

Weekly Political Update

6th March 2017

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](#).

Employment and Industry

Click on link for source

<p><u>Written question regarding Access to Work programme assistance</u></p>	<p>Jim Fitzpatrick MP (Lab, Poplar and Limehouse) asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to ensure that disabled people have Access to Work support plans in place before an employment offer.</p> <p>Penny Mordaunt MP (Con., Portsmouth North, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work) pointed out the pre-employment eligibility letter for individuals, their employers or potential employers in order to provide an indication of the help that people may be able to receive from the Access to Work scheme. This letter has recently been updated.</p> <p>She also mentioned that they are producing case studies to illustrate how the scheme can support people in a range of settings and how it makes a positive difference to disabled people's working lives.</p>
<p><u>Written question regarding Access to Work for interns and work experience</u></p>	<p>Jim Fitzpatrick MP (Lab, Poplar and Limehouse) asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his department has to extend the Access to Work programme to incorporate work experience and internships.</p> <p>Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work Penny Mordaunt MP (Con, Portsmouth North,) pointed out that the Access to Work scheme already covers self-arranged work experience and Supported Internship, with guidance set out in paragraphs 123-140 of the Access to Work Staff guide. This has been the case since July 2013.</p>

British Sign Language

Click on link for source

<u>Written question on a British Sign Language GCSE</u>	<p>Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness Jim Fitzpatrick MP (Lab, Poplar and Limehouse) has asked the Department for Education what plans it has to offer British Sign Language as an option at GCSE.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Schools Standards, Nick Gibb MP (Con, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) said that ‘there are no plans to introduce additional GCSE subjects’.</p>
--	---

Transport

Click on link for source

<u>Bus Services Bill passes second reading in the House of Commons</u>	<p>The Government’s Bus Service Bill has been debated in the House of Commons and passed at second reading – the Bill was agreed without a division as no MP objected to the Bill.</p> <p>The Bill was amended in the House of Lords to include a provision which would allow the Government to use the Equality Act to impose a requirement on bus operators to offer audible and visual announcements. A number of MPs from a range of parties spoke in favour of this amendment and congratulated the Government for amending the Bill in this way.</p> <p>In response to an intervention from one MP calling for small and rural operators to be exempted from the initial introduction the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Andrew Jones MP (Con, Harrogate and Knaresborough) said:</p> <p><i>“We will work through the phasing of the introduction of the requirement, but we do not want to hold back from it. There is a slight cost implication for operators, but we think that that will be more than offset by the extra patronage they will secure if people are more able to use the buses. This is a business-generating approach, but we will treat the issues for the smaller operators with great sensitivity.”</i></p> <p>The Bill will now move to committee stage in the House of Commons where MPs will undertake line-by-line scrutiny of its provisions.</p>
<u>Oral question regarding transport assistance on railways</u>	<p>Jeremy Quinn MP (Con, Horsham) asked the minister to confirm increasing number of on-board supervisors on Southern Rail’s Govia Thameslink and whether <i>“as a result, can we expect to see an improvement in services for disabled passengers?”</i></p>

	<p>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport Paul Maynard MP (Con, Blackpool North and Cleveleys,) confirmed that the Thameslink Railway is of particular interest and that they are currently awaiting the results of a 'mystery shopping' exercise (being conducted by the Office of Rail and Road).</p>
--	---

Technology and Digital

Click on link for source

<p><u>Question regarding the threat assessment to hearing aid of the upcoming bandwidth sale</u></p>	<p>Liberal Democrat Health Spokesman, Normal Lamb MP (Lib Dem, North Norfolk) asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the potential threat to hearing aids proper functioning could mobile devices operating on the 2.3GHz and 2.5GHz band, and whether the bands used by hearing aids will be protected.</p> <p>The Minister of State for Culture and Digital, Matt Hancock MP (Con, West Suffolk), stated that the matter of determining and reacting to interference was a matter for Ofcom who have made an initial assessment that adjacent bands did not cause any issue but have been performing additional testing due to representation from the 'assisted listening community'. The results of those tests are expected to be announced soon, alongside a statement on the auction of 2.3 and 3.4 GHz spectrum.</p>
<p><u>Department for Culture Media and Sport published the Government's Digital Strategy</u></p>	<p>The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has published the UK's Digital Strategy. The Government have placed the Digital Strategy within the wider context of <u>the Industrial Strategy Green Paper</u>, saying:</p> <p>"Our industrial strategy will see government stepping up to back businesses to invest for the long term. It involves building on Britain's strategic strengths and tackling our underlying weaknesses, creating the conditions where successful businesses can emerge and grow. Its objective is to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country. Our digital strategy now develops this further, applying the principles outlined in the Industrial Strategy green paper to the digital economy."</p> <p>The Government made the following commitments within the Digital Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve connectivity, they will invest £1.1m through the NHS on projects to support digital inclusion. <i>"This will help the most excluded groups (such as.... Disabled people...) to develop their digital skills so they can feel confident using online tools to manage their health."</i> • To improve research into the Internet of Things (IoT), the UK will fund £30m of research over three years (IoT UK Programme) including research into disability assistance tools and health products e.g. NHS test beds.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding for a wide variety of products and services, both through the NHS and through funding available to private sector research and development, targeted at improving patient outcomes.• Developing the 'Tech Talent Charter' to target not just women working in tech, but also other under-represented groups including people with disabilities.• A plan for digital technology to assist in the '<i>seven day a week NHS</i>' concept by developing new digital technology can meet patients' needs without the requirement to be physically located at any particular place e.g. the GP surgery. £4.2 billion over five years will be invested in this aim, going towards electronic patient records, apps and wearable devices, telehealth and assistive technologies.• They point out the limitations of technology i.e. "<i>...it's there to support people and act as an enabler and won't replace the important human dimension of care.</i>"• The Strategy mentions digital technology being used to the welfare process in the future, but gives no details in regards to disabilities.
--	---

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

