

Hansard

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Oral Answers to Questions

Volume 597: debated on Wednesday 1 July 2015

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Cabinet Office

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

National Citizen Service

Stephen Metcalfe >

(South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)

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1. What progress he is making on increasing the number of places on the National Citizen Service. (Unique identification number 900655 (Unique identification number))

Martin Vickers >

(Cleethorpes) (Con)

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3. What progress he is making on increasing the number of places on the National Citizen Service. (Unique identification number 900657 (Unique identification number))

Alan Mak >

(Havant) (Con)

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5. What progress he is making on increasing the number of places on the National Citizen Service. (Unique identification number 900659 (Unique identification number))

The Minister for Civil Society >

(Mr Rob Wilson)

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With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, may I first congratulate the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on the birth of her son in May? I am sure that it is the reason for her absence today, as she normally shadows me.

More than 135,000 young people have benefited from the National Citizen Service in recent years. In 2015, more young people than ever will have the opportunity to take part. I have written to all Northern Irish and English MPs encouraging them to visit an NCS programme near them this summer.

Stephen Metcalfe >

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build long-lasting relationships. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to back the NCS into the future, so that we can give increasing numbers of young people the skills they need to get on in life?

Mr Wilson >

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his assessment, which is why I am delighted that more than 1,100 people took part in his constituency and the surrounding area last year and why I am committed to continuing the rapid expansion of the programme. He will be pleased to hear that 92% of participants say that the NCS helped them to develop useful skills for the future and 76% feel more confident about getting a job in the future.

Martin Vickers >

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I welcome the Minister's answer. I am a tremendous supporter of the NCS programme, having seen the work done in north-east Lincolnshire, where the programme is delivered by Grimsby Town Sports and Education Trust. Does he agree that encouraging football clubs and similar organisations in this area encourages our young people to get even more involved in the programme?

Mr Wilson >

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I join my hon. Friend in thanking Grimsby Town for the part it played in supporting nearly 200 young people taking part in the NCS in his constituency and the surrounding area in 2014. In particular, I pay tribute to Graham Rodger and Lee Stephens for leading an excellent team. I understand from my hon. Friend that it contains a former Grimsby Town goalkeeper, so it could be said that the NCS is in safe hands.

Alan Mak >

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In my area, 831 young people participated in the NCS last year. Does the Minister agree that the NCS reflects this Government's one-nation values by bringing together young people from all backgrounds so that they develop greater self-awareness and responsibility?

Mr Wilson >

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I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on that. That view is supported by consecutive independent evaluations, which have demonstrated the effectiveness of the programme for people from a range of backgrounds. For instance, in 2013, 16% of NCS participants were in receipt of free school meals, which compares with a figure of about 8% of 16 to 17-year-olds in the general population. Despite this great success, I still want to go further in reaching out to more young people who face big challenges in life.

Peter Kyle >

(Hove) (Lab)

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One of the Minister's predecessors, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), said that he was "obsessively" monitoring the backgrounds of people taking part in the NCS. Can this Minister reassure the House that he is monitoring with equal enthusiasm? Are people from deprived backgrounds taking part in the programme to the same degree as others?

Mr Wilson >

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have a manifesto commitment on guaranteeing a place on the NCS for all young people. That requires commitment from across government. I am working with Ministers across government to ensure that the NCS benefits as many young people as possible, no matter where they live, what school they went to or what their circumstances in life have been.

Andrew Gwynne >

(Denton and Reddish) (Lab)

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The Minister will be pleased to hear that I will be visiting an NCS scheme in my constituency over the summer recess. Given that youth services in England have experienced cuts almost three times greater than overall cuts to local authorities, what is he doing to make sure that young people have valuable activities all year round, not just through the NCS?

Mr Wilson >

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The NCS is complementary to, not a replacement for, local government services. The NCS consistently demonstrates its positive impact on participants and value for money. I find it very disappointing that local councils are making the choice to cut youth services, but we in the Cabinet Office are supporting local authorities through programmes such as the Centre for Youth Impact and Delivering Differently for Young People.

Voter Registration

Catherine West >

(Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)

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2. What funding is provided to local authorities with low rates of voter registration to improve rates. (Unique identification number 900656 (Unique identification number))

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster >

(Mr Oliver Letwin)

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May I begin by wishing the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, many happy returns on his birthday?

In answer to the question, as well as giving more than £50 million to enable local authorities to carry forward the individual electoral registration system, we have also given more than £10 million to enable them to take proactive steps to increase voter registration.

Catherine West >

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What actions will be taken against local authorities that have coasting rates of registration—those that have registered fewer than 98% of eligible voters?

Mr Letwin >

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I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that the Minister for constitutional reform—my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose)—is proactively stepping in to try to ensure that those local authorities do take further action. The Electoral Commission has also reported on this, and we are keen to see that every local authority ensures right away that it no longer has large groups of people who are unregistered and that it cleans its register.

(Meriden) (Con)

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Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the positive impact on voter registration of civil society campaigns and the campaign by the Church, Have Your Say, before the last election?

Mr Letwin >

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Yes, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. I am glad to say that we see a pattern of local authorities in many parts of the country doing what she describes and working with civil society partners to reach those people who might not otherwise be reached by more formal means to persuade them to register.

Tommy Sheppard >

(Edinburgh East) (SNP)

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I think that we can all agree that electoral registration is desirable and that one factor that will affect that is the degree of faith and confidence that people have in our electoral system. One measure that could enhance that is the ability of people to recall their Member of Parliament in between elections. When will the Minister bring into force the remaining provisions of the Recall of MPs Act 2015?

Mr Speaker >

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The hon. Gentleman has indulged in what might be called an elastic interpretation of the question on the Order Paper. But just as I have been indulgent of him, I feel sure that the Minister will be similarly indulgent.

Mr Letwin >

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I am delighted to answer that question. The Recall of MPs Act, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, was passed just at the end of the previous Parliament. Two things now need to be done: one is to issue the commencement order, which is relatively straightforward; and the second is to issue the regulations that govern the conduct of the petition, which is more complicated. All of us in this House have a considerable interest in ensuring that that is done right. However, we are doing it at pace. I intend to bring the provisions before the House in September, when we return from recess.

Wayne David >

(Caerphilly) (Lab)

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Two weeks ago, the Electoral Commission published a report on the transition to full individual electoral registration. It expressed concern about the numbers that could fall off the electoral register if the Government brought forward the date of full IER to December 2015. Will the Government follow the advice of the Electoral Commission?

Mr Letwin >

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The shadow Minister is absolutely right that the Electoral Commission has made observations about that matter. We are now considering them very carefully, and we will think through the Government's response before we inform the House what it is. In response to earlier questions, I should say that the Electoral Commission report has also indicated that we now have an increase in the total number of people registered compared with the situation before individual electoral registration was introduced.

[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)**Stephen Phillips** >

(Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)

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4. What steps he is taking to improve the administration of civil service pensions. (Unique identification number 900658 (Unique identification number))

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General >

(Matthew Hancock)

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We have reformed the delivery of civil service pensions by setting up MyCSP, which is part-owned by employees who administer the scheme. That will reduce costs and ultimately deliver a better service.

Stephen Phillips >[Share](#)

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. I know from corresponding with him on numerous occasions that he is aware of certain problems with MyCSP, but I am still receiving letters from constituents who feel that they are being let down. Will he assure the House that every effort is being made to ensure that MyCSP offers a good service to those who rely on it for the administration of their pensions?

Matthew Hancock >[Share](#)

Yes, I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for bringing the matter to the House's attention. Work is under way to improve the performance of MyCSP. There has been a year-on-year productivity improvement of it since it started in 2012, but there is much work to do to ensure that we get everybody's pension administered in exactly the right way.

Derek Twigg >

(Halton) (Lab)

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The problem is that these problems have been going on for a long time. I have written to Ministers over the past 12 months about problems with my constituents and only last week I had a constituent who was given a pension estimate that proved to be completely inaccurate. They had based their future plans on that estimate. May I ask the Minister again to try harder to ensure that we get this sorted out? It has been going on for far too long.

Matthew Hancock >[Share](#)

Yes, I agree that this needs to be sorted out. When we brought the delivery of civil service pensions from an external provider in 2010, there was a larger backlog than anticipated. That means that there is an awful lot of work to do, but we are pushing it through.

Senior Civil Servants (Social Background)**Rehman Chishti** >

(Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)

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identification number 900660 (Unique identification number))

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General >
(Matthew Hancock)

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Background should be no barrier to success and we are committed to ensuring that the most senior ranks of the civil service can be reached by all.

Rehman Chishti >

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Although 10% of the civil service are from a black and minority ethnic community, only 4% are in senior positions. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that each and every one of them can achieve their true potential without their background being a hindrance?

Matthew Hancock >

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My hon. Friend raises an important point. This is true not just about ethnicity in the senior civil service but about gender and people with disabilities. We need to ensure that the senior civil service represents the country that it serves. Steps are under way to ensure that that happens and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to reach that conclusion.

Jonathan Ashworth >
(Leicester South) (Lab)

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We welcome the Minister to his place and the Opposition support genuine efforts to increase the diversity of the civil service. He will be aware that 58% of permanent secretaries were privately educated, as were 53% of senior diplomats and 45% of public body chairs. Would he therefore support targets to increase the numbers from state education at the top of our civil service?

Matthew Hancock >

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I certainly strongly agree that it is important that as well as considering gender, ethnicity and other characteristics we ensure that people from all backgrounds—whichever school they went to and whichever part of the country they come from—can get to senior levels in the civil service. We have a programme under way to ensure that that happens.

Mr Bernard Jenkin >
(Harwich and North Essex) (Con)

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment as Minister for the civil service and assure him that the now Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee will look forward to working with him on civil service reform, as we did with his predecessor, who did so much during his term of office. May I also give my fullest support to his objective of achieving diversity? That is a vital part of having an agile civil service and requires the challenging of attitudes and habits of behaviour as much as setting targets.

Matthew Hancock >

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working with him, although I say that with some trepidation, knowing his depth of understanding of these issues. I entirely agree that this is about culture and agility in the civil service as much as it is about tick-box targets.

Andrew Percy >

(Brigg and Goole) (Con)

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One of the biggest barriers to accessing some senior civil service jobs is where they are located. What more can be done to ensure that jobs are located outside the south of England? Why not start by moving the Department for Transport to the north, which might bring some of the money it spends down here up there, as well?

Matthew Hancock >

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As my hon. Friend knows, we are investing a huge amount in transport systems across the nation, not least in the north of England and in his area. It is crucial that we proceed in an efficient and cost-effective way. There are civil servants who work across the land, and we should not forget that, and we must ensure that they represent the whole country, too.

Franchise for London Elections

Patrick Grady >

(Glasgow North) (SNP)

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7. What assessment he has made of the effect of the inclusion of EU citizens in the franchise for elections to the Greater London Assembly and the Mayor of London on voter engagement; and if he will make a statement. (Unique identification number 900661 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office >

(John Penrose)

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EU citizens resident in London are eligible to register and vote in local government elections and elections for the GLA and Mayor. I am sure that both I and the hon. Gentleman would encourage them to do just that. So far I have made no assessment of the effect on voter engagement, but if the hon. Gentleman has thoughts or insights he would like to share, I am very happy to hear them now.

Patrick Grady >

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The Mayor of London, now also the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), once claimed that London was the sixth biggest French city in the world. Why does the Minister believe that it is right that all those French citizens who have made London their home should be allowed to vote for the Mayor's successor, but not for whether this country should stay in the European Union?

John Penrose >

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The vote for staying in or leaving the EU will be based on the parliamentary constituency franchise, which is based on people who are eligible to vote for this place. British nationals living in EU countries elsewhere in the EU are not allowed to vote in equivalent referendums elsewhere—for example, in the Dutch referendum in 2005.

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(Lichfield) (Con)

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Does my hon. Friend share my fear that, with an air traffic control strike and transport workers on strike in France at the moment and massive unemployment in France owing to its socialist republic and with all these people coming over here, we could end up with a French-speaking Mayor?

John Penrose >[Share](#)

Anecdotally, quite a lot of people are commenting on the fact that many of the French who choose to come to live in London do so because they prefer it here; they think that it is a more advantageous business environment and a better place to live and work. Therefore, perhaps they have imbibed and imbued themselves with some of the local colour and flexibility, rather than with the attitudes that my hon. Friend describes.

Electoral Register

Grahame M. Morris >

(Easington) (Lab)

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8. What recent estimate he has made of the number of eligible voters not on the electoral register. (Unique identification number 900662 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office >

(John Penrose)

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As we have heard, the Electoral Commission recently published an analysis, and I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that it shows that parliamentary registers have over 400,000 more entries than a year ago. The last full assessment of the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers was published in July, and it showed that the decline in registration between 2000 and 2010 had stabilised since 2011. The next full assessment will be undertaken when the transition to individual electoral registration is complete.

Grahame M. Morris >[Share](#)

I thank the Minister for that response, but the number of eligible voters who are missing from registers is a concern. I draw his attention to two specific groups: private rented tenants and the rising 18s. In my constituency, the rising 18s are down 50%. What action is he taking to try to address that issue?

John Penrose >[Share](#)

As we heard earlier, almost £10 million has been spent on registration activities and drives since the start of this year, and we have made it a great deal more convenient and easier to register through individual electoral registration. We are looking at the report and recommendations produced by the Electoral Commission. In due course, when we respond to them, I am sure that we will have more to say.

Tom Pursglove >

(Corby) (Con)

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themselves registered for parliamentary elections?

John Penrose >

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One of the benefits of individual electoral registration is that it has a built-in check for validity, which dramatically improves the quality of registers as a result. As more and more of the roll is completed using individual electoral registration, we expect it to have a beneficial effect in weeding out people who are incorrectly registered in the way that my hon. Friend describes.

Ian Lavery >

(Wansbeck) (Lab)

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10. Since March 2014, there has been a reduction in young people about to turn 18 registering to vote. Will the Minister not commit the Government to rolling out the Northern Ireland schools initiative, so that schools and colleges can work with local authorities to make sure that those people register to vote? (Unique identification number 900664 (Unique identification number))

John Penrose >

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A number of interesting initiatives are under way to persuade and allow students to vote. Some interesting examples are going on in Sheffield. So there are a range of possibilities, many of which are very promising. We want to ensure that we have analysed them all properly, so that we can choose the best and most cost-effective.

Topical Questions

Danny Kinahan >

(South Antrim) (UUP)

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T1. If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities. (Unique identification number 900685 (Unique identification number))

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General >

(Matthew Hancock)

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The Cabinet Office is responsible for efficiency and reform, transparency, civil society, digital technology, cyber-security, constitutional matters and the delivery of the Government's agenda.

Danny Kinahan >

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I and many others are concerned about the Union. A convention or congress has been ruled out quite emphatically. With Scotland wanting more and more and Wales and Northern Ireland excluded from the process and, indeed, England threatened by it, too, what mechanism is the Minister's office putting in place to properly preserve and plan the future of the Union?

Matthew Hancock >

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him, we seek a lasting settlement that strengthens the United Kingdom, and I look forward to further eloquent contributions from him to that debate and to working with him to make it happen.

Luke Hall >

(Thornbury and Yate) (Con)

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T5. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on his plans to deliver efficiency savings across Whitehall? (Unique identification number 900689 (Unique identification number))

Matthew Hancock >

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As we try to bring the books back into balance and reach surplus, making the Government more efficient is crucial in ensuring that as much money as possible gets to front-line services where it is needed. We have a widespread efficiency and reform plan, which we are driving through as part of the spending review to ensure that every taxpayer pound is spent as wisely as possible.

Lucy Powell >

(Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)

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May I welcome the new ministerial team to their places? The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is being a little sheepish and, if he does not mind me saying so, a bit disingenuous about the numbers on the electoral register. We all know that the last election was the high-water mark with people automatically put on the register, but with the Electoral Commission saying that nearly 2 million people will fall off that register, will he say today whether he will accept its recommendations on the early bringing forward of the IER scheme? Does he really want this Government to go down in history as the first to reduce the franchise in this country?

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster >

(Mr Oliver Letwin)

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As I have already told the House, we will look at the Electoral Commission's recommendations seriously and come back to the House when we have made our decision on them, but there is a clear distinction between those people who are on the electoral register who should not be on it because they are not resident in the place that they are registered for—that is what the cleaning is about—and what I take it is our joint endeavour to get all those people, estimated by the Electoral Commission at 7 million, who should be on the register but are not, on to the register. That is why we are spending money and helping local authorities to attract those people on to the register.

Andrew Stephenson >

(Pendle) (Con)

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T6. A new cyber-security institute in Nelson in my constituency, sponsored by Training 2000, is due to be launched in the autumn. What support is the Cabinet Office offering to education providers to ensure that Britain is equipped with the cyber-security skills we need for the future? (Unique identification number 900690 (Unique identification number))

Matthew Hancock >

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My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. To defend Britain from cyber-attack, we need to ensure that we have the cyber-skills in the future. That involves not only university-level skills, which we are putting money into expanding, but cyber-apprenticeships and entry-level schemes to ensure that, at all levels and from all parts of our country, we can recruit people to work

[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)**Mr Speaker** >[Share](#)

It would assist us if the Minister looked towards and spoke into the microphone. That tends to assist amplification in these circumstances.

Paul Blomfield >

(Sheffield Central) (Lab)

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T2. The importance of students' electoral registration was recognised by the Cabinet Office in allocating welcome if belated funds to the National Union of Students to get people on the register in the run-up to the general election. Will the Minister commit to providing similar funds to boost student electoral registration at the start of the new academic year to ensure that they are represented properly on the register on which the parliamentary boundary review will be based? (Unique identification number 900686 (Unique identification number))

Mr Letwin >[Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman raises a serious question about student registration. As he will know, we now have a system of individual registration, which people can do in about three minutes on an iPhone. We are going to make that even easier, and we will work with the NUS and others to try to encourage students to do exactly as he suggests.

Maggie Throup >

(Erewash) (Con)

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T7. With the help of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), on St George's day this year I launched a petition calling for English votes for English laws. I am therefore delighted to see a firm commitment by the Government to right this historic inequality once and for all. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on when we can expect the Government to introduce that important constitutional change? (Unique identification number 900691 (Unique identification number))

Matthew Hancock >[Share](#)

I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. As she says, we are absolutely going to right this wrong, and there will be further details shortly.

Tulip Siddiq >

(Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)

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T3. A report published today by Children's Rights Alliance for England points to a dismal failure by the Government when considering the best interests of children and young people in their decision making. Bearing that in mind, does the Minister agree that giving 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in the EU referendum would be a first, positive step towards greater inclusion of young people in the democratic process? (Unique identification number 900687 (Unique identification number))

Matthew Hancock >[Share](#)

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having 2 million more jobs and by turning our country around. The consideration of whether voting should start at 16 or 18 is a balanced one. We think 18 is the right age, but, frankly, the best thing we can do for the future of the children of this country is improve and strengthen our economy.

Mr Richard Bacon >
(South Norfolk) (Con)

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Will the Minister for the Cabinet Office undertake to visit the Major Projects Leadership Academy in Oxford and see the excellent work being done to develop senior civil servants?

Matthew Hancock >

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Not only will I undertake to visit the academy—I have heard very good stories about it—but I understand that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has visited it, and he has just told me that I had better go too, so I will get there pretty shortly.

Prime Minister

The Prime Minister was asked—

Angela Crawley >
(Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)

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Q1. If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 1 July 2015 (Unique identification number 900670 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >
(Mr David Cameron)

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I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in congratulating the England women's football team on reaching the semi-finals of the world cup in Canada and wishing them well for their match against Japan this evening.

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

Angela Crawley >

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The Prime Minister's plans for English votes for English laws will reduce my rights and the rights of other Scottish MPs in this House—
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker >

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Order. The hon. Lady must and will be heard.

Angela Crawley >

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Commons, but the real issue is my ability to protect the interests of my constituents. Will the Prime Minister guarantee today that, under his plans, a Bill that has a direct or indirect effect on Scotland's budget will not be certifiable as England-only?

The Prime Minister >

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First, let me welcome the hon. Lady to her place. We will publish our proposals shortly and Parliament will have plenty of time to consider and vote on them, but let me be very clear: we are not creating a system of two tiers for MPs. All MPs will still vote on all Bills, but what we are saying is that laws which apply only in England should pass only if they are supported by a majority of English MPs. That seems to me—in a devolved system where Members of the Scottish Parliament can determine their own future on health, housing and an increasing number of subjects—to provide fairness across our United Kingdom.

Graham Stuart >

(Beverley and Holderness) (Con)

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Q15. Yesterday the National Audit Office called for the introduction of a fairer schools funding formula so that it is “related more closely to their”—that is, pupils’—“needs and less affected by where they live.” Can the Prime Minister confirm from the Dispatch Box that the additional and very welcome £390 million awarded last year as a first step towards a fairer funding system will be incorporated into the baseline for future years? (Unique identification number 900684 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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I can say that we will implement the pledges in our manifesto on this issue because we need to make funding fairer across the country. If we look at the figures today, it is clearly unfair that a school in one part of the country can receive over 50% more funding than an identical school in another part of the country. We have already made some progress on this, but I want us to go further.

Ms Harriet Harman >

(Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)

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I join the Prime Minister in his congratulations to England's women's football team. With only a fraction of the resources that the men get, they are showing the men how it is done.

Sadly, we now know that 22 British citizens have been confirmed dead in the Tunisia attack. Our thoughts are with the bereaved and injured, and the help they and their families will need. The bereaved and those who have experienced life-changing injuries and trauma will need long-term practical and emotional support. The experience after 7/7 was that to really help those affected families, there needs to be co-ordination across Departments and agencies, so will the Prime Minister establish a dedicated taskforce reporting to a Minister to support those who have suffered in that terrible attack?

The Prime Minister >

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Yes, I can give the right hon. and learned Lady that assurance. Let me update the House, because I am sad to say that the confirmed number of British citizens killed in this appalling attack is now 27 and, as we have said, we expect it to rise still further. Today we are repatriating eight bodies from Tunisia on an RAF C-17 plane. The plane is now in the air and will land at RAF Brize Norton this afternoon. Every family of a victim now has a dedicated Foreign Office liaison officer, but—I can confirm what she asked—I have asked the Cabinet Secretary for advice on creating a ministerial committee to ensure that work is properly co-ordinated right across Government to provide all the support that the victims of this appalling attack deserve and to ensure that, as a nation, we mark and commemorate this event appropriately.

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That is a really important step that the Prime Minister has taken. We fully support it and thank those who will be working in that respect. Reports over the past few days have suggested that it was not just a lone gunman who perpetrated the attack, but an organised cell. Following the Home Secretary's visit to Tunisia and the deployment of 50 police officers, will he update the House on the progress being made to help identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice?

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

On that specific issue, there is still a lot of work to be done to identify all the circumstances of this appalling attack and the support that the gunman received. As we get that information and confirm it, I will ensure that the House is regularly updated. I can confirm that the discussions between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Tunisians went ahead and were successful. As I have said previously, that is looking at everything, from the protective security in hotels and resorts to intelligence co-operation at the highest levels between Britain and Tunisia, so that we can help with its capacity to combat such appalling events. It will need a lot of long-term work between our two countries, but the French, the Germans and the Americans are also willing to help, and we need to co-ordinate between ourselves how best to support that country on its road to democracy.

Ms Harman >[Share](#)

The Prime Minister has rightly said that this was an attack on our values and everything we stand for, and there is radicalisation in this country, too. Last November the Intelligence and Security Committee said that the Prevent programme had not been given sufficient priority and that counter-radicalisation programmes are not working. Today a new statutory duty to challenge radicalisation comes into effect. Will there be sufficient training and support for those covered by the duty, and will he look again at the concern that the Prevent programme has not focused sufficiently on engaging with the communities?

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

The right hon. and learned Lady raises very important issues. Let me answer them as directly as I can. First, we have now put more money and resources into the Prevent programme. Secondly, on her point about the statutory duty on public sector bodies, I think that is very important, because we are saying to schools, universities, local authorities and others that they have a duty to deal with radicalisation and to confront extremism, because this effort is not just for the police and security services, or indeed just for the Government; it is an effort for us all. On her specific question, which goes back to whether it was right to split the Prevent work into work that is done to deal with extremism under the aegis of the Home Office and the programmes to encourage integration, which should be done by the Department for Communities and Local Government, I maintain that that was the right decision. It followed a review in 2011 by Alex Carlile, who found that

“there have been cases where groups whom we would now consider to support an extremist ideology have received funding.”

As we discussing in the House on Monday, it is very important that that does not happen. Yes we should work with community groups, but not those that encourage an extremist narrative.

Ms Harman >[Share](#)

It is important that the Prime Minister does not just defend the decisions he has made, but continues to reflect on this and really tries to make absolutely sure that he gets it right. If he does that and gets the right outcomes, we will strongly support him on that.

Let me turn to another issue. With all-party support, the Prime Minister commissioned the Davies report to look at the question of airport capacity. Now that the commission has recommended a third runway at Heathrow, does he agree with us that, subject to key environmental tests being met, there should be no further delay and that it should go ahead? Will he now take that forward?



First, let us all thank Howard Davies and the team for the very thorough piece of work they have done. I think that there is a lot of common ground across almost all parts of the House that there is the need for additional airport capacity in the south-east of England, not least to maintain this country's competitiveness, but it is important that we now study this very detailed report. I am very clear about the legal position; if we say anything now before studying the report, we could actually endanger whatever decision is made. The guarantee that I can give the right hon. and learned Lady is that a decision will be made by the end of the year.

Ms Harman >



The Prime Minister says there is common ground, and there is common ground across the House; the worry is the lack of common ground on his side of the House. He gives the impression that there is going to be a proper process, but something very is different coming out of No. 10, because it is briefing that it is not going to happen. It looks like the Prime Minister has been overruled by the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson); he should tell him that he is not the leader of the Tory party yet. Will the Prime Minister stand up for Britain's interests or will he just be bullied by Boris?

The Prime Minister >



I would have thought that with all her years of experience, the right hon. and learned Lady would know not to believe everything that she reads in her morning newspapers. It would probably be good for her blood pressure, as well as for mine, if she did not. Let me give the mildest warnings about jumping to a conclusion before seeing the results, because we had a classic example of that last week when the shadow Health Secretary warned the Government that the poverty figures would make us all hang our heads in shame. That was of course before the poverty figures were published, showing that relative poverty was at its lowest level since the 1980s.

Ms Harman >



The Prime Minister seems to be keen to get off the issue of airports. It seems like he is in a holding pattern above Heathrow and Boris will not let him land. Our economic infrastructure is essential for future jobs, for growth, and for our productivity, but this week the Government have pulled the plug on electrification of the railways and seriously undermined the renewable energy sector, and now they are backing off over airports and risking losing the opportunity for Britain to be at the heart of the global economy. If the Prime Minister makes a swift decision on the Davies report, we will support him and there will be a majority in the House, so will he put Britain's national interest first?

The Prime Minister >



It is an interesting day when the leader of the Conservative party wants to talk about child poverty and the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about an airport report that none of us has yet had time to read. I seem to remember that the last leader of the Labour party—although we have been churning through a few recently—had a totally different position on airports to the one that the right hon. and learned Lady is now putting forward. What I can say to her is that we will all read this report and a decision will be made by the end of the year.

Simon Hoare >

(North Dorset) (Con)



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the Prime Minister commit the Government to do all that they can, with sufficient energy and resources, to ensure that the 5% black hole is filled as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister >

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First, let me welcome my hon. Friend to his place. Before coming here, he was a very successful district councillor in an area I am familiar with, where he helped to achieve the second lowest council tax in the country. I am sure that he will bring that sense of good housekeeping to this place. He is absolutely right to raise the issue of superfast broadband and how we fill in the last 5% to 10% of homes, particularly in rural areas. We are providing extra funding and we are looking at all the different sorts of technology that can help to deliver this.

Angus Robertson >

(Moray) (SNP)

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I associate myself and the Scottish National party with all the tributes and condolences to the families and friends of everybody caught up in the tragedy in Tunisia.

Because of the way the United Kingdom is structured, decisions on health, education and much English legislation have an impact on the Scottish budget. Will the Prime Minister confirm that he plans to exclude Scottish MPs from parts of the democratic process at Westminster that will have an impact on Scotland?

The Prime Minister >

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The point I would make to the hon. Gentleman is that English MPs are entirely excluded from any discussion of Scottish health, Scottish housing or Scottish education. What we are proposing is actually a very measured and sensible step which says that when there is a Bill that only affects, for instance, England, the Committee stage should be composed of English MPs, but then the whole House will vote on Report and, indeed, on Third Reading. What this will introduce, as it were, is a system for making sure that the wishes of English MPs cannot be overruled. That, I think, is only fair in a system where the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and, indeed, the Northern Irish Parliament have increased powers.

Angus Robertson >

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On overruling MPs, it is very interesting that 58 of 59 Scottish MPs have voted for the Scottish Bill to be strengthened, but they have been outvoted by English MPs. Not content with outvoting Scottish MPs elected on a mandate to strengthen the Scotland Bill, the Prime Minister is now going to introduce second-class status for MPs elected from Scotland on issues that can have an impact on the Scottish budget. He is even planning to make the membership of the Scottish Affairs Committee a minority pursuit for Scottish MPs. Is that what the Prime Minister means when he says he has a respect agenda?

The Prime Minister >

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I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what I mean by a respect agenda: every single thing Lord Smith represented in terms of welfare has gone into the Bill. Is it not interesting that the hon. Gentleman objects to a vote in the UK Parliament on a UK issue, which is what has happened? Let me tell him again: instead of endlessly talking about the process, is it not time that the SNP started to talk about how they are going to use these powers? Why do they not tell us? Which welfare benefits do they want to put up? Which taxes do they want to increase? Why do they not start to tell us? I have been following the debate very closely and have noticed that none of Scotland's 59 MPs is arguing that the state pension should be devolved. In other words, the principle of pooling and sharing our resources and risks across the United Kingdom, which I believe in as leader of the United Kingdom, is apparently shared by the Scottish National party.

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(Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)

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My constituent Paul Short from Wooler showed great courage during the Tunisian massacre last week by helping to save the life of an injured victim with first aid skills he had learned as a member of the Territorial Army. Will the Prime Minister set out how the new measures in the extremism Bill will tackle extremists and stand up for our values of democracy, equality, free speech and respect for minorities?

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

First of all, let me take this opportunity to praise my hon. Friend's constituent and the skills that were used on that dreadful day in Tunisia. The Bill will reinforce the work we have already done to increase funding for counter-terrorism and counter-terrorism policing; make sure there is a duty on public authorities to combat radicalisation; and go after the fact that there are groups and individuals who are very clever at endorsing extremism but then stopping one step short of actually condoning terrorism. That is what the new banning orders we are looking at aim to achieve, because we are clear that people who support the extremist narrative have no place in our public debate.

Mark Durkan >

(Foyle) (SDLP)

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Q2. Given regional wage profiles, many families in the north of Ireland will identify with the concerns raised today by the four children's commissioners about tax credits. Further to heeding those wider warnings, will the Prime Minister have the Chancellor take particular care to ensure that no supposedly more targeted changes to child benefit or tax credits will end up being misdirected against natural, everyday, cross-border working families in my constituency and its hinterland? (Unique identification number 900671 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

When we talk about cross-border working families, it is still the case that welfare arrangements in the United Kingdom are far more generous than what is available in the Republic of Ireland. Our view is clear: the right answer is to create jobs, cut taxes, raise living standards and reduce welfare. I want an economy that has high pay, low taxes and low welfare, instead of low pay, high taxes and high welfare.

Let me share with the House one important statistic. Under the last Labour Government—*[Interruption.]* I know that Labour Members do not want to talk about the last Labour Government. *[Interruption.]* Well, under the last Government, inequality and child poverty fell. Now for the history lesson: let us go back to the last Labour Government. Under Labour, the number of working-age people in in-work poverty rose by about 20%. That was at the same time as welfare spending on people in work went up from £6 billion to £28 billion. What that shows is that the Labour model of taking money off people in tax and recycling it back to them in tax credits has not worked. It is time for a new approach of creating jobs, cutting taxes and having businesses that are creating the livelihoods we need.

Rehman Chishti >

(Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)

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Q3. Having led a campaign and authored a letter signed by over 120 Members of Parliament from across the House to the Prime Minister and to the BBC against calling the so-called Islamic State "ISIL" or "ISIS", I thank the Prime Minister for not calling it "Islamic State", but an issue remains with calling it "ISIL". Will the Prime Minister lead the way by officially calling it "Daesh", as do France, Turkey and other countries in the middle east, which is acceptable to Muslims in this country and around the world? (Unique identification number 900672 (Unique identification number))

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My hon. Friend, who has spoken about this a lot, makes a very strong point. The argument I would make is that “Islamic State” is inappropriate, because it is neither Islamic in the true meaning of the word nor, indeed, is it a state; it is a bunch of terrorist thugs. I am happy for people to use “Daesh”. I think ISIL is an alternative because it does not confer such authority. I am pleased that the BBC seems to have moved its position, because until yesterday it was calling it “Islamic State”. It looks like it is going to change its approach, and I really welcome that.

Mr Nigel Dodds >

(Belfast North) (DUP)

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Given the vital importance of Parliament and Members from both sides of the House and from all parts of the United Kingdom being able to hold the Government of the day to account properly and effectively, will the Prime Minister confirm whether he intends to try to reduce the size of the next House of Commons to 600 Members?

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

I am committed to what is in the Conservative manifesto, which is to complete the work that should have been done in the last Parliament so that we have equal-sized constituencies in a smaller House of Commons and cut the cost of politics.

Andrew Bridgen >

(North West Leicestershire) (Con)

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Q4. Owing to ongoing issues with the Post Office’s Horizon software accounting system, I believe that many honest, decent, hard-working sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses have lost their reputations, their livelihoods, their savings and, in the worst cases, their liberty. This is a national disgrace. Will my right hon. Friend consider the requests from Members across the House for a judicial inquiry into this matter and bring it to a conclusion? (Unique identification number 900673 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

My hon. Friend has done a real service in campaigning tirelessly on this issue, and I know that he has led a debate in the House on it as well. The Post Office’s answer is to say that it set up an independent inquiry which has not found evidence of wrongdoing, but, clearly, that has not satisfied many Members on both sides of the House who have seen individual constituency cases and want better answers.

What I think needs to happen next is for the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), to convene a meeting involving Members of the House, the Post Office and representatives of sub-postmasters to discuss their concerns and see what should happen next. I would hope that it would not be necessary to have a full independent judicial inquiry to get to the bottom of this issue, but get to the bottom of it we must.

Mr Speaker >[Share](#)

Question 5 is a closed question.

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Mr Graham Allen >
(Nottingham North) (Lab)

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Q5. If he will hold discussions with his Cabinet colleagues to review the effect on voters' perceptions of Parliament of Prime Minister's Question Time. (Unique identification number 900674 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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I regularly reflect on Prime Minister's questions with Cabinet colleagues and others. For all its faults, and there are many, I would say that it has two important points: it puts the Prime Minister on the spot to the public, but it also puts the Government on the spot to the Prime Minister—needing to know issues right across every Department before coming to the House at 12 o'clock on a Wednesday is an important mechanism of accountability.

Mr Allen >

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Given that Parliament may be moving out of this place in 2020, will the Prime Minister take that opportunity to share the joys of Prime Minister's questions, which he has just outlined, and this federal Parliament by convening it in each of the nations of the United Kingdom and thereby symbolise his Government's and this Parliament's commitment both to the Union and to devolution?

The Prime Minister >

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As I said in an earlier answer, I am committed to trying to cut the cost of politics, and I am not sure that that would help. It is important that we take our politics and issues to all the different regions of the country, and that is something the Government are very committed to do, not least with our regional economic plans for every region of our country. As for the future of this House of Commons and where we stand and where we debate, that is a matter for the House of Commons, but I have to say that I have a slight emotional attachment to this place—the place at this Dispatch Box specifically.

Richard Benyon >
(Newbury) (Con)

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The brass fittings on that Dispatch Box are worn paper thin by the sweat from the palms of Prime Ministers and Ministers down the ages. That is a visual example of parliamentary accountability. Although our constituents rightly feel that, at times, this session is a little absurd, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a great pity if senior members of the Executive were not held to account in that way?

The Prime Minister >

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I agree with my hon. Friend. I remember taking some constituents on a tour when I first became a Member of Parliament and hearing for the first time something I had not known—namely, that after this Chamber was bombed some of Winston Churchill's most important speeches and parliamentary occasions took place in the other place rather than here. I do not want to start a complete fight between both Houses, so I think I will leave it at that.

[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)**Neil Gray >**

(Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

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Q6. The Prime Minister has been asked repeatedly about his plans to exclude Scottish MPs from decisions that will directly and indirectly impact on Scotland's budget and my constituents in Airdrie and Shotts. Will he finally tell the House and the people of Scotland whether it is right to create a second-class status for Scottish MPs through the back door, or is he content to press ahead with plans that will bring about the break-up of Britain? (Unique identification number 900675 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

I am quite baffled. I thought the whole point of the SNP is that SNP Members want to exclude themselves from the UK Parliament forever. I thought that was the whole point. What we are putting in place is a fair and balanced system that is fair to all parts of our United Kingdom. Long may it stay together.

Edward Argar >

(Charnwood) (Con)

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Q7. Over the past five years, increasing numbers of people in the east midlands and the UK have decided to take the courageous and important step to set up their own businesses and become self-employed. What steps will the Prime Minister and the Government take in future further to support those entrepreneurs in my constituency and beyond who represent and personify aspiration and hard work? (Unique identification number 900676 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

Let me welcome my hon. Friend to his place. I agree with him that people taking that step to become self-employed and start their own business has been a very big part of the jobs and enterprise revolution in our country over the past five years. Things such as start-up loans have made a real difference, which is why we are increasing them in this Parliament, but when we look at helping self-employed people, it is important to look at all the aspects of being self-employed—how people interact with pensions, benefits, maternity leave, public authorities and social housing rules. That is why I am asking Julie Deane, the founder of the fantastic Cambridge Satchel Company and a model for how self-employed people can achieve great things, to lead a review for the Government. Let us look at all the ways in which we can help self-employed people to get going.

Cat Smith >

(Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)

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Q8. Given the Prime Minister's commitment to localism, will he stand by and respect the decision made by Lancashire County Council this week to reject fracking, yes or no? (Unique identification number 900677 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

Those decisions must be made by local authorities in the proper way, under the planning regime we have. Personally, I hope that, over time, unconventional gas sites will go ahead, whether in Lancashire or elsewhere, because I want our country to exploit all the natural resources we have. I want us to keep energy bills down and I want us to be part of that revolution, which can create

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world, which has a higher carbon footprint. We should do that, but if the Labour party wants to paint itself into a background of not wanting any unconventional gas at all, it should say so.

Alok Sharma >

(Reading West) (Con)

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Q9. Labour-controlled Reading Borough Council recently received a damning report from Ofsted for not doing enough to help struggling schools under its control. Will the Prime Minister tell us what the Government intend to do to ensure that systemically failing local education authorities such as Reading do not continue to ruin the life chances of our young people? (Unique identification number 900678 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that. Frankly, one extra term in a failing school is too long for our children. In the past, Governments and LEAs have been too tolerant in allowing schools to continue to fail year after year, so this Government have set a very testing regime for failing schools and for those that are inadequate. As my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary set out this week, we will do similar things to schools that we would define as coasting and that could be doing better. We can now see the model of academy chains taking over a failing school, changing some of the leadership and putting in place the things that are necessary. We can see radical increases in the results, which is what we want. We will today talk about how we tackle poverty in the long term. Tackling sink schools and educational underachievement is vital to the life chances of our children.

Chris Law >

(Dundee West) (SNP)

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Q10. After four opportunities, the Prime Minister still has not answered the question regarding the impact of English votes for English laws. May I strongly urge him to finally reassure the people of my constituency that their elected MP will not be given minority status in matters affecting the Scottish budget and, consequently, the lives of the citizens of Dundee? Moreover, last night 58 out of 59 Scottish MPs— (Unique identification number 900679 (Unique identification number))

Mr Speaker >

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Order. We are very grateful. We have got the gist of it.

The Prime Minister >

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The hon. Gentleman has had a very clear answer. It may be that the Scottish National party does not like the answer, but the proposals we discussed at great length in the last Parliament for solving this issue will now be introduced. The absolutely key point is that if, in some future Parliament, there is disagreement between English MPs who want one thing and the House of Commons as a whole which wants another, there would have to be a way of resolving the deadlock. This is effectively a block for English MPs. It is not the ability to legislate willy-nilly. He would know that if he read the manifesto.

Jack Lopresti >

(Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)

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foreign aid, but will not commit to a target of a minimum of 2% of GDP for defence? Does he realise that this is damaging the relationship with our key strategic ally, the United States, and risking our credibility with our NATO allies?

The Prime Minister >

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What I would say to my hon. Friend, who I know cares deeply about this issue and has in his constituency some of the most important defence manufacturers in our country, is that we have in every year met that 2% target. Many countries in the European Union do not even meet 1% for defence investment. The commitment we have made already is to invest £160 billion across 10 years into our equipment programme, with real-terms increases every year. That is why we can say the aircraft carriers, the C-17s and the new aeroplanes will all be coming forward. We will obviously make final spending decisions in the spending review this autumn.

Mr Dennis Skinner >

(Bolsover) (Lab)

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Q11. For a man who seemingly is never away from Europe, why is it that he has never taken the opportunity, when he has been there, to put in a claim for state aid to save British miners' jobs? He is the man who, during the election campaign, masqueraded as the workers' champion but he has not got the guts to help those miners. He took £700 million out of the mineworkers' pension scheme and he has not given a penny back. No wonder they call him "dodgy Dave". The man that went to Eton: educated beyond his intelligence. *[Interruption.]* (Unique identification number 900680 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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It is very good to see the Labour party in full voice cheering on Jurassic Park. I would stick to the movie.

There is a serious point here. The Government have offered £20 million to the owners of Hatfield colliery to keep it going. We have been prepared to put forward money. Unlike the previous Government, we have been prepared to make ministerial directions, because we have some courage when it comes to these things.

Zac Goldsmith >

(Richmond Park) (Con)

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There is a very strong sense that the Airports Commission began life three years or so ago with a conclusion and then spent £20 million backing up that conclusion. The Prime Minister is going to have to make a decision on the back of those recommendations shortly, but what assurances can he give the million or so Londoners who stand to be affected by Heathrow expansion that he will engage with the real arguments in a way that Sir Howard Davies has not?

The Prime Minister >

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Let me pay tribute to my hon. Friend for how strongly he campaigns on this issue. I know how strongly he cares about it and how strongly his constituents feel about it. The promise I can give him is that this very thorough report, which landed on my desk yesterday afternoon, will be studied properly. This really does matter. If you make some precipitate decision or rule out one particular option, you will actually make the decision you would like to make impossible to achieve because of judicial review. We may not like that in this House, but those are the facts and those are the ones we need to operate on.

Mr Speaker >

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Clive Lewis >

(Norwich South) (Lab)

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Q12. Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Mental Health Trust, which serves my constituency, is refusing to publish the so-called Alexander report on its operation. The report, which I have seen, raises serious questions about patient safety and care owing to cuts to services. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that the duty of candour should apply to NHS management as it does to NHS front-line staff? If so, will he join me in the call for the report's publication? (Unique identification number 900681 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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First, let me welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. I make no apology for the Care Quality Commission's rigorous inspection regime, which is identifying areas that need improvement. I would argue that the two things we need here are to uncover bad practice and turn it round, and then to back it up with the resources the NHS needs, including those recommended by the Stevens plan. As things stand, only this party is backing the extra £8 billion into the NHS—and not the Labour party.

Chris Law >

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On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker >

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Points of order come after statements, and we have a couple of statements, so I am saving the hon. Gentleman up for later.