

Weekly Political Update

22nd June 2015

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Health

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Item	Summary
Written question on the mental health of deaf people	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green MP (Lab, Stretford and Urmston), asked the Department of Health what steps it is taking to promote good mental health amongst deaf people.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Care and Support, Alistair Burt MP (Con, North East Bedfordshire) outlined the general approach of Public Health England (PHE) to the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness. He added that at a local level, Health and Wellbeing Boards are responsible for developing an analysis of the current and future health and care needs of the local population through their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA). He said that Health and Wellbeing Boards, and the JSNA process that they oversee, offer valuable opportunities to drive improvements in meeting the needs of local people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment.</p> <p>He went on to say that “Department of Health officials have begun identifying and taking forward actions on how we can provide therapeutic support to Deaf people. In the meantime, we expect clinical commissioning groups to recognise the importance of commissioning Improving Access to Psychological Therapies services that are accessible to British Sign Language users and Deaf people more generally.”</p>
Written question on the mental health of deaf children	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green MP (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) asked the Department for Education what steps it is taking to promote good mental health among deaf children and young people in mainstream education and other settings.</p> <p>In response the Minister for Education Sam Gyimah MP (Con, East Surrey) said that the Government recognises the</p>

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	<p>prevalence of mental health problems is greater among deaf children. The Minister provided information on the general provision to support the mental health of pupils. He also said that Clinical Commissioning Groups are expected to recognise the importance of commissioning mental health services that are accessible to British Sign Language users and deaf people more generally.</p>
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Television

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Written question on digital exclusion of people with sensory loss</u></p>	<p>Laurence Robertson MP (Con, Tewkesbury) asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions he has had with television companies about the digital exclusion of people with sensory loss.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Ed Vaizey (Con, Wantage) stated that he has 'not as yet had any meetings with companies specifically about sensory access' but added that the Government remains committed to seeing an improvement in the provision of access services for video-on-demand (VoD) services and will continue to monitor progress.</p>
<p><u>Written question on access services on video-on-demand</u></p>	<p>Newly elected MP Wes Streeting (Labour, Ilford North) has asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to ensure that people with sensory loss have full access to subtitles and audio description whilst using on-demand content.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Ed Vaizry MP (Con, Wantage) said 'the Government remains committed to seeing an improvement in the provision of access services for video-on-demand (VoD) services and will continue to monitor progress. If the 2015 ATVOD's annual survey of VOD Services indicates that significant progress has not been made, then as stated in the Connectivity, Content and Consumers Paper (July 2013) we will consider legislation in 2016.'</p>

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Employment

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<p><u>Written question on the disability employment gap for people with hearing loss</u></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green MP (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) has asked the Department for Work and Pensions what the disability employment gap was for people who are deaf, have a vision impairment and are deafblind on the latest date for which figures are available. She has also asked what the disability employment gap was on 8 May 2015; and what methodology is used in calculating that gap. Kate Green also asked how many people whose Access to Work awards currently exceed the proposed limit on those awards are deafblind.</p> <p>The Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson MP, responded with a single answer which stated that the Labour Force Survey was used to calculate the disability employment gap – the difference between the employment rate of disabled people and the employment rate of non-disabled people. The Minister then provided a table with information on the employment gap for disability and sensory loss; this showed that the general employment rate was 79.3%, the disability employment rate was 46.3% (a gap of 32.9%). For people with hearing loss the employment rate was 64.9%, giving an employment gap of 14.3%.</p>
<p><u>Lords written question on the disability employment gap</u></p>	<p>Lord Touhig (Lab) has asked the Government what steps they are taking to end the disability employment gap.</p> <p>In response Baroness Altman (Con) said that in the last 12 months there has been an increase of 238,000 disabled people in work, however she said that there was still more to do and reiterated the Government’s commitment to halve the disability employment gap. She added:</p> <p>“Government cannot achieve this ambition alone so we are working closely with disabled people, their organisations, employers and employment support providers to develop our strategy to enable more disabled people to get into, remain in and progress in work. The Disability Confident Campaign, which actively promotes the Access to Work scheme, is key to supporting employers in working with Government to halve the disability employment gap.”</p>

<p><u>Written question on employers making reasonable adjustments for disabled people</u></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green MP (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) has asked the Department for Work and Pensions what action it will take to ensure that employers make appropriate reasonable adjustments for employees before Access to Work awards are made.</p> <p>In response the Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson (Con, Swindon North) said that Access to Work advisers are able to provide information to employers when they are considering the types of support that may be available. He added that the Disability Confident Campaign and Access to Work advisers promote a clear message to employers of their responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments and also that Access to Work is available as a support beyond reasonable adjustments. This can de-risk hiring or retaining disabled workers.</p>
<p><u>Written question on the return on investment from Access to Work awards</u></p> <p><u>Written question on the impact of the proposed Access to Work award limits</u></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green, (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) asked the Department for Work and Pensions if it will estimate the return on investment from Access to Work awards.</p> <p>The Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson (Con, Swindon North) responded by saying that ‘estimating Value for Money for Access to Work is difficult – there is no readily available comparison group against which to assess the difference the programme makes to someone’s likelihood of being in work’. He added that Access to Work covers a wide range of support and that each case is different and therefore ‘it is not possible or accurate to estimate the return to the Exchequer for each case’. The Minister said that his officials are considering how best to estimate the return on investment delivered by Access to Work.</p> <p>Kate Green MP has also asked how the proposed limit on Access to Work awards supports the Government's Fulfilling Potential disability strategy.</p> <p>Justin Tomlinson MP responded by saying that based on current figures, when the cap is fully implemented in April 2018, the 200 current users affected will still collectively receive over £8 million pounds per year to support them in employment, provided their circumstances do not change. He added that ‘the introduction of the limit of Access to Work awards will enable around £3m per year to be re-allocated to new users and other under-</p>

<p><u>Written question on consultation on the proposed Access to Work award limit</u></p> <p><u>Written question on communication with people affected by the Access to Work award limit</u></p> <p><u>Written question on online information on Access to Work</u></p>	<p>represented groups. For example this sum could be used to support around 1,000 new customers at average award levels or 3,000 extra places on the Mental Health Support Service’.</p> <p>Kate Green MP also asked for what reasons his Department did not consult people in receipt of Access to Work awards and their employers before deciding to introduce a limit on those awards.</p> <p>In response Justin Tomlinson MP said that “consideration was given to the requirements upon public bodies to act lawfully and fairly, to the evidence available, and to the nature and significance of the decision for affected individuals, including any mitigating factors.”</p> <p>Kate Green asked what discussion the Department plans to have with people in receipt of Access to Work awards and their employers about the introduction of a limit on those awards.</p> <p>In response Justin Tomlinson MP said that the Department was developing new, user friendly guidance which sets out the process clearly and simply. This will be published shortly and it will be available in Easy Read and British Sign Language. Guidance will be published well in advance of the October introduction of the new limit.</p> <p>He added that ‘Advisers will discuss the introduction of the limit to Access to Work as part of the awards process including exploring how the maximum support can be deployed to greatest effect’. He added that the Department are updating their factsheets, including those for employers. He added “Advisers are able to discuss reasonable adjustments with employers and provide advice on additional cost effective ways of support employers may not have considered – for example on the latest technology which our advisers are made aware of from dedicated technology awareness sessions.”</p> <p>Kate Green asked for what reason reference on the gov.uk website to Access to Work being provided where someone needs support or adaptations beyond the reasonable adjustments which an employer is legally obliged to provide under the Equality Act no longer makes reference to support or adaptations beyond reasonable adjustments and whether this change in wording is due to a change in policy.</p> <p>In response Justin Tomlinson stated that the Access to Work pages on Gov.UK have been updated to reflect announcement</p>
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<p><u>Written question on the implementation of the cap on Access to Work awards</u></p>	<p>of forthcoming changes to Access to Work. The statutory duty to make reasonable adjustment for disability remains. The legal obligation for employers to make reasonable adjustments is not replaced by Access to Work. This has not changed. Access to Work will make a significant contribution of up to £40,800 per year to meeting individual needs above that level.</p> <p>Kate Green has also asked what steps the Government will take to monitor the effect of the limit on Access to Work awards on recipients from when that limit is introduced.</p> <p>In response Justin Tomlinson MP said that ‘We intend to monitor the cases of new users at their annual review points. We will also make use of the annual review process to monitor the progress of existing users prior to their cap implementation date of April 2018’.</p>
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Accessibility of Parliament

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<p><u>Written question on facilities for people with hearing loss in Parliament</u></p>	<p>David Winnick MP (Lab, Walsall North) has asked the House of Commons Commission if it will consider what facilities can be made available to hon. Members and staff who are hard of hearing in non-public meetings in rooms on the Estate.</p> <p>In response the MP who represents the House of Commons Commission, Paul Beresford (Con, Mole Valley) said that a number of meeting rooms on the estate do not currently have any microphone facilities and hence have no induction loops. He said that low spill induction loops would not be practical in these rooms and therefore said that ‘officials in the Department of Facilities will work with the House of Commons audiovisual (AV) contractor to provide costings for a solution to address the issue’.</p> <p>David Winnick has tabled a supplementary question asking ‘what advice is given to people using hearing aids in order to hear non-public proceedings in meeting rooms in the building where no loop provision exists; and whether the Commission has discussed that matter with Action on Hearing Loss.’</p>
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	Action on Hearing Loss awarded the House of Commons its Louder than Words Charter Mark in March 2013.
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Disability

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<p><u>Written question on disability awareness training for taxi drivers</u></p>	<p>Zac Goldsmith MP (Con, Richmond Park) has asked the Department for Transport what steps it is taking to ensure that taxi and private hire drivers undergo disability awareness training.</p> <p>Transport Minister Andrew Jones MP (Con, Harrogate and Knaresborough) responded saying that although there is no statutory requirement for Taxi and PHV drivers to undertake disability awareness training, the Department for Transport's best practice guidance on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing in England and Wales recommends local licensing authorities work with operators, drivers and trade bodies in their area to improve drivers' awareness of the needs of disabled people. This includes encouraging their drivers to undertake disability awareness training. A separate licensing regime regulates taxi and private hire vehicles in Scotland and the Scottish Government publishes its own Best Practice guidance.</p> <p>He added that the Law Commission recently undertook a wide ranging review of taxi and private hire legislation in England and Wales and published their final report and a draft Bill on 23 May 2014, in which it recommended mandatory disability awareness training for drivers. The Government will respond to the report shortly.</p>
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British Sign Language

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<p><u>Written question on funding for British Sign Language in further education settings</u></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green MP (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) has asked the Department for Business Innovation and Skills if it plans to reduce funding for further education institutions offering British Sign Language qualifications.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Skills, Nick Boles MP (Con, Grantham and Stamford) said that the Department's £450m</p>
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<p><u>Written question on the impact of Business, Innovation and Skills budget changes on disability employment</u></p>	<p>savings will be delivered through known underspends and releasing unallocated funding, with spending decision for 2016-17 and beyond to be taken during the Spending Review. He added that</p> <p>“On 12 March, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issued a statement setting out plans to work with deaf people and stakeholder groups to undertake a market review of British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation provision to explore long term improvements in the market. My officials are working with DWP counterparts to develop this work. We will await the outcomes of the review before deciding if a cross-departmental working group is the best way forward to consider what changes can be implemented. I have not had the opportunity to discuss this with my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, or other Ministers, but would expect to do so in due course. I would be pleased to meet with Signature to discuss this further once the findings from the market review are known.”</p> <p>Kate Green also asked the Department for Business Innovation and Skills if it will assess the implications for his Department's policy on ensuring that disabled people gain employment of the in-year funding reductions announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the Department on 4 June 2015.</p> <p>In response Nic Boles said that the Government ‘remain committed to ensuring the skills system operates effectively to support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of the Department’s £450m savings will be delivered through known underspends and releasing unallocated funding’.</p>
<p><u>Written question on Crown Commercial Service's framework agreement for the provision of language services</u></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Kate Green MP (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) has asked whether the Crown Commercial Service's framework agreement for the provision of language services only supplies communication and language professionals working with deaf and deafblind people who meet the standards set by the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). Her question also asks whether the agreement contains terms and conditions that he considers are likely to attract qualified and NRCPD-registered communication and language professionals. She also asks if the agreement means that at the tendering stage greater priority will be given to cost</p>

	<p>than quality considerations in relation to decisions about the letting of contracts and provides a level playing field for small and medium-sized enterprises with larger firms.</p> <p>In response the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Matthew Hancock MP (Con, West Suffolk) said that the Crown Commercial Service’s Language Services Framework Agreement (RM1092) will provide a standardised contracting route that enables procurement authorities to engage British Sign Language translators to deliver high-quality and cost-effective services that maintain national interpreting standards. He added:</p> <p>“The minimum qualifications for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters employed through the framework shall be those listed at http://www.nrcpd.org.uk and they must be registered with the National Register of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people, (NRCPD), or the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI).”</p>
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Select Committee Chairs

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Item	Summary
<p><u>House of Commons elects Select Committee Chairs</u></p>	<p>The House of Commons has conducted elections for the Chairs of its Select Committees. The full list can be found <u>here</u>.</p> <p>Of interest to Action on Hearing Loss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work and Pensions: Frank Field, Lab, Birkenhead • Health: Sarah Wollaston, Con, Totnes (re-elected) • Culture Media and Sport: Jessie Norman, Con, Hereford and South Herefordshire • Transport: Louise Ellman, Lab, Liverpool Riverside (re-elected unopposed) • Women and Equalities: Maria Miller, Con, Basingstoke (this is a new Committee whose formal remit is to scrutinise the Government Equalities Office)

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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.
- **Ten Minute Rule Bills:** The sponsoring MP is given a slot in which they may make a speech lasting up to 10 minutes in support of his or her bill
- **Presentation Bill:** a Member is not able to speak in support of it and it stands almost no chance of becoming law