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(HANSARD)

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House of Lords

Thursday, 3 December 2009.

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Liverpool.

Tourism: Air Passenger Duty

Question

11.06 am

Asked By **Lord Palmer**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effects of new rates of air passenger duty on the United Kingdom tourism industry.

Lord Palmer: My Lords, in asking this Question, I declare an interest in tourism in that I open my home to the visiting public.

The Financial Services Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Myners): My Lords, the Government published an implementation impact assessment of the reformed air passenger duty in March 2009, and a copy was deposited in the Library of the House. The Government keep all taxes under review.

Lord Palmer: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he not agree that in these harsh economic times Her Majesty's Government ought to be doing everything they can to encourage tourism rather than discourage it? Is it not interesting that Holland has already dropped its APD?

Lord Myners: The increase in the air passenger duty is a relatively small amount of money: £10 for a standard-rate traveller to band C on an air ticket price that could be anything from £500 to £3,000. It is modest but it will contribute to healing the public finances, as well as having some good environmental consequences.

Baroness Noakes: My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, told the House yesterday that the Prime Minister had asked the Treasury to look urgently at the issue of the way in which the APD is impacting particularly on the Caribbean. What does this review entail, and what does "urgently" mean?

Lord Myners: The issue is being reviewed by the Treasury as part of a process of keeping all taxes under review. The increased rates were effective only from 1 November, and clearly a good review will test the outcomes in terms of changes of behaviour from previous performance. We will need some data and some information to be able to inform that judgment. "Urgently", therefore, will be seen in the context of ensuring that we have sufficient information to make an informed judgment.

Lord Lee of Trafford: My Lords, I declare an interest as chairman of the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions. Just like the charges for visas and the changes to the holiday letting taxation rules, it appears that air passenger duty was brought in totally ignoring the impact on our tourism industry. Is the Minister aware of the work that Deloitte and the Tourism Alliance have done that calculates that if APD were abolished, nearly 40,000 new jobs would be created in our tourism industry?

Lord Myners: I am not aware of that report, but I am aware that air travel receives considerable implicit subsidies. Air fuel is not subject to fuel tax and air tickets are not subject to VAT. The combined effect of that massively outweighs these very modest increases in air passenger duty, a tax introduced first of all by the party represented opposite.

Lord Harrison: Does the Minister agree that there is a discriminatory disadvantage to the United Kingdom domestic tourism industry? Would it not be better to go down the route of working with our colleagues in the European Union so at least disadvantage does not stem from competition with the other 26 members?

Lord Myners: I thank my noble friend for that question. This is one of the issues that will be looked at in the review that I referred to earlier.

Lord Naseby: My Lords—

Lord Geddes: My Lords—

Lord Kilclooney: My Lords—

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Baroness Royall of Blaisdon): My Lords, it is the turn of the Cross Benches.

Lord Kilclooney: My Lords, is the Minister able to confirm that, contrary to what was stated in the last question, there has been a dramatic decrease in tourism in the eurozone area—for example, down by 20 per cent in Greece this year—whereas in the United Kingdom there has not been a similar dramatic decrease?

Lord Myners: The noble Lord is absolutely right in his observation. Our share of European visitor numbers has increased quite dramatically over the past 12 months, as the UK is recognised as being an extraordinarily good and interesting destination for foreign visitors.

Lord Geddes: Does the Minister agree that one effect of this appalling increase in duty will merely be to encourage travellers from this country on long-hauls, for instance to Hong Kong, to go via Amsterdam to the considerable detriment of UK-based airlines?

Lord Myners: The saving involved for a long-haul passenger who has to have two tickets issued that are not connected—because if they are connected, they will still be subject to the air passenger duty—is the matter of a modest amount of a few pounds, which is nothing compared with the inconvenience of having to change flights and other issues. However, I recognise that those who make long-haul flights will be concerned about this, and I am concerned about people who are regular visitors to the Caribbean or to adjacent countries. I worry about Mr Zac Goldsmith going to see his

[LORD MYNERS]

trustees in Cayman, or the noble Lord, Lord Ashcroft, going to Belize, but I somehow think that they will be able to afford this.

Lord Walpole: My Lords, I am sure that the answer to my question is in the Library, and I will go and look it up some time, but what effect does this tax have on small airports such as Norwich International Airport?

Lord Myners: The rate is the same regardless of whether one flies from an extremely good small airport, like Norwich or Newquay, or from larger airports.

Lord Tebbit: My Lords—

Baroness Howells of St Davids: Yesterday, the noble Baroness the Minister told us that the Prime Minister had asked for an urgent review, and this morning I heard the Minister say that he needs the research. I can tell him without research that he will be crippling the economy of the Caribbean, which depends solely on tourism at this moment. Also, I am not talking about the Ashcrofts of this world, but the people who live here and have given so much to Britain and who can no longer afford to go home to bury members of their family with the tax that has been put on. I ask him for some really urgent action.

Lord Myners: I am very aware of the concern that my noble friend expresses, as indeed I am of the very many other representations that I have received from the diplomatic community and the industry, but I remind the House that we are talking about an increase in the total cost of travel of £10—less than the price of a return ticket to Gatwick Airport.

Lord Naseby: My Lords, how can it be right that there is a flat rate all the way over to Los Angeles, and anywhere else in the States, and a variable rate for the Caribbean? That is surely an inconsistency.

Lord Myners: There is a flat rate for all bands. The bands are based on 2,000-mile limits and on travel from London to the capital of the country. It is a simple administrative approach, which has been much welcomed by those in the travel industry, who do not want to see a proliferation of rates. I assure the House that the approach for the Caribbean is as fixed as it is for other jurisdictions and destinations.

Cultural and Creative Arts

Question

11.15 am

Asked By **Baroness Sharp of Guildford**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the contribution the cultural and creative arts make to gross domestic product; and what proposals they have to promote their further growth and development.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Davies of Oldham): My Lords, the creative industries contributed 6.4 per cent of the UK's gross value added in 2006. There are 1.9 million people in creative jobs, both in the creative sector itself and in creative roles in other sectors. They are identified as a key industry sector in several government initiatives such as BIS's New Industry, New Jobs and the DWP's Future Jobs Fund. These are additional to the Creative Britain strategy, launched in February 2008.

Baroness Sharp of Guildford: I am grateful to the Minister for his positive answer. Is he aware that these industries, even through the recession, have been growing by 5 per cent a year in GDP terms? It is the fastest growing employment sector in the UK and contributes more to the balance of payments than even the banking sector. Nevertheless there are crucial skills shortages in the sector, particularly among technicians, and the companies concerned are having to recruit overseas applicants for these jobs. Are the Government right, therefore, to put so much emphasis on the STEM subjects in their skills and universities policies? Should these sectors not be given somewhat more priority in skills funding?

Lord Davies of Oldham: My Lords, the noble Baroness is right to identify the importance of this sector. She is also right to draw attention to the question of skills. As she will know, since the Leitch report we have addressed ourselves significantly and particularly to the issue of technicians' skills. That is the basis of our apprenticeship strategy. Of course she will also know that it takes a little while for this process to produce results. However, we are addressing ourselves to the matter. As for higher education, we have a project with the University of Brighton to look at the relationship between higher education and this industry and at whether the courses are fit for purpose from the employers' as well as the universities' perspectives. That is a constructive approach.

Baroness Whitaker: My Lords, can my noble friend ensure that architecture and design, the nursery of some of our very greatest creative talents, are routinely included in all government assessments of the creative industries?

Lord Davies of Oldham: Of course I accept my noble friend's point. It may be that the country has not previously given sufficient recognition to our creative talents, but it is now clear that they are a very important part of our national well-being, not just because of the enjoyment that we get from the creative work which is produced but because of this crucial dimension of the economy. The House will recognise that the Digital Economy Bill plays its part in recognising this important fact.

The Lord Bishop of Liverpool: My Lords, I declare an interest as a trustee of the National Museums and Galleries in Liverpool. Is the Minister aware of the two reports that have been published following Liverpool's

year as European Capital of Culture: the Capital of Culture outputs final report and the National Museums Liverpool economic impact report for 2009? Both show that for £20 million of government investment, there has been a £120 million impact on the regional economy. Does that encourage the Government to continue to invest in cultural and creative arts?

Lord Davies of Oldham: My Lords, it certainly does. I speak on behalf of the whole of the Government, but I must confess an interest: both museums write to me regularly, as I have a close association with them, so I am all too well aware of their success since the year of culture. It shows just how that concept can bring advantages to a city such as Liverpool. I am enormously gratified to see the extent to which the city is building on those foundations.

Lord Howarth of Newport: My Lords—

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: My Lords, I thank my noble friend for his gracious withdrawal.

Does the Minister agree with me that a lot of the energy, diversity and, indeed, success of the cultural and creative industries over the past decade has been due, at least in part, to a consistent and growing level of investment from government in the core elements of those industries? Does he also agree, going back to the point about technical skills, that the creative industries need those skills just as much as many other industries do, and that one of the helpful things that government could do in encouraging people to think about investing their time and energy in developing technical skills is to point out that they can be deployed very effectively in the area of culture and creativity?

Lord Davies of Oldham: My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend. The latter point is valid, which is why I emphasised it in one of my earlier answers with regard to apprenticeships. There is no doubt that the creative industries need that skill level to support the more creative aspects that artists, film directors and so on recognise a great deal more. We all recognise that these are straitened times as far as government investment is concerned, but the record over the past decade is quite unparalleled. The Government are committed to this sector for its value in enhancing the life of the nation and its significant contribution to the economy.

Baroness Howe of Idlicote: My Lords, given the point about the need for technical skills, how much extra effort are the Government putting into ensuring that schoolchildren are properly informed about the opportunities which are available if they begin their education in these areas now?

Lord Davies of Oldham: My Lords, the noble Baroness has identified an important point regarding the effectiveness of communication in schools about such opportunities. We are developing a project in which schoolchildren are introduced to such opportunities. We are looking at that as a pilot study to see how we can spread it across the nation. There is no doubt that there are opportunities in this area which we need to

see young children exploit and develop. I have not the slightest doubt that they would gain fulfilment from careers in this area.

Health: Epilepsy

Question

11.22 am

Asked By **Lord Walton of Detchant**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to implement National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance on the management of epilepsy, with particular reference to the role of specialist nurses.

Baroness Thornton: My Lords, the Government take epilepsy very seriously and want to see improvements made to services and treatment. Department of Health officials are working with epilepsy groups and others on a number of initiatives to strengthen the commissioning and delivery of services. This work is building on the earlier guidance issued to the NHS, including the clinical guideline published by NICE and the guidance published in 2008 highlighting the value of neurological specialist nurses.

Lord Walton of Detchant: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that encouraging reply. Is she aware that the Joint Epilepsy Council has recently produced a highly critical report demonstrating that a large number of health service bodies are failing to implement the NICE guidance? It found that about half a million people in the UK suffer from epilepsy, and that there have been 990 epilepsy-related deaths, of which it believes that some 400 could have been prevented with better care. Happily, there has been an increase in the number of consultant neurologists, although they are still far short of what would be ideal, but it is clear that the role of highly specialised nurses in the epilepsy field can be invaluable. What action are the Government taking to persuade health service bodies to appoint more epilepsy specialist nurses?

Baroness Thornton: There is no doubt at all that epilepsy specialist nurses fulfil very many roles supporting people with epilepsy and their families, as well as helping to improve co-ordination and communication with the NHS in their local areas. We absolutely support the development of this range of specialist roles within nursing and within the nursing workforce. However, these decisions are taken at local level, so we are working to establish regional clinical champions who will work with the local NHS organisations and patient groups to raise awareness of these standards, and the need to recruit these nurses.

Baroness Gardner of Parkes: The Minister says that decisions are made at local level, but what is the national picture in terms of how many specialist epilepsy nurses there are? Are all these posts filled, or do more people need to be trained as epilepsy specialist nurses?

Baroness Thornton: The figure on how many specialist nurses work in the field of epilepsy is not available to me. I shall go back to ask if the information is available, but I already have asked and was told that it was not collected. However, I am aware that neurological voluntary organisations are expressing concern about this matter, as are we. Over the next year, we will look at this issue and use those regional champions to drill down to the PCTs to ensure that recruitment is taking place.

Viscount Simon: Further to the Question of the noble Lord, Lord Walton, will the Care Quality Commission look into standards of care for epilepsy?

Baroness Thornton: The Care Quality Commission published in June its forthcoming programme for special reviews, which did not include epilepsy. However, the commission has informed us that it is considering which topics should be undertaken as specialist reviews in 2010-11. That consultation is taking place at the moment, so the time is now ripe for those concerned with epilepsy and its conditions to be making the point to the CQC that it might consider including epilepsy in the forthcoming reviews.

Lord Skelmersdale: My Lords, I must declare an interest as a member of my family suffers from epilepsy. Further to the question of my noble friend Lady Gardner of Parkes, are there any geographical gaps in the provision of these specialist nurses?

Baroness Thornton: I cannot tell the noble Lord exactly where they are, but I am sure, given that we know the areas where recruitment has and has not taken place, that there almost certainly are geographical gaps.

The Countess of Mar: My Lords, the chairman of the Care Quality Commission has been reported as saying that she will ensure that GPs and other doctors obey the NICE guidelines by enforcing them. Does she have powers to do that?

Baroness Thornton: The clinical guidelines provide an important means of improving patient care, but they are not mandatory in the way that the NICE technological appraisal guidance should be. Clinical guidelines support clinical decision-making and can assist PCTs in developing and redesigning services. However, health professionals are free to use their clinical judgment, in consultation with patients, and decide on the most appropriate treatment options on an individual basis. While the NICE guidelines on diagnosis and management of epilepsy have established standards of care, access to that care remains variable across the country, as we have already recognised. That is why I certainly would be interested in using the CQC as one of the levers to pinpoint where we have gaps and where they might be improved.

Baroness Barker: The noble Baroness mentioned regional clinical champions. Will they all be in acute care, or will some be in the primary care sector? Do neonatal and obstetric units have access to epilepsy specialist nurses?

Baroness Thornton: The answer to the second question is yes they do, because the nursing facility and the specialism is for the whole of the PCT. I mentioned the nurses in my opening Answer; they provide a service across the piece within the area in which they operate.

Lord Campbell of Alloway: Is there a shortage of these specialist nurses? There is a shortage of specialist nurses in some other fields.

Baroness Thornton: I am not sure exactly that there is a shortage. The noble Lord makes a good point, because a decision needs to be taken to employ specialist nurses, and, when that decision is taken, training is available and places are certainly there for them to fill.

Lord McColl of Dulwich: Is the Minister aware that the public will often call an ambulance when a patient has an epileptiform fit? The problem is that the last thing that these patients want is to be taken to hospital by ambulance. They want to slip away unnoticed.

Baroness Thornton: My Lords, the noble Lord makes a very good point. That is exactly right. It points to the work of the all-party group, which is about raising public awareness of what to do when someone has an epileptic seizure.

Railways: National Express

Question

11.29 am

Asked By **Baroness Hanham**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the current position on the National Express East Anglia franchise.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Lord Adonis): My Lords, termination of the National Express east coast franchise, which I notified to the House on 5 November, is a default under the National Express East Anglia franchise. I notified National Express East Anglia on 25 November that its franchise will terminate early, on 31 March 2011. The process for letting the franchise to a new operator has begun and a new operator will begin in April 2011.

Baroness Hanham: My Lords, I thank the Secretary of State for his response and for the three Written Statements that this House has received on the matter. Will he tell us whether he intends to let the new franchises under the same or different terms compared with those operating at the moment? Will he let them to one company or to different companies? Also, will he take the advice of the Opposition and let longer franchises, which would give operators greater ability to invest and to weather financial changes?

Lord Adonis: My Lords, we will let the franchises separately. We will consult on the franchise specifications. I am keen to see that we improve on the specifications so that we get a better deal for the travelling public. I am, indeed, considering the potential for longer franchises, because I believe, as does the noble Baroness, that there could be benefits.

Baroness Scott of Needham Market: As a poor benighted passenger of National Express East Anglia, may I ask the noble Lord whether he is aware of the steady deterioration in services with regard to cleanliness, refreshments, repairs to carriages et cetera, which is making the travelling experience pretty miserable? Can he assure passengers that in the new franchise more attention will be paid to ensuring that the new company operates a decent service?

Lord Adonis: My Lords, I am keen to see improvements to the service. In respect of the East Anglia service, punctuality levels have been improving; therefore, what matters most to passengers, which is that the trains turn up and arrive on time, has been improving. However, it is important that other elements of the service are also maintained in good order and we expect that of National Express.

Lord Walpole: My Lords, like the last speaker, I use this service regularly. I could not agree more about the lack of service, which is getting worse and worse. The punctuality is not too bad, but the service suffers from Railtrack problems, such as level crossings that do not shut so that we have to wait for 10 minutes, which meant, I am afraid—addressing the right reverend Prelate—that I missed Prayers the other day.

Lord Adonis: I am very sorry to hear that the noble Lord was inconvenienced by a delay on the line. As I say, the punctuality record has been improving, but it has scope to improve significantly further.

Lord Grocott: Can my noble friend confirm that two characteristics of the privatised rail system are, first, that people still hold the Government responsible for failures in the system, even when the trains are operated by private companies, and, secondly, that it has more public money going into it than the system ever did under British Rail? Finally, as one of those who spent a lifetime believing in public ownership and the public sector, I simply express my gratitude to him for demonstrating by his action in respect of the east coast main line that this has a very important part in the economic thinking of the 21st century.

Lord Adonis: I am grateful to my noble friend for those remarks. It is not just that people hold the Government accountable for the service but that, as I now know from painful experience, they hold me personally accountable for the service. They call me the Thin Controller. However, the House can be assured that I take those responsibilities very seriously and now that I am personally in charge of the east coast main line I am sure that all its problems will vanish overnight.

Earl Attlee: Is the Secretary of State aware that many of us think that he is an excellent controller? Who is best placed to manage and to cost the positive and negative risks of economic change, the Treasury or the TOCs?

Lord Adonis: I am grateful to the noble Earl for his opening remark. It is important that we get a viable system of risk sharing and that we learn from experience. Clearly, the east coast franchise did not work out and we need to learn the lessons from that experience when we let the new franchise.

Lord McNally: My Lords, as the noble Lord is such a good controller, will he consider taking control of the Bedford to Brighton line? He rushed to the House to make a public statement when the dispute started. The dispute is still going on and the workers who use that line are facing a second-rate service daily. When will he intervene in that dispute?

Lord Adonis: My Lords, there have been very positive talks between the unions and the management in the very recent past, which I hope will lead to the resumption of the full service on that line. To repeat what I said when the concerted action started, it is totally unacceptable that passengers are being held to ransom in this way and I continue to expect that the two sides will reach a settlement that gets the trains running as soon as possible. There is no justification whatsoever for that concerted action on the part of the train drivers.

Lord Skelmersdale: My Lords, the Secretary of State jokingly referred to solving problems overnight, but he earlier referred to the fact that the new franchises would start on 1 April 2011. Why is it taking so long?

Lord Adonis: My Lords, that is the period that it takes to let a new franchise. Of course, we expect National Express to fulfil the terms of its franchise in the period until then. I should stress that, although National Express is withdrawing from the rail industry, the managers on those lines are experienced rail managers, who I know will do their duty by the public.

Earl Ferrers: My Lords, I think that the question asked by the noble Lord, Lord McNally, was: when will the Government intervene? I did not hear the noble Lord answer it.

Lord Adonis: My Lords, as I said, there have been recent talks between the two sides, which I understand have been very positive. I hope, therefore, that there will be an early resumption of the full service on that line.

London Local Authorities Bill [HL]

Third Reading

11.36 am

Bill passed and sent to the Commons.

Health Professions (Hearing Aid Dispensers) Order 2009

Pharmacy Order 2010

Motions to Refer to Grand Committee

11.37 am

Moved By Baroness Royall of Blaisdon

To move that the draft Orders be referred to a Grand Committee.

Motions agreed.

Economy: Modern Languages

Debate

11.38 am

Moved By *Baroness Coussins*

To call attention to the contribution of modern language skills to the United Kingdom economy; and to move for papers.

Baroness Coussins: My Lords, I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate this topic today and look forward to hearing from all noble Lords who will be speaking—and, of course, to the Minister's response. It is most fitting that we shall be hearing from possibly the only bilingual government Minister, although I was relieved to discover when I checked the *Companion* that he will be obliged to use his English rather than his Welsh.

I am proud to be a modern languages graduate myself and I declare an interest as the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages. The group is supported by CILT, the National Centre for Languages. CILT and others have provided me with a great deal of information for which I am most grateful. I also pay tribute to the work done over many years by the late and much-missed Lord Dearing.

Professor Michael Worton's review of modern language provision in English universities was published last month. He came to the stark conclusion that unless the decline in modern language learning is reversed, anglophone Britons will become one of the most monolingual peoples in the world, with severe consequences for our economy, for business competitiveness, for international reputation and mobility and for community cohesion at home.

English is one of the great world languages, and we benefit enormously from the desire and willingness to learn it on the part of so many other people—as do they—but its prevalence should not be overestimated. Only 6 per cent of the global population are native English speakers and 75 per cent speak no English at all. One telling indicator of the relative influence of English is its declining share of internet traffic. English material on the web has fallen from 51 per cent in 2000 to only 29 per cent in 2009. Over the same period, the amount of material in Chinese rose from only 5 per cent to 20 per cent.

There is much evidence that the operational language needs of employers are not being met and that this is damaging both to competitiveness and to the employability of our young people in particular. Research by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce showed that 80 per cent of English exporters were unable to conduct business in a foreign language and that 77 per cent of them reckoned they had missed or lost business because of it. By contrast, exporters who proactively use language skills, and the cultural knowledge that goes with them, achieve on average 45 per cent more sales. Research by Cardiff University's business school suggests that the UK economy could be missing out on contracts worth up to £21 billion a year because of the lack of language skills in the workforce.

CBI surveys have highlighted the frustration of UK employers. Sixty per cent are dissatisfied with the foreign language skills of school leavers, and I should perhaps say at this point that there is plenty of evidence to show that learning a foreign language greatly reinforces literacy in English too. Over a third of UK businesses want people specifically for their language skills, but increasingly are forced to recruit overseas to meet their needs. Seventy-two per cent of UK international trade is with non-English-speaking countries, but only one in 10 of us can speak a foreign language and only 30 per cent of us say we can even understand a conversation in another language. Three times more French, German and Spanish students go on Erasmus-funded placements abroad as part of their degree than British students, giving themselves a competitive advantage in a global labour market. I hope the Minister will undertake to remind universities to inform all students, not just the linguists, how they may benefit from the Erasmus scheme.

The Foreign Office has reported complaints from some companies bringing inward investment to the UK that they have to source qualified engineers from their home markets because UK engineers do not have the relevant language skills, and a good grasp of the parent company's home language is an important skill they expect from people in technical or management jobs.

French and German are top of the list of languages that employers want but, as new markets open up in the Far East, Central Asia and Latin America, significant numbers also want Mandarin or Cantonese, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. Most employers do not require complete fluency. They want conversational ability, which will give a good impression, help to build relationships and make new contacts. Basic language competence is important for retailers, secretaries, receptionists, marketers, transport and healthcare workers and many others. Between now and 2012, when we host the Olympics, we need to be sure we can provide a multilingual service in all these areas, as well as finding 300 specialist translators and interpreters. Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government will encourage businesses to invest in language training for 2012 and beyond?

The supply of interpreters and translators brings me to another aspect of this debate that I want to raise. There is a chronic shortage of English mother-tongue interpreters and translators at the United Nations and at the European Commission and Parliament. In Brussels, meetings are having to be cancelled because no English interpretation is available. Since the last round of enlargement, demand for native English speakers has increased substantially, but 20 per cent of the Commission's English translators will retire in the next five years and recruitment is slow. In 2007, 70 more were needed but it got only 24. The picture is no better for interpreters, of whom a further 200 to 300 will be needed over the next decade. This crisis must be addressed to prevent further negative impact on the EU's work and before the reputation of the UK in supporting international institutions is undermined.

However, a crisis always brings an opportunity, part of which is the language industry. This August, the first ever study of the size of the language industry

in the EU was published. It covers not only interpreting and translating but language teaching, language tools, subtitling and dubbing, web localisation and so on. Many other sectors, as we know, are struggling, but the language industry is in robust health, with an estimated value of €8.4 billion in 2008, which is on target to double to €16.5 billion in 2015. The report makes recommendations to help businesses to seize the opportunities to benefit from multilingual competence. SMEs, for example, are advised against assuming that localising a website into the language of a target country is sufficient to generate sales, and member states are urged to introduce compatible statistical measures to help foreign language planning.

I understand that there will, for the first time, be a question on language in the 2011 Census. Will the Minister say what that question will be and how it is expected that the information will be put to good use? Will he also confirm that his department is familiar with this study and will do its utmost to ensure that British businesses and UK citizens are encouraged and enabled to benefit from their fair share of the opportunities and prosperity offered by the language industry?

There is also the important domestic issue of interpreting. Many people are being prevented from working at a level that is commensurate with their skills, and many others are being deprived of the basic human right of knowing what is happening to them when they are at their most vulnerable: in hospital, in court or in a police station. This is because the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting—the DPSI—is in jeopardy. There are about 1,000 candidates a year, and demand has never been higher. Around 50 different languages, combined with English, were on offer in 2009, ranging from the traditional languages of western Europe to the languages of the enlarged EU, such as Estonian, Lithuanian and Polish; the languages of the Indian sub-continent; and those of countries that are or have been in conflict, such as Kurdish, Serbian, Pashto and Somali.

However, the courses that teach the diploma are threatened by a lack of funding. The course has been taught in the FE sector with funding allocated by the Learning and Skills Council, but the current priorities of the LSC are for education and training at basic and lower levels. The DPSI is rated as level 6, which is equivalent to an honours degree, and so is losing out. The consequences of this will be insufficient affordable courses and fewer fully qualified public service interpreters against what is already acknowledged as a national shortage. Will the Minister undertake to look again at this and see what can be done about adjusting the funding criteria of the LSC to prevent something from happening that is so much at odds with the Government's policies on community cohesion and social mobility?

If languages are part of the solution to economic recession, at least a little green shoot is visible in primary schools. Ninety-two per cent now offer some language teaching, and it will be compulsory from 2011, but we really cannot just wait for today's seven year-olds to come through the system. The Government and the universities must respond positively and quickly to the recommendations of the Worton review. A third

of modern language departments have closed in the past seven years, and according to Professor Worton there is a strong sense in the universities that the importance and value of languages are not properly understood either by government or by potential students.

Professor Worton calls on the Government to up the ante on expectations for secondary schools. I hope that the Minister will agree to take this up with his DCSF colleagues, in particular the need to upgrade to a mandatory target the current very vague hope that 50 to 90 per cent of students should take a language until they are 16. We know that this is completely ignored by the vast majority of state schools, which do their pupils a great disservice by excluding them from one of the skills that would maximise their employability.

The principal recommendation for the Government in the Worton review, however, is to upgrade their own messages about the importance of languages and to work with others across all sectors to communicate them. I warmly welcome the announcement that the Minister of State, David Lammy MP, will chair the new forum, in which government, HEFCE, the universities, CILT, schools and employers will all work together on this, but could the Government please be more consistent and remember languages all the time? It is quite astonishing and extremely disappointing that the new national strategy, *Skills for Growth*, published only two weeks ago, does not contain one single mention of language skills. I hope that I have given enough examples today to convince the Minister that a strategy that says its objectives are economic growth and individual prosperity is seriously incomplete without language skills being integrated into it, and I ask the noble Lord whether he will take urgent action to amend it.

Languages are often forgotten when the so-called strategically important and vulnerable subjects are discussed. Science, technology, engineering and maths always get top billing and I do not seek for one moment to detract from their importance, only to achieve a higher profile alongside them for languages, which have been equally designated within the SIV definition.

Another important message that teenagers, teachers, parents and careers advisers need to hear is the finding of a survey of earnings three and a half years after graduation, which showed that modern linguists earn more than graduates from any other discipline except medics, architects and pharmacologists.

The last message from the Worton review that I want to flag up, and which I would be reassured to know the Minister was prepared to discuss with the universities, is the way in which admissions policies can influence the take-up of languages. I very much regret that my own university, Cambridge, recently abandoned the requirement for all students to have a language qualification as a condition of entry. This was motivated by the desire to widen access, but how much better would it have been to adopt the model agreed by University College, London, which has introduced a language requirement, irrespective of degree subject, with the proviso that students who cannot comply, possibly because their school did not provide or encourage it, must agree instead to undertake

[BARONESS COUSSINS]

a language course during their first year at university. This seems a much more constructive way of underpinning the importance of languages without risking elitism, and it should be applauded and copied.

I believe that every young person in the 21st century will need a measure of modern language competence, whether specialist and learned or basic and conversational, every bit as much as they will need IT skills, English and maths. You could call it a utilitarian asset but it is much more than that. It is also the key to intercultural understanding, to the fun of participation, to the pleasure of literary discovery and the gateway to a more civilised co-existence with other people. I beg to move.

11.53 am

Lord Watson of Richmond: My Lords, I begin by thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, for her most excellent and comprehensive speech and, in particular, I second her question about why language skills were omitted from the Skills for Growth strategy.

I declare two interests which may be relevant to this debate. First, I am chairman emeritus of the International Council of the English Speaking Union, and I wish to say something about the role of the English language. Secondly, I am president of the British-German Association, and I wish to refer to German language learning in British state sector schools.

The only area where I may have a slight nuance of difference with the noble Baroness concerns what is happening to the growth of English at present. It is worth reminding ourselves in this debate of the unique position of English as a global language, because it has great relevance to the British economy. The truth is that the four languages in the world spoken by the greatest number of people are, as one might expect, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic and English, but of course English is there for a different reason from the others. It is there because of the number of people who are not native English speakers using the language. The number is extraordinary and continues to grow because English has a huge momentum of expansion. To give an example, over 200 million people in China are learning English. Indeed, it is not really possible for anyone to enter a university in China without a foreign language qualification, and over 98 per cent choose English as the language they should learn. That is an enormous driver of English and therefore extremely important.

The international expansion of English began 400 years ago with the first permanent settlement in Jamestown. At the time roughly 3 million people were using the English language globally, mainly in the British Isles and the West Indies, and we are now reaching a figure of something like 2 billion English language users worldwide, with the figure still increasing. It is worth remembering that.

Should we do anything other than rejoice at this phenomenon? Rejoice we should, because if English was not in this position, economically we would be far weaker than we actually are. However, there is a reason for having some reservations and doubts about this. A problem is that the dominance of the English language

encourages us to commit an own goal because it encourages us not to bother with other languages. The following story is no doubt apocryphal, but I enjoy it. In the 1950s, a US senator testifying on the Hill about the inadequacy of foreign language learning in American schools was becoming increasingly irritated by his cross-examination. In the end he banged the desk and said, "Gentlemen, if English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for us". We must not fall for that sort of folly.

The failure to get to grips with foreign languages has many consequences, and in introducing the debate the noble Baroness focused quite rightly under its terms on some of the economic consequences, but it is also worth referring, as indeed she did briefly, to the cultural impact. I think it was Goethe who said that you cannot possibly understand your own language unless you can speak someone else's. That remains a profound truth, and the enrichment at the cultural, intellectual and even spiritual levels of being fluent in another or several languages other than English is very great. But, as the noble Baroness pointed out, there is increasing measurement of the economic cost of the relative inadequacy of foreign language learning in Britain. While I cannot add any data, I want to cite one or two examples.

It is particularly dangerous, when travelling in countries within continental Europe where English is highly prevalent—for example, Germany—to assume that because people are speaking to you in English, that that is their preference and that they are saying the same things as they would be saying to you if they could speak in German. I had a good example of that some years ago with the Siemens company when attending a major company seminar in Berlin. The whole seminar was conducted in English. But when I came out during the coffee breaks, everything was happening in German, and I was able to listen to what the Germans were actually saying about the session from which they had just come—which had been held formally in English, even down to the PowerPoint illustrations. Their take on the session was quite different, and that was because of the difference in the language.

I have mentioned that the British-German Association is involved with German language learning in schools. We have a scheme called Youthbridge which is now active in over 50 schools in England. I should like the Minister to note, because it might be of some practical help, that we have found that by far the most important single initiative in increasing the enjoyment of another language in those schools—in this case German—has been the purchase we carried out of Astra satellite dishes so that the children can get German television. That has shown those children that there is a huge society not many miles away from them which, while indeed a different language is spoken, shares with them a great wealth of experience, variety and lifestyle. That has made the language real in a way that teachers told us would be difficult otherwise to put across.

It is also interesting that Youthbridge receives no government funding; it is funded entirely by British and German companies, who clearly understand its importance. It is against that background that the decision in 2004, which we debated in this House—I

remember expressing dismay at the time—to suspend compulsory foreign language learning after the age of 14 for GCSE was quite clearly a mistake. What has happened since bears that out. The number studying French in British state schools has fallen by more than 30 per cent since 2004. We are now in the ludicrous situation that of the number of children learning foreign languages, only one in 11 is learning German, for example, and one in nine is learning French. That is not good enough. Given the huge economic importance to us of both the German and French markets, that is an own goal that we cannot tolerate.

On the role of English in the European Union, a recent survey showed that 86 per cent of all officials who work for all the institutions in the European Union have English as their preferred second language. It is interesting to me, as an enthusiast of the European Union, that underlying Euroscepticism is a strange combination of insularity and insecurity—and one of the reasons for the insecurity is a feeling that they are not talking our language. However, the truth is that they are talking our language overwhelmingly, certainly within the new member states. So, in the economic and political context, English has a strong position. Of course, the relationship changes if you also are offering the other person's language.

We should rejoice in the unique position of English but seek the competitive advantage of, in addition, having other languages. If we cannot achieve both, we seriously underplay our own strengths and limit our opportunities. In replying to the debate, I hope the Minister will make clear to the House what the plans are for foreign language learning for over-14s and whether the 2004 decision can be decisively reversed.

12.03 pm

Baroness Butler-Sloss: My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, on introducing this debate on such an important and relevant subject, particularly as it comes so shortly after the Worton report.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, said, the ability to speak another language—or, preferably, other languages—is an enormous asset in government, business and all kinds of agencies. One has only to look at the emphasis that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office places on the skill—it requires its entrants to learn the language of the country in which they will be stationed—to realise that it is very important. The noble Lord, Lord Richmond, referred to the position in China. When I was in Beijing, I learnt with great interest that 25 per cent of all teaching in all universities in China has to be in English. Such a requirement would shock us in this country, would it not?

I should like to raise, from my experience at both King's College, London and the University of the West of England in Bristol, two issues regarding the teaching of languages in universities. The noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, raised comprehensively the subject of funding, but I want to tie it to a particular issue at King's College London.

As I am a former vice-chairman of the council at King's, I consulted its modern languages department, which is one of the oldest language centres in the

United Kingdom. It has something like 1,400 undergraduates doing modular courses in addition to their degree course. One-third of them come from the School of Medicine, which I thought was a particularly interesting figure. The centre also offers MA and PhD students an opportunity to take up a language to enhance their research and career prospects. That, however, has to be cross-funded by its external contracts, and the long-term financial sustainability of the project is uncertain. There is general concern at the language centre about the survival of language courses, a concern which is shared by universities across the country.

The second issue is the negative culture, or, perhaps more accurately, the negative perception of the usefulness of modern languages by students generally. I declare an interest as I have been the chancellor of the University of the West of England for the past 16 years. A former polytechnic, it is now a large university with about 30,000 students, with more than 3,000 students from foreign countries. We have agreements with more than 60 international institutions, so there is a major foreign element to our university. The university recognises the importance of languages, particularly for internationalisation and employability.

I asked the vice-chancellor what the approach was to teaching languages at UWE, and I received a very depressing answer. Student demand is small, which may very well be due to the fact that the teaching of languages generally is seen to be done better at the older universities. UWE has offered good courses, including Chinese studies, but it has not received students of sufficient calibre and, with regret, has ceased recruiting from 2009 in French, Chinese studies and Spanish. It continues to offer an MA in translation that is very well supported and one of its highest-recruiting courses. The university therefore intends to continue teaching language teachers and postgraduate translation, and will set up a technical language centre to allow students to take a language module with their degree, very much along the lines of King's College, London.

Is it not sad that one of the major advantages of a large and successful former polytechnic—the preparation of the student for the workplace—is not being sufficiently accessed by those students who might find themselves at a real disadvantage by not having sufficient foreign language skills? The polytechnics, now the new universities, are particularly good at training for the workplace, and our vice-chancellor is very sad to be stopping those language courses.

It is a sad reflection on a wider student view of the need to learn a language. This view no doubt starts in schools, where languages have played a smaller part than they should have done. I regret to say that, until very recently, that has been encouraged by the Government's not requiring students over the age of 14 to learn a language. Only 44 per cent of pupils took a language at GCSE in 2009, compared with 76 per cent in 2000. That is a direct result of the non-requirement for languages at GCSE. This feeds into the attitude to learning languages either as a module with one's degree or for the sake of languages at university, since the majority of students will come from state schools.

[BARONESS BUTLER-SLOSS]

We need a change of culture. We need a significant prod from the Government to reverse a worrying trend that will continue to inhibit our economy unless it is checked soon.

12.09 pm

Lord Harrison: My Lords, I, too, would like to thank the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, for the excellence of her introduction but also for bringing to our attention this very important problem of jobs and languages. I, too, look forward to my noble friend's reply, as he specialises in small businesses. I hope that he will say something interesting and sensible about the acute difficulties of small businesses in their failure to have language acquisition and be able to trade across the European Union and wider. My own suggestion is that there should be some form of flying linguist to help small businesses which want to broaden their normal market share.

In 2003, the Government published their national language strategy, which pointed to some of the deficiencies—how too few employees learn languages and too few employers help employees to learn languages. Indeed, only one in four firms organised any form of language training. More recently, the regional development agencies did an audit of such languages and found three out of five firms used at least one language in their daily work, while one in 10 use as many as five. But the significant figure is that one in five of the firms asked demonstrated or said that they had lost business, first, because of poor language skills but, allied to this, because of poor cultural understanding of those to whom they were selling services or goods. This is a point on which I wish to dwell. Of course, having a language is not simply a matter of conversing with someone in another language, to order a beer or whatever; it is the key to cultural understanding and to understanding the market to which you sell goods or provide services. If you fail to understand that, you make failures in providing for such goods and services and therefore reduce the opportunities for jobs.

The most famous faux pas is an old one—but the noble Lord, Lord Watson of Richmond, is used to old ones, as well. The previous President Bush went across to Japan with the three chiefs of the car industry and asked the Japanese why they did not buy the gas guzzlers that were habitual in the United States of America. That is entirely attributable to a cultural misunderstanding and a lack of understanding of the Japanese language, through which one understands about the Japanese way of life. We have to repair that, as we see the position now in which Japanese cars are the top sellers in the United States of America.

These views have been confirmed recently by Professor Michael Worton, who came to our All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, which has been so well led by the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins. There is a very important chapter in his report on graduate employability and languages. The report that came out only last month from BIS says that language learning enhances students' employability and gives a deeper understanding of other ways in which to think and express ideas.

Lord Dykes: I am sorry to interrupt the noble Lord in the middle of his sentence, but is it not also true that George Bush said on a visit:

“The thing that's wrong with the French is that they don't have a word for entrepreneur”?

Lord Harrison: Yes, I left that one out, but it is absolutely true as I understand it.

En passant, if I may, there has been much *kafuffle* this week about the appointment in the European Union, following the passing of the Lisbon Treaty—and I am aware that I have two very distinguished colleagues here who associate themselves with the European Union. Is it not an ultimate irony, as the noble Lord, Lord Watson, explained in terms of the German example, that our colleagues habitually speak English and often speak many other languages? While Nye Bevan once said that he did not want to be sent naked into the debating chamber on the issue of nuclear bombs, the truth is today that we for the most part send our British representatives tongue-tied into the negotiation chamber. There are few British politicians who have fluency in another language. Indeed, I remember that one of the few with some fluency, Prime Minister Blair, expressed his love and admiration for his French counterpart, Lionel Jospin, more in the way of being carnal than fraternal.

One of the excuses already alluded to has been that everyone else in the world speaks English; this has been repudiated by the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins. They do not. South America is one example and China has been given as another. China is a huge country and is furiously acquiring English. It may well be that, in time, China will have more English speakers than the United Kingdom, but it will still be a foreign country with many different languages which we ought to make the effort to understand so that we can provide jobs for our people.

When I was a Member of the European Parliament in the 1990s, English was used as a *lingua franca*, but it was a changing English. This, again, confirms what the noble Lord, Lord Watson of Richmond, was saying. We may find English as we know it disappearing. That is all the more reason why we should learn languages: to speak to our colleagues in them.

I say to the Minister that we may need some fresh thinking on these issues. I have a ready example from my wife, a French teacher. In Chester in the 1990s she had the idea, which went against the national curriculum, of recognising that Chester is a tourist town. A tourist town attracts many of our continental colleagues. She had great difficulty teaching her students the literary French of Racine and others, but had the idea of providing them with job skills so that they spoke a number of languages and could therefore be employable within the shops and services of Chester. To this day, however, you still do not see “*Man spricht Deutsch*” or “*Si parla Italiano*” in any Chester outlets, which would at least be an encouragement for people to come into the shops with the knowledge that they can speak their own language and get served properly. We must do more there.

We must also do more about the informal acquisition of language. Again, I go back to what the noble Lord, Lord Watson of Richmond, said about German TV.

It is difficult for our young people to acquire the skills, or be encouraged to learn them. Pop music is in English; films and TV programmes are in English. It would be good if we had some influence in this country over what is done on the continent to encourage our young people and show them that there is something worthwhile in that.

We should recognise the contribution of the languages within our own country. We scorn Welsh. We should not scorn a vibrant language. We should take advantage of those from the sub-continent. It is a huge market, and we should acquire the languages that are already here.

I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, on having invited the noble Lord, Lord Coe, to speak to our All-Party Group on the 2012 Olympics and the challenge of languages there. We have something like 300 foreign languages being spoken within London. Let us take advantage of them, and ensure that they help and contribute to improving the skills of our young people with a view to recognising that there is a direct link between jobs and language acquisition.

12.19 pm

Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve: My Lords, I, too congratulate my noble friend Lady Coussins on securing this debate, particularly with its emphasis on the link between languages and the economy. That is not to minimise the importance of languages and culture, but today we are focused on languages and the economy.

Sadly, we have had a period of decline in this country in the past decade. Perhaps the underlying reason is a failure to appreciate that language learning is not some luxury consumption good but a fundamental requirement in a knowledge economy, more urgently needed than it used to be in a globalising world.

I have to declare a couple of interests, and noble Lords will see why: first, as chair of the Nuffield Foundation and, secondly, as a past president of the British Academy and the National Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences.

In 1998 the Nuffield Foundation established an expert group, jointly chaired by Sir Trevor McDonald and Sir John Boyd, to report on language learning and its importance to the economy and to working life; this is not a new topic. Its 2000 report, *Languages: the Next Generation*, was generally quite optimistic. A language GCSE had been successfully introduced as a universal requirement, although students were rather often exempted from it, particularly in certain schools in certain regions. It remained to improve the pedagogy to make more language learning more fun, and to recognise that this was an economically vital skill. The central message of the report remains important:

“Capability in other languages—a much broader range than hitherto and in greater depth—is crucially important for a flourishing UK. The scale of what needs to be done has become ever more striking ... At the moment, by any reliable measure we are doing badly. We talk about communication but don't always communicate. There is enthusiasm for languages but it is patchy. Educational provision is fragmented, achievement poorly measured, continuity not very evident”.

The most fundamental finding was that the UK workforce suffered from a chronic shortage of people at all levels with usable language skills. Companies

increasingly needed personnel with technical or professional skills plus another language, and often their only option was to recruit native speakers of other languages. Mobility of employment was in danger of becoming the preserve of people from other countries. The report was written in 2000, yet throughout the past decade a large number of well-paid jobs in the City, in business and in other sectors have gone to people not educated in the UK. It is clear that we need to do better.

The point of the Nuffield languages inquiry was to set out how we might do just that. Its recommendations were practical and to some extent still familiar: a national strategy, an earlier start, putting an end to the situation at that time where nine out of 10 gave up language study at age 16, providing a broader sixth-form education and improving teacher supply and accreditation.

No one who read that report could have anticipated that the Government would soon abolish the hard-won GCSE language requirement in 2003. In effect, they chose not to do things better but to do less. I suspect that this has been the single most striking piece of educational vandalism—I am sorry to say that—inflicted on the young people of this country by a Government who have claimed to be, and indeed have been, keen on education. It was a major own goal.

The one recommendation acted on was the introduction of primary language learning, inaccurately spoken of from the start as an “entitlement”. It has hitherto been no such thing; rather, it has been a patchwork of variable provision—sometimes enthusiasm on the part of amateurs, sometimes genuine teaching and progression. What exactly will children in England, who will soon become entitled to language learning in primary school, be entitled to? What plans do the Government have for the lost generation who did not do more than three years of language learning?

Primary language teaching did not address the problem of transition to secondary, which remains unresolved, while beyond secondary level, as other noble Lords have said, the picture is one of dramatic decline. Lord Dearing's 2007 languages review reported that between 2000 and 2006 the percentage of pupils taking a language in the 14-16 age group in maintained schools fell from around 80 per cent to 50 per cent—well below 50 per cent for boys, and declining since then. The damage runs through the supply chain. Fewer school pupils lead on to fewer language students, while there has been closure of the honours degrees in many universities and a decline in available language teachers. The supply of linguistically competent people, who could export as well as import, was reduced.

Language learning is like learning maths: it is cumulative, there are wrong answers, and high marks may be a bit harder to get. We all know that making maths optional at GCSE would be catastrophic for the skills of those entering the labour market, and many of us believe passionately that the practice of giving up maths after GCSE is also damaging to a vast range of careers, far beyond the STEM subjects. The practice of giving up languages at age 14 and then further at 16 is also damaging to the skills base, yet we not merely permit but incentivise pupils to do so—and we incentivise schools to encourage that by making the number of GCSE passes a performance indicator for schools.

[BARONESS O'NEILL OF BENGARVE]

The British Academy returned to these topics in 2008, after warnings from senior academics in a number of fields that British-educated researchers were no longer adequately prepared for research in many disciplines, or for international collaboration. That loss of competitiveness parallels what has happened in many other lines of work. In its report *Language Matters*, published in June, the British Academy noted that globalisation is leading to increased,

“demand for language skills in non-language-based ... disciplines”, as research is more international and uses comparative methods, and it studies, “non-Anglophone parts of the world”.

At present, UK universities are major and successful players, whose recruitment of overseas students represents a major economic benefit to our economy. That is being eroded by loss of competitiveness, and this is one of its sources.

At present university departments are, like the City of London, addressing the skills shortage by buying in the skills that they need from those educated abroad, not by seeking UK researchers and academics to upskill. I believe that universities could do more, and could permit students who arrive without language competence to take an intercalated year to work abroad learning a foreign language. It would be cheap, and many students would benefit from it in many ways. However, while universities are judged on the speed with which they get students from matriculation to graduation, little will change.

What do the Government plan to do to enable and encourage universities to address the employment needs of their students by encouraging more study abroad? Can the Minister also explain what the Government are doing to encourage and promote language competence among civil servants and beyond the FCO? None of this is new, and all of it is remediable. The remedies are not even particularly expensive. If we really mean what we say about building a high-skill knowledge economy, language learning is one competence that we need to support. All that we need is a will to change, some leadership and some co-ordination.

12.28 pm

Viscount Montgomery of Alamein: My Lords, it is a great honour to follow my noble friend Lady O'Neill, a distinguished academic who has made a powerful speech with which I entirely agree. I congratulate my noble friend Lady Coussins on introducing this subject; she is a distinguished linguist and, as has already been pointed out, the founder of the All-Party Group on Modern Languages, which she leads very successfully.

Fifty-four years of my life have been involved with Latin America, including six years living in different countries. I did not read languages at Cambridge; in fact, I was an engineering student and arrived in Latin America unprepared. It was a steep and quick learning curve, and I quickly discovered that to understand the people properly you need to speak their language, including all the nuances that are often lost in translation. I can therefore also endorse what my noble friend has said about the value of this in doing business. It proved very beneficial in my case as time went on and

I understood the language; I was able to win certain deals because I knew the people better and understood them better than my competitors.

Some people have made jokes about translation. I am reminded of the Irishman who was asked how he would translate “mañana”. He said, “I’m afraid we have no word for that sense of urgency”. As has already been said, Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world, but it is not an international language. As the noble Lord, Lord Watson, said, the largest international language is English, but it is often a second language. My research reveals that Spanish is the second most-spoken language as a mother tongue, followed at a great distance by Portuguese. The whole continent of Latin America speaks Spanish, except Brazil and the three Guyanas. Portuguese is spoken in Brazil, Portugal and several African ex-colonies.

Interestingly, some 20 to 25 per cent of the population of the USA speak Spanish as a first language. This dates back to the time when what are now California, New Mexico and Texas were all part of Mexico. They were lost to the US following the Mexican-American war from 1845 to 1847. Given the large and growing percentage of the USA, including Florida, that speaks Spanish, it would seem that la Reconquista is well in hand.

I am glad to hear that Spanish and Portuguese are established subjects in the curriculum in British schools and universities, although not nearly sufficiently or adequately so, as several speakers have said. I am sure that the noble Lord who is to reply will deal with this. I hope that he will, although I have no specific questions for him on this subject.

In the United Kingdom, Canning House is the institution in London which represents and focuses on Latin America, the Iberian Peninsula and where they meet each other. In this context, I declare a considerable interest, since it is an institution with which I have been involved in an honorary capacity for many years. Canning House does not currently run Spanish courses; this is done very adequately by the Institute of Cervantes in London. It holds classes in Brazilian Portuguese at four levels, from beginners to advanced. It also has a very popular annual essay competition in Spanish and Portuguese. These activities at Canning House are extremely valuable and make a useful contribution.

I realise that Latin America is an area of the world that is not of much interest to the Government at present; I hope that will be reversed in the future, but it is the subject of another debate, on trade. I still hold the view that Spanish and Portuguese are very valuable languages. I am glad to have been involved in the debate and I thank my noble friend Lady Coussins for bringing this subject to our attention.

12.34 pm

Lord Selsdon: My Lords, I feel like a lone voice crying in the wilderness from these Benches. I would not be here if the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, had not kindly written to me to ask me to substitute for someone more capable. All my life, I have been known as a Snopake speaker. You get invited rather late—maybe two weeks before—to speak at a dinner. Then you see the Snopake on the menu and you scratch it to see

whose name is underneath. Every time, it has been someone far more important than me. Therefore, when I speak in this House I have to take inspiration from others, usually the right reverend Prelates.

That is where I will begin today. Yesterday I said to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Liverpool, "There was a debate on education not long ago when one of the right reverend Prelates said that he had majored in dead languages. What is a dead language?". I thought that it was the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Portsmouth, partly because, like the noble Lord, Lord Montagu, we supported a mission in Portsmouth. I was also a naval rating in Portsmouth—a Pompey rating. Indeed, it was the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Portsmouth. The right reverend Prelate said that "dead" languages are not necessarily dead. Beside me I have a list of 110 dead languages. The distinction between dead and extinct languages is important and very real. An extinct language is one that is never used, let alone spoken.

The question, therefore, is how many languages there are in the world. My advisers in the Library—occasionally I can beat them—tell me, from the records, that there are 7,000 languages in the world. Many are extinct. Many, of course, are used for academic purposes only. The noble Lord, Lord Watson of Richmond, quoted the figure that approximately 2 billion to 3 billion people are learning English, speaking English or thinking of learning it. Therefore, English is a very powerful language. For me, as a Scot, to say that is extremely worrying. We are, of course, descended from the Norse. As your Lordships will know well, the Norse word "mö"—with a diaeresis—means "begotten of". I am a McEacharn—begotten of the horse and a sword maker.

I find that, in general, the ladies in my family seem to marry Latin lovers. Sometimes they might have been called sleeping dictionaries. In my arguments with my Italian indirect cousins, I managed to prove conclusively in Florence about 15 years ago that Machiavelli was Scottish—the son of the devil. What I am trying to say is that learning languages should be fun. It should not be a struggle. First you need a map of the world, such as I give to my grandchildren. On it, there are dots and rivers—the Yangtze, the Yellow River, the Brahmaputra and all the rivers of the world. It is down those rivers—and, of course, across the seas—that knowledge goes first. If you are to try to encourage people to learn, you have to make it fun.

I have had many dealings with Albania. The Albanians are highly intelligent people. As your Lordships will know, they have 50 per cent more letters in their alphabet than anyone else. I have argued with them that if you have to have a lot of letters you are not very intelligent. In Albania I have also found that many people speak Mandarin and Chinese, because from 1957 onwards the Chinese were there and the Albanians learnt those languages. I also found this in Sudan and the rest of Africa. The Chinese provided cultural support, building colleges and conference centres. As people get interested in trade, so their culture expands.

All the native American languages were effectively replaced by colonial languages, such as Portuguese, English, French and Spanish. This has happened in

most of the world. Coptic was replaced by Arabic. If we, a colonial power that managed to extend its interests throughout the world with the Commonwealth, now find that our economy is failing, perhaps English may start to be less and less important. It is a worry that I have. English is a very difficult language to understand now, because many of the words have been bastardised and the Latin or Greek origins have gone. Latin and Greek are not dead languages—or not extinct—because they are used for cultural purposes. Any language, be it Sanskrit or any other, that has a cultural purpose becomes an important part of life.

Let me explain this with another bit of religion. Not so long ago I became involved with another bishop: I was asked whether I would talk about languages to the students of Bishop Thomas Grant School. I thought that talking to schools might be part of the outreach project. About 15 per cent of the 1,000 pupils at the school do not speak English at home. So you suddenly say, "Wait a moment, maybe we need to teach a modern language called English in our own country". I found myself in a room with a Jeremy Paxman-like character, with a microphone thrust at me, being videoed while discussing the importance of languages. I had to speak in German and French, although they wanted me to speak in Italian as well, which was not quite so good. Three of the people involved were quite brilliant. I asked them to write to me about the discussion. Laura wrote a nice letter saying that she was from the Congo and spoke Congolese and French.

The point that I am coming to is that we should make modern languages something that people enjoy doing in school because the lateral thinking that comes with them is extremely important. I have traded around the world and found that the misunderstandings are very great. I used to work in eastern Europe; the UK and the Ukraine are next door to each other in the alphabet, which is how I got involved in the Ukraine. Albania is the original name for Scotland—"Alba", or the white people. The Norsemen went across the North Sea. I think that Greenland Norse died out in the 16th century, but the Norsemen also went down through the Black Sea and came right along the Mediterranean—probably they were Jason and the Argonauts—and arrived up in Ireland. When they arrived there, the Irish Scots, as they were called, said, "You can stay for a bit. We don't have any women to give you, but we'll lend you some", and they went across to the Kingdom of Albanact in the north, which was called Albania. When you start to talk to people about this, they get maps out and say, "Where did this word come from? Where did this language come from?". I used to get mixed up between etymology and entomology, and anything else ending in "ology", until I realised that the suffix was probably Greek. In the confusion of my own mind, I realised that languages are extremely important. However, they should not be called modern languages; they are a form of learning, a form of general knowledge. When I watch "University Challenge", I get embarrassed if I cannot get more than one in three answers.

What about two countries separated by a common language, such as the United States and ourselves? What about incidents that have occurred in the Middle

[LORD SELSDON]

East, which the noble Lord, Lord Wright of Richmond, will know of? We had a wonderful ambassador, Sir James Craig. Whenever there were meetings, the King of Saudi Arabia used to insist that Sir James, who could tell the most hilarious jokes in Arabic, should be his official interpreter. When Coptic was replaced by Arabic, we forget the importance of that in the world.

I cannot resist going back to a point that has been made by the noble Lord, Lord Dykes, about Mr Bush, who asked why the French do not have a word for “entrepreneur”. If you translate it correctly—I am known as an entrepreneur in France—it means an undertaker; someone who undertakes something, like an *Unternehmer* in Germany. But if you translate the word back into English, it means something slightly different; it means dead things. If you translate the English “undertaker” into French, you get “*croque-mort*”—an old crock, perhaps like your Lordships’ House. There are two types of old crock. Undertakers would bite the toe of the deceased to see whether the deceased was dead, as many people wanted their veins cut to make sure that they were not buried alive. They would bite the toe and say “*croque-monsieur*” if it was a madame and “*croque-madame*” if it was not. This is the fun of a language. Everybody in France who is self-employed is an entrepreneur. We need a bit of fun in language teaching.

12.44 pm

Lord Wright of Richmond: My Lords, how on earth do I follow that? I nevertheless will try.

Like others, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, on her speech, on initiating the debate and on chairing the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, which over the past year and a half has given us a number of extremely interesting meetings with professional linguists and educators, all of whom have given us an insight into some of the valuable work being done to propagate a better understanding of the benefits which a study of languages, both classical and modern, bring to British society and to Britain’s place in the global economy.

Before I speak about modern languages, I should perhaps declare an interest in that I come from a family consisting very largely of clergymen, classical schoolmasters and other teachers. I admit to being a strong proponent of the teaching of two of the dead languages in the list of the noble Lord, Lord Selsdon, Latin and Greek, first as an intellectual exercise giving access to some of the great literature of the ancient world; secondly, as an invaluable tool towards the learning of Romance languages; thirdly—as I discovered when the Foreign Office sent me to Lebanon in the 1950s to learn Arabic—towards the learning of other unrelated, but difficult, languages; and, fourthly, as a help for English speakers towards an understanding of our own language, spelling and grammar, quite apart from understanding the large number of words of classical origin still in daily use by our doctors, lawyers, scientists, astronomers, botanists and ornithologists, to name but a few.

But it is not classical languages that we are debating today. I should perhaps declare one further interest in that my late aunt was the only lecturer in the Igbo

language at the School of Oriental and African Studies, a relationship which won me serious brownie points when I was head of the Foreign Office and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth was Chief Emeka Anyaoku, an Igbo.

What I want to concentrate on in this brief intervention is to counter the widely believed fallacy that because English—or should I say American?—is now the *lingua franca* in much of today’s world, we have no need to study, or use, other modern languages. This lazy and complacent misperception, that a knowledge of English is enough for all transactions, economic, commercial, financial, cultural, intellectual and even diplomatic, may, to some extent, be a legacy of colonial arrogance, but it ignores the fact that, however well our foreign friends speak and understand our language, we cannot hope properly to understand them, or to do effective business with them, if we do not have at least a grounding in their languages; a point well illustrated by the noble Lord, Lord Watson of Richmond. As the world economy becomes more and more dominated by Asia, and as the influence of the United States declines, business in the Far East is going to rely increasingly on an understanding of China and Japan, and an ability to speak, and understand, their languages.

As a retired diplomat, I hope that the Minister can assure us that highest standards of language training still apply not only to our Diplomatic Service but to the public service as a whole. With the inauguration this week of the External Action Service in the European Union, our success in gaining influential positions in the European public service will increasingly require fluency in other European languages, at least to the very high standard of English enjoyed by our French, German and other European colleagues.

I believe that by ignoring the importance of modern languages we are dangerously underskilling our young people in this country, and that we risk excluding them from the increasingly global enterprise. While large numbers of overseas students study in Britain, our students are finding it increasingly difficult to take advantage of such schemes as Erasmus, or to undertake part of their course in another country in Europe. In a situation where it is no longer compulsory for a potential student to take even one foreign language at GCSE level, and where the proportion of British students taking a modern language in their GCSEs has fallen from about three-quarters before 2004 to less than half now, our young will face serious disadvantages in nearly every marketplace in the world.

Government claims to give advantages to the disadvantaged ring hollow when mathematics and modern languages are being dumbed down in our schools. With only 3 per cent of university students taking a language degree in 2008, the dangers for Britain’s place in the global economy are serious. Our compatriots are already less competitive linguistically in the marketplace than their peers from Germany, China or Brazil. I hope that the Government will address this problem with the attention it deserves.

12.50 pm

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Baroness on obtaining this debate. It has been very useful and was magnificently led in her

opening remarks. I welcome Professor Worton's review of modern languages in higher education in Britain. I should declare two interests. First, I am on the board of the UK-Japan 21st Century Group, which is a non-governmental forum bringing together business people, journalists, scholars, diplomats, politicians and others with a keen interest in developing UK-Japan relations. The group was founded by Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1984, held its 25th anniversary meeting in Tokyo this year and will be holding its annual meeting in the UK in March next year.

UK-Japan relations continue to be strong, warm and mutually beneficial. Japan is the world's second largest economy, with a GDP equivalent to 50 per cent of that of the whole of Asia. The United Kingdom provides a strong base for Japanese companies here, the majority of which have their regional headquarters in London, and something in the order of 1,400 Japanese companies have a UK presence. An often-quoted statistic is that, although Japan has only 2 per cent of the world's population, it is responsible for 20 per cent of the world's research and development. It is an enormously important country. Learning Japanese and maintaining strength in Japanese languages, as the noble Lord, Lord Wright, observed, is important and dear to my heart.

Secondly, I am on the international advisory board of the White Rose East Asia Centre, which comprises the schools of east Asian studies in the Universities of Leeds and of Sheffield and the Centre for International Business at the University of Leeds, which is one of the centres funded under the Language-Based Area Studies Initiative to undertake research and training in both Chinese and Japanese languages and in broader area studies.

My remarks are principally about university-level teaching and research. It is important to know not merely who is learning languages but who is learning to teach them. Where are the researchers to take forward the research? It is enormously important that there should be not only research by secondary sources but research in the original languages. Even with the important area initiatives, we in the UK have a tiny number of university academics who will be the next generation of researchers and the next generation of teachers of the teachers. I am greatly concerned that, at this time of cutbacks, there will be cuts in universities. Along with many other parts of the public sector, universities are going to have a difficult time in the next few years. I hope very much that the area initiatives will not only be maintained, at the very least, but also be further strengthened.

The number of students in the United Kingdom graduating in Chinese, for example, remains small. In the past academic year, there were just over 1,000 single and joint honours students in Chinese at English universities. That represents some 250 a year on four-year courses, which includes a year spent in China. As about half of those are single honours students, probably only between 125 and 130 people graduate with top-level skills in Chinese and thoroughly understand China. Those figures are tiny compared with the size of China.

Professor Tim Wright of Sheffield University told me that Slovenia, which has a population of 2 million, has as many students studying Chinese as the United Kingdom does. Several Italian universities have enrolments in Chinese of more than 1,000. We can talk about the importance of languages, but unless we start to put figures on what is happening we will be deluding ourselves. Our current efforts are puny. It is important that the Government have recognised this, but it is not only the Government who have been slow to recognise the scale of the need.

The failure to get anywhere near recognising the huge step-change required is illustrated in the Arts and Humanities Research Council's recent allocation of PhD scholarships. For the five years from 2009 to 2013, the council will issue slightly fewer than 3,000 PhD scholarships. Of those—for an area covering China, Japan, India and the whole of south-east Asia, more than half the world's population—only 13 will be doctoral students studying Asian languages and culture. That is not good enough, and I very much hope the Minister will look at it carefully. These are difficult matters. I recognise why 255 doctorates are awarded in philosophy and 174 in archaeology; those are important subjects. However, it is just not good enough for only 13 students out of 3,000 to be studying the languages of half the world.

While on the subject of Chinese, and rather more positively, I draw noble Lords' attention to the recently formed Association of Speakers of Chinese as a Second Language, a not-for-profit voluntary body set up to provide support for people learning Chinese. Once you have learnt Chinese, or any language, it is important to keep it up, particularly if you have not been using it; and even when you are, it is important to be able to network and build on relationships. I strongly recommend that noble Lords look on the association's website. The organisation wants to establish a series of short internships with companies working in China for graduates to enable them to make that important transition from learning the language to really understanding the culture. As many noble Lords have said, it is especially valuable to understand the culture of societies as well as the language. I hope that the website catches your Lordships' attention.

Not only the "real" specialists—the single honours and joint honours people at universities—are important in this; so, too, are the language centres which are growing in universities. At one time the language centres taught English to foreign university students; now they are increasingly teaching foreign languages to English university students. There have been some petty jealousies between language centres and the researchers—the "real" university people. I am pleased to say that that is not the case at Leeds, my old university, but I am aware that it is a problem in some places. Language centres are terribly important, and I echo those who strongly commend UCL on its initiative. All universities should follow this lead. I shall strongly urge the University of Leeds to say, "Either you have a GCSE in a foreign language before you come here, or you do the equivalent exam in the first year". That can and should be done, and it would be a very small step to take.

[LORD WOOLMER OF LEEDS]

I conclude by sharing with the House an e-mail I received from someone who has been working in China for most of the past 25 years. I asked him whether he had any observations about the debate, and he said that, in 25 years, he had noticed two things about working in China:

“Britain puts itself at a disadvantage in China because few of us speak the language well. Inability to work in Chinese means a loss of respect in Chinese colleagues/partners eyes, a lack of alacrity in seizing new opportunities, difficulties in building up all important networks of friends and contacts and the closing off of large swathes of experience. ... When British do master Chinese well, they can be very successful here ... There are many examples of this. They also tend to promote our national brand very effectively. Many of these people have built up their own businesses here from nothing-proving that the Chinese market isn't so tough if you are equipped to handle it. ... Thus if we as a country wish to really engage with the fastest growing economy in the world, there is no better way of doing it than training our young people to speak Chinese and operate independently in a Chinese context”.

In that context, I hope the Minister will look again at the issue of 13 of 3,000 doctoral scholarships being available for study in this subject in our universities.

1.01 pm

Lord Broers: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, on gaining this debate and on her truly comprehensive opening speech. As many have said, it is clear that in today's global world businesses must operate overseas, and to do that effectively their employees should have a working knowledge of the local language. Such skills are becoming increasingly rare because of a decline in the teaching of modern languages, especially in the final years of schooling. That decline is perhaps the most serious consequence of the narrowness of England's secondary and tertiary education, enforced by the requirements of our A-level-based system. I have been concerned about that enforced narrowness for many years and have laid out my views in several places, including in my Higher Education Policy Institute lecture delivered in 2005 and in my speech in the debate in this Chamber on the Science and Technology Select Committee's report on *Science Teaching in Schools* in 2007. The problem persists.

I was talking to a friend only yesterday who was telling me that his daughter, who is very clever, was in tears over the fact that she was being forced to choose between science and mathematics and the arts and humanities at the age of 15. She had taken several languages in her GCSEs but was going to have to abandon several of them and give up mathematics if she was to take the arts and humanities A-level track. We are the only nation that I know of which encourages students to do that, and it is wrong. Certainly some schools offer the international baccalaureate but the number of schools doing so does not seem to be increasing and remains a minority. I will celebrate if the Minister tells me that I am wrong on this. There have been attempts by examination boards to introduce broader curriculae but significant progress in this direction is lacking.

As many have said, the study of a modern language is of great benefit to students. First, it gives them a skill which can help their subsequent employers to maintain global competitiveness; secondly it gives them

an appreciation of the culture of other nations; and, thirdly, they gain a better understanding of the structure and vocabulary of English. Students are well aware of these benefits as I can illustrate by telling you about the success of the programme of language teaching in the Department of Engineering in Cambridge. I declare my interest as a past head of that department and subsequently as vice-chancellor of the university. In the mid-1990s, while I was head of the department, several of us decided that we should try to put right the wrongs of the A-level system and offer undergraduate engineers the chance to study French or German, initially on a voluntary basis and with no credits offered towards their degrees. We were fortunate in managing to raise external funds to support the project. Of course, there was no money in the system. The majority of our intake had taken two maths and physics at A-level. We did this because we felt that it would open up the possibilities of student exchange with German and French universities, give the students the ability to read German and French technical literature, and offer broader employment opportunities. We had hoped that 10 to 20 per cent of the first-year students might be interested but more than 60 per cent signed up for the courses.

Last week, I contacted Professor Dame Ann Dowling, the present head of department, to get an update on the programme 15 years on. This was provided for me by Dr Alex White, who is chairman of the Cambridge University Engineering Department Language Unit. I was pleased to hear the noble Lord, Lord Woolmer, mention a similar unit at UCL. Dr White sent me the annual report prepared by the unit's director Casimir D'Angelo. Let me give you a few details. The unit now offers French, German, Japanese, Spanish and Chinese, and is developing a programme of self-taught courses in languages such as Italian, Russian, Cantonese, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Swedish and Portuguese. A total of 775 students registered this year—up from 751 last year—and 600 took language courses or participated in third or fourth-year language projects. The rest were overseas research students studying English as a foreign language. The students now come from across the university. There were chemists, materials scientists, chemical engineers, computer scientists and even three MIT students who are on exchange from MIT: 168 took French, 90 German, 128 Japanese, 108 Spanish, and 60 Chinese. So the programme thrives and student interest is sustained and expanding, not thanks to national education policies but through independent initiative; even this programme would be more successful if more of the students gained language skills at a younger age.

If students are certain that they want to specialise in the arts and humanities or in STEM subjects in their pre-university studies, they should be able to do so but they should be advised that it would be better if they kept their options open and maintained breadth until their abilities and interests have had more time to develop. It is also interesting to note that many of the world's leading universities encourage, and even require, that breadth is maintained in undergraduate degrees. I cite the new model successfully established at my alma mater Melbourne University, which now offers just six new-generation undergraduate degrees in which

students choose 25 per cent of their courses from areas other than the core disciplines of their degree. Languages are, of course, one of the options. The second example is MIT, where all students are required to meet a humanities, arts and social science—or HASS—requirement and modern languages are among the most popular options.

I would argue that in today's global world, knowledge of a second language should be a primary requirement of everyone's education and that we should re-examine the structure of our secondary education to achieve that aim.

1.08 pm

Lord Williamson of Horton: My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Coussins for launching this debate. It is a very necessary topic for discussion. Of course, it is indeed desirable to favour greater language skills and to be keen on a wider use of the English language. I give special thanks to the memory of the Indian princess, Pocahontas, who saved the first English-speaking settlement in North America. She is probably the greatest single contributor to the worldwide use of English. Our history is a little surprising at times.

I declare an interest as a former Secretary-General of the European Commission. I was the first British Secretary-General of the European Commission, which has a large translation service and a large interpretation service, both of outstanding quality—in my view, the best in the world. I was privileged to work with them for many years. It is true, as the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, said, that they are currently under pressure in relation to native English-speaking interpreters and translators. It is getting more difficult for them, but they still offer a magnificent service.

Today, although I draw on my personal experience of speaking and working for many years in or with many foreign languages, I intervene strictly within the terms of the debate: the contribution of modern language skills to the UK economy. As others have said, that includes education, which is the pathway to the acquisition of those skills for work or for life.

I shall make three brief points. First, I certainly do not want to restrict my comments to the European languages, although I dealt with them every day for many years. My office was capable of handling 11 European languages every day of the year. On the contrary, the changes in our society brought about by immigration and the presence of speakers of so many foreign languages here is a resource from which we can draw much greater benefit for the economy and for improved integration in our society. It is perhaps difficult for those of us not closely involved with education to know how much our schools, while teaching English to non-English-speaking students, do or do not encourage non-English speakers to see their language as a real asset, potentially making them more employable, and sometimes encouraging others to learn some of their language.

It is quite clear that within our ethnic communities, we have an immensely rich resource of languages, such as the Indian languages, Chinese, Arabic, the Middle Eastern and African languages, Cypriots, Greek, Turkish and Portuguese, to name only a few. Sometimes, we

forget what a large number of speakers of those languages are present in our schools and our society. We could make much better use of them.

On behalf of this House, I attended the funeral and memorial service for the late Lord Chan some years ago. It was amazing to see Liverpool Cathedral filled to the doors with Chinese-speaking persons—many of them British citizens—and to hear the funeral service was conducted in two languages. We sometimes forget what a big resource we have and we do not make enough use of it.

Secondly, I have the impression that languages are seen in our schools as a difficult subject—like physics—more appropriate to the brightest student. That discourages some students from taking modern languages. They get the wrong impression that it is a very difficult subject, whereas, in reality, that is not so. A specific characteristic of language is that it must be listened to. My experience of working with people who speak or understand many languages—11 when I was working in the European Commission—is that some learners achieve language skills much more quickly than others because they have a good ear or they listen more effectively. There are people with natural ability to pick up languages; that is clear. Those people achieve language skills almost effortlessly—they are like a bilingual baby, frankly. It is also true that for some schoolchildren, that mastery of another language can be a source of great pride, which is very important to those boys and girls at school, even if they are not very successful in other subjects. It gives them a boost. Identifying natural learners in that subject is important.

If, like me, you travel on the tube a lot, you see hundreds and hundreds of children every day with plugs in their ears listening to Arctic Monkeys, Robbie Williams and the like. Is it too fanciful to think that it might be a good idea if a few of them were listening to Spanish for beginners. Some children learn very quickly and would be beyond the beginners' stage very quickly if they did that. That would improve their life chances. We know that many parents' preferred language for their children to learn is Spanish—no doubt for holiday reasons but, like other widely spoken languages, Spanish can help the economy and activity worldwide.

Thirdly, it is clear that many companies must have available to them people with an understanding of a foreign language or languages—for example, in the import or export trade or other more difficult operations, such as franchising abroad, which are difficult to organise, so you need people who understand the language well.

I have heard it said recently—this has been commented on here—that some companies take the view that it is not necessarily worthwhile to employ a foreign-language speaker because they can always find a bilingual English and foreign language speaker in the country with which they will deal, thanks to the education system in those other countries, which prove to be rather good in many cases. I do not dispute that there can be circumstances when that is a very good way to do business, but a medium-term objective for our economy should still be to have enough people with a working knowledge of widely used foreign languages, so that

[LORD WILLIAMSON OF HORTON]

any company could easily find efficient employees with this extra skill—it is an extra skill, but it is not difficult to obtain.

I believe that that is a realistic objective and should run through how we look at our education system for modern languages and how modern language speakers are incorporated into the economy, the work of our companies and other organisations with overseas interests.

1.17 pm

Lord Lyell: My Lords, I apologise to the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, and to your Lordships, because until last night I had not realised that I would be available to be in the House today. I will be very brief in speaking in the gap. I hope not to be too autobiographical, but in 1954, at the age of 15, I was told that I was not qualified—I think that “too stupid” was put in brackets—to attempt O-level in science. Already I was pushing through Latin and Greek as part of my curriculum at school. French was part of the curriculum too, but I was lucky in 1954 to start learning German. One of the tutors admitted that much of O-level French taught to young boys in the 1950s was a question of a dog jumping through hoops and learning verbs one to 33. That is how I might have looked at it. I hope that the noble Baroness, and others of your Lordships who have added enormously to our debate in your Lordships’ House today, will think of one noble Lord, who has been in your Lordships’ House for more than 40 years.

The noble Baroness might think of looking at the teaching of languages—not just modern languages, as my noble friend said—top-down. Many of your Lordships have stressed that when people come to use languages at university, it is part of a discipline. I was awarded a place at Oxford. In my first year studying politics and economics, I had to study a language. I will shock your Lordships by saying that the subject was *L’Ancien Régime*, written by Alexis de Tocqueville. I was nothing if not a cynical young man from Scotland, so I did not need necessarily to grind through the French—I read the English translation and they were pleased enough.

As a result of much of my studies at Oxford and outside, I began to look at sport. I discovered that there is a daily French sporting paper. I have a copy here, but it is improper for me to read from it in your Lordships’ House. I wonder whether the noble Baroness and, indeed, the Minister might consider looking at modern languages from the bottom up by using organs such as *L’Équipe*—that means “the team” in French. It covers every aspect of sport. I wonder whether one could use sport in any language—French, German or Italian—to captivate the minds of young people for whom, like for me when I was 15, a foreign language is something of a discipline whereas, with sport, it is a pleasure. The noble Lord, Lord Watson, who spoke earlier, touched on that. I am particularly grateful to the noble Baroness and to your Lordships for allowing me to express a small, quiet, second voice from the Conservative Benches.

1.21 pm

Lord Dykes: My Lords, the House has to express very warm thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, for raising this subject today. I think I am right in

saying—I am happy to be corrected if I am inaccurate, but I have not had time to rush out and do the research in the Library—that there has not been an important debate in this House on language learning in Britain for more than 10 years. That is well before I was a Member, so I could be incorrect, but I am pretty sure that that is right. In recent years, there have been some fierce exchanges at Question Time about the lamentable decision of the Government to weaken language learning and the teaching of languages to pupils in state and other schools and about the strange notion that they should be dropped in secondary schools so that, when they were later made compulsory in primary schools, there were not enough teachers to do the teaching.

The noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, must be one of the foremost experts on modern languages in this country, let alone in this House, and we appreciate what she said. This is one of those debates that is a bit like, “Aren’t good weather and apple pie wonderful?”, because it is very easy to agree with everything that has been said. However, in my case that is literally true: I agree with everything that has been said, including the request to the Minister to give some persuasive replies today because millions of sensible people in this country are anxious about the neglect of languages. The only Member who puzzled me a bit, because I could not follow all the comments he made, was the noble Lord, Lord Selston. None the less, he made an interesting speech.

The noble Lord, Lord Wright, who is no longer in his place—I hope he returns for the rest of the debate, as is the normal custom—is a famous and distinguished diplomat and was a very distinguished head of the Foreign Office for many years. He reminded me that when I went to Bulgaria as an MP at the end of the 1980s, I was received in Sofia by the British ambassador, who was a very famous, legendary, slightly eccentric character, but a brilliant multilingual person. That was not the subject of our conversation when I went into his extremely sumptuous sitting room. He was on his own, standing in a declamatory pose by the marble fireplace, and shouted at me—he was the kind of person who used to shout and was rather tall—and said, “The House of Commons is full of rotters. Would you like a gin?”. I said, “I agree, and yes”. Then we went on to languages, and he reeled off a number of European and other languages that he spoke. I shall not mention his name in order not to offend the family because he is long since deceased. The Foreign Office has always been a wonderful example of the proficiency of language learning in this country. It achieves marvellous levels. When visiting other countries, one has the great joy of hearing our diplomats speaking the tongue of the country concerned.

I declare an emotional interest. I am sorry if this sounds smug, because it is true, but I find languages extremely easy to learn. I always have done. I had the good fortune to decide to learn them young, although I do not know why. My parents were poorly educated, primitive local yokels in Somerset. They are long since deceased, so I can say that. I hope it does not sound too unkind. They were delightful people, but they had no connection with languages, so I never know where this comes from. I have no connection with learning

musical instruments either, which people sometimes say helps. They also say that left-handed people are good at languages, and I am left-handed. I have the good fortune—it is pure luck, not cleverness on my part—to be able to speak a number of European languages very easily. I also learned Russian literature as a subsidiary subject at Cambridge University, but that is now rusty because I have never had the chance to use it properly. If I was there for six months, it would come back.

Modern languages skills are extremely important to this country and have to be tackled by an energetic Government, of whatever hue after the general election. Any Government must look at this again. As the noble Lord, Lord Woolmer, said, we are becoming weaker. The statistic he mentioned and the other statistics mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, and other noble Lords about our reckless neglect of foreign languages were chilling. We are fortunate that English has become the world's leading commercial language. Some people say it is the world's leading language, but others come up with other examples, such as Chinese. That has many different dialects, although I gather the script is the same for all of them, and hundreds of millions of people are now able to speak Putonghua, the standard version of Mandarin.

With English as the leading language, the complacency is understandable, but it is even more fatal for us. We are not a strong exporter; our export ratio is good, but our economy is limited and more truncated than that of other European countries, so the total figures do not look too good. Yet so much business is lost by people's inability to speak foreign languages. As we know, that is intrinsically daft. English people, and Americans for that matter, have sometimes foolishly persuaded themselves that it is hard for them to learn languages because of their cultural background. That is not true. There are some brilliant Anglo-Saxon-type Americans who speak Spanish very well because it is such an important and dominant language in the United States, as the noble Viscount, Lord Montgomery, said. I have met so many British people who can speak foreign languages wonderfully, changing the accents for each language. I have the good fortune to be able to do that. A lot of people can do it. I have a recent example that noble Lords would not expect from a black cab driver in London. You ride in a black cab in London on the terms that the taxi driver talks to you and you occasionally get a chance to say, "Oh, that's interesting", very quickly. The driver said to me, "When I retire in a few years' time, Doris and I are going to Spain. We're looking for an apartment". I said, "Oh, Malaga or Marbella, I suppose". He said, "Certainly not! I don't want to be near those British people who do not speak any Spanish".

There are apparently 800,000 British people who have retired to Spain. Some of them still live in the UK as well, but most of them are out there and retired. They are of various hues. Before we had the extradition agreement, the Metropolitan Police knew some of the names and there were some colourful characters. I am reliably assured by people there that only a tiny proportion speaks any words of Spanish at all. Yet it is one of the world's easiest languages. It was

apparently ordained by a Roman emperor—I think there is an inscription somewhere in north-western Spain about this, but not in Santiago de Compostela—who wanted a modern form of Latin that the squaddies could speak without any of those daft declensions and verb endings. That became Spanish. Apart from the irregular verbs and the proverbs, of which there are many that they still use, it is a very easy language.

That conversation was encouraging to me, particularly as it was a few years after I read in one of the comics that masquerade as tabloid newspapers in Britain that the wife of an MP—I apologise to the noble Baroness, Lady Verma, because it happened to be a Tory MP, but there is no reason why that has any connection at all—parked her expensive car in a prohibited area in a supermarket car park. She ignored the regulations, the colours and the signposts saying, "Do not park here". When she was interviewed by the tabloid journalist, her words were literally, "Naturally, I didn't speak Spanish, and the stupid policeman didn't speak English". That was her reply and her attitude to silly foreigners who do not speak English.

As a result of the recent football championship in Germany, more Brits saw Germany for the first time. They realised what a great country it is for holidays because the Germans have never promoted it. They noticed with astonishment that it was not just educated intellectuals and leading figures in society who spoke wonderful, incredible English, but ordinary Germans. The police have told me that the policemen on the street who worked with British bobbies when they went over could speak wonderful English, sometime better than the bobbies.

The lesson is now for there to be no more neglect by Governments. We beg the Minister, who has a reputation for being on the ball about business aspirations for British society and is credited with all sorts of other things—he has a distinguished background and career—to tackle this matter and give us some promising answers today in detail about what we will do with this question in the future.

Finally, the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, is correct to say that this is not just about utilitarian objectives and the reasons why people should be hired for jobs; it is about art and culture and the psychological confidence that language proficiency gives anyone of whatever background. That applies to children starting out in schools. Multilingual children in other European countries can speak one, two, three, four foreign languages because they start early. Why do we not do that here? The Minister can cheer us up today by reassuring us that this dark Gothic era of ignorance about languages is over because the Government are now going to make some interesting announcements in this debate.

1.30 pm

Baroness Verma: My Lords, I join all noble Lords in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, on securing this very important debate today. I, too, speak other languages besides English. Knowing other languages does indeed give you a great sense of learning and attachment to different cultures. It is crucial that we as a nation recognise the value that other countries

[BARONESS VERMA]

put on languages and their pathways to improving the economy. Sadly, we seem to be travelling in the opposite direction.

I start by stressing how important education is for our economy, as I think everyone recognises. Following the Leitch report and numerous discussions after that, we know that it will not be okay to go merrily along as we have done. We will need to ensure that all our citizens are engaged in better skilling, higher education and transferable skills if we are to remain internationally competitive. Languages are an important aspect in this development. In an ever growing global market, language becomes a commodity that can be an aid for growth. Let us not make it a barrier.

The rate at which children in all levels of education learn languages is shocking. A report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England found that:

“The UK is in danger of becoming one of the most monolingual countries in the world”.

How can we expect to attract investment and the relocation of international companies when this is how the country is perceived? As has been mentioned, only 44 per cent of key stage 4 pupils currently take a language at GCSE, compared with 71 per cent in 1997. This is staggering.

The Government have indicated that they are to make modern languages compulsory from the age of seven. Will the Minister enlighten the House as to how such children will manage a new language when four out of 10 children leaving primary education can barely read or write English? Where will the teachers come from to teach these languages, and where in the curriculum will the lesson be placed? Will the Government accept that, by making language compulsory at seven, making languages voluntary at key stage 4 was the wrong decision and they are now having to make a U-turn?

Given the importance of languages in the international economy, is it not now time to reinstate a modern foreign language as a compulsory part of secondary education? The Schools Minister confirmed in a response to a Written Question in the other place in 2007 that nearly 100 secondary schools put fewer than 10 pupils in for language exams in 2007. Furthermore, in 60 schools, not one pupil got a good grade in a language at GCSE-level. Why have the Government not taken more urgent action to address this worrying issue?

Total entries among 16 to 18 year-olds for languages at A-level dropped from 39,554 in 1996 to 29,542 in 2009. Not only is this overall decrease extremely worrying but there is a serious gap between children who are at independent schools and those who are at state schools. A recent survey undertaken by the Association for Language Learning found that 88 per cent of private schools made pupils study languages to GCSE-level, while just 22 per cent of state schools did. It is clear that independent schools recognise that it is in pupils' interests to study languages up to the age of 16. Why will the Government not recognise this as well?

Students entered for GCSE French in the independent sector are five times more likely to get an A* than those from the maintained sector. The same is true for German; 7 per cent of pupils in the maintained sector

achieve an A* in contrast to 30 per cent of independent pupils. Will the Minister tell the House what the Government are doing to raise the take-up rate of this vital subject, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds? Is he concerned that state schools' reluctance to enter pupils for languages at GCSE-level reflects the fact that the qualifications are perceived to be in difficult subjects?

My honourable friend Nick Gibb has said:

“We cannot be satisfied with such vast disparity in attainment. To close the gap we need a remorseless focus on raising expectations and we need schools to adopt the tried and tested approach to teaching languages”.

In addition, the National Union of Teachers has called on the Government to revoke their decision to make the study of foreign languages voluntary. Will the Government now accept that they have got it wrong?

Since 2002-03, there has been a 5 per cent reduction in the number of undergraduates studying languages in England. At the same time, 49 per cent of employers have expressed concern about graduates' foreign language skills. What do the Government intend to do to remedy this situation? This is no small issue. The assistant head of Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School believes that large firms and the finance sector are now going for European employees if they want language skills. Is the Minister worried that this is the case? According to HEFCE:

“the higher education ... languages community in England perceives itself to be in crisis”.

Does the Minister believe that this is the case; and, again, what does he intend to do about it?

In most countries, languages are considered integral rather than optional. A foreign language is an important educational asset in its own right, as well as being a very valuable skill in the modern economy. The drop in the number of pupils taking languages post-14 is a hugely serious problem and a reflection of the educational disadvantage that many of our young children suffer.

Lord Watson of Richmond: My Lords, on a point of clarification, does the noble Baroness agree, and does the Minister acknowledge, that there was a great deal of confusion when that fatal decision was taken in 2004. My recollection is that the Conservative Party in this House did not oppose the change at that time. One of the basic reasons was that a great deal of credence was given to the argument that the emphasis would switch to primary schools and that this would make the difference. Surely it is very important that we recognise that that simply did not happen because the teachers were not available to make it happen, and that we therefore have to reverse the earlier decision and to continue with the commitment to primary education.

Baroness Verma: My Lords, I thank my colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Watson. I will continue.

In her opening speech, the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, highlighted the great difficulties facing business. The global economy demands a much more versatile employment base, and it is hard to disagree with a number of points that she raised. I agree completely

with the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, that we need a change of culture. It is crucial to realise that learning a new language not only helps to skill and reskill our workforce but gives young people greater employment, not only here but abroad, and a much wider understanding of the world in which we all live.

My noble friend Lord Selsdon is always to be congratulated on educating your Lordships. This time he did so on the origins of language. Listening to my noble friend would excite any young person to want to take up another language. I am also very pleased that my noble friend Lord Lyell contributed, as he offered some valuable perspectives to the debate.

All noble Lords across the Chamber have throughout the debate highlighted the need to fill the vacuum created for many young people by their being unable to participate actively in employment. That will involve many people working alongside those who do not have English as their main language and, with more jobs involving travel and time spent in other countries, it is an area that we cannot ignore. In 2007, the then Education Secretary said that we would be embarking on,

“a renaissance in languages in schools and beyond”.

However, rather than a renaissance, I think the Minister will have to agree that we have appeared to reach a nadir in modern languages.

1.40 pm

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Lord Davies of Abersoch): My Lords, I start by declaring an interest. I did not speak English until I was about seven years of age, so it is very much my second language. I also declare that I am chair of the council of the University of Wales at Bangor.

I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, for providing an excellent opening to the debate and I thank all noble Lords for the huge range of opinions that they have expressed on this issue.

Before I joined the Government, I worked in a very diverse corporation. It had 75,000 people but only 1,300 were British and I saw the value of understanding other people's cultures, faiths and attitudes. Working in Kuala Lumpur, I was struck, in particular, by the fact that the average number of languages spoken by members of staff was five. That is where the competition is, and the competition is intense.

The UK currently has a huge diversity of languages and cultures. It attracts 340,000 international students from more than 200 countries. Contrary to opinion, the World Bank ranks the UK first in Europe and in the top five globally for ease of doing business. We have been the fourth largest recipient of foreign direct investment flows, and the stock of inward foreign direct investment as a proportion of GDP is the highest of any G7 nation. Therefore, we have a huge range of international companies investing in the UK and they bring with them an enormous number of people and staff, who generally speak more than one language.

English on its own is not enough for us to stay competitive. It may well be the global language or one of the global languages but, as the noble Baroness,

Lady Coussins, said, 75 per cent of the world's population does not speak English and it is the first language of only 6 per cent. English comes a close third to Spanish, which has 330 million speakers, and long behind Mandarin, which has approaching 1 billion speakers. However, the world is changing. As has been said, English used to account for more than half of internet traffic; now it accounts for only 29 per cent.

The world is interconnected: barriers to trade are coming down and the movement of people is facilitated by cheap air travel. The UK is very much part of a global economy and we therefore need to raise our game to compete successfully. We are going to have to adapt to the skills that are required to compete internationally, but we are also going to have to adapt to the changing trade corridors around the world, which means new language skills. Perhaps I may pause here and say that I agree with my noble friend Lord Harrison that we should not scorn the Welsh.

This morning I was speaking at ACAS. There were about 75 heads of human resources present from government and corporates, virtually all of whom—74 out of the 75—said that modern language skills are hugely important if we are to stay competitive.

Languages increase cultural awareness. As has been said, with the emergence of the economies in Latin America and Asia, the ability of British people to speak Mandarin and Spanish will become increasingly important. My noble friend Lord Woolmer of Leeds highlighted how important that will become. However, it is also important to reflect on what the CBI has said—that 74 per cent of employers are looking for conversational and related intercultural competences rather than language fluency. We should never forget that 50 per cent of our exports in the UK are to Europe, so European languages are important, too. Our key role in Brussels has also been mentioned.

Although French and German still top the list, a significant proportion of companies require speakers in Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish and Russian. Therefore, the Government are revitalising the key stage 3 curriculum and are no longer restricting schools to teaching the working languages of the EU first, providing secondary schools with greater flexibility to teach world languages. By March 2010, materials for key stage 3 students will be available in French, German, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. Already one in seven secondary schools teaches Mandarin, and Spanish is the second most taught language after French.

I was struck by a recent report from researchers at University College London, who studied the brains of bilingual people. They found that learning other languages develops the area of the brain that processes information—the grey matter. So, much as exercise builds and tones muscles, the good news is that languages build brain power. However, the bad news is that you need to start young. The same research found that older learners will not be as fluent as those who learn earlier in life.

That finding very much supports the Government's approach of getting children enthused about language at an early age. There is no neglect on this issue in government. It is absolutely critical that we push for early learning, as it is very important to learn languages

[LORD DAVIES OF ABERSOCH]

early in life. We are making languages a statutory part of the national curriculum in primary schools from September 2011. Over 92 per cent of primary schools already teach languages, which is up from 44 per cent in 2003. We have trained more than 4,500 primary teachers with a languages specialism and we are giving £32.5 million in funding to local authorities to support the delivery of primary languages.

It was mentioned that languages are important for international business. However, they are also important for the Diplomatic Service. Since I have been in government, I have visited 29 countries and I am off to Saudi Arabia on Sunday. I am struck by how important a role our multilingual diplomatic staff play in supporting not just the Foreign Office but business generally. It is absolutely critical that they keep that competitive edge. The FCO invests heavily in language training for staff going overseas, particularly for the more difficult languages. There is also a standing conference for civil servants in particular departments—for example, the Ministry of Defence—and continuous attention is given to this in government. It is important that that stays.

Why do more women than men learn languages? It is true that we need to get more people learning languages, but we have to get a wider group of people learning them. We need to change society's attitude towards learning languages. Languages are more popular with girls and women. In higher education, roughly two-thirds of language students are women. We need to tackle this by making languages more appealing to boys. Similarly, languages are seen as slightly elitist and are associated with independent schools, Russell Group institutions and higher socio-economic groups, which are disproportionately represented when it comes to language learning. We want children and young people from all backgrounds to be learning languages, so language learning needs to become more diverse. The Government are acting to make that so. We are seeking to address the gender imbalance through making course content more flexible in order to engage boys more effectively, developing communications materials aimed at boys and creating new online resources for them.

Although an impressive 92 per cent of primary schools already offer languages, from September 2011 all schools will be obliged to provide language learning as part of the national curriculum. Languages are already compulsory for children aged 11 to 14 and there we are revitalising the curriculum to make it more engaging.

As the Minister for Trade, I have to say that Britain has many strengths. Britain is a country that is highly creative and innovative, strong in science and research, inquiring and adventurous, yet when it comes to foreign languages we seem to have a bit of a mental block. Why do we not have the same success? It cannot be for any innate lack of capability.

The Government recognise the value of languages and are doing a huge amount to support language learning. We have a national languages strategy, which is about increasing the number of people learning languages from primary through to postgraduate level,

and from 2011 we are introducing a languages and international communications diploma. We are also developing a communications campaign aimed at young people to point out what a difference language can make to their future and their lives. We have classified languages as strategically important in terms of higher education and we are investing in them through the Routes into Languages programme.

Since I became involved in this, I have been genuinely disappointed at the take-up of ERASMUS. When you look at the number of students going out internationally, you see that we have around 5.6 per cent of the market share, while around a 10 per cent share of the students are coming into the UK—we have around 10,000 students going out internationally and 20,000 coming in. We need to fix that. It is something that I need to do with the vice-chancellors. We also need to look into the issue of European interpreters. I will take that away.

The demand for degrees in some languages is growing, even if overall numbers are down. Language degrees in England fell from 3.2 per cent in 2003 to 2.7 per cent in 2008, but the numbers enrolled on joint language degree courses were up 5 per cent. What is also interesting is that the numbers for world languages have risen. Spanish degrees have risen by 13 per cent, Chinese by 36 per cent and Japanese by 43 per cent. Many students are opting to learn languages alongside their other specialisations. Some 30,000 students are taking a language module as part of their degree and more than 25,000 are doing language courses in their spare time.

We need to inspire young people to study languages in higher education. The £8 million Routes into Languages programme, funded by the DCSF and HEFCE, has created a consortium of schools, colleges and universities to work together in order to stimulate demand for language learning in secondary and higher education. Some 67 universities and more than 1,200 schools are involved, with over 27,000 school pupils taking part in activities. UCL's policy was also mentioned. It is obviously for each university to decide on its admission policy, but what I would say is that UCL is showing strong support for language learning and I commend it for that.

Both today and on other occasions there has been criticism that languages are not compulsory at key stage 4. We do not believe that compulsion is the right approach. As Lord Dearing noted in his 2007 review of languages, a one-size-fits-all approach is not right for all pupils, and forcing 14 to 16 year-olds to study languages will not in itself raise standards or motivate pupils. We are considering a range of options for boosting take-up at key stage 4, including making the benchmark mandatory. It is interesting that Lord Dearing thought that the priority was to make language learning more exciting. I think that the decision in 2004 was made really to increase flexibility in the curriculum for vocational opportunities. We are already taking action to incentivise learning at key stage 4, such as the revised key stage 3 curriculum, the online Open School for Languages and, as I said, our communications campaign.

I was struck by the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Watson of Richmond, on Youthbridge, which I will take away, and I agree to meet with the organisation. But it is not all down to the Government. The corporate sector needs to step up to provide more language learning for its employees. It makes good business sense and will make firms more competitive. My noble friend Lord Harrison mentioned that some companies admit that they are losing out. A Europe-wide study of 195 SMEs found that 115 of them had lost a contract through lack of language skills, with an average loss of business over a three-year period of £325,000. We need to join the chambers of commerce, the CBI and trade associations, together with some of the major corporations, to put in place a significant push and drive on this. As the Minister, I will take that forward and look at the scale of the language sector and its importance to British industry, and we will work with UKTI on the issue. Coupled with that, mention has been made in the debate of scholarships, and I will also take that away as an issue.

Language increases cultural awareness. One of the great benefits of language learning is the insight that it gives to other cultures, which can be vital when doing business overseas. Employers want people who can multitask and who are multiskilled. They want people who are numerate and literate, have IT skills, can work well in a team and are results-focused. Also, research shows that learning a foreign language early aids literacy and the learning of English. Employers want people who have foreign language skills and an international mindset. The great thing about studying languages is that it helps to build many of these skills.

In the Government, we realise the huge importance of the subject. We need partnership with universities, with business and with a variety of associations and we need to give a prod to the corporate sector. But the key is to get youngsters excited about language and to start them on the journey early. We have a series of actions in place, one of which is a response to the Worton report. David Lammy has said that he is willing to chair a new forum consisting of universities, schools and employers to develop a clearer communications strategy on languages.

Finally, on *Skills for Growth*, the whole document is built to be demand-led. Only yesterday I chaired a meeting with 16 of the major corporations in the UK at which we were discussing what skills they require to be competitive. It was very clear that language learning is something that they need and therefore we need to respond to. I thank all noble Lords.

1.59 pm

Baroness Coussins: My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who have spoken in the debate and who have made such excellent contributions. The debate has been wide-ranging and has touched on all education sectors from primary up to university research level. We have talked about business, the Diplomatic Service and even the Olympic Games. What is striking is the degree of interconnectedness between the different sectors; when it comes to languages, that interconnectedness has an impact on our economy and the quality of our competitiveness as a nation.

I thank the Minister for his encouraging response. I hope that he will feel free to draw on the extensive expertise that has been demonstrated by all the speakers in the debate as we go forward. He made commitments to look further into a number of issues and I look forward to monitoring progress. I beg leave to withdraw the Motion.

Motion withdrawn.

Equality Bill

First Reading

2 pm

The Bill was read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Future of the BBC

Debate

2 pm

Moved By Lord Fowler

To call attention to the future of the BBC; and to move for papers.

Lord Fowler: My Lords, you can go for months in this House without there being a debate on the media and then, rather like buses, two come along at the same time—the digital economy yesterday and the future of the BBC today. As the House knows, I am chairman of the Select Committee on Communications and, before that, I was the chairman of the BBC Royal Charter Select Committee. However, in this balloted debate for Back-Benchers I speak only for myself, although I concede that I pay tribute to the wisdom of the Select Committees that I chaired.

I start on a sour but important note. The Secretary of State, Ben Bradshaw, in an interview in the *MediaGuardian* on 23 November, said that it his duty to point out that there were real dangers of a Tory Government in their policies towards the BBC. He added:

“Like the National Health Service, the BBC reflects Labour values”.

That was a fairly crass statement. Historically, of course, it is entire rubbish. Labour can certainly claim to have started the National Health Service, although it does not really justify a claim of ownership, but the BBC was started not by a Labour Government but by a Conservative Government. In the same way, public service broadcaster Channel 4 was also started by a Conservative Government, as too, of course, was independent television generally. So my party does not need to establish its credentials so far as broadcasting is concerned.

More fundamentally, the Secretary of State's comments lead us in entirely the wrong direction. The characteristic over the years has been the way that there has been all-party support for the BBC. That does not mean that there cannot be disagreements on particular issues, but such disagreements are against a background when

[LORD FOWLER]

all the major parties in this country support the concept of the BBC and its major role in public service broadcasting. There is obviously a debate to be had on the future of the corporation—hence this debate today—but much of it is with some of the BBC's powerful commercial competitors, not least with News International, which has at least been frank about its ambitions.

In his MacTaggart lecture in the autumn, James Murdoch was quite explicit in his attack. He said the BBC produced “state sponsored journalism”; that impartiality in news was impossible to achieve because it always depended upon choices that editors have to make; and that the only real guarantee of broadcasting independence is profit. I disagree with all three assertions. It is absurd to draw parallels with the real state sponsored journalism of countries such as the old East Germany and, regrettably, the many other countries that still suffer from it today.

As to impartiality, what matters is what the organisation aims for. It is never going to be perfect but the question is: what are the standards? When I worked for the *Times* in the 1960s, my first editor was William Haley, former director general of the BBC. There was no question what the standards were: you were required to be fair and accurate. The BBC come nearer to achieving that than, for example, Fox News, which reported the Iraq invasion to the accompaniment of martial music and the stars and stripes fluttering in the corner of the screen.

As for profit, I do not believe that that is the only criterion. I will say a word later on BBC profit. The central concept of the BBC is that it should provide not only impartial news but also good drama, good entertainment and good children's programmes on television, on radio and, of course, now on the net, in return for the licence fee. Rightly, the BBC has rejected the argument of some of its competitors that it should simply make programmes that the commercial companies find unprofitable to make. That is not the agreement with the licence-fee payer.

The BBC has achieved a great deal. In the provision of news, for example, it provides more world news than any other media company in this country and, arguably, in the rest of the world. At a time when newspapers have been forced to close their foreign bureaux and rely on journalists being flown in as firemen to report particular crises, the licence fee has enabled the BBC to retain year round foreign coverage; while the World Service, funded differently, continues to provide excellent journalism. The country has been well served by the BBC and anyone who doubts that should cross the Atlantic and talk, as the Select Committee did, to some of the big media companies there. The reputation of the BBC is high and the British concept of public service broadcasting is much admired. The challenge now is to ensure that, at a time of unprecedented change in the media, the BBC retains its high position. That is vital for the BBC.

This brings me to a fundamental defect in the BBC's organisation. Although it has a total revenue of over £4 billion, more than 20,000 staff and offices throughout the world, it has no chairman and no proper board. Instead, it has a curious, divided structure

unlike anything else in corporate Britain. It has an executive committee headed by the director general and then, in a separate building, it has what is called the BBC Trust headed by Sir Michael Lyons, who can call himself BBC chairman, but only as an honorary title.

At this point, Government Ministers tend to shrug. “What does it matter?”, they say; “It is only a matter of organisation”. If it does not matter, they should ask themselves why was there so much concern when ITV seemed to be failing to find a new chairman; why there was so much interest in the new chairman for Channel 4 and how he would lead the organisation; why there is always speculation and comment when a chairmanship becomes vacant in any big company? The answer, of course, is that having the right chairman is crucial to the health of any big organisation or company.

The Minister will agree that this is not a recent criticism of mine or of my colleagues. In the BBC you do not have the normal process of co-decision that you have in virtually every other company. You do not have a chairman and a chief executive standing side by side in joint decisions. It too often appears to be the case that the trust, in its regulatory role, is standing to one side from the corporation. At the time, we strongly proposed what had been proposed but were told it was non negotiable. The Government said that it was a unique arrangement but the BBC was a unique organisation, and that was that. The truth, of course, is that this is a shambolic compromise as a direct result of the Government's dispute with the BBC on its early coverage of the Iraq war—a questioning which, frankly, looks nearer the mark with every witness that appears before the Iraq inquiry.

I was critical of the Secretary of State at the beginning of my remarks but I certainly give him credit for having recognised the truth. His view was given in a speech to the Royal Television Society in September. He said that he was concerned about the regulatory structure of the BBC and that the trust was, “not a sustainable model in the long term”.

He added:

“I know of no other area of public life where—as is the case with the Trust—the same body is both regulator and cheer leader”.

So, there we have it: four or five years after the Government introduced this eccentric system, they admit that it does not work. But the question for the Government now is what they propose instead. They have a corporate organisation in which they have no confidence. It would be utterly wrong for them to allow it to struggle on in this way; the BBC is too important for that.

I accept that making changes is difficult under the royal charter process that the Government have chosen to follow. Again, I have to say that it was not the process that the Select Committee advised them to follow. We said that the BBC should be set up on a statutory basis, allowing changes to be made in it, but that was overridden again by the Government.

Therefore, as far as the incoming Government after the election are concerned, this is unfinished business. We should not be overinfluenced by Michael Grade's opposition to any change, as set out in his article in *Financial Times* yesterday. He of course was responsible

for negotiating this defective arrangement. He may want to go down saluting at the mast, but that is no reason why the rest of us should be dragged down at the same time.

My final major point is about the wider role of the BBC. It is a massive media player in the United Kingdom. By partnerships with other players, such as in sharing costs, it can make a big contribution. However, it is very good at talking the talk about partnership. I am struck by the number of witnesses who say in evidence to the Select Committee that, in practice, it is nothing like as successful as that. As a big media company, it must be careful not to crowd out the efforts of smaller companies in the United Kingdom—that is important, too.

However, the argument does not go all one way. It is often not the smaller companies which complain but some very big competitors. We should recognise that there are some very determined opponents of the BBC out there who would like nothing better than a diminished corporation, which may not be in the public interest.

The future of the BBC also affects many other people who are not employed on the permanent payroll: directors, actors, writers, musicians and entertainers. If dramas, for example, can be sold overseas, that is good for the BBC and for the companies which have made them.

That is the role of BBC Worldwide, one of the corporation's undoubtedly successful companies. It sells around the world, and its aim is to create value from BBC content. Its values are BBC values, and it provides very good value for licence-fee payers. It has an annual revenue of more than £1 billion and it makes profits for the BBC of more than £150 million. How far do we want this BBC company to go? Your Lordships may have seen a press release from the BBC Trust last week on future policy here. The flavour is given by its headline:

“Trust announces new limits to Worldwide activity”.

What other corporation would take pride in being able to boast that its highly successful commercial subsidiary was aiming to limit profit and activity?

I would put it rather differently from the trust. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The British film industry's prosperity was much limited by distribution being in the hands of the big United States studios. With television, BBC Worldwide is already there; it is established; its reputation is well known. It needs the resources to grow further. Licence-fee money is limited and, in any event, this is a commercial activity best done with private sector resources. The opportunity is for a new company to be formed—a public/private partnership. There is no reason why other broadcasters should not take shareholdings in it. The BBC should be able to earn better profits from such a company and be a substantial beneficiary of any sale.

The BBC should remember the opinion poll organised by the Department for Culture a few years ago which showed that 90 per cent of the public agreed with the proposition that the BBC should raise as much money as it could from selling its products and programmes overseas. That is the case particularly when that action would be to the direct benefit of the broadcasting industry generally and those who work in it.

The opportunity here is to create a leading global media brand. The question is whether, in its international operations, BBC Worldwide can be freed to carry out even more entrepreneurial action. I know what their competitors would do given the same opportunity. It is something of an acid test for the BBC. Those of us who are supporters of it want to preserve its standards, but we also want it to take its chances. Here is a very big chance, and I very much hope that it takes it. I beg to move.

2.16 pm

Baroness Howe of Idlicote: My Lords, I shall not be the first today to thank the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for this opportunity to discuss the future of the BBC, but I do so very warmly. Your Lordships' House is lucky to have had him, with his distinguished media as well as parliamentary career, as chairman of its Select Committee on Communications, since this was first established after a little battle with the powers that be earlier this century. It has been a great privilege to be part of his team.

I am glad to say that research shows clearly the importance and value of the BBC to this country. Eighty-five per cent of UK citizens would miss it if it were not there, and the level of trust in all that it does continues to grow. Above all, our citizens want a strong, confident and high-quality BBC. Its “jewel in the crown” image is as accurate today as when that phrase was first coined. It is also agreed that there needs to be a competitive range of public service broadcasting programmes from the commercial media, particularly to provide independent, high-quality, impartial news of the kind currently provided by ITN and Channel 4. This House, as we know from yesterday, will shortly have an opportunity to discuss in detail the Government's DE Bill's proposals about how this might be provided in future, but it must be said that there are doubts about what is proposed.

As your Lordships know, debate continues about the BBC's governance, the licence fee arrangements and even whether in today's multimedia/internet world such a privileged organisation should continue to exist. The BBC's current governance has been criticised in our Select Committee reports. It is said that the Communications Act 2003's two-tiered self-regulatory structure, with the BBC Trust at arm's length from the day-to-day responsibilities of the main board, does not really work. Ofcom has some regulatory responsibilities for the BBC, but a consensus is said to be developing that an altogether different structure is needed.

However, if change is needed, there is a different danger to be avoided. We should certainly ensure a greater degree of transparency about how the licence fee settlement is reached between government and BBC through proper parliamentary scrutiny, as our Select Committee has suggested. Equally, the independence of the BBC from undue parliamentary as well as government influence must be maintained once a settlement has been reached. It is well known that every Government have tried to put pressure on the BBC at some stage in their relationship. The very existence of the royal charter, despite these kinds of

[BARONESS HOWE OF IDLICOTE]

pressures, allows the BBC to continue asking the right questions at the right time—and, thankfully, it still does. For that reason alone, it is also reassuring to learn that a recent press report that the Conservatives might be planning to get rid of the BBC charter altogether was denied.

There are increasingly difficult challenges for the media as a whole. Digital switchover is well under way; there has been a huge increase in the number of internationally accessible competing worldwide channels and multiplexes; and a growing internet attraction for the advertising industry has led to a rapid decline in TV advertising. Hence, ITV's decision that it can broadcast public service programmes in future only if they are fully funded from elsewhere. Likewise, Channel 4's situation, as it, too, has been funded previously out of advertising revenue, is equally problematic. On top of that sits the appalling economic situation, together with uncertainty about when the recession will end. It is therefore entirely right that the BBC look for economies within its own situation, as well as ways of supporting other PSB initiatives. It looks, and we look to it, to do so.

We need to put into perspective the normal situation that existed in this country about salaries and bonuses before the crash. High salaries, based on what the market showed one had to pay to attract or retain the best people, were the norm for remuneration, as were bonuses. I can remember thinking that the proposed salaries for Ofcom's top management were very high indeed when it was set up, but I was told that that was the media market price. It is hardly surprising, if we take that into account, that BBC top salaries and talent costs are high. Therefore, it is commendable that the director-general, Mark Thompson, has decided to publish a range of salaries paid to top BBC personnel together with plans to contain them in future.

Equally important is the recent insight to which he referred, when addressing the Voice of the Listener & Viewer conference a week ago, on how the commitment is progressing that was given five years ago to see that the BBC should be as small as its mission allows. Considerable progress has been made with thousands of jobs gone, including whole divisions—but the clear impression also given is that the BBC's view for the post-2012 switchover is both imaginative and radical but will inevitably mean some pretty uncomfortable choices. Although continuing to resist every form of top-slicing, I am certainly heartened that as well as the best journalism, high-quality arts and drama, particular priority will be given to high-quality programmes and services for children—that is crucially important—and that there will be a greater proportion of original British content.

To end on two points, the majority of BBC radio channels, especially Radio 4, are quite outstanding, and, I hope we are going to see the plans for digital radio fully in place by 2015, as I said yesterday. But I also want to commend the BBC World Service, as the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, did, on its reach, with 238 million listeners for its weekly international news alone, and its reputation for objectivity and relevance. It is funded mostly via the FCO and includes some TV and online content. Since the launch of BBC Arabic

Television two years ago, this has become the most widely respected, comprehensive news and information multimedia service in the area.

Finally, looking back over the many years and enjoyable hours that I have spent listening to the BBC, I think one memory reigns supreme. It must have been at least 30 years ago that that incredible series, "Life on Earth", was made by David Attenborough. I still have all the programmes on video and they remain amazing to watch. Now, as I watch the latest, equally amazing and beautiful Attenborough programmes on insect community life, I think that heritage is yet another example of exactly what the BBC is all about. I know just how lucky I am to have been around for all but the first 10 years of its quite remarkable life.

2.25 pm

The Lord Bishop of Southwark: My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for enabling the House to address important issues on the future of the BBC and for the report on public service broadcasting from the Select Committee, which he chairs and of which my friend the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Manchester is a member. I declare an interest in today's debate as an occasional broadcaster and former chair of the Churches' Media Council.

No one who has lived abroad for any length of time would need much convincing of the quality and range of BBC broadcasting. Its output of information, edification and entertainment at home, and its role as a cultural and informative ambassador for Britain abroad has been a valuable part of our national life for decades. If we from these Benches have not been uncritical of particular aspects of the BBC over the years, we are in general its strong supporters and we wish the BBC to have a viable and fruitful future. In particular, we wish to express support for the BBC's wide range of good religious output as part of its wider public service commitments, but my friend the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Liverpool will address this more fully in his speech.

Significant as the past contribution to the life of our nation the BBC has been, this debate is concerned with its future, and there is naturally some concern as to how the BBC will survive intact in the coming digital marketplace. For me, a parable of hope might be the way in which in central Africa in the 1970s people like me every evening tried to tune in to the eight o'clock news from the BBC World Service on shortwave radio. This was no easy task, because the night ether was full of signals from radio stations both near and far, with a babble of different call signs and languages. Nor was the BBC one of the stronger signals; on the contrary, one had to be patient and have a keen ear to eventually pick up the unmistakable BBC sound and style.

It was not only British expatriates who believed that the effort was worthwhile, for it was generally believed that the BBC provided a breadth of news and an objectivity of reporting that was not to be found so clearly in other stations. It was worthwhile, therefore, going to some effort to find and tune into the BBC among the shortwave maelstrom. Listening to the eight o'clock BBC news became quite a ritual. That

was then and this is now; technology is transforming every aspect of life, including communications. In the digital age that we have now entered, it is perfectly easy to find several BBC stations and channels at the touch of a control button. The problem is that in the digital marketplace it is equally easy find dozens of other competing stations. Also in this 24-hour news world, an eight o'clock or even ten o'clock ritual of listening to the news is becoming a thing of the past. People find and listen to the news whenever and wherever they want—on television, radio, laptop or mobile phone, and probably before long on key-ring.

But this is not necessarily bad news for the future of the BBC. Just as in shortwave Africa, people went to some effort to make the BBC their station of choice because of its quality and objectivity, so in the easy come, easy go digital age, enough watchers and listeners will make the BBC their first choice, provided that it maintains quality and objectivity. I think that a sign of this is the number of people now making the BBC News 24 webpage their default page on their laptops and mobiles.

Nor does this just apply to news-gathering, telling and interpretation. The director-general of the BBC said in a recent lecture that it was his concern that the BBC should deliver to the British public the best programmes it can, and to turn fine words of the theory of public service broadcasting into journalism, drama, documentary and children's programmes that live on in the memory and,

"open doors that otherwise would be shut".

From these Benches we would want to say yes to that. We look forward to the report of the review which the director-general and the BBC Trust have set up to look to the post-switchover world of 2012.

In the same lecture, the director-general tells us that we might expect to see a further shift of emphasis in favour of key priority areas: the best journalism in the world, high-quality programmes and services for children, content of every kind that builds knowledge and shares music and culture, a long-range commitment to outstanding British drama and comedy, and national events that bring us together. These words echo, in many details, the first recommendation of the report of the Select Committee of the noble Lord, Lord Fowler.

Perhaps unintentionally missing is what is included in the Fowler list but is not included here: an explicit reference to programmes dealing with religion and other beliefs. I presume that religion and faith, which form such a vital part of the lives and behaviour of many British citizens, will continue to form an integral part of the BBC's future output. However, the director-general's words also contain a warning:

"Expect to see reductions in some kinds of programmes and content".

And there's the rub. For cut back some minority interests and the specialist units interpreting them become no longer viable and it will be very difficult to build up such specialisms again. We on these Benches will be interested to monitor the effects of any future cutbacks.

What structures might the BBC need for effective service in the post-switchover world? The corporation, like any institution in today's world—including my own church and perhaps even your Lordships' House—stands on the frontier in history between what is no longer appropriate and what has not yet been invented. This is not a comfortable place to be, because predicting the future is always hazardous and deciding what needs to be carried from the past into the future requires some judgment.

We on these Benches wish the provision of excellent public service broadcasting to have a strong place in the future life of the BBC. If this is to be so, then the BBC will need to have sufficient institutional independence and financial security to be able to plan ahead with some confidence and without constant change. At present, this institutional independence and financial stability are provided by the royal charter and the licence fee. It will be for those who feel that these are no longer appropriate to make their case. I, for one, will take some convincing that any other package will serve the nation better.

2.33 pm

Lord Bragg: My Lords, first, I give many thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for securing this important debate. He has covered the ground in detail. I intend to be more general.

The BBC is unique. I believe that that is worth emphasising at the outset. In any other country it would be a thing of wonder. Like the British Museum, the British Library or the magnificent cluster in South Kensington, it is difficult to imagine that it would be invented today. We are very lucky that these institutions exist. Like them, the BBC has world fame, and of the most distinguished kind. But other countries, and other cities in this country, have their great museums and libraries for which they, too, claim eminence. None has the BBC, which—in the volatile, acutely competitive, commercially saturated, piranha-infested waters of the global media—retains its distinctive independent clout, its own tradition, its reach and its potential for good, for democracy as well as for culture, and for the reflection and portrayal of the singularity of our nations.

If you were to judge the BBC by those in this country who have eyes to see and ears to hear, this would be a brief debate. The overwhelming number of listeners and viewers—the majority of our population—rely on and use the BBC through the weeks, and they support it. Despite blips and often rather dubious statistical evidence from its opponents, there is sovereign proof in this country that it is regarded as being earthed in our society. For many people today, given the sad and embarrassing shadows across government, and the shame across the financial world, it is something of a rock. I declare an interest. I work for BBC Radio 4 as a freelance and for ITV as an employee.

This is an information society in which much information is tainted. It is sometimes lightly biased by harmless enough prejudices or transparent interests. It is at other times distorted, even used deceitfully and as near propaganda as makes no difference. Yet the BBC is constantly attacked for its independence—by

[LORD BRAGG]

politicians, for instance. The Labour Party, the Conservative Party, the Lib Dems, and I would guess all other parties have asserted from time to time that it is biased against them. This usually means that they feel criticised, challenged or analysed, with their plans to rule or misrule us put to a public test. That is what we want to happen in a democracy. Surely in a country as mature as ours, that is to be expected. In fact, it surprises me—given the way in which over the past decades Governments have often sleepwalked into mess after mess out of which the people have had to bail them—that the criticism is not much fiercer.

It can be said of the BBC, as has been said of democracy itself, that, unsatisfactory though it might be, it is far better than anything else on offer. And the BBC offers plurality, the essential twin to democracy. What it delivers is not the state propaganda which we still see in many countries, and not the oppressive commercial pressure that we see in others. By being what it is and by being so powerful, it is a constant corrective to the two extremes of the controlling state and unbridled Mammon. So powerful—that, I think, is the rub. The BBC is not the valiant rump of public service broadcasting that exists in the United States of America. Nor is it the impoverished, policed service available in other parts of the world. It is a rich global player. It has a strong income protected by an elected Parliament of which it is independent. That is unique and quite extraordinary. Its quality at its best is undeniable: in drama, documentary, science, arts, natural history, national news, foreign reports and, of course, the peerless World Service.

At a time of increasing lawlessness in the digital world—as we heard graphically spelt out in your Lordships' House yesterday—the BBC's public accountability is of greater value by the month. The creative industries, 8 per cent of our economy, are under serious threat, for instance, from copyright theft. The digital world is so under-regulated that the consequences could be a severe collapse in what has been our finest post-war success story: the growth of intellectual and imaginative property, the creative economy in which the BBC is a major player.

Of course the BBC has faults. They must be tackled, and frank friends must not hold back. Unsurprisingly, they reflect the state of the country which the BBC mirrors and describes so comprehensively. The BBC is, some critics claim, too stuffed with middle management and hired consultants, over-regulated, over-bureaucratic—like, well, the NHS, the great maw of Whitehall itself? The BBC is, other critics claim, over-aroused at the prospect of boundless expansion and puts itself about too promiscuously—like the City, the banks, the Government? Importantly, the BBC is now being caned for what it was asked to do by the Conservative Government; that is, to supplement the licence fee by going out there, using its brand and bringing in private profit to swell its coffers and lessen the burden on the licence fee, to keep the BBC as it ought to be. The BBC went out and did just that.

To put the BBC in context gives us perspective, but of course it does not erase legitimate anxieties about the organisation that it needs to address. There are

more current local anxieties that have emerged recently—for instance, the position of the BBC Trust, so closely examined by the noble Lord, Lord Fowler. And, like the ever-present chorus in a Greek tragedy, there is the constant lament about dumbing down, although in my view that is largely misplaced.

The BBC is an archipelago of variety in radio, television and the new media, and it is at the forefront of all of them. It has so far followed the two great forces: one is meeting change, while the other is maintaining the essential, even unchanging heart of any great enterprise, as happens here in your Lordships' house. It is a difficult feat to yoke these two, but it is provenly the only way to move forward without a form of self-destruction. In doing this the BBC has shown us, and at its best still shows us, at our best. It still has its core mission to educate, inform and entertain. The future of the BBC is embedded in the fabric of the future of this country.

It certainly matters that the BBC makes fine programmes; essentially, in one way, it is the sum of its programmes. It certainly matters that the BBC continues in a tradition that has proven itself for many years, because we in this country have respect for such things. It matters most, though, that the BBC is the way we do things in broadcasting. It has survived the arrival of other systems and it has sustained itself. It is part of the difference that we in Britain have and cherish because we can see how close it is to our core aspirations and our character.

The future of the BBC, then, warts and all, is worthy of all the support that your Lordships can give in the undoubted battles ahead, with the slings and arrows that are waiting just over the horizon.

2.41 pm

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, on this debate, which is both topical and timely. I declare an interest as an associate of an independent production company and as someone with insider knowledge, having worked for many years at the BBC.

While we have heard nothing but praise inside this Chamber, out there the BBC is under attack. The Government want to top-slice the licence fee, while the Conservatives, in the shape of David Cameron and Jeremy Hunt—if not the noble Lord, Lord Fowler—want to freeze it.

Rupert Murdoch wants to reduce the corporation to a US-style public subscription channel offering only education and information and providing absolutely no competition to the commercial sector. His son James accuses it of being,

“a threat to the plurality and independence of news provision”, and, I am afraid, normally sensible newspapers have taken up this accusation. Feeling the pain of competition with the internet, they have turned on the BBC, despite the fact that in every other country—none of which, unfortunately for them, has a BBC—newspapers are facing equally dire problems. The head of Australia's public service channel said about James Murdoch's pronouncement:

“But strip away the lofty language, and you see that the James Murdoch solution is less about making a contribution to public policy than it is getting rid of the BBC’s services, effectively destroying the BBC as we know it—a tragedy for the UK—a tragedy for the world”.

Simon Schama, in self-imposed exile in New York, has said:

“There is nothing like a little distance to make you reflect on what makes Britain really great. Since I live in the United States for most of the time I can tell you that many is the time I wish deeply that there was a presence like that of the BBC”.

An ICM poll a couple of months ago of those of us who live here, which the noble Baroness, Lady Howe, referred to, showed that public confidence in the BBC has grown; 77 per cent regard it as a national institution that we should be proud of, 69 per cent declare it trustworthy and two out of three people think that it provides good value for money. Politicians and *Sun* journalists would pay for such accolades.

As all of us taking part in this debate know, British broadcasting has reached a critical point: the transition from one age to another, from analogue to digital. The analogue age lasted for about 100 years, during which time Britain developed arguably the best broadcasting system in the world. Central to this system was and is the BBC.

In 1922, when the British Broadcasting Company was set up, it had a staff of four people. I do not know how many noble Lords have seen that admirable series, “A History of Modern Britain” with Andrew Marr, but it had wonderful footage of those pioneering days when the BBC—radio, of course—appears to have been the possession of a Captain Eckersley, who would, to use the words of Andrew Marr that accompanied the film,

“trundle his piano from his local pub to an equally local army hut from which he would perform to the nation”.

Then along came Lord Reith, who put an end to Eckersley and such frivolity.

The BBC was financed by the licence fee and of course in those days it was a monopoly provider, a situation that we must not return to. The creation of Independent Television in 1955 and the introduction of competition had a profound impact on broadcasting: the BBC lost its captive audience and large numbers of viewers deserted it. It had to learn to connect and it did. It did not jettison its values but it changed what it did.

Then the independent TV companies, raking in the money in those days, were asked to spend a proportion of it on PSB. BBC2 was created and then Channel 4, and in parallel with them was the creation of the independent production sector—and we enter a wonderful world of plurality and diversity. This purely terrestrial world was further enhanced by the advent of subscription channels such as Sky and for a time there was peaceful cohabitation. Today we see this under threat. Competition from digital channels and the internet has led to declining advertising revenue for the commercial public service broadcasters, exacerbated by the fact that we are in recession.

Those critics whom I referred to at the beginning of my speech fear a return to a monopolistic, overpowered BBC. Here I depart slightly from what has been said

so far today, because I believe that the BBC has not helped itself. Its behaviour in some areas has only fed concerns about its size and scope. I disagree with the noble Baroness, Lady Howe, here. The salaries paid to its executives are ridiculous, with 39 of them earning more than the Prime Minister, one with the title “director of organisational development and change”—perhaps what Prime Ministers should aspire to be. These salaries are being paid against a background of cuts to high-quality news programmes that are central to the BBC’s PSB remit. Recently a BBC reporter told the *Evening Standard* that on many current affairs programmes the producer is flying solo, with no researcher to help them dig into the story and check the facts. I used to be a producer on “Panorama” and “Newsnight”, and it is not a job that you can do well on your own.

The BBC’s commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, charged with making profit to cushion the public service BBC, has been told this week by the BBC Trust that it should desist from activities that are not in keeping with the BBC brand—such as the £90 million purchase of Lonely Planet, perhaps, which so many of us supporters of the BBC questioned at the time. Like other noble Lords, I have sympathy with those running BBC Worldwide—their remit, after all, was to make money—but the way in which that remit was sometimes handled reminds me of an image conjured up in a speech made by Tim Gardam, once my boss and a former senior executive at the BBC. In it, he asked his audience to remember Walt Disney’s “The Jungle Book”, and compared the BBC to that,

“well meaning herd of elephants, stomping through the jungle, trumpeting its achievements, each executive holding onto the tail of the one in front. They are undoubtedly a force for good, but unfortunately can be oblivious to what might get crushed under their enormous feet”.

Now, more than ever, this elephant behaviour has to be banished.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, we on these Benches would like to abolish the BBC Trust. We called long ago for a truly independent regulator of the BBC and argued at the time that the BBC Trust was established that this arrangement would only perpetuate the muddle between regulation and governance. It has. Considering that these were the very sentiments expressed publicly by the latest Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, does the Minister not think it odd that the matter of BBC governance is not addressed in the Digital Economy Bill?

Next, there is the fact that, while commercial public service broadcasters are struggling and suffering, the BBC is seen as being too big. It was good that the director-general’s speech, a week ago, acknowledged this; we look forward to his commitment to establishing more focused, slimline boundaries within the BBC. The other essential element in ensuring a healthy future for the BBC is competition and we welcome the Government’s commitment in the Digital Economy Bill to Channel 4.

The transformed economics of commercial PSB have put the provision of regional and local news under particular threat. Without intervention, the BBC will become a monopoly supply in this area, so we also welcome the launch in April of three independently financed news consortia pilots. We Liberal Democrats,

[BARONESS BONHAM-CARTER OF YARNBURY]

as I think everyone in this House knows, were always against £600 million of the licence fee being used to pay for digital switchover's targeted assistance programme. Now it appears that not all of that money is needed and some is to be used to pay for those news consortia pilots.

While we were against BBC money being used to fund the social cost, we support the surplus being used to help to fund commercial public service broadcasting—but there it ends, because we are absolutely against top-slicing the licence fee, which threatens the independence of the BBC and blurs lines of accountability in public service broadcasting. Andy Burnham, the last Culture Secretary, when responding to a Conservative debate on the licence fee, said:

“Would any Government be properly challenged by the BBC when the corporation's fate was always under review and the corporation was engaged in almost never-ending debate with civil servants and Ministers about ... funding?”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 20/5/09; col. 1582.]

No—and the present Secretary of State should take heed.

While we do not believe that the licence fee should be raided, we feel that the BBC needs to share the good fortune that its funding formula gives it. A year ago, with a great fanfare, the corporation announced that “the power of partnership” was to be the name of the game and the answer to everything. However, a year on there seems to have been little progress. The proposals to share regional news resources with ITV have come to nothing and talks with Channel 4 are at best ongoing. Andy Duncan, the recently retired chief executive of Channel 4, told the Communications Committee, of which I am a member, that,

“had the BBC wanted to ... they could have moved a lot quicker than they did. They kept their options open and it has been frustrating trying to get the partnership nailed down”.

Historically, partnerships have not been what the BBC has been best at and it seems that, unlike with the advent of competition back in 1955, it has failed to change its culture. It must learn to share.

In conclusion, through the years there have been many attempts at defining the elusive quality that is public service broadcasting and why it is so important. Sir David Attenborough is to me, as he is to the noble Baroness, Lady Howe, a man who exemplifies what our broadcasting system—at the heart of which sits the BBC—has allowed to flourish. I choose on this occasion to refer to his words in a lecture last year. He described the advent of broadcasting in this country, and the public service remit that is so integral to it, as, “that miraculous advance, still not a century old, that allows a whole society, a whole nation, to see itself and to talk to itself ... to share insights and illuminations, to become aware of problems and collectively to consider solutions”.

2.54 pm

Baroness Deech: My Lords, I, too, welcome the opportunity kindly afforded to us by the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, to discuss this important topic. I declare an interest as a former governor of the BBC—indeed, one of the very last—and in having a close family member working for the BBC. It is an interest that never leaves me, for the BBC permeates our daily lives and is never more missed and revered than when one is

abroad and the topic is raised by foreigners. There should be no doubt that the existence of the BBC is a major factor in the reputation of this country all over the world, for the good, and as a purveyor of truth in countries where reliable news is sadly lacking.

I regard the BBC as almost wholly excellent at the moment and I have some suggestions for making it even more so in the future. The licence fee is sometimes criticised, but it amounts only to the cost of a few football tickets, or 39p per household per day. One-third of the income is spent outside the organisation on, for example, independent production. The licence fee is not just for television and radio; it supports the website, the orchestras, the Proms, the Reith lecture and sport. There is also training, and not only of the BBC's own employees—as those people spread out, the training has benefited artists and journalists in all media, who owe a great deal to the BBC. I hope that your Lordships will never countenance direct government funding or the relinquishment of the charter, which keeps the governance stable and out of politics for 10 years at a time.

The future is digital. In at least one way, that is detrimental to the BBC's desire to educate and include younger viewers, for they will apparently download what they want, which is unlikely to be news and serious political programmes. In BBC Three, I venture to suggest that the BBC has not had great success in targeting the 16 to 34 age group. BBC Three costs £87 million a year. When I was a governor, criticism of the quality of the output was off-bounds at meetings. The feeling was that the governors were not capable of judging content but had to stick to strategy. In my humble opinion, however, and now that I am freed of that constraint, if cuts have to be made, BBC Three might not be as missed as some others. It never seemed to me to have a theme.

The governors of the past were, perhaps, feistier in getting involved in these things than is the carefully structured group of representative governors that one has today. There is a case for having the deputy chairman, if not the chairman, elected by his or her fellow trustees to ensure total independence from government and to ensure that all trustees who are appointed may think that they could rise to that position.

Your Lordships will have noted with gratification that the BBC has been challenged by the trust to curb salaries and to suspend bonuses. That is absolutely right. When I was a governor, I challenged bonuses on the ground that the BBC was public sector and not supposed to make a profit. Therefore, there was no rationale for bonuses. The reply, from a very senior person, was, “The trouble with you academics”—I was one then—“is that you earn so little that you don't understand money”, to which I replied that there were more people like me out there than like that person.

The trust, which seems to me not very different from the governors, holds the BBC to account. I fear that governance theories, as others have mentioned, may have moved the trust too far away from the executive, a process that started in my time. The trust cannot hold the BBC to account unless it knows some details in advance—for example, of the high salaries

being offered and controversial programmes being made. However, there should never be any prior censorship.

Holding the BBC to account means handling complaints properly. What is needed is a complaints ombudsman for the BBC—an independent external person who will handle complaints according to best practice and bring real independence as well as expertise to bear. The Governors' Programme Complaints Committee, as it was—it is now the Editorial Standards Committee—was often asked to judge factual matters in which it had no particular expertise. For example, I remember the question coming forward whether the European Commission could properly be described as a Parliament. Only an outsider can be perceived to be independent in judging impartiality and accuracy.

Moreover, it seems only right that the apology or correction when a complaint is upheld should be broadcast in the same slot as the original error or shortcoming so that the same people see or hear the correction. However, the BBC usually apologises only online. Had an independent complaints process been in place when a complaint was made about the infamous Gilligan early-morning broadcast in 2003, I have no doubt that history would have been different.

The BBC also has to be representative. On screen one sees older men of various stages of maturity, complete with their natural hair colour and body shape, only as expected at their age, reading news and conducting interviews. They are seen in a position of authority. Older women with equally grey hair are invisible. There are plenty of older women with the appeal, authority and clarity of, say—I am being invidious—the noble Baroness, Lady Boothroyd, and other noble Baronesses of mature years in this House. There are plenty of them to represent the older woman on screen, whose invisibility is an insult.

The BBC should not be held back too much from competing with commercial providers. It is a matter of regret to me that BBC jam, an educational website, was brought to a halt by commercial competitors and European red tape. The National Health Service would not refrain from providing the best machinery and treatment to its patients, even if private providers are in competition. As an equally public service, the BBC should do no less. Its future is to continue its high-quality product, but taking note of the concerns about expenditure, possible overextension of channels and the effects of the digital future. Once again, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for this opportunity.

3.03 pm

The Lord Bishop of Liverpool: My Lords, I, too, associate myself with all the appreciation that has been expressed to the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for his initiative and leadership in this whole area. I also associate myself with my noble friend the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark in declaring an interest. Like him, I contribute to the BBC in the "Thought for the Day" slot—but perhaps more of that later.

It was 40 years ago last month that I had my first encounter with the creativity of the BBC, when, as a student, I was invited to take part in my first religious broadcast. It was to be on All Souls' Day. The creative

producer decided that the best place to celebrate this would be the chapel of the local crematorium. As your Lordships will appreciate, there is not exactly a regular congregation there, so it was decided to bus in the relatives of all those who had been cremated in the previous year. This may sound rather macabre and morbid to your Lordships, but the chapel was packed to capacity. I remember being shown to my seat at the microphone, next to CA Joyce, a famous broadcaster of the day. There, on the seat, was a shining white card with, emblazoned on it in black letters, my name: James Jones. I was suitably impressed, picked it up, turned it over and read "in memoriam".

Before ordination I was a producer. It was a time when video had been launched on to the market. Some noble Lords may remember the great battle between VHS and Betamax over which format would dominate. At that time, it was widely and wildly predicted that video would see off cinema and kill it for ever. Of course, since the advent of video, we have never had such a creative period in the history of cinema in this country. It just shows that we should always be cautious when it comes to predicting any future, especially the future of the media.

Also, when it comes to prophecy and prediction, nobody towards the end of the last millennium ever predicted or prophesied the role that religion would play in the third millennium. I know it is a surprise to many that two powerful religious forces—evangelical Christianity in America and Islam in the Arab world—continue to shape political ideologies. This is presumably why Mark Thompson himself in a recent lecture on faith, morality and the media said:

"So many of the big stories of the day—war and peace, global poverty, environmental sustainability, advances in science and medicine—throw up issues and debates in which religious perspectives feel relevant".

One of the distinctive features of the BBC is its religion and ethics department, which has an international reputation. It produces outstanding religious programmes on radio, and, on television, programmes of remarkable quality given their limited budgets. These programmes inform and educate the audience at a time when religion is shaping the world again. These are vital programmes, enabling the audience to understand what is happening in and to our society. I have had the opportunity, over the years, to broadcast across the spectrum. The difference between making religious programmes with the BBC, as compared to ITV—with the notable exception of the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, with whose speech I would like to identify myself very much—is that religious producers at the BBC are not just skilled broadcasters. They are also theologically literate. They understand the subtleties and nuances of the religious landscape, which is so vitally important in a culture of different faiths today. Producers who were less aware could so easily undermine the harmony and cohesion that are among the virtues of public service broadcasting.

I welcome the recent decision of the BBC trustees to maintain the religious character of "Thought for the Day", not because I want to marginalise atheists and agnostics, but because introducing a non-religious element into that programme would simply change its nature—like introducing hockey into "Match of the

[THE LORD BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL] Day". "Thought for the Day" is a religious broadcast within a major current affairs programme, covering events in a world where religion not only frequently makes the news but helps shape the world. It seems to me that the trustees' decision was a proper editorial judgment of an international public service broadcaster to maintain a religious input in a prime-time programme.

Yesterday, in the digital economy debate, the noble Lord, Lord Mandelson, spoke about the Government's commitment to public service broadcasting as a means to creating,

"a well informed, well educated and socially cohesive society".—*[Official Report, 2/12/09; col. 746.]*

I hope that I may be permitted to say "amen" to that. The truth is that in an increasingly digital age when tens of millions have their own web cameras, there will still be an appetite for someone to collate, synthesise and disseminate, out of the billions of daily images, some sort of common narrative. My own view is that such a public service broadcasting service would still merit some form of licence fee, but that the contract between the BBC and the public will inevitably be constantly negotiated in a process that will require the BBC to watch and listen as much as the public watch and listen to the BBC. Such media outlets possess extraordinary power as they interpret the world to us, the audience.

There is one principle of public service broadcasting that I hope will be enshrined and protected by the BBC of the future. There is a tendency within all broadcast media to dramatise every issue in order to attract larger audiences, to find the extremes on every subject and to polarise every debate; it simply makes more interesting viewing or listening. Unfortunately, to do so can reinforce prejudice and not only hinder understanding but actually undermine cohesion. A stable and harmonious society is well served by a public service broadcaster that is truly committed to inform and to educate, so that there is indeed mutual understanding between the polarities in a diverse society, and even reconciliation. A public service broadcaster is one that serves the public in all its diversity. It serves both as a model of service and as a means of enhancing the common good. I believe that these ideals are consistent with the original Reithian values, which I hope will continue to be one of the hallmarks of a future BBC.

3.11 pm

Lord Maxton: My Lords, I join in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for introducing this debate. I also thank him for his chairmanship of the Communications Committee. I have served under him on the previous and current BBC committees. We always get on but we do not always agree. However, I have always found his chairmanship even-handed, balanced, extremely useful and much better than a previous chairmanship under which I served when I was down the other end.

I never knew that the House authorities had a sense of humour, but they obviously have in having me speak immediately after the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Liverpool, who has just spoken about religion

on the BBC, because everybody knows that I take an almost diametrically opposite point of view from him on that matter. I am fascinated by the view of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Manchester that there is religious broadcasting, and that everything else on the BBC is non-religious and, in a sense, anti-religious. It is a remarkable point of view. I hope he would accept that the rugby international at the national stadium in Wales is a religious broadcast because they all sing "Bread of Heaven" at some point or other. I do not agree with my noble friend Lord Harrison when he says that we ought to have humanists on "Thought for the Day" in the morning. I do not think that we ought to have "Thought for the Day" at all—not that we ought to introduce something else into it, but that we should not have it at all.

I have been a strong supporter of the BBC ever since I entered politics, and certainly since I became a member of the national heritage Select Committee—as it was then—in the other House, which became the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. I have supported it to the extent that when the Select Committee, under the chairmanship of Gerald Kaufman, introduced a report which was highly critical of the BBC, and almost suggested that it ought to be abolished, I wrote, and had published, a minority report. I remain a strong supporter of the BBC. It may be that this is my old-style socialism coming out, but I actually believe in nationalised industries and that they should have rights over those that are not part of the nationalised industries.

The BBC creates high-quality broadcasts and programmes, not just public-service broadcasts or stuff which the cultural elite think is good, but it produces quality. Radio 1 is a high-quality radio station, because it allows high-quality and new pop music to be played in a way that is not necessarily the case with other commercial radio stations that play pop. "EastEnders", the BBC's most popular programme, and "Coronation Street" on the other side, compete for the most viewers, but in terms of production values "EastEnders" wins hands down almost every time.

The BBC is a high-quality producer and should remain so. It has moved into digital broadcasting. I do not watch BBC Three and, therefore, I should not comment on what the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, said about it. However, I watch BBC Four, which produces excellent programmes, not only on jazz music for older people such as me, but across a range of other areas. I should pay tribute to our colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Birt, for the BBC's innovations on the web. When I want to see what is happening in the news, when I sit in front of my computer, I do not turn to Google or anywhere else, I go straight to the BBC website. Although I am down here, I live in Scotland—the SSRB may wish to take note of that. When I want Scottish news, I look at the Scottish BBC website to see what is happening. The noble Lord, Lord Birt, is to be complimented, because he introduced the BBC website.

The BBC continues to be an innovator on the web. I hope that many noble Lords have seen the BBC's recent website innovation Democracy Live, which allows you to watch this House, the House of Commons, the

Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the European Parliament live or on video. That is an important innovation. It may be only for anoraks such as me, and political anoraks in particular, but it is well worth having.

BBC iPlayer has been a great innovation. I have some reservations about it, because I wish we would be allowed a slightly longer period in which to watch programmes, and I hope that the BBC will persuade Virgin Trains to allow us to watch it on the train. You cannot do that at the moment.

What has been done on the BBC website should not be curtailed for commercial reasons by any party which comes into government. There are those who say that Rupert Murdoch transferred his support from this side to that side because he believes cynically that the party opposite will curtail the BBC's websites and allow him to charge for the *Times* and his other newspapers on the web. If that is the case—and I hope that the Conservative spokesman who is to reply will take the opportunity to say that it is not—it would be a most cynical act. We certainly cannot allow that to happen. The BBC should be allowed to continue to develop its websites.

I have two further points. I entirely agree with those who have suggested, because it is a publicly funded body, that freedom of information legislation should cover all aspects of the BBC. We should be able to find out exactly what is going on, not just because the BBC is publicly funded, but because it is an important part of the democratic process in this country. For that reason alone, we ought to open it up. In my view, we should open up the whole media to that scrutiny, because they play an important part in our democratic processes.

I have some reservations about some of the news coverage on the BBC. I absolutely accept that it is not biased in favour of any particular party. However, there are occasions, when, in my view, it is anti-politics and that pervades a large amount of the BBC output. There is almost an element of sneering at politicians and at those who are part of the political process. Even this morning, in a report on Prime Minister's Questions, there was the throwaway line: "All the Labour Back-Benchers cheered at that but they would, wouldn't they, they don't get out very much". That was unnecessary and it was a smear. I hope that the BBC will look at that.

One last, slightly jokey point is that a great advantage with the BBC is that throughout all its coverage, on television, radio and everywhere, there are no adverts. Your listening and watching are not interrupted by adverts. I fully support the BBC. I believe it should continue and it will continue in the longer term as a producer of high-quality programmes for what I constantly call the narrow-casting age and not the broadcasting age.

3.21 pm

Lord Haskel: My Lords, today is the 16th anniversary of my maiden speech in your Lordships' House. During that time, I have spoken on matters about which I have known something and on matters on which I have been briefed—that is certainly not the same thing. I

have also spoken on matters about which I feel very strongly and that is the case today. I know little about the BBC but, like many others in this House and in the country at large, I feel very strongly about its future. I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for giving me this opportunity to say something.

I want to speak up for the BBC because, as the noble Lord, Lord Birt, put it, the BBC sees me as a citizen and not a consumer. I want that to be preserved. Yes, the BBC plays an essential role in maintaining and developing our culture—I mean culture in all its aspects. One of the more obvious aspects is music, which is especially important to me. The BBC commissions music; it has some of our finest orchestras; and it runs the Proms, which is our biggest musical festival. Then there are the drama and comedy programmes and human interest programmes which inform and entertain us. Perhaps less obviously cultural is the news gathering and the news dissemination about which many noble Lords have spoken. What is cultural is the fair, balanced and thorough way in which that is done, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Manchester explained. That culture of public service broadcasting needs to be preserved; it needs to be impartial; and it must not be an arm of the state with political pressures, nor an arm of commerce with commercial pressures, but its pressures should be budgetary and ethical. I want to see that continue in the future.

The BBC helped its case by having Professor Sandel as this year's Reith lecturer. He spoke about the common good and the limits of the mind. He provided the answer to those who would like to commercialise the BBC more and who see the licence fee as distorting the market, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter, described.

We now know that markets may serve us as consumers but they do not necessarily serve us as citizens. To protect us from exploitation as consumers we need the agencies and regulators, like Ofcom, because without that protection we would get bland content for entertainment and selected news and current affairs with incomplete and unbalanced information. That is the limit of markets. Of course, that cannot happen in a vacuum. To serve the public properly, public service broadcasting needs to come from a variety of broadcasters from every region and needs to serve every minority.

I agree with your Lordships' Select Committee that plurality is required here, and that the market will not provide it. Because of the emerging broadcasting platforms and viewing patterns due to digitalisation, it is obvious that the advertising business model is no longer sustainable. Unless the regulatory and market framework is changed, the dominance of the BBC will become so great that it will have a virtual monopoly.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Fowler: monopolies spell danger. The future of public service broadcasting will be secure only if there are alternative providers to the BBC, or if the BBC works with others. That, together with a variety of sources for commissioning and content, will provide the competition to encourage the raising of quality and the incentive for innovation. That is a difficult balancing act, complicated by the current financial crisis and the rapidity of changing technology. Of course, that is one of the purposes of

[LORD HASKEL]

the Digital Economy Bill, which your Lordships debated yesterday. The Bill places a particular duty on Ofcom to ensure that many broadcasters provide public service content. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that when he winds up.

What about the BBC and the new digital technology? Digital technology, like all technology, is a means to an end—an end that opens up new possibilities. It is the artistic content and development that will drive it. That is why the plurality of the licence fee and commercial funding should serve us well. We do not know where the digital age is leading us. We have a good idea of the direction of travel, and alternative viewing patterns and platforms are appearing, but who knows what the destination will be? That makes it especially important to preserve the private and the public sectors in broadcasting. Some of the great technical and innovative advances have been made possible by public involvement and support. I agree with my noble friend Lord Maxton that the online activities of the BBC, a public broadcaster, are leading the way.

As other noble Lords have said, central to this is the independence of the BBC—independence from politicians, financial short-termism and the pressures of a race to the bottom. Mark Thompson is right to seek that all political parties should respect the royal charter, which gives the BBC its independence, the multi-year funding regime and to let the trust conduct responsible and ethical stewardship. Let the trust hold the management of the BBC to account, as the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, put it. I have always thought that one of the great strengths of our arts organisations was that funding is handled by an intermediary, which takes its stewardship responsibilities very seriously. It works far better than when the donor calls the shots.

I say to the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, that responsible stewardship is badly lacking in the private sector. That is something that business could learn from the BBC. A stewardship issue regarding the BBC and most parts of the public and private sector is the pay of senior executives, about which the noble Baronesses, Lady Bonham-Carter and Lady Howe, spoke. I have a slightly different perspective.

A combination of the spectacular earnings of rock stars and footballers, and boards matching the pay of senior executives in an ever-upward spiral means that top executives this year will earn 81 times the average pay of full-time workers. Nine years ago, that figure was 47 times the average wage. This cannot go on. Has anyone noticed a corresponding rise in competence accompanying this spiralling rise in pay? I have not. It will not stand up to public scrutiny. As well as being transparent about salaries, a welcome initiative from the BBC would be to adopt the proposal in the Bill introduced by my noble friend Lord Gavron, which we have debated in your Lordships' House. It states that organisations and companies should state what the ratio between directors and shop floor workers currently is and, perhaps, what it should be in their organisation. That is what is called "serving the common good". If the BBC would adopt it, what a nice way it would be of showing that it listened to its own Reith lecturer.

3.30 pm

Lord McNally: My Lords, I say to the noble Lord, Lord Haskel, what must have been said to him 16 years ago: I hope we will hear much more from you in the future. It is only 14 years since I first addressed the House. At that time I was being mentored on the BBC by Lord Thomson of Monifieth. I remember that in those early debates I had to fight off Lord Orr-Ewing and the noble Lord, Lord Chalfont, who had a group that met regularly and believed that the BBC was a leftist conspiracy which had to be attacked. It is a great pleasure to say that the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, has been a notable exception to that. He is in a tradition of which the Conservative Party can be proud in the initiatives it has taken over 80 years to sustain and provide public service broadcasting in this country.

I also take pride in the success that the noble Lord has made of the Select Committee. As the noble Baroness, Lady Howe, said, it took a little while to persuade the powers that be to have such a committee on communications, but it has been a success under his stewardship. I put down a marker to noble Lords. We must ensure that the committee is reappointed at the beginning of the next Parliament because, as this debate has so clearly illustrated, there will be a big agenda of work for such a committee in the new Parliament.

We have covered a great deal today. On the BBC Trust, I would just say to the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, that I did not see all that much which the governors had got wrong in the previous 80 years to justify having this creature thrust upon us. But whatever comes next, I hope we can have some kind of all-party consensus which gives it some long-term prospects.

This debate is really a continuation of yesterday's debate on digital Britain. There are obviously discussions outside this House between those who see the BBC as key to a successful digital Britain and those who see this as an opportunity to marginalise it and cut it down to size. Indeed, although it is difficult, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Liverpool said, to predict the future, the noble Lord, Lord Mandelson, gave us some clues yesterday. He did not name names but he spoke about media moguls who,

"want to commandeer more space and income for themselves ... because they want to maintain their iron grip on pay-tv ... They also want to erode the commitment to impartiality—in other words, to fill British airwaves with more Fox-style news. They believe that profit alone should drive the gathering and circulation of news".—[*Official Report*, 2/12/09; col. 747.]

The noble Lord did not name names, but I notice that today's media have leapt to the conclusion that he meant Mr Murdoch and son. If he did, it shows the remarkable chutzpah of the noble Lord because, as the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, mentioned yesterday, it was he who dispatched Mr Blair halfway round the world to kiss hands with Mr Murdoch—I think that is what he kissed, anyway—before the 1997 election.

As has been mentioned today, this Government have a sorry record of attempting to bully and intimidate the BBC during their term of office. I ask both sides of the House when they will learn that Mr Murdoch does

not create winners; he follows them. He has ditched Labour because he thinks it will lose, and he has switched to the Conservatives because he thinks that they can deliver. Clearly the Conservatives think that decisions on broadcasting are being made elsewhere, because not many of them are here today to listen to the debate. I make no complaint about Mr Murdoch; I simply want our politicians to defend the public interest with the assiduity with which he defends his shareholders' interests.

The noble Lord, Lord Maxton, speculated on whether there has been some Faustian pact with the Conservative Party on the future of the BBC. Unless such attacks have been spelled out in detail in the Government's manifesto, and unless the matter is thoroughly debated in the general election campaign to come, I hope they will not claim any Salisbury convention to see such attacks on the BBC go through this House, should they by any chance be in government after the next general election. Vague words in an election manifesto do not give them the mandate to dismantle something that, as has been said time and time again, has been an important part of our politics, culture and social cohesion over 80 years.

In that respect, I hope that we can look to the coming debate on the BBC with an eye not to commercial interests outside but to the fact that this Parliament of ours, with the will of the people, has for more than 80 years willingly distorted the market to make the BBC the iron pole of quality and, in the old Reithian terms, to educate, inform and entertain the whole nation. The BBC has delivered that in spades, which is why the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark and the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, emphasised the importance of the charter and the licence fee as key to keeping that commitment going.

The BBC must be careful not to crowd out commercial radio. It is powerful and it could become a monopoly provider, particularly locally and regionally. Indeed, both the noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter, and the noble Lord, Lord Haskell, warned of the danger of the BBC getting into monopoly positions in various sectors or in regions and localities.

I agree with the praise heaped on the World Service by the noble Baroness, Lady Howe, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark and the noble Lord, Lord Bragg. I give only one warning. We are entering a time of austerity. Whenever the budgets of my old friends in the Foreign Office are under attack, they often find it convenient to send the dear old World Service budget to the Treasury as a kind of sacrificial lamb, saying, "You want cuts. Well, here you are", and they take a great hack at the World Service. They have done it before and I warn the House that they will try to do it again.

I am pleased that my noble friend Lady Bonham-Carter and the noble Lords, Lord Maxton and Lord Haskell, all drew attention to online services. What Mr Murdoch is proposing is what I pay for and get through my licence fee: the excellent online services of the BBC. He proposes that that should be stopped so that he can make me pay for his online services at the *Times*. I

get the news service that I want. I do not get it for free; I pay for it through the licence fee and I should be able to continue to do that.

I think that we are in dangerous territory. There is no doubt that powerful forces want to damage the BBC at this time, but one thing that Tessa Jowell said during her period of responsibility was very true: she described the licence fee as venture capital for our creative industries. The contribution on the cultural and creative side is important, as well as what the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, described as the ability to talk to ourselves and to the world with the distinctive voice that the BBC gives us.

The noble Lord, Lord Sheldon, once described the great gifts in Britain of the 20th to 21st centuries as being our impartial Civil Service and the BBC. The BBC is still a great gift that we should all work to protect and cherish. It has its critics and its failures, and some of those criticisms have been made today, but it is something well worth defending. As I have said to both sides of the House, if defending it needs, defend it we will.

3.41 pm

Lord Howard of Rising: My Lords, I join in thanking my noble friend Lord Fowler for introducing this debate.

Two main issues when considering the future of the BBC are content and how far the activities of the BBC should be extended beyond its historical television role. Where content is concerned, is the justification for the BBC and the licence fee—which, when all is said and done, is a tax on watching television—that the BBC will produce higher-quality television and make programmes that might not otherwise be made? If that is the case, it calls into question the reason given by the BBC when accused of going downmarket and producing populist programmes: that these programmes are what the public want.

Of course, there must be programmes that appeal to the public but it is difficult to see the justification in the BBC using taxpayers' money to provide more than a minimal amount of the sort of popular programmes that can be provided by commercial stations at no cost to the taxpayer, especially when there are so many superbly good things that the BBC has done and which it has made its own. When considering what the content should be, it would be hard to improve on the recommendation by the Select Committee on Communications, of which my noble friend Lord Fowler is chairman, which reflects the definition contained in the Communications Act 2003. The committee recommends the provision of,

"core elements including national and regional news, current affairs programmes, the arts, children's programming, programmes dealing with religion and other beliefs and UK content".

The BBC should not use taxpayers' money to compete in the commercial arena against companies which do not have the luxury of large streams of cash, on which no return has to be given to shareholders or interest paid to banks. Purchases such as the *Lonely Planet* only go to show how far the BBC has strayed from its core brief.

[LORD HOWARD OF RISING]

The size and scope of the BBC has come under increasing criticism recently—justifiably so. It would make sense, in the use of taxpayers' money and to avoid abuse of its position and deflect criticism, for the BBC to restrict itself to promoting and reusing its existing television and radio material, including its online news content, in such a way that it does not abuse its privileged position or, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter, put it, trample on others, rather than full-bloodedly trying to create new content for other kinds of media.

The noble Lord, Lord Maxton, asked this side to comment on Rupert Murdoch. My comment is this. It is inconceivable that the noble Lord's proposition is correct. If he seeks a reason for the change of loyalty by the *Sun* newspaper, he has only to look at the sorry state of so many things in this country brought about by the present Government to easily understand why that newspaper should change its allegiance. The noble Lord, Lord McNally, appreciates this.

We on these Benches are against the use of the BBC licence fee to help fund independently financed news consortia, as was touched on yesterday in the debate on the Digital Economy Bill. If it provided the finance, the state would end up being the ultimate provider of news. While I am sure that no Government, even the present one, would abuse this position, it is a dangerous path to go down. In a world where spin has become a way of life, it might be too much of a temptation for some future Government to try to become the piper calling the tune. Also, it would always be a temptation to an organisation seeking funds to slant news content in the direction it thinks the paymaster would like, even if no such indication had been either given or implied.

Lord Haskel: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for giving way. As he is calling the licence fee a tax, could he explain why he does not apply the same principles to the other taxes that we pay, those which are used to fund the police, the Army and to rescue banks?

Lord Howard of Rising: My Lords, those things do not supply our entertainment in the same way as the BBC. Any money which is taken compulsorily from a citizen of this country is a form of taxation, whatever guise it comes under.

In the 19th century there was a debate over whether some of the tithes that went to the Church of England should be distributed to other churches. This was firmly rejected because it would create a monopoly supplier. The same argument applies today just as strongly in the provision of news.

Another argument against top-slicing is that the pursuit of the grant would soon eclipse the pursuit of news. If anyone doubts this, they have only to look at the National Health Service to see how, over the years, the growth of bureaucracy and administration has far exceeded the expansion of patient care. A simpler and better way to assist the independent companies would be to get rid of some or all of the many restrictions under which independent suppliers of public service

television are governed. Most of these restrictions are inappropriate in a digital age. As well as being expensive, they create heavy-handed and onerous regulation. Steps such as getting rid of cross-ownership rules and giving greater freedom for the sale of advertising would be of considerable assistance to the industry, but this needs to be acted on promptly to avoid any necessity for subsidy.

As my right honourable friend David Cameron and my honourable friend Jeremy Hunt in another place have both said, this party supports the principle of the licence fee and the BBC, but agreeing that something is overall a good thing does not necessarily mean full agreement with the way it is executed or with every point of detail. For example, it was disgraceful that this year, at a time when people are being made redundant and there are pay freezes extending even to public sector employees, the BBC should have taken a licence fee increase in excess of the rate of inflation. In the ever-accelerating pace of change in the world of television and media, it may well be that different methods of financing the BBC will evolve. It would certainly be nice to see the end of the bullying and unpleasantness which accompanies demands for the licence fee. Rather than waste your Lordships' time, let me say that as far as the BBC Trust is concerned the words of my noble friend Lord Fowler are worthy of your Lordships' consideration and attention.

I urge the Minister to give the National Audit Office full access to review the BBC. The huge sums of taxpayers' money involved and the disquiet over aspects of remuneration at the BBC make it ever-increasingly difficult to justify the BBC being exempt from the examination to which all other bodies are subject.

3.50 pm

Lord Davies of Oldham: My Lords, I am grateful to all noble Lords who have spoken in the debate. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, on his good fortune in introducing yet another debate on broadcasting when we also have a Bill on related areas before us on which we will spend a great deal of time.

The noble Lord made a somewhat more tendentious opening than he sometimes does as chairman of the Select Committee in his onslaught on the Secretary of State's position. I regard that as a thoughtful contribution to an ongoing debate on a crucial issue. I shall discuss that issue because the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, has long been critical of the BBC Trust model and is concerned that we should address the matter. The issue cropped up in a number of contributions today and is the most significant feature of this debate on the future of the BBC. I shall come back to it in a moment.

I appreciate the noble Lord's indication of his approval of so much of the BBC's work, particularly his tribute to the quality of its news provision; it is unparalleled and is one of the features of the BBC that we hold in the highest regard. That is why, when we discuss the future of the corporation, we have to pay great regard to that crucial role. I was also grateful for the concern he expressed about the opportunities for BBC Worldwide and the way in which it might, with partnership,

extend those opportunities to the benefit of the country. That issue certainly needs to be looked at. There was a Question this morning about the creative industries and there is no doubt that the BBC has a critical role to play. The creative industries are an important part of the British economy and we should look at ways in which resources can be usefully invested in that area.

The noble Baroness, Lady Howe, also stressed her appreciation of the value of the BBC in the nation's life. She particularly emphasised the role that it needs to play in the provision of high-quality children's television. The noble Baroness takes the opportunity on every occasion to stress this crucial point—as she did today—and it is well taken by the BBC. Television plays an important part in the education and development of our children and it is important that we guarantee that high-quality children's television is available, and the BBC's role in that is of considerable importance. She also emphasised the importance of the commercial sector and the role of Channel 4 in public service broadcasting. These issues, inevitably, will be discussed within the framework of the Digital Economy Bill over the next few weeks, when noble Lords will be able to deploy their arguments in greater detail than they are able to do in this short debate today. I am grateful to the noble Baroness for identifying that point.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark made a thoughtful contribution about the issues of religion and faith in broadcasting. He will be aware that this has been a fairly lively issue in this House during the past two weeks or so. The noble Lord, Lord Maxton, identified a controversial dimension to it, which he expressed in his usual trenchant manner. Suffice it to say, I do not think that the BBC Trust's decision regarding "Thought For The Day" a couple of weeks ago did anything other than identify that it foresaw a significant role for religious and faith broadcasting within a certain context and regarded "Thought For The Day" as exclusively for that purpose. It therefore rejected an alternative position which my noble friend Lord Maxton would have advocated. The right reverend Prelate's anxiety can be allayed. Given the multiplicity of views and faiths in our community, the BBC would be neglecting its duties if it did not respond to the points that the right reverend Prelate put forward.

The noble Lord, Lord Bragg, in his short speech expressed more eloquently what might have taken me 10 minutes to say about the role that the BBC has played in our national life throughout its history. If any of us wants to appreciate the significance of the BBC in our national life, a reading of the noble Lord's speech would prove fulfilling. It took away from me the need to defend much of the BBC's role, because it was done so cogently by him. There is no doubt that the BBC is a unique institution which is a world leader and greatly envied elsewhere. That is why this debate is of such great importance, dealing as it does with the future of the corporation.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter, also spoke of the value of the BBC and reflected her concern about the threats to it, to which I shall come in a few moments. An important point to emerge from the debate is that, in an age in which substantial resources are available for pay and commercial television,

and given the changes in the way in which people receive their entertainment and information, the challenge to the public service broadcasting of the BBC is obvious. That was certainly reflected on the noble Baroness's side of the House, particularly in the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord McNally, who said that we should pay attention to the BBC's need to be able to resist challenges from sources which have different values from those which it enshrines.

The noble Baroness mentioned top-slicing the licence fee. She will recognise that what is being suggested for independent news broadcasters are pilot studies for development of a response to what we all recognise is a very serious issue; that is, the loss of support and revenues for independent news programmes and the great danger that the BBC therefore adopts that monopoly position which it aspires to but which would be forced upon it if independent broadcasters and alternative news centres failed. That is why it is right that we address these issues within the framework of the Digital Economy Bill. I hope therefore that the noble Baroness will regard it not as a threat to the licence but as a necessary action by the Government. After all, we are converting resources for the digital switchover towards this wholly beneficial development to sustain independent news consortia. I hope that is regarded as a constructive contribution to the broadcasting position.

The noble Baroness, Lady Deech, also emphasised her respect for the BBC and the role that it plays. I hope that it has listened to the point that she makes about the question of the extent to which mature women can make a contribution to our broadcasting life and viewing perspectives. I know that she has a powerful ally in Joan Bakewell, who has also been campaigning on this issue. There is no doubt that there is an enormous danger that, because television has such a significant role to play, it deals with narrower stereotypes than may be appropriate for a broadcaster, which ought to appear to all sections of the community and represent them in every way that it can.

I was very grateful to my noble friend Lord Haskel for his contribution and his emphasis on how this Bill related to the Digital Economy Bill. He fleshed out the question of pay rather more than the noble Baroness, Lady Bonham-Carter, did in her contribution. I shall turn in a moment to the governance of the BBC, but the trust moved with some strength and alacrity to address the concern about BBC pay levels among senior executives. I hope that the House recognises that the Director-General of the BBC has acted to put these issues more into the public domain and that there is concern about this. The point that my noble friend Lord Haskel introduced goes much wider than the BBC; that the disparity in average pay within any industry and the salary levels of the top managers should concern us all. He asked whether they are actually justified with regard to performance. That goes wider than broadcasting; the banks bring dramatically to mind the issue of whether high-level pay is necessarily a reflection of high-level or indeed any level of performance at the banks. I hope that the House appreciates that the BBC is responding to that. Discussions are going on on the point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Howard, on the National Audit Office and those aspects to which it may properly

[LORD DAVIES OF OLDHAM]

address itself with regard to value for money at the BBC. His point is being addressed by the BBC. I hope that it will be recognised that there are constructive perspectives in those terms.

The noble Lord, Lord McNally, raised a number of interesting questions, as he always does. He was constructive in his comments about the World Service and the concerns about commercial radio. The BBC has the right with its radio services to cater for licence payers in all their plurality. Many of the programmes that it puts on are hugely popular. But it would be wrong for the public sector to adopt a monopoly position on this. I am sure that the BBC is all too well aware of the point that the noble Lord made—but these are issues that we can discuss in more detail in another arena.

The noble Lord, Lord McNally, asked a question at the end, which the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, began to answer at the beginning. The noble Lord, Lord McNally, said that he did not know what was wrong with the existing structure of governance. The noble Lord, Lord Fowler, has always advocated a different perspective on governance with regard to the BBC from the trust. What is more important about the BBC than the trust is the charter, which is a 10-year agreement between government and the BBC that is the essential protection of the BBC's independence from direct government interference. I therefore take it that, when all noble Lords are praising the BBC for its achievements—even if they are not following the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, in all his details—they also recognise the bedrock on which it stands, the charter, and its importance in the construction of a public service broadcaster which is responsible to the nation, paid for by licence holders but independent of government interference.

It was clear from our charter review of the past few years that the public wanted the BBC to remain the cornerstone of public service broadcasting. They also wanted the BBC to be independent: separate from government and direct parliamentary interference. The charter is undoubtedly the best way to achieve both these aims. It gives the BBC the independence which it requires. That is why, even though we must expect the BBC to be able to show flexibility in a period of rapid change both in broadcast technology and in the audience's demands upon it, it is important that it has the independence and security to plan its responses to the challenges that lie ahead.

Granting a charter of fixed duration provides the opportunity for a fundamental, root-and-branch review of the BBC's future role and purpose at the end of each charter period. It is somewhat premature for noble Lords to be definitive in saying that the trust model has failed when we are only two or three years into its operation. As I have indicated, the BBC has responded to several areas of acute concern over the past couple of years. As the noble Lord, Lord McNally, acknowledged, I do not detect a deterioration of the BBC's performance, responsibility or the general regard in which it is held resulting from its new structure.

Lord Fowler: It is not just noble Lords here who have reservations and opposition to the trust. Surely the most significant thing is that the Secretary of State

himself has said that this is not a sustainable model. That is the point that the Minister must answer.

Lord Davies of Oldham: I was coming to that, my Lords. The Secretary of State has identified aspects of the BBC that he thinks should be looked at in the charter review. He is not advocating significant and important change at this point. He is indicating to the BBC that he has reservations about the present structure which he fully appreciates are about the future of the BBC.

The noble Lord, Lord Fowler, indicates that there are considered solutions to these issues. He certainly has a perspective, but he will also know that a range of possibilities for BBC governance were put before the review. The question of how one regulates the BBC has produced a range of different propositions. All the Secretary of State is doing at this stage is indicating to the BBC that the trust has to look to its laurels with regard to the way that it governs the BBC. Its performance will be under scrutiny, particularly in these times of straitened circumstances in general finances. There is no doubt, though, from the charter review that we carried out, that the trust model was the one that was advocated and became the one that should be chosen. We should give it time to see how it performs. The Secretary of State is indicating areas in which he thinks the trust should pursue areas of reform, and I have indicated one. The trust has been concerned about the extent to which the BBC, in certain of its financial activities and its use of public moneys—the licence fee, of course, is a public money—should recognise that the National Audit Office has a role to play with regard to that matter.

I am defending the BBC Trust against a background where it is showing its recognition of, and willingness to deal with, the challenges to the BBC that are thrown up from time to time, which are inevitable in the role that the BBC plays in broadcasting. Within that framework, the Secretary of State is playing his part in ensuring that the trust is up to the mark.

We have had an interesting debate about the future of the BBC, which is destined—in fact, the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, has almost ensured this through his committee—to be at least an annual part of the deliberations in the Chamber. In addition, we have the advantage at the moment of the Bill that my noble friend Lord Mandelson introduced yesterday on the digital economy, which inevitably impacts on significant areas in which the BBC has a real interest and on the BBC itself. I have no doubt that many of the issues that have been raised today will be considered in fuller detail in those debates too. On that basis, I hope that the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, will feel that he has given the issue a considerable, important and effective airing today against a background whereon it has been clear that, on nearly every side of the Chamber, support in the House for the BBC is very strong.

4.12 pm

Lord Fowler: My Lords, the Minister has done his best to defend the indefensible in the form of the Government's arrangements. I admired the ingenuity of his argument, but we will come to that some other time.

This has been an extremely good debate, and I thank everyone who has taken part in it. I thank the Front-Benchers, the noble Lord, Lord McNally, and my noble friend. I thank the right reverend Prelates the Bishop of Southwark and the Bishop of Liverpool, who both touched on religious broadcasting and “Thought for the Day”. I always thought that the greatest achievement of my Select Committee on the charter was to get the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Manchester and the noble Lord, Lord Maxton, to agree upon a final wording on that issue, and I have no intention whatever of reopening it with the Select Committee.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, who made an outstanding speech with which I agreed entirely. I thank my colleagues on the Select Committee, the noble Baronesses, Lady Howe and Lady Bonham-Carter, and the noble Lord, Lord Maxton. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Haskel, on the 16th anniversary of his maiden speech.

I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, who made a very thoughtful speech. I do not agree with her or the Minister about the charter. It is a straightforward deal between the Government and the BBC; it is totally undemocratic, and it is simply not as it has been described, particularly by the Minister. I have much more sympathy with what the noble Baroness said about the governance of the BBC, about complaints and, above all, about ageism in the BBC organisation.

This has been an exceptional debate, with some extremely good contributions from all around the Back Benches.

Motion agreed.

Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills Order 2009

Motion to Take Note

4.14 pm

Moved By Lord Hunt of Wirral

That this House takes note of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills Order 2009 (SI 2009/2748).

Relevant Document: 29th Report, Session 2008–09, from the Merits Committee.

Lord Hunt of Wirral: My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the Register. I have tabled this Take Note Motion in order that we should enjoy an opportunity to debate what the Merits Committee quite rightly identified as an issue of public policy that is likely to be of interest to your Lordships’ House. I am speaking, of course, of the merger of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform on 5 June this year.

The delayed date of the laying of this order, to accommodate the lack of Privy Council meetings in August and September, has given us an opportunity to assess the impact that the Department for Business,

Innovation and Skills has had. So much was promised by the First Secretary of State in June that it is surely right that we should hold him to account for his delivery—or, as I will contend, his non-delivery—of those promises.

On 9 June, the Secretary of State assured this House:

“We have a new phoenix in this department, which will be able, I hope, to extend its reach to outer space and beyond”.—[*Official Report, 9/06/09; col. 530.*]

The First Secretary of State is nothing if he is not, as I suppose, ambitious. We have spoken before of his responsibility for outer space. I am not sure whether he realises that he also has responsibility for that hardy perennial issue, British Summer Time, so he is not only master of all he surveys but a Time Lord. He has underlined that point by enjoying several much publicised reincarnations and by taking us back in time, specifically, I would say, to the 1970s. This vast new department, headed by someone who cannot be held to account by elected Members in another place, is a ghastly throwback to the age of corporatism. Many of us had hoped and believed that that era had been consigned to the dustbin of history by the endeavours of my noble friend Lady Thatcher. It seems not; the Labour Party forgets nothing and learns nothing. Despite the supposed best endeavours of the First Secretary of State, Labour never fundamentally changes or modernises its view of the world.

The Secretary of State’s new department boasts 2,900 staff members and a budget of £22,000 million for this year. The reorganisation of departments confirmed that the £9 million spent on consultants and IT during the establishment of DIUS, only two years before, was completely wasted—and that does not even include the cost of establishing DBIS. I suppose that we have become accustomed in recent times to talking about billions, particularly when looking at government waste and profligacy, but even £9 million used to be thought rather a large sum of money when spent by the Government on futile gestures. I hope that one day it will be thought so again. A major reorganisation, so quickly reversed, is surely a candidate for being considered futile, even if it is not perhaps as egregious as the short-lived renaming of DBERR as DPEI in 2005.

Fundamentally, the matter in hand today is accountability. Can so vast a department really be held to account effectively when its only Cabinet Minister is here and not in another place? The First Secretary of State has intimated that he might be willing to go to another place to answer questions from colleagues there, but that totally misses the point. This country needs enterprise to deliver recovery; this is therefore a critically important department. It should be fully represented at Cabinet level in another place, where the elected representatives of this country are to be found.

We come to what the Secretary of State has achieved from his little list of promises. DBIS has certainly not helped our economy to come through this recession more strongly. On the latest published figures, the UK is not out of recession yet, unlike so many other developed countries in Europe and further afield. Indeed, it was marked as worst placed in the world’s

[LORD HUNT OF WIRRAL]

major economies by the OECD last year. Sadly, there are now 51 companies going bust every day and there are record levels of individual insolvency. We are also suffering from the lowest level of business investment since records began. To which planet, in which part of his outer empire, has the Secretary of State withdrawn if he genuinely believes that, as a result of his efforts, we have a strong and competitive economy?

The many loan schemes and guarantees that DBIS has rolled out to support small businesses, provide credit and encourage growth have clearly failed to make a meaningful impact. The only two policies that have had any measure of success were ideas taken from the Conservative Party. The enterprise finance guarantee is a pale shadow of that much larger national loan guarantee scheme that we would have implemented. The Business Payment Support Service, which allows the deferral of certain taxes, is a copy of our VAT deferral scheme.

On the innovation and skills areas of the new department, it is apparent that DBIS is doing no better. The recent near-collapse of the Government's system of student finance has gravely damaged universities, which have been forced to spend thousands of pounds on helping to tide over their students, many of whom are at the beginning of their first year. Struggling to pay your rent and food bills is hardly the most auspicious start to an academic career. The unique DBIS brand of so-called help has unfortunately been extended to other, non-university, learners as well. The Government have talked the talk of increasing investment in training, skills and apprenticeships but behind the scenes it is clear that this spin bears no relation to the facts.

We are now told that the Government are cutting £340 million from that budget as efficiency savings. It is true that waste is prevalent throughout Whitehall, but only £100 million of that far larger figure is apparently to be saved on administration and quangos. Around £250 million is to be drained directly from front-line services, such as apprenticeships and career development loans. It is estimated that this will lead to 335,000 fewer loans. How is this helping UK students to gain the skills and training that they so desperately need? How will it help to reverse the growing tide of youth unemployment? How does this embody the vaunted so-called investment, of which the Prime Minister so often aggressively speaks in another place? This may be only an interim report on DBIS itself, but we now have to consider almost 13 wasted years of this Labour Government, who have taken us from a golden economic inheritance in 1997 to a shambles now.

The recent appointment of the so-called sorcerer's apprentice, the noble Lord, Lord Sugar, as an adviser to speak with the full authority of the Government, will supposedly revitalise the Secretary of State and his department. I have already alluded to the First Secretary of State's penchant for the arrogation of powers and the accretion of titles. He is the Lord Pooh-Bah of our day. Live on the BBC this morning I heard the Secretary of State say on the "Today" programme, "Who is Pooh-Bah?". I will tell him who

Pooh-Bah is, with a strangely apposite refrain from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Mikado", from Lord Pooh-Bah himself. He said:

"It is ... my degrading duty to serve this upstart as First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chief Justice, Commander-in-Chief, Lord High Admiral, Master of the Buckhounds, Groom of the Back Stairs, Archbishop of Titipu, and Lord Mayor, both acting and elect, all rolled into one. And at a salary! A Pooh-Bah paid for his services! I a salaried minion! But I do it! It revolts me, but I do it".

When it really counts, can this Lord High Everything Else before us really deliver when it matters? I would say that the answer is plainly no. The failure of the First Secretary of State to secure the safe passage of the Postal Services Bill in the previous Session shows how all the titles in the world cannot deliver success if an unreconstructed Labour Party and an unreconstructed, weak and cornered Prime Minister obstruct the path of progress. The First Secretary of State repeatedly and emphatically told us that that Bill was essential for securing the future of the Royal Mail and essential for UK business generally. Sadly, it soon became the flagship that sank without trace. We heard yesterday that even the Secretary of State's modest plans to expand the financial services provided by the Post Office are to be delayed until after the election.

Two weeks ago, when we were debating the Loyal Address, the Secretary of State's noble friend Lord Myners expressed eagerness to hear more about Conservative policies. I sympathise entirely; I would much prefer to focus on what a newly elected Conservative Government would do than dwell on the abundant failings of this one. It is important to end on a positive note and to talk about some of the changes that we would make if we were able to bring the enormous resources of DBIS to bear on the problems that this Government have caused.

We will introduce our national loan guarantee scheme to help to get credit flowing again and allow small businesses to defer their VAT bills for up to six months. We will help small companies with their cash flow by cutting national insurance and corporation tax. We will encourage job creation through tax breaks for start-ups and companies that hire long-term unemployed people. Instead of cutting the number of apprenticeships available, we will fund 100,000 new apprenticeships every year and make sure that they are credible, rigorous and relevant. We will introduce a £60 million business skills development fund to promote non-apprenticeship skills that businesses need and employees want.

We will simplify research and development tax credits, targeting them more effectively at the small companies and start-ups that will drive the innovation and product development that our economy so badly needs. Instead of seeking to micromanage businesses, we will make substantial, transparent cuts to red tape and bureaucracy and make the institutional changes necessary to stop further regulatory creep. We will introduce the regulatory budgets that this Government have never properly delivered. I cannot emphasise enough how damaging this Government's addiction to regulation has been to the UK economy—it costs us between 10 and 12 per cent of GDP—and how frustrating it has been for us to listen again and again to meaningless speeches from government Ministers about the importance of

deregulation while they pass order after order after order. It is no accident that the words “regulatory reform” have been deleted from the title of this department.

That is not a full list of the improvements that a Conservative Government would bring. It does, however, amount to much more than DBIS is able to deliver under this Labour Government. I hope that this debate will go some way towards shaking the Secretary of State out of his complacency about how little he and his policies have benefited workers and businesses over the past six months. My message is: let us see an end to the empire building and a beginning to some serious enterprise building. I beg to move.

4.30 pm

Baroness Garden of Frognal: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, for introducing this Motion and giving us the opportunity to hear from the Secretary of State about this statutory instrument and the creation of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. We also welcome the Secretary of State back from Rotherham. He has had a long day.

Among underlying technical issues, we note how little say Parliament has over changes made to the structure of government. In 2007 the House of Commons Public Administration Committee noted that changes to the machinery of government are a royal prerogative, which the Government are very unlikely to want to give up. The report went on to note:

“There needs to be a mechanism to ensure that changes are fully considered before implementation, and that the reasoning behind them stands up to scrutiny”.

The Government argue that they must be able to act quickly to respond to urgent needs, but while speed may be important, as the committee noted, speed and parliamentary scrutiny are not incompatible. It stated, “if government has a sensible and defensible rationale for changes then it should have no reason to be wary of debate”.

Can the noble Lord shed some light on the process by which the changes were decided and on the levels of consultation which took place with stakeholders?

There are also many administrative issues to consider. The reorganisation of departments is a costly business, as the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, explained. In 2007, DBERR and DIUS were set up as new departments. DIUS alone was reckoned to have cost £9 million to set up. In two short years, both departments have been found so defective that they have been scrapped. Has anyone been held accountable for such a costly exercise? What lessons have been learnt and passed on from this change to the machinery of government, both good and bad, for future changes to take into account?

Can the Secretary of State say how much DBIS cost to set up, where the money was found at a time when public spending is so stretched, and how the cost has been evaluated? There will be direct costs, such as signposts, graphic designs, stationery, websites, and so on, but reorganisations also carry less obvious costs—confusion both internal and external, establishing who is responsible for what, where queries should be directed, and uncertainties which lead to loss of efficiency. There is a danger that expertise will be lost in a reorganisation. It takes a considerable time for a knowledge base to be built up. What steps have been

taken within the department to ensure continuity in key areas? What impact has the merger had on the morale of staff in the department, and what methods have been employed to gain feedback from staff about the merger?

Given the emphasis that the Government place on education, it seems that it has been poorly served in these changes. We wonder what arrangements have been made over the working relationship with DCSF, particularly regarding shared policies and programmes which span the two departments.

Science, too, seems to have been passed around departments. It has been proved beneficial to have responsibility for science and universities within the same department. Science spending and policy is central to this country’s future. We hope that within this wide-ranging department, neither universities nor science is neglected. In passing, we regret that the concept of “Universities” has disappeared from a departmental title, along with “Education”.

In the transfer, what has happened to the work which DIUS was undertaking to improve its efficiency, following criticism of its structure? What evaluations have the Government undertaken of the value of the creation of DBIS?

The Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee reported on the DIUS departmental report in December 2008, and judged it to be,

“by most standards a poor read ... written in an impenetrable style and peppered with jargon”.

It also contained,

“unsupported assumptions and claims designed to promote DIUS”. My honourable friend in another place, Phil Willis, the committee’s chairman, said:

“We were less than satisfied with the DIUS report”—which is an understatement—

“which we found unhelpful and too reliant on promoting a positive tone rather than providing us with clear and comprehensive information. While we appreciate that it will take some time for DIUS’s work to be realised, this must not be used as an excuse to produce a sub-standard report. A more concise report written in plain English with independently verified statistics would be of far greater use next year”.

That may be of greater use, but not as useful as preserving the department’s life.

Can we be assured that DBIS reports will be clearer and more helpful? DIUS was to make £1.5 billion efficiency savings by 2010-11. How will these be carried over to DBIS? How have they been re-evaluated in the bigger department? In answer to a question in June, the Secretary of State referred to the commitment of DBIS and said:

“We will provide help to businesses, universities and colleges, and to UK workers and students through training, skills, lifelong learning, first-class science and technology, further education and research policies”.—[*Official Report*, 9/6/09; col. 528.]

We wonder why that was not already being done through existing departments and whether finite resources would not have been used more profitably in supporting these aims, rather than in the disbandment and creation of government departments. We recognise that DBIS is now with us, for how long who can say. I hope the noble Lord may offer reassurances and clarify the thought, analysis and wisdom which influenced the changes. I look forward to his reply.

The First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and Lord President of the Council (Lord Mandelson): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Wirral, on securing the debate. I also congratulate myself on being here three days in a row. I do not think that shows any lack of accountability to Parliament. Of course, it is a great pleasure to be at the Dispatch Box.

I listened very carefully to what the noble Lord said. His remarks do not quite tally with what my shadow, Ken Clarke, has been saying recently. He has praised the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills for developing workable policies which he says he would try to match if elected. True, he damned the rest of the Government with faint praise, as he cheered my department to the echo. Perhaps they need to speak to each other and try to tie up what the Opposition's views are. Having followed the noble Lord very carefully, I am none the clearer about whether he supports the merger of the two departments and the creation of DBIS and I do not know whether the Conservatives would reverse the situation if they were in power. I do not know which one of our growth measures they would take an axe to. I am not even sure he knows the answer.

None the less, it is good to have this opportunity to set out again the purpose of the new department and, more importantly, its progress. I am glad to say and to confirm at the outset that the merging of the two departments was remarkably inexpensive. It surprised me that it was the modern equivalent of two and sixpence. I would not draw any satisfaction from bandying around charges that this has cost taxpayers an excessive amount of money.

I start with the challenge which goes to the very heart of why the Prime Minister created this new department. We must recognise that we need to prepare this country for something more than just a cyclical economic recovery because the changes in the global economy are structural and they are not going away. They present dangers and opportunities for us in Britain. The pace and intensity of global competition will increase, not slacken. In due course, we will be challenged, even in the areas such as advanced manufacturing, financial services and the creative industries, which we rightly think of as our greatest strengths. Innovation, above all, will need to be the lifeblood of the British economy as we take on these challenges. Without that, there will be fewer new jobs and no rising standard of living. Whatever some on the Opposition Benches believe—or, at least, say—there will be no balanced budget without the economic growth that we now need to organise and commit ourselves to.

Economic growth is the biggest antidote to debt, which is why we should emphatically reject the Conservative policies of sweeping retrenchment that would simply derail the current recovery that is under way. That does not mean that all growth is the same. The growth that we need must be resilient, durable and widely shared—diversified both across the sectors of the economy and the regions of the country. It must be environmentally sustainable, it must be built on something more than turning a quick profit, because that is not the basis of a national business model. However important

are the services that we supply in our economy and the invisibles we trade in, a huge part of our self-identity and creativity rests, and should rest, in what we make: the goods that our product and component manufacturers make. I am glad that a commitment to invest in and cultivate our modern manufacturing capabilities in Britain is becoming the hallmark of my department.

In Britain, we pay high wages and we believe in quality public services. These things are not, in my view, negotiable, but both of them depend on our ability to pay our way in a global economy. In a global supply-chain economy, Britain cannot and should not ever aspire to be a country that competes by undercutting on wage costs or employment standards. We must compete by adding value, not reducing it.

That puts a premium on what we do in knowledge, specialisation and sophisticated skills. It puts a premium on making this country one of the world's great repositories of scientific and technical knowledge and the ability to commercialise that knowledge. It puts a premium on thinking about the interests of business—not just the businesses that already exist, but those that do not yet, but are out there in every entrepreneur's head. The question is: how do we help to create those future businesses?

We need to view industrial competitiveness not just as the end result of the discipline of the market but as the result of the right combination of private initiative and dynamism and public investment. Of course, private enterprise will always be the engine of the economy. We must encourage it, nurture it and reward it, but, at the same time, we need to recognise that our comparative advantages in this country are built on a complex network of essential capabilities, such as sophisticated skills, access to growth finance on the right terms, modern infrastructure and a strong science and research base. That is where government enters the picture, and where my department, in particular, finds its role.

Unfortunately, the backdrop of industrial policy in the 1970s and the anti-manufacturing prejudices of the 1980s have not served us well. That is why I tried to turn the argument around in the government policy framework, *New Industry, New Jobs*, this year. That is the policy challenge that BIS reflects—a modern industrial policy fit for the 21st century—and the agenda that it has driven forward effectively this year. Our remit is simple: to maintain the UK's position as a dynamic, open-knowledge economy. I do not know whether the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, who introduced the debate, wants to hear my response to his very interesting remarks, but if he wants me to pause for a moment while I regain his attention, I will of course be happy to do so.

4.45 pm

We have to use the influence of government to drive innovation and competitiveness and invest in the capabilities and resources that our people, businesses and society need in order to prosper in a global economy and drive this agenda in Europe, our biggest market, with an amplifier for our economic policy around the world. The logic for bringing the parts of government that do this work into a single team is compelling. Why should it be distributed or fractured among a number of different departments? Why not bring it together under one roof?

As a way of making what I am trying to describe a little more concrete, I shall refer to my visit to Rotherham this morning and describe our policies in action. I think that will assist your Lordships' understanding of what the department is doing. Rotherham is one of the UK's great manufacturing cities, along with Sheffield. Over the past 30 years, we have seen them reinvent themselves from metal-bashers to modern manufacturers. Fifteen years ago, too much of the talk in Sheffield was about what had been lost. These days it is increasingly about what is being built and renewed: new jobs, new industries and new ties to the global and European economies. Now, Sheffield has the potential to be a hub for the UK's civil nuclear supply chain.

However, that will require a number of things to happen. First, it requires a clear commitment from government to nuclear in Britain's energy mix so that private investors can move forward with confidence. With our planning statements for nuclear new build and clear strategies from the utility companies, they now have that confidence to invest to move forward. More than 300 companies have registered in the past nine months to be certified suppliers to EDF, Westinghouse and Areva. We are building up quite a supply chain to support and supply this nascent industry, for which we are seeing some renaissance.

This activity will need major private investors and the depth of experience to handle nuclear technologies. That is why the Government agreed to partner Rolls-Royce with £45 million of government investment in a range of advanced manufacturing plants, including a civil nuclear factory proposed for the South Yorkshire region. It will need a strong network of research strengths behind it, the strengths we committed to protecting and leveraging in my department's new higher education framework, which is why, this morning, I announced that we will support the universities of Sheffield and Manchester in leading a new nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre in partnership with industry. I was pleased to visit it and speak there during my visit earlier today. It will need a growing pool of British technicians and scientists with the skills to handle civil nuclear technology. That is why we have created a nuclear skills academy and why we have just invested £8 million to upgrade the training facilities at the Dalton Cumbria facility. That is also why the ambition of my department's new skills strategy last month was the creation of a new class of modern technicians in Britain through a big expansion of advanced apprenticeship numbers. Many of them will, for the first time, be able to move from apprenticeships to universities, where they will be able to train to the highest level in handling these new technologies. The point is that unless we understand the multiple capabilities and interconnected policies that produce these industrial outcomes, we will simply fail to achieve them. The levers here are university and science policy, business and innovation support, skills policy and strategic investment. BIS puts those levers in one place, under one roof, for the first time.

The Earl of Onslow: My Lords, I am immensely moved by the noble Lord's love of all things nuclear, but I would be rather more moved by it had the Government not dilly-dallied for about 10 years before

making up their mind and not sold off some of our great nuclear engineering capabilities. How does he square that with what he is saying now?

Lord Mandelson: My Lords, the noble Earl should not take what I am saying simply as a love for all things nuclear, although I am very committed to the renaissance of civil nuclear capacity in this country both for manufacturing reasons and for purposes of energy security. Frankly, if the noble Earl is asking me a direct question, I will give him a direct answer. I am not sure that all the decisions that have been taken in the past 10 years on civil nuclear energy were the right ones or the most timely ones to have been taken. There are a whole number of other areas, such as the industrial and manufacturing sectors and policies, in which a little more forethought and activism of the sort that I am trying to create through this new department would have been well used if we had seen more of them not just in the past 10 years but in the past 20 and 30 years. The mistakes in industrial policy did not begin with this Government; they are, I am afraid, very much more long-standing than that.

I see from the noble Lord's response that illustration is clearly the best means of argument, so let me give another example of what our policies mean in action. Earlier this year, Richard Lambert of the CBI said:

"The UK has the capacity to be a serious player in the manufacture of electric vehicles. What's needed is for the industry to produce a credible road map identifying strengths and weaknesses—and for judicious public funding to support the necessary technology. That's industrial activism".

He got it in one. We now have that road map, which is one of a number of sectoral strategies that we have produced this year.

The UK now has the world's biggest demonstrator project of its type for low-carbon vehicles. I underline that we have it because my department took the decision and the Government have chosen to fund it. It also has a low-carbon economic area in the north-east of England which leverages low-carbon automotive strengths in the same way as we are doing in Sheffield for nuclear. We are also investing in charging infrastructure and consumer subsidies for the first generation of low-carbon cars. Where have Toyota and Nissan chosen to base their low-carbon operations in Europe? In Britain, and they have done so as a result of our actions over the past year.

Britain also now has a new range of demonstrator and product development facilities for innovative small companies in key technologies such as industrial biotechnology, wind power, wave power and plastic electronics, because my department chose to fund them through the £750 million strategic investment fund that was created in the Budget earlier this year. We have a new Office for Life Sciences, which is giving the same kind of strategic direction in biosciences and the medicines industry. Jeff Kindler, the chief executive officer of Pfizer, has described the Office for Life Sciences as unique, forward-thinking and an effective model of government that works with industry and the health system, and he has recommended the model to the US Government.

[LORD MANDELSON]

My intention is that BIS will remain absolutely at the front line of public policy for protecting our enterprise environment, as the noble Lord rightly emphasised: getting our productive base through this recession intact, investing in the strategic capabilities that we will need for the future, and putting into place the economic conditions and industrial capabilities that we need for the future economic success of this country.

For the present, we remain on a crisis footing as regards business support. Since the global crisis began, more than 95,000 businesses have benefited from a free Business Link health check; some 6,850 businesses have been offered loans totalling £692 million through our enterprise finance guarantee scheme; and more than 150,000 businesses have been able to defer their tax payments by courtesy of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in order to help their cash flow during this last year of economic and financial crisis. Targeted measures, such as our car scrappage scheme and Train to Gain, which are both BIS initiatives—I assume that they have the support of the noble Lord, Lord Hunt—have helped to sustain demand and retain essential skills across British supply chains.

Our new strategies for adult skills and higher education represent a cast-iron commitment by us to our world-class university system and a new focus on ensuring that Britain has both the generic skills and the specialist STEM graduates and technicians that our modern economy requires. We are creating the new UK Innovation Investment Fund to create a new public/private source of investment in innovative companies, and we will build on this in our response to the Rowlands review on growth capital for SMEs. I am convinced that long-term finance for industrial investment in this country is not a cyclical problem but a structural one, and we are now responding to that market failure. We have put a lot of time and effort into creative and innovative finance in our banking sector; perhaps now we need a bit more focus on financing creativity and innovation in the rest of the economy.

We will also be producing our new tasking framework for regional and local government investment in economic growth, which will further strengthen the role of the regional development agencies in managing national investment and growth strategies across their regions. The RDAs have played a vital role over the past decade, training almost half a million people, securing or creating 200,000 jobs in our regions, and turning every pound that they have invested into £4-worth of economic growth. If noble Lords do not mind my saying so, I think it is characteristic of the tin ear that the current Conservative leadership has for the country's growth needs that it has committed to scrapping the regional agencies, despite warnings from business that this will be a very reckless thing to do.

I conclude by saying with complete conviction that BIS is a department created in the public interest and it is delivering for the public's economic, industrial and employment future. The immediate costs of setting up BIS have, as I indicated at the outset, been very limited—around £160,000 on changes to signage and offices. That is just 0.05 per cent of our total annual

budget. We are also already delivering savings and greater efficiencies as a result of the merger.

With a great sense of pride and some satisfaction, I pay tribute to the hard work and professionalism of the BIS staff and their partner agencies, without whom the achievements of the past six months would have been simply impossible. They came to this new department with extraordinary enthusiasm and commitment to the work that they do. We have made painstaking attempts from the very outset, led by an excellent Permanent Secretary, Simon Fraser, to consult staff not just as a one-off exercise but on a continuing basis. We take very seriously what our staff say.

I hope that my wider public interest argument today is clear. Britain's business environment and industrial base are not things that we can leave to chance. The base is strong, but we ignore its future needs at our peril. It needs to be stronger, smarter and more sophisticated. The department's core remit is to ensure that Government investment in these capabilities ultimately pays for itself in new growth, new strengths and new opportunities in our economy. I believe that BIS is now uniquely equipped to do that, and I believe that it should command respect and support from all parts of your Lordships' House.

5 pm

Lord Hunt of Wirral: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Garden of Frognal, for her contribution to the debate, and I share in her frustration that on many of the clear questions she posed to the noble Lord the First Secretary of State, we still await an answer. To dismiss in particular one of her questions—that on what has been the real cost of setting up the department—by confining it to the cost of signage, misses the point. Just as we eventually got the figure of £9 million out of the wasted cost of setting up the previous exercise, we await with great interest to learn what is the real cost of this one.

I would say this to the First Secretary of State: I join him in his tribute to the skill and experience of his staff in the new department. It is not their fault that the Government keep chopping and changing departments. As my right honourable friend Kenneth Clarke and I and our team have said on several occasions, we pay tribute to the experience and skill of the staff. It was good to hear the First Secretary of State identify his support for his staff as well. That gives me an opportunity to stress that my criticism is of the First Secretary of State and his ministerial team, along with his predecessors in this Labour Government. In many ways, skilled and experienced civil servants look to Ministers for decisions. Sadly, out of this Government we have probably had more reviews than most West End musicals because things are reviewed time after time. My noble friend Lord Onslow pointed out that we have been waiting for a decision on nuclear energy for as long as I can recall, indeed since this Government first came into office. For the First Secretary of State to dismiss it and say that they have not wasted any time at all puts a new definition on time which, I suppose—as I pay tribute to him as perhaps the first time lord on modern earth—makes him right to seize this opportunity.

There are key questions he has not answered, and perhaps he might write to the noble Baroness and I—not communicate by mobile telephone but in a letter that he might also place in the Library. And could he possibly, at last, answer this question: what on earth has happened to the Postal Services Bill? I have asked him about it on many occasions and I am still awaiting his answer. Why was it not in the gracious Speech, why does he not bring it forward now, or is he still being blocked by his ministerial colleagues? Does he not owe it to this House, which spent so much time and energy on improving the Bill? Indeed, he paid tribute to this Chamber for having improved the Bill dramatically. The noble Lord first nods his head and now shakes it, which is an indication of the ambivalence of this Government and their inability to make decisions.

I should also say that he has not responded to my questions about £340 million-worth of cuts, which the noble Baroness, Lady Sharp, and now the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, and I along with several other noble Lords have asked about. Where are these £340 million-worth of cuts going to bite? For example, how is the First Secretary of State going to deal with the important knowledge-based economy? He has failed to touch on all the questions asked about the falling numbers in university places, for example.

In many ways, this is a timely debate because we are trying to work out what benefit the reorganisation of departments has brought. The Explanatory Memorandum is explicit. Under the heading “Impact”, it states:

“The impact on business ... is foreseen to be nil ... The impact on the public sector is likely to be negligible”.

This debate is about the purpose of the reorganisation. We are still asking all the questions. We will continue to ask all the questions, including the one that I know the First Secretary of State feels strongly about, because we shared the frustration of young people when we were involved in the administration of the British Youth Council together in the 1970s: how is this going to help to reverse the growing tide of youth unemployment? That is one of the biggest questions of all, but it still lies unanswered. In the mean time, I beg leave to withdraw the Motion.

Motion withdrawn.

European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Stabilisation and Association Agreement) (Republic of Montenegro) Order 2009

Motion to Approve

5.06 pm

Moved By Lord Faulkner of Worcester

That the draft Order laid before the House on 21 October be approved. *23rd Report, Session 2008–09,*

from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, considered in Grand Committee on 2 December.

Motion agreed.

Census (England and Wales) Order 2009

Motion to Approve

Moved By Lord Faulkner of Worcester

That the draft Order laid before the House on 21 October be approved. *23rd Report, Session 2008–09, from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and 29th Report, Session 2008–09, from the Merits Committee, considered in Grand Committee on 2 December.*

Motion agreed.

Bournemouth Borough Council Bill [HL]

Manchester City Council Bill [HL]

Message from the Commons

A message was brought from the Commons that they have made the following Order: That the promoters of the Manchester City Council Bill [HL] and Bournemouth Borough Council Bill [HL], which were originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2006–07 on 22 January 2007, may have leave to proceed with the Bills in the current session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).

Canterbury City Council Bill

Nottingham City Council Bill

Message from the Commons

A message was brought from the Commons that they have made the following Order to which they desire the concurrence of this House: That the promoters of the Canterbury City Council Bill and Nottingham City Council Bill, which were originally introduced in this House in Session 2007–08 on 22 January 2008, may have leave to proceed with the Bills in the current session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).

House adjourned at 5.07 pm.

Written Statements

Thursday 3 December 2009

EU: Energy Council

Statement

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath): In advance of the forthcoming Energy Council in Brussels on 7 December, I am writing to you to outline the agenda items which will be discussed. I will represent the UK.

The first item on the agenda is an update on the energy efficiency package (made up of a Directive on the energy performance of buildings; a Directive on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by energy related products; and a Directive on the labelling of tyres with respect to fuel efficiency). We expect the Presidency to provide information on progress. The UK supports the ambition of the individual elements of the Energy Efficiency package and is happy with the progress made so far.

The Commission will then report on progress on the proposal for a Regulation on the security of gas supply. The progress report will be followed by a policy debate, which will be centred around questions provided by the Presidency. Whilst many Member States are likely to broadly welcome the intention of the draft legislation, which is designed to improve the ability of the EU to withstand a gas security of supply emergency, the UK and others have serious concerns over the extension and open-ended nature of powers that the legislation envisages for the Commission. This is in relation to both national emergency planning and in dealing with an EU emergency.

The Commission will also provide information on the state of play on the Economic Recovery Package for Energy; this may be followed by an exchange of views by Ministers. The UK is pleased to see that the Commission is pressing ahead with implementation of the Economic Recovery Package, which we consider a means of stimulating jobs and growth in the short term, improving energy security and laying the foundations for a low-carbon future.

The Commission will report on progress on the Proposal for a Council Regulation on the notification of investment projects in energy infrastructure within the European Community, followed by a discussion. Other Member States are likely to share the UK's concern that any additional reporting burden on governments and industry is fully justified.

This will be followed by a presentation from the Commission and an exchange of views on the Commission's recent Communication on investing in the development of low-carbon technologies (SET-Plan). The UK supports the objectives of the EU's Strategic Energy Technology Plan but has concerns over the financing estimates and expectations outlined in the Commission's Communication on financing.

Finally, the Commission and the Presidency will provide reports on a number of items on international relations in the field of energy including relations

between Ukraine and Russia, the Energy Community Treaty, and the EU-US Energy Council. Discussions of Russia-Ukraine relations are expected to continue over lunch.

Under Any Other Business, the Commission will report on progress in implementing the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan.

The Swedish Presidency has organised a dinner for Ministers the night before the Council, where a decision on the location of Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) is to be taken.

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales

Statement

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Bach): My right honourable friend the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Jack Straw) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, Dame Anne Owers DBE was appointed in August 2001, initially for five years. Her appointment has been extended but she has now indicated that she will not be seeking a further extension as Chief Inspector when her current term of office expires at the end of March 2010.

Dame Anne has been justifiably widely admired for the diligence, skill and independence she has brought to the post, and I would like to place on record my own great appreciation for her work.

The Ministry of Justice will shortly be advertising the vacancy and seeking applicants for the Chief Inspector post. Although the post is not within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, the appointment will be made using a process which takes account of the Commissioner's Code of Practice as best practice. I will inform the House once I have selected my preferred candidate for the post.

National Accreditation Body UK

Statement

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Ministry of Defence (Lord Drayson): In June of 2008, following a review of the New Approach to technical harmonisation, the "New Legislative Framework" was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

A key component of the package is EC Regulation 765/08 (accreditation and market surveillance). This Regulation will, for the first time, provide a legal framework for the provision of accreditation services across Europe by setting out the provisions for the operation of accreditation. It will enhance the confidence in and quality of conformity assessment (e.g. testing, certification and inspection) of products and services through the increased use of accreditation. It does this by establishing a system of accreditation that functions by reference to a series of consistent principles to

binding rules. It will thus help to strengthen mutual confidence between Member States in respect to the competence of conformity assessment bodies and consequently the certificates and test reports issued by them. This reinforced system will help ensure that the conformity assessment bodies provide the high quality services that manufacturers, consumers and public authorities need.

While this Regulation is directly applicable law, and applies from 1 January 2010, it requires each Member State to appoint a single National Accreditation Body (NAB).

Since 1995, the Government have recognised the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) as the sole NAB for the UK. Since its establishment by the Department of Trade and Industry, UKAS has played a significant role in the operation of national, European and international accreditation.

I have therefore with Statutory Instrument 2009 No. 3155 formally appointed UKAS as the UK's NAB.

BIS has a long-standing and effective relationship with UKAS that both parties value highly. We will continue to work together not only to ensure that the requirements of EC Regulation 765/08 are fulfilled but to improve the quality and breadth of accreditation in the UK, and that accreditation plays its proper and valued role in the standardisation infrastructure.

Transport: Road Safety

Statement

The Secretary of State for Transport (Lord Adonis): The Department for Transport has recently consulted on the strategy to improve road safety in Great Britain in the next decade and on a number of dangerous behaviours on the road. I have been considering carefully the responses to both these consultations.

Great Britain is among the best performers in the world on road safety. We have made very good progress in reducing the numbers of deaths and serious injuries over the last decade, and it is good news that we met in 2008 the targets for casualty reductions that we set for achievement by the end of 2010.

If we are to continue to make progress in this area, we will need to be effective in tackling the most dangerous behaviours on the roads. Although most

drivers are safe and responsible, there is a minority that continues to compromise safety by driving while under the influence of drink and/or drugs. Drink-driving was involved in 430 road deaths in 2008 and research suggests that drug-driving is also a key concern for the public.

Many consultees to our road safety strategy have urged us to take a fresh look at the drink drive limit as part of wider efforts to reduce drink-driving. On drug driving, the police tell us that there are practical problems with enforcing the current drug-driving legislation, including the absence of reliable equipment to identify impairing substances.

Based on the evidence to date, I think there may be a case for reforming the current legal framework covering drink and drug driving. However both topics raise complex legal and practical issues, and I have decided that before I publish a new road safety strategy I should seek further advice on both these topics from an independent expert.

I have therefore asked Sir Peter North to provide me with advice on the merit of specific proposals for changes to the legislative regime for drink and drug driving, reporting by the end of March 2010. Sir Peter is an internationally renowned legal expert whose previous studies include the review of traffic law which led to the Road Traffic Act 1991 and his 1997 report on marches and parades in Northern Ireland which led to the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. It will be a matter for Sir Peter how he proceeds; and he will act wholly independently in publishing his conclusions and advice.

This report will inform the final contents of the next road safety strategy. For drink driving, the report will advise on the case for changes to the prescribed alcohol limit for driving (either reducing the current limit, or adding a new, lower limit, with an associated revised penalty regime). For drug driving, the study will advise on whether there is a need for new legislation to make it an offence to drive with a named substance in the body. For both drink and drugs, the study will also set out the likely impacts of any changes on driver behaviour, and the practical steps needed to support introduction of any or revised offence. I have placed a copy of the terms of reference for the review in the House Library.

Once this review has reported, I will consult on its findings.

Written Answers

Thursday 3 December 2009

Asylum Seekers: Deportation

Questions

Asked by *Baroness Warsi*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many illegal asylum seekers have been deported in each of the last five years. [HL307]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): Information on asylum removals and voluntary departures in the last five years is available from Table 3.1 of the *Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2008* bulletin (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1409.pdf>).

The Home Office publishes statistics on the number of persons who were removed or departed voluntarily from the UK on a quarterly and annual basis, which are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office's research, development and statistics website at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>.

Asked by *Baroness Warsi*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the average cost per person of deporting an illegal asylum seeker. [HL308]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the average cost per person of a failed deportation of an illegal asylum seeker. [HL309]

Lord West of Spithead: It is not possible to provide an average figure for the cost of removing an individual, including failed asylum seekers, for either successful or unsuccessful removals. This is because there are many different factors which may or may not be involved in the cost of a case (such as detention costs, travel costs, and the cost of escorting the individual in question). We are unable to disaggregate the specific costs and any attempt to do so would also incur disproportionate cost.

British Citizenship

Questions

Asked by *Baroness Warsi*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many times the UK Border Agency has referred concerns over the delivery of citizenship examinations to the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator. [HL230]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): The UK Border Agency does not maintain statistics on the number of referrals to the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual).

However, we take the integrity of our immigration system very seriously and have put tough measures in place to prevent fraudulent activity. If someone is

found to have met the language requirements for citizenship through dubious means, then their application will be refused for failure to meet the good character requirement. In order to satisfy the good character requirement, they must show that they have been open and honest with immigration officials. If this is found not to be the case, their application will be refused and they will be barred from reapplying for 10 years.

Asked by *Baroness Warsi*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many centres previously delivering the United Kingdom Citizenship Test have been barred from doing so for not complying with appropriate regulations. [HL231]

Lord West of Spithead: To date only one centre has been removed from the network, City Wide Learning in Sheffield. The centre was found to be operating fraudulently and was the subject of a major fraud investigation by the police. The trial of those involved begins in January.

Crime: Domestic Violence

Questions

Asked by *Lord Sheikh*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address domestic violence, in light of its correlation with alcohol consumption. [HL161]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): There are a number of alcohol arrest referral schemes in operation which aim to reduce reoffending among people arrested for alcohol-related offences. People who are arrested on suspicion of alcohol-related domestic violence in AAR pilot areas may be referred to a domestic violence specialist adviser and encouraged to address their behaviour and the consequences of their unsafe drinking. We will continue to work with our stakeholders to better understand the role that both alcohol and drugs play in contributing to incidents of domestic violence.

Asked by *Lord Sheikh*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to increase the amount of community services for victims of domestic violence. [HL165]

Lord West of Spithead: On 25 November, the Government launched *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls: A Strategy*. In relation to service provision, the Government have committed to ensuring that violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, is mainstreamed into the joint strategic needs assessment process, enabling the identification of joint or aligned commissioning strategies in response to local needs.

While central government have a role in the provision of some services, the main responsibility for local services rests with local statutory partners who administer the bulk of budgets and the now devolved commissioning responsibilities.

We will continue to invest in specific domestic violence services such as national helplines, multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) and independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs).

Asked by Lord Sheikh

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will assist other local authorities to introduce domestic violence schemes similar to the Living without Violence programme provided by Brighton & Hove City Council. [HL196]

Lord West of Spithead: We support the introduction of community-based perpetrator programmes. However, it is local partners who have the main responsibility for the services in their area. In our recently published strategy, *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls*, we set out our commitments over the coming year to assist local areas to ensure that they have the appropriate service provision in place. This includes developing tools to assist areas to assess need and clear guidance for commissioners.

Crime: Hate

Question

Asked by Lord Dear

To ask Her Majesty's Government what changes they intend to make to the document *Hate Crime: Delivering a Quality Service—Good Practice and Tactical Guidance* of March 2005, in particular to the handling of complaints of homophobic conduct. [HL203]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): The Association of Chief Police Officers is refreshing the guidance and intends to publish a new manual in March 2010. The details of the document are currently in development. The publication of the new manual is one of the actions within the recently published cross-government hate crime action plan, which includes a range of other activity to reduce hate crime.

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/hate-crime-action-plan/>

Many police organisations and the ACPO lesbian, gay and bisexual group have done work to reduce hostility from staff to homosexual colleagues and some forces have performed very well in the Stonewall employer index, including in 2006, when Staffordshire Police was awarded the Employer of the Year Award by Stonewall.

Cyber Security

Questions

Asked by Lord Patten

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the Office of Cyber Security will be fully operational by March 2010. [HL193]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): The Office of Cyber Security was established in September 2009, and is already working in support of delivering the Cyber Security Strategy. Within the strategy it was felt sensible to plan for an initial operational capability—which included being staffed by approximately 20 people from different departments and agencies—by March 2010. They presently have 12 staff but are not waiting for an arbitrary initial operational capability; they are already making progress in their priority work areas. Other staff will be recruited over the remainder of the financial year.

Asked by Lord Patten

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they have taken or will take through the European Union to improve its cyber security strategies. [HL195]

Lord West of Spithead: The UK has contributed valuable input over many years to the improvement of the elements of Cyber Security, both through ENISA (the European Network and Information Security Agency) and other EU fora. This work takes place under the broad Commission headings of Critical Information Infrastructure Protection and Telecommunications Resilience, as well as the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection (known as EPCIP). Actions include collaborative efforts aimed at increasing European co-operation on policy to enhance cyber security, such as developing European priorities, principles and guidelines on long-term internet resilience and stability, as well as enhancing co-operation with industry.

Department for Communities and Local Government: Meeting with MPs

Question

Asked by Lord Bates

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord McKenzie of Luton on 12 November (WA 205), what were the conclusions of the meeting between the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Denham, and Members of Parliament who have constituencies in ports; what meetings he has had with the Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, on the ports' tax; and on what dates. [HL244]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Department for Work and Pensions (Lord McKenzie of Luton): The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Denham, met with Members of Parliament who have constituencies in ports and listened to their representations. The Government are currently considering the position and will reach their decision shortly.

The review of ports by the Valuation Office Agency was to ensure that all individual business properties within and outside ports are rated fairly to ensure that the burden of contributions to funding local government is shared fairly amongst businesses around the country.

The Government have listened to the concerns of businesses with significant and unexpected backdated bills, including some businesses within ports. They have legislated to enable such bills to be repaid over an unprecedented eight years rather than in a single instalment, helping affected businesses to manage the impact on their cash flows during the downturn by reducing the amount they are required to pay immediately by 87 per cent.

Embryology

Question

Asked by **Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord Drayson on 12 November (WA 207–8), which recent publications demonstrating research excellence the Medical Research Council relied on in awarding an extension to the research project entitled "Improving the efficiency of human somatic cell nuclear transfer"; and what were the impact factors associated with those publications.

[HL255]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Ministry of Defence (Lord Drayson): The Medical Research Council (MRC) awarded a one-year extension to the University of Newcastle for the project "Improving the efficiency of human somatic cell nuclear transfer". The award, which is an extension to the duration of the study, was granted at no additional cost to the MRC to allow the completion of the planned research. Such a time-only extension is the standard mechanism employed by the MRC for allowing grants to fulfil their original objectives. As such awards involve no significant changes to the research plans they are not subject to additional peer review. The original award, which was made in 2007, was subject to the MRC's rigorous peer review process and was considered to be internationally competitive.

The MRC's peer review process includes an assessment of the importance of the scientific questions being asked, the research programme's potential for advancing biomedical science, and the justification for the resources requested; any ethical issues that need further attention are also identified. The process does not include a formal assessment of an applicant's previous research papers and any associated impact factors.

Energy: Wind Farms

Question

Asked by **Lord Reay**

To ask Her Majesty's Government which planning appeals on wind farm applications have been recovered for decision by the Secretary of State since June 2008; and for each case (a) why it was recovered, (b) what the outcome was, and (c) whether the Inspector's recommendation was accepted or overturned.

[HL151]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Department for Work and Pensions (Lord McKenzie of Luton): The following table lists those appeals together with the decision where that has been published, and whether the inspector's recommendation was accepted or overturned in each case. Data on the reasons for recovery are not collected centrally, but most of these appeals will have been recovered under the criterion "proposals for major significance for the delivery of the Government's climate change programme and energy policies".

<i>Name and location of appeal</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Was inspector's recommendation accepted or not</i>
Land adjacent to Alcan Smelter, Northumberland	Allow	Accepted
Land at Barmoor, between Ford and Lowick, Northumberland	Not yet published	N/A
Land at Berrier Hill, Penrith	Not yet published	N/A
Land at Crook Hill, Rochdale (4 appeals)	Allow	Accepted
Land at Grise Wind Farm, Penrith	Not yet published	N/A
Land at Hall Farm, Routh, Beverley	Allow	Accepted
Land at Reaps Moss	Allow	Accepted
Land at Todmorden Moor, Calderdale	Dismiss	Accepted
Land at Toft Hill, Northumberland	Not yet published	N/A
Land at Westfield Lane, Wakefield	Not yet published	N/A
Land between Clough Foot and Sharney Ford	Allow	Accepted
Land north-east of Swinford, near Lutterworth	Not yet published	N/A
Moorsyde Windfarm, Northumberland	Not yet published	N/A
Sober Hill Windfarm, York	Not yet published	N/A
Wadlow Farm, Cambridgeshire	Allow	Accepted
Wandyllaw Far, Chathill,	Allow	Accepted

Government Departments: Annual Reports

Question

Asked by **Lord Bates**

To ask Her Majesty's Government which departments publish an annual report on their departmental communications. [HL242]

Baroness Crawley: This information is not collected centrally. Each government department, agency and NDPB is responsible for reporting on its own communications and each Secretary of State is responsible to Parliament in the normal way. Departments review and report on their communications function as part of the normal departmental planning process.

Government Departments: Websites

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made in ensuring that all websites owned by them have the letters "uk" in their domain name.

[HL270]

Baroness Crawley: Government departments must ensure that by March 2011 all their websites use .gov.uk domain names. Guidance was issued by COI in November 2008 and approved by the then Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Tom Watson MP). Government have actively pursued this policy through centrally co-ordinated communications.

Homelessness: Rough Sleepers

Questions

Asked by **Lord Roberts of Llandudno**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to end rough sleeping by 2012.

[HL345]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Department for Work and Pensions (Lord McKenzie of Luton): Following on from the publication of our new rough sleeping strategy, *No One Left Out: communities ending rough sleeping* in November 2008, we have recently published our annual progress report for November 2008—November 2009 which outlines the progress that we have made in further reducing rough sleeping.

The progress report can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/annualroughsleeping>

Asked by **Lord Roberts of Llandudno**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the most recent figures of the numbers of rough sleepers in each local authority area.

[HL346]

Lord McKenzie of Luton: There have been significant and sustained cuts in the numbers of people who are living rough on the streets since we established a baseline of 1,850 rough sleepers in 1998. The 2009 headline figure for rough sleeping based on local authority counts is 464 and set out in the table below.

Local Authority	Date	Number
Westminster	26/03/2009	110
City of London	20/03/2009	38
Tower Hamlets	01/05/2009	17
Southwark	03/04/2009	15
Kensington & Chelsea	25/11/2008	13
Lambeth	26/03/2009	13
Haringey	27/11/2008	10
Bath	03/04/2009	10

Local Authority	Date	Number
Bedford	23/05/2008	10
Hackney	20/03/2009	10
Hillingdon	19/11/2008	10
Chester	27/03/2008	9
Liverpool	21/04/2009	9
Manchester	28/11/2008	9
Hammersmith & Fulham	25/11/2008	8
Norwich	07/05/2009	8
Herefordshire	24/09/2008	7
Hull	19/05/2009	7
Worthing	21/11/2008	7
Bournemouth	28/10/2008	6
Brighton and Hove	04/03/2009	6
Camden	22/04/2009	6
Leeds	18/04/2008	6
Peterborough	28/05/2008	6
Reading	14/05/2008	6
Redbridge	28/05/2008	6
Carrick	31/03/2009	5
Exeter	08/05/2009	5
Kirklees	21/11/2008	5
Oxford	21/11/2008	5
Watford	25/03/2009	5
Birmingham	28/11/2008	4
Brent	07/03/2008	4
Coventry	26/03/2009	4
Derby	12/05/2008	4
Milton Keynes	28/11/2008	4
North Devon	18/03/2009	4
Plymouth	25/11/2008	4
Winchester	18/11/2008	4
Bradford	21/11/2008	3
North Cornwall	31/03/2009	3
Restormel	31/03/2009	3
Salisbury	09/10/2008	3
Sheffield	07/05/2008	3
Sunderland	26/11/2008	3
Crewe & Nantwich	27/03/2008	2
Lancaster	06/03/2009	2
Lewisham	27/03/2008	2
Macclesfield	27/03/2008	2
Newcastle upon Tyne	29/04/2008	2
Northampton	16/04/2009	2
Waltham Forest	24/04/2009	2
York	29/04/2009	2
Bromley	13/03/2009	1
Calderdale	15/05/2008	1
Cambridge	03/10/2008	1
Fenland	09/09/2008	1
Halton	27/03/2008	1
Isle of Wight	04/04/2009	1
Penwith	31/03/2009	1
Portsmouth	22/05/2009	1
Rotherham	16/09/2008	1
Teignbridge	26/03/2008	1
Wakefield	22/05/2009	1
Caradon	31/03/2009	0
Congleton	27/03/2008	0
Ellesmere Port & Neston	27/03/2008	0
Gateshead	15/04/2009	0
Hertsmere	22/05/2009	0
Kerrier	31/03/2008	0

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Number</i>
Newham	07/03/2008	0
North Lincs	16/10/2008	0
North Somerset	15/05/2008	0
Staffordshire Moorlands	22/04/2008	0
Vale Royal	27/03/2008	0
Warrington	07/03/2008	0
Total from street counts		464

Asked by Lord Roberts of Llandudno

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many children under 16 years old are sleeping rough in the United Kingdom. [HL349]

Lord McKenzie of Luton: There is no evidence from rough sleeper counts, conducted by local authorities, of children under 16 sleeping rough.

Identity Cards

Questions

Asked by Baroness Neville-Jones

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by the Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, on 12 November (HC Deb, col 946W), what percentage of the people whose applications for an identity card have been received work for the Secretary of State for the Home Department. [HL272]

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by the Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, on 12 November (HC Deb, col. 946W), what percentage of the people whose applications for an identity card have been received work for (a) the Home Office, (b) Home Office executive agencies, and (c) Home Office sponsored non-departmental public bodies. [HL273]

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by the Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, on 12 November (HC Deb, col. 946W), how many applications for an identity card have been received (a) in total, and (b) from people working in (1) the Home Office, (2) the Identity and Passport Service, and (3) other executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Home Office. [HL274]

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by the Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, on 12 November (HC Deb, col. 946W), and following the issuing of identity cards to members of the public in Greater Manchester, how many applications for identity cards they expect to receive from British and Irish citizens in each of the next 12 months. [HL275]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): The commencement order under the Identity Cards Act 2006 that came into force on 20 October allows for certain IPS and Home Office staff as well as airport operator staff at

Manchester and London City airports to be amongst the first to apply for identity cards. The information held on the National Identity Register does not include the basis of an individual's eligibility to apply for an identity card.

Since 20 October, up to and including 27 November, 1,416 eligible volunteers, from the Greater Manchester area, London and the two airports, have made an appointment to enrol for an identity card. Up to and including 20 November, almost 13,000 people have registered their interest in the National Identity Service. So far 19 per cent of those registered are from the Greater Manchester area.

We began enrolling those who live and work in Greater Manchester from 30 November. At this stage it is, therefore, difficult to make any precise forecast of the number of people likely to take up the option of applying for an identity card in the next 12 months.

Immigration

Questions

Asked by Baroness Warsi

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of illegal immigrants in the United Kingdom. [HL172]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): Since the phasing out of embarkation controls in 1994, no Government have been able to produce an accurate figure for the number of people who are in the country illegally. By its very nature it is impossible to quantify accurately and that remains the case. However, the Government have reintroduced border controls through the e-borders system, which will, in future, allow an estimate to be made.

Asked by Baroness Warsi

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many illegal immigrants have been found working for the UK Border Agency in each of the last five years. [HL228]

Lord West of Spithead: In 2006, a total of nine contract cleaners, working in the then Immigration and Nationality Department of the Home Office, were found not to have valid leave to remain in the UK. Following that, the Home Office's procedures for checking its own employees were tightened and the Home Office worked with its contractors to ensure that they fulfilled their responsibilities for pre-employment checking of their employees. Since 2006 we know of only one other case (in 2008) where an employee of a contractor had invalid leave to remain.

Asked by Baroness Warsi

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many illegal immigrants have been found working for the Home Office in each of the last five years. [HL229]

Lord West of Spithead: There have been two occasions within the last five years where compliance checks have found illegal immigrants working for Home Office contractors. In the first case (2007) the individual was removed from the UK; in the second (2009) removal action is currently under consideration.

Immigration: Detention Centres

Question

Asked by *Lord Avebury*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to the warnings they have received of the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse in immigration detention centres; and what assessment they have made of whether contractors managing these centres provide adequate staff to monitor the use of these substances, and take action when evidence of abuse comes to their attention. [HL129]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): Each immigration removal centre (IRC) has a security department responsible for identifying threats, including drugs, and for developing strategies, responses and actions to counter these and to manage the risk.

For security reasons, we are unable to reveal the detail of the strategies. However, they are designed to minimise illegal entry to the centre of prohibited items including drugs and alcohol.

All removal centres are adequately staffed to provide a safe and secure environment for staff, detainees and visitors alike. Detention custody officers are all trained in searching techniques and substance awareness. All drug finds and incidents of trafficking are reported to the police and, where appropriate, detainee visits are monitored or visitors banned.

Immigration: Northern Ireland

Question

Asked by *Lord Laird*

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord West of Spithead on 12 November (*WA 220*), what arrangements exist for those granted leave to enter the United Kingdom whilst resident in the Republic of Ireland who enter the United Kingdom through the Northern Ireland land frontier with the Republic of Ireland to get their passports stamped to prove a United Kingdom arrival date, as required for applications for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [HL315]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): There are currently no arrangements in place for those persons holding leave to enter the United Kingdom, who cross the land border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to have a UK arrival endorsement placed in their passport. This is because the principles of the common travel area mean that such an endorsement is not required.

When applying for indefinite leave to remain, a person is asked on the application form to supply all passports and travel documents used since their first arrival in the UK. However, the accompanying guidance notes make it clear that where this evidence is not available, the applicant should provide an explanation and supply additional documentary evidence of having lived in the UK during the qualifying period.

Migration

Question

Asked by *Lord Roberts of Llandudno*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what information is given to migrants from the European Union on their arrival in the United Kingdom. [HL348]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): As all EEA nationals have a right to freedom of movement in the United Kingdom they are not subject to the same border controls as non-EEA nationals seeking to enter the United Kingdom.

As such no information is given to EEA nationals on their arrival.

The United Kingdom Border Agency offers relevant information on the Home Office website for EEA Nationals, and ukvisas.gov.uk offers information in the form of leaflet INF18, for EEA nationals intending to travel to the UK.

National DNA Database

Question

Asked by *Lord Lester of Herne Hill*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have information about the ethnicity of those whose data are included in the national DNA database; and, if so, whether they will publish the information. [HL278]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): The National DNA Database (NDNAD) does not hold self-reported ethnicity data, but data on the "ethnic appearance" of persons who have a DNA profile on the database. The ethnic appearance data have six broad ethnic categories plus "unknown". It is based on the judgment of the police officer taking the sample and is recorded for police intelligence purposes to assist in subsequent identification. The ethnic appearance data have only been recorded for volunteer samples since 2005.

The table below shows the number of DNA profiles on the NDNAD broken down by ethnic appearance, as at 16 October 2009. "Unknown" means that no ethnic appearance was recorded by the officer taking the sample. The number of profiles held is not the same as the number of individuals. This is because some profiles are replicates—i.e. more than one profile is held for one individual. This may occur if, for example, an individual gives different names, or different

versions of their name, on separate arrests. It is estimated that 13.8 per cent of the subject profiles held on the entire NDNAD are replicates.

Data on the number of subject profiles retained on the NDNAD broken down by ethnic appearance are published in the NDNAD Annual Reports. The latest annual report for 2007-09 is published on the NPIA website at: <http://www.npia.police.uk/en/14399.htm>

Northern Ireland Office: Political Directorate

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what changes they propose to the Northern Ireland Office's Political Directorate regarding its monitoring of human rights and equality. [HL269]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Baroness Royall of Blaisdon): None.

Planning

Questions

Asked by **Lord Clement-Jones**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will introduce regulations to reform planning legislation to enable control over partial demolition and development in conservation areas. [HL65]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take to reform planning regulations to take account of concerns about the level of heritage protection in conservation areas caused by the 1991 South Lakeland and 1997 Shimizu judgments. [HL66]

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they will proceed with reform of permitted development rights in conservation areas resulting from feedback on the White Paper, *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century*. [HL67]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Department for Work and Pensions (Lord McKenzie of Luton): The Government are preparing a new planning policy statement (PPS) on the historic environment. The draft PPS, which was the subject of a recent public consultation, advises that, where an element of a conservation area does not positively contribute to its significance, local planning authorities should take into account the desirability of enhancing or better revealing the significance of the conservation area. The Government believe that this could go some way towards addressing the implications of the South Lakeland judgment. We hope to publish a final version of the PPS in spring 2010.

In the 2007 White Paper, *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century*, the Government proposed that planning permission should be required for the partial demolition of an unlisted building in a conservation area. The intention was to address the 1997 Shimizu judgment that consent from the local planning authority is required only for total or substantial demolition. Responses to

consultation on the White Paper showed that there was general support for this measure, implementation of which would involve an amendment to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. The timing of any such changes will be considered alongside other priorities.

Asked by **Lord Tope**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to review Planning Policy Statement 15 to ensure that listed buildings receive adequate protection. [HL167]

Lord McKenzie of Luton: A draft planning policy statement (PPS) 15 was the subject of a recent public consultation exercise. It is intended that this will replace the current planning policy guidance notes 15 (planning and the historic environment) and 16 (archaeology and planning). The draft sets out policies on the conservation of the historic environment, including designated heritage assets such as listed buildings, through the planning system. Responses to the consultation exercise are being considered and a final version of the PPS is expected to be published next spring.

Public Bodies

Questions

Asked by **Lord Selsdon**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the difference between a quango and a non-departmental public body. [HL61]

Baroness Crawley: The term "*non-departmental public body*" has been used by successive Governments since 1980 to describe bodies which have a role in the processes of national government but are not government departments, or part of one, and which accordingly operate, to a greater or lesser extent, at arm's length from Ministers. The term "*quango*" is not an official term or classification used by government.

Asked by **Lord Selsdon**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what was the annual expenditure on non-departmental public bodies in (a) 2008, (b) 2007, (c) 2006, (d) 2005, and (e) 2004. [HL62]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the budget for expenditure on non-departmental public bodies for 2009-10. [HL63]

Baroness Crawley: Information on total expenditure by non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) is published in the annual Cabinet Office *Public Bodies* report. Copies of *Public Bodies* for the period 2004-08 are available from the Libraries of the House. Copies can also be downloaded from www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/resources/ndpbs.aspx

Public Bodies 2009 will be published early in the New Year. Information on budgets for NDPBs for 2009-10 is not held centrally.

Asked by **Lord Selsdon**

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the remarks by Baroness Crawley on 12 November (HL Deb, col. 899), which Members of the House of Lords were appointees to non-departmental public bodies on 18 November; and what were their appointments and levels of individual remuneration.

[HL64]

Baroness Crawley: I wrote to the noble Lord on this issue on 19 November.

Questions for Written Answer

Question

Asked by **Lord Bates**

To ask the Leader of the House how many Questions for Written Answer tabled in the House of Lords in session 2008-09 did not receive an answer by the end of the session.

[HL243]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Baroness Royall of Blaisdon): Six Questions for Written Answer tabled in the House of Lords in Session 2008-09 did not receive an answer by the end of the session. Departments have been advised to provide substantive answers to these questions in writing in due course.

Visas

Questions

Asked by **Baroness Warsi**

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord West of Spithead on 16 July (WA 264-5), what happened to each international student who had their student visa revoked.

[HL170]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): In general terms a student whose visa is revoked has three options: they can appeal against the decision to revoke their visa to the independent Asylum and Immigration Tribunal; they can seek to regularise their stay in the United Kingdom by applying for leave to remain in another immigration category; or they can return home. Students who do not follow one of these courses of action will be considered for appropriate enforcement action. Action to enforce a person's departure is prioritised on those who pose the greatest risk to the UK public.

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord West of Spithead on 12 November (WA 239), in how many countries VFS Global is contracted to act as an outsourced visa service for United Kingdom visa applicants; and which other companies are contracted to supply visa services for United Kingdom visa applicants in which other countries.

[HL311]

Lord West of Spithead: The UK Border Agency has contracts in place with two suppliers to provide visa application support services throughout its global network. VFS Global operates in 34 countries, CSC (Computer Sciences Corporation) operates in 14. The countries in which they operate are listed below:

Countries in which VFS Global and CSC operate the UK's visa application support services

VFS	CSC
Bahrain	Algeria
Bangladesh	Brazil
China	Canada
Ethiopia	Egypt
Ghana	France
India	Germany
Indonesia	Italy
Japan	Jamaica
Kazakhstan	Jordan
Kenya	Lebanon
Kuwait	Libya
Malawi	Serbia
Malaysia	Switzerland
Mozambique	Turkey
Namibia	
Nepal	
Nigeria	
Oman	
Pakistan	
Philippines	
Qatar	
Russia	
Singapore	
Saudi Arabia	
South Africa	
South Korea	
Sri Lanka	
Syria	
Taiwan	
Thailand	
UAE	
Uganda	
Ukraine	
Zimbabwe	

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Lord West of Spithead on 12 November (WA 239), how many visa applications were (a) accepted, and (b) turned down, by VFS Global in the last year in (1) India, and (2) Pakistan.

[HL312]

Lord West of Spithead: All decisions on UK visa applications, including those lodged in India and Pakistan, are made by UK Border Agency (UKBA) entry clearance officers. VFS Global is contracted by the UKBA to provide visa application support services in India, Pakistan and various other countries and plays no part in decision making. VFS Global has no power to refuse to accept an application after due payment is made. It may inform an applicant if certain key documents appear to be missing, and that the application may be refused for that reason.

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