

Backbench Business

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 11 October 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 11 October 2016.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Kevin Foster; Gavin Newlands; Mr David Nuttall; Jess Phillips.

Questions 1-18

Witnesses

[I](#): Helen Hayes.

[II](#): Mr David Lammy.



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Helen Hayes made representations.

- Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this session of the Backbench Business Committee. We have had a couple of withdrawals from Members who wished to put in applications this afternoon, so the only Member here with us today is Helen Hayes. Heidi Allen is not with you, is she?

Helen Hayes: She had another meeting, unfortunately, because of the short notice.

- Q2 **Chair:** Okay. Your application this afternoon is on the Youth Parliament Select Committee report on young people's health. Straight over to you, Helen.

Helen Hayes: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to present to the Committee this afternoon. I would like to apply for a debate in the House of Commons Chamber on the Youth Select Committee report on young people's mental health.

The report was published in 2015 and concluded that mental health services for young people are significantly underfunded in the UK. It made recommendations across three areas: funding and the state of services, the role for education and awareness, and stigma and digital culture. I am grateful to the Conservative Member Heidi Allen for agreeing to co-sponsor this debate, and to Melanie Onn and Kerry McCarthy for coming along to support it today.

The report has never been debated in Parliament, yet young people's mental health issues are, I suspect, among the issues most frequently raised with all Members. They certainly are in my constituency, whether by young people themselves, health professionals—increasingly those in our accident and emergency department—or teachers. All the headteachers across my constituency raise young people's mental health issues absolutely unprompted when I visit their schools.

Very little has changed since the report was published in the delivery and resourcing for young people's mental health, and I think a report published by young people about young people is a very good starting point to debate these issues. When I asked for expressions of interest in supporting this debate, 50 Members from four political parties indicated their support. I believe a debate in the Chamber would be very heavily subscribed.

Chair: Thank you very much. Any questions from the Committee?

- Q3 **Bob Blackman:** Helen, thank you for the application and presentation. Can we just be clear on the timing of such a debate—not the amount of time, but when it would ideally be held? Obviously the Youth Parliament is balloting young people across the country on the issues to be raised in the Youth Parliament coming up. Do you want this at a particular time before the Youth Parliament meets in Parliament again, or afterwards?

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What would your ideal timing be?

Helen Hayes: I would like the **debate** to take place as soon as possible, so that it avoids clashing with the next term. When they resume, they should be getting on with the agenda that comes from the latest ballot. This issue came top of the previous ballot and, to my mind, it is unfinished business because it was not the subject of a full debate.

- Q4 **Kevin Foster:** It was interesting to read your list of supporting names. Do you want purely a general debate, or were there conclusions and suggestions that came out of the Youth Parliament's work that could form the basis of a substantive motion?

Helen Hayes: Really, I want an **opportunity** to debate the report and its conclusions. The conclusions are pretty cross-cutting. They relate to funding and resources—issues that many Members would like to raise—to the role of education, to awareness of mental health, to stigma and to digital culture. Those are all big issues that have been raised with me as part of the suite of issues of general concern around young people's mental health. The point of the debate is to take this report as the starting point for allowing Members an opportunity to represent their constituents' experiences of mental health issues and services.

- Q5 **Kevin Foster:** The reason I **ask** that question is that we have a large number of requests. For the Chamber, priority is normally given to substantive motions, which in theory—rather than in practice necessarily— could result in a Division. Clearly, a general motion could be given time in Westminster Hall. Would that be acceptable or do you want the Chamber?

Helen Hayes: I would like it to **be** in the Chamber. It would give the Youth Parliament, as well as its work on the report and on the issue, the dignity of a debate in the House of Commons Chamber. Although the issue's profile is increasing, it is still at nowhere near a level that reflects its magnitude. There is sufficient concern across the Chamber to warrant the debate.

- Q6 **Gavin Newlands:** Kevin has already **asked** the question I was going to ask, so I will ask a question in response to your previous answer. If the report deals with generalities rather than ultra-specific recommendations, you could still frame a substantive motion that asks the Government to take note of the recommendations. Particularly if the recommendations are not specific and there are no controversial items in the report, you should be able to get support from across the House. That would give you the chance to formulate a substantive motion, which would guarantee that the debate could only take place in the Chamber.

Helen Hayes: I would be happy to consider the wording of a substantive motion if it would help the Committee to make the decision that the debate should be in the Chamber.

Chair: Chamber time is at a **premium**. We have an outstanding list of about eight or nine unheard debates. Therefore, we would normally give precedence to a debate with a substantive motion actually asking the

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Government to do something.

It is not rocket science to suggest that the provision of child and adolescent mental health services around the country is patchy to say the least. There is enough evidence already—beefed up by this report—to ask the Government to do something substantive about that.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** The Government have not responded to the report, have they?

Helen Hayes: I believe that there was a meeting, which might have concluded in a note going to the Select Committee.

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** But there has been no formal Government response. We have not had a debate in the Chamber or anywhere else. I am just thinking about how to frame your potential motion. You could call on the Government, as a minimum, to respond to the recommendations of the report. It would be good for the Government to do that before the Youth Parliament meets again, having debated the issue a year ago. That could be a goal.

Helen Hayes: It could be.

Q9 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Helen. Will you consider that? Send any motion you draw up directly to the Clerk, please.

Helen Hayes: And would you like that as soon as possible?

Chair: Well, if you would like the debate as soon as possible.

Helen Hayes: But you don't need it in five minutes' time for your further deliberations?

Chair: No. I would suggest the sooner the better, but certainly before Friday would be very useful. Thank you very much indeed. Next up is Mr David Lammy, please.

Mr David Lammy made representations.

Q10 **Chair:** Good afternoon David. You have a bid on apprenticeship funding.

Mr Lammy: Yes; it is nice to be back. I want to bring to the attention of the Committee and the House a decision that was made quietly over the summer—at the end of August. A consultation was slipped out by BIS—actually, with the change in government, I think it is now with the Department for Education—on substantial cuts to apprenticeship funding. Right across the House there is a universal desire to support and increase apprenticeships. The Government have an ambitious target of £3 million for high-quality apprenticeships by 2020, yet the Skills Funding Agency proposes funding cuts of up to 30% on average and 50% on average in the more deprived areas of the country.

I think that this must get proper debate and reflection in the House. That is perhaps why I already have 55 Members and six parties that have

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questioned and raised concerns about the decision. I have a motion. This has not had any real scrutiny or discussion; the Government have said it is merely a consultation. I have heard on the grapevine that there has been a bit of confusion, frankly, between the Government and the Skills Funding Agency. It has to be flushed out and I hope to be able to do that as soon as possible.

- Q11 **Chair:** Okay. I sit on a joint Education and BIS Committee, which is a hangover from the situation before the changes made in the summer. It is actually considering skills and apprenticeships, and funding is part of that. Were you aware that that piece of work was taking place?

Mr Lammy: I wasn't aware—

Chair: It is a special joint Select Committee working between the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, as was, and the Education Committee. Of course, with the change in responsibilities going from BIS to Education, this subject would become part of the remit of the Education Committee in future. We have agreed jointly to carry on with that work until it is finished. I think it is anticipated that that piece of work will be done before Christmas. That is happening in the background, so I just thought it would be useful for you to know that.

Mr Lammy: That is good to know, thank you.

- Q12 **Mr Nuttall:** First, Flick Drummond and Neil Gray are listed as co-lead Members. Are they not able to be with you today?

Mr Lammy: No, they send apologies.

- Q13 **Mr Nuttall:** Okay. My second point is on the impressive list of Members, cross-party, who want to take part in the debate. Have all these indicated that they want to take part in the debate?

Mr Lammy: Yes they have.

- Q14 **Mr Nuttall:** How did you ascertain that?

Mr Lammy: By email—most of them I emailed. To be honest, you might recall there was a campaign at the end of August, beginning of September, in which I wrote a letter, which many Members signed, to the Prime Minister, I think. *[Interruption.]* To Robert Halfon, sorry. I am losing touch; I wrote to the Prime Minister on something else. So there are many Members who knew about this anyway, and frankly their own colleges have been lobbying them and saying, "Oh my God, do you know about these funding cuts?" When I then emailed them and said, "Look, I think this is suitable for a Back-Bench motion, would you like to participate?" all these Members came back and said, "Yes, absolutely."

- Q15 **Mr Nuttall:** This was the email of 14 September.

Mr Lammy: Yes.

Mr Nuttall: The email of 14 September says, "If you are happy to add your name to my application, please simply reply yes." So that is what

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people did.

Mr Lammy: Yes.

Q16 **Mr Nuttall:** That is not the same as saying, "Do you want to take part in the debate?" Supporting the application might just be somebody saying, "Well, I think we should debate it." That is not quite the same as somebody saying, "Yes, I definitely want to take part in the debate."

Mr Lammy: I get the point. Having been a Skills Minister and a Higher Education Minister, knowing that there is literally an FE college in every constituency in the country, and knowing that a letter to the Minister has already been drafted, I would be staggered and surprised if a debate on apprenticeships does not garner sufficient Members for a Back-Bench debate when it concerns funding cuts to their individual colleges.

I have to concede that the specific question was not asked in the email. Of course, if the Committee wants, I can go back to Members and ask them that, but I hope that Members, given the experience that is around this table and that they will have their own reflections on who has participated in skills-type debates, might think that this is the sort of topic on which they would be surprised if Members who had indicated that there should be an application did not take part.

I should also say that this application is supported by the Association of Colleges and *FE Week*. I would expect that, on finding out that the Committee had granted the debate, those organisations would lobby Back Benchers to attend. As Back Benchers will know from their own experience, those organisations are pretty formidable.

Q17 **Mr Nuttall:** Finally, one of the things we have to consider is whether or not there are any other avenues for this subject to be raised for debate. The motion is substantive and there is nothing wrong with it on its own terms, but it does read like an Opposition day motion. Have you considered, with your Opposition Front-Bench team, whether this might form the basis of an Opposition day motion?

Mr Lammy: Well, Mr Nuttall, I think you know that I am certainly capable of being in opposition mode, but I think colleagues also know that I am also very capable of working across party lines, which is why I am leading a review of the criminal justice system on behalf of the Prime Minister.

I remind the Committee that six parties have supported this application, that it is about a national funding cut that affects apprenticeships throughout the country, and that that is an average funding cut of 30%. There are of course many Labour Members because there is also a significant cut in deprived areas—the reflection of that means that there are more Labour Members, I think—but this is absolutely a cross-party issue. It is for that reason that I felt it was a subject for a Back-Bench debate.

The Government have not reached a final determination. The nature of Opposition debates is that you immediately turn the subject into a political

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issue, in a sense. At this stage at least, until the Government finally reach their decision on the consultation, it is a cross-party issue. I have, of course, spoken to those on the Labour Front Bench and they are concerned about this issue, but they agreed with me. They saw it as a cross-party issue at this stage that was appropriate for a Back-Bench debate. The Education shadow suggested that to me in discussion.

Chair: A minor technicality, David: I'm afraid that several people who have signed your application are now Front Benchers, so you will have to take their names off, but it is still an impressive list in terms of the overall numbers who have signed up to support the debate.

From a personal perspective, given the work I have been doing on the joint Select Committee, it is a matter of concern. The CBI is concerned about funding because of the apprenticeship levy, as are chambers of commerce and a whole range of other employers organisations.

Thank you very much for your application, and we will be making our considerations. That ends the formal part of the agenda this afternoon.

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