

Weekly Political Report

12th September 2016

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Disability

Click on Link for Source

Item	Summary
<p><u>House of Lords debate on report of the Select Committee on the Equality Act and Disability</u></p>	<p>The House of Lords has held a debate on the report of the Select Committee for the Equality Act and Disability. The temporary committee <u>published its report</u> in March and the Government <u>published its formal response</u> in July.</p> <p>The debate was opened by the Committee’s Chair, Baroness Deech (CB) who summed up the report, saying:</p> <p><i>“Once the evidence of our report is taken into account, it is impossible for any Government....to ignore our recommendations, which have been crafted to be almost cost free. We need willingness on the part of government to take care of all our people, and we need organisations and services to be forced to adapt if the softly-softly approach does not work—and I am afraid it has not. We were disappointed with the government response in July, which in general I can sum up by calling it buck-passing and the dragging of heels.”</i></p> <p>[...]</p> <p><i>“In sum, we call for the restoration of the Equality Advisory and Support Service and conciliation services to the EHRC. We call for a cumulative impact assessment of the effect of cuts and financial changes on disabled persons; for amendments to the PSED, buses Bill and licensing objectives; and for technical guidance to be laid before Parliament as codes of practice.”</i></p> <p>Home Office Minister, Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con) responded to the debate for the Government. In her speech she argued against the Committee’s recommendation to strengthen the Public Sector Equality Duty (PESD) so that public bodies would be required to take ‘proportionate steps’ to accommodate disabled people rather than ‘have due regard’. She said:</p>

	<p><i>“The due regard test is well established and the courts have recognised that difficult decisions by elected politicians should not be second-guessed by the courts where all the relevant facts have been considered. The due regard requirement helps to ensure that public bodies remain conscious of equality issues throughout the process of exercising their functions. As soon as a requirement becomes more specific—the noble Baroness and I talked about this today—or task oriented, there is inevitably the risk that many public bodies may start to think of short cuts or ways out of fulfilling their duties.</i></p> <p><i>“The noble Baroness [Deech] and a couple of noble Lords talked about disabled people losing out now under the PSED. We disagree, first and foremost because two of the leading cases brought under the PSED on the spare room subsidy and the independent living fund were brought by, or on behalf of, disabled people. We feel that if public bodies were under separate duties to have regard to each of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act, we would have a more complicated and bureaucratic scheme than at present.”</i></p>
<p><u>Written question on prosecutions for disability hate crime</u></p>	<p>Former Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson MP (Con, Swindon North) asked the Attorney General what progress has been made in increasing the number of prosecutions for disability hate crime.</p> <p>In response the Attorney General, Robert Buckland (Con, Swindon South) said that in 2015/16, the CPS completed 941 prosecutions for disability hate crime, an increase of 41.3% on the previous year when it completed 666 prosecutions. The number of convictions rose from 503 in 2014/15 to 707 in 2015/16, an increase of 40.6%.</p>
<p><u>Written question on disability awareness training for staff at sports grounds</u></p>	<p>Peter Dowd MP (Labour, Bootle) has asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, taking to ensure that public-facing staff at sport venues have disability equality awareness training.</p> <p>In response the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Sport, Tracey Crouch MP (Con, Chatham and Aylesford) said the Government’s Sports Strategy recognises the need for everyone to be able to access live sport and to benefit from the experience. It makes clear that sports venues need to provide an inclusive environment that welcomes all spectators. She added that the Government <i>‘expect all sports and all clubs to take the necessary action to fulfil their legal obligation under the Equality Act of 2010 to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled</i></p>

	<i>people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage when accessing sports venues’.</i>
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Hearing Loss

Click on link for source

Item	Summary
<u>Written question on access to the National Citizen Service for young deaf people</u>	<p>Tim Loughton (Con, East Worthing and Shoreham) has asked the Government what steps it is taking to encourage young deaf people to take part in the National Citizen Service.</p> <p>The Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson (Con, Reading East) responded saying that in order to encourage young people with sensory disabilities to take part NCS, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport is working closely with NCS Trust, the independent organisation which delivers NCS, to ensure that NCS is accessible. Many NCS providers already reach out and offer support to those with disabilities, including deaf young people. The largest provider, The Challenge, has worked with the National Deaf Children's Society, and adapted the programme for deaf young people, including providing dedicated support workers.</p> <p>He added that the NCS Trust is currently developing a detailed inclusion strategy to ensure that over the longer term there is consistent and high quality provision for young people with disabilities to take part in the programme.</p>

Medical Research

Click on Link for Source

Item	Summary
<u>Written question on funding for research into hearing loss</u>	<p>Nic Dakin MP (Labour, Scunthorpe) has asked the Department for Health what research into hearing loss it has commissioned in the last three years.</p> <p>In response the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Nicola Blackwood (Con, Oxford West and Abingdon) said that the Department's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) invested £4.1 million in ear disease research in 2014-15. The NIHR is investing £6.2 million over five years (2012-17) in</p>

	<p>the Biomedical Research Unit in Deafness and Hearing Problems at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust and the University of Nottingham.</p> <p>The NIHR has launched a new, open competition for biomedical research centre funding from April 2017 to March 2022. In this competition, a number of clinical areas of particular strategic importance to the health of patients are highlighted including deafness and hearing problems.</p> <p>Current NIHR-funded awards relating to hearing loss include a £1.6 million research professorship to develop the evidence base for Ear, Nose and Throat medicine and surgery, and a £1.3 million feasibility study of an implantable middle-ear microphone.</p>
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Television

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Written question subtitle provision on on-demand services</u></p>	<p>Royston Smith (Con, Southampton Itchen) has asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport if they will hold discussions with on demand television providers on extending the provision of subtitles.</p> <p>The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy, Matthew Hancock MP (Con, West Suffolk) responded by saying:</p> <p><i>“Yes. Furthermore, Ofcom, as the regulator for video on demand services, is currently consulting on the accessibility of on demand programme services and proposed steps to ensure their services are progressively made more accessible. We have requested an update from broadcasters, content providers and platform operators in Spring 2017 setting out their progress in increasing the provision of access services on video on demand services.”</i></p>

Employment

Click on Link for Source

Item	Summary
<u>Written question on the number of Disability Employment Advisers</u>	<p>SNP Westminster Group Leader for Social Justice and Welfare, Eilidh Whiteford MP (SNP, Banff and Buchan) has asked how many disability employment advisers are employed by Jobcentre Plus.</p> <p>The Minister of State for Employment, Damian Hinds MP (Con, East Hampshire) said that the number of Disability Employment Advisers employed by the Department for Work and Pensions is 263 at July 2016.</p>

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.

