

Weekly Political Report

11th July 2016

The consultations section is at the end of this document.

For further information on any of the parliamentary terms used in this document, please click here.

Hearing Loss

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Written question on the support provided to deaf parents by schools</u></p>	<p>Amanda Holloway MP (Con, Derby North) has asked the Department for Education if it will take steps to ensure that deaf parents receive adequate support so that they can participate in their children's schooling and all related school activities undertaken by parents.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Children and Families, Ed Timpson MP (Con, Crewe and Nantwich) said that the Public Sector Equality Duty within the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies, and those carrying out public functions, such as schools, to have due regard to the following aims when designing policies and delivering services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010 • advance equality of opportunity, and; • foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. <p>Ed Timpson added that this includes discrimination against people with a disability, such as deafness. Public bodies must be able to show how equality issues have been considered when they develop, implement, evaluate and review policies, services and processes. He added that:</p> <p><i>“We are committed to ensuring all parents have a more significant voice in all schools. Through the new Parent Portal, we will ensure parents have access to clear and simple information about the school system and how to support their child. This will work alongside the new performance tables website which is making it easier for parents to find out how well</i></p>

	<i>their child's school is performing and to compare schools across a range of key measures."</i>
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Employment

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Item	Summary
<u>Westminster Hall debate on Employment for People with Disabilities</u>	<p>Derek Thomas MP (Con, St. Ives) led a Westminster Hall debate on the employment opportunities for disabled people. He used much of his speech to focus on the barriers faced by people with learning disabilities and case studies from his constituency. Talking about the attitude of employers he said:</p> <p><i>"although willing, employers would be nervous about whether a candidate had the skills and support network needed to work in often busy workplaces. Community-based organisations can build trust with businesses owners and have the connections to help to equip prospective employees with the skills and confidence they need."</i></p> <p>The SNP Spokeswomen for Work and Pensions, Eilidh Whiteford (SNP, Banff and Buchan) called on the Government to set out a clear timetable for the publication of its Green Paper. She called for the Work and Health Programme to take Work Choice as its starting point for the design of initiatives, rather than the Work Programme. She went on to say:</p> <p><i>"In contrast, most of the emphasis in current programmes is on helping to prepare and equip unemployed disabled people for the workplace. If we want to secure a step change, the real trick is to prepare and equip employers not just to take on more disabled staff but to retain staff who become disabled or develop long-term health problems. Access to Work can play a crucial role in aligning the needs of businesses with employment programme outcomes, but it can also help businesses to adapt when a valued employee develops a condition that makes it harder for them to do their job. I wholly accept that certain jobs and certain conditions may be incompatible, but there are many, many occupations that can be sustained with the right adaptations.</i></p> <p><i>"This cannot just be about changing employers' attitudes. Let us acknowledge that the take-up of schemes such Disability Confident has been fairly low. We have seen some degree of</i></p>

cultural change in recent years in terms of flexible working, which has probably been driven more by labour market requirements than by concerns about disabled people's employment rights. We should also remember that flexibilities have cut both ways, with a sharp rise in zero-hours contracts and more insecure and unpredictable working patterns."

Speaking for the Labour Party Margaret Greenwood MP (Lab, Wirral West) was highly critical of the Government's progress on disability employment, saying:

"As study upon study has shown, the Government's pledge to halve the disability employment gap rings hollow. It is estimated that, at the current rate, it will take until 2030 to do so. The shelved White Paper, with the promise of a strategy defining support for disabled people, is yet another broken promise, so I join others in their request to Minister today: will he tell us definitively when he will produce his Green Paper?"

She went on to say:

"What needs to happen? Addressing those issues, including the disability employment gap, needs political will. If 90% of disability is acquired, why are we doing so little to help employers to retain skilled and experienced employees who may become poorly or disabled? We need practical measures to support disabled people at work, enabling them to thrive and protecting them from leaving the labour market prematurely. Some disability charities have recommended more flexible leave arrangements, as well as extending Access to Work. Even if the Government do finally increase Access to Work from the 37,000 or so who were helped last year, it will still be available only to a tiny proportion of the 1.3 million disabled people who are fit for work. In the current economic climate, what assurances has the Minister had from his colleagues that Access to Work funds will be increased?"

"The Disability Confident scheme needs to be rebooted. The latest revelations that only 40 mainstream private sector employers across the UK have been involved since its inception three years ago show that the scheme is, to put it mildly, clearly inadequate. What measures are in place to monitor its efficacy? For those employers who work hard to recruit and retain disabled employees, how does the scheme apply to their procurement policies and supply chains?"

The Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson MP (Con, Swindon North) responded to the debate for the Government. He responded to points made during the debate about Disability

	<p>Employment Advisers, saying that the Government are rapidly re-recruiting and are looking to get to 500 disability advisers.</p> <p>Justin Tomlinson went on to celebrate the success of Disability Confident, saying:</p> <p><i>“Disability Confident is an important part of [halving the disability employment gap]. Some 690 organisations have now signed up; we are making changes to the scheme, with greater asks of larger employers in particular, and are recruiting more than 100 organisations a month now, so it is beginning to accelerate quickly.”</i></p> <p>On the timing of the Government’s Green Paper, he said:</p> <p><i>“The Green Paper is a priority for the Government. It is well supported by stakeholders, who understand that, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives set out so clearly, when we use their experience and knowledge, we can make real and good decisions. But it cannot be rushed; we have to do it as and when we get all the right questions answered and the right information. It will come this year and will be done in the right and proper manner with the full support of the stakeholders who I regularly engage with.”</i></p>
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Disability

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Government responds to the Lords Select Committee Report on the Equality Act and Disability</u></p>	<p>The Government Equalities Office has published their response to the <u>final report</u> of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010: the impact on disabled people.</p> <p>One of the Select Committee’s most powerful recommendations to Government was that the Public Sector Equality Duty should be strengthened, the Duty currently requires public bodies to take ‘due regard’ to the needs of disabled people when designing services, the committee recommended that this is changed to a requirement to take ‘all proportionate steps’. The Government responded:</p>

“In line with the recommendations of the 2013 Review of the Public Sector Equality Duty by the independent steering group chaired by Lord Haywood, the Government is considering a further review of the PSED. We will ensure that the Select Committee’s concerns and recommendations are taken into account in any such review.”

The Government rejected the Committees recommendations around two measure which could be taken to improve the support for disabled people on public transport – these were around the provision of audio-display systems on buses and a proposed requirement for bus drivers to undertake disability awareness training.

The Government did not respond to those recommendations from the Committee which were explicitly aimed at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, such as the call for greater sector specific guidance on the meaning on reasonable adjustment in the Equality Act.

Action on Hearing Loss presented written and oral evidence to the Select Committee. Our press statement setting out our response to the Committee’s final report can be found here

Parliamentary terms

Early Day Motion (EDM)

Early Day Motions are formal motions for debate submitted by MPs in the House of Commons. There is usually no time available to actually debate an EDM, but they are useful for drawing attention to specific events or campaigns and demonstrating the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view. MPs register their support by signing individual motions.

Oral Parliamentary Question (OPQ) and Written Parliamentary Question (WPQ)

Parliamentary Questions are used by both MPs and Peers to question Ministers in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They are used to seek information, and Ministers are obliged to explain and defend the work, policy, decisions and actions of their departments, oral questions can also be used to make political points. Parliamentary questions are a vital tool in holding the Government to account. The Prime Minister answers oral questions from the House of Commons every Wednesday at midday.

Debates

Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords hold debates in which Members discuss government policy, proposed new laws and current issues. All debates are recorded in a publication called 'Hansard' which is available online or in print.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal groups composed of politicians from all political parties. They provide an opportunity for cross-party discussion and co-operation on particular issues. All-party groups sometimes act as useful pressure groups for specific causes helping to keep the Government, the opposition and MPs informed of parliamentary and outside opinion.

Select Committees

House of Commons Select Committees exist to scrutinise the work of government departments. Most committees have about 11 members and reflect the relative size of each party in the Commons. They conduct enquiries on a specific issue, and gather evidence from expert witnesses. Findings are reported to the Commons, printed, and published on the Parliament website. The Government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

Written ministerial statements

Government ministers can make written statements to announce:

- The publication of reports by government agencies
- Findings of reviews and inquiries and the government's response
- Financial and statistical information
- Procedure and policy initiatives of government departments

Private Members' Bills

Private Members' Bills allow backbench MPs or Peers to introduce their own legislation. There are three types of Private Members' Bills introduced into the House of Commons:

- **Ballot Bills:** A ballot is held at the beginning of each parliamentary year the 20 MPs whose names come out top are allowed to introduce legislation on a subject of their choice.

