

Weekly Political Report

19th September 2016

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Employment

Click on Link for Source

Item	Summary
<p><u>Written question on the Government's Disability Employment Gap Green Paper</u></p>	<p>SNP Group Leader for Social Justice and Welfare, Eilidh Whiteford MP (SNP, Banff and Buchan) asked the Government whether it plans to include proposals relating to Personal Independence Payments in its upcoming Green Paper on the disability employment gap.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Disabled People, Work and Health, Penny Mordaunt MP (Con, Portsmouth North) said that:</p> <p><i>“Later this year, we will produce a Green Paper and conduct a consultation on a wide range of issues.”</i></p> <p>This is the first time that the Government have referred to a consultation taking place alongside the Green Paper.</p>
<p><u>Written question on the life chances of disabled people</u></p>	<p>Danny Kinahan MP (UUP, South Antrim) has asked the Department for Work and Pensions what steps they are taking to enhance the life chances of disabled people.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Disabled People, Work and Health, Penny Mordaunt MP (Con, Portsmouth North) said that the Government is committed to improving the life chances of disabled people and has made a commitment to halve the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people.</p> <p>She added that:</p> <p><i>“The Government is working with employers through Disability Confident to challenge attitudes towards disability and ensure that disabled people have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations.”</i></p> <p>She also went on to outline the success of Access to Work and</p>

	<p>Work Choice in improving the employment prospects of disabled people.</p>
<p><u>Written question on funding for disabled people in Northern Ireland</u></p>	<p>Danny Kinahan MP (UUP, South Antrim) has asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had on maintaining the level of funding for disabled people in Northern Ireland when support for such people from the European Social Fund ceases.</p> <p>In response the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Kris Hopkins MP (Con, Keighley) said that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has regular discussions with colleagues on a range of issues regarding the UK's exit from the European Union. The Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed on 13 August that European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) projects signed before the Autumn Statement will be fully funded, even when these projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.</p> <p>He added:</p> <p><i>"For projects signed after the Autumn Statement, the Government will work with the devolved administrations on funding arrangements to allow them to prioritise projects within their devolved responsibilities. As we transition to longer-term arrangements, we will ensure the devolved administrations are treated fairly and that their circumstances are taken into account."</i></p>
<p><u>Written question on Disability Confident</u></p>	<p>SNP Group Leader for Social Justice and Welfare, Eilidh Whiteford MP (SNP, Banff and Buchan) has asked the Department for Work and Pensions what plans it has to increase awareness of the Disability Confident campaign and how it plans to measure the effectiveness of that campaign.</p> <p>The Minister of State for Disabled People, Work and Health, Penny Mordaunt MP (Con, Portsmouth North) responded saying:</p> <p><i>"We have developed a new Disability Confident employer accreditation scheme. This went live in July. This will be core to our engagement with employers to raise awareness, improve performance and drive up engagement on the disability employment agenda. We are developing plans to formally launch the scheme in the Autumn and more information on take up and effectiveness measures will be available from then."</i></p>
<p><u>Written question on the</u></p>	<p>Andrew Bridgen MP (Con, North West Leicestershire) asked the</p>

<p><u>effectiveness of Access to Work</u></p>	<p>Department for Work and Pensions what recent assessment it has made of the effectiveness of the Access to Work scheme and its administration.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Disabled People, Work and Health, Penny Mordaunt MP (Con, Portsmouth North) said that Access to Work continues to support over 36,000 people per year take up or retain employment.</p> <p>She added:</p> <p><i>“On 2 September 2016 we launched the Access to Work Digital Service in response to customer feedback requesting a more convenient, accessible and quicker process. This transformation will also enable staff to administer the scheme more efficiently as we look to increase the number of disabled people who could be helped into or remain in work as part of the Government’s ambition to halve the disability employment gap.”</i></p> <p>She also highlighted the funding commitment to extend the scheme to an additional 25,000 people and the promotion of Access to Work through Disability Confident.</p>
<p><u>Written question on the employment rate for disabled people</u></p>	<p>Stephen McPartland (Con, Stevenage) asked the Cabinet Office what estimate it has made of the employment rate for disabled in each year from 2010 to 2016.</p> <p>In response the Parliamentary-Under Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office, Chris Skidmore MP (Con, Kingswood), said that this was a matter for the UK Statistics Authority and referenced a written response that they have provided. In this response the UKSA said that the latest figures showed that in 2016 there were 3.4 million disabled people in work, an employment rate of 47.9%. The letter also provided the figures back to 2010, but explained that a change in the way that the UKSA calculates the number of disabled people in work in 2013 makes the figures difficult to compare.</p>

Health and Social Care

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Item	Summary
<p><u>MPs debate NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans</u></p>	<p>The House of Commons debated NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans as part of an Opposition Day Debate led by the Labour Party.</p>

	<p>The debate took place on a motion from the Labour Party which noted that <i>'NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans are expected to lead to significant cuts or changes to frontline services..... calls on the Government to publish the Plans and to provide an adequate consultation period for the public and practitioners to respond'</i>.</p> <p>Opening the debate Shadow Health Secretary, Diane Abbott MP (Lab, Hackney North and Stoke Newington) opened the debate saying:</p> <p><i>"In that context of financial pressure and concern about the availability of services, the sustainability and transformation plans are arousing concern. They sound anodyne and managerial, and there is undoubtedly a case for bringing health and social care stakeholders together to improve planning and co-ordination. But the concern is that, in reality, the plans will be used to force through cuts and close hospitals, will make it harder for patients to access face-to-face consultations with their GPs, and, above all, will open the door to more privatisation."</i></p> <p>Speaking for the Government the Minister of State for Health, Philip Dunne MP (Con, Ludlow) opened his speech by saying he was pleased to take the opportunity to correct the misconceptions around the plans. He set out that the plans were aimed at supporting the recommendations from the Five Year Forward View. He rebutted the claim that the Sustainability and Transformation Plans were about cuts, but instead said that they <i>'are about local areas, including commissioners, providers and local authorities, coming together and deciding how to improve services in the medium and long term. Some areas are taking difficult decisions, often looking to tackle long-standing problems, but this will be subject to rigorous local and national scrutiny'</i> He added that any services changes would be subject to consultation.</p> <p>The motion was defeated on division by 280 votes to 195.</p>
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Hearing Loss

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Item	Summary
<u>Written question on</u>	Tom Blenkinsop (Lab, Middlesbrough South and East

<p><u>funding for sign language classes for parents of deaf children</u></p>	<p>Cleveland) has asked the Department for Education if it will consider changing adult learning funding to fund BSL courses for families of children who are born deaf.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Skills, Robert Halfon MP (Con, Harlow) said:</p> <p><i>“This Department funds British Sign Language (BSL) qualifications in England through the Adult Education Budget (AEB). In the current economic climate, our funding must be focussed where it can have the most impact, so we support young adults aged 19 and over to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get work or to progress in their chosen career.”</i></p> <p>The rest of the answer did not address the needs of parents of deaf children.</p>
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Television

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Digital Economy Bill passes its second reading in the House of Commons</u></p>	<p>The Government’s <u>Digital Economy Bill</u> has been debated at second reading in the House of Commons. This piece of legislation is of interest to Action on Hearing Loss because it is possible that it could be amended during its passage through Parliament in order to incorporate a new clause enacting the aims of our Subtitle It! campaign.</p> <p>Two MPs used the Second Reading to press the case for an amendment to underpin the provision of subtitles on on-demand services. Lilian Greenwood MP (Lab, Nottingham South), intervened during the speech of the Secretary of State for culture, Media and Sport, Karen Bradley MP (Con, Staffordshire Moorlands). She asked:</p> <p><i>“I welcome the Secretary of State’s commitment to shaping the digital world to ensure that no one is left behind. Is she aware that those who are deaf or who have hearing loss are being excluded by the lack of subtitling? That is required on linear television, but it is not provided on the vast majority of on-demand services. Will she look at that exclusion? There is a</i></p>

	<p><i>huge opportunity to amend the Bill, so will she think again about extending the Communications Act 2003 to include the deaf and those with hearing loss?"</i></p> <p>To which the Secretary of State relied:</p> <p><i>"The hon. Lady makes a very good point. I am aware of that point; it has been raised with me, and I am working on it with the Minister for Digital and Culture to improve the situation. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that there has been progress in that area, but I fully take the point that we always need to do more."</i></p> <p>In his speech Neil Carmichael MP (Con, Stroud) also supported the campaign, saying:</p> <p><i>"now turn to something completely different, which is not in the Bill although I think it should be: subtitles. This connects with the interests of, for example, Action On Hearing Loss. The Bill offers a great opportunity to improve access to information for people with hearing difficulties by changing the structure of services. Would the Government consider using the Bill to improve the provision of subtitles on on-demand services, given the drastic improvement of their provision on linear television following legislation that has since become outdated?"</i></p> <p>The Bill passed its second reading without a division and will now move to a Public Bill Committee for line-by-line examination.</p> <p>Action on Hearing Loss will be submitting written evidence to the Public Bill Committee and seek to reach those MPs appointed to the Committee in order to gain their support for an amendment in line with our Subtitle It! campaign. Our proposal is an amendment which will use the <u>Private Member's Bill Lilian Greenwood</u> tabled in the previous annual session of Parliament as its basis and will code for a legally enforceable code setting out the minimum levels of subtitles which must be provided on on-demand services.</p>
<p><u>Written question on the regulatory framework for subtitles in on-demand services</u></p>	<p>Drew Hendry MP (SNP, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) has asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport what recent review it has conducted of the regulatory framework for the provision of subtitles for on-demand services.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Matt Hancock MP, said:</p> <p><i>"In 2015 the then regulator for video on demand services, the</i></p>

	<p><i>Authority for Television on Demand (ATVOD), published its Provision of Video on Demand Access Services Report. The Department analysed the findings of this report, and met with platform operators, content providers and broadcasters to review the provision of such services. The Department has asked broadcasters, content providers and platform operators for a progress update in Spring 2017.</i></p> <p><i>“Ofcom is the regulator with responsibility for on-demand programme services (ODPS). Ofcom are presently consulting on how to improve access services and ensure that providers see broadcast and ODPS accessibility as equally important.”</i></p>
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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.

