya  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Falconer, Mr Hamish  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd

Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Murray, James  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Payne, Michael  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Reader, Mike  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel

Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry (*Proxy vote cast by Adam Jogee*)  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Ward, Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Gen Kitchen and**  
**Anna McMorrin**

*Question accordingly negated.*

## New Clause 21

### DIRECTIONS TO PUBLIC AUTHORITIES ON RECORDING OF SEX DATA

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the passage of this Act, issue regulations relating to the code of practice set out in section 49 of this Act which require public authorities to—

- (a) collect, process and retain sex data only where it is lawful to do so in accordance with data protection legislation;
- (b) request and record sex data accurately, in every circumstance where sex data is collected, in accordance with following category terms and definitions—
  - (i) ‘Sex’ meaning male or female only based on ‘sex at birth’, ‘natal sex’ or ‘biological sex’ (these terms carrying the same meaning and capable of being used interchangeably); and,
  - (ii) in addition, where it is lawful to do so in accordance with data protection legislation and the Gender Recognition Act 2004, ‘Acquired Gender’ meaning male or female only, as recorded on a gender recognition certificate issued in accordance with the Gender Recognition Act 2004;
- (c) have updated relevant organisation guidance to stipulate that, where sex data is collected, this must be done in accordance with the definitions set out by subsection (1)(b) within three months of these regulations coming into force;
- (d) have conducted a review of the accuracy of data held in relation to the sex of data subjects to ensure that the data is accurate in recording sex at birth and, where relevant and collected lawfully, acquired gender as recorded on a gender recognition certificate within 12 months of these regulations coming into force;
- (e) have taken every reasonable step to ensure that any data held in relation to the sex and, where relevant and collected lawfully, acquired gender as recorded on a gender recognition certificate of a data subject that is found to be inaccurate is rectified or erased within 18 months of these regulations coming into force; and
- (f) have produced and submitted to the Secretary of State a report setting out the findings of its review in relation to the matters set out by subsection (1)(d) and, where relevant, a description of the steps taken

to ensure that the data held by the relevant public authority is accurate within the definitions set out subsection (1)(b) with 18 months of these regulations coming into force.

(2) The Secretary of State may, on receipt of a report in accordance with subsection (1)(f) instruct a public authority to take any further remedial steps within a specified timeframe reasonably necessary to ensure the accuracy of the sex and acquired gender data held by the relevant public authority.

(3) The Secretary of State must, within one month of the passage of this Act, establish and maintain a register of public authorities approved to act as sources of data relating to the attribute of sex for persons providing digital verification services.

(4) The register in subsection (3) must be published on the website of the Office for Digital Identities & Attributes or any successor body.

(5) Until such time as a public authority is added to the register under subsection (3), persons providing digital verification services may only obtain data on the sex of an individual requesting the provision of digital verification services from the record of births held by the General Register Office in accordance with subsection (6).

(6) Information supplied by the General Register Office pursuant to subsection (5) must specify sex as recorded at birth, as well as any subsequent corrections to the register in the field marked ‘Sex’.

(7) The Secretary of State may, from time to time, add public authorities to the register as under subsection (3) only upon being satisfied on the basis of a report issued under subsection (1)(f), or satisfaction of such further steps required by the Secretary of State under subsection (2) that the data held by the relevant public authority in relation to sex and, where relevant, acquired gender as recorded on a gender recognition certificate, as defined in subsection (1)(b), is accurate.”—(*Dr Spencer.*)

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to issue regulations relating to the code of practice in section 49 requiring public authorities to record sex data in line with these regulations when data are collected. This clause is linked to amendments 39 and 40.*

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 97, Noes 363.*

## Division No. 190]

[6.38 pm

### AYES

Allister, Jim	Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Anderson, Lee	Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Anderson, Stuart	Duffield, Rosie
Andrew, rh Stuart	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Argar, rh Edward	Evans, Dr Luke
Atkins, rh Victoria	Fortune, Peter
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	French, Mr Louie
Bool, Sarah	Fuller, Richard
Bowie, Andrew	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Brandreth, Aphra	Glen, rh John
Burghart, Alex	Grant, Helen
Cartlidge, James	Griffiths, Alison
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Harris, Rebecca
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hayes, rh Sir John
Cocking, Lewis	Hinds, rh Damian
Cooper, John	Hoare, Simon
Costa, Alberto	Hollinrake, Kevin
Coutinho, rh Claire ( <i>Proxy</i>	Holmes, Paul
<i>vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )	Huddleston, Nigel
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Hudson, Dr Neil
Cross, Harriet	Hunt, rh Sir Jeremy
Davies, Gareth	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Davies, Mims	Jenrick, rh Robert
Davis, rh David	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Dewhurst, Charlie	Jopp, Lincoln

Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)

Kruger, Danny

Lam, Katie

Lamont, John

Leigh, rh Sir Edward

Lewis, rh Sir Julian

Lopez, Julia

Mak, Alan

Malthouse, rh Kit

McMurdock, James

McVey, rh Esther

Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew

Mohindra, Mr Gagan

Moore, Robbie

Morrissey, Joy

Mullan, Dr Kieran

Mundell, rh David

Murrison, rh Dr Andrew

O'Brien, Neil

Patel, rh Priti

Paul, Rebecca

Pochin, Sarah

Pritchard, rh Mark

Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Gagan Mohindra*)

Rankin, Jack

Reed, David

Robertson, Joe

Rosindell, Andrew

Shannon, Jim

Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil

Simmonds, David

Smith, Greg

Smith, Rebecca

Snowden, Mr Andrew

Spencer, Dr Ben

Stafford, Gregory

Stephenson, Blake

Stride, rh Sir Mel

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Thomas, Bradley

Timothy, Nick

Trott, rh Laura

Vickers, Martin

Vickers, Matt

Whittingdale, rh Sir John

Wild, James

Williamson, rh Sir Gavin

Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
Ben Obese-Jecty and  
Jerome Mayhew

### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)

Abbott, Jack

Abrahams, Debbie

Ahmed, Dr Zubir

Aldridge, Dan

Al-Hassan, Sadik

Ali, Tahir

Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Amos, Gideon

Anderson, Callum

Aquarone, Steff

Arthur, Dr Scott

Asato, Jess

Asser, James

Athwal, Jas

Atkinson, Lewis

Babarinde, Josh

Bailey, Olivia

Baines, David

Baker, Richard

Ballinger, Alex

Bance, Antonia

Barker, Paula

Barron, Lee

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex

Baxter, Johanna

Beales, Danny

Beavers, Lorraine

Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)

Bell, Torsten

Bennett, Alison

Berry, Siân

Betts, Mr Clive

Billington, Ms Polly

Bishop, Matt

Blackman, Kirsty

Blake, Olivia

Blake, Rachel

Bloore, Chris

Blundell, Mrs Elsie

Bonavia, Kevin

Botterill, Jade

Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena

Brash, Mr Jonathan

Brewer, Alex

Brickell, Phil

Brown-Fuller, Jess

Bryant, Chris

Buckley, Julia

Burgon, Richard

Burke, Maureen

Butler, Dawn

Byrne, Ian

Byrne, rh Liam

Caliskan, Nesil

Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Campbell, Irene

Campbell-Savours, Markus

Cane, Charlotte

Carden, Dan

Carns, Al

Chadwick, David

Chamberlain, Wendy

Chambers, Dr Danny

Champion, Sarah

Charalambous, Bambos

Chowens, Ellie

Coghlan, Chris

Collier, Jacob

Collinge, Lizzi

Collins, Tom

Collins, Victoria

Conlon, Liam

Coombes, Sarah

Cooper, Andrew

Cooper, Dr Beccy

Cooper, Daisy

Costigan, Deirdre

Cox, Pam

Coyle, Neil

Craft, Jen



Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Dance, Adam  
 Darling, Steve  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 Davies, Ann  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Dean, Bobby  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dillon, Mr Lee  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Doogan, Dave  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Eccles, Cat  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Ellis, Maya  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Falconer, Mr Hamish  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foord, Richard  
 Forster, Mr Will  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Franklin, Zöe  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Glover, Olly  
 Goldman, Marie  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Gordon, Tom  
 Grady, John  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette

Harding, Monica  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Heylings, Pippa  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Liz  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Clive  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Maguire, Ben  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Martin, Mike  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Mayer, Alex  
 Maynard, Charlie  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex

McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Medi, Llinos  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 van Mierlo, Freddie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morello, Edward  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Morrison, Mr Tom  
 Munt, Tessa  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, James  
 Murray, Susan  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Payne, Michael  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reid, Joani  
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam

Russell, Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Scroggham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry (*Proxy vote cast by Adam Jogee*)  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Voaden, Caroline  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Ward, Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie

Wrigley, Martin  
Yang, Yuan  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Gen Kitchen and**  
**Anna McMorris**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

#### Clause 4

POWER TO MAKE PROVISION IN CONNECTION WITH  
BUSINESS DATA

*Amendments made:* 11, page 6, line 25, after “recipient” insert

“in relation to business data”.

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 12.*

*Amendment 12,* page 6, line 26, after “authority” insert

“to do something with the business data”.

*Clause 4(4)(a) refers to a person appointed by a public authority. This amendment specifies that the person must be appointed to do something with the business data in respect of which the public authority is a third party recipient (defined in clause 4(2)).*

*Amendment 13,* page 6, line 30, at end insert—

“(aa) make provision requiring a person who is a third party recipient in relation to business data (whether by virtue of those regulations or other data regulations), and who is appointed by a public authority to do something with the business data, to publish or provide business data as described in paragraph (a)(i) or (ii),”.

*This amendment enables regulations under Part 1 to require people who are third party recipients of business data, and who are appointed by a public authority, to publish business data or to provide it to customers of the trader to whom the business data relates or to other persons.*

*Amendment 14,* page 6, line 31, leave out from “or” to “, make” in line 32 and insert

“the appointed person referred to in paragraph (a) or (aa)”.

*This amendment enables regulations under Part 1 to make, in relation to a person described in paragraph (aa) of clause 4(4) (see Amendment 13), any provision that they can make in relation to a data holder (other than provision imposing a levy).*

*Amendment 15,* page 6, line 37, after “authority” insert “or appointed person”.

*This amendment and Amendment 16 enable regulations under Part 1 to make, in relation to a person (other than a customer) who, in accordance with regulations made under clause 4(4), receives business data from a person appointed by a public authority, any provision that they could make if the person received the business data from a data holder.*

*Amendment 16,* page 6, line 39, leave out “(a)(ii)” and insert

“(a) tab=“yes” or (aa), other than a customer described in paragraph (a)(i).”—(*Chris Bryant.*)

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 15.*

#### Clause 8

ENFORCEMENT OF REGULATIONS UNDER THIS PART

*Amendments made:* 17, page 12, line 5, leave out

“and sections 9 and 10”.

*This amendment and Amendment 18 adjust the way in which clauses 9 and 10 are signposted in clause 8(3), to reflect the fact that clauses 9 and 10 make provision about regulations under Part 1, not just regulations under clause 8(1).*

*Amendment 18,* page 12, line 6, at end insert

“(and see sections 9 and 10).”—(*Chris Bryant.*)

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 17.*

#### Clause 11

FEEs

*Amendments made:* 19, page 16, line 14, leave out

“for the purpose of meeting expenses” and insert

“in connection with activities”.

*This amendment and Amendments 20 and 21 remove the requirement for the amount of fees provided for by regulations under clause 11 to be linked to the expenses of performing duties imposed, or exercising powers conferred, by or under Part 1 of the Bill.*

*Amendment 20,* page 16, line 25, leave out from beginning to “performing” in line 26 and insert “Those activities are”.

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 19.*

*Amendment 21,* page 16, line 35, leave out

“in respect of which the fee is charged”

and insert

“in connection with which the fee is charged (and for the total amount of fees payable in connection with things to exceed the total cost)”.

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 19.*

*Amendment 22,* page 17, line 14, at end insert—

“(9) The Secretary of State or the Treasury may by regulations make provision about whether a person listed in subsection (2), or a person acting on their behalf, who could require payment in connection with an activity described in subsection (3) otherwise than in reliance on regulations under subsection (1) may do so.

(10) Where duties or powers are imposed or conferred—

(a) on a person in their capacity as a third party recipient by or under regulations made under this Part, other than regulations made in reliance on section 4(4)(a), (aa) or (b), or

(b) on a person in their capacity as a person described in section 4(4)(c) by or under regulations made under this Part,

nothing in this section, or in regulations under subsection (1) or (9), prevents the person, or a person acting on their behalf, from requiring payment in connection with the performance or exercise of those duties or powers, or restricts their ability to do so, where the person could do so otherwise than in reliance on regulations under subsection (1).

(11) Examples of requiring payment otherwise than in reliance on regulations under subsection (1) include doing so in reliance on other legislation or a contract or other arrangement (whenever entered into).”—(*Chris Bryant.*)

*This amendment enables regulations to make clear whether or not powers to charge arising otherwise than under regulations made under Part 1 can be used in connection with activities carried on pursuant to such regulations. It also provides that, where third party recipients have existing powers to charge, the regulations cannot prevent or restrict the exercise of those powers.*

**Clause 15**THE FCA AND FINANCIAL SERVICES INTERFACES:  
SUPPLEMENTARY

*Amendments made:* 23, page 21, line 26, leave out third “to”.

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 24.*

*Amendment 24,* page 21, line 27, after “subsection,” insert

“or to a person acting on behalf of such a body or person,”.

*This amendment and Amendment 23 insert a reference to a person acting on behalf of an interface body or a person listed in clause 15(7) into clause 15(6).*

*Amendment 25,* page 21, line 27, leave out “for the purpose of meeting expenses”

and insert

“in connection with activities”.

*This amendment and Amendments 26 and 27 remove the requirement for the amount of fees provided for by FCA interface rules (defined in clause 14(2)) to be linked to the expenses of performing duties, or exercising powers, arising from regulations under Part 1 of the Bill or FCA interface rules.*

*Amendment 26,* page 21, line 32, leave out subsection (8) and insert—

“(8) Those activities are performing or exercising—

(a) duties or powers imposed or conferred on the interface body or person listed in subsection (7) by FCA interface rules, and

(b) other duties or powers imposed or conferred on that body or person by or under regulations made under this Part.”

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 25. This amendment also makes minor changes for consistency with clauses 11(3) and 14(2).*

*Amendment 27,* page 21, line 40, leave out

“in respect of which the fee is charged”

and insert

“in connection with which the fee is charged (and for the total amount of fees payable in connection with things to exceed the total cost)”.

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 25.*

*Amendment 28,* page 22, line 10, at end insert—

“(da) may require or enable rules to make provision about what must or may be done with amounts paid as fees;”.

*This amendment confers express power to enable the FCA to make provision about the treatment of amounts paid as fees to interface bodies and others, for consistency with the similar power in clause 11(1)(b).*

*Amendment 29,* page 22, line 13, at end insert—

“(9A) Regulations under section 14 may enable FCA interface rules to make provision about whether an interface body or a person listed in subsection (7), or a person acting on behalf of such a body or person, who could require payment in connection with an activity described in subsection (8) otherwise than in reliance on FCA interface rules may do so.

(9B) Examples of requiring payment otherwise than in reliance on FCA interface rules include doing so in reliance on other legislation or a contract or other arrangement (whenever entered into).”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment enables FCA interface rules (defined in clause 14(2)) to make clear whether or not powers to charge arising otherwise than under FCA interface rules can be used in connection with activities carried on pursuant to such rules or regulations under Part 1.*

**Clause 21**

## REGULATIONS UNDER THIS PART: SUPPLEMENTARY

*Amendment made:* 30, page 26, line 17, after “sections” insert “11(9).”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment provides that the regulation-making power under clause 11(9) (inserted by Amendment 22) is not restricted by clause 21(3).*

**Clause 23**

## RELATED SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

*Amendment made:* 31, page 27, line 26, at end insert—

“(3A) For the purposes of determining whether subordinate legislation contains provision described in clauses 2(1) to (4) or 4(1) to (4), references in those sections to something specified are to be read as including something specified by or under any subordinate legislation.”—(Chris Bryant.)

*Clause 23 confers power to make provision in connection with subordinate legislation that is similar to regulations that can be made under Part 1. This amendment provides that, when determining whether that power is available, clauses 2 and 4 should be read as referring to things specified in subordinate legislation, rather than in regulations under Part 1.*

**Clause 25**

## OTHER DEFINED TERMS

*Amendment made:* 32, page 29, line 2, at end insert—

“(4) In this Part, references to regulations made under subsection (3) of section 4 or any of sections 5 to 21 (and references which include such regulations) include regulations made under section 4(4)(b) or (c) which make provision that could be made under the other subsection or section.”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment provides that references in Part 1 to regulations made under particular provisions of Part 1 include regulations made under clause 4(4)(b) and (c) (which confer power to make provision that could be made in reliance on those other provisions).*

**Clause 56**NATIONAL UNDERGROUND ASSET REGISTER:  
ENGLAND AND WALES

*Amendment made:* 1, page 57, leave out lines 35 and 36 and insert

“obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers in relation to any provision which would be within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru if contained in an Act of the Senedd (ignoring any requirement for the consent of a Minister of the Crown imposed under Schedule 7B to the Government of Wales Act 2006).”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment provides that the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers before making regulations under Part 3A of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (inserted by this clause) in relation to any provision that would be within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru if contained in an Act of the Senedd.*

**Clause 57**INFORMATION IN RELATION TO APPARATUS:  
ENGLAND AND WALES

*Amendments made:* 2, page 60, line 2, leave out “consult the Welsh Ministers” and insert

“obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers in relation to any provision that relates to apparatus in streets in Wales”.



*This amendment provides that the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers before making regulations under section 79 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 in relation to any provision that relates to apparatus in streets in Wales.*

Amendment 3, page 60, line 25, at end insert—

“(4A) Before making regulations under this section the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers in relation to any provision that relates to apparatus in streets in Wales.”

*This amendment provides that the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers before making regulations under section 80 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 in relation to any provision that relates to apparatus in streets in Wales.*

Amendment 4, page 60, leave out line 28.

*This amendment is consequential on amendment 3.*

Amendment 5, page 61, line 17, leave out subsections (8) and (9).—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment removes provision applying the Street Works (Records) (England) Regulations 2002 to Wales and also removes provision revoking the Street Works (Records) (Wales) Regulations 2005.*

### Clause 58

NATIONAL UNDERGROUND ASSET REGISTER:  
NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: 6, page 67, leave out lines 25 to 27 and insert—

“(A1) Before making regulations under this Order the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Department for Infrastructure.”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment provides that the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland before making regulations under the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.*

### Clause 59

INFORMATION IN RELATION TO APPARATUS: NORTHERN  
IRELAND

Amendments made: 7, page 69, leave out lines 35 and 36.

*This amendment is consequential on amendment 6.*

Amendment 8, page 70, leave out line 25.—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment is consequential on amendment 6.*

### Clause 135

CREATING, OR REQUESTING THE CREATION OF,  
PURPORTED INTIMATE IMAGE OF ADULT

Amendments made: 33, page 173, line 22, leave out “This section” and insert “Subsection (2)”.

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 34.*

Amendment 34, page 173, line 29, at end insert—

“(3) Subsection (4) applies where a person commits an offence under section 66F of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (requesting the creation of purported intimate image of adult).

(4) A purported intimate image which is connected with the offence, and anything containing it, is to be regarded for the purposes of section 153 (and section 157(3)(b))

as used for the purposes of committing the offence (including where it is committed by aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring).

(5) A purported intimate image is connected with an offence under section 66F of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 if —

(a) it appears to be of a person who was the subject of the request to which the offence relates (whether or not it is what was requested), and

(b) it was in the offender’s possession, or under the offender’s control, as a result of that request.”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment provides that deprivation orders can be made under the Sentencing Code in connection with an offence under new section 66F of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (requesting the creation of purported intimate image of adult).*

## Schedule 11

FURTHER MINOR PROVISION ABOUT DATA PROTECTION

Amendment made: 35, page 225, line 13, at end insert—

“21A In section 170(2)(a) (unlawful obtaining etc of personal data), after “preventing” insert “, investigating”.

21B (1) Section 171 (re-identification of de-identified personal data) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (3)(a), after “preventing” insert “, investigating”.

(3) In subsection (6)(a), after “preventing” insert “, investigating”.”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment adds references to investigating crime to existing references in the Data Protection Act 2018 to detecting or preventing crime. (There are similar amendments in paragraphs 23, 26(2) and (3), 27(2) and (3) and 29 of Schedule 11.)*

## Title

Amendment made: 36, line 18, after “services;” insert

“to make provision about works protected by copyright and the development of artificial intelligence systems;”—(Chris Bryant.)

*This amendment is consequential on NC16 and NC17.*

Third Reading

6.51 pm

**The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House has worked incredibly hard to get the Bill to where it is today. It is a relief that after so many attempts to get this piece of legislation through, over such a long period of time and multiple Governments, we will finally get it across the line. I put on record my thanks to the people who have got us to where we are, including the Members from across the House who have contributed in sincere and passionate ways during today’s debate on Report, and now on Third Reading.

I also put on record my very sincere thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant), the Minister responsible. He has seen the Bill through assiduously, persistently, and with passion at all times to make sure that it passes through Parliament and is out there, benefiting the people of Britain. I thank him, and also officials in my Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. There are certain officials who have been working on this Bill since 2022

and who have put their life and soul into it, often seven times a week. Their dedication to getting this piece of legislation through should be recognised by Members right across the House—it certainly is by me. I thank them very much.

I hope the House has noticed that the Government have tabled amendments to improve the Bill until the last moment. By making it an offence to request the creation of deepfake intimate images without consent and empowering the courts to deprive offenders of images and devices containing them, we will ensure consistency in our approach to protecting women and girls from that vile, demeaning form of abuse.

To conclude in the short time I have available, the Bill will make life better for working people right across our country.

**Munira Wilson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Peter Kyle:** I am afraid that in the time I have, I cannot give way. I want to do the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Havant (Alan Mak), the courtesy of allowing him to have his say in the remaining couple of minutes.

The Bill will give working people across our country a stronger economy, better public services, and more time to do the things they like with the people they love. I look forward to working with people, including hon. Members from across the House, to resolve as quickly as possible any outstanding issues that may arise after the Bill passes. The version of the Bill that is before us today is its third substantive iteration. It follows two failed attempts by the previous Government, the first of which started back in July 2022. It is time that we got this done; for far too long, our citizens and businesses have paid the price of the failure to deliver data reform, and we cannot expect them to put up with it any longer. Today, we have an opportunity to finally get it right. The Bill that is before us today will remove the brakes that are holding back our country.

6.54 pm

**Alan Mak (Havant) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for allowing time for an Opposition response. I begin by thanking hon. and right hon. Members across the House for their contributions to this Bill over many months, and I thank officials in the Department across several Governments and officials in Parliament. May I thank the entire team on our Benches, but in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) for his extremely hard work and our senior researcher Sophie Thorley?

The Conservatives left the Government with a data Bill that would have improved Britain's position as a leading tech-enabled economy and society. However, in Labour's hands, the Government have delivered only confusion and failure. A wide range of amendments have been tabled to Labour's Bill, highlighting key issues that required both leadership and agility from the Government, but they have failed on each of those areas. On AI and copyright, they let down our content creators. On sex and gender, they let down women and girls. On social media safety, they let down our children. The last Conservative Government turned Britain into a leading tech power, and our original Bill built on those achievements. Labour's Bill today takes the country backwards, and our country deserves so much better.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order. No. 118(6)),*

#### CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Amendment, Surrender and Compensation) (England and Wales) Order 2025, which was laid before this House on 27 March, be approved.—(*Gerald Jones.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## Havering Borough and Essex Devolution

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Gerald Jones.)*

6.57 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): I have proudly represented my home town of Romford in this House for some 24 years. An historic market town since 1247, it has been part of the county of Essex, formerly the kingdom of Essex, since the 6th century. Essex is my county. I was born at Rush Green hospital, Romford, Essex. I have lived all my life in Marshalls Park, Romford, Essex. I went to schools at Rise Park and Marshalls Park in Romford, Essex. My house has a Romford, Essex RM1 postcode. My home telephone number has a Romford, Essex 01708 dialling code. The church of St Edward the Confessor in Romford Market, where I was christened and confirmed, falls within the diocese of Chelmsford, Essex.

Essex county cricket club is our local cricket team, and we support it strongly. Romford football club, who were the proud winners of the vase trophy at Wembley one year ago, are part of the Essex senior football league. Last week, I hosted a St George's Day celebration at Romford golf club, which is part of the Essex Golf Union. Our local bowling clubs for Romford, Gidea Park and Hornchurch all fall under the Essex County Bowling Association.

The Bedfords Park visitor centre in the historic Essex village of Havering-atte-Bower is managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. Our water supply comes from Essex and Suffolk Water. The Essex chamber of commerce ably represents business interests throughout our fine county. On Essex Day, on 26 October every year, the mayor of Havering—my borough—raises the Essex flag from our town hall in Romford to demonstrate local pride and love for our historic county.

Romford is geographically Essex. We are historically Essex. We are culturally Essex and our social, sporting and commercial connections have always looked towards the county of Essex. My constituents and I are proud of our Essex identity, which transcends local government or administrative boundaries that are forever changing—as they are again today. Indeed, the London Government Act 1963 created a new administrative region, to be known as Greater London.

7 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Gerald Jones.)*

**Andrew Rosindell:** That is when our problems began. Rather than Romford borough council and Hornchurch urban district council being retained as part of the Essex county council administrative area, it was decided to incorporate Romford and Hornchurch into the new Greater London and create a “London borough of Havering”. Ever since then, our Essex identity has tragically been diminished and even discarded by some, as if centuries of history in belonging to such a great English county could end simply because of local government reorganisation, which was lazy in its construction and took no account of our history. This has led to 60 years of muddle, confusion and constant

debate about whether Romford and Havering remain part of Essex or not. The truth is, however, that the new London boroughs formed in 1965 were never removed from their historic counties of Essex, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent and Hertfordshire.

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech about a subject that is close to my constituents' hearts as well. Does he agree that other Government institutions should follow the lead of Mr Speaker in flying, for example, the Middlesex flag on Middlesex Day to celebrate the heritage of my constituents, and that the heritage of Essex should be celebrated in a similar way? Will he also join me in encouraging the Prime Minister—or No. 10 Downing Street—to follow the example of his predecessor in flying both the Middlesex flag on Middlesex Day and the flags of the other historic counties on their relevant days in the coming months?

**Andrew Rosindell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point about the flying of historic county flags. Middlesex Heritage, an organisation established by Russell Grant which has promoted the importance of the heritage of the ancient county of Middlesex, actually purchased two Middlesex flags. They gave them to the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and one of them was proudly flown from No. 10 Downing Street, London being part of the county of Middlesex. That tradition continued under the next Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Order. I think the hon. Gentleman means the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton.

**Andrew Rosindell:** Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let me say this to my hon. Friend. I do hope that the current Prime Minister will uphold that proud tradition and, later this month, fly the Middlesex flag. I think it would please a lot of people in the historic county were he to do so.

The historic counties remain today, and are proudly celebrated by local people throughout those counties and throughout England. Mr Speaker is demonstrating that by flying the historic county flags here in the House of Commons on all the historic county days. What happened six decades ago was only a change in local government structures, but sadly ceremonial arrangements were also changed, which was completely unnecessary and has added to the confusion, removing Romford from our rightful place under the Lord Lieutenancy of Essex. It seems that changes like this happen every few decades when new Governments take office, and we are seeing that again today. I say to the Minister, “Let us do this properly and get things right.”

In Havering, we have much in common with Brentwood, our neighbouring town, but not really with Brentford in west London. Epping is on our doorstep, but Ealing is a long way from our neck of the woods. We visit Southend but never go to Southall. What works for Hampstead is not always what is required in Havering, and it is unlikely that my constituents could tell you where Colliers Wood is, but Collier Row is a cherished part of Romford, Essex, and has many rural parts that feel like one is deep in the English countryside.



I am not suggesting that the people of Havering do not value the important connections that we enjoy with the City of London and what is known as the east end of London, because we do. So many families, including mine, have moved from the east side of London to Essex over the past century, and our links to London are vital to us for business, work, travel, tourism and, of course, family connections—not to mention going to the theatre in the west end. Coming from a borough that orbits the capital, I can tell the Minister that the people of Havering are not opposed to co-operating with boroughs, towns and communities to the east when it makes sense to do so, but Greater London, as a region with an overarching Mayor, is too big and too remote to meet the needs of a borough such as Havering, which considers itself to be part of Essex.

It is also very costly for us to be part of Greater London, as we pay tens of millions of pounds per year to the Greater London Authority. That equates to a vast sum for the GLA precept per household—an exorbitant amount of money that my constituents simply cannot afford. London-wide policies are imposed on us, such as planning decisions and, of course, the ultra low emission zone, but we do not get the services that we are meant to receive. They are completely inadequate, with policing being the worst example.

**James McMurdock** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Reform): The hon. Member makes an important point about ULEZ. In my constituency, there has been huge concern about the creep of ULEZ. Though denied, I understand that there have been conversations between local councils about Thurrock joining London. Does he agree that Thurrock, like his own constituency, is Essex through and through and should remain that way?

**Andrew Rosindell:** The hon. Gentleman is completely right. Havering and Thurrock are neighbouring boroughs, and we are Essex through and through. He is very lucky, because his constituency does not have London-wide policies imposed on it, so it avoids ULEZ and planning interference from the Mayor of London. It is free to make its own decisions—in fact, as a unitary authority. I commend the hon. Gentleman for what he said, and we are certainly on the same page on this issue.

We barely see policemen in Romford. They are mostly seconded into inner London areas, and this is compounded by the tri-borough arrangement that merges Havering, Barking and Dagenham, and Redbridge. We now get even fewer police on the streets of Havering.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): May I commend the hon. Gentleman? In all the time I have known him, he has always been British to the core—there is absolutely no doubt about that. Although I am a supporter of devolution—many matters are devolved in Northern Ireland—I understand the complexity. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that devolution is only as useful as the people in place to carry out the job? Effective people are the key. Does he further agree that devolution must have community support and that, regardless of whether it is in Essex or Strangford, the general public must always have the final say?

**Andrew Rosindell:** The hon. Gentleman is completely right: any type of devolution has to have the consent of the people. I have to say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do not believe that the current Greater London

devolution arrangement really has the consent of people in Havering. I think that if there were to be a referendum tomorrow, they would overwhelmingly vote to leave Greater London and be a unitary authority, but maybe there are other options. That is why this debate about Havering borough and Essex devolution is so pertinent today, and I look forward to the Minister's response to my arguments.

To return to what I was saying about the police, all but one of our police stations have been closed, and my constituents are deeply unhappy with the lack of police cover we receive, despite the huge amount we contribute financially to the Greater London Authority. This is no fault of the dedicated officers who form the day-to-day, rank-and-file backbone of our local police operation. The local force is dedicated and determined to respond to and prevent instances of criminality that blight the locality, but they are undermined by a lack of the resources that we in Havering pay for, but simply do not receive. Indeed, if you speak to my constituents, they will tell you that they believe Havering residents are in effect subsidising inner London areas and, through the Greater London Authority, funding what I believe has become a London-wide bureaucracy in City Hall and associated London-wide quangos. It is hard to see how the people of Havering benefit from that, and more often than not, it has no relevance to local people in my borough whatsoever.

The reason for my Adjournment debate is to ask the Minister to please allow us to look at alternatives. Now is the time to consider Havering's future. With devolution for what is termed Greater Essex now being implemented, this must surely be the right moment to examine a change that would give the people of Romford, Hornchurch, Upminster and Rainham hope that we could be part of something that better suits our local needs and goes with the grain of our historical identity. If the Government truly believe in genuine devolution, I hope the Minister will agree that local people should determine what is best for them, and a borough such as Havering must surely have the freedom to consider all options for our future. I request that the Government open up a meaningful conversation with the people of Havering about devolution for Essex that could include Havering, so that we can look sensibly and in detail at ideas for change.

Let me make one thing crystal clear. The freedom travel pass for pensioners is often cited as one of the benefits of being part of Greater London, as if the Mayor of London provides it to us for free, which is not the case. My borough pays millions to buy in to this scheme. It has always done so and will always continue to do so. We pay millions of pounds for the privilege, but I will always defend and support the freedom pass as our older folk deserve the benefits it gives them.

**Peter Fortune** (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend on an excellent speech. Does he agree that boroughs such as mine—Bromley—face many of the frustrations that his constituents in Havering face, and that we are also contributing huge amounts of money to the Mayor of London?

**Andrew Rosindell:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend is completely right. The people of Romford feel the same as the people of Bromley, Ruislip and other parts of outer Greater London who are disenchanted with the current settlement.

[Andrew Rosindell]

On the freedom pass, I have long argued that the scheme should be extended to all council areas where Transport for London operates. Indeed, the Elizabeth line runs to Shenfield and the Central line runs to Epping. Other TfL services operate in local authority areas that go way beyond the supremely outdated boundaries of Greater London, to the west side of London in particular, so any travel schemes like the freedom pass must surely be offered equally to all the local authorities that TfL serves. The freedom pass for older people and others should not be used as a reason never to change the structure of local government in what I call the capital region of the UK, which now stretches far beyond the Greater London boundaries of the 1960s.

May I also make it clear that I do not agree with the creation of super-unitary authorities? I believe they will prove to be very remote from towns, villages and neighbourhoods and from real people who want local democracy to be truly local, with councillors who genuinely know their wards and understand the areas they represent. If the Government are, however, set on going down this path, as they are now doing in Essex, I believe it is inevitable that boroughs in Greater London will go in the same direction at some stage, with amalgamations of councils taking place. Already, there is much discussion about this prospect, with varying proposals being put forward and openly spoken of by think-tanks, among local government officials and in London elite circles, of course.

Let me say here and now that if Havering is destined for eventual merger with east London boroughs in some new super-council configuration, that is not something my constituents or I would support. We in Havering are a town and country borough, with an Essex heritage and a special character that local people cherish and will fight to retain.

So, based on the principle the Government are already pursuing with the creation of expanded unitary authorities, I ask the Minister to please consider Havering for collaboration with, for example, our neighbouring Essex local authorities such as Brentwood or Epping Forest, both of which are also served by Transport for London and have much in common with Romford and Havering.

It has been evident for a long time that Havering is at a crossroads, and it is now becoming abundantly clear to anyone who dares to look that either we continue on a path of future London integration or we take a new path in line with our heritage, which fully realises our Essex roots, culturally, economically, and politically. I, alongside the people of Havering, strongly argue that this second path is the one we should, and indeed must, walk.

It could just be, much to the surprise of many of my constituents, that the new Labour Government's plan for devolution and local government reorganisation provides the opportunity we need to finally take control of our own affairs and have our future restored to becoming part of Essex local government structures once again. It would be a great plus for the people of Romford if it was a Labour Government that actually delivered what they have been asking for for so long.

This is what I have been fighting for over the course of my entire political life—not as a personal preoccupation, but because it is what everyone in my constituency believes,

from local families and business owners to pensioners and market traders, and indeed young people. They all tell me that is what they want: they want their identity restored to being part of Essex and having our local control away from central London and City Hall. It is high time that their voices were listened to and this opportunity was seized to shape Havering and Essex for the better.

I believe that today we have a once-in-almost-a-century chance to look afresh at the old boundaries of Greater London that were constructed six decades ago. The entire region around our great United Kingdom capital of London has changed dramatically since those days, and we should therefore seize this moment to be bold and look at options for change that local people would be happy to see, thus giving my constituents in Romford, Hornchurch and across the Borough of Havering hope for a much better structure of local government, rightly determined and supported by the people it is established to serve.

7.17 pm

**The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for securing this important debate and raising the question of Havering borough's place in relation to devolution in Essex. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for championing his area and for the very clear passion that he has for the place he represents. One thing that is special about Parliament is that connection and the pride with which Members speak about the place they live in and represent, and I absolutely heard that in every canter through the historic county of Essex and just how rooted it is in that kind of county, ceremonial, historic identity. I accept that completely.

Although our reorganisation in Greater Manchester was a bit later, in 1974, many of us still feel that we are Lancashire to our heart, even though we are part of the Greater Manchester combined authority, and I think it is possible to be proud of both. We are proud in the way that we look to Manchester and the success of that city region, but proud too of our historical roots in Lancashire, so I think the two are possible.

The hon. Gentleman might find it useful to know that one of the first things that we did upon coming into government was change the way the county flags are flown. For a very long time, the Department that I represent held all the historic county flags for England in the Department, and whenever the historic county day came up through the course of the year that flag would be flown from Marsham Street, at what I would say is a very average office block. I did not think that that quite gave status to the historic counties, and it did not give the opportunity for Members of Parliament and visitors to see the county flags. They have been transferred to Parliament, to the Speaker's Office. In addition to Counties Week, 21 to 27 July, when all the county flags of England are in Parliament Square, the county flags will be flown in New Palace Yard on the day of each county. I think that is the appropriate place and I hope Members will search out their flag on that day. Identity and belonging is really important.

As hon. Members will be aware, the Government have made it a clear mission to extend devolution to all corners of England, while fixing the foundations of local

government. Our work with councils across Greater Essex demonstrates the strength of that ambition, as we endeavour to establish a new county combined authority for the area while delivering local government reorganisation.

The Government recently conducted a public consultation on our proposals to establish a mayoral combined county authority across Essex county council, Thurrock council and Southend-on-Sea city council, as part of the devolution priority programme. Responses to the consultation are currently being assessed and I will shortly make a decision on whether to proceed with the necessary legislation, subject to further consent from the councils involved. The three existing council areas firmly form the currently proposed footprint for the future devolution of Greater Essex, as the consultation was conducted on that basis.

The three councils, along with the district and borough councils across Essex, were also invited in February to submit proposals for a new unitary structure for the county. As requested, they submitted an interim plan in March and we provided feedback to support the development of final proposals, which are now due in September. It is for the local councils to develop those proposals and for the Government to assess them on that basis. It is currently not envisaged that the boundaries of Greater London will be changed, or that the proposed Greater Essex mayoral combined county authority will be expanded, although the latter would be possible at a later date should it be locally desired and should statutory tests be met.

As for changing the boundaries of the councils themselves across Greater Essex, that will be for the councils to propose if they wish, as they develop and submit proposals

to the Government for unitary local government in that area. We remain open to discussions with any council across England on its vision for its region, and we continue to encourage discussions across councils and areas as we deliver on our ambitious agenda for local government.

I hope that this brief and by no means exhaustive summary of our plans for Greater Essex devolution and local government reorganisation has provided helpful context to the hon. Member for Romford. I understand completely his point about Havering being anchored in Greater London, but I hope he takes some reassurance that the guidance we sent out throughout the process has anchored two things that he touched on in his speech.

First, the administrative boundaries being drawn are about efficiency and the importance of having a single tier of local government that people can hold to account and that is sustainable in the future. But it is in no way intended to cut across the identities that people feel and are proud of. No council should try to cut across the historic identity that local areas feel.

Secondly, every council, regardless of size or where it is in England, should always root itself in local communities and local neighbourhoods. The days of councils being disconnected and removed from local communities are long gone, and that empowers local councillors to be the frontline community convenors that they stood for election to be.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.23 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 7 May 2025*

[SIR JOHN HAYES *in the Chair*]

## Automotive Manufacturing: Employment

9.30 am

**Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for employment in the automotive manufacturing sector.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir John. The automotive industry is an important part of the UK economy, contributing £93 billion in turnover and £22 billion in value added. It invests around £4 billion each year in research and development and employs around 0.8 million people across the wider industry. Many of these are high-skilled, high-paid jobs, of which a considerable proportion are outside London and the south-east, but I am pleased to say that some of these high-value jobs are in the south-east, in places like my constituency of Reigate.

In Burgh Heath, just down the road from Epsom, we find the UK headquarters of Toyota. It is not only one of the biggest employers in the local area; it is also an eco-HQ. In a project that started in 2014, Toyota partnered with Kew royal botanic gardens and the Surrey Wildlife Trust to create a landscaped oasis full of native species from the surrounding countryside, complete with an orchard and meadow. It is wonderful to see a business taking the time and energy to ensure its HQ fits into our special corner of Surrey.

And it does not stop there. Outside the site, Toyota has supported many local initiatives, from providing rooms for community meetings to providing buses for local groups and charities. In 2024, more than £40,000 in grants were given to support the work of local groups, including, to name just a few: the Brigitte Trust; Home-Start Epsom, Ewell and Banstead; St Catherine's hospice; and Warren Mead school parents and friends association. Before I talk more broadly about the automotive industry, I want to take the opportunity to thank Toyota GB for its significant contribution to the Banstead, Burgh Heath and Epsom area.

The automotive industry is important to this country and our economy, and it is vital that it is not smothered by over-regulation, over-taxation and green initiatives. Only by creating an environment that is conducive to growth will we see the creation of more high-quality jobs. UK car and commercial vehicle production saw a significant decline of 11.6% in February 2025. Worryingly, that marks the 12th consecutive month of declining car production. This must be an important wake-up call. More must be done to protect the automotive industry we already have, to help it grow and to encourage inward investment in new plants and new technologies. It can only continue to create new jobs and innovative technologies with growth-supporting policies.

The automotive industry accounts for over 12% of total UK goods exports, generating £115 billion of trade in total automotive imports and exports. Eight out of 10 cars produced in the UK are exported overseas

to 140 different countries, but automotive manufacturers now face additional US tariff costs of around £1.9 billion, which will have a significant and detrimental impact on the industry. The USA is the UK's second largest car export market after the EU, with exports of over 101,000 units in 2024. These tariffs have material implications for competitiveness, investment and export potential, and it is vital that the Government's policymaking reflects this new protectionist and uncertain environment. With this massive setback to the industry, it is now even more important that we get things right domestically, to create an environment that stimulates growth for this important industry. I want to raise some of the biggest challenges here in the UK, and I ask the Minister to confirm her plans to address them.

In simple terms, for an industry to thrive, it needs to be able to manufacture products at competitive cost, employ people with the skills it needs, have free access to a market for its products without barriers or restrictions, and not be taxed to high heaven, so that it can reinvest in innovation and growth. A good product will always do well. If it is something someone needs, if it provides value for money and if it makes their life easier, they will buy it—it really is that straightforward—so let us talk about the zero emission vehicle mandate challenge first.

The ZEV mandate sets out the proportion of new zero emission cars and vans that manufacturers are required to produce each year up to 2030: 80% of new cars and 70% of new vans sold in Great Britain must be electric vehicles by 2030, increasing to 100% by 2035. Part of the reason for introducing this policy was to provide investment certainty for the charging sector to expand the network, given that lack of charging points is one of the things that puts consumers off buying an electric car. There can be no doubt that it is a well-intentioned policy, but as the old saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Notably, the moving of goalposts by Governments of various colours in recent years has been deeply unhelpful. The previous Government made the decision to delay the ban on new diesel and petrol cars by five years, from 2030 to 2035, whereas the new Government have reversed that. Putting aside the question of which position is the correct one, such chopping and changing is not fair on the automotive industry, which needs certainty and consistency so that it can deliver what is expected of it while still growing its businesses.

I do, however, recognise the Government's recent announcement about increasing the flexibility of the ZEV mandate, which is welcomed by the industry and shows that the Government are listening. In particular, I welcome the reduction in fines for missing targets and the allowance for all forms of hybrid cars until 2035. However, I would suggest that the whole approach in this area needs to be reconsidered as a priority. Tinkering is not enough.

The ZEV mandate targets are incredibly challenging for businesses to meet. It makes no sense to expect businesses to dictate what products their customers should buy, when we all know that consumer preference and need should drive the products that a business sells, and rightly so. In 2025, ZEV sales will need to increase by 43% for cars and 171% for vans for automotive businesses to achieve the mandate targets. That is not achievable, and a fine of £12,000 per vehicle is levied on those businesses for every missed EV sale.

[Rebecca Paul]

The automotive industry cannot win on this one. Consumers are not ready to buy EVs yet, because of the lack of charging infrastructure, the battery range issues and the cost, but the automotive businesses will be held responsible and expected to pay the price. If we continue in that way, we will see contraction of the industry, plant closures and job losses, all in the name of net zero. That has already started, with Vauxhall owner Stellantis announcing plans to close a van factory in Luton that employs around 1,100 people.

The industry has already invested billions in bringing more than 130 ZEV models to market. Despite spending some £4.5 billion in market support for EVs in 2024, it still missed last year's target by some way. Such a level of support from industry is unsustainable and is diverting resources away from investment in new technology, models, plants, and research and development. I urge the Government to take responsibility for their role in delivering charging infrastructure and lowering energy costs, rather than beating businesses over the head for their own failings.

I also urge the Minister to review the mandate targets as soon as possible and to consider other, more effective ways of driving growth in EV take-up. It would make much more sense to incentivise consumers, rather than penalising businesses. The ZEV mandate targets cannot magically drive demand out of thin air. What we need is more carrot and less stick.

Has the Minister considered such alternative options as reducing the VAT on EV sales and public charging, or offering plug-in grants for cars? Those could be straightforward and effective ways of boosting consumer demand. If the Government are wedded to the current draconian ZEV mandate approach, the fair thing would be for them to commit to delivering public charging infrastructure on equivalent targets.

For example, in 2025 the target is for 28% of new car sales to be electric, so the Government must ensure there are sufficient public charging points across the UK to serve those new EVs by the end of 2025. If the Government fail to do that, the shortfall should be offset against the fines levied on the automotive industry, reducing what it has to pay. Surely that is fairer. The Government need to play their role and must also be held to account when they do not deliver.

Before moving on, I want to touch on domestic energy prices, which apply to all manufacturing industries, not just automotive.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing the debate. I did some research on the industry back home in Northern Ireland, and I am sorry that I cannot make a speech because I have sponsored an event at 10 am, and it cannot happen if I am not there.

We have a vibrant automotive sector in Northern Ireland that provides some 11% of employment and 13% of gross value added. That is down not just to Wrightbus, which has great sales across the United Kingdom and further afield, but to the rest of the automotive industry in Northern Ireland. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government need to step up in supporting businesses and helping research and development? We have the skills, but we need the support,

and today's debate is a significant step forward for the industry across this great United Kingdom. Research and development is on the mainland, yes, but it is also in Northern Ireland. The Minister knows that already and, I suspect, is already on it.

**Rebecca Paul:** I agree with the hon. Member on the importance of supporting businesses. We must make sure that we remove obstacles and barriers that hinder growth. I hope that conversation starts today and that we can get to a better place where we support our amazing automotive industry, which delivers so much for this country, including Northern Ireland.

Energy costs must come down. The industry cannot manufacture at a competitive cost with energy costs being so high compared with what other countries pay. We must not shoot ourselves in the foot with a net zero obsession. We must make sensible decisions on the energy mix to ensure energy security and value for money so that our manufacturing industry can compete on the global stage. That means investing in nuclear and not making the mistake of thinking that solar and wind are a silver bullet.

I urge the Minister to share her views on how she intends to reduce energy costs for manufacturing industries in the short to long term so that they are better able to compete. I recognise that some of this goes across many briefs, so I appreciate that this is not something over which she has full control.

Another important challenge is ensuring that we have a skilled workforce. Research by the Institute of the Motor Industry suggests that around 107,000 additional technicians will be needed by 2030. That is an amazing opportunity for this country. The more the industry grows, the more jobs and opportunity there will be, but we must ensure that we have people here with the skills to take up the jobs to ensure the industry's success.

That is why it is so important to support apprenticeships, which are a great way for young people to gain the skills they need while working. A survey from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders in February 2025 found that the UK automotive sector will increase apprenticeship numbers by 16% in 2025, with opportunities spanning manufacturing, supply chain logistics and vehicle maintenance. The most in-demand roles are design and development engineers, EV technicians and specialists in batteries and power electronics. That equates to over 700 new apprenticeships available among UK automakers.

I want to take this opportunity to mention East Surrey college in my constituency, which offers full-time and part-time qualifications in vehicle technology, maintenance and electric/hybrid vehicles. I recently visited and was impressed by the expert teachers, the well-equipped workshops with industry standard equipment, and the very talented and engaged students. We must ensure that we provide the right courses so that people with the right skills will be available to fill job opportunities in the industry. East Surrey college is certainly playing its part.

I ask the Minister to clarify what the impact of abolishing level 7 apprenticeships will be on the automotive industry and how she plans to mitigate any detriment. Additionally, I urge her to consider how the new Government's Employment Rights Bill will impact on



the automotive industry. In February 2025, a Motor Ombudsman survey found that 58% of businesses reported difficulty in recruiting qualified technicians to meet growing workload, and that those difficulties would be made worse by the Employment Rights Bill, which is causing businesses to re-evaluate their hiring strategies.

It is vital that the UK remains competitive and that the industry is not further burdened when it already faces so many challenges. It is clear that the rise in employer national insurance contributions is putting additional pressure on the automotive industry, with a cost of £200 million. The increased cost of doing business in the UK will reduce inward investment, economic growth and ultimately jobs. The Institute of the Motor Industry stated:

“These changes are likely to have a significant impact on costs for small businesses that operate in the automotive sector, which is already facing a skills gap of 20,000+ vacancies.”

It went on to say that the additional costs will

“dampen investment in training and continuous professional development”.

If the Government are really committed to boosting job opportunities and growth in the automotive sector, they need to reflect on some of their recent policies. Just saying that growth is a priority does not make it so. They need policies that do not put obstacles in the way.

Lastly, I want to raise the challenge of taxation. In the interests of time I will not speak in detail, but the automotive industry has raised concerns about recent announcements on proposals to ban employee car ownership schemes and changes to capital allowances and benefit-in-kind treatment for double-cab pick-up vehicles. The SMMT is concerned that those changes will

“undermine the market, hit profitability and viability and have serious consequences for UK tax returns, automotive OEMs and their employees, and sole trader/small business operations.”

Will the Minister confirm whether there are any plans to remove or adjust the vehicle excise duty expensive car supplement?

That is enough from me for now. I will bring my comments to a close so that anyone else who wishes to contribute has the time to do so. I thank all hon. Members for attending the debate and showing their support for the automotive industry.

9.45 am

**Mrs Sureena Brackenridge** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir John. I thank the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) for introducing this timely debate, particularly in the light of the turmoil and uncertainty caused by US tariffs.

As on many occasions, I rise to champion a flagship site of the UK automotive sector: Jaguar Land Rover's engine manufacturing centre at the i54, which is just outside my constituency. That world-class facility employs 1,700 people, with many of them living in my constituency. I welcome the 100 more roles recently announced as part of JLR's drive towards electrification, which is part of an additional £18 billion investment over the next five years.

The UK automotive sector is a cornerstone of our manufacturing economy, generating £93 billion in turnover last year and supporting hundreds of thousands of

skilled jobs. Yet, today, the sector faces serious uncertainty following the announcement of a 25% US tariff on automotive imports. I am therefore here to seek urgent clarifications. First, what progress has been made in negotiations with the US to remove or reduce those damaging tariffs? Secondly, in the worst-case scenario—the absence of a deal—how will the Government act to support the industry through the immediate and longer-term challenges?

The US is a crucial market for JLR, accounting for around a quarter of its global sales. A prolonged 25% tariff would hit the business and the UK auto sector disproportionately. We need a deal that prioritises reducing those barriers. I support the calm, clear and statesmanlike leadership of our Prime Minister amidst the turbulence and erratic policy shifts from across the Atlantic. However, if a deal cannot be secured, the Government must act swiftly to protect jobs, sustain investment and safeguard our industrial base.

In the west midlands, we are talking about a potential £6.2 billion hit—the biggest regional impact in the UK. The support announced at JLR's Solihull site in April is welcome. To support the transition to net zero and the automotive sector, the Prime Minister has introduced pragmatic changes: easing EV targets, allowing cleaner petrol cars to count towards quotas and extending hybrid sales to 2035. Those realistic steps back innovation, while keeping our ambitions intact.

We must now fully deliver on our promise to protect British industry from global shocks. That includes supporting time to pay arrangements, to help manage cash flow; cutting energy costs; and creating a new advanced manufacturing partnership with the west midlands to bolster supply chains and drive growth.

Finally, I want to highlight another reason why JLR is such a vital employer in my constituency: its outstanding commitment to skills and apprenticeships. With 350 new places across BTEC and T-level routes, from engineering to electrification, it is building the workforce for the future that we so badly need. It is a powerful example of how business and education work in partnership, hand in hand, to secure long-term prosperity.

I again ask the Minister, what progress has been made in securing a deal with the US? If one cannot be reached, what specific support will the Government provide to protect this vital sector and ensure that world-class facilities such as JLR's i54 site can continue to thrive?

9.49 am

**Antonia Bance** (Tipton and Wednesbury) (Lab): Thank you for indulging me, Sir John, and for letting me speak after I walked in so late. I also thank the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) and congratulate her on securing this important debate.

We have heard today how strategically important the automotive industry is for our country and about the £93 billion turnover across the industry and its supply chain. I would also like to flag how important the industry is to many of our regional economies. In my constituency, which covers Tipton, Wednesbury and Coseley—the home of the industrial revolution—we have 21,000 manufacturing jobs across 1,000 firms, many of them in the supply chain for the automotive industry.

[*Antonia Bance*]

I recently visited J.H. Lavender & Co., which makes cast aluminium casings for JLR's new electric Land Rover. It was incredible to see the process go from the silver liquid all the way through to the finished casing. Those world-class products are made in a family firm in the heart of my constituency. Truflo makes industrial air-cooling fans that go in industrial vehicles—the construction and heavy goods vehicles we are all so familiar with—and exports across the world, including to China and the US. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Mrs Brackenridge) so eloquently outlined, the west midlands is also the home of Jaguar Land Rover, with its 34,000 jobs—many of those people live in my constituency—and 200,000 jobs in the supply chain.

The automotive industry faces two key challenges: transition and tariffs. On the transition piece, automotive is critical if we are to reach net zero. I do not believe that this country will give up its cars—I certainly do not want to give up mine—so it matters that we move towards net zero in a way that is sustainable and that supports the freedom that owning a car brings. We can see that the investment towards that net zero future has already begun, whether it be JLR's investment of £18 billion over the coming five years or the investment elsewhere in the industry. I was so glad the Prime Minister went to JLR in April to announce the flexibilities that have been needed for so long in the ZEV mandate to smooth the requirements, cut the fines and ensure that there is a continued role for hybrids.

We know there is more to do to increase the uptake of electric vehicles, whether that be on consumer demand or the charging infrastructure we need. More broadly, I hope that the industrial strategy, when we see it, takes action on the issues that have held back advanced manufacturing: skills, access to finance—particularly in the supply chain and for smaller manufacturers—and energy costs. I was absolutely appalled to hear Nissan tell the Business and Trade Committee two weeks ago that its plant in Sunderland is its most expensive in the world, because of the energy costs. It will be great to hear the Industry Minister's thoughts ahead of the industrial strategy, although I know she will have more to say in the coming months.

Let me turn now to tariffs. This morning, I talked to Richard Parker, our Mayor of the West Midlands, and his team. They have produced research by Steve Rigby, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East touched on, showing a £6.2 billion hit to the west midlands economy from the US automotive tariffs if nothing changes—the biggest regional hit in the country. Some 52% of firms in our local manufacturing base are warning about profits because of the tariffs.

JLR alone accounts for 4% of UK goods exports. We need a deal, and soon. I thank the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, the Business Secretary and the Industry Minister for their calm approach to the negotiations. That is right, but we must get a deal; otherwise, that impact will be coming down the road in my constituency and in all our constituencies in terms of jobs and the critical research and development that will help us navigate the transition that we need to electric cars and net zero. When it comes to a deal, fast is better than perfect: that is the message from the west midlands automotive industry to my colleagues in the Government.

I would like to hear from Ministers what options they intend to explore to help the industry, and especially the employment base in the automotive industry supply chain in my constituency, if—God forbid—we get no deal. The Chair of the Business and Trade Committee set out a number of options in a letter to Ministers earlier this week. It would be good to hear what consideration is being given to things such as a reduction in employer costs, help with energy costs, domestic sales subsidies for EVs, an increase in research and development tax credits, and help with cash flow, particularly for the smaller companies in the supply chain, which tell me time and again that they need that.

Then, of course, there is the £2 billion that was allocated in the Budget to the automotive industry's transition, which we will hear more about in the industrial strategy. It would be good to know whether that can be used to help in the event that there is no deal and there is a prolonged period of tariffs. But that money is necessary for the transition—for research and development, and for moving our workforces to the new industry's new production techniques and requirements—so it will have to be replaced in time.

My colleagues in Government know how urgent this issue is and have been working at pace to get the deal that our automotive sector needs. They have the support of all of us in this House, and I urge them to continue that work for this vital sector of the UK economy, of which we are so proud.

**Sir John Hayes (in the Chair):** We will move to the winding-up speeches now but, given how much time we have left, I emphasise that Front Benchers should not fall into the Gladstone trap of becoming intoxicated by the exuberance of their own verbosity.

9.56 am

**Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir John. I thank the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) for securing this important debate.

The UK's automotive industry is a cornerstone of our economy, contributing £93 billion and providing many high-skilled, high-wage jobs across the country, which pay 13% above the national average. Crucially, many are located outside London and the south-east. However, the industry faces intense global competition, supply chain pressures and the ongoing demands of the transition to net zero, as well as Trump's disastrous tariffs, which are deliberately targeted at the automotive sector. The UK Government, under the Conservatives and now Labour, have struggled and failed to grow the economy. The automotive sector will need to be at the forefront of any plan to get on to the right path again.

When I visited BMW's Mini plant in Cowley earlier this year—

**Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for trade, for visiting the Cowley Mini plant in Oxfordshire. All Liberal Democrat Oxfordshire MPs attended; it was a pleasurable visit and we saw the amazing work being done there. I am worried that the Government are asleep at the wheel on this issue and that we will see job cuts at Cowley as a result of the very high energy costs in the United Kingdom. I would like the Government to do more to tackle that and, potentially,

to support the industry. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should announce greater flexibility, benefiting not just luxury manufacturers such as JLR—that is very welcome—but those that make cars intended for the mass market?

**Clive Jones:** I certainly agree with what my hon. Friend says about energy prices, and I will talk about that a bit later.

When I visited BMW's plant, I met hard-working staff, who are the most at risk if the Government continue to get this wrong. Whether plants are being closed or investment scaled down, people lose their livelihoods and a rich history of manufacturing at the heart of Britain is lost, possibly forever.

This sector is at a crossroads: with the right support, it can lead the way in innovation, climate action and economic resilience, but without swift and strategic action, we risk losing a competitive advantage built up over generations. That is why more must be done to end the uncertainties that the car industry faces, and that starts by building consumer confidence in electric vehicles. The previous Conservative Government failed to support a thriving electric vehicle market in the UK, implementing chaotic U-turns that badly hurt the industry, and they continually failed to deliver the charging infrastructure needed to boost demand, create jobs and cut emissions. The Government must right that wrong by cutting VAT on public charging by 5%, by investing urgently in schemes to speed up the installation of rapid charging points throughout the country and by making it as affordable as possible to own an EV by reducing electricity prices that are passed on to the consumer.

One of the clearest calls from the sector is on energy costs. UK automotive businesses face electricity prices that are, on average, twice as high as those in the EU; gas costs are nearly 60% higher. That is an unsustainable burden. If we are serious about reshoring manufacturing and making the UK a global hub for ZEVs, we must address that urgently.

Ensuring that we have a strong trading relationship with our economic allies is vital for supporting UK automotive employment. The EU remains our largest trading partner for vehicles, and electric vehicles are now the biggest share of UK automotive exports by value. With the next EU-UK summit on the horizon, the time to act is now. We must give investors and manufacturers certainty and protect the employment and regional growth that depend on it.

What contingency planning is in place to protect UK manufacturers and exporters if President Trump's damaging tariffs remain in place? What action is being taken to reduce the UK's industrial energy costs to ensure a level playing field with our global competitors? What is the status of the £200 million that was announced in the autumn Budget for charging infrastructure but is in limbo? What is the status of the rapid charging fund, which has delivered ultra-rapid en-route hubs across the country? Will the UK formally seek to accede to the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention to provide manufacturers with a more flexible and reliable origin framework?

**Sir John Hayes (in the Chair):** I remind the remaining Back Benchers that interventions should be pertinent and pithy.

10.3 am

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir John. I begin by drawing the House's attention to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) on not only securing this debate but delivering a superb opening speech. She spoke with passion for the automotive sector, particularly Toyota in her constituency, and she spoke with realism about the challenges that we face, and the other way that is possible to ensure that consumers get to choose vehicles of the future that are greener and cleaner and do not rely on fossil fuels, but do not necessarily fit in with the Government's chosen winner, despite the fact that they claim to be technology neutral. That is battery electric, whose sales figures, once we remove fleet sales, are utterly appalling because people simply do not want to buy one of those vehicles.

Employment in the automotive manufacturing sector—a sector that has long been the backbone of British industry, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs and driving innovation—is the foundation of regional economies across our great United Kingdom. My constituency does not have any major vehicle manufacturers, but it sits in the absolute heart of motorsport valley. The motorsport sector and its supply chains do so much to create the next big thing and innovate. They find solutions, yes, for speed and the racetrack, but there is often a direct translation from the race car to the road car. So much British innovation in motorsport has found itself in the cars that I am sure all of us in this Chamber and people across the country drive today.

It is therefore with great concern that I speak about the marked lack of support for the vital automotive sector under this Labour Government. Let us be clear that this is not a new challenge: automotive manufacturing has been under pressure for many years from the combined forces of global competition, supply chain shocks and the urgent transition to cleaner technologies—note the plural, cleaner technologies; there is not just one. We now see a deeper, more systemic failure, which is rooted in the inability of this Government to deliver on their own promises and provide the strategic direction that the industry so desperately needs.

Take, for instance, Labour's 2024 manifesto commitment to “supercharge the electric vehicle revolution” and make the UK “the best place in the world to manufacture electric cars”. Those are bold words yet one year into their term, we see precious little action, only rhetoric that seems to accept an electric future rather than a technology-neutral approach.

**Freddie van Mierlo:** Will the hon. Member give way on that point?

**Greg Smith:** I will give way to my constituency neighbour.

**Freddie van Mierlo:** Does the hon. Member regret the lack of action to bring forward battery manufacturing in the UK under the Conservative Government?

**Greg Smith:** What I regret is the ZEV mandate, which is why I voted against it at the time. It puts shackles around our automotive industry, and it needs to be revisited so that our automotive sector has the freedom to get on, innovate and provide future solutions that consumers might actually want to buy.



[Greg Smith]

Even with the electric obsession, the promised gigafactory developments remain stalled or mired in uncertainty, commercial investment incentives have been vague at best and crucial supply chain support has failed to materialise in any meaningful way. Labour also pledged to spend on a national training programme to reskill workers for the green transition, yet we still await details of how, when and, crucially, where that will be delivered.

The skills gap in the automotive industry is widening by the day. Thousands of jobs are at risk, not because there is no demand for people to work in that sector, but because we do not have a pipeline of trained, job-ready individuals. The industry has been crying out for a co-ordinated national effort to address this, and what it has received instead is a patchwork of pilot schemes and a lot of ministerial hot air.

Contrast that with the pragmatic and targeted steps taken by the last Government, which launched the Advanced Propulsion Centre and the Faraday battery challenge—programmes that secured investment in cutting-edge technologies and laid the groundwork for the electric vehicle sector in particular. To attract global investment, we need to back British innovation and give investors confidence in our long-term industrial strategy. In government, the Conservatives also took real action to support jobs: the automotive transformation fund, which was backed by Conservative Ministers, delivered vital support to manufacturers, and let us not forget the commitment made to freeports, which are already starting to attract inward investment and create highly skilled jobs, including in areas directly linked to automotive logistics and component manufacture.

Now, under Labour, we see dithering where there should be decision making. The industry does not need more consultations; it needs action. Businesses are ready to invest—yes, in electric, but also in synthetics and hydrogen. However, they need the certainty that they can get on and do that. They need clarity on planning reform, energy prices, trade policy and the Government's commitment to industrial growth.

The Government must address the ever-growing training deficit. They must launch a comprehensive industry-led training strategy that spans apprenticeships, technical colleges and adult reskilling programmes. It must be tailored to the needs of automotive employers, not devised in isolation by Whitehall, where the Government pick the winners and losers at odds with what consumers want to buy. The Government must do more to attract foreign direct investment into the automotive sector. That means tax incentives that are actually internationally competitive, a planning system that works at pace and a stable regulatory environment. Labour's flirtation with regulatory overreach is already spooking the investors.

The Government must ensure that the UK's de-fossilisation transition is an opportunity for jobs and growth, not a burden on industry. I repeat: that means genuine technologically-neutral support, embracing other technologies beyond battery electric, such as synthetic fuels and hydrogen, as well as putting realistic deadlines around any transition.

The automotive manufacturing sector is not asking for handouts; it is asking for clarity and leadership. The last Conservative Government took steps in that direction. Labour, in contrast, have offered slogans over substance,

and pledges over performance. We cannot allow this Government's inaction to cost Britain its place at the forefront of the global automotive industry. The time to act is now.

10.11 am

**The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir John, and to have this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) on securing the debate and on her words; she gave a very helpful summary of the importance of the automotive sector to the UK. She is absolutely right about the number of jobs it creates and the amount that it brings into the economy, as well as the importance of Toyota in her area, which is not far from mine—I know how important Toyota is. Other Members have talked about the importance of the factories in their constituencies, stabilising whole economies through their supply chains. I thank the hon. Member for Reigate for her valid points.

I start by saying that we need to deal with the world as we find it, and the world we find today is a difficult one in terms of tariffs. I will talk about those in more detail. There are many challenges facing the automotive sector. However, as nobody has mentioned it, I will champion the trade deal with India that we secured yesterday. This is good for the automotive industry in the UK, in particular JLR and our high-end manufacturing—they are going to win from this deal.

Automotive tariffs into India are historically incredibly high at 100%, and we have negotiated bringing them down to 10% under a new quota system. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade said that we could see 22,000 high-end cars from the UK being sold into the Indian market. That is very substantial for those high-end vehicle manufacturers, and hopefully it is something that everyone will welcome. We worked with the automotive industry as we developed our relationship with India and came to this deal, so we are confident that it is a good deal for the industry.

Members rightly pointed to the challenging issues of the day in their contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Mrs Brackenridge) and I spoke yesterday about those issues. We will continue to do so, just as she will continue to champion JLR, the number of people it employs and the importance of that site. I will come on to our approach to the US and what we are doing, but I hope that we will continue to have those conversations about JLR. My hon. Friend the Member for Tipton and Wednesbury (Antonia Bance) also talked about the importance of her area in the supply chain, quoting companies such as Lavender's, which is so important in JLR's production. I will say more about our approach to the US in a minute.

Of course, it is about not just the US but the rapid growth of China as a major car manufacturer, high energy costs—as Members have rightly said—and the transition to electric vehicles. That has led to lower sales and volumes of production, which in turn has put pressure on the supply chain, increasing the risk of job losses across the sector. This Government are not prepared to sit back and leave industry to face those challenges alone. I would say that I speak to the automotive industry every week, but often more regularly, and since the introduction of tariffs I have been having regular

roundtables with the whole affected sector and talking in detail about what needs to be done. We are determined to do what is necessary to help our car industry to weather the storm and achieve the long-term growth that we all want to see.

Where manufacturers are telling us that there are policy hurdles, we are listening, responding and helping industry to overcome them. That is why we launched the zero emission vehicle mandate consultation back in December, and in April we announced significant changes to the mandate, which I think everyone in this place welcomes, to ease the path for the automotive sector's transition to electric vehicles. We have increased the flexibilities within the mandate for manufacturers up to 2030, smoothing the transition towards zero emission vehicles. We are allowing hybrid cars, such as the Toyota Corolla and the Nissan e-POWER, to be sold until 2035 to ease the transition and give industry more time to prepare. British supercar brands, such as McLaren and Aston Martin, have been exempted altogether from the 2030 phase-out date.

Crucially, we are also boosting demand for electric vehicles by improving charging infrastructure—an issue that several Members mentioned. The current statistic on charging infrastructure is that there are now 76,500 public charging points, and the National Audit Office recently found that we were on track to deliver 300,000 charging points. However, I hear what Members are saying, and I heard what the hon. Member for Reigate said about the need to go further. Of course, we are working with our colleagues in the Department for Transport to do just that.

Moving on to the US trade deal, Members will have seen speculation in the *Financial Times* this morning that we are very close to a deal. Of course, we cannot comment on that, but we know that we are in a good starting position. We have good relationships with our colleagues in the US, and the Business Secretary has been having regular conversations with them; the Prime Minister has also been talking to the President.

We know that tariffs are a real concern for the sector, and we saw JLR temporarily having to pause shipments to the US last month. From the outset, we have been talking to the industry and playing back our approach to them all the way along. They very much support our calm and cool-headed response, as well as the discussions that we are having with the US. That is what industry wants us to do, and that is exactly what we are doing.

At the beginning of April, we launched a request for input to hear from business about their concerns and assessments of what the next steps need to be. We are working through all those responses now. Following that request for input—it was not a consultation; for some reason we have to call it a “request for input”, but I do not know why—we are looking at the feedback and my colleagues are continuing to talk to the industry every day.

We will always act in the best interests of UK consumers and businesses, and throughout the last few weeks we have rightly focused on negotiating a deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Tipton and Wednesbury mentioned the letter from the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North (Liam Byrne), and other Members mentioned preparations in the event that there is not a deal. Obviously, our focus is

on getting that deal, but we would not be doing what we should if we did not also look at the available options in the event that there was not a deal. Of course the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee has suggested some options and, as I say, we are considering all options in the event that there is not a deal. However, we firmly believe that we are in a good position. We have a good relationship with the United States and we want to secure a deal as quickly as we can.

In addition to trying to achieve a reduction of tariffs, we are really investing in the automotive industry. In the Budget last year, we committed over £2 billion of capital in research and development funding until 2030, as has been mentioned, for zero emission vehicle manufacturing and the supply chains, and a further £300 million to drive the uptake of electric vehicles.

This new funding will support cutting-edge research and the scale-up of innovative zero emission vehicle technologies. It will also unlock capital investment in ZEVs, batteries and the wider supply chain. And that comes on top of the great work being supported by our Automotive Transformation Fund, which enables British brands and car manufacturers to benefit from a globally competitive supply chain for electric vehicles and their batteries. That has given much confidence to the sector and helped to secure major investment in the UK—including, of course, the £4 billion investment by Tata in its new gigafactory in Somerset. We also want future initiatives to work alongside the National Wealth Fund as part of a comprehensive offer to other big-hitting international investors.

Several Members raised the issue of skills, and they were absolutely right to do so. We recognise that we have a skills gap, and we need to ensure that we can fill it through the development of the industrial strategy, which will come out in a few weeks' time. We are working with the Department for Education and with Skills England to look at the skills gaps across a whole range of industries in the UK, including advanced manufacturing and automotive, to see what the gaps are and to see how we can tilt funding to help to fill them. That is exactly the work that we are doing. Apprenticeships are also incredibly important in this space. There are some brilliant apprenticeship models out there in our car manufacturers. Of course we will continue to support those models. We are also making the apprenticeship levy more flexible, so that a wider range of people can use such models.

The hon. Member for Reigate mentioned East Surrey college, which I know; it is very good, and I am very pleased to see that it is helping in this space. She also raised the level 7 apprenticeships issue, which I recognise. We are working on all these issues in the run-up to the industrial strategy and the publications that will go alongside it.

Skills have to be at the heart of this agenda. We do not just want to grow the automotive industry. It is an industry in transition, so we must ensure that we are transitioning skills and creating the workforce of the future that we want to see. So, Members are right to raise these issues. Of course we are working very hard on them, and I hope that we will have much more to say about them shortly.

The hon. Member for Reigate also mentioned a couple of tax issues—the employee share ownership scheme and the double-cab pick-up vehicles. We have no plans

[Sarah Jones]

to change those things at the moment, but I hear what she says about the pressures that exist. What we are doing through the run-up to the spending review is looking at how we can support the industry more widely. How do we increase demand, how do we provide support, how do we help to fund, and how do we break down further barriers? So, she is right to raise those issues and of course we continue to look at them. There will also be technical consultation later this year on the employee car ownership scheme, which she might want to look out for. However, I have heard the points she makes. We are currently in a period when we are developing plans but are unable to speak about them, because we cannot yet confirm what the spending review will tell us. However, I hope that the industrial strategy and the spending review will give her reassurance that we are very serious about the automotive sector and will support it in the future.

In the run-up to the publication of the industrial strategy, we are engaging with the sector on very complex issues such as access to finance or the planning system when it comes to electric vehicle charging infrastructure. We are looking at everything.

Of course, all Members rightly mentioned energy prices. I am acutely aware of how high our energy costs are in this sector compared with other sectors. Our industrial energy costs doubled under the last Government, and we want to take action to tackle that. Of course, we are pushing for clean energy by 2030 to ensure that energy bills come down in the long term and that we have the stability to ensure that we never again suffer a massive shock, as we did when the war in Ukraine began. However, we know that we need to do more. I am working at pace to do that. I hope that, through the processes that we have coming up in the next few weeks, we will see movement; but I completely understand the situation. I am working with lots of sectors, including ceramics, chemicals and automotive. Everybody has the same challenge, and we are looking to see what we can do about that.

To conclude, the automotive sector is incredibly important to our country. I appreciate Members' caring so much about those high-quality jobs and supply chains. We know we need to upskill and reskill the workforce, provide the industry with support for the transition, and build our strengths in new technology, artificial intelligence software, connected and autonomous vehicles—which comes under this remit—and of course, our off-road vehicles as well, which we are supporting. The automotive sector will be at the heart of our industrial strategy, and we will create the right climate for the industry to thrive.

10.25 am

**Rebecca Paul:** Thanks to everyone who has attended this important debate today, particularly the hon. Members for Wolverhampton North East (Mrs Brackenridge) and for Tipton and Wednesbury (Antonia Bance), who I thank for their powerful speeches. It is so clear how much they care about JLR and what it brings to their constituencies. I am grateful to them for coming along and providing more on the manufacturing piece, which is not in my constituency. It was really good to hear that from them.

What came through is that tariffs are the big and urgent issue right now. Clearly, getting that deal must be the No. 1 priority. Obviously, energy costs are also an issue, and all of us here today have spoken about them. I was struck by the fact, which the hon. Member for Tipton and Wednesbury mentioned, that Nissan's plant is the most expensive to run in the world due to energy costs. That in itself should be a massive wake-up call. For the medium to long-term success of the automotive industry—and all manufacturing throughout the country—we clearly need to address that. I also thank the Lib Dem spokesperson, the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones), for the excellent questions raised. A lot of us are asking the same questions, which is really helpful.

I was not sure whether there would be anyone else in the room with the same view on the ZEV mandate as me. I was heartened to hear—funnily enough, from the same side of the room—that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) is also sceptical about whether that is the right approach. I appreciate that the Government are trying to make that work as best as they can, and to make the adjustments.

Lastly, I thank the Minister for a clear, constructive and logical response. I am grateful that they have gone through and addressed all the concerns raised. I am reassured that they are looking into those. I acknowledge that the India deal may well be beneficial for the automotive industry, because the cost of employing those people will be lower, but we also need to think more broadly about that, because we could disincentivise the recruitment of local residents. The deal needs to be viewed through a wider-angle lens, and those concerns need to be considered too. I thank everyone for attending this important debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Government support for employment in the automotive manufacturing sector.

10.28 am

*Sitting suspended.*



## New Nuclear Projects: Wylfa

11 am

**Llinos Medi** (Ynys Môn) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the development of new nuclear projects at Wylfa.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir John. I am leading today's debate with one simple message to the Government: Wylfa is the best nuclear site in Europe and must be prioritised for new nuclear energy projects. We know that UK energy demand will likely double by 2050, as we develop the new technologies of the future and grow our economy. To reach our energy needs, nuclear power will play a part in the energy mix. It is a source of consistent baseload power, needed to cut our reliance on fossil fuels, improve energy security and keep energy bills down.

However, the last nuclear power station built in the UK was in 1995, and only one nuclear power plant is currently under construction, at Hinkley Point C. Wylfa is in prime position to help meet our energy needs by producing clean, reliable home-grown power for Wales and the rest of the UK, and it will last for 60 years. As Trade Unionists for Safe Nuclear Energy says:

"New nuclear development at Wylfa is imperative to retain and grow our incredible civil nuclear workforce. Sizewell C should not be the last Gigawatt project in the UK and Wylfa would create thousands of well-paid, highly skilled and unionised local jobs whilst supporting UK energy security by generating critical clean baseload power".

How did we get to the situation where Wylfa has been overlooked? For context, it is worth recounting the history of nuclear generation at Wylfa. Two Magnox reactors were constructed at the site and came online in 1971. The Wylfa nuclear power station then generated electricity for 44 years. In 2012, both reactors reached the end of their operating life and were shut down by 2015. Plans for a successor project, Wylfa Newydd, were first proposed in 2009. Those plans were paused in 2019 and scrapped in 2021 after Hitachi withdrew, following a failure to reach a funding agreement with the then Conservative UK Government.

In March 2024, during the spring Budget, the then Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Sir Jeremy Hunt), announced that the Wylfa and Oldbury sites would be purchased from Hitachi for £160 million. Since the current Government came to power last year, I have raised the issue of Wylfa several times in Parliament. I have been told by the Government that,

"we will work with Great British Nuclear to assess options for new nuclear at Wylfa",

but there has been no further clarity on the project since.

The lack of clarity and urgency from the Government on Wylfa is all the more confusing, given that it is an excellent site for a new nuclear project.

**Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate. I welcome her shedding light on the terrible legacy of 14 years of Conservatives who did nothing to invest in Wylfa, but while this Government get to work on delivering the greatest upgrade to our energy system in decades, I believe Plaid Cymru is playing politics here. Is it not the case that the party's previous leader came out against Wylfa and called new nuclear "the wrong answer" for Wales?

**Llinos Medi**: I thank the hon. Lady for that timely intervention, because I can say that I went out publicly against the leader of my party at the time and stood strongly for the people of Ynys Môn, recognising the need for nuclear as part of the energy mix and the Plaid Cymru policy being that Trawsfynydd and Wylfa are sites for future nuclear development.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Given that nuclear is so significant for north-west Wales as a whole, this begs the question of what the future use of Trawsfynydd will be. I would like the Minister to update us on what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government in relation to Cwmni Egin and the potential use of this public-owned nuclear licensed site for an advanced modular reactor or radioisotopes, for example. What future does it have?

**Llinos Medi**: We need to make sure we do not lose the nuclear legacy in Wylfa and Trawsfynydd and the can-do attitude of our workforce, and we must make sure these sites work for those communities.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady. All the time that I have known her and the leader of her party here, the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), their commitment to nuclear has never been in doubt. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is essential that we safely implement a new nuclear power strategy that will ensure we have capability and capacity, as well as energy resilience—a topic that is foremost in our minds after the devastating effects of the power cuts in Europe? Does she also agree that it is possible to achieve net zero hand in hand with nuclear options?

**Llinos Medi**: Nuclear is an important component of reaching our clean energy goal of net zero and bringing costs down, which I will touch on later in my speech.

Wylfa is located in a perfect site. It is on higher ground with hard bedrock, ideal for construction of a nuclear power station. The risks of coastal flooding, erosion and sea level rises are considered to be low. Its proximity to seawater means there is a readily available and abundant supply of cooling water. The site has nuclear heritage, with an existing grid connection established in 1971. However, that is at risk of being taken up by a large solar farm on the island—all the more reason for the Government to commit to the site before the opportunity is lost.

Significant work has already been accomplished at the site by Horizon to characterise the site and to seek licences and planning consent. There is considerable public and political support for the project, both nationally and locally. Vendors are serious about the site. The Nuclear Industry Association has told me that it has hosted several interested vendors who want to build at Wylfa, but are waiting for the Government's plan. What discussions has the Minister had with developers regarding the Wylfa site? Is the Government's lack of clarity deterring investment?

The Government have argued that regulations are stifling new nuclear. They claim that

"The industry pioneered in Britain has been suffocated by regulations and this saw investment collapse, leaving only one nuclear power plant—Hinkley Point C—under construction."

[Llinos Medi]

Rather than overburdensome regulations, in fact political will is the reason Wylfa has been left behind. During the 2024 general election, Labour pledged to

“end a decade of dithering that has seen the Conservatives duck decisions on nuclear power.”

At present, it seems that this pattern of delays and false dawns is continuing, which is all the more shocking when we consider the fact that the original planning application was lodged for Wylfa B in April 1989—36 years ago.

Let us compare ourselves with other countries that are pushing ahead with new nuclear projects, such as the Czech Republic. Within five years, the Czech Government have gone from endorsing new nuclear at Dukovany in July 2019 to issuing tenders to developers shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, recognising the urgency of developing domestic energy generation capabilities, and are now on the verge of signing a fixed-price contract for two gigawatt nuclear power reactors at the price of \$17 billion, which comes with a guarantee of at least \$10 billion in work for the local area. Why can my community, which has been promised new nuclear at Wylfa for 50 years, not have the same benefits as Dukovany? What lessons are the Government drawing from the decisive steps that countries such as the Czech Republic have taken to invest in their nuclear industries in recent years?

What benefits would new nuclear at Wylfa bring to local people? It is estimated that a gigawatt plant at Wylfa would create 850 long-term jobs and 10,000 in the shorter-term construction. It would generate £90 million in wages annually for the local economy and likely nearly £40 million in business rates. The impact would be incredible, given that the decline of stable, well-paid employment in north Anglesey has left the area with fewer than 2,300 jobs. The project would bring good, well-paying, long-term jobs to north Wales, an area in desperate need of opportunity and new industry.

The Horizon project plan for Wylfa also estimated that 45% of the operational staff at the site would have come from north Wales and Anglesey, helping to draw back and retain Welsh speakers on the island. Wages would be well above the Anglesey average of £630 per week, helping to reverse the rising deprivation, low wages and economic inactivity in the region. Nuclear workers in Wales and the whole of the UK contributed around £102,300 per person in gross value added in 2022, four times the Welsh average of £23,804 per person. Construction of a large modular reactor at Wylfa would generate £5 billion in opportunities for the supply chain. A gigawatt project would be the single biggest inward investment in Welsh history.

The Government say that their No. 1 priority is growth. Backing investment in Wylfa is an obvious way to improve livelihoods and secure our energy supply for the long term. Despite those clear advantages, however, I am concerned about the Government's approach: they have removed the list of designated sites, which included Wylfa, from their new nuclear planning policy. Their decision to consult on a new planning policy without committing to established sites such as Wylfa is creating damaging uncertainty and deterring the very investments we need.

I reiterate that Wylfa is the best site in Europe for a new nuclear project. What we need now is a clear strategic business case, a funding commitment and a timeline that gives developers the confidence to move forward. Of course I am supportive of future nuclear developments, including the next generation technologies such as small and advanced modular reactors, being prioritised at existing sites approved under the previous nuclear planning policy documents, which includes Wylfa, before other sites are looked at.

I will conclude by saying that it is astonishing that Wylfa, a site with proven capability, global potential and cross-party support, has been stuck in limbo for decades. People in Ynys Môn are fed up with the Labour Government, and the Tories before them, dragging their feet on this. Investors are ready, the community is supportive and the need for clean, secure energy has never been greater. What we need now is leadership, a clear decision, a funding commitment and a timeline to match the urgency of the moment. Will the Government finally give the people of Ynys Môn assurance that Wylfa will play a central part in their mission for the UK to become a clean energy superpower? Diolch.

**Sir John Hayes (in the Chair):** I call the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the hon. Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks).

11.13 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** I think they call that my full Sunday title, Sir John. I thank the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi) for securing this debate and also, as I said to her in the House last week, for her passion on this issue and energy projects more generally. We have debated a number of them in this Chamber over the past few months, and I am grateful for the way in which she does that.

This is a very important debate. I want to raise a few general points about the importance that the Government place on nuclear power, and then I will come to some specific points on Wylfa. First, new nuclear will play a critical role in this country's energy mix by delivering the clean and secure home-grown energy that the country needs. As the hon. Lady said, it is increasingly clear that demand for electricity in this country is only set to increase significantly. Our estimate is that it could double by 2050, but given the current growth rate of things like AI, it is likely to be quite a conservative estimate. Nuclear will play a critical role in that energy mix.

As we adapt to a more uncertain world, as we continue to recover from the global pandemic and with all our future growth plans, nuclear's energy security advantages make it essential. We have been clear that the role of our clean power mission is to push gas off the system, and nuclear will play a critical role alongside renewables. This is not a renewables-only drive; this is about renewables alongside nuclear. As the hon. Lady outlined, Wylfa has huge potential in that energy mix, and we are not overlooking it for a second.

I will come back to that point in more detail in a moment, but first I want to say something more generally about Wales. The hon. Lady gave us a useful history of nuclear power. Since the 1950s, Wales has played an important role in delivering nuclear power for the whole

country. As she rightly outlined, the expertise and skills in Wales are extraordinary, and there is huge potential to build on those skills.

The tens of thousands of jobs that will be created by our new nuclear projects could be spread across the UK, which is why I think the opposition to new nuclear in some quarters—for example, from the SNP in Scotland—is so short-sighted. This is an economic opportunity as well as a key energy driver. Our forthcoming industrial strategy White Paper will say more about how we will support the wider energy industry in Wales and across the country.

The hon. Lady outlined the historical role of Wylfa, and she referenced decisions going back to the year after I was born, which brings it into stark contrast. In its 44 years of operation, the former nuclear power station at Wylfa generated enough safe, low-carbon and home-grown electricity to power 2 million homes a year, as well as supporting hundreds of good jobs in local communities. I pay tribute to all those who worked in the former plant for their expertise in running an incredibly safe operation over 40 years.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I would be grateful if the Minister could provide an assurance on continuous decommissioning at both Trawsfynydd and Wylfa. At Trawsfynydd, decommissioning is currently providing 276 very well-paid jobs. Trawsfynydd is the United Kingdom's "lead and learn" site and could well be the first fully decommissioned nuclear site in Europe. However, we need an assurance that decommissioning will be continuous and that there will be sufficient funding, beyond this year and into the future, to ensure effective decommissioning, which will also give the public confidence in nuclear power into the future.

**Michael Shanks:** I thank the right hon. Lady for that point. Trawsfynydd—I think that is the correct pronunciation—is potentially also an important site for future nuclear, but she is right to highlight decommissioning. I am sure the Minister for nuclear, my noble Friend Lord Hunt, will be happy to discuss this in more detail, but clearly decommissioning is important. It creates a lot of jobs and skills, as well as developing future economic opportunities—it might be new nuclear, but it might also be other things. I am happy to volunteer my noble Friend to speak to the right hon. Lady about this, but it is certainly something we take very seriously. With something like nuclear power, we also have a responsibility to decommission it responsibly, which is part of the story of nuclear, alongside the years of generating.

**Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab):** Last year's Welsh Labour manifesto said that our two Labour Governments in Wales would explore the opportunities for new nuclear at Wylfa. Could my hon. Friend elaborate a little on that, bearing in mind the extensive history provided by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi) gave? I was listening carefully, and it was excellent to listen to. We have, of course, been in power for only 10 months, after 14 years of failure. Will my hon. Friend expand a little more on that point, further to the commitment we made to the electorate in Wales last year?

**Michael Shanks:** I thank my hon. Friend, not least because that is the very next part of my speech, so it is excellent timing. The history of Wylfa is important to our energy story, but so is the future. The potential of

the site has long been recognised. I recognise the point made by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn that, after several years of hard work, the withdrawal in 2020 of Horizon's plans to develop a new large-scale nuclear power station at the site was a setback for the whole country, but particularly for the local community. She rightly outlined the role that such projects can play in developing skills and good, very well-paid jobs, which often have salaries considerably above the average. It is really important that we move those projects forward.

I will reflect on what my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis) said. It has been nine months since this Government came into power, and our in-tray has had no shortage of issues from the previous Government to deal with—I note that no Conservative Members are present at this debate—but delay and dither is by far the biggest issue that we have had to deal with in our energy system. We have not been moving forward at pace on several key decisions that were taken, and I am afraid that Horizon is just one of many examples of delays and setbacks in nuclear project development since 2010.

It is a real disappointment that not a single nuclear power station was completed, or even progressed significantly, in that period, and the previous Government should take responsibility. Too many proposals have fallen by the wayside, leading to the loss of huge opportunities not only for our energy system but for local economies right across the country.

We are determined—I say this very clearly—to enable faster and more sustainable nuclear project development around the country. We have been clear that we are in favour of new nuclear. We want to create an investment landscape in which investors come to invest in nuclear projects in this country, and in which we give the certainty that nuclear will play a key part in our energy mix long into the future. We are taking important steps to kick-start new nuclear in Britain by working closely with EDF to get Hinkley Point C over the line, while Sizewell C is making good progress. However, the final investment decision is for the spending review. Great British Nuclear, the Government's expert nuclear delivery body, is driving forward the SMR competition for UK deployment. Final decisions on that competition will be taken very soon.

I will highlight other actions we are taking to make progress.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** Will the Minister provide any information on whether there will be updates on sitings for SMRs? We understand that the siting is being reconsidered, and businesses that are engaged with a design are very keen to know where the likely sites will be.

**Michael Shanks:** I will come on to the question of siting in a moment. I do not want to be drawn into the particulars of the SMR competition because Ministers are not involved in that at the moment. That process is under way, and we are moving forward with it at pace.

First, our targets for clean power are really important. We have set out the clean power mission for 2030, as well as the wider question of decarbonising the economy by 2050, in part because we want to drive momentum in the energy space for investment into sectors like new nuclear. Nuclear power is a crucial part of our toolkit to deliver energy security and decarbonisation, and we



[Michael Shanks]

have said that our striving towards clean power does not end in 2030. We are in a sprint because that is necessary for our constituents, who are paying far too much for their bills, but the effort will continue long into the 2030s and 2040s. That is when nuclear will particularly play a critical role.

Secondly, the new national policy statements reflect a new era of nuclear. Wylfa was, of course, one of eight sites designated for new nuclear in the EN-6 national policy statement, which recognised the site's future potential. Nothing that we are doing takes away from that crucial future potential, but we recognise that the new range of technologies in nuclear open up a series of sites that are different from the eight that were fixed for larger-scale nuclear in the past.

National policy statement EN-7 is all about turbocharging our ambitions for new nuclear: not taking away from sites that were already designated but opening up a range of new sites. It sets out a refreshed planning framework for new nuclear reactors, including, as we have discussed, small and advanced modular reactors.

The proposed planning framework is robust, transparent and agile, and it is about empowering developers to identify more sites across the UK. Clearly, those must be set against a very robust set of siting criteria—we are not saying that new nuclear can be built anywhere in the country—but there are a lot more sites for SMRs and AMRs than there were in the past.

Thirdly, and this comes to a point the hon. Member for Ynys Môn made about regulation, we have been keen to cut outdated and bureaucratic rules that are holding back investment, but clearly we also have in this country one of the most robust sets of regulations for nuclear, which is important for the public to have confidence in nuclear energy. It is also why we have had decade upon decade of incredibly safe nuclear generation in this country. We will maintain robust regulation, but we will update it to make sure that we are driving forward investment. The Prime Minister recently announced that John Fingleton will lead a nuclear regulatory taskforce to identify opportunities for better regulation in the nuclear space, particularly to speed up delivery.

Fourthly, we are tackling one of the biggest reasons for delays and uncertainty head-on by taking bold action on the connections queue in the GB grid. Connections reform is about helping viable clean energy

projects connect faster, and it is about giving investors the certainty that, if they come forward to develop a project, they will be able to connect to the grid much faster. Future nuclear projects will benefit from those reforms, freeing up the more than 700 GW currently sitting in the queue and freeing up a lot of that capacity for important future projects.

Returning to Wylfa, as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn noted, Great British Nuclear purchased the site alongside the site in Gloucestershire at Oldbury, which gives us a real opportunity to make strategic decisions. Although I hear the call to move faster on those decisions, it is crucial that we take time to make sure that they are fully informed. The question of how we finance any such projects is a critical one for Government to think about.

As we fix the foundations of new nuclear in this country, it tees us up for rapid future success. We will make sure that we drive forward the potential for communities to benefit from the supply chains and the construction that go alongside those sites. I reiterate that we are hugely ambitious and excited about the opportunity for new nuclear in this country. I recognise the frustration that the past 14 years of dither and delay have meant that it seems like we are not making as much progress on those nuclear sites as possible. I gently ask that we are given the space and opportunity to drive forward our ambitions for nuclear. After more than nine months, we have demonstrated the pace at which we want to move. We will do the same on nuclear, but we need the time to set that out fully.

I close by thanking the hon. Member for Ynys Môn again for securing this important debate. I know she will continue to engage with the Minister for nuclear, my noble Friend Lord Hunt, on these questions. We are ambitious for Wylfa and for other sites. The hon. Lady is right to push because “further and faster” is the mantra of this Government in a whole range of areas. She is also right to highlight the huge potential for her community, but also for our energy security across the country, of moving forward with new nuclear as part of our energy mix.

I thank all hon. and right hon. Members for participating in this debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.28 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Personal Independence Payment: Disabled People

[DR ROSENA ALLIN-KHAN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Personal Independence Payment and disabled people.

I am proud to have secured this debate today, and to be able to stand up for the disabled in the light of the catastrophic effects that the proposed cut to personal independence payments will have on them. This is the week after the council elections and the Runcorn and Helsby by-election proved disastrous for at least two major parties. The issue on everyone's lips, and the cause of much of the disaffection, was welfare cuts, and specifically cuts to personal independence payments.

I begin by thanking in advance all those who will take part in this debate, all those watching, all those in the outside world who are campaigning against the cuts and, above all, the disabled community itself, which, day by day, shows exemplary resilience and courage.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in her spring statement, raised the curtain on a series of welfare cuts: the health element of universal credit will be cut by 50% and frozen for new claimants, and the Office for Budget Responsibility has outlined that the planned cuts to disability benefits will reduce PIP for at least 800,000 claimants and cut health-related universal credit payments for 3 million families. And that is just the beginning.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): On that point, I thank my right hon. Friend because many of my Slough constituents are extremely concerned about the proposed welfare cuts, especially to personal independence payments and other disability benefits. Unlike the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition that embarked on austerity, and unlike Conservative Governments of recent years that became characterised as “the nasty party,” does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the job, indeed the moral duty, of this Government to protect the most vulnerable so that they can lead a dignified and independent life?

**Ms Abbott:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The Government insist that the rising disability benefits bill means that something must be done, but in a recent report, the New Economics Foundation revealed that the disability benefits bill has risen because there has been a rise in the number of disabled people and a rise in deprivation. But, as we learned from David Cameron's round of austerity, cuts have consequences that severely limit, or even eliminate, their supposed savings.

**Ayoub Khan** (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): In my Birmingham Perry Barr constituency, notwithstanding these forecasted cuts, people are already suffering because the Department for Work and Pensions—or perhaps His Majesty's Revenue and Customs—is trying to clamp down and suspend benefits such as PIP. That is causing immense anxiety for disabled and vulnerable adults, who are now having to seek an appeal while their

benefits are being cut. Does the right hon. Member agree that an equality impact assessment needs to be conducted now, as opposed to simply cutting £5 billion in the near future?

**Ms Abbott:** I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We need an equality impact assessment now, and I cannot understand why the Government are introducing these random welfare benefit cuts without allowing MPs to understand fully what the consequences will be. The fact that the proposed welfare cuts come on top of the cut to the winter fuel allowance and the failure to raise the child benefit ceiling makes everything worse.

The furious response to their proposed welfare cuts, particularly the cuts to personal independence payments, seems to have come as a surprise to the Government. PIP is a benefit intended to help people who have a health condition or disability with the extra costs of living. Unfortunately, some people, including some Ministers, talk about it as if it were a handout.

**Shokat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): Does the right hon. Member agree that PIP is not an income, and that those councils that count it as income should be called out? Leicester city council counts PIP as income. The number of people applying for PIP is therefore reducing, and they are not getting council tax support. People like my constituent Jason will be £900 worse off.

**Ms Abbott:** PIP is certainly not an income, and I imagine that the Minister will be in contact with Leicester city council to try to understand what it thinks it is doing.

The new points system that the Government are suggesting for people to qualify for the maximum level of PIP is particularly concerning. For instance, it will mean that people who cannot wash below their waist could lose points and lose benefits, and be expected to find a job. Focus groups are revolted when they hear that. The country's anger at these cuts boiled over last week in spectacular fashion with the by-election in Runcorn, where Labour lost its 16th safest seat.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Lady for securing this debate. Westminster Hall is full today, so this is clearly a massive issue.

PIP is effectively a lifeline to help to maintain people's wellness and independence, and in many cases people's employment, so more needs to be done. Furthermore, if a claimant no longer qualifies for the daily living component, any carer will also lose their direct access to carer's allowance, which would be a loss of £10,000 on top of the other money that is lost. This situation is a minefield for those who are disabled and depend on PIP to continue having some quality of life. Does the right hon. Lady agree that today the Minister must give us many, many answers and change the policy?

**Ms Abbott:** It is indeed a cruel and brutal system that needs reform. It does not need cuts.

Elements of the Labour party seem to want to claim that the loss of the by-election in Runcorn and the fact that Labour lost two thirds of the council seats we were defending was all about immigrants. However, voter surveys show that, far from being all about immigrants, the single most important reason for vote-switching was

[*Ms Diane Abbott*]

anger at the Government for the winter fuel allowance and welfare cuts, such as the proposed cut to PIP. Immigration came well down the list.

Labour people who went out knocking on doors said that two issues came up over and over again: cuts to winter fuel payments; and cuts to personal independence payments. However, despite the catastrophic results last week, the Prime Minister has made it clear that nothing will deter him from pushing ahead with these cuts. So far, his only concession has been to say that he will go “further and faster.”

In my Hackney North and Stoke Newington constituency, well over 8,000 people are on either personal independence payment or disability living allowance, which translates nationwide to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of men and women whose fury will only mount as they find that, month by month, their payments are shrinking or disappearing altogether.

The Labour leadership have not helped their case for cutting PIP by putting forward a set of contradictory arguments. On the one hand, they insist that they are helping the disabled by putting them back to work, but on the other hand, they say this cut will save £9 billion. Well, they cannot do both. Putting disabled people into rewarding, sustained employment, which we would all support, means spending money on training, therapy and childcare. In the short run, putting disabled people into jobs will not save money; it will actually cost more. The only certain way that cutting PIP saves the billions of pounds that the Government want is by making PIP recipients live on less, and this is something that Ministers claim they do not want to do.

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): I thank the right hon. Member for her powerful speech. I briefly draw attention to some figures from the Public and Commercial Services Union about its members working in the Department for Work and Pensions, including in jobcentres. Almost 50% of PCS members working in the DWP claim the very benefits that they process. Many of them rely on PIP to work, which further underlines the point she is making about the folly of cutting the benefits that enable people working for the Government to deliver these policies—they will not be able to do so if those benefits are cut. Does she agree that these cuts will punish sick and disabled people, including those working for the Government in this policy area?

**Ms Abbott:** Far from enabling the Government to put people into work, removing PIP will actually stop people working, because they depend on PIP for the extra cost of going to work.

Perhaps the most preposterous argument for cutting disability payments is that it is the moral choice. This is obviously nonsense. In what universe is slashing benefits for the disabled moral? No one is taken in by that, not even those who think that all benefit claimants are scroungers.

**Warinder Juss** (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): I have a constituent who has two sons suffering with cystic fibrosis. The condition means they have to be on a high-calorie, high-fat diet, so the cost of their food is much more than the ordinary shop. On top of that, my

constituent has to bear the additional costs of buying medication and the loss of income as a result of having to be a carer for her two children. My right hon. Friend mentioned the need to look after our children. Does she agree that we need a system in which PIP provides for individuals such as my constituent's two sons, so that children can also have the support to lead good-quality lives?

**Ms Abbott:** I entirely agree. Furthermore, it seems to me that Ministers have not really looked into the costs that PIP is covering, otherwise they would not be talking about slashing it in this way.

I wonder whether it ever occurs to the Government that voters will begin to notice that whenever they want money, they take it from the most vulnerable—old people, poor children and now the disabled. When we suggest a wealth tax, they recoil in horror, yet a 2% levy on men and women whose assets are worth more than £10 million would affect only 0.4% of the UK population and raise £24 billion a year. Politics is the language of choices, and sadly, this Government are making a conscious choice to balance their books on the back of people on welfare in general and the disabled in particular.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy** (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my concerns that, by the Government's own estimates, 300,000 people will be pushed into relative poverty by 2030 and, as a result, will need to rely on council services that are already severely oversubscribed? Does she agree that these cuts, without funding for council emergency services, will be a disastrous combination that risks exacerbating the pressures already faced by our local councils?

**Ms Abbott:** There is no question but that my hon. Friend is correct. These cuts will put even more pressure on local authorities, which are already in difficulties.

There is all this talk about getting disabled people into jobs—what jobs? The areas of employment where there are labour shortages tend to be minimum wage, like social care, or seasonal, like agricultural work. The DWP's own figures show around 102,000 registered vacancies. Of those, only 807 can be done completely remotely, of which 127 are with employers that the DWP describes as Disability Confident, and of those just 10 are part time. Where are these jobs that the Government want to coerce the disabled into, and with what employers?

The PIP claimants that the Government want to force back to work may have physical disabilities, but they may also be severely depressed or have mental health problems. Most employers will not tolerate the intermittent patterns of employment and long periods out of the labour market that come with those types of health problems. Furthermore, there is very little evidence that cutting benefits boosts employment—a point made by a group of concerned charities recently—and, as the hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) said earlier, Ministers seem to miss the point that PIP is paid to disabled people regardless of whether they are in work. That means that many of the women and men the Government are taking PIP off already have jobs.

Supporters of the Government's cuts claim that, all too often, men and women on welfare are “taking the mickey”—I am quoting a Minister there—or making a



“lifestyle choice”. People who describe welfare as a lifestyle choice obviously do not actually know many people who live on welfare. The poor housing, the struggle to pay for the basics and the humiliation they often endure mean that it is not a lifestyle that anybody would choose.

**Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): I thank the right hon. Member for her passionate speech and, in particular, for highlighting the real human impact of these cuts. Over 1 million disabled people were forced to use food banks last year, while, for many others, basics such as affording transport to hospital appointments will be jeopardised by these cuts. Does that not only emphasise and underline the case that right hon. Member was making: that this is a political choice, and that asking the very wealthiest in society to pay a bit more in tax would be the moral thing to do?

**Ms Abbott:** It is indeed a political choice. I would prefer my Government to introduce a wealth tax or some taxation system that asks the very wealthy to pay a little more than take money away from the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society. But the Government refuse to accept that there is anything wrong with cutting benefits for the disabled. Instead, they say that there has been a “communication problem”. Some of us have tried explaining to Downing Street that they could employ the best communicators in the world, but these welfare cuts will be impossible to sell to the public and will undermine Labour’s position in communities.

**Mr Adnan Hussain** (Blackburn) (Ind): I recently met many furious constituents outraged both by the cuts already made and by those still to come. Nearly 10,000 people in Blackburn rely on PIP. I join the right hon. Member in condemning these cold-hearted and cruel cuts that leave people fearing that they cannot even heat their homes or eat.

**Ms Abbott:** I entirely agree, and I would add that if Ministers think that the recent local election results were bad, they should wait until next year’s council elections in Scotland, Wales, big city conurbations such as Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool, and every single London borough.

There are people in No. 10 who believe that we did not go far enough. A nameless No. 10 adviser said:

“We didn’t go big enough the first time round...It’s a fairness issue”.

Another nameless Government source said:

“We should’ve done it all in one hit—we didn’t go far enough.”

I wonder how many poor or disabled people those people have ever met or known.

The Government should drop the cuts to the winter fuel payment and review the personal independence payment. They should consult the disabled and organisations that work with them, and genuinely improve and reform it.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is really important that the Government work on co-production so that disabled people are involved in the decision-making processes. On the interaction with the Scottish Government, the UK Government have said that they are cancelling

work capability assessments and are relying on the PIP assessment to make the decisions. In Scotland, we do not have PIP assessments; we have adult disability payment assessments. Will the right hon. Lady join me in encouraging the Minister to set out clear plans before the welfare Bill comes to Parliament? Otherwise, we will be taking a decision about something with no idea about its impact.

**Ms Abbott:** We undoubtedly need more information before we can meaningfully vote on these proposals.

Some of us are old enough to remember Mrs Thatcher and her poll tax, which was her undoing. It is not too late to drop the winter fuel tax and the cuts to PIP. I plead with my Government to do so.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate. As so many people wish to speak, and I would like to give everyone the opportunity to do so, I will unfortunately have to set a one-and-a-half-minute timer; otherwise, we would simply not be able to get everyone in. I know everyone feels strongly about this issue.

2.52 pm

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I commend the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing this very important debate.

Young people battling cancer are being failed by the system. They are forced to wait an average of eight long months before they can access PIP, including a three-month qualifying period that applies even after a confirmed cancer diagnosis. In that time, those young patients and their families face an extra £5,000 in out-of-pocket costs, on top of the emotional, physical and psychological burden of the cancer itself.

Does the Minister understand the consequences of these reforms for young people already enduring the fight of their young lives? Will he commit to working with his ministerial colleagues to scrap the arbitrary wait times, ensure that a medical diagnosis alone is accepted as sufficient evidence for PIP eligibility, and reshape the system so that it does not punish but protects?

2.54 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): Harold Wilson once said:

“The Labour party is a moral crusade, or it is nothing.”

We need to be clear, as millions of people outside this place are clear, that to try to balance the books on the backs of the poor and disabled is fundamentally immoral and un-Labour. The Prime Minister and the Government need not to plough ahead apace with this immoral, appalling plan, but instead to drop it now. Let us be clear: someone who needs assistance to cut up their own food and wash and dress themselves would currently get a personal independence payment, but they could lose it thanks to the Government’s proposals. That is completely appalling.

[Richard Burgon]

These cuts were cruel enough when the OBR estimated that 800,000 people would lose PIP, but a new freedom of information answer from the DWP estimates that 1.3 million people could lose it. The Government should come clean and say what the figure is. It is outrageous to have a vote without knowing the figures. I say quite clearly that if the Government do not drop this immoral plan, I will vote against these cuts to disability benefits. I know that many of my colleagues will do so as well.

2.56 pm

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): Too many disabled people in West Dorset are living in fear: fear that the PIP support they rely on will be taken away or that loved ones might not qualify. In recent weeks, I have heard from 190 constituents each sharing their distress about the plans. One of my constituents, Barbara, is 65. She has lived with juvenile idiopathic arthritis since she was three. She has experienced constant pain, multiple surgeries and increased disability throughout her life. Yet she worked in social services for many years and never claimed employment and support allowance. Her PIP award helps her fund the support she needs to give her independence: mobility equipment, home adjustments and private care when the NHS service falls short.

Despite scoring three points in some areas on her most recent assessment, and scoring on virtually all areas of daily living, Barbara would not qualify for any support under the proposed changes. For constituents such as Barbara, this is a terrifying prospect. As she put it herself:

“PIP is not a benefit. It is a tool for survival.”

As we debate the potential changes to PIP, I hope we will remember her words. Disabled people and their carers deserve dignity. They deserve to be seen not as a cost to be managed, but as valued citizens, worthy of respect and entitled to fairness and compassion from this House.

2.57 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Everything is hard in body or in mind. People face the barriers, pain, dejection and not being believed—even when they are, assumptions are made on which only lived experience can speak. They face the effort to live, to just get up and face the day and to prove that their experiences are real, and they face the costs. After 14 years of battling, here we are, with “Pathways to Work”, taking away money, agency, dignity, independence and the essence of life itself. I fear, like many do, that people will take their lives, once again crushed by a system that fails to believe and points the finger rather than offering the hand, turning hope to despair. Poverty, dependency and harm—if not physical, most definitely psychological—await.

Colleagues, we are better than this. Let us vow to stop such pernicious cuts and rewrite the story with the voices, experiences and hope of disabled people. Even if tech, task, time and place can be accommodated, work is not always the answer. We do not even have the diagnosis, understanding of the evidence, or answers from Charlie Mayfield’s report. I will vote against these cuts because I am Labour and because disabled people matter.

2.58 pm

**Ann Davies** (Caerfyrddin) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Dr Allin-Khan; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Of the so-called savings, £4.5 billion will come from restricting eligibility for the daily living element of personal independence payments. Restricting that will result in an average financial loss of £4,500 each for our constituents. PIP is not a benefit for people out of work. With one in five people in the workforce in Wales being disabled, taking away PIP, or the option of PIP, from disabled workers will leave people worse off.

Often, post-industrial areas have a higher proportion of working-age people receiving PIP, and they will be disproportionately affected by these changes. Recent Policy in Practice data has shown exactly that: Wales will suffer three times the economic impact and have twice as many affected residents as London and the south-east. Four out of 10 of the most affected local authority areas are in Wales. In Carmarthenshire alone, over £17 million will be lost because of PIP changes, with nearly 4,000 people losing eligibility within my constituency.

Data and analysis by organisations such as Policy in Practice are crucial for our understanding, especially since the UK Government have so far refused Plaid Cymru’s call for an impact assessment in Wales. Even the Labour First Minister of Wales has requested a Wales-specific impact assessment, but the proposal was batted away and refused. This is not the change that Wales and the UK voted for, and they have recently made that crystal clear.

3 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): For the last few years, I have chaired a group of unpaid carers—the Minister has met them—who struggle to manage on carer’s allowance as it is. Under the Government’s proposals, 150,000 unpaid carers will lose the carer’s allowance. Already, 1.2 million carers live in poverty and 400,000 live in deep poverty. I fear the impact of the proposals on carers who have devoted their lives to looking after family members.

A few months ago, I hosted a drop-in with Siobhan O’Dwyer from the University of Birmingham, whose team have been researching the risk of suicide and suicide incidence among carers. Most MPs who attended were shocked by the scale of risk and the scale of incidence at the moment.

I am absolutely terrified that the proposals will push more carers over the edge and that people will suffer. When such changes occurred in the last round of austerity under the previous Government, people lost their lives. I do not like to do this to my own Government within their first year—they are so new—but I will be voting against the proposals. I hope that the Government will think again and withdraw them.

3.1 pm

**Jess Brown-Fuller** (Chichester) (LD): With limited time, I will share the voices of some of the 200 constituents who have been in touch with me about the proposed changes to personal independence payments. For example, one worried father, Robert, contacted me on behalf of his son, Richard, who lives with functional neurological disorder. Robert told me how vital PIP is to Richard,

who will never be able to work again. They feel completely abandoned by these proposed cuts and, after countless attempts to engage with the Department for Work and Pensions, they feel ignored and disillusioned.

Another example is James, who lives with multiple mental health conditions that have left him hospitalised several times in the past. He wrote to me saying:

“Nearly all my PIP goes towards paying for my guardian angel carer. Without that support, I would have to move into a supported living arrangement, which would make my mental health problems much worse and I would end up in hospital again. I don’t want to lose my independence as I am just managing with the support I have now.”

For James, it is clear that PIP is the difference between managing or entering crisis.

Meanwhile, Susan is the sole carer and appointee for several disabled members of her family. Under these proposals, at least two of them would lose all of the support they get. She wrote to me saying:

“I honestly am broken, life is hopeless—I can’t feed my family if these cuts go through. Please can you join us in fighting the cuts.”

My constituents in Chichester are not asking for special treatment. They are just asking to live with dignity, fairness and, importantly, independence, which is what PIP gives them. The changes are the exact opposite of what the Government claim they want to achieve.

3.3 pm

**Lizzi Collinge** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. Many of my constituents have contacted me with serious concerns about the proposed changes to PIP. Putting aside the human cost of that worry for one moment, we already know what happens when we take money away from early intervention and preventive support. It does not save money; it simply shifts the cost, and often ends up increasing it.

We have evidence for that. When the disability living allowance was replaced with PIP in 2013, people with multiple sclerosis were often taken off the benefit. The MS Society investigated the effects of those changes on 2,500 people with MS who lost the higher rate of DLA. Unsurprisingly, it found that those people relied more on NHS services, particularly GPs and A&Es. In one year alone, those GP and A&E costs were £7.7 million for just 2,500 people.

We are still dealing with the real human cost of 14 years of Conservative austerity and cuts to health and social care. We have to learn from the failure of those policies and do something differently. This party was elected on a promise of change. I stand by that promise, and I stand by my Government, but no one is denying that our welfare system needs serious reform. That should not come at the cost of disabled people.

3.4 pm

**Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): In response to all the letters and emails from my constituents, I will focus on PIP and the effect that the changes will have on the 1.3 million people who are suffering from ME and long covid. I am particularly concerned that the additional criterion for a PIP award of needing four points in one descriptor disproportionately affects people with ME and long covid, because they currently reach their eight points with a spread of low points across many descriptors.

The abolition of the work capability assessment and the focus on PIP are a double whammy, particularly given the extra difficulty that people with ME and long covid will have in accessing PIP. They did better under the work capability assessment, because that could accommodate the fluctuating nature of ME and the reality of post-exertional malaise as a distinct aspect of it. PIP does not accommodate the nature of that disability for those who suffer with the condition.

The Green Paper talks about two positive moves, which I potentially support: the redesign of the PIP assessment and the recognition that many people have lifelong disability and cannot return to work, so there should be some accommodation for them through special funding. I ask that the Minister consider people with ME and long covid when looking at that redesign.

3.6 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): We have heard from the Government that by 2029-30, 800,000 fewer people will get the daily living component of PIP. For the 370,000 people already on it, the average loss is £4,500. Three million people will see their health-related universal credit cut, some by as much as £3,000. The consequences will be rising poverty, greater food bank reliance and mounting pressure on public services.

The Government claim that those consequences will be offset by incentives to work. However, estimates from the Learning and Work Institute and the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggest that only 1% to 3% of those affected—perhaps tens of thousands out of millions—may gain employment. That leaves 97% worse off. As the MP for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East, I have repeatedly asked how that will affect my constituents, how many will lose their entitlement, and how many will fall into poverty.

I have asked at Prime Minister’s questions and I have tabled written questions for equality, employment and poverty impact assessments to be published before legislation is introduced. I have asked whether disabled people and carers will be consulted on changes, such as the one requiring claimants to score four points. I have not received any response to those questions, yet the changes will proceed with urgency. This is policymaking in the dark. I will be voting against the changes, because for me it is always country first and party second.

3.8 pm

**Ayoub Khan** (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I extend my extreme gratitude to the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for bringing forward this debate. Thousands in my constituency will be affected by the proposed cuts to PIP and to wider benefits. That is about not just numbers on a balance sheet, but the daily lives of real people.

PIP is a vital lifeline for those living with disabilities and long-term health conditions. It helps to cover the extra costs that many of us never have to think about: mobility aids, transport and specialist care. Cutting that support does not just tighten budgets; it strips away independence and, more importantly, dignity.

We must ask ourselves what kind of society we want to be: one that turns away from its most vulnerable, or one that lifts them up, ensuring that disability does not



[Ayoub Khan]

mean poverty, isolation or fear. Behind every efficiency saving is a person: a mother skipping meals so her disabled son can get to an appointment; a veteran left waiting months for a reassessment; or a young woman terrified of losing the support she needs to work part time and stay independent.

This is about not just fairness but justice, compassion and basic human rights. I ask the Minister to halt these proposed cuts, to review PIP with empathy and not austerity, and to build a system that supports not punishes the most needy in our society.

3.9 pm

**Cat Eccles** (Stourbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing this important debate. I wish to place on record my grave concerns about the Government's proposals to change the eligibility criteria for PIP. When His Majesty's Revenue and Customs has written off £27 billion of debts over the last five years, saying they are uncollectable, and the UK is still failing to act on UN tax avoidance guidance, losing us millions of pounds every year, it is impossible to accept that targeting disabled people is the answer. No consideration has been given to the knock-on effects to local government.

In my area, Conservative-run Dudley council has made more than £42 million-worth of cuts, which includes a loss of services for carers, for mental health, for domestic abuse and for dementia, as well as the slashing of funding to the charitable sector. Where are people supposed to turn for help? A narrative is being created of scroungers and cheats, when in reality, disabled people are fighting tooth and nail for every little scrap they can get. As one constituent told me, being disabled is a full-time job.

The Green Paper suggests that disabled people will be supported to retrain or access voluntary opportunities. That is patronising; they have qualifications and careers. One in three of us will become disabled in our lifetime, and I will vote against these proposals.

3.11 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for her courage, and I commend the courage of all hon. Members who have made a clear commitment today. I thank them for that, and I mean that quite honestly.

I have a wonderful lady in my office as our benefits adviser, and she is fantastic at talking people through the PIP and benefits process, and supporting them with filling in their forms, as it can be a very stressful process. The points system can already be challenging, often leading to mandatory reconsiderations and appeals, so I can easily understand why many people are worried about the changes.

One of the criteria changes that Labour will introduce is a requirement for claimants to score four points on at least one of the 10 activities to qualify for the daily living component. That change could result in some existing claimants no longer meeting the eligibility

requirement, which could impact them severely month to month. Parkinson's UK told me that the degenerative condition incurs average extra costs of more than £7,500 a year, so PIP is a crucial payment for people with Parkinson's.

I do not have much more time, but more study is clearly needed to assess how the changes will truly impact people. I speak on behalf of the 200,000 people across Northern Ireland who the changes will ultimately impact. I look to the Minister for greater clarity that action will be taken only when backed by evidence. The Minister is a great friend of us all, but today we need answers.

3.12 pm

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): The Government claim that the proposed cuts are about getting disabled people into work, but they have provided no evidence that they will result in significantly more disabled people in work. Even if that was the result, there would still be some disabled people who are unable to work. They deserve support too, but under the proposals, many of them would not receive it. The proposed disability cuts mean more poverty, suffering and hardship for disabled people.

One young person living with mental illness told Just Treatment, which I hosted in Parliament yesterday:

"I feel suicidal when I get caught up in the thoughts of losing this life changing support."

Another says that she will not be able to access "food, shelter, and vital care"

for her condition. A third young person says:

"I am terrified they will take my PIP away, that I will end up homeless, and my only option will be suicide."

We should be in no doubt that these proposals will cost lives. That is not hyperbolic: the benefits system has already been a key factor in the deaths of disabled people such as my constituent Philippa Day, who tragically took an overdose and was found next to a letter from the DWP refusing a home assessment visit.

If the Government go through with these disability benefit cuts, they will be making a huge mistake that the public will not forgive us for. We must be true to our values as a party and stand up for the whole of the working class, including disabled people, whether they are in work or not. It is not too late for the Government to drop these cuts. If they do not, I will vote against them.

3.14 pm

**Adam Dance** (Yeovil) (LD): In Yeovil, 7.9% of working-age adults claim PIP, which is higher than the average for the south-west. For my constituents, PIP is not some kind of luxury; it allows them to live their lives, manage their disabilities, go to work and do daily tasks that people without disabilities can do. For example, one constituent told me that

"we are terrified of becoming homeless if these cuts go ahead".

The Government's proposals are likely to result in rising child poverty, and that is just not good enough. Many of the changes detailed in the Government's new Green Paper seem to be financially driven. That is simply wrong; Labour should do something about that.

The assessment process has to change, especially assessments over the phone, which have left my constituents unable to express their needs and get the support they

are owed. The Government cannot make decisions about disabled people without consulting them. Over the past decade, we have seen under-investment in our social care system, which has to change. If it does not, there will be no meaningful drop in the welfare bill.

In conclusion, it is right that we bring down the welfare bill, make Britain healthier and give all our constituents meaningful work, but that cannot come at the expense of the most vulnerable.

3.15 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I will be brief. I want to draw Members' attention to a report published on Friday that provides evidence of the impact by constituency. It clearly shows the impact on northern areas: an average of £269 per working adult in the north-east, and similar in the north-west and in Yorkshire and Humber. The cumulative impact could be tens of millions of pounds for each constituency.

The impact on local economies, which we have not explored in great detail, is significant. My constituency of Oldham East and Saddleworth will lose £15 million a year, which will have a huge impact on our local economy. Importantly, the financial losses will be highest in the constituencies with the lowest life expectancies, which means that health inequalities are likely to widen even further.

3.16 pm

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): Millions of lives have been impacted overnight by a single policy. It is indefensible. It will drive more disabled people into poverty, push children further into poverty, further strain public health and leave those in the greatest need behind. We should help those in greatest need in our society, not abandon them.

Let me be clear: the four-point rule is a cruel test dressed up as a reform. It means that people with complex, overlapping needs who score few points in many areas could be cut off. Those are real people, with anxiety, chronic pain or fluctuating conditions. If they do not tick a box, they do not get help. The system should protect, not punish.

As outlined by a number of speakers, a 2% tax on wealth above £10 million would raise £24 billion a year, more than five times what the Department for Work and Pensions hopes to save. Let us be honest: this is not about sustainability; it is a political choice. We cannot weaken the foundation that protects those with the greatest need. This is a moral line that we cannot and must not cross.

3.18 pm

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy** (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing this important debate—as always, she is right. Like many hon. Members, I have been contacted by hundreds of constituents who are angry and anxious about the Government's proposed cuts, which make no sense and will push people further into poverty. There is no evidence that they will get people into work, but there is an abundance of evidence of how devastating they will be.

My biggest fear is that we may ultimately count the cost of these cuts in lost lives. Lest we forget, a study attributed 330,000 excess deaths in Britain between 2012 and 2019 to the last round of austerity cuts. There is no denying that the number of people claiming sickness and disability benefits is rising, but we cannot ignore the fact that the increase in claims is linked to an ageing population and a decade of under-investment in our health services.

If the Government are to recoup costs from somewhere, they should cast their gaze away from some of the most vulnerable in our society and instead look at those with the broadest shoulders. Disabled people bore the brunt of cuts under the previous Government, while UK billionaires saw their wealth triple. These cuts represent the worst of all worlds and will plunge disabled people into poverty while failing to increase employment. They will make people sicker and more reliant on the NHS, and they will not win the Government any favours with the electorate.

At the last general election, people voted for change—for a Labour Government that would be more compassionate than the previous Conservative one. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington that it is not too late to change course. The Government can and should reverse these plans.

3.19 pm

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool West Derby) (Lab): Last week, I held a citizens' assembly in my constituency on the Government's plans, and dozens of disabled people told me how frightened they were. Laurence, a disabled man who led the debate against the cuts, said:

"Parliament is legislating to assist my suicide...while legislating to stop me from being able to live."

The fear in his words—they are his, not mine—cut through the room. I held a vote at the end of the meeting, and every single person voted against the cuts.

If the proposed cuts are brought to Parliament, then, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said about Tory cuts a decade ago, I will swim through vomit to vote against them. I cannot express to the Minister the scale of the devastation they will cause for disabled people in my constituency and across the country. The Government's analysis shows that they will drive 250,000 more people into poverty and many others deeper into deprivation. This is not what the Labour party was formed to do.

I conclude with this appeal to the Minister. We were elected last summer on a promise of change. These cruel cuts are not the change that people voted for. Last week, we saw the people's judgment on unpopular, unnecessary and immoral cuts. For the sake of disabled people in Liverpool West Derby, and for the sake of basic decency and morality, abandon these cruel cuts, deliver the progressive change our country needs and stop austerity.

3.21 pm

**Steve Witherden** (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing this vital debate.

[Steve Witherden]

I want to speak about working people. My constituency of Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr has a proud industrial heritage. Some may claim that the birthplace of the industrial revolution is Telford, but I would encourage them to read up on Bersham. In 2010, we witnessed the closure of our large chemical plant, which in 1920 was the world's leading producer of phenol. We were also home to the last coalmine in north Wales, in Rhostyllen, which closed in the late 1980s. Like many post-industrial areas, our region suffers from higher deprivation and increased rates of illness.

When I look at the proposed cuts, especially the unjust tightening of the eligibility criteria for personal independence payment, I am filled with deep concern for many of my constituents. Wales already has the highest poverty rates among disabled people in the UK, and a greater reliance on PIP than any other part of the country. These cuts will hit Wales and my constituents particularly hard. I will vote against them.

The Government must withdraw the proposals and ensure that disabled voices are at the forefront of all future reforms. We urgently need a welfare system that supports people when they need it most, so that they can continue to live, work and contribute to society, not one that pushes them further into poverty.

3.22 pm

**David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): A strong social security system is not just the cornerstone of a welfare state, but a hallmark of a decent society. However, it is exactly because the system is so essential that we must safeguard its future. It is our duty not just to help the most vulnerable today, but to ensure that the system is sustainable so that it can offer support tomorrow.

That is the central challenge when we consider PIP. The number receiving it has more than doubled in the five years since the pandemic, and more than 1,000 new people join it every single day. Although health conditions have become more widespread in the years following covid, due mainly to the Conservatives' terrible mismanagement of and under-investment in the NHS, the number of people on health-related benefits such as PIP has, on some metrics, increased at twice the rate that underlying health conditions have.

Those of us who believe in the welfare state cannot simply ignore this issue, and neither can we posit speculative new revenue sources to wish the problem away. Some of my hon. Friends have mentioned a wealth tax as a possible solution. I say to them gently: if only it were that easy. Dr Allin-Khan,

"no country in the world has ever successfully had a wealth tax".

Those are not my words, but those of Paul Johnson, head of the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

If we are to protect the system, we must not seek to freeze it in aspic or ignore the problems it faces. Instead, we must confront the problems head on and seek reforms that will allow the institutions of the welfare state and the values they encode to endure.

3.24 pm

**Anna Gelderd** (South East Cornwall) (Lab): Many people in South East Cornwall are deeply worried about what the proposals will mean for them and their families.

The Government's consultation is still open, so I urge residents to participate and respond. Alongside the work that I and colleagues undertake daily, raising the issue in public and holding meetings, the consultation is a vital opportunity for people to participate.

In South East Cornwall, 9.3% of working age adults are claiming PIP, well above the south-west average. Behind every one of the numbers is a person—a neighbour, a parent, a carer, a young adult trying to build a life in a rural part of the country where access to services and transport is already difficult. The most common reasons for making a claim include anxiety, depression, learning disabilities and so on, so it is clear that we must do more to support working-age adults who can work to do so. That means quality mental health services and better special educational needs and disabilities provision for our families.

The cost of living continues to hit hard in South East Cornwall, so I welcome the Government's commitments to raise the standard universal credit allowance above inflation and to introduce the new health premium for those who will never be able to work, but I ask the Minister: what is being done to ensure that those affected are protected from being pushed into poverty? Will he commit to reviewing how to ensure that more accurate decisions are made in the first place to reduce stress, deliver better for our communities and reduce costs? Ultimately, South East Cornwall people rely on these services, and that is who I work for every day and will continue to fight for as their MP.

3.26 pm

**Ian Lavery** (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan. I give great credit to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for bringing this subject to the Chamber.

There is not one MP here who was elected to make people poorer—not one. If there is, they should look at themselves in the mirror and feel a million shames. I look at the Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms)—a good friend of mine and a tremendous servant to this House—and I wonder what went wrong. Why, when the rich are getting richer, the very rich are getting even more rich and there are more billionaires and millionaires than ever, are we tapping people for pennies, taking away their livelihoods and making their lives so miserable? My constituency of Blyth and Ashington is in the bottom 10% for social deprivation. I have 10,467 people depending on PIP support just to live. They are not living a life of luxury.

**Imran Hussain:** I forgot to say in my speech that I will vote against these measures if the Government push ahead. Will my hon. Friend do the same?

**Ian Lavery:** I will definitely vote against these measures. I was not elected to make my people poorer, for heaven's sake, and to reduce support and benefits. There are some decent proposals with regard to getting people back to work, but the threat of a blanket reduction of benefits is scandalous. It is not Labour.

By the way, I will not take any lectures from the Tories, who have said categorically that they would double the amount of money that we are looking to withdraw from the benefits system—probably up to



£15 billion. I will definitely be voting against these measures. I am a voice for people who need a voice in this place, and we need to oppose this.

3.28 pm

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing this important debate.

I totally agree that the welfare system needs reform. There is something seriously wrong when a person who cannot work at one point in time is written off work forever and not supported to re-enter the labour market, after having failed the work capability assessment. That is the flawed system that the Government are rightly aiming to address, but I want to use this short time to express my real concerns about the proposed tightening of PIP eligibility criteria. The truth is that many people who currently qualify for PIP will no longer qualify under the reforms, despite having very significant care needs.

Jane, one of my constituents, has Crohn's disease. The condition significantly impacts her daily life, affecting food preparation, washing and dressing, and leading to anxiety when interacting with others. She uses her PIP to buy more expensive free-from foods, and petrol to allow her to use a car to go to work. She is seriously worried that if these reforms are implemented and she loses her PIP, she will not be able to work.

I have had example after example from constituents whose care needs would seem, from the reasonable perspective of a member of the public, to be significant despite the proposed removal of PIP. The Prime Minister was absolutely right this morning to say that the principle is that the most vulnerable will be protected. At the moment, it seems to me that we are not meeting that test.

3.30 pm

**Daniel Francis** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): As the parent of a child with cerebral palsy and complex disabilities, I know what it is like to be a carer—I am a carer every day and I will be a carer until my dying day. It is therefore incumbent on me to speak on behalf of carers in this debate.

I am now privileged because of the income I earn, but I have been there: worrying every day about the struggle of caring and the cost of paying the bills and mortgage. I know how many of my constituents in Bexleyheath and Crayford are stuck in the bubble that you get yourself into—stuck on a mixture of carer's allowance and PIP, often becoming disabled yourself because of the mental or physical cost of that care. According to analysis by the Carers Trust, 28% of carers are already living in poverty; it has particularly asked for a detailed impact assessment specifically on the carers community. Will the Minister comment on that when he sums up?

I believe that this policy is driven by the DWP and Treasury alone. It is incumbent on us to ensure that other Government Departments—the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education and the Department for Transport—come up with proposals that also support the measures. I ask the Minister to comment on that because if we are truly to

get disabled people to access work, and if we are truly to support carers, we need a strong cross-Government departmental strategy.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (in the Chair):** I am going to call the final Back-Bench speaker and, following that, Steve Darling.

3.32 pm

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): PIP and its predecessors have never been unemployment benefits but a critical aid to supporting people in and out of work to live independent lives. We know that being disabled or suffering from a chronic health condition means facing many additional costs. Scope estimates that households with a disabled inhabitant need to spend an additional £1,000 a month just to secure the same standard of living as those without. Prepared food delivery, specialised clothes and technology required to aid normal everyday living, or just simply to get to work, all come at a greater cost.

Right now, we know that these households are disproportionately impacted by the cost of living crisis, with Trussell estimating that three in every four households accessing a food bank have a disabled inhabitant. Data from the Department for Work and Pensions shows that 307,000 households who currently receive the daily living part of PIP needed to use a food bank in the past year. That is three times the rate of food bank usage among households in general, which illustrates the significant hardship that disabled households face.

Yes, we have problems and too many people need welfare support, but let us attack the reasons for that rather than simply cutting the financial envelope associated with those services. Let us build a system that reflects the founding principles of the welfare state—compassion and fairness—and that recognises the challenges of the 21st century, but removes the remaining obstacles, making sure that all people can live fulfilling and worthwhile lives.

3.33 pm

**Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). I myself applied for this very debate last week, but I am delighted that the Mother of the House came out of the hat—or maybe Mr Speaker chose her. I am delighted that the right hon. Lady has led the charge so ably.

This is about dignity and independence. What is the point of being an MP? It is to give people agency over their own lives, and that is what PIP does in shedloads—it gives people with disabilities agency over their own lives. In my constituency of Torbay, 8,592 people claim PIP—12% of our working-age population, against a national average of 8%. I have the honour of representing the most deprived Liberal Democrat constituency in the country, and I live some of that myself, being disabled. We face real challenges. The issue is the highest area of interest for those who come to our citizens advice bureau in Torbay.

Only this week, I met a couple of people who came to take part in events. A blind gentleman from Portsmouth shared with me how he has PIP to back him up if things go wrong with Access to Work—and sadly, things regularly

[Steve Darling]

3.39 pm

go wrong with the Access to Work system, as the Minister knows, because I have crossed swords with him on this before. I also met a young lady yesterday who has mental health challenges. She is able to have therapy, but that would not be there and she would be spiralling in a mental health doom loop if she did not have PIP to support her.

**Manuela Perteghella** (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): In Stratford-on-Avon, I have heard from constituents who fear that the welfare reforms could actually undermine their ability to remain in employment. Does my hon. Friend agree that many of our constituents rely on PIP as a crucial support that allows them to overcome the barriers they face to staying in work?

**Steve Darling:** That is the crucial thing—PIP is there to support people getting back into work; my hon. Friend is quite right.

Whether it is the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Chancellor or the Prime Minister, they all say that the benefits system is broken, so let us make sure we reform it with some compassion. Liberal Democrats would like to see the benefits system reformed, but we want that to be done with people with disabilities, rather than it being foisted upon them. The Office for Budget Responsibility has said there is no evidence that the cuts will get people back into employment—actually, 300,000 people will end up in poverty. We must also remember that PIP is a passport to other benefits; for example, carer's allowance is often married to it. Under the proposals, a number of households across the country could lose £12,000 if they lost PIP and carer's allowance at the same time. That would be massive.

I want to touch on a couple of case studies. One is from Scope: the case of a gentleman called Anthony who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and autism. He gets 13 points—brilliant—but sadly, all those points are collected up under the four-point threshold. That is extremely concerning. He is worried sick about what he will be able to afford, and he works part time. The citizens advice bureau in Torbay reached out to me about a lady whose condition got worse. She was assessed, but sadly she lost her PIP. She is almost a harbinger of what could go wrong for other people, because she is now not able to meet her living costs, particularly her housing costs. That is a massive challenge for her.

I have a few questions for the Minister. I am particularly interested to know why the Government are introducing this cruel cut to PIP without undertaking reform in advance. As a few Members have highlighted, academics have found that there were about 600 suicides at the time of the change from DLA to PIP. As this cohort is much larger, has the Minister undertaken an assessment of how many suicides there will be? Is it over 1,000? Will he share with us what mitigating measures the Government are considering to ensure we do not hit those figures, which are extremely scary?

As the Mother of the House highlighted, there was a by-election in the not-too-distant past. Will the Minister listen to the people who spoke in that by-election and make sure that some of the most deprived communities do not have the heart ripped out of them by cuts to PIP?

**Danny Kruger** (East Wiltshire) (Con): Thank you very much indeed, Dr Allin-Khan, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to participate. I acknowledge the powerful speeches made by all Members this afternoon and my deep respect for the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). Nobody speaks with greater sincerity and authority on behalf of people who are marginalised and disadvantaged in our society. I pay tribute to her, to her work and to her contribution today.

I want to say a quick word about the history, as mention has been made of the Conservatives' time in office. I acknowledge that genuine mistakes were made in the design of the welfare system that we have now. The system is clearly not perfect, but it was very much not perfect before: in 2010 the system was extremely complex, with high rates of benefit dependency. The introduction of universal credit and PIP helped to rationalise and bring greater order to the system, and to reward work rather than welfare. Significant improvements were made in that regard, including improvements in the number of disabled people who were able to work and were supported in work.

In the last year of our time in government, 300,000 more disabled people were in work than in the year before. There was genuine improvement. Nevertheless, not enough support was given to many welfare recipients; that was the consequence of our fiscal inheritance in 2010 but also of choices made by the coalition Government, which fell particularly hard on local authorities and the DWP. I acknowledge that point, which is often made by hon. Members.

Then something else happened, particularly around 2017 or 2018 and even more so after covid. We saw a significant rise in the number of people in receipt of health and disability benefits, including in the higher categories of the universal credit health element. People were stuck on benefits, in many cases indefinitely and forever. What explains the imperative for reform, which the Government are responding to, is that the number of people on the higher rate of UC has increased by a third over the past five years. The PIP budget is growing by 50% in this Parliament alone. The fact is that the benefit bill is unsustainable. However, it is also true that the system can be inhumane and ungenerous.

We have a paradox: a system that is bloated and unsustainable overall, leading to the large budgets we are facing, yet on the frontline, in people's actual experience, the system is starved in terms of the consequence of the inadequacy of benefits for many people. This is a huge opportunity and an imperative for reform—genuine reform, not just the soundbite. I notice that we do not have any Reform MPs in Westminster Hall for this debate. We genuinely need real reform.

In 2024, the Government I supported had plans to bring in further reforms to the benefit system; we did not have the opportunity to introduce those reforms, thanks to the public. Labour was elected with a huge majority that includes many Members here. To my regret and surprise, after 14 years of complaints about Government welfare reforms, the Labour party entered Government apparently without any plans to change the system.

We have spent eight months waiting for reforms to be introduced, only to get what we have now: a crude and cruel set of cuts, without any reform to the system at all. It is purely in response to what the Chancellor has done to the British economy—induced a fiscal crisis and caused the Treasury to demand of the DWP that swingeing cuts be made to the welfare budget, without any opportunity to reform the system or to reduce demand for welfare. That is, of course, what we should be doing if we want to bring down the bills.

There are also, of course, tax increases, including on employers, making it much harder for people to move from welfare into work, which I will not discuss today, and the removal of vital support from pensioners through the winter fuel payment cut.

**Ian Lavery:** Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell us how much His Majesty's Opposition propose to cut from the welfare bill?

**Danny Kruger:** The hon. Gentleman will be gratified to know that we are not in government, so it is not for us to come forward with precise plans. At the end of the previous Parliament, we had a manifesto commitment to reduce benefit spending and reform disability benefits and UC. We are now in a position of policy formulation, so I am afraid I am not able to tell him exactly what we would do. My role is to challenge the Government on why they have taken so long to come forward with an absence of meaningful reform plans. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I want to see benefit spending reduced. I think we spend too much on welfare in this country, but that is because we have social breakdown and poverty. The answer to that is not simply to cut benefits without reforming the system, but to reduce the drivers of poverty.

I recognise many of the problems with PIP, and I understand the imperative for change. Members have powerfully made the case that the system is currently inadequate, particularly for people with fluctuating conditions. We have heard powerful testimony about that in the Work and Pensions Committee—the Chairman and many other members are here. In fact, just this morning we heard powerful evidence from people talking about mental health. People who have a set of very complex, interconnected needs might not reach four points on any one measure, so could lose PIP under the Government's proposal. I have read evidence from the MS Society that makes the same point: 48% of PIP recipients with MS do not reach four points in any one of the measures, so would be at risk. I am very concerned on behalf of those individuals.

I am also concerned that we do not even know how many such people there are. Members made the point that it took a freedom of information request to get the figure of 1.3 million out of the Government. That is not the figure that was officially released. As the hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) said, we are also unclear about the effect on passported benefits, which is a significant question for the Government to answer. Most of all, we do not know what the Government's announced assessment review will come forward with, yet we are making the cuts before we understand how the method of assessing eligibility will be reformed.

I implore the Minister to pause the measures set out in the Green Paper. We need a proper review not just of the assessment but of the way the whole system works.

We absolutely need to bring down the benefits bill, but we do that by reducing demand for welfare, and many of the levers for that are of course outside the DWP. Nevertheless, we should redesign the system itself because of the many problems I have identified. As Members said, we should do that with claimants, not to them.

People voted for change in 2024, but they are not getting it. The Prime Minister promises more of the same—to go “further and faster” on the course he is already on. I deeply regret what he is doing. I have very great respect for the Minister. Few people have spoken in Parliament with greater authority, conviction and expertise on the subject of welfare in recent times. I have great sympathy with him for having to defend this policy position, which I do not think he would have defended in opposition.

I echo the points made by the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and the right hon. Members for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and for Hackney North and Stoke Newington. They said that Labour should be better than this, and I agree: we should all be better than this. My party will stand with Members who oppose the changes.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (in the Chair):** Before I call the Minister, I kindly request that he leave Diane Abbott a couple of minutes to have a final closing word.

3.48 pm

**The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms):** I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan. Like everyone else, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on securing the debate and on the way she introduced it. I pay tribute to her for her consistent focus on this very important topic for a long time. To everyone who has spoken, I say that it is absolutely right to be passionate about this topic.

The “Pathways to Work” Green Paper, published in March, set out to deliver three things with a properly thought-through plan—contrary to what the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger) just said. First, we will provide proper, tailored employment support for people who are out of work on health and disability grounds, with the biggest reforms to support for a generation and a funding commitment rising to an additional £1 billion a year by the end of this Parliament.

Secondly, we will remove the disincentives to work that were left behind in the benefits system by the previous Government's haphazard benefit freezes, which forced too many people to aspire to so-called limited capability for work and work-related activity status, when it should be supporting people to aspire to work and providing the support to enable them to achieve those aspirations. As has been mentioned, we have announced the first ever permanent real-terms increase in the universal credit standard allowance.

Thirdly—this is where we have focused in the debate—we will make the costs of PIP sustainable and address the unsustainable increases that have led to an almost doubling of the real-terms cost of the benefit, from £12 billion to £22 billion, since the year before the pandemic. Last year alone, it increased by £2.8 billion beyond inflation. I think everybody who has spoken would recognise that we simply cannot let that trend carry on.



[*Sir Stephen Timms*]

I think I am right in saying that 30 years ago my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and I served together on the Treasury Committee. She knows as well as anybody the need for funding to be sustainable. It is not in the interests of those for whom PIP is a lifeline, in anything beyond the very short term, for the Government simply to allow the costs to rise as they have done over the last five years.

**Nadia Whittome:** Will the Minister give way?

**Sir Stephen Timms:** I will give way just once, as that is all I can manage.

**Nadia Whittome:** Has the Minister seen the latest analysis from the New Economics Foundation, which estimates that fewer than 50% of disabled people are claiming these benefits, and that the acceptance rate has remained static? It is not actually the case that people are claiming who should not be claiming: people are claiming benefits to which they are entitled.

**Sir Stephen Timms:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The people who are getting PIP are the people who meet the criteria. My point is that we cannot simply carry on increasing spending at the current rate. That has to be addressed.

I well understand the concerns among people who claim PIP, and I want to take the opportunity of this debate to address those concerns. We are talking to disabled people, disability charities and disabled people's organisations. The Green Paper consultation will continue until the end of June, and a White Paper will follow later this year. But we need to act ahead of a White Paper. Claims to PIP are set to more than double this decade, from 2 million to more than 4.3 million. That increase is partly accounted for by a 17% increase in disability prevalence, as mentioned, but the increase in the benefit caseload is much higher. It would certainly not be in the interests of people currently claiming the benefits for the Government to bury their heads in the sand over that rate of increase.

Following the Green Paper, we are consulting on how best to support those affected by the eligibility changes. We are looking to improve the PIP assessment; as mentioned, I will lead a review of that. The current system produces poor employment outcomes, high economic inactivity, low living standards and high costs to the taxpayer. It needs to change. We want a more proactive, pro-work system that supports people better and supports the economy as well.

I will turn specifically to the changes to PIP eligibility. PIP is a crucial benefit that contributes to the extra living costs that arise from disability or a health impairment. The changes we have announced relate to PIP daily living; the PIP mobility component is not affected. We are clear that the daily living component of PIP should not be means-tested, taxed, frozen or anything else that has been suggested. We are committed to continue increasing it in line with inflation. For the majority of current claimants, and categorically for the most vulnerable, who have been highlighted in this debate, it will continue to provide, in full, the support that it currently provides. Employment support for those who are able and want to work will be substantially improved as well.

As has been referenced, we have published data that shows that just over half of those who claim PIP today scored four points in one daily living activity in the last PIP assessment. Understandably, as we have heard, almost half of those who currently claim the benefit will be concerned that they will not be eligible in future. However, we have also published the Office for Budget Responsibility's assessment, which is that by 2029-30 only around 10% of those who currently claim the daily living component of PIP will lose it as a result of the changes. That is the assumption that has gone into the spending forecasts. We are projecting that spending on PIP will continue to increase in real terms every year, but not at the unsustainable rate of the last five years.

**Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Sir Stephen Timms:** I am afraid I cannot give way again.

The OBR is right on this. Its assessment is based on previous experience of changes of this kind. The behaviour both of the people claiming the benefits and of those who conduct the assessments changes. For example, I have met people who were awarded two points for one of the activities last time around, when I thought they were entitled to four, but it did not change their award, so it was not challenged and nobody minded. In future, someone in that position could well score four points on that activity and so retain the benefit, even though they did not score four points on any of the activities last time around.

Changes to the PIP assessment will not be immediate; they will take effect from November 2026.

**Imran Hussain:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Sir Stephen Timms:** I cannot give way again; a lot of points were made in the debate.

For a given individual, the changes will take effect only at their first award review after November 2026. Award reviews take place on average at three-year intervals, so for many PIP claimants the change will take effect only a year or two after November 2026. In line with existing practice, people who are above state pension age will not normally be reassessed and so will not be affected at all.

If and when people are reassessed, it will be by a trained assessor, and the assessment will be of their individual needs and circumstances. We are consulting on how best to support those who lose entitlement, including those who will lose carers' allowance, who are explicitly flagged up in the Green Paper. We set out in the Green Paper our plans to improve trust in the way that both PIP and WCA assessments work, which many of us have heard worries about, through reviewing our approach to safeguarding; recording assessments as standard so that when something goes wrong with the assessment, we can look back at the recording, see what happened and improve the assessment for next time; and moving back to having more face-to-face assessments, while continuing to meet the needs of people who may require different methods of assessment.

I think I have time to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Anna Dixon).

**Anna Dixon:** I apologise for not getting here earlier; I have been listening to carers who have been sharing their stories. I spoke to a woman who is caring for her husband, who has a neurodegenerative disease and currently scores only two points across the board. Their family would be penalised under the tightening restrictions. Does the Minister agree that somebody with a neurological and degenerative disease should be counted as severely disabled and protected from the changes?

**Sir Stephen Timms:** I would be happy to talk to my hon. Friend about the details of that particular case. I think the threshold we have set is the right place to set the eligibility criteria in the future. I am happy to discuss that point specifically. Our goal is a system that is financially sustainable in the long term so that it can be there for all of us who need it in the future.

3.58 pm

**Ms Abbott:** The Minister has again repeated the line that the number of people claiming PIP has shot up and that there must be something dubious about that. I ask him to look at the New Economics Foundation report that came out today, which says that the reasons why the number of people claiming has gone up are a rise in the number of disabled people, a rise in deprivation, long covid and the pressures on the NHS.

The Minister said we were asking the Government to put their head in the sand; no—we are just asking the Government to talk to the disabled and their supporters and not ram through legislation without giving us sufficient information. This cruel and misconceived legislation will not end well politically. Meanwhile, millions of the disabled will live in fear.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Personal Independence Payment and disabled people.

## Defence Sector Financing

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** I will call Luke Charters to move the motion. I will then call the Minister to respond. I remind other Members that they may only make a speech with prior permission from the Member in charge of the debate and the Minister. As is the convention for 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up.

**Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered barriers to defence sector financing.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for responding today. Every era has ideas that capture imaginations, but only some give birth to institutions that genuinely have the chance to reshape history. The World Bank kick-started post-war reconstruction, and in 1949 NATO was founded, representing a giant, global step forward towards peace and security—frankly, it is hard to imagine a world without it. The lesson here is clear: when institutions are bold and are built for the long term, they secure the peace that prosperity depends on.

Today I want to present another bold idea about an institution that would strengthen and deepen our alliances for generations. What makes this opportunity even more unique is that one of the architects of the concept will hopefully be joining us later. I speak, of course, of the urgent need for a multilateral defence development bank. In my view, that is the single most transformative lever the Government could pull to fortify our collective security.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing today's debate on defence sector financing. Given the current precarious security situation in Europe, we cannot be complacent and be left behind while our adversaries and others ramp up their military capabilities. Does he agree that it would be highly misguided to hold back British industry in such volatile and unpredictable times?

**Mr Charters:** I thank my hon. Friend for his sterling work on the Defence Committee. Through our collective industrial strength, what greater deterrent could there be to our adversaries?

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I spoke to the hon. Gentleman before, so he knows what is coming. Is it not ironic that at a time when the Government want to increase defence spending—most MPs support that, and I am one of them—the trustees of the Members' pension fund have decided that there is to be no investment of MPs' pension contributions in the defence industry? Is it not time for the pension trustees to change their attitude immediately? What a disgrace. I hardly believe it.

**Mr Charters:** There could be nothing more ethical than investing in the companies that support our Ukrainian friends.

[Mr Charters]

I believe Britain's membership of a multilateral defence development bank could cement Britain as a leader not only in financial services, but in defence. Today, I will also talk about how we can bolster our sovereign defence industries by fixing the capital stack here at home and by sorting out the credit and cash-flow issues for British companies.

I will just take a couple of steps back. When I was at the Bank of England and the Financial Conduct Authority, I was working on cross-border payments, sanctions and so many related things, but more importantly, I had a front-row seat to the regulatory and financial barriers that defence start-ups faced when I was acting head of compliance at a fintech. I saw how everything from export controls and dual-use rules to complex international regimes made it really difficult for those defence customers.

A few months ago, the Prime Minister pledged the largest defence spending rise since the cold war. That sent a clear signal that now is the time to invest in peace. Yet British defence innovators have told me they still face hurdles accessing finance, bank accounts and insurance. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Alex Baker) and I brought together over 100 Labour parliamentarians to write to the sector, highlighting some of those challenges. Following that, we wrote to the FCA, which helpfully published a statement that, as we have heard from firms, has eased environmental, social and governance perception concerns.

**Mrs Sureena Brackenridge** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): At this pivotal moment for national security, I welcome my hon. Friend's call to clarify ESG rules to better back defence investment. Collins Aerospace in my constituency works really hard to create highly skilled jobs and apprenticeships. Does my hon. Friend agree that financial institutions play a vital role in supporting the defence sector, so we can further boost UK jobs in our economy?

**Mr Charters:** If we can get the financing environment right for Collins Aerospace, perhaps it can grow at more pace and deliver more high-skilled jobs in my hon. Friend's constituency, for which I know she is such a powerful advocate. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot and I hosted a summit at the Guildhall last month, and we were kindly joined by the Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle). Also joining us were defence primes, small and medium-sized enterprises, major banks and other stakeholders.

**Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned small and medium-sized businesses. Would he agree that, for small businesses in defence-adjacent industries that want to grow into the defence market—such as those in the Teesside defence and innovation cluster in my constituency—a defence development bank, as he proposes, would give them that opportunity for market growth?

**Mr Charters:** My hon. Friend is a really powerful advocate for the businesses in his constituency, and as I will come on to, a multilateral commercial bank could help commercial lenders lend to the SMEs in his area.

When we were at the Guildhall, we were gathering evidence from UK banks, investors, defence primes, SMEs and start-ups. We drafted a light-hearted report, of more than 6,000 words, which is due in the coming weeks. It diagnoses domestic financing barriers for defence companies, which can be summarised as the six Cs: credit, cash flow, capital, contracts, compliance and consensus. I will focus on two of those, credit and cash flow, before returning to the concept of a multilateral defence bank.

If the UK is serious about strengthening its sovereign defence capability, we must build a proper defence financing stack, from early-stage equity to multilateral development finance. The stakes could not be higher, as one outstanding British SME founded by a veteran, told me they are likely to move to the US because some of the issues I am about to touch on.

We know funding challenges affect all SMEs, but those issues are more acute in defence. The sector's unique risks, long procurement cycles, unpredictable cash flow and stringent compliance requirements all make commercial lending much harder. Let me start with some reflections on cash flow. We know cash flow constraints significantly increase defence SMEs' working capital requirements. If a prime contractor delays payments, it creates a knock-on effect that constrains smaller suppliers. Commercial lenders see those risks and apply higher risk premiums to working capital loans—or, in some cases, deny lending altogether.

To its credit, the Ministry of Defence under this Government is leading by example, paying 95% of invoices within five days. That is world class. However, some primes are not at that standard, and their slow payment practices squeeze liquidity from the very companies we need to support. I have been told first hand by commercial lenders that they find it difficult to raise lending limits for existing borrowers in the defence sector, or even worse, are not always able to lend to those with promising growth potential.

One UK bank, which is doing quite a significant amount in this space, has written to me calling for the creation of a Government-backed defence guarantee scheme. That scheme would allow defence SMEs to access loans that might otherwise be unavailable commercially. It could also increase lending to those with a restricted borrowing capacity, and it could be modelled on existing schemes run by the British Business Bank.

We also need to address, head-on, poor payment practices of some of the major contractors. I thought about naming some of the firms under parliamentary privilege, but I shall not. One commercial lender wrote to me with the idea of a prime contractor scheme, where major contractors are required to reduce payment terms or even pay some British defence companies in advance. That could be transformative for SMEs operating in this high-risk sector. Let us back British defence SMEs, not just with warm words but with the finance stack, fair terms and funding guarantees they need to succeed.

The two ideas I have set out—a prime contractor scheme and a Government-backed defence guarantee scheme—would both tackle the classic market failure, which is more prevalent in defence. This is where information asymmetries and high-risk premia leave a segment of the market undercapitalised. By underwriting



a proportion of commercial lending via Government guarantees, we would be able to reduce some of those borrowing spreads, lower the cost of capital for those firms and better align commercial lending with our national security aims. I warmly invite the Minister to work with colleagues in the Department for Business and Trade and the Ministry of Defence to see whether those ideas have merit.

I am delighted to be joined today by Rob Murray, an outstanding ex-Army officer. He has been working on the concept of a multilateral defence bank, known as the Defence, Security and Resilience bank. It would be not-for-profit and is one of the strongest proposals out there because of his expertise and that of his team. A multilateral bank, backed by allies across the world, be it the EU, our North Atlantic friends or Indo-Pacific allies, is the right fit for Britain at this time. Let me set out why.

Take the ongoing war in Ukraine. We are already feeling the effects of that in the UK, industrially and financially. While Russia is fighting with artillery, we are fighting with accounting rules. That is why now is the time to be involved as a founding member of a multilateral defence bank. On my earlier concept of the defence financing stack, a multilateral bank would supply a much larger funding source to support large-scale industrial capacity. It would sit alongside the other two ideas I mentioned. It would be a World Bank-style financial vehicle, focused on defence, and it is ready to launch. Owned by nation states, it would mobilise capital into allied defence production and supply chain resilience. It would raise capital at triple A rates and guarantee working capital loans to commercial banks, who would then in turn lend to individual companies. That would mean that commercial lenders would be able to get credit at sensible prices backstopped by a multilateral bank.

Not only that but, through its triple-A rating, it could save 50 to 100 basis points for some countries. It would hold factories, tooling and inventory on its own balance sheet, meaning that Governments would not need to borrow and book public debt, creating vital fiscal headroom in the process for nation states. It would crowd in private sector capital and kick-start reindustrialisation in Britain and Europe without breaching fiscal rules, such as my favourite acronym in fiscal politics: PSNFL or public sector net financial liabilities.

The reason this idea ultimately wins for me is on value for money. I know through my work on the Public Accounts Committee that it is not just about how much money is spent but how smartly it is spent. This is a great opportunity to continue the Prime Minister's work to make Britain a leader on the world stage once again. A multilateral bank could unite our allies, and the UK could anchor a multilateral defence bank at the heart of any future defence pact with Europe. The UK and EU summit on 19 May could be an excellent place to start this conversation. It could also include like-minded partners from around the world, be it Canada, Australia, Japan or Ukraine on the frontline.

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Highgate) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate him on a very important speech. I know he has been vocal on this topic since he was elected. He will not be surprised

to know that I agree with him: the City has an important role to play in mobilising capital to support the defence industry, as he mentioned.

I also know how important it is for UK companies to have access to EU finance. For example, there is the Horizon scheme. British scientists have already secured £500 million in research funding, thanks to the UK rejoining the programme. He just mentioned the summit coming up. Does my hon. Friend agree that co-operative defence procurement should be a high priority for the Government at the UK-EU summit?

**Mr Charters:** As always, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. To secure lasting peace, we need greater co-operation in defence procurement and financing with the EU and allies across the world.

Last month, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot and I warned that Russia plans to produce 4,500 tanks and armoured vehicles this year, plus 250,000 shells per month. That would lead to stockpiles three times larger than those of the US and Europe combined. Let that sink in. This is not a temporary surge; it is a long-term shift. We must match military strategy with financial and industrial muscle through a multilateral defence bank.

**Mike Martin** (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): The hon. Member is speaking eloquently about the need for joined-up financing and fundraising for defence, but the other side of that issue is clarity about what the Government want. A key example is space: the UK has significantly underperformed and punches well below its weight in defence space, which is spread across two Ministries. There is no clarity. The sector says, "We want just one person in Government to tell us what they want." Does he agree that, as well as sorting out the funding, the Government's key role is to be clear about what they want? I think that that is the strategy of which he speaks.

**Mr Charters:** Growth in the defence sector, and allied sectors such as space, will deliver prosperity across the UK. If we can get commercial lending working for defence, it will support growth in those allied sectors too.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is one of the most erudite Members, and understands the City of London better than anyone else, so I am sure she agrees with me that there is no better home for the bank than the Square Mile, not least because of our relationships across the Atlantic and our proximity to Europe. My simple ask today is that the Government invite officials from finance Departments around the world to meet in London to discuss and explore the concept of a multilateral defence bank.

**Steve Barclay** (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I join colleagues in welcoming this debate. The hon. Member is making some constructive suggestions, but a simple thing that the Government could do, because they have sole control of it, is look at the British Business Bank, which is sector-agnostic. That would be persuasive to international partners and would fit with the arguments he makes. Why are Ministers not willing to give a steer to the British Business Bank?

**Mr Charters:** I praise the last Government for their role in setting up the national security strategic investment fund as part of the British Business Bank. One of the problems with it is that it allows lending only to dual-use parts of the defence supply chain. That is an interesting point for the Government to look at. We must not think about these institutions in silos; we have to look at the BBB, the national wealth fund and UK Defence Innovation as a collective to find out how they can best support the sector.

Defence has always operated on two fronts: economic and military. This week, we reflect on VE Day 80 years ago. During world war two, factories in Britain were transformed overnight to churn out Spitfires, tanks and munitions, while rationing and war bonds mobilised a home front economy to sustain the fight. Let me be clear: Britain faces strategic competition not just on the battlefield but in our factories, our budgets and our very financial systems. This is not a challenge on the horizon; it is one that is already confronting us, economically, industrially and financially. Turbocharging financial support for our defence industrial base will empower companies of every size and truly build a powerful economic and industrial deterrent. It is time to remove the barriers and act faster, further and more decisively in supporting British defence.

4.19 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Emma Reynolds):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Mr Charters) on securing this debate. I also thank the Chair of the Defence Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for their contributions.

I am going to embarrass a few people now. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Mrs Brackenridge), who is one of my successors in a seat I represented between 2010 and 2019. It was great to hear about the success of Collins Aerospace, which is in that constituency. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton North (Chris McDonald) and for Hampstead and Highgate (Tulip Siddiq), as well as the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), for their interventions.

Today's discussion and the fantastic speech from my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer have highlighted the complexities and challenges we face in ensuring that our defence sector is robust enough to protect our national security and support our growth mission, which is the No. 1 mission of this Government. In recent years, the world has been reshaped by global geopolitical instability, including Russia's aggression and its illegal invasion of Ukraine—a war on our continent—as well as increasing threats from malign actors. This, combined with the challenging economic and fiscal context, makes it essential that we address the barriers to finance in the defence sector, so I thank my hon. Friend again for securing this debate in Westminster Hall.

National security is the first duty of the Government, as highlighted in our plan for change. We have demonstrated our commitment in recent announcements, such as the Prime Minister committing to reach defence spending of 2.5% of GDP from April 2027. As he said at Prime

Minister's questions today, the last time the UK reached that level of spending was under the last Labour Government. Our ambition is to reach 3% of GDP in the next Parliament, as economic and fiscal conditions allow.

Given that uplift in defence spending and the challenging fiscal and economic context we find ourselves in, this Government want to ensure that the defence sector contributes to achieving our No. 1 mission of economic growth. The Chancellor reiterated that message at the spring statement, when she announced a package of defence and growth-focused measures. That included the creation of a new organisation, UK Defence Innovation, with the explicit aim of supporting the scale-up of SMEs, start-ups and non-traditional defence suppliers, enabling them to grow and thrive, fostering an innovative defence tech ecosystem and crowding in private capital.

As has been discussed in this excellent debate, we have been made aware of a number of financing issues in the defence sector, and I will come on to them shortly. I will first respond to the final part of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer, on the proposals for a multilateral defence bank. I thank him for drawing our attention to these proposals, and I thank Rob Murray, the founder of the multilateral Defence, Security and Resilience bank, who has been liaising with the Government and championing this proposal. We recognise the issues that my hon. Friend raised today. We are looking carefully at the proposals and actively discussing with our allies a range of multilateral options.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate mentioned the EU, and I should say that we are looking forward to the UK-EU leaders' summit on 19 May. We welcome the EU's efforts to bolster Europe's defence, including the ambitions set out in the ReArm Europe package and the defence White Paper. We have been clear that we are keen to work with EU allies on common challenges to our shared security. The Chancellor discussed this with counterparts at the G20 in February, and we are discussing the shared challenges with our European partners. I cannot comment in detail on those discussions at this time, but we will continue to work together with our European allies on this incredibly important issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer talked about some of the spillover effects, and I assure him that the Treasury and the MOD are keen to maximise spillovers and synergies between the civil and military sectors for both economic growth and military reasons. We are considering how to maximise these benefits as we develop the defence industrial strategy.

My hon. Friend mentioned a number of issues to do with defence companies' access to finance, and I welcome the recent meeting he held with our hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Alex Baker) at Guildhall in the City. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry was present at that meeting, as were representatives of the defence sector and a number of trade associations representing the City and financial services.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer brings to this House a great wealth of experience in financial services, from both a firm and a regulatory perspective, so he will know that decisions regarding the provision of financial services to businesses are a commercial

matter; banks and insurers need to make an assessment of the relevant risks and conduct appropriate due diligence. However, we are very clear that no company should be denied access to financial services purely on the basis that it works in defence. I encourage all defence firms to read the very helpful guidance published by UK Finance and ADA Group. It is excellent to see the trade associations coming together, working from the different perspectives of the defence sector and finance, to produce that guidance.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): The proposal for a multilateral bank is a fascinating, but part of this debate has been to focus on some of the inhibitors on providing private finance and investment in the United Kingdom. The situation is getting worse with large-scale pension funds. My hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned the parliamentary pension fund, but it pales into insignificance when we consider that Aviva, Royal London and the National Employment Savings Trust are all divesting from defence in our own country. That contrasts with the efforts that this Government and previous Governments have made to invest in this space.

Will the Minister consider—perhaps through FCA guidance—strengthening the fiduciary duty that the trustees of these funds have to increase the coffers and increase growth? That would show that Government are prepared to do more than just issue guidance, but that they will challenge and encourage investment in this vital sector in our country.

**Emma Reynolds:** We have been clear that there is no contradiction between ESG considerations and investment in defence, and that investing in our defence industry is a way to protect our democracy and borders, and to work in solidarity with our European neighbours. I will write to the hon. Gentleman about the specifics, but I know that various accusations have been levelled at some of the companies he mentions and others. We need to be very careful about that.

I heard what the hon. Member for Strangford said about our own pension funds. There is huge potential in our pensions industry. We should ensure that that industry is in a position to leverage the great returns that can come from defence companies, but there is a lot of muddying the waters around certain firms and what they are doing. I do not want to name particular companies, but I am happy to discuss it with the hon. Gentleman in detail after the debate. Aspersions have been cast against certain companies managing pension funds that are not absolutely accurate when it comes to ESG. A lot of things are piled under the ESG banner. We are very keen that opaque ESG ratings should not impede the attractiveness of the defence sector.

I am running out of time. I believe that the Member who moved the motion replies?

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** No.

**Emma Reynolds:** I have a bit more time then.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer talked about access to finance for defence companies with regard to bank accounts. That is a commercial decision. He also mentioned access to credit, loans and cash flow, where we know defence SMEs often face challenges. We want to work across the Government, with SMEs in the defence sector and with the main players in financial services to ensure that we bring down some of the barriers to finance. My hon. Friend suggested a Government-backed growth guarantee scheme, and made a strong, thoughtful and compelling case for that. With other interventions, that is being considered as part of the defence industrial strategy.

I look forward to working with my hon. Friend and other Members with a keen interest in this vital sector. We want to see a thriving UK defence sector, with both large defence firms and SMEs in the supply chain, that provides security for the United Kingdom and helps to deliver the economic growth that the country needs to raise living standards across the country.

*Question put and agreed to.*



## **Educational Opportunities in Semi-rural Areas**

4.31 pm

**Josh Dean** (Hertford and Stortford) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling barriers to educational opportunities in semi-rural areas.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and it is a privilege to secure this debate on behalf of young people in Hertford and Stortford, along with our school leaders, teachers and support staff. It is the honour of my life to represent the community where I grew up and where I call home, Hertford and Stortford. Ahead of today's debate, I reflected on my journey through the education system. I did not follow a traditional route into politics; I left school at 17, dropping out of sixth form to work in Hertford town centre. I felt that traditional education was not for me and wanted to follow a different path, but I was left feeling directionless, struggling to connect with the right opportunity.

For too long, young people in semi-rural communities such as mine have been overlooked and the challenges that we face have been left unaddressed. Since my election, I have visited almost half of the 50 schools in my constituency. I have held two roundtable discussions with secondary headteachers here in Parliament, and I will shortly be hosting similar discussions with heads from local primary schools. There is no end to the ambition of our teachers to deliver a thriving education for our children, but I hear regularly from school leaders about the challenges they face in recruiting and retaining staff.

In semi-rural communities such as Hertford and Stortford, the high cost of living makes it difficult for primary schools to attract early-career teachers. This challenge is reflected across the education sector in our community. Spiralling house prices and a lack of single-person properties or starter homes for young families offer little incentive for early-career teachers to settle in our community and teach in our schools, which presents an acute challenge for communities like ours. Our secondary schools and sixth forms are key to connecting our young people with opportunity, and it has been a privilege to visit many of them and to welcome some of their students here to Parliament.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I share his concern about the lack of affordable housing for many school staff and other public sector professionals in southern England. It is a serious issue in my Reading constituency, despite the council working at pace to try to provide more council houses, so I hope we get to discuss this further.

**Josh Dean:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention; I completely agree that this presents an acute challenge in many semi-rural areas like ours.

Spiralling house prices and a lack of single-person properties are a real challenge, and our sixth forms and secondary schools are key to connecting our young people with opportunity. I have had many conversations with school leaders about the erosion of external services under the previous Government, which decimated services

previously provided by the local authority, including mental health and family support services. This has left our teachers picking up the shortfall. They are now on the frontline of providing that essential support, taking on responsibilities well beyond their job description.

I know from my own experience that a traditional path through education is not always the right one, but a lack of post-16 provision in semi-rural communities can also hold young people back. I am proud that my community is home to Hertford regional college's Ware campus, which I have had the pleasure of visiting a number of times since I was elected. However, it is the only further education college in my constituency, and I understand that Bishop's Stortford is the largest town in the country without an FE college.

Similarly, limited access to apprenticeships, work experience and industry placement opportunities holds our young people back. That is a particular challenge for T-level students, whose placements have to be subject-specific, but it also applies to subjects such as digital, science and engineering. That lack of provision leaves many young people limited in choice and struggling to connect with the right opportunity for them.

I turn to three specific challenges facing semi-rural communities in Hertford and Stortford. The first is transport and connectivity. In Hertford and Stortford, the cost and frequency of public transport presents an ongoing barrier to our young people's access to educational opportunities.

**Lisa Smart** (Hazel Grove) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is laying out well the challenges that all our young people face in accessing educational opportunities. My constituency, which is on the urban fringe of Greater Manchester, is the bridge between the centre of Stockport and High Peak. Many of my young constituents in the rural bits of Mellor, Marple Bridge and Strines are denied opportunities, particularly of further education, just because there are no bus routes to get them there. Does he agree that when we look at growth in our communities and our economy, we should think about access to education in semi-rural areas, and look at transport as an asset, not just a cost?

**Josh Dean:** I agree. I often talk about public transport in terms of not just getting people to places but connecting people with opportunity. That is absolutely how it should function.

Issues around connectivity diminish the number of opportunities for our young people, making it harder for them to get to school and access work experience opportunities or apprenticeships. For many students, the extra activities outside the school day, such as clubs, trips or sports matches, are out of reach because they cannot get the buses they need to make it home safely. As we all know, those are the activities we remember most from school. They gave us the chance to develop our interests, explore culture, meet other students and expand our horizons. These opportunities should not be available only to those whose families can afford to drive them or pay for taxis.

Secondly, we know that young people are at the sharp end of the mental health crisis. I remember the challenges that my peers faced in accessing appropriate mental

health support at school. When I speak to young people and school leaders today, they say that the situation has only got worse.

Isolation is a key driver of poor mental health. In a 2021 YoungMinds survey, a staggering 95% of children and young people from semi-rural areas cited feelings of loneliness and isolation. Child and adolescent mental health services in Hertfordshire are under huge pressure, leaving many young people facing long delays when trying to access desperately needed support. Schools are under huge pressure to keep young people safe and in school, but they are not always equipped to deal with mental health challenges such as emotional-based school avoidance, anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Thirdly, compounding the situation further, children living with special educational needs and disabilities face huge challenges, which are all the more acute in Hertfordshire, where only 40% of education, health and care plans were issued by the local authority within the statutory deadline in 2023, compared with 50% across England as a whole. That is largely due to a shortage of educational psychologists and a significant increase in the number of EHCPs and assessment requests. A shortage of specialist places leaves many children and young people waiting years for school places, and many SEND children are out of education for long periods.

I recognise that these issues fit into the national context on SEND, but the problems are exacerbated in semi-rural communities. For example, transport guidance currently states that primary school-aged children should travel no more than 45 minutes, and secondary school-aged children should travel no more than 75 minutes, including pick-up times. It can be a real challenge in semi-rural communities to meet those timelines, and that often puts huge demand on children living with SEND, who may find travelling distressing or have specific medical needs. It can also leave children feeling isolated. They may attend schools many miles away from where they live and be separated from their peers, and their parents may struggle to access the natural support network that comes with schools.

I welcome the work that the Labour Government are undertaking to break down the barriers to opportunity for children and young people in Hertford and Stortford and across the country. That includes the roll-out of free breakfast clubs to ensure that every child starts the day well fed and ready to learn, and the additional £1 billion of funding for SEND across the country, which is a welcome first step as we seek to fix the broken system inherited from the Conservative party. We have also committed to putting specialist mental health support into our schools. I was very grateful for the Minister's recent answer to my question on that in the House.

I recognise that there are no quick fixes to the challenges that I have set out facing semi-rural communities, but they must none the less be addressed to ensure that children and young people in communities like ours can find the right path for them and thrive. I know that the Minister takes these matters incredibly seriously, and I commend the Government on the progress they have made so far. I would be grateful if he addressed a few specific points in his response.

Some of the issues I have touched on, such as the cost of housing or transport, sit outside the Department's brief, but they have an impact none the less, so will the Minister confirm that the Government are taking a

cross-departmental approach to address the challenges? Will he set out in further detail what progress the Department is making on rolling out specialist mental health support in our schools? And what consideration has been given in Government to open access early support hubs in semi-rural communities, to ensure that provision is accessible outside school, too?

There should be no link between where a young person comes from and how far they can go in life. I welcome the Government's work to tackle the barriers to educational opportunity for young people, and I look forward to hearing the contributions from the Minister and all hon. Members here today.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** This is only an hour-long debate, and lots of people want to speak, so we will have to have a time limit of three minutes on speeches. If we have interventions, not everybody will get in.

4.41 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) on setting the scene. I want to give, as I always do, a perspective from Northern Ireland—I know that is not the Minister's responsibility, but I think it adds to the flavour of the debate.

In Northern Ireland, barriers to education include financial pressures, lack of funding, declining pupil numbers and, as is so often the case, special educational needs. This is similar in other areas, but rural schools tend to be the smaller schools with the big heart—those who try extra hard to make things better. I can understand why education authorities and trusts are tempted to look at numbers as the bottom line, but rural school numbers and rural schools must be looked at differently, as the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford set out. According to the education strategy for 2022 to 2027, some 230 of the 800 primary schools in Northern Ireland have fewer than the recommended number of pupils. One primary school in my area has capacity for 95 pupils, but it could easily house perhaps another 10. We need to ensure that small schools—small by their nature—can survive, because they are vital to rural infrastructure.

In Northern Ireland, there is a further drive for integrated schools. My two eldest granddaughters attend such a school, and I was heartened that it was put in the peninsula. However, as a governor on the board of Glastry high school, I am also cognisant of the difference in funding that exists, when Glastry has long needed a building project and yet Strangford integrated college is in its new campus building already. Additionally, there is no issue if anyone wants to stay after school for sports or music in Newtownards, but if children live in the countryside, some will get a school bus at 7.15 in the morning and then cannot get one until 5.30 in the afternoon to get back home. That underlines the importance of schooling within the community.

I know that the Minister will respond very positively to the issues he has responsibility for. He is always very helpful, and we always share ideas, so I ask him to swap ideas with the Education Minister in Northern Ireland to look at improvement and what we can do to benefit us all. I am always proud to be the Member of Parliament for Strangford in this great United Kingdom of Great

[Jim Shannon]

Britain and Northern Ireland. I always say that we are better together, and that is because we can share ideas and learn from each other. With that in mind, I ask the Minister to do that and let me know how he gets on with those conversations.

4.44 pm

**Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your esteemed chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing the debate and particularly for including the phrase “semi-rural” in the debate title. Often in this place we debate the issues facing rural and urban areas, but the specific challenges facing areas such as my constituency—whose towns and villages, although a little too compact and urban to be considered rural, are certainly not major towns or cities—are not always heard. However, they are being heard today, so I thank my hon. Friend for that.

One of the biggest challenges facing families in my constituency is securing a place at a primary school in—or even near—their community. In the Cannock area, 147 primary school applications were refused across 11 primary schools for September 2024—the figure will be even higher this September—and in neighbouring Rugeley, 17 were rejected. That means that over 160 families in my constituency were essentially told that there is no place for their child at a local school.

Similarly, Norton Canes primary academy in Cannock and Poppyfield primary academy in Hednesford each turned away 35 applications, which is more than a full classroom of children. This acute shortage of school places has been going on for at least six years, yet county councillors have not engaged in finding solutions and schools have been left in the dark. These are not just numbers; they represent real families, often with both parents working. Suddenly, they are forced to find alternative arrangements, often miles from home.

Cannock Chase has grown significantly over the last few years, which is certainly something to be proud of. After all, why would people not be drawn to such a fantastic area? But growth without planning leads to pressure, and in this case the pressure is being felt in our school admissions system. It is clear that local capacity has not kept pace with housing developments.

Beyond admissions, access to education, from reception to college, is being hindered by poor public transport infrastructure, as has been mentioned. Like many of the semi-rural communities represented here, Cannock Chase suffers from infrequent and unreliable bus services. I have heard from teachers and parents whose children face long waits after school and who, in some cases, cannot attend extracurricular activities or get home safely.

Although Staffordshire county council provides free transport for some eligible pupils, eligibility is narrowly defined as living over 2 miles from a primary school and 3 miles from a secondary school, and only if the child is attending the nearest suitable school. That often leaves parents with no viable alternative but to drive their children to school.

**Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that transport in rural

and semi-rural areas can often be much more expensive than in urban areas, where it is subsidised to a far greater extent?

**Josh Newbury:** I absolutely agree, and my hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. Often, the premium in semi-rural areas is very real.

I will finish by saying that children and young people in the semi-rural communities that those of us here represent have just as much potential as those in rural and urban areas. I look forward to working with the Minister and the Government to make sure they finally realise that potential.

4.47 pm

**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): It is an honour to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Edward. Nowhere is it plainer that there are barriers to educational opportunity in semi-rural areas than in the part of Devon that I represent. Young people are held back not by any lack of talent or ambition—far from it—but by structural challenges in the recruitment of their teachers, in transport and in broadband access.

Let me start with what matters in every school: the teachers. According to the latest data from the Department for Education, Devon has 5,620 teachers across 372 state-funded schools, which is a drop of nearly 50 teachers in the last year. Last week, I met National Association of Head Teachers representatives in Devon, who talked about a recruitment and retention crisis.

However, there are positives. The University of Exeter is pioneering a new postgraduate certificate in education approach across the south-west. It has set up primary training hubs—rural local hubs—in Exeter, north Devon and Somerset. That model recognises that teachers often stay where they train and where they go to university, so this new approach is really quite positive.

I will turn now to digital connectivity, which is another barrier that disproportionately affects semi-rural areas. The online newspaper DevonLive reported in 2021 that poor internet connection was impacting children’s learning. Four years later, that has not changed. I have had correspondence from constituents in Furley, Kentisbeare and Colyton who have all reported unreliable broadband, slow speeds and frequent outages.

Problems with travel distances are particularly acute in counties such as Devon, which is said to be the third largest county by area. People live scattered many miles from colleges and education hubs, but over the past decade bus routes have been cut, costs have risen and the options for safely cycling and walking to school have become fewer.

In its 2024 report “The Grass Ceiling”, the University of Exeter notes that rural underachievement is being hidden. On the face of it, there is high performance in rural areas, but that is because of some high-performing pupils. Advantaged households are skewing the data, and that masks the reality that many pupils are struggling—indeed, rural pupils are up to 8 percentage points behind urban pupils in GCSE results on average.

To summarise, talent is spread across the whole country, including the whole of Devon, but right now opportunity is not.



4.51 pm

**Natalie Fleet** (Bolsover) (Lab): Bolsover is one of only 15 constituencies in the whole of England to be without a sixth form. Our incredible and inspiring young people live in small towns and villages, and they have to rely either on parents to give them a lift or on barely existent public transport. One village, Morton, has just had its bus service cancelled, cutting it off entirely. Residents tell me that it is now impossible for young people to get to Chesterfield college.

The lack of a sixth form, combined with poor transport, means that far too many do not attend sixth form at all. In places such as Shirebrook, 7% of young people do A-levels, compared with 52% nationally. Across our constituency, fewer than one in four 18-year-olds go to university, and fewer than one in five have a degree—half the national average. The lack of sixth form provision is undoubtedly one of the main drivers of low aspiration and academic achievement. It sets our young people on a path to deprivation, poverty and poor health. It limits their earning potential and their opportunities in their professional and personal lives.

Bolsover has plans for a new sixth form, which the Department for Education, wonderfully, is considering. Access to further and higher education is essential to removing a preventable barrier to our incredible young people achieving their ambition. I call on the Minister to prioritise our young people, just like the last Labour Government prioritised my education, which meant that I could be here today. I want us to smash down barriers to opportunity and approve Bolsover sixth form.

4.53 pm

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing this important debate.

It should not be controversial to say that children and young people deserve an equal start in life, regardless of whether they grow up in a city, suburb or small rural village, but for those growing up in semi-rural or rural constituencies such as West Dorset, there are persistent and systematic barriers that too often get overlooked in national policy.

Young people in rural areas rely heavily on public transport to reach school, college, apprenticeships or work, yet bus services in rural Dorset are disappearing. Dorset received just £3.8 million in Government funding for the bus service improvement plan—less than a third of what Devon received, and the lowest funding in the south-west. For too many families, that means there is no bus at all.

That matters when we consider that, in 2023, 64% of children in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings had to get to school by car, compared with just 28% in urban towns and cities. The cost of that travel is often unsustainable, particularly at the moment, during a cost of living crisis. For poorer families, in particular, the lack of affordable, reliable transport directly limits access to education.

Young people also need safe options to travel independently, but in rural areas that is often not possible. Although we need active travel and cycle to work and

school schemes, we cannot ignore the fact that cycling on rural roads is disproportionately dangerous. Statistics show that cyclists are nearly twice as likely to be killed on rural roads than on urban ones.

Transport is only part of the picture. Children's mental health matters too. In Dorset, CAMHS provision is centralised in one location—Dorchester. For a family living in Lyme Regis or Beaminster, that can mean travelling between 25 and 35 miles for help. That is not good enough. Poor mental health affects a child's appetite to learn, make friends and participate in class. It can shape their entire educational experience.

Yet, rurality is not counted in the models that provide funding to our schools and services. The headteacher of the Thomas Hardy school in West Dorset previously worked in a London borough. He spoke to me yesterday and highlighted the difference: his previous school in London received approximately £10,000 per pupil; in West Dorset, it is closer to £5,000. Government funding formulas rely on deprivation metrics and overlook rurality, failing to reflect the challenges we face, such as transport, staffing and access to services. We are letting our parents, children and teachers down by not properly funding our schools.

Apprenticeships could help to fill the employment opportunity gaps in rural areas, but current funding arrangements do not take into account the additional costs faced by rural employers, such as transport and cost of materials.

Rurality should not be a barrier to aspiration. Young people in my constituency of West Dorset have every bit as much potential as those in cities, but potential needs opportunity, and opportunity needs investment. We must support our teachers, we must support our schools and we must support our children.

4.56 pm

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing this important debate, which shines a light on an issue that affects my constituency.

Although Harlow itself is a built-up town, I am also proud to represent the surrounding villages of Nazeing, Roydon, Hatfield Broad Oak, Hatfield Heath and Sheering, to name just a few. These are vibrant communities, which I regularly visit through my constituency surgeries, local events and attendance at parish meetings. Time and again, I hear the same concerns: young people in semi-rural areas are being let down by barriers that limit their access to quality education.

I recognise that this Government are committed to making education an equal playing field for all, but in too many semi-rural areas there are issues that we need to address. One of the most pressing, as mentioned by other hon. Members, is transport. In urban areas, many students can walk to school, but families in villages such as Roydon or Sheering face long and often unsafe journeys. Buses are infrequent or unreliable, and parents—many of whom work full time—can spend hours each day driving their children to and from school.

One constituent, Kelly from Roydon, had to drive 30 minutes each way for the school run before heading to work. Her husband, Jason, often had to leave work

[Chris Vince]

early to pick the children up. That is not just inconvenient; it is a clear disadvantage, and one that working families should not be forced to bear.

Another issues I want to address, which I have seen a lot in constituency surgeries, is road safety and infrastructure. Even when children live close to school, the journey can be dangerous. Sheering Road, for example, is home to two primary schools, yet I would hesitate to call it child friendly. I have done the walk myself, and it is hair-raising at times. The road lacks the proper safety measures, and I have witnessed at first hand just how hazardous it can be for young pedestrians. School should be a place of learning, not something a child risks their safety just getting to. Poor road infrastructure also makes it harder to attract and retain talented teachers. As has been mentioned, long and difficult commutes into isolated areas are a barrier to recruitment. Without teachers, there is no education.

Beyond infrastructure there is the issue of resources. Many semi-rural schools have limited access to reliable internet and electricity, holding them back from using technology that could enrich learning. Teachers, who are the backbone of our education system—I have to say that; I used to be one—often gravitate towards schools where they are offered better salaries, career progression, housing options and transport opportunities. That makes it even more difficult for rural and semi-rural schools to retain high-quality staff.

In Harlow, 20.4% of the adult population have no formal qualifications, which is 2.2% above the national average for England and Wales. That figure should concern us all.

In conclusion, if we are truly committed to educational opportunities for all, we must invest in transport, infrastructure and digital access to attract the best teachers to every part of the country, not just our cities. No family should be disadvantaged because of where they live. Education should not be a postcode lottery. Let us work together to ensure that every child—whether they live in central Harlow or the smallest village—can reach their potential.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** I apologise; I am going to have to reduce the time limit to two minutes to try to get you all in. I would like to listen to the next speaker for hours, but he has only two minutes. I call Peter Prinsley.

5 pm

**Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab):** Thank you, Sir Edward. That is very kind.

Far too often, people who leave the academic track at 16 are not provided with an alternative. Apprenticeships and skills education were neglected by our predecessors, so I am glad that in Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket we have some fantastic businesses, such as British Sugar and Greene King, providing high quality apprenticeships. We also have excellent technical education providers such as Nikos Savvas, principal of the outstanding Abbeygate sixth-form college in Bury St Edmunds and CEO of the Eastern Education Group, who has been visionary in championing the value of effective technical skills, extending all the way from early years to adulthood.

It has never been more important to have a proper system of technical education. We will soon see a wave of major infrastructure projects in the east of England, and we will need thousands of workers. We must ensure that we are educating people quickly enough to fill those jobs. Anglian Water reservoirs, offshore wind farms, East West Rail, Sizewell C—the success of these vital projects depends on a constant supply of technically trained people. The Eastern Education Group has suggested a formal network of “further excellence” technical colleges, a suggestion that I strongly commend to the Government.

I recently visited Hinkley Point C, the model for Sizewell C, and met outstanding nuclear technicians who started their careers with apprenticeships. They went straight into well-paid jobs and will eventually operate nuclear power plants. What matters most, they explained to me, was being a SQEP—a suitably qualified and experienced person. Whatever your academic background, it is important simply that you can do the job, so let us SQEP up our society and invest in technical education and apprenticeships across the country, especially in rural areas where it is so sorely needed. We will train the generation that will rebuild Britain.

5.2 pm

**Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing this incredibly important debate. I also thank my schools and the college in North West Leicestershire for welcoming me on my various visits in the last 10 months.

As time is short, I will focus on post-16 education. When young people make decisions about their post-16 education, they should be thinking about the jobs they want and the skills they need to get there. However, in rural communities, those decisions are complicated by the additional barrier of just how they are going to get to college. How are they going to access the transport that will get them to a suitable course to take them on their journey?

Just two years ago, a key bus link between Coalville in my constituency and Hinckley in the neighbouring constituency was withdrawn. The cut took place midway through the academic year and left many students, who used the bus route to access North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire college or Stephenson college, without suitable public transport. I know from speaking to parents at the time that they had to adjust their work schedules to ensure that their children could finish their studies. Going to college, accessing an apprenticeship or staying in school is a key part of striving towards independence, and getting there is so much more challenging for those living in rural communities. Some of my villages are barely served by two buses a day. We must ensure that long-term decisions are made on key bus routes to help my constituents to get not just to school or college, but to work.

We have also heard locally about the difficulties young people face in getting a driving test. I appreciate that that is a broader issue, and that the Government are taking steps to address it, but obtaining a driving licence in a rural community can be very important to access education. Being able to drive is much more important when bus connectivity is limited, and that has a detrimental

impact on people's choices. We have the opportunity to improve connectivity in rural areas and to help people in those areas to access additional educational opportunities.

5.4 pm

**Terry Jermy** (South West Norfolk) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for raising this important issue.

Educational achievement in rural areas is not spoken about nearly enough, so I welcome this debate. It is something I have first-hand knowledge of: I grew up in rural Norfolk and went to school and college there, before serving as a school governor for a number of years at two separate schools. I have always been passionate about education—I had originally intended to become a teacher, but life took me in a different direction. It is often thought that students in more urban areas who are from disadvantaged backgrounds do worse than those who grow up in rural areas such as mine. However, it is poverty, not rurality, that lowers outcomes, and we have very similar issues. There is a clear link between rural poverty and educational attainment.

One of the main barriers, as has been said, is transport. I vividly remember going to college, waiting at 6 am at the bus stop in the winter, and it was no fun. It is no wonder that, by the time Christmas arrived, there were very few of us left at that bus stop; more than half had dropped out of our college course. Statistics show that only half of pupils in rural areas can get to a further education institution within a reasonable travel time.

There is also a choice barrier. I wanted to become a geography teacher, and I was disappointed that my sixth form did not offer that option at A-level. Fine subject as it is, there were just not enough people wanting to study it, and the course was not put on. That was one of the reasons why I ended up not going to university and not becoming a teacher. A lack of choice of subjects is a major issue, and so is the limited choice of places to study.

I am pleased that this Labour Government are breaking down barriers to education, and I welcome and have been proud of the measures taken since we took office.

5.6 pm

**Julia Buckley** (Shrewsbury) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing this vital debate.

My concern for Shrewsbury also focuses on educational opportunities for 16 to 18-year-olds, in terms of both funding and geographical access. My local provider map will probably mirror that of many other semi-rural areas: the constituency serves the whole county of 19 market towns, and in recent years there has been a domino effect as smaller schools have closed down their sixth forms, leading to a centralisation in the county. As a result, Shrewsbury Colleges Group now supports more than 10,000 students. It is the sixth largest college in the country, offers a wide range of courses, and was recently graded as “outstanding” by Ofsted.

However, the situation presents geographic barriers to those aged 16 and 17 who live across the county in those smaller villages, due to the lack—as we have heard—of

public transport. In Shropshire we have limited train stations and we have lost more than 5,000 bus routes in the past 12 years, leaving many young people excluded from opportunities. One example was a hairdresser I met in the village of Broseley. I asked her why she became a hairdresser; she said that she had really wanted to do an apprenticeship in engineering, but there were no buses, and this was the only apprenticeship she could walk to. There is poverty of opportunity, as young people reduce their aspirations to match their transport options.

That is depressing enough, but even where there is a bus between towns, the average annual ticket costs £750. It is known locally as the “A-level tax”, and for many families it is completely unaffordable. However, many rural colleges do not receive additional funding to help with the bursaries they offer. Colleges such as Shrewsbury combine both A-levels and FE courses, yet they fall between the two stools when it comes to funding. I urge the Minister to review the anomaly whereby sixth forms and FE colleges receive funding, but where the two are combined, as they often are in rural areas, they miss out on crucial funding.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Last but not least, Matt Rodda.

5.8 pm

**Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. Thank you for fitting me into this important debate.

I want to take a few moments to elaborate briefly on the concerns I raised earlier about recruitment and retention in the Reading area and Berkshire for school teachers and other school staff, but also staff in other parts of the public sector and our public services more generally. The basic problem in our area is that house prices are very high, but sadly national pay scales do not always reflect those additional pressures. That is a particular issue for a small number of areas; I am certainly aware that parts of Oxfordshire have similar problems to Berkshire, and there may well be other scattered issues across certain parts of England. Now that I have raised the issue, I hope the Minister might be able to look into it for me. I know that the Government are working extremely hard to raise standards in education and invest in the education system.

I wanted to give the example of a local comprehensive school whose former headteacher told me recently that it had had issues with recruitment and retention with certain subjects. That issue occurs across the country with certain shortage subjects, possibly in the case of science, technology, engineering and mathematics or English teaching, and maybe one or two other disciplines within large secondary schools. However, because of the increase in house prices and the cost of living pressures more generally, the situation has changed over the last few years and got progressively worse while the last Government was in office.

Last year, things reached a point where it was extremely difficult to recruit any teachers. Often, there was only one applicant for any advertised vacancy. That is a challenge for any leader in any organisation, and particularly for teachers and heads under extreme pressure. I appreciate the work that the Government are doing; I thank Reading borough council for its work on council house building,



[*Matt Rodda*]

which I mentioned earlier, and the University of Reading for its excellent teacher recruitment work, but it would be wonderful if the Minister could look into this issue.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** We have got everybody in. I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

5.10 pm

**Anna Sabine** (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing this important debate. I represent Frome and East Somerset, also a semi-rural constituency, and I recognise many of the challenges he talked about earlier, particularly around affordable housing and the mental health of our young people.

For far too long, young people in rural and semi-rural areas have faced persistent barriers to accessing education, whether due to poor transport links, limited youth services or a lack of training support. The Lib Dems have always believed that education is the cornerstone of a fair society, but we also recognise that not every child is given a fair shot. Geography should never determine opportunity. That is why we have been calling for a £2 billion rural services fund, which would enable the co-location of essential services, such as GP surgeries and schools, in local hubs that make the most of existing infrastructure, helping to revitalise and support local rural communities.

In my constituency, the lack of reliable public transport, as mentioned, is a daily challenge for many families. One constituent from Beckington, a village just outside Frome, has two children attending middle school in Frome. Although the school is under three miles away, the only walking route is along a narrow pavement beside a 60-mile-an-hour road. In 2019, the council deemed that route safe, yet almost every parent in Beckington drives their child to school because they quite rightly believe that it is not. If my constituent could not drive, they would be forced to pay £80 a month per child for school transport—an unaffordable cost for many families. That is not choice; it is necessity born out of neglect.

While we welcome the introduction of breakfast clubs under the Labour Government, we continue to believe that free school meals would be a more inclusive and effective alternative. In many rural and semi-rural areas, students simply cannot get to school early enough to benefit from breakfast clubs, due to sparse and inflexible bus timetables. There is currently no indication that those would be adjusted to support the policy.

Reliable broadband is another area where rural communities are being left behind. The Lib Dems have long championed the need for hyperfast fibre-optic broadband, with priority being given to rural areas. While we welcome the Project Gigabit roll-out across Devon and Somerset, I still await further detail on how it will benefit my constituency specifically.

The pandemic laid bare the digital divide. Too many households in semi-rural areas lack the reliable internet access needed for remote learning. In the 21st century, broadband is not a luxury; it is a basic educational need. Students who cannot log on cannot keep up, and

we risk leaving them behind. As someone with a teenager who is about to start their GCSEs, I know it makes them very grumpy if they cannot log on.

Let us not forget about post-16 education. In rural areas, access to sixth forms, colleges and apprenticeships remains patchy, creating a postcode lottery for young people's futures. Limited public transport and poor broadband only compound the problem. That is why the Lib Dems want to introduce a young people's premium, extending the pupil premium funding to disadvantaged 16 to 18-year-olds. Every young person deserves equal access to education, training and opportunity, no matter where they live. When we invest in education, we invest in our economy, our communities and our shared future. Every child in every corner of the country deserves the chance to succeed.

5.13 pm

**Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I am sincerely grateful to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing today's important debate on tackling the barriers to educational opportunity faced by young people in semi-rural areas. This issue touches communities across the country, including parts of my constituency, so I am pleased that we are in Westminster Hall giving it the attention it deserves. I have certainly felt that, for too long, much of the discussion around educational disadvantage has focused to a large extent on inner cities. While there are undeniable challenges in urban settings, that somewhat narrow framing has obscured the realities faced by young people growing up in less densely populated areas.

On the surface, rural and semi-rural pupils appear to perform well, often even outperforming their urban counterparts in headline attainment measures, but averages can be deceptive. Recent research from the University of Exeter has shown that when the data is disaggregated, a very different picture emerges. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in rural and semi-rural communities actually do worse—sometimes significantly worse—than similarly disadvantaged pupils in urban areas. At GCSE level, the attainment gap can be as high as eight percentage points.

We also need to be honest about the practical barriers that young people in semi-rural communities face—barriers that, while often not obvious to central Government, are plain to see for anyone who has spent time listening to families, school leaders or employers in these areas. The first and arguably the most pressing, which has been repeatedly raised today, is transport. The lack of affordable reliable public transport comes up again and again in conversations with headteachers, apprenticeship providers and young people themselves. The result is that some young people simply cannot take up the opportunities that exist, whether that is a college course in the next town, a part-time job or a work placement that would open doors. Employers, too, are feeling the strain, reporting that inadequate public transport limits their ability to recruit young staff. That is simply not good enough.

No less important is solid digital infrastructure. In 2025, it should go without saying that high-speed broadband is a basic educational necessity, yet across pockets of semi-rural England, people still struggle to access reliable

internet at home. During the pandemic, when learning moved online, that digital divide was laid bare, but it did not begin there and it has not gone away. Even now, slow speeds and patchy connections undermine students' ability to complete homework, access the virtual tutoring used by their peers and easily apply for jobs and apprenticeships. The failure to deliver truly universal digital access is becoming a core driver of poorer outcomes in rural and semi-rural education.

The third barrier relates to choice and proximity. In many semi-rural areas, the number of local education providers is limited, as we have heard today. That can mean fewer subject options at A-level, less availability of vocational and technical qualifications and more pressure on local schools to stretch resources across a wide catchment. Whereas a student in a city might have a dozen sixth-form or college options within easy reach, a student in a rural town might face a daily bus journey of more than an hour each way, if the bus runs at all.

Schools and colleges everywhere are feeling the strain on their budgets, but for smaller settings in semi-rural communities the financial pressure is acute. The Government's decision to increase employer national insurance contributions has added costs to education budgets. For a teacher earning £40,000, the combination of national insurance and teachers' pension scheme changes means an additional cost of nearly £3,000 per year per staff member.

The reality is that semi-rural schools and colleges are often the most vulnerable to cuts. Their smaller size limits economies of scale, their geographical isolation makes recruitment more difficult and their budgets are less buffered by reserves or alternative income streams. When costs go up and funding falls short, they feel it first and they feel it hardest, and it will have an impact on the most vulnerable students.

In many semi-rural areas, students face a stark lack of choice as to further education and skills pathways post 16. The push for T-levels and other reforms has not been matched by the transport funding or delivery infrastructure needed to make them a realistic option outside urban centres. The promise of parity between academic and technical routes is laudable, but is hollow if it depends on travel that students cannot afford or on opportunities that do not exist locally.

I ask the Minister: what is the strategy to ensure that young people in semi-rural areas can access the full range of educational opportunities, regardless of where they live? Where is the investment in transport links, digital infrastructure and sustainable funding settlements for small schools? When it comes to education, geography should never be destiny. We believe that every child, whether they have grown up in a city suburb, in a coastal town or in a rural village, should have access to a high-quality education that allows them to thrive. Despite our policy differences, I know that the Minister shares that aspiration.

This has been an extremely valuable debate, and I repeat my thanks to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford for securing it. I will speak no longer, because we all want to hear from the Minister.

5.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Stephen Morgan):** It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for

Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) for securing this debate on such an important topic. As his efforts to secure the presence of so many hon. Members today demonstrate, he is a champion for tackling barriers that young people face in his constituency and in rural areas up and down the country. I also welcome the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) to her place on the Opposition Front Bench.

This is a mission-led Government, and one of our key missions is opportunity. Indeed, the Department for Education is the Department for opportunity. Our mission means breaking down the barriers to opportunity for everyone, regardless of socioeconomic background. The Government will ensure that everyone can access education and training opportunities that will support them to succeed, progress in their education and thrive in work and life. That means that everyone, whatever their background and wherever they come from, should have the opportunity to get on with the education and training they need.

As we have heard from Members across the House, people who live in rural or semi-rural areas face some specific issues relating to distance and transport for education, work and life, by virtue of their location. The problems facing people in rural areas include choice and availability of provision, physical access to provision, and transport to training providers. As my hon. Friends the Members for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury), for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet), for Harlow (Chris Vince), for North West Leicestershire (Amanda Hack) and for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy) and the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) all said, rural transport systems are often a significant barrier to accessing post-16 education.

Although such matters are not for my Department, I absolutely recognise the points made about the importance of connecting opportunities. I am aware that Hertfordshire specifically offers a discounted travel card, a spare seat scheme and travel support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have an education, health and care plan. The Department for Transport offers a 16-17 saver card and student railcards to support travel for young people. For example, the saver card offers 16 to 17-year-olds a 50% discount on rail travel.

The statutory responsibility for transport to education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds rests with local authorities, which are in the best position to make reasonable decisions. They can consider the specific needs of their young people, the local transport options and the resources available. Each local authority must publish a policy statement annually to set out the support available, but that does not have to include free or subsidised transport.

We recognise that the cost of transport can be an issue for some young people, and 16-to-19 bursary funding is allocated directly to schools and colleges to support financially disadvantaged young people who need additional support with costs such as transport. Many local authorities, though not all, offer some form of subsidised travel. Many transport companies also give some kind of discount for young people; as I have mentioned, such schemes operate in Hertfordshire.

Regarding the matter of choice for young people in rural areas, local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and track the participation of 16 and 17-year-olds

[Stephen Morgan]

in education. That includes supporting those not participating to do so and making sure there is sufficient and suitable education and training provision to meet their needs. If a local authority identifies a need for additional provision, it can negotiate with existing providers to expand their provision. Where that provider is an academy, the academy trust can then make a significant change request for the Department to consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford also mentioned the issue that some people are struggling to get to and from part-time jobs while undertaking their studies. Again, those are local transport matters, but I should point out that the Department makes 16-to-19 discretionary bursary funding available to support students with travel, equipment, books or other education-related costs where they would not otherwise afford to participate. As part of this mission-driven Government, we will continue to work across Government to identify barriers and seek solutions.

On the points raised about the mental health of young people, arguably nothing says more about the state of a nation than the wellbeing of its children. That is why this Government are prioritising mental health support for children and young people, helping them to achieve and thrive in education. We are working across Government to provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, ensuring pupils in all areas—whether urban, rural or semi-rural—have access to early support to address problems early before they escalate. Mental health support teams continue to be rolled out in schools and colleges across the country, and we expect coverage to reach at least 50% of pupils and learners later this year.

In addition, the Department for Education provides a range of guidance and practical resources on promoting and supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing. For example, there is a resource hub for school and college mental health leads to help embed effective whole-school approaches and a toolkit to help education staff review and develop early-support options for pupils. Outside of education settings, this Government have also committed to recruiting 8,500 new mental health support staff to treat children and adults, and to opening new Young Futures hubs with access to mental health support workers in communities.

I now turn to the numerous contributions on SEND reform. Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve, thrive and succeed. However, we are aware of the challenges in the SEND system, and this Government have made a clear commitment to addressing those. We are prioritising early intervention and inclusive provision in mainstream settings, as we know that early intervention prevents unmet needs from escalating, and that this supports all children and young people to achieve and thrive alongside their peers. We are providing an extra £1 billion for high needs budgets in England in the next financial year, following the Budget of autumn 2024. That brings the high needs funding for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities to over £12 billion.

We have also published local authority allocations for £740 million of high needs capital funding for 2025-26 to invest in places for children and young people with SEND who require alternative provision. Reforming the SEND system needs a considered approach to deliver sustainability and change. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford that we are working at pace with a neurodiverse taskforce and experts to develop that, and we will be setting out plans in due course. We are committed to working with the sector, our partners and the experts we have appointed to ensure that our approach is fully planned and delivered in partnership.

I close by once again thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford for securing this important debate and so strongly supporting the interests of his constituents, some of whom will face the problems that he has highlighted. As a Department, we want young people, wherever they live, to have the opportunities that they need to succeed. The Department will continue to work closely with local authorities as we continue to break down barriers to opportunity. I reassure all hon. Members today that I have listened carefully to the range of points that have been raised, and I thank them for their contributions.

5.27 pm

**Josh Dean:** I thank all hon. Members for their very insightful contributions this afternoon. I attempted to list everyone's constituency, but there are too many for the time I have, which is a nice problem to have in my first Westminster Hall debate. I thank everyone for contributing.

I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset (Anna Sabine), and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul), for their contributions. And I thank the Minister for his detailed and considered response to the issues raised in the debate, which I know will be much appreciated by children, young people and families in my constituency.

Every young person, regardless of where they come from, should have the opportunity to thrive and live a fulfilling life. I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues as we seek to break the link between a child's background and their ability to succeed, and to supporting the Government as they work to break down the barriers to opportunity.

On a very brief personal point, as a young person who did not take a traditional path through education and who feels these issues very deeply when I speak to young people, children, teachers and school leaders in our community, and as the son of a special educational needs co-ordinator, I appreciate the thoughtful contributions this afternoon. It is a real pleasure to have secured this debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of tackling barriers to educational opportunities in semi-rural areas.

5.28 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# ORAL ANSWERS

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