



Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 16 January 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 16 January 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Chris Davies; Patricia Gibson; Jess Phillips; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1-11

Witnesses

[\[I\]](#): Teresa Pearce

[\[II\]](#): Robert Halfon, Emma Hardy, Martin Vickers and Lucy Allan

[\[III\]](#): Mr Alistair Carmichael and Jamie Stone

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Teresa Pearce made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have a number of applications before us this afternoon. Since she is here, we will begin with Teresa Pearce on the importance of statutory high-quality PSHE.

Good afternoon, Teresa, and welcome. The title of your application is fairly self-explanatory, so over to you to explain why we need a debate about this.

Teresa Pearce: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Committee, for listening to me. The reason we have brought this request forward is that on 19 December, just as we broke for Christmas, the Government launched a call for evidence to allow the general public to have a say on relationships and sex education and personal, social, health and economic education. That call for evidence ends on Monday 12 February.

Through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Government committed to making RSE mandatory in all secondary schools and relationships education mandatory in all primary schools from 2019. The Act also includes a power to make PSHE statutory, and the call for evidence will help to inform the Government about how to do that—how to put the Act into effect.

PSHE is a subject that supports children in schools and helps them to become healthy, safe individuals prepared for adult life. At the moment, its non-statutory status on the curriculum puts it at a disadvantage compared with other subjects, which often means—depending on the school and on the teacher—that it can be very patchy. PSHE is proven to support children in mental and physical health. It has reduced the risk of drugs and alcohol misuse and can have a very good impact on the academic attainment of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils.

There is strong support for this. There is a group of MPs with an interest in the importance of the matter, and we wish to secure time for a debate that explores high-quality statutory status for this subject. The Government wants to hear from teachers, parents, young people and Parliament. I believe that having the debate would not only let the Government hear the voice of Parliament, but encourage teachers, parents and young people to respond to the consultation, meaning that we will get better legislation.

There is parliamentary interest in this. Although at the moment only 11 MPs have signalled their intention to speak, that is because we have only just returned after the recess and time is very short. I am sure that if I



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had had another week to run round the tea rooms, I would have got many more people.

PSHE has been referenced 264 times in the Commons, including in the debate on Caroline Lucas's private Member's Bill, which was introduced in January 2017 but fell because of the general election.

Is there cross-party support for this debate? I recognise that the three lead Members on the application are all Labour party Members, but that is because of the short time we had and because the debate applies to England only, which meant that we could not go to the SNP or Plaid Cymru. But there is cross-party support. Julian Knight, chair of the APPG on financial education for young people, and Peter Aldous, chair of the APPG for first aid, would both have been here today had they not had prior engagements.

We understand that parliamentary time is short. We would love a half-day debate, but we will be perfectly happy with 90 minutes if that is what this Committee decides. Given the need for the debate to be held before 12 February, we believe that appearing before this Committee is probably the only way for us to get this cross-party group of MPs to share their views on this important topic. We hope you might look favourably on our request.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Teresa. You will be aware that there is an Education Select Committee report on PSHE. It is a couple of years old now, but it is still there, anyway.

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** I am very sympathetic to the application. You have made a 90-minute application. How does Tuesday 6 February grab you as a potential date?

Teresa Pearce: Sounds marvellous. Obviously we realise time is short, but I am sure we could rustle up quite a few people for that date.

Patricia Gibson: I was just going to say that you obviously want to make the debate as cross party as possible, and if it is a 90-minute debate, 10 speakers is quite respectable.

Chair: Right. That looks like a distinct possibility, Teresa. We will make our determination in the closed session once we adjourn. Thank you.

Robert Halfon, Emma Hardy, Martin Vickers and Lucy Allan made representations.



Q3 **Chair:** Welcome, Robert. The application you have submitted is on hospital car parking charges. Over to you.

Robert Halfon: Thank you. Hospital car parking charges have become an ever-increasing issue for patients and visitors to hospitals and their relatives right across the United Kingdom. The *Daily Mirror* did a big campaign on this over Christmas, and it is something I have been arguing about for some time. It would cost roughly £200 million to scrap the charges. Many charities are supportive of the campaign to scrap hospital car parking charges, including CLIC Sargent, which is a child cancer charity, other charities and the RAC as well, which sent in its support.

I did a ten-minute rule Bill on this only a few weeks ago. I am very fortunate that the campaign has received cross-party backing. We are very lucky to have my hon. Friend—I say hon. Friend; she is a friend—Emma Hardy, who is sitting next to me, and other senior MPs. We have Ed Davey from the Liberal Democrats and Frank Field from the Labour party as well. I have Conservative colleagues, Lucy Allan and Martin Vickers, with me today. There is considerable support from all sides of the House for a proper debate on this issue, to try to get the Government to look at the issue.

We want to scrap hospital car parking charges for patients, visitors and, particularly, the staff, because it is very unjust that many staff who work in the public sector, such as police officers or teachers, don't pay for car parking, yet we penalise hard-working public sector workers who work in the NHS. I will pass over to my colleague.

Emma Hardy: One thing I am particularly passionate about is that we are charging people who work in the NHS to actually go to work. We all know the headlines and how much the public sector has suffered, and that these people have in effect had a pay cut over a large number of years and are struggling. We have seen the headlines about nurses using food banks, yet we are charging them to go to work. Some of them are in my constituency.

It was actually the unions that approached me about this and asked if I knew that there are nurses in my constituency who have to park in quite difficult areas late at night and walk there on their own when they finish their shift because they cannot afford to park their car for the day in the car park. When I approached the CEO of Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals about this, he said they were providing them with a security guard to walk them to their cars. Can you see how ridiculous this whole situation is getting? People are being left in a vulnerable situation just because they are coming to work.

That is one of the main reasons I really support the Bill: to support all



those people working for our NHS, a lot of whom do not earn that much money and who are getting penalised every day because car parking charges are incredibly high.

Martin Vickers: I just add, as well as what Robert has outlined, that the Committee has to be mindful that in rural areas, such as in Lincolnshire, people have to spend considerable amounts to actually get to the hospital in the first place. Even in an urban area, such as my own in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area, many of the services are actually centred in Hull. That involves traveling, and paying the Humber Bridge toll and so on, before they get to the parking charges, so I am very supportive of this. There is, of course, a cost, as there is with everything, but I think this would be widely welcomed by the public.

Lucy Allan: I just want to reiterate my right hon. Friend's point that there is cross-party support for this and has been for a considerable period. I know there have been debates on this in previous Parliaments, but the time has now come, following the recent contribution that my right hon. Friend made in the House, to get behind some of the anger that the public feel. It is a tax on the sick, penalising those most in need, and we cannot just stand back and say it is acceptable because the hospitals decide that that is what they are going to do. We want to give a real profile to this issue, because it matters to the constituents of Members on both sides of the House.

Robert Halfon: May I say one final thing? When there was an initial campaign on this, the Government brought out guidelines in 2014 to curtail the cost of car parking charges. Since that, something like 47% of hospitals have increased their hourly charges. On top of that, you have close to 50% of hospitals charging disabled people to park. The guidelines are not working. We have given the Government time to see if the guidelines work, but things are not getting better at all, and people are still paying a huge whack for car parking charges in hospitals.

Q4 **Bob Blackman:** I have two questions. First, I have no doubt that you will not have a problem on this, but at the moment there are insufficient speakers on your application. We would need to see, for a three-hour debate, a minimum of 15 speakers. I am sure you will not have a problem acquiring that, but we need to see it. Secondly, I am very sympathetic to your draft motion, but there are two issues. One is that the Government need to supply the money to replace the income from the car parking charges—the money would have to go to the hospital trusts or whatever. Then there would need to be a ruling to outlaw charges, because the risk is that the Government give the money but the hospitals just carry on charging. While I have sympathy on scrapping the charges, I think the wording of the motion needs to be slightly revised.



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Robert Halfon: If we were given the Committee's permission to have a debate, I can guarantee that I will get the speakers.

Bob Blackman: I am sure you can, but you will understand that we have a lot of applications in front of us, all of which have the requisite number of speakers already registered, so we have the confidence that those debates will proceed. You are a veteran of applying to this Committee, so you know the way we have to operate.

Chair: I am afraid, Robert, that there is a hoop through which we expect Members to jump.

Robert Halfon: On the second point, I am happy to amend the motion, but in essence, if the motion were passed, I am not expecting the Government to suddenly announce the scrappage. There would be a proper consultation period on how it would be done, the money that would go to hospitals and so on.

Bob Blackman: I understand completely where your colleagues are coming from, but from a London perspective, the other issue is how you control who parks in the car parks. It is not just people using the hospital, but commuters and other people who may choose to park in a car park.

Chair: It is not just a London problem, Bob.

Patricia Gibson: On that point, I am very sympathetic to your application and obviously support it. In terms of the mechanics of how it would work in practice, I ask you to look at the example of Scotland, where we have got rid of these charges and made the concessions to injustice that you have mentioned. Looking at how it was implemented in Scotland might be a good place to start.

Q5 **Chris Davies:** Mr Halfon, you put down for a Chamber debate. If, due to time, you were offered a Westminster Hall debate, would that be acceptable, or is this time-limited, and would you rather wait for a Chamber debate?

Robert Halfon: The preference of all of us is to wait for a Chamber debate.

Chair: It would be quite unusual indeed for us to award a 90-minute Chamber debate, so you would need an increased number of speakers to fill a three-hour debate. There is no doubt about that. Thank you very much for the application. We will be considering it in our closed session after we have adjourned.

The subject of the next application is a policy framework for agriculture after the UK leaves the EU.



Mr Alistair Carmichael and **Jamie Stone** made representations.

Mr Carmichael: The genesis of this application comes from discussions that I had with the National Farmers Union of Scotland, who are very keen to see that the issues from the diverse parts of the United Kingdom are ventilated at this stage. You will be aware that the Secretary of State recently, in his Oxford conference speech, gave some indication about the direction of travel that he wanted, but I think it was apparent from that speech that the thinking is still very much in the early stages. I think the feeling of the NFUS and certainly of myself and those who have indicated a willingness to speak in the debate is that this would be a good opportunity for Parliament to have a say and a voice in setting the agenda here rather than waiting for the Government to come up with some of the ideas and to respond.

The interests of farmers in my constituency will be very different from those in East Anglia, for example, where there will be big arable farms, which are very different, again, from the dairy farms in the south-west. For that reason I thought that to keep it a general debate as far as possible, rather than tying ourselves to a motion, would be sensible, and it would allow people with different interests from their particular geographic area of concern to put their views on the record.

I see this as being the start of a process rather than an event in itself. This is a subject to which we will be returning with quite monotonous regularity over the next few years, but it would be appropriate at this stage to have an event in Parliament. As I say, it was the NFUS and their representations to me that motivated me to put in this application. I would anticipate—I think we have got something like 12 people indicating an interest to speak at the moment—that in the event that we were to have a debate, the NFUS and the NFU would probably engender a fairly significant degree of interest in the debate when it actually happened.

Chair: Jamie? Nothing to add—okay.

Q6 **Bob Blackman:** Just a couple of quick questions in terms of the timing. At the moment, as you say, you have got potentially 12 speakers. We would expect to see 15 speakers for a three-hour debate, but potentially you could have a 90-minute debate, which would fit a Westminster Hall application. Is that something that you would accept?

Mr Carmichael: I would accept whatever you think is appropriate. At the moment, as I say, I think this is not going to be the only occasion on which we will debate these issues, so a 90-minute debate would probably serve to ventilate the issues. If it is a question of finding another three speakers, as I say, once a date is set I would anticipate that the unions will be fairly active in getting people to speak, quite apart from the other



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interest groups that there are in food production which are not, shall we say, producer interests.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** If it was a 90-minute debate, one of the issues that we offer, occasionally—you are asking for a general debate anyway—is to come back to the Committee with a set of proposals and ask for a divisible motion in the Chamber at a future time if you do not get the answers from the Government that you want. Is that something that would fit?

Mr Carmichael: In fairness to the Government—not words you will often hear me say—I think there are not many answers to be had from anyone on this at the moment. What is needed is for the Government to hear the different voices from farming communities in the different parts of the country. The thinking behind it is that there is a ventilation of the issues. I would not then bounce up and down and say, “You have not told us what we are going to have by way of a framework.”

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Would Tuesday 30 January suit, for a 90-minute debate?

Mr Carmichael: Tuesday 30 January would be one of the worst possible dates in the year for me. It is the day when Shetlanders dress up as Vikings and burn boats. It is Up Helly Aa. You can Google it. It is a cultural experience to behold.

Bob Blackman: I take that as a no.

Jess Phillips: Three-line Whip.

Mr Carmichael: That is the advantage of being Chief Whip, you see: there is never a Liberal Democrat three-line Whip.

Chair: Do you throw burning barrels at one other and that sort of stuff?

Mr Carmichael: No, it is southern places like Stonehaven that do that.

Q9 **Bob Blackman:** The alternative is Thursday 1 February in the late afternoon.

Mr Carmichael: Thursday 1 February sounds delightful.

Jess Phillips: Unless you are on fire.

Mr Carmichael: Unless we are still on fire, trying to douse the flames.

Q10 **Mr Wragg:** Clearly, a lot of wisdom comes from Scotland, but I wonder whether you might have a greater diversity of Members from the United Kingdom on this issue, other than the Member for Westmorland.



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Mr Carmichael: I am sure that diversity could be obtained.

Q11 **Chair:** As I said to Robert, when we are looking at applications for three-hour debates, we want a minimum of 15 names on the paper. Therefore, if you have other names in mind, please forward them to the Clerk and then we can proceed.

Mr Carmichael: We will feed them in.

Chair: That is a minimum requirement. Thank you very much indeed.