

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 13 September 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 September 2016.

Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-45

[I](#): Dr Sarah Wollaston, Emma Reynolds and Maggie Throup.

[II](#): Stephen Kinnock.

[III](#): Jim Shannon.

[IV](#): Fiona Mactaggart.

[V](#): Chris White, Peter Kyle and Michelle Thomson.

[VI](#): Lisa Nandy.

[VII](#): Anna Turley, Stephen Kinnock and Chris White.

[VIII](#): Liz Kendall and Chris Leslie.

[IX](#): Yasmin Qureshi and Hannah Bardell.



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Dr Sarah Wollaston, Emma Reynolds and Maggie Throup made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome. I have a number of things to mention before we start. We had a special request from the Chair of the Select Committee on Health, Dr Sarah Wollaston, that their application be taken first because they have a Committee meeting that is due to start. As soon as you leave here, you will go to Committee, I take it, Sarah. We have acceded to that request.

The other thing I would urge on all applicants this afternoon is brevity where possible, because we have nine applications this afternoon. Brevity, if it is forthcoming, may well be rewarded. Thank you.

We will kick off with the first application, from the Select Committee on Health—Dr Sarah Wollaston et al.—on reducing health inequality. Sarah, over to you.

Dr Wollaston: Thank you, Mr Mearns. I am here with Emma Reynolds from Labour and Maggie Throup. We are all members of the Health Committee, and Maggie Throup is also chair of the all-party parliamentary group on obesity. We are here to make a pitch to you for a three-hour debate on the Floor of the House on the subject of reducing health inequalities. We think that is exceptionally topical and highly important.

In her first speech as Prime Minister, standing before the steps of Downing Street, Theresa May put at the top of her list of “burning injustices” reducing the inequality in life expectancy; there is a difference of, on average, nine years. The issue is not just the inequality in life expectancy; it is the even greater inequality in the number of years lived in good health. We feel that the issue is not related only to the Health Committee. We know the wider determinants of health are very important here. It is about education, poverty and housing as well as health.

The ability to narrow that gap has eluded successive Governments. We have cross-party support, including from the SNP and Liberal Democrats. There is great interest in this subject. It could not be more important, in that action needs to be taken early, and to cover a number of Government Departments. It needs to be sustained, and to take a long view that goes beyond the short-term political cycle.

As you will notice from the list of Members who have indicated that they would like to take part in the debate, there would easily be enough for three hours. With a new Prime Minister and Government, having the guidance and input of parties across the House could not be more timely or important.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. Do you have anything to add, Maggie?

Maggie Throup: It is well recognised that there is a link between obesity and lower-income groups. Studies have shown that obesity is prevalent among reception-year children living in the most deprived parts of the country; the obesity level there is 12%, as opposed to just under 6% for

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children in the least deprived parts of the country. At year 6, that rises to 25% and 11% respectively.

The Government published "Childhood Obesity: a plan for action" during the summer recess, so the House has not had a chance to debate that, hear a statement from the Health Secretary, or have an urgent question on the issue. This debate would give the House the opportunity to discuss this important topic.

Emma Reynolds: Briefly, Chair, there is obviously concern across the House about health inequalities, what their drivers are, and what the solutions are to those problems. In my city of Wolverhampton, for every mile that you travel from west to east, you lose a year in life expectancy. We know that in our constituencies, there are huge health inequalities, even in medium-sized cities. A debate on this would afford Members across the House the opportunity to gain a better understanding of what the drivers are; it would also give us time to explore what steps both the Government and local authorities could take to try to improve the situation.

Chair: Questions from the Committee? David?

Q3 **Mr Nuttall:** Emma, you are not listed as a lead Member on the application I'm looking at. Have you replaced Ben Bradshaw?

Emma Reynolds: I am a recent addition, I think.

Dr Wollaston: We decided that members of the Committee would decide who was going to be a lead Member from the Labour party from our Committee, and Emma has put herself forward to be the lead Member. I apologise for not having updated the information, but there are many people who would like to be leading this.

Q4 **Mr Nuttall:** You have listed quite a few lead Members.

Dr Wollaston: Yes, indeed. Can we adapt that list? I apologise for the fact that that wasn't done immediately beforehand, so that it read "Emma Reynolds".

Q5 **Mr Nuttall:** The three of you will be the lead Members?

Dr Wollaston: Yes. That is what we were going to propose—that there be three lead proposers. The others would still like to take part, but we agreed to keep with three leading Members and a larger group. If you needed somebody from other political parties as well, there are others who would be keen to be added.

Mr Nuttall: That is fine, as long as we know where we are. We do not need any more names.

Q6 **Bob Blackman:** You have plenty of names, don't worry. Have the Government responded to your report on this issue?

Dr Wollaston: We have just received the Government response, but the other point to make is that, over the summer, the Health Committee

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published the report of our inquiry into public health, so I think there are other reports that we could tag on to this. Yes, the Government have only just responded, but their main response was through the publication of the childhood obesity **plan**.

- Q7 **Bob Blackman:** You will appreciate that we have a waiting list, and have had nine applications today for the time that we have available. One criticism might be that the Government should find time for this debate in Government time, given that they have published a strategy to deal with this. Why should we give you time, which would potentially deny time to other valid **applications**, when the Government should be giving it?

Dr Wollaston: Because this goes beyond the issue of obesity alone. I think this is triggered because it is about the wider determinants of health and health inequality. The reason why I think it is important is that it would give the House an opportunity to give guidance to the Government on what we expect to see. Also, I think the House needs to get much better at recognising that there is a common goal here. We all want to achieve the same thing when it comes to reducing health inequality. It need not be the exceptionally divisive debate it can be, and there needs to be a consensus, because in order to achieve these effects, action needs to go beyond the short-term political cycle; that is the point here. It needs to be taken early on, and it needs to take a long **view**.

Jess Phillips: My question was answered. It was about whether the Government had responded.

Chair: I kind of go back a long way with this. I certainly remember the Black report and the Townsend report from the '70s and '80s, and the subject is as topical now as it was then. This is not just about health; it is about a whole range of other factors that impact on public health generally. It could be a very wide-ranging and important debate. Thank you very much for your application. We will consider where we can put it in the list later on in the afternoon.

Stephen Kinnock made representations.

- Q8 **Chair:** The next application is quite timely and is from Stephen Kinnock. The application is about the consequences of the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union for funding for **Wales**.

Stephen Kinnock: Thank you very much, Chair, and many thanks to the Committee for this opportunity. The issue at hand is that Wales was the part of the United Kingdom that received the most money per capita from the European Union of any across the UK. We are trying to find our way to understanding how that funding can be maintained. As for the actual figures, Wales was receiving £658 million from the EU and contributing £415 million, so there was a net financial benefit of £245 million a year—the equivalent of £79 per head. The money received, particularly from the agricultural and regional development funds, played an absolutely critical role in community development, economic development and ensuring that

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Wales was successfully moving forward economically. We obviously have heard the announcement about funding being guaranteed until 2020, but 2020 is actually a very short timeframe indeed, in terms of people being able to plan and implement their programmes and projects.

I think there is considerable interest from colleagues. I have Nia Griffith, Chris Elmore, Gerald Jones, Susan Elan Jones, Wayne David, Chris Bryant, Jess Morden and Stephen Doughty signed up. I also have Mark Williams—we have just heard that he would very much like to speak—and Jonathan Edwards, so we certainly have Labour, Lib Dem and Plaid, and we are very much hoping that Conservative colleagues will also speak. I commend this proposal to the Committee.

Chair: Thank you very much. Questions, please.

Q9

Bob Blackman: The obvious point is that we would like to see some Conservative speakers on the application to make it cross-party. The other issue is, which Department do you see answering the debate?

Stephen Kinnock: That is a good question. I had been working on the assumption that it would be the Wales Office, but there is a case to be made for it being the Brexit Department. I don't know what the convention is, and whether it is possible to have two Departments responding, giving the cross-cutting nature of this issue. As this is about Wales and funding, I had assumed that the Wales Office would answer, but I would certainly hope that it would consult extensively with the Brexit Department before it came.

Q10

Bob Blackman: There is potential for the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning, as opposed to on a Thursday, given that you have asked for a 90-minute debate, but it would have to be the relevant answering Department. The next one would not fit, but the one after that might, so it would be helpful if, in the interim, you could indicate to us which Department you would seek.

Stephen Kinnock: I will do that. I will inquire with the House authorities and get clarity on that.

Q11

Bob Blackman: And also cite some Conservative names.

Stephen Kinnock: Yes, we will reach out.

Jess Phillips: There are not many around.

Bob Blackman: There are a lot in Wales.

Mr Nuttall: Have the new Departments started appearing on the lists?

Chair: Yes, although the Select Committees have not been set up yet.

Mr Nuttall: There is that option to specify.

Chair: Thank you very much, Stephen. We move swiftly on.

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Jim Shannon made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** We have the recipient of a season ticket, Jim Shannon. Where did Jim go? He was there. We'll move on. Ah, how timely is that? I know, Jim: you had to put your season ticket through the scanner outside.

Jim Shannon: Apologies. Mr Chairman, first, I would just thank the Committee. I understand that I have got the other debate on organ—

Q13 **Chair:** Before you kick off, Jim, I would just formally announce that Jim and others are applying for a debate on National Arthritis Week, which I believe is technically the first week back after the recess, but there is no time to allocate in that week.

Jim Shannon: First, as always, these are very important issues, and I thank you, Mr Chairman, and the Committee members as always for the chance to come and ask for a debate on these issues. The correct date for World Arthritis Day is 12 October, and a debate then is not possible, but there will be a campaign over the whole length of October, so any time in October would be great. Obviously, the organisations that are interested in this issue are very keen to have a debate. We haven't had a debate on musculoskeletal conditions in the House of Commons since 2011, so perhaps it is time to revisit the subject in this term of Parliament.

On the reasons for the debate, very quickly—I am always very conscious of the time, and of the Members behind me who want to ask for debates as well—over a third of the population over 50 will suffer arthritic pain, whether it be during travel, leisure or work. It costs the NHS some £5 billion. One in five people consult their GP about arthritis and back pain each year. Hip fractures cost about £2 billion, and there are 176,000 hip and knee replacements caused by arthritis every year. I am not at the stage of having any of those yet, but I suspect, Mr Chairman, that there may be many in this room who do have them, or will. Some 600,000 people have arthritis across the United Kingdom. We should highlight this, make people aware of it, and make World Arthritis Day a focus of attention in the Chamber.

Some of the MPs who have signed this application either have arthritis themselves or have family members who do. We have galvanised some 26 Members across all parties within the Chamber, including independents. There is a section of those from the bigger parties, Conservative and Labour, as well as Plaid Cymru, SDLP, Ulster Unionists and, of course, my own party, the DUP, and Caroline Lucas from the Green party as well. I think we have fairly significant support from among the MPs, and I believe it would be an opportunity to have a debate on an issue that is very important and in which I believe many Members will wish to participate.

Chair: Thank you very much, Jim. Any comments or questions?

Q14 **Bob Blackman:** Jim, the week we come back after conference recess would be most fitting but, given we don't have any time, would you be in a position to take a Tuesday or Thursday slot the following week if it was made available?

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Jim Shannon: Absolutely, yes. Westminster Hall is where we want to be. The arthritis organisations have asked for Westminster Hall, so we are quite happy with that if that is available.

Q15 **Chair:** Okay, thank you very much, Jim. Anyone **else?**

Jim Shannon: Can I just thank the Committee and yourself, Chair, for the debate I am having on organ transplants on 11 October?

Chair: Don't rub it in, Jim.

Fiona Mactaggart made representations.

Q16 **Chair:** Are you on your own, **Fiona?**

Fiona Mactaggart: I think I am, yes. Kate Green, who was to have been here, said unfortunately she couldn't be in the House this afternoon. Various other people who were supporting said, "Oh, but what room is it in?" and things like that, so I am on my own.

Q17 **Chair:** The application is for a debate on the performance of Concentrix in dealing with tax credit claimants. Over to you, **Fiona.**

Fiona Mactaggart: I asked for the debate because of widespread concern among Members about the fact that Concentrix, who have been commissioned by HMRC to investigate false tax credit claimants, are performing appallingly. They are bullying our constituents. In every case that I've taken up—I've spoken to a number of Members across the House about taking up cases and their experiences are similar—Concentrix back down, because the data they are using is outdated and is slightly magical thinking in some cases. They have a £75 million contract that has delivered £0.5 million of savings, which is rather short of the £285 million that they promised when they were first **instituted.**

I am actually less concerned about the fact they haven't delivered what they promised. I am much more concerned about the experience of largely single mums who are being bullied by Concentrix and who, in cases where, for example, they haven't received a letter from Concentrix, the first time they know they are at risk is when their tax credits are stopped. I don't think the public is as aware as it should be of this basic administrative failure. I don't have a view about whether these things should be done by a private company or by public authorities, but I do have a view that, when it comes to public administration, it should be done fairly and efficiently. We have a really gross example of an unfair, inefficient way of dealing with tax credit claimants. This House should be highlighting that fact. It is just unacceptable.

There have been hearings of the Public Accounts Committee that have criticised it. There was an EDM—I had nothing to do with it—that had 41 signatures. At the last business questions, as you know, Chair, two Members with no connection to each other, and with neither of them having spoken to me, raised precisely this issue for an urgent debate. It is

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clear that there is real concern across the House about how badly this company perform and I think we should have a debate about it.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions, Bob?

Q18 **Bob Blackman:** Fiona, you have asked for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall but the only time we have available immediately would be the second week back after conference recess. Who would you see answering this particular debate—DWP?

Fiona Mactaggart: A Treasury Minister.

Q19 **Bob Blackman:** Would you be in a position to accept a Tuesday or Thursday slot the week after we get back?

Fiona Mactaggart: Yes.

Mr Nuttall: We agree.

Jess Phillips: Yes, we all agree.

Chris White, Peter Kyle and Michelle Thomson made representations.

Q20 **Chair:** Good afternoon everyone. The application is for a debate on industrial strategy.

Chris White: Thank you, Chairman and Committee, for giving me this opportunity. The issue of industrial strategy has interested me for quite some time and I was pleased to speak in the Queen's Speech debate about the topic. Lo and behold, and to my thorough delight, there is now a Department that has got industrial strategy as part of its title, and I think it would be right, as this Department is forming its work and its scope, to give the House an opportunity to present its ideas on how it should take shape.

Q21 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Anything to add, Michelle or Peter?

Peter Kyle: Only that steadfastly, for the last year and through the last Government, the Government have refused—not just have they not had an industrial strategy but, on repeated challenges at the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee on which I sit, they have actively said it would be damaging for our economy and the wrong approach for our economy. So to have such an about-face in such a short space of time is a really significant thing. Whichever part of the economy you are looking at, whether it is geographical, whether it is social, whether it is about the different parts of the strategy that unfold, this is an incredibly important moment in time to have this debate.

We have people who have been Ministers in the previous Government and back into the Labour Government, who are still sitting in the House, and it would be really important to have their input and give them the space to talk about their experiences in not just developing an industrial strategy,

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but rolling it out. I think this is a really good forum in which to have the debate, and not just an important point to have the debate.

Michelle Thomson: Picking up on that briefly, I agree with Chris. It is definitely about helping frame some of the thinking, where you have varying levels from, "There should be no industrial strategy whatsoever"—even within the Government side—"and it should be all free market," right up to the other side. It is worthy of a debate in itself.

Obviously, as a Scottish Member, I would like to bring a slightly different perspective to it, on how medium-sized countries are driving forward and how, particularly, we can use our SMEs. We talk oft and long about the centralisation in London around financial services, but we need to be looking forward much more around R and D and innovation, and we know we have some challenges there.

I am confident that the debate will bring people wishing to contribute from all sides, from all parties. It is worthwhile. What, fundamentally, do we mean by industrial strategy? How will it serve us going forward? Do we have long-term enough ambition and the thinking to realise it?

Q22 **Bob Blackman:** You have certainly got a range of speakers. However, you are asking for six hours' debate. We have got nine requests today—a waiting list already—so Chamber time is very limited. If you were offered a shorter period of time—say three hours—would that be acceptable to you, rather than waiting for quite a long time, I suspect, before we could allocate a six-hour debate?

Chris White: I would like to push for a six-hour debate, I think. Given how things are when you have a three-hour debate—you end up having two minutes to speak on a subject which is quite technical—I think we would be selling Members short. I put this note out last Thursday and by Friday we had already got 20-something Members, so there is clearly a lot of interest in this discussion. I would not want to wait too long, I have to say, but somewhere in between those two.

Chair: That clarifies that. Anyone else, please? Right, in that case, thank you very much for your application.

Lisa Nandy made representations.

Q23 **Chair:** Moving swiftly on; Lisa, please.

Lisa Nandy: Well, thank you to the Committee—

Chair: Have a seat, Lisa, please.

Lisa Nandy: I thought if I was the quickest I might get to the top of the list.

Chair: We want brevity, but we need to do things in order. The application is on the role of grammar schools and faith schools. Over to you.

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Lisa Nandy: Thanks to the Committee for allowing me to present the application on behalf of myself and 35 others. Although I am here alone, I am much supported in spirit, including by Caroline Lucas and Neil Carmichael, who are the co-lead Members of the application.

The Committee will be aware that yesterday the Government published proposals to open new grammar schools for the first time in 18 years and to allow faith schools to select a greater proportion of their pupils. The plans will have significant implications for millions of children and their families and they are deeply controversial.

Proponents on both sides of the argument have claimed that the evidence supports their case. The Prime Minister said that it was "completely illogical" not to proceed with the plans, while the former Education Secretary said, "The evidence is now incontrovertibly clear that a rigorous academic education does not need to be the preserve of the few."

The Committee will be aware that there is very strong interest in this issue. Last week's urgent question was extremely well attended. In the schools statement yesterday, 69 Back-Bench Members of Parliament spoke with only a few hours' notice.

I asked colleagues to support this application on Friday morning and already 36 MPs from Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives, the Green party and the DUP have agreed to support it. There has also been huge public interest and the Prime Minister has committed to £50 million of funding to the project at a time when education funding more generally is under pressure.

We are aware that Chamber time is at a premium, but we believe the level of interest in this area would warrant holding a debate in the Chamber. The motion is extremely topical. The Government presented the Green Paper to the House yesterday and the Education Secretary herself called for a debate on the issue, strongly suggesting to me and others that the Government's plans may change and develop over time.

A full and wide-ranging debate on this issue would give us a significant opportunity to influence these plans for the better before the consultation closes in December. It is a contested debate with very strong feelings among different MPs.

The majority of MPs who have signed the motion, including me, are deeply opposed to plans to open new grammar schools. However, others who have supported the application, for example, Graham Brady MP, are very strong advocates in favour of the Government's case. We think there would be a very lively debate in the Chamber on this issue.

Similarly, with faith schools there are different views that are deeply held. So far there has been no time allocated to debate these proposals thoroughly. Although the Government will eventually have to legislate if the plans go ahead, we believe it is important that the evidence is

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considered at the earliest opportunity and before the consultation closes, and that the Government set out how they plan to take this forward.

Grammar schools were not a topic of debate at the general election. The last time that the House of Commons debated grammar schools, it was in relation only to funding and was held in Westminster Hall in January 2015, well before the Government decided to change policy.

We believe there is a significant opportunity to effect change. The Government's case for new grammar schools is based on the proposition that the current rules sacrifice children's potential because of dogma and ideology. Yet there is a great deal of research by the DCSF, Sutton Trust and the IFS, which found that children who are excluded from grammar schools do worse than they might otherwise have done.

In addition, the educational landscape has changed significantly in the past six years because of the introduction of academies and free schools. We believe that we need a wide-ranging debate in order to consider the likely implications of this proposal on all children.

There are also a number of areas of the country where grammar schools still exist. Many of the MPs for those areas—Sammy Wilson, Kate Green and Graham Brady, for example—would like the opportunity to ensure that their experience of grammar schools in those areas informs the Government's developing plans.

The implications of this change will be profound. That is why we have put forward this particular motion—a votable motion—in order to ensure that the Government thoroughly assess the evidence about the impact of their plans.

We have considered the possibility that one of the Opposition parties might also want to call a debate on the subject. However, the MPs who are supporting this motion are keen that the evidence is thoroughly debated in a wide-ranging debate, and we believe that a Backbench Business debate is the most appropriate way to do that. We have seen, through other Backbench Business debates, how the non-partisan atmosphere has a much stronger impact. It enables MPs from all parties to feel free to speak openly. Particularly on this issue, which divides political parties, including the governing party, we think that a Backbench Business debate is much more likely to have a stronger impact on developing Government policy. I would be grateful if the Committee would consider granting our application.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Q24 **William Wragg:** This may well have been answered, but I was wondering how many proponents of grammar schools you have indicating their wish to speak.

Lisa Nandy: We have certainly got one on the list, and we have a couple of people who have not taken a view either way but would like to talk about the pros and cons. I am sure the Committee will be aware of this,

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but Neil Carmichael, who is a co-sponsor, is also the Chair of the Education Committee, which is deeply interested.

Q25 **Bob Blackman:** You will appreciate, Lisa, that we have a limited amount of time. I completely understand the topicality of this issue. Has there been any indication from the Government about having a debate in Government time on this topic?

Lisa Nandy: No.

Bob Blackman: Given that it is a Green Paper.

Lisa Nandy: At some stage, we anticipate that if they proceed with the plans, there will be legislation, which would give some opportunity for debate, but we feel that it is important we have this debate at the earliest opportunity in order to ensure that the plans taken forward and brought before the House are sensible plans that will affect the majority of children in a positive way.

Chair: The Green Paper consultation finishes in December, so there is a possibility of having a debate before the consultation period closes.

Q26 **Mr Nuttall:** Could you expand on something? I think you were going down the road of suggesting that a Backbench Business debate would be more powerful than an Opposition day debate.

Lisa Nandy: I think they serve different purposes. There are very strong feelings in the Opposition about the re-introduction of grammar schools and faith schools, but a Backbench Business debate gives MPs from all parties the opportunity to debate the subject in a much less partisan way. It is not seen by the Government as being as critical of Government policy as it might if you are debating Government legislation or something that has been brought forward by the Opposition. Of course, most MPs on this list have no control over how an Opposition motion would be presented, depending on which party brought it forward. We want to make sure that the evidence is considered, and that is what this motion is about today.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We will be considering that in due course.

Anna Turley, Stephen Kinnock and Chris White made representations.

Q27 **Chair:** Next **up** is Anna Turley.

Anna Turley: Thank you, Chair. I would like to reiterate my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee for granting us our first debate on steel almost exactly a year ago, just a few days before the SSI plant went into liquidation in my constituency. That gave us the opportunity to raise the issue and bring it before the Government in a really timely way.

Here we are, one year on, and the steel industry is still in crisis, despite the loss of thousands of jobs, not least in my own area. There is great upheaval and uncertainty in areas like Port Talbot, Scunthorpe, Hartlepool

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and all around the country. We particularly wanted to bring this debate forward from the Back Benches because a number of constituencies are affected. You will see from the sheet that we have a large number of MPs from across all parties signed up. We have 22 MPs from four different parties—the Labour party, Conservative party, SNP and Plaid Cymru. There is a strong strength of feeling across parties on this issue.

Why now? As I said, one year on, we are still no clearer on where we are in terms of the steel crisis. We had a steel summit in October. We had five workstreams, but very little meaningful action has come out of that, and a huge number of jobs are still in the balance. We have seen at the TUC conference this week steelworkers taking to the stage to set out their uncertainties and their fear. Of course, we are in a completely different global climate now, post-Brexit. There are huge implications for the steel industry in terms of exports and trade protection.

Obviously, Chinese dumping is one of the biggest factors in the steel crisis. Many people in my constituency, for example, voted for Brexit on the understanding that it would give us more power to prevent Chinese dumping. What is the reality of that when we are apparently all committed to free trade and not so much to trade protection?

There are also issues around the proposed merger between Tata and ThyssenKrupp—I don't know if I pronounced that correctly—and of course Greybull, which is buying Scunthorpe. We also now have British Steel up and running, which I am proud to represent.

There are major crises outstanding, not least the pension consultation—many people's future pensions are up in the air—and we still do not know what the situation is, or have clarity about it. We also have the creation of the industrial strategy, now in the BEIS title—music to our ears, as people who have been asking for a long time for an industrial strategy. We would like to discuss that strategy and its implications for steel and the future of steelmaking around this country.

I hope that the Committee will consider our request. Thank you very much.

Q28 **Chair:** Chris?

Chris White: Anna has covered the topic. An industry that has such strategic importance does have the need to be debated in the House, which is why I am happy to support this application.

Q29 **Chair:** Stephen?

Stephen Kinnock: We have had a number of debates on this issue, but a lot has happened since the last one—with Brexit, the new Government, the industrial strategy and big question marks over the pension scheme. So there is certainly a lot for us to get our teeth into in this debate.

Chair: Questions, please, Jess.

Q30 **Jess Phillips:** I just wondered if there are any time constraints. Obviously

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we are all going off for conference recess, but is there a time constraint to do with how soon a debate would need to be? Is something happening—some summit, something that is happening—that you need to get in front of?

Anna Turley: Not this year. Obviously, last year was time-critical, but now there is just an ongoing unease and uncertainty around the industry. We are still waiting to hear from Tata whether it will keep the British business or sell it, what that means for jobs and pensions, and—

Stephen Kinnock: There is time-sensitivity around the pension scheme, because the consultation date for that closed on 23 June, and there are noises that the Government are coming to a conclusion. So I think there will be an announcement on the pensions quite soon. So that is time-sensitive.

Chair: Thank you.

Liz Kendall and Chris Leslie made representations.

Q31 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome. The application this afternoon is for a debate, the title of which is the effect of the UK leaving the European Union on financial services. Liz, please.

Liz Kendall: Thanks very much, Chair. The reason why we are requesting time to discuss this vital issue is the huge contribution that financial services and other related professional services make to the UK economy—over £127 billion a year, employing around 2 million people. That is not just in London and the south-east, but in other parts of the country. The second largest centre is Leeds, but there are also substantial financial services companies and jobs in Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland.

Members have yet to consider the potential impact on this important sector of Britain leaving the European Union. The Government are obviously developing their proposals for trying to get the best deal for Britain, and this is a vital issue that needs to be considered as the Government put forward and develop their strategy.

There is obviously considerable cross-party support for debating this topic, and a good geographical spread of MPs whose constituents will be affected. It is a very timely issue. You will have seen in the newspapers, I am sure, many companies thinking about what the implications might be. We think that it is very important that Members are able to raise the issues that affect jobs, companies and their constituents, which is why we would like the debate.

We understand the real pressure on time, so while we would like the debate in the main Chamber, we are only asking for a three-hour debate—it would not have to be the full six hours.

Q32 **Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much. Chris?

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Chris Leslie: It is not very likely that we will get this in Government time—

Chair: I cannot imagine why.

Chris Leslie: The Government are moving gently towards their negotiating position and so forth. This is 12% of the economy, and in all of our constituencies. It is not just banking, it is insurance, legal services, accounting—think about all those jobs involved. It reaches across the political spectrum, because there are some of us who would argue that, if we changed our approach to regulating financial services, that could have a massive effect, but there are others who will be wanting to look at the competitive edge that Britain has, relative—in trading terms—to those other centres. It is really just because of the importance for the whole of the country and across all the different parties that we think this is pretty essential and it fits Backbench Business.

Q33 **Bob Blackman:** While I agree with you that you are not likely to get Government time for this, given that it is a very general debate, would you accept an offer of a debate in Westminster Hall? Just so you know before you answer, we have a huge number of applications here today, we have a backlog, and we have no time allocated for the Chamber at all as yet, so your chances of getting a debate in the Chamber any time soon are almost non-existent, whereas Westminster Hall may be possible.

Liz Kendall: I completely understand why you put that suggestion forward. Many of the Members whom I spoke to were obviously keen to debate it on the Floor of the House, because it is such a huge issue for the country. We could have had a six-hour debate. There would be plenty to fill that. I think three hours is sufficient, but for people's constituents actually to hear about such a big issue for the country on the Floor of the House—that is really what we want to stick with. I understand that you are being helpful, but I think that is why so many people wanted to sign up for the debate.

Q34 **Mr Nuttall:** I completely agree that it is a crucial and important subject that does deserve debate. Would you be open to slightly changing the motion? Chris mentioned in his comments the effect on legal services, and I wondered whether you may actually want to reflect that in the title.

Liz Kendall: Absolutely. I would be willing to put, "Effect of leaving the European Union on financial and other professional services." That would be absolutely—

Q35 **Mr Nuttall:** They are all tied up together, the services—financial, legal and accountancy services. I am not trying to limit it, but—

Chris Leslie: People think it is about banking sometimes, when in fact it is much more than that.

Mr Nuttall: It might perhaps more accurately reflect what you are actually trying to achieve.

Q36 **William Wragg:** I agree entirely that it is an important debate to be had,

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but—similar to my last question—do you have any people on this list who would be willing to speak about the positives and the opportunities that might potentially come forth from this?

Liz Kendall: Yes, I am sure there would be. I would include myself in that, because although I voted for remain, we have voted out, and I want to get the best deal for Britain.

William Wragg: Fair enough. Thank you. That's good.

Chris Leslie: It is the fact that this could lead to new treaties bilaterally with the EU; it could be about getting out of the customs union and building relationships with other countries and jurisdictions; or it could be about staying in the single market and the ramifications that would flow from that, so this is just one thread—a big one—but there is so much that flows from it.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Yasmin Qureshi and Hannah Bardell made representations.

Q37 **Chair:** Last but not least for this afternoon in terms of the applications, we have Yasmin Qureshi and Hannah Bardell. I am sure, like me, Yasmin, you have nightmares about having meetings in Committee Room 5. We spent so many happy months together on the HS2 Hybrid Bill Committee in this very room.

Yasmin Qureshi: A year and a half.

Hannah Bardell: This is my first time in front of the Backbench Business Committee, so it is a pleasure.

Q38 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome. The application this afternoon is about the inquiry into hormone pregnancy tests.

Yasmin Qureshi: Thank you, Chair. You may remember my coming before the Backbench Business Committee in the previous Parliament, because you were then a member of this Committee. I raised the issue of the drug Primodos. Some Members who were here in the previous Parliament may have heard me mention this in the Chamber quite a few times. This is essentially a drug that was given to pregnant women in the '50s, '60s and '70s that we say caused deformities to thousands and thousands of babies. Something happened in the '80s—one of the MPs raised this—but then the matter just quietened down. My constituents came to see me about this matter about five years ago and I raised it.

In the last Parliament, after asking questions at PMQs, meeting the Prime Minister, writing letters to Ministers and coming to the Backbench Business Committee for a debate in the main Chamber, at the end of that debate the then Minister, George Freeman, ordered an independent expert panel of inquiry into this drug: the use of it and the regulations regarding it—the regulatory framework. We argued not only that the drug caused all these

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deformities but that the medical authorities, and especially the Committee on Safety of Medicines, which should have known better, failed to do anything even though it was pointed out to the committee that there were some problems with this particular drug.

In fact, after the Backbench Business Committee debate, we have subsequently discovered documents from the Kew archives that showed letters from the person who was in charge of the Committee on Safety of Medicines saying that essentially the information should be disregarded. And not only disregarded: they sent out letters to GPs saying that "Your obligation is normally to make a note of any adverse reactions to any medication, but you should not even keep records of that, just in case somebody may sue you." Many other documents as well have shown that there was not just a negligent failure but actually a criminal failure in that they had deliberately turned a blind eye to it. Since that debate and the setting up of the independent expert panel, we have had people travel to Germany, where they have discovered more documents.

The reason we would like this debate is that we have tried to contact the chair of the expert panel inquiry. When George Freeman agreed to the inquiry, he promised three things: First, that the chair could speak to the chair of the panel. Secondly, that all evidence was going to be made available to the independent panel—that is, not only what we had; the Department of Health said it was going to look into its records to see if there was any information. Thirdly, they said clearly that the regulatory failures were to be looked at as well.

Subsequently we have found out, since the panel has met, that it has a lot of people on it, but, from reading their CVs, half of them are not qualified to deal with this issue. We have seen that some of the people on the panel have conflicts of interest in the sense that they have done work with Bayer, which is the main pharmaceutical company that we are alleging has done all this. Also, I wrote recently a very long letter, which is supported by all the MPs who have signed up to the group, to the chair asking a number of questions for assurance that all evidence will be taken as promised by the Minister. Her letter says, "No, we the panel will decide what we want to have a look at, not everything that you or others want to put."

We also said, and it was agreed, that the regulatory failures were to be looked at by the panel. The chair has now turned around and said, "No, we are not going to be looking at that. We are only looking at the issue of causation." We said that causation is just one aspect of the case and that there are all these other things.

So, essentially we are very concerned about the way the way the inquiry is going. We think that if it carries on at the rate it is, it is going to be a complete whitewash, not worth the piece of paper it is written on. This is the only way we think we can get some pressure on the panel of inquiry and on the Ministers about the original framework and agreement by George Freeman to us and the APPG members. At the most recent meeting we had with him, 24 Members of Parliament were in attendance

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and he gave us this assurance that all these things would be happening in this panel, but none of them is happening.

This is one of the reasons I have asked for a debate in the main Chamber. We have drafted a votable motion, because we feel that only by having it in the Chamber and having a vote on it will we be able to direct the Minister's mind to the fact that the panel has been set up and, at the moment, the way it is going is towards a complete whitewash, which would be really unfair to the thousands and thousands of babies who are now in their 40s and 50s and having a lot of health complications. As more publicity is given to the cause, more and more people are becoming aware.

When we started, we had only a couple of people in Scotland. Subsequently, we have had a number of victims now coming across from Scotland as well. I think Hannah Bardell would like to touch on that.

Hannah Bardell: As Yasmin has very eloquently and extensively described, she has been working on this matter tirelessly for a number of years. I got involved through my constituent Wilma Ord and her daughter Kirsteen, whom I have met a number of times. I have seen the very personal and significant impact it has had on their lives, not knowing or understanding why or if these drugs have affected her.

There are also big gaps in people's medical documentation; items have disappeared without any question. We have to remember the responsibility we have to our constituents. The point of having the debate in the main Chamber is to give the greatest profile to the issue, particularly from an external media perspective.

We believe there are many people out there who do not know or realise that they could have been victims of this. That is a major reason to have it in the main Chamber. It has been some time since the last debate and much has happened since then.

Sometimes we have a number of debates in a short period of time. It is fair to mention the work done by Yasmin and George Freeman. The panel has been set up and there are major questions now to be answered about the panel, its conduct and its members.

In the German documents there is actually a charge of murder being launched against the pharmaceutical company in relation to this drug. A number of documents have been produced. It is so important to have this debate in the main Chamber where we would be able to have the highest profile for the debate.

As Yasmin said, we have constituents, as do many other Members, who are looking for answers. This is essentially the forgotten thalidomide. It is so important that we give this the greatest profile that we can so that we can put on pressure.

Yasmin Qureshi: Can I add one final point? I know all MPs come and say that they fight for their constituents. One of the reasons I am fighting so

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hard on this issue and have taken it so seriously over the past six years that it has almost become part of my life, is that when I first met my constituent and read some of the documents they had managed to get hold of, I put on my barrister's hat to look at them evidentially. The expression that came to my mind was that this stinks to high heaven. There is criminal negligence here. I am honestly not exaggerating or trying to blow this up. Once all the documents we have now are looked at properly, this will turn out to be one of the biggest cover-ups of the 20th century.

Hannah Bardell: We also have public money being used on this expert panel group. I think that is a major point. For it to end up being a whitewash, or even perceived to be one, would be a failure in duty and misuse of public money. So we have a duty to ensure that the panel does its work properly and is held to account in the best way we can.

Chair: Thank you. Any questions, please?

Q39 **Gavin Newlands:** This is clearly a worthwhile and emotive issue. The application says 90 minutes or three hours. There are 34 people listed to speak. If that were a three-hour debate, taking away the lead-off speech, the summing up from the Front Benches and the Minister, that would be about three minutes per Back-Bench speech, if everyone were to speak. I assume you would not be taking 90 minutes anymore because clearly you are talking about 60 seconds to 75 seconds for everyone to speak in 90 minutes.

Yasmin Qureshi: Well, when you get me started in the Chamber—we are happy to take 90 minutes. If you can give us three hours that would be fantastic but being in the main Chamber is the really important thing for us. Three hours would be brilliant because so many people want to speak.

Gavin Newlands: Somebody wanted six hours with 20 speakers; you want 90 minutes with 34 speakers.

Chair: Honestly, Yasmin, if you were to have 90 minutes you would not be fair to your applicants. I would counsel you against that.

Q40 **Bob Blackman:** The most important thing for you, presumably, is for the substantive motion to be passed, rather than the number of speakers on the issue. That is what matters.

Yasmin Qureshi: For me, what matters most is, yes, getting the motion passed and a Minister having to do something about it. This needs a push from the top.

Q41 **Bob Blackman:** Given that, what about the time sensitivity of this issue?

Yasmin Qureshi: Urgent.

Q42 **Bob Blackman:** How urgent?

Yasmin Qureshi: I would say as soon as possible for this reason. Unfortunately, one of the problems we have with this expert panel is that they will not tell anybody how many sessions they are going to have. For

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all we know, the next session might be the last session, and that is happening in October. That is why it is important that we get it soon.

Q43 **Bob Blackman:** Is there a deadline for them to report?

Yasmin Qureshi: No. Unfortunately, that was one of the things never given to them. The next meeting could be their last meeting for all we know.

Q44 **Chair:** I am not being too cynical but this session today is televised on Parliament TV, so they may well be watching as we speak. We don't know that.

Hannah Bardell: I certainly hope so.

Q45 **Chair:** Thank you very much for the application. You made a very strong case on behalf of fellow applicants and their constituents.

Yasmin Qureshi: Thank you for listening. We are that close to getting justice for these people.

Chair: Thank you. That concludes the formal business of applications for this afternoon.

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