



HOUSE OF COMMONS



United Kingdom

Youth Parliament
MAKING OUR MARK

United Kingdom Youth Parliament Debate

10th November 2017

House of Commons

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Friday 10 November 2017

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

10.58 am

Mr Speaker: Welcome to the ninth sitting of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament in the House of Commons Chamber. As you will know—I am merely reminding you—this marks the beginning of UK Parliament Week, a programme of events which connects people with our Parliament. This year’s UK Parliament Week is the biggest yet, with over 4,500 organisations and 360,000 people set to take part across the United Kingdom. Today’s five debate topics were chosen by the 954,766 11 to 18-year-olds who voted in the annual Make Your Mark ballot. Today, the UK Youth Parliament will choose the two issues that it wishes to take forward as priority campaigns for 2018.

This year’s Youth Parliament also marks the fourth year of the Paul Boskett memorial award, which was set up in memory of Paul Boskett MBE, who was one of the driving forces behind the UK Youth Parliament at the British Youth Council. British Youth Council support workers, parliamentary staff and guests will have been given ballot papers to vote for the two awards: best debate lead speech and best Back-Bench contribution. The presentation of the awards will take place at a reception to be held at a later date.

Today’s proceedings will be broadcast on Facebook Live and aired on BBC Parliament this weekend. To come forward and read a message from the Prime Minister, I call Samantha-Rose Beacham from the East Midlands.

Samantha-Rose Beacham (East Midlands): The message is as follows:

“Welcome to the House of Commons and to the UK Youth Parliament. I would like to congratulate you all on the success of the Make Your Mark ballot. I am sure that you will all enjoy discussing the important issues that the ballot has identified over the course of today.

As you may know, next year will mark the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918 and the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, which gave women the right to vote for the first time. As we commemorate this achievement, we are reminded of the significance of ensuring that everyone has a voice in our democracy. It is important that all of us work together to build and maintain our democratic traditions.

I would like to send my thanks to the British Youth Council, which ensures that the UK Youth Parliament continues to engage young people like you and enables them to have their voices heard. For the past eight years, the UK Youth Parliament has been the only group other than Members of Parliament allowed to debate inside the House of Commons Chamber. I hope that that serves as evidence of how seriously your views are taken as the elected representatives for young people in your areas.

I hope you have an unforgettable experience while participating today, and I wish you all the best for the future.

Theresa May.”

Mr Speaker: Thank you, of course, to the Prime Minister and, indeed, to Samantha-Rose. Now, in the spirit of the occasion, please give the warmest possible welcome to the Leader of the House of Commons, Andrea Leadsom. [*Applause.*]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think we should introduce that as the method of beginning of all our proceedings—a resounding cheer and a few claps would make life a lot more cheerful in the Chamber. Thank you all so much for being here; I do not think we have seen it this energetic in a while. I am delighted to be here to open this year’s Youth Parliament, which is a fantastic opportunity for all of you, and I am sure that you will all do your regions proud today.

I would like to start with a question. Who here has ever been told, “Young people don’t really understand politics”? I think quite a few of you will have been. What about “You’re too young to be interested in politics,” or “You don’t really know what you’re talking about”? How patronising! Too often, young people are made to feel left out or excluded from politics, which should never be the case. That is why it is so important that you have all bothered to take the trouble to come here today to put that right. The Youth Parliament is one of the small ways that we can demonstrate that the voices of young people belong in politics and in this Parliament. Over the years, Mr Speaker has been a great advocate for young people, and I feel just as passionately about removing barriers to politics. I was therefore delighted that, as Leader of the House, the motion on the Order Paper that was set down in my name allowing the Youth Parliament to sit commanded cross-party support. In my role as Leader of the House, I work hard to foster that cross-party consensus whenever possible.

As Parliament’s representative in Government, it is my job to communicate the goings-on of this Chamber to the Prime Minister and her Cabinet. That includes the various requests made and concerns raised by my opposite number, Valerie Vaz, who I am pleased to say is here today, and other political parties’ shadow Leaders. I am pleased to tell you that the cut and thrust of the daily debates in this Chamber does not always reflect the sometimes very collegiate working relationship between many of us right across the different parties.

The second part of my role—representing Government in Parliament—is focused on getting legislation through the House. In this Session, there is, of course, a big focus on getting through our Brexit Bills, but we are also working hard to get our domestic legislation through the House. My ambition for this Parliament, as Leader of the House, is to prove that this is a listening Government. I am determined to deliver on the will of the British people in last year’s referendum, but I certainly recognise that the best way to achieve that is by listening to the views of parliamentarians and the public, and particularly young people, whose lives will be so changed by the fact that most of their adult lives will be spent outside the European Union. The process of legislating for Brexit can be a positive one that proves we are capable of working together and putting the country above all else.

In many ways, we can learn more from the Youth Parliament than you can from us. Your green Benches are more diverse than ours, with a better gender balance and representatives from a wider range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. We can learn so much from the priorities you have identified for today’s debate. They are issues that have an impact not just on young people but right across society, and include improving our transport systems, having work experience hubs—a great

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

idea that I am looking forward to hearing much more about—and, of course, continually striving to improve LGBT rights.

I really hope you get a lot out of today. I know we will. I look forward to reading *Hansard* and hearing your views on these important subjects. Finally, I hope you will carry on proving that young people are not just interested in politics but are very much a part of politics. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the House very much for what she said and for the way in which she said it. Your presence today and that of the shadow Leader is a testament to the importance that you attach to the UK Youth Parliament and, I think, is rightly seen as a mark of respect for and encouragement to Members of the Parliament. It will not be forgotten, and it will always be appreciated. I now call the Minister of State for Sport and Civil Society, Tracey Crouch. [*Applause.*]

The Minister for Sport and Civil Society (Tracey Crouch): I like that, Mr Speaker. We have oral questions next Thursday—can you please introduce me like that and ensure we get a round of applause in response?

I add my welcome to Members of the Youth Parliament to the House of Commons. I have flown back overnight from the middle east to be here today for the ninth UK Youth Parliament. As I look around and see so many fresh, young and excitable faces, I cannot work out if I am jetlagged or feeling old.

I think I have the best job in Government, as Minister for Sport and Civil Society, and I have the enormous privilege of being the Minister responsible for youth policy and youth voice. As such, I am committed to ensuring that listening to young people is not just confined to my own Department but is a feature of policy making across Government.

I myself was politically engaged and active in my mid to late teens, and it is reassuring to see that I was not the weirdo my friends thought I was because I liked politics. Engagement in key issues—and not just youth issues, as some might patronisingly like to think—is widespread, alive and well. In fact, during the snap election, I had a group of six youngsters, all under the age of 22 and four of whom have been members of the local Youth Parliament, knocking on doors and delivering leaflets day in, day out. While I felt a bit bad about some of the new and certainly non-parliamentary language they may have learned from disgruntled voters, they were a hit on the doorsteps, with constituents delighted to see youngsters, including an 11-year-old, engaged in and knowledgeable about politics and current affairs.

I thought that I would offer Members a few tips for today, although I am not sure that they need it. First, it is okay to be nervous. I still get nervous when speaking in the Chamber, as Mr Speaker knows. In fact, I am nervous right now—If I were to take my hands off the Dispatch Box, you would see them quivering. I have a very simple measurement of success when speaking in the Chamber: if I have not thrown up or passed out over the Dispatch Box, then score. So you will all be fine today.

Secondly, it is okay to use a script or refer to any notes that you might need during the debate. When I first entered the House, I remember being almost paralysed with fear at the thought of having to speak without notes. Then I saw my colleague Sir Nicholas Soames delivering a speech with notes, and I thought, “Well, if it’s okay for the grandson of Winston Churchill, one of the country’s finest orators, then it’s okay for me.”

Thirdly, if you wish to endear yourself to Mr Speaker, slip into your speech the fact that you like tennis or Arsenal. What you absolutely must not do is say that you support the mighty Tottenham Hotspur, and that they are three places and four points above Arsenal in the table. [*Applause.*] Just don’t do it, folks.

Finally, please enjoy it. You are debating issues that almost 1 million young people have deemed significant. That is such a powerful and important mandate.

Before handing over the Floor, I want to say a few words of thanks. I would like to start by thanking Members here for their sterling efforts to promote this year’s Make Your Mark ballot. Just over 950,000 young people took part. That is one in six 11 to 18-year-olds. This is a brilliant achievement and a clear testament to everyone’s hard work. Now, despite everything you have done so far, it is actually unparliamentary to give yourselves a round of applause, so let me repeat that last sentence and you can, in the tradition of this House, give yourselves a rousing “Hear, hear.” Are you ready? This is a brilliant achievement and a clear testament to everyone’s hard work. [MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]

I would also like to thank Jo Hobbs and everyone at the British Youth Council. The BYC plays such an important role in promoting young people’s voices locally, nationally and on an international stage, including organising today’s Parliament, the Make Your Mark ballot and so much more. Let us have another “Hear, hear.” [MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] I could do this all day, Mr Speaker.

Let me conclude by wishing everyone here the best of luck. This Chamber, with its stained-glass windows, wooden panelling, green Benches and slightly dim lighting, has seen history made time and again. It has heard laughter and tears, declarations of war and of peace. It has seen wigs, cloaks, swords, smartphones and open-neck shirts. It has passed equal marriage and abolished slavery. Today it will hear your voices. Enjoy your day and go home knowing that you have contributed to history.

Mr Speaker: Minister, on behalf over everybody here present, let me thank you for your presence, engagement and humour, and for your warmth and humanity to Members of the Youth Parliament. You were typically you: authentic, and all the better for it. People really appreciate it. I again thank the Leader of the House and you for what you have said.

Colleagues, we can now proceed with the business of the day. I remind Members of the Youth Parliament who wish to speak of the following: please stand in your place when you are seeking to catch my eye, and, if called to speak, say your name and region at the beginning of your speech, so that the *Hansard* writers know who you are.

Protect LGBT+ People

Mr Speaker: The Youth Parliament will now consider the first motion of the day: Protect LGBT+ People. The full motion is printed on the Order Paper. To move the motion, I call, representing Army Welfare/British Forces Overseas, Germany, Kate Jones. Please give her a tumultuous welcome.

11.14 am

Kate Jones (Army Welfare/British Forces Overseas, Germany): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I speak in favour of the motion:

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender+ young people deserve to be treated the same as everyone else; discrimination needs to be challenged.

Mr Speaker,

“I have a dream...a dream that one day”.

Those words had such a heavy impact that they would change the world forever. When Martin Luther King gave that speech, he was of course addressing the plague of racism across his country. He was a campaigner for acceptance in a world where there was none.

I, too, have a dream: a dream that one day LGBT+ youth will no longer live in fear—that one day there will truly be a time of acceptance among people of all orientations and gender identities. But that dream cannot be attained without the valuable support of all you MYPs here today. I have a dream that will not be realised today, tomorrow or in this coming term of the Youth Parliament, but to set that dream in motion and to begin to right the injustices felt by our LGBT+ constituents is what we can accomplish today.

The Equality Act 2010 lists sexual orientations and gender identities as protected characteristics, but that legislation does not always translate into the real world. As is often apparent from my interactions with other young people, particularly my own constituents, discrimination is not an intrinsic feature of the human condition—it is a learned behaviour. That begs two questions: where is it that this hateful attitude that is so harshly felt by our LGBT+ young people originated; and what is it that we as MYPs can do to combat it?

Ignorance breeds contempt, and education is the key. According to Cambridge University’s “School Report”, 40% of lesbian, gay, bi and trans young people were never taught anything about LGBT+ issues at school. Furthermore, 80% of secondary school teachers have never received any specific training on how to tackle homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying. Education begins with educators. To eliminate ignorance, we need to start with those who have such a powerful impact on our young people’s lives. LGBT+ youth face horrific abuse on a daily basis—an unacceptable reality—and since approximately one in two youths are LGBT+, this motion affects half of your constituents. That means almost half of young people feel victimised and attacked, and afraid to openly show their true selves. What precedent does that set for the remainder of the population? What atmosphere does that create for young people of other minority groups?

A world of fear and oppression is not one that I want any part of, and I would like you to ask yourselves whether it is one that you and your constituents want.

For the sake of all your LGBT+ constituents, I urge you all to support this motion to protect the rights of those who are so vulnerable to discrimination. Organisations such as Stonewall, the LGBT Foundation and the Allsorts Youth Project are doing all they can, but more funding, more education and more awareness are still necessary, because there is currently a lack of visibility, support and basic care for LGBT+ young people, and their persecution is ongoing.

Is this really what we want to be remembered for, or do we as MYPs—and, indeed, as members of a larger community, as UK youths ourselves—want to make a difference? Do we want to be remembered as a generation of perpetual hate and ignorance, or do we want to be remembered as a generation of progression? As the late LGBT+ activist Gilbert Baker once said,

“visibility is key to our success and to our justice.”

Thank you for your time. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Kate, thank you for that fine and rousing start to our proceedings. You have given a very uplifting opening speech of which you can be very proud.

Colleagues, before we proceed with the opposing speech and speeches from the floor, I should say now that I will from time to time—this will be a feature of the day—reference parliamentary colleagues of mine whom I can see are present. They are here to show their support for you. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to welcome Lloyd Russell-Moyle, who is sitting in front of the Sergeant at Arms’s chair. Lloyd, perhaps you would raise your hand. Lloyd is the newly elected Labour Member of Parliament for Brighton, Kemptown and, very importantly, himself a former Member of the Youth Parliament. He made it from the Youth Parliament to the House of Commons as a full constituency Member. Please give your appreciation for Lloyd, who has not forgotten where he came from. [*Applause.*]

Please give an equally warm and supportive welcome to the opposer of the motion. From Yorkshire and Humber, I call Lara Ferguson. [*Applause.*]

Lara Ferguson (Yorkshire and Humber): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I want you to imagine the future—a future where people can live side by side, free of oppression and stigmatisation. I want you to imagine a future where our friends and relatives can introduce us to their partners and, whatever their gender, that is okay and accepted. Now envisage a time when there is no longer a need to come out, and when our LGBT friends will not be required to declare their sexuality or gender any more than their cis straight peers. The notion of coming out simply perpetuates inequality in our society. It marginalises an estimated one in two of we young people by creating the premise that loving someone in a way that differs from society’s expectations means that you are somehow different, abnormal and distinct. Such binary definitions only confine us to the inner spheres of labels and force us to place ourselves in boxes where we shall remain for ever more.

There is no disputing that LGBT rights have improved incrementally over the past 50 years. In 1967, my gay relative could finally hold the hand of his partner in the street without being prosecuted. In 2002, they could adopt a child and form the family that they could only

previously have dreamed of. In 2014, they could finally declare their lifelong affection in the form of marriage. But the fight for equality is not over yet. Each year, families lose cherished ones who fall victim to the horrific homophobia with which our society is riddled. Others are left contemplating their existence, wondering when this misery and torment will end.

Whatever our views on homosexuality, this horrific level of disparity cannot be allowed to continue. We need to act before more lives are so painfully lost. But, my friends, regrettably this issue is not amendable through a simple Act of Parliament, a change of policy or a year-long UK-wide campaign. We need change—social change. Our time is not best spent commandeering countless campaigns that are already tirelessly being pursued by organisations across the country. The Albert Kennedy Trust, the LGBT Foundation and Stonewall, to name but a few, are all better equipped, better positioned and better funded than we can ever be. Instead, we need to pave the way towards the future we envisage. By contesting derogatory slurs and opposing discrimination, we can be the change we need to see. Soon, this will no longer be a matter of LGBT rights, but instead a simple matter of humanity—a matter of what is right and what is wrong.

Now, I want you all to imagine the future: blissful, safe and accepting. Thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Lara, for a highly articulate and equally passionately delivered speech, the approval of which will have been very clear to you from the reaction of your fellow Members of the Youth Parliament.

Before I call the first Back-Bench speaker, I want to reference a non-Member who, not for the first time, is here in support of the UK Youth Parliament. I am referring to the gentleman in the under-Gallery at the back. Don't be shy; you never have been. Unless it is a failure of eyesight on my part—I do not think it is—I am looking in the direction of Stephen Benn. Am I looking in the direction of Stephen Benn? I am.

Stephen's father Tony, who sadly passed away in early 2014, was one of the outstanding parliamentarians of the 20th century. Tony believed passionately in his socialist principles, of course, but he also believed passionately in parliamentarism—in debate, in representation, in speaking from the heart as well as the head—and that is a characteristic of all members of the Benn family. I remember that just before Tony died I welcomed him in Speaker's House at a reception for the State Opening of Parliament. I said, "How's tricks? What're you doing?" He said that he had just finished what was almost certainly going to be his last book, which was due to be published. I said, "Where are you publishing it?", and he said, "Well, it hasn't been decided yet." I said, "Well, I think you should launch it from Speaker's House, if you wish." He said, "Well, that is immensely kind," and he did. The book, if I remember correctly, was 32 letters to his grandchildren. He said to me, "You know, Mr Speaker, the only purpose of the old is to encourage the young." Tony did that throughout his career. Stephen Benn and Hilary—Hilary Benn is the serving Member of Parliament for Leeds Central, as many of you will know—and other members of the Benn family have always done that, so, Stephen, thank you for joining us today.

I will try to call as many colleagues as I can. I am looking at this stage if possible—by all means stand if you wish to speak—for someone from the South West of England. The gentleman at the end with the blue tie—please say who you are and tell us what you think.

Fintan Yeatman (South West): I represent Bristol city.

I am not going to stand here and disagree with protecting LGBT communities, but I am going to disagree with the proposal that we should make it a campaign. We should not make a campaign pledge of protecting our minority communities. We should not have to say, "Let's protect this minority," to get ourselves more publicity, and perhaps more political support from a variety of people. We should make that our duty and it should be everything that we stand for. As ambassadors and people who represent young people, we are fighting for their voice. We are better representatives than the Government.

To that end, I call on this Chamber not to make protecting LGBT communities a campaign, but to make it our duty, and the duty of our peers, our friends and family, and everyone in this country, to protect those who lack the voice.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I think that MYPs become more eloquent every year—I am very impressed.

Is there someone on either side of the argument from the North West who wishes to speak?

Jacob Woods (North West): Although we have come a long way in the past 50 years since living as a gay man was decriminalised in the Sexual Offences 1967, we have got a long way to go. I could quote statistics at you all day. I could talk about the increased rate of bullying that LGBT young people face, or the likelihood that transgender young people will attempt suicide—nearly half of them will. I could go on all day, but I won't. I am going to talk about personal experience. Gay friends of mine have been physically attacked and subjected to constant harassment for their identity. I myself, as a bisexual man, have been told to pick a side and that that is not a real thing. I have been told that I will mature and it is just a phase. That undermines your self-confidence and the sense of who you are.

We still have a long way to go. I urge the Chamber to put as much support and effort behind the motion as possible, because so much needs to be done and, as has been said, this affects so many young people.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Jacob, for what you have said and for your personal testimony—that is what this place is about and you are setting a fantastic example.

I am now looking for a female speaker, if possible, because we have had two male speakers. Is there a young woman from Scotland who wants to take part in this debate?

Beth Gilmour (Scotland): I am from West Scotland.

None of us is going to stand here today and say that we do not want to protect this community or that it is wrong to do so. It is clear that we already support doing so. This is not cowering away from a big challenge, but simply not stepping on the toes of good work that is already being done, and that we do not need to double-do.

We do not need to do something that has already been done by our counterparts who have a stronger voice, more resources and more financial support. We can put our resources into something that can really be changed. This is something on which we can show our support, and let the people who are already doing this get on with it.

Mr Speaker: What about somebody from London? Who have we got from London?

Catriona Cheek (London): I represent Hounslow. Before I start, I would like to say thank you for the opportunity to speak, as I was a contributor to this motion. The UK Youth Parliament has been a standard-bearer for upholding LGBT rights since we became one of the first organisations in the UK to make a manifesto commitment in favour of same-sex marriage. We absolutely have the right to congratulate ourselves on that achievement, but it is simply not enough. The struggle of LGBT young people in this country did not conclude with the legalisation of gay marriage. It is an issue that we battle every single day in classrooms, on public transport and at work.

Unlike with other motions that will be debated today, there can be no doubt that we, as a Youth Parliament, are the right group to lead the campaign on this issue. The people sitting in this Chamber represent a generation with an unparalleled understanding of sexuality and gender. As such, we have a responsibility to make a stand against LGBT discrimination, in a way that past generations could not, unanimously. UKYP prides itself on its achievements in diversity. Past campaigns have made it clear that we do not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of race or religion. It is time that we were able to say the same about sexuality.

Mr Speaker: What about the West Midlands? Who have we got from the West Midlands? The young man here who is waving at me in a distinctive manner.

Jake Cooper (West Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am the Member of Youth Parliament for Dudley. So, here we are: Members of Youth Parliament for the United Kingdom. We have a job to protect young people in our country. I want to agree with the right hon. Member from London who spoke, because we have strived a lot towards protecting LGBT communities; but so what if a lot of money has been put into it already? So what if a lot of work has been put into it already? We have still got work to do. We still have work to do to protect young people in our society. We have work to do to ensure that the rights of young people in our community are protected. We have two choices: the option to gain a new right—votes at 16—or an option to protect our current rights. Do you know what? I would rather give up my right to vote at 16 to ensure that a young person can live without discrimination.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for that excellent speech. Do we have a would-be speaker from Northern Ireland? Is there anybody from Northern Ireland who wishes to speak in this debate?

Benjamin Sharkey (Northern Ireland): I am from Lagan Valley. I learnt nothing of sexual identities when I was at school. I learnt nothing of the struggles and

everyday dilemmas that LGBT people face. This motion is for the protection of this community, but that must start at the ground level with comprehensive education on understanding and acceptance bought in from a young age. That is the only way to make a real change that actually lasts. Many of you know how Northern Ireland was thrust under a magnifying glass after the last snap election, and many of you posted your outrage on Facebook about what you found. There are a lot of people in Northern Ireland growing up with mindsets stuck years in the past concerning matters from sexuality to religion, race, political alignment and more. We will only move on when an entire generation learns from impartial sources instead of embittered relatives. That is why we need a curriculum for life in the UK. That is a way to start to make a real change towards acceptance, so that we can allow everyone and anyone to be viewed on an equal level regardless of circumstance.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Now, Members of the UK Youth Parliament, do we have an aspiring speaker from the East of England? We have one person from the East of England—you, sir. We are about to hear the contents of the fine book that you are holding, and of your mind.

Isreal Genius (East of England): I represent Southend-on-Sea. I am here today to tell you that this campaign is possible, because we have done something similar in Southend. My colleagues at the fantastic Southend Youth Council have worked tirelessly on a project to set up an LGBT youth forum in our area. We are going to use the local library to create a forum where all LGBT young people and supporters can meet and discuss their issues. We are linking up all the school LGBT societies and working with charities to create a community so no LGBT person in my constituency feels left behind or alone.

If we are in the process of doing that in my constituency, every one of us can do it. If every constituency in the country had an LGBT forum or a linked network of school LGBT societies, not one LGBT person would feel left alone. That is why I think we should support this campaign. It is achievable, because Southend is in the process of doing it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for another excellent and succinct speech. Do we have a speaker from Wales? The first person I saw gesticulating at me in a mildly demonstrative fashion some time ago was the young woman with the pink jacket.

Alisha Gibbons (Wales): I represent Carmarthenshire. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people deserve to be treated the same as everyone else, and discrimination needs to be challenged. I strongly believe that LGBT young people should not be excluded or rejected. Studies by psychologist Susan Cochran show that there are higher rates of major depression, generalised anxiety disorder and substance use in LGBT youth. There are high rates of suicidal thoughts among people between 15 and 54 with same-sex partners. LGBT youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide or experience suicidal thoughts. Between 38% and 65% of transgender individuals experience suicidal ideation. In order to minimise the negative effects of these issues on young people, we

should tackle minority stress. Minority stress is a type of stress suffered by minorities as a result of stigma and discrimination. MYPs, I urge you so much to support this motion for a fair and equal society.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Would anybody from the North East like to speak? Yes, the young woman here.

Lesedi Mphisa (North East): Half of all LGBT people are bullied in our schools nationally every year. Even though we might think that in one year we cannot make a difference to what people think, in the past we have shown that we can make a difference in a year. We have done it before, and we can do it again for LGBT people. I think we should do so.

Mr Speaker: What about the South East? Who have we got from the South East? The first person I saw was the young woman with the white top.

Dami Salako (South East): I represent Kent. As much as I believe that nobody should be discriminated against on the basis of their age, gender, social background, ethnicity or sexual orientation, I also believe that there are other groups in society that are discriminated against. Young carers, disabled people, people with mental health issues, and black and minority ethnic groups are just a few of those who are discriminated against in society on a daily basis.

As young people, we all share a common experience, and that is discrimination. Not one of you in this room can tell me that you do not know what it feels like to be different. We are MYPs, and we are interested in politics; not many people are. *[Laughter.]* That is a true fact. We are sitting here today on the green Benches where adult MPs make decisions. We can be decision makers, too.

Imagine what it feels like not to be able to achieve your full potential just because of the colour of your skin, or because your name is 27 letters long. I believe that everybody in this room and in this country is entitled to equal opportunities, and no one should be discriminated against on the basis of their age or sexual orientation. However, we should not prioritise one group in society, because there are so many other people who are discriminated against.

We should incorporate culture into our curriculum, to teach people about the different foods that people eat and the different clothes that people wear. Just because you are not in someone else's shoes, it does not mean that you should not understand what they are going through at a particular point in time. Everybody should be accounted for when it comes to discrimination, and we should not single out one person and cater for their rights. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you for that heartfelt and powerful speech, which is warmly appreciated by Members of the UK Youth Parliament. I am now looking for a contributor from the East Midlands.

Florence Orchard (East Midlands): I am an MYP for Nottinghamshire, and in my constituency this was the most voted for issue in the Make Your Mark ballot, and in fact it was put forward by a Nottinghamshire MYP called Chandler, who unfortunately cannot be here today.

He is the very first non-binary person I have been able to meet, and meeting him has taught me so much; it has changed my whole perception as to what gender is. What we need to do through this campaign is try to get as many people as possible to meet others of different genders and sexualities, because when we meet them we can ask those difficult questions, and have conversations about what gender is and how sexualities can be different, and then our whole mind changes and opens up.

We can make a change on this. There are already lots of organisations, as mentioned before, like Stonewall, but if we work together with them we can make even better change. The other motion before us is on votes at 16, which is also an important issue, but I believe we can make more of an actual change through the LGBT+ motion, and in a year's time look back and think, "Yeah, we actually did work together and manage to make an amazing change with the work we have put in." I urge all of us to think about how the work we would put in could make a difference, and I think it can.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for another very clear and incisive speech. We had a Front-Bench lead from Yorkshire and the Humber, but have not had a Back-Bench contributor from there yet, because I have not called one.

Liberty Branston (Yorkshire and the Humber): I am Liberty from Leeds.

Everyone deserves to be happy. Age, appearance and race do not matter, and it should not be any different with sexuality. As young people representing our constituents, it is our responsibility to make sure no one is discriminated against. We can do so much if we choose this as our campaign, by speaking to the various groups, creating awareness and changing people's perspectives. No one deserves to be alone.

We need change, and as Nelson Mandela once said: "Be the change you want to see in the world." Today, I am asking you, Members of the Youth Parliament, to be that change. So I urge you all to vote for this campaign.

Mr Speaker: There are always more people wanting to speak than there is time to accommodate them. If you were not called, keep trying in other debates, if you are interested, and if I can call you, I will. It is always the intention to call as many speakers as possible.

To conclude the debate, I want you to give a very warm welcome to our speaker from the West Midlands, Amias Perry.

Amias Perry (West Midlands): I want to start by dedicating this speech to all who have suffered and lost their lives as a result of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia throughout history.

Friends, nearly 100,000 11 to 18-year-olds voted to protect LGBT people in this year's Make Your Mark vote. Many of them are members of the LGBT community themselves and will likely have experienced the horrific feeling that comes from continuous targeted hate—as, sadly, have I. However, many will also know how ineffective and sometimes downright unhelpful many generic, untargeted one-size-fits-all national campaigns can be. Perhaps this campaign is best left to local authorities or schools.

Stonewall's "School Report" for 2017 states that one in five LGBT pupils does not feel safe in their school and that 70% regularly skip school out of fear of being attacked or abused. How horrible is that—young people afraid to leave their own homes simply for being themselves? It means that LGBT discrimination is depriving people of valuable education, taking away opportunities and actively harming their prospects.

I say to schools: take action and protect all your pupils. Schools should be a safe area. Every person across this united kingdom has the right to feel safe, comfortable and accepted, whoever they are, whoever they love and no matter where they live in the UK—rural or urban city, town or village, from London to Llanfair-pwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch, they have that right.

As previously stated, however, there are multiple organisations that are better equipped, better funded and in a better position to deliver this sort of campaign. I recently attended a residential event run by Stonewall. That environment of acceptance and freedom to be yourself without fear is one that I would like everywhere, and especially in our schools.

I implore you to listen carefully to each and every point made today. Make your decision, vote with your conscience and represent your constituents. If we want something to happen, we cannot just wait; we must act, for, in the words of William Shakespeare:

"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves."

We are often told as young people that we cannot make a difference and to leave things to the adults, but I say to Members of the UK Youth Parliament and to any young person watching this debate: if there is something,

such as LGBT rights, that you are passionate about, do not be scared to fight for what you believe in, do not be afraid of making your voice heard; stand up and be counted. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Amias, thank you for that inspiring speech, a speech of real quality and distinction, which I hope you will treasure and remember for a very long time.

That was, if I may say so, a superb opening debate. I hope that it has opened your eyes to your own quality—what you can deliver—and that it encourages all those who follow to emulate the very high standard that has got us under way.

We are about to move on to the second motion, but I just want to mention—oh, what a pity: I think he has just left the Chamber, but a moment ago, during that fine winding-up speech, we were joined by the Clerk Assistant, who is the second most senior Clerk in the House. He is a procedural expert in parliamentary privilege, in the bible of Parliament, "Erskine May", who sits at the Table and advises the Speaker—me—the Deputy Speakers and Members of the House, including members of the Government and the Opposition. I am referring to Dr John Benger. John is a great fan of the Youth Parliament and, as in previous years, he has been here today. We will probably see him again, but in his absence, because I cannot see him at the moment, I thank him for turning up.

Colleagues, the Youth Parliament will now consider the second motion of the day, on votes at 16. The full motion is printed on the order paper. To move the motion, I call, and invite you enthusiastically to welcome, from the North West of England, Jonathan Wright.

Votes at 16

11.48 am

Jonathan Wright (North West): The motion is as follows:

Give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in all elections/referendums.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. One hundred and fifty years ago, the radical motion that women should be allowed to vote was proposed to the Commons. Quickly dismissed by the establishment, it was defeated by 194 votes to 73. The crusade for women's suffrage was long and enduring. It took decades of campaigning, demonstrating and perseverance before the renowned Representation of the People Act 1918 first granted the right to vote to women 99 years ago.

Last week, the votes at 16 Bill was cast aside in this very Chamber on Second Reading and it is extremely unlikely to be debated again as it is. You might now be thinking, "What's the point? The Government clearly do not agree. It's not going to happen. End of story." However, my friends, that is precisely what we must not fall into the trap of thinking. Do you think that the mothers of the suffrage movement just gave up in 1867? Evidently not.

Like those women 100 years ago, we are constantly told that we are not mature enough to vote. But look around you. Each and every one of us is proof that that is a load of absolute tripe. There are countless examples that prove that we are more than worthy of possessing the right to vote. Take the fact that we have all been democratically elected by thousands of young people who are clearly engaged and mature enough to put pen to paper and poll whom they want to be represented by. What about in Scotland? For the 2014 independence referendum, it was agreed that Scottish teens were engaged and mature enough to have a vote. Seventy-five per cent. of them turned out to do so. What is more, 97% of them said that they would do so again. Is it not a shame that some of the "maturer generations" are not that engaged? (*Applause*)

MYPs, we must adopt this campaign so that we can disprove those unfair and bigoted misconceptions. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill:

"Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."

If we vote for the motion, we will take the next step on our road to success with renewed and revitalised enthusiasm. We will probably encounter more obstacles before we have the right to command our MP to support the curriculum for life campaign or establish work experience hubs, but just like those noble women who came before us, through co-operation, determination and a smidge of elbow grease, we can play our part in bringing about the full, sincere and absolute democratisation of our nation. Thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Jonathan, thank you for a terrific and truly outstanding speech. In a moment, I am going to call, to oppose the motion, a speaker from the East of England. I want you to give, as I do so, friends and colleagues, the warmest possible welcome to Ayesha Khan.

Ayesha Khan (East of England): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will try my hardest not to filibuster.

The women's suffrage movement: 62 years. The movement for all men to have the vote: 20 years. The right for 18-year-olds to vote: 41 years. That is the time it took to get the vote. We have a mere 12 months. The journey for the vote has seen the cries of those who have fought for it echo through this very Chamber. Their virtues will be for ever admired, yet here we are again centuries later fighting for the same cause, proving that this is not a short battle and cannot be won within the limited time that we have.

That does not mean that our efforts have stopped or that we have failed. We will carry on campaigning, contending and convincing until we have the vote. Whether it is a political party that does not believe we can do it or a generation that looks down upon us, they may be able to withstand the criticisms of a 17-year-old girl, but can they withstand the sheer determination that is present in the Chamber today? I do not believe so. We stand strong and mighty, in the face of those who oppose us, who want to filibuster to prevent democracy and who want to cast out our voice. I, too, want a world in which my future son and daughter can shape their lives without being beholden to their superiors. The only way that we can do that is by getting the vote. There is no hope without the vote. However, the only way that we can get the vote is by first getting the curriculum for life, which is something that we may be able to do in the next 12 months.

Ladies and gentlemen, without education we are as much use as a glass hammer. We can campaign and we can contend but we cannot convince the opposition that we are educated enough to vote. Why not campaign for a better curriculum—one that ensures that our young voters are educated enough to vote and are informed when they vote so that whether they are 21, 26, 18 or 16, they can make an informed decision?

No, this is not pessimism; there is no calculation. This requires careful planning and diligence and a time space of more than 12 months. Thus I plead with you today to vote against this motion being part of the national campaign. Please do not misunderstand me; it is manifestly absurd to suggest that it is beyond this Youth Parliament or this generation to win the battle for civil rights. I refuse to accept that the bank of justice is only corrupt when handing us our civil liberties. However, it requires time. We do not ever want to run the risk of building our future on shifting sands; on sands that wash away at the first tide of criticism.

I was told in a lesson that we valued individual liberty. I was told in a lesson that we valued mutual respect. I was told in a lesson that we valued democracy, yet I stand here without the vote. I stand here without a say in my future. No, we will not succeed by tomorrow, and, no, we will not succeed by next month; we may not even succeed in the next year, but once we do, in perpetual victory we shall be and in perpetual victory we shall stay. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Ayesha, thank you for an exceptional speech of quite remarkable self-assurance. It was a very impressive speech indeed, so well done you.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Can we have a speaker on this matter from the south-east of England?

Alaa Fawaz (South East): I am from Slough in the south-east.

It is easy to say that we are not engaged and to assume that, at the age of 18, we suddenly become informed overnight. This should not be an excuse to deny 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote, but a reason to improve our education system. As time passes, society changes and the law adapts, so tell me why, in 2017, 16 and 17-year-olds are, by law, able to pay income tax and national insurance; be able to be a director of a company; and even to sleep with their own MP, but not to vote for them? We are able to feed into the country economically, so why is it not possible politically?

It feels as though politicians only care about the electorate. If we are not part of the electorate, how will we ever be valued, active citizens in the UK? If we introduced a demographic of 16 and 17-year olds into the political system, imagine how much the political parties would want our support. It would result in more policies being catered to meet the needs of our generation. I urge you to vote for this motion. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you. In the last debate, the East Midlands was called relatively late—somebody has to be first, somebody has to be last, with lots in between. This time I am looking for a speaker from the East Midlands.

Sami Ayoub (East Midlands): I really, really, really love votes at 16, but it has been a manifesto point for many years and we keep getting the same outcome. As a result, other young people's points are not being recognised, which is unfair on them, and we should give a different manifesto point another chance. Unfortunately, the Government have said that they will not support this motion, so why not give another chance to a different manifesto point on which we can actually make a change within the 12 months? It is a short span of time, and such a big campaign cannot be run within 12 months, so we should give another topic a chance.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. What about the North West?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Wow. That is the most demonstrative reaction yet recorded in the UK Youth Parliament's annual sitting of 2017. I am referring to the young woman in the third row. [*Interruption.*] It could only be you; I do not know whether anyone else was quite as demonstrative. It was a most interesting display of enthusiasm.

Jade Calder (North West): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I get the tram to college every morning, and I get off at a stop called St Peter's Square. That will not mean anything to most of you, but the Peterloo massacre took place a few hundred yards from St Peter's Square in 1819, when thousands of working-class people from across Lancashire, including at least 5,000 people from my town of Oldham, gathered to campaign for electoral reform. Ninety-nine years after that, the suffrage movement, led by Emmeline Pankhurst from just down the road in Moss Side, got the right to vote for women over 30. Fast forwarding a little to this summer, a group of democratically elected youth councillors from Oldham met our local MP, Jim McMahon, to persuade him to make votes at 16 the subject of his private Member's Bill. That is significant,

because we are the first youth council in the country to have such involvement in drafting a private Member's Bill.

While I understand many of the arguments against votes at 16, such as the discrepancies in the law about whether someone becomes an adult at 16 or 18, we need to have that argument. These views need to be challenged. Today, for example, young people can join a political party and can vote for who they want to be the leader of their party, but they cannot vote for them to lead the country. Young people are allowed to take part in the democratic process only when it benefits the political parties, not when there is a risk. That is the sorry state of affairs of politics today and is similar to the obstruction of democracy shown during the debate on the private Member's Bill last week. To an extent, that validates quite a few of our assumptions, such as that young people have for far too long been offered next to nothing by the political class and they know it, which is why they are afraid of giving us the vote.

However, the seeds of change have been sown, not least because of the record youth turnout in the recent snap election. After work done in a dingy little room in a civic centre—it had a leak, and we had to put a bloomin' bucket down while the drips went all over us—a Bill from the young people of Oldham came all the way to the House of Commons. That is the power of the UK Youth Parliament. We forced the MPs of this country to sit up and listen to our concerns. Despite the stalling of the campaign last Friday, I believe that we are still in the optimal position to effect real change, and to say we should give up now would be a complete fallacy. A point that has been ignored is that the Bill asked for better political education in schools, which would lead to us being better citizens who are more aware of and informed about the world around us. Why would we want to oppose that? If the whole UK Youth Parliament supports votes at 16, I believe that things can and will change.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for your speech. I hugely enjoyed that, and I appreciate it. Let's have a speaker from Scotland.

Cailyn McMahon (Scotland): I represent Mid Scotland and Fife.

I think I speak for a majority of us when I say that we are so disappointed that the votes at 16 Bill was not debated last week. I fail to understand how the view that young people do not care enough to engage in the democratic process is still out there. We are here, we care, and we deserve better. In Scotland, we are long-standing campaigners on this issue, as the Scottish Youth Parliament has a firm belief that one of the best ways of getting involved in making decisions and having our voices heard is through the ballot box.

After all, we are the ones who have to live the majority of our lives with the repercussions of any vote, and especially referendums. It is only logical for us to be the ones deciding the world in which we want to live. We should not be made to sit by and watch as our futures are dictated to us. Today's decision makers want us to become engaged, and they want people to make well-informed decisions when they vote, so we need to send them a message through our chosen campaign; we need to tell them to let us engage and let us vote. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: What about London?

Sabiqa Umer (London): I am the MYP for Ealing and part of the NHS Forum.

In 1971, everybody aged 18 was permitted to vote as they were deemed to be more mature and politically aware, but now the majority of young people aged 16 feel that their views do not matter as they cannot vote, and they are not wrong. Society calls us the lazy generation, but no; 16-year-olds are just as wise and politically aware as 18-year-olds, or even more so. Mr Speaker, look around at all these beautiful faces and ask yourself, are we not mature enough? Today we are sitting in the House of Commons, and we should be greatly proud of ourselves.

Are we not entitled to the right we deserve and the freedom that every 16-year-old should and must be allowed—the right to vote? If, at 16, we are allowed to pay taxes, become parents and leave home, why are we not allowed to vote? If we are deemed old enough to get married and contribute to the Treasury, we should be deemed old enough to decide who makes the policies that so greatly affect our lives.

Apathy is the greatest problem facing the UK political system. Engaging people in decision making at a younger age would improve that—don't you agree? This motion has been swimming around for a long time. Let us finally make a change, so that we can say that 2017 or 2018 was the year we finally did something and got our right to vote. I believe in us, and I believe that working together, we have to make a change and get our freedom to vote.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Now, what about the West Midlands?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Let's hear from the young person in the very smart three-piece suit.

Zagham Farhan (West Midlands): I am the Member of Youth Parliament for Newcastle and the Staffordshire Moorlands.

We have been sent here by hundreds of young people who believed we were suited for the job of making their lives better and representing them at the highest level. Imagine not having this House of Commons. Imagine people not having voting rights. Imagine women still not being allowed to vote—you can start breathing again now! It all changed here on these very premises where modern democracy was born. Now imagine a 16-year-old working, making money, paying taxes, getting married, having children, serving the country in the armed forces and yet still not having the right to decide who is in government. We are the representatives of these young people and have the responsibility to change that.

The Votes at 16 campaign has now gathered such momentum that it was almost debated in Parliament. Now is when we need to be behind it the most. Let us change the destiny of this great nation and make it truly democratic. Let us create history. Instead of letting our campaign fall mid-flight, let us become the wind beneath its wings once more. Please stand by Votes at 16.

Mr Speaker: Superbly spoken. Thank you very much indeed. Who have we got from Wales? Gosh, there is such a galaxy of choice.

Bethany Roberts (Wales): Diolch, Mr Speaker. I am Bethany Roberts, from Pembrokeshire in Wales. I am very much for the motion. I am pretty sure that everyone here today has heard the classic arguments about why 16 and 17-year-olds should have the right to vote—for example, the responsibilities that young people can gain at that age, such as joining the Army or becoming parents—but I think we should look at this more broadly.

Is having the right to vote really that bad? I know that there will be young people here today who are against the motion, arguing about our maturity and our capability to vote appropriately for the future of our country, and also about how uneducated we are on this topic. One of our motions today is on a curriculum for life, and it states that we want to be taught about politics, because our education system fails to offer that and does not teach us skills for life.

The other people who are suitable to educate us about politics are politicians themselves. I am learning loads as a youth representative on my local youth town council. If we were granted the right to vote, would that not trigger the education process about politics, as political parties would want our votes? That is not ideal, but how many people who vote now are educated about politics and truly understand what and who they are voting for? For example, I know people who do not bother to vote because they do not think it affects them, and I know people who go in and tick any box.

I have never understood the maturity argument. I do think that 16 and 17-year-olds are mature enough to vote. There seems to be a change in perception, and more young people want to vote. To be perfectly honest, I think that 16 and 17-year-olds are more than capable of dealing with the responsibility. Yes, some 16 and 17-year-olds can be a bit silly and do things that are seen as immature, but I am sure that would not be the case when they stepped into a voting booth by themselves. I know that because it is just as easy for them to run as an MYP as it is to vote.

I would like to assume that all of us here today, older and younger than 16, are taking this seriously and being mature. The 1001,041 young people who took part in Make Your Mark wanted votes at 16. What difference does it make when an 18-year-old, who has gone through the same education process as all of us, then has two extra years to think about the political education they did not have before being able to vote?

I am here today to listen to the arguments, and I only want to assume that Wales is ahead of time. Although it might not seem so to those visiting Wales, things such as votes at 16 and a curriculum for life are changing things for young people there in a positive way. My fellow Welsh representatives here today are lucky enough not to have to worry too much about votes at 16, because the Welsh Government are granting us the right to vote, hopefully by 2021. Although that is a few years away, it makes me proud to be a Welsh citizen, because the Welsh Government are listening to their young people and have given us what we are rightfully entitled to.

I hope that all of you here today will vote for the motion—for votes at 16 to be our campaign for a second time—to prove to the UK Government that this is what we want, and we want it now.

Mr Speaker: There have been so many magnificent speeches—more than I can remember in any year I can recall, and on the whole I have a pretty good memory. It

really is getting better and better, and I am very proud of and for you. Let us hear another fine speech, from a speaker from the North East of England. Who have we got? Well, what a splendidly demonstrative and eccentric means by which to catch the eye of the Chair, and on this occasion it is successful. Let us hear from you, Sir.

Clark Kent Chavez (North East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from Northumberland. This may be an unpopular opinion, but I feel that 16 is too young for some people to vote. All of us here are politically active, of course—some more than others—but I believe that age 16 and younger should be devoted to developing the political mind of the young person, in order for them to have a mature political mind by the time they come to vote. This coincides with the curriculum for life. Implement that and we can develop the political mind, enabling the young person to have the mature mind and to make the decisions for themselves when voting at 18.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. That point of view needs to be heard, and it has been. Can we please have a speaker from Northern Ireland?

Leah Quaile (Northern Ireland): I represent Upper Bann.

Votes at 16—what a topic! I am confident that all of us are already very familiar with how popular the proposal is—and rightly so. I strongly believe that votes at 16 is one of the most important issues we face as MYPs. Out of all our elected topics, it keeps showing up. It is not going away—not now and not in 2022—and neither are we. To me, this is an issue of choice, freedom and power. Is it fear of what might happen if young people are given the choice to change this country, to change the lives of people in this country, and to feel politically and socially empowered that is holding this back?

We have the passion to achieve votes at 16. Unlike the 16 and 17-year-olds we represent, we are not completely silenced, but we still need action. Let this be the year we can stand proudly, without fear, on behalf of every 16 and 17-year-old and say we have accomplished our goal of giving young people the right to choice. If we want any motion to succeed, we need to choose this one—the only motion that truly gives young people power. I urge you to vote for this motion so that we can turn our passion into action, and action into change. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for that—in terms of both content and delivery, it was terrific. We have not had a speaker from the South West of England.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: The second gentleman along on the very back row is waving ostentatiously. Let us hear from you, Sir. You look in a state of high excitement. We are excited for you, and we want to hear from you.

William Nicholls (South West): I am the MYP for mid-Cornwall.

I believe we should vote in favour of votes at 16 as it is an important issue. Sixteen and 17-year-olds have a voice and an opinion, and they are part of our generation. We are the next generation to walk and live upon this earth—well, in this country. We are the most important

generation, hence 16 and 17-year-olds should have the right to vote—they are the most important people to vote. That is why you should vote in favour of votes at 16 and 17.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Normally I go back and forth between sides, but this is a question of which regions have been heard from, and we have not yet heard a speaker from Yorkshire and Humber.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Someone is jumping up and down in a state of uncontrollable excitement, so we will hear from him. I saw him looking at me a few moments ago. Let's hear you, Sir.

Ali Khosravi (Yorkshire and Humber): From one Arsenal fan to another, Mr Speaker—thank you.

Mr Speaker: I didn't know that. It is very good to hear that you are an Arsenal fan; we would also like to hear your name.

Ali Khosravi: I am Ali Khosravi from Barnsley.

Like many other 16-year-olds across the country, I took the time to be patronised—sorry, to watch the debate on votes at 16 last Friday—[*Applause.*] I found it quite interesting. We were called immature, and someone even quoted Disraeli to defend a failed and outdated ideology.

I heard something very interesting from you, Mr Speaker, which resonated with me. You said that in politics it is not enough to make a good point once; you have to keep arguing your case until something gets done. Colleagues, last year we voted for a motion on votes at 16 and it was our national campaign, but this year we must send an even stronger signal before the debate in December and, possibly, a second Bill. This time Her Majesty's Government have to listen. This is the UK Youth Parliament, for heaven's sake.

We must think about what kind of message we send to people. We are telling 16-year-olds that their tax revenue is welcomed by Her Majesty's Treasury, but that they cannot have a say on how those taxes are spent. We are telling 16-year-olds that they are welcome to serve in our military, but that they cannot have a say about what type of country they can sacrifice their lives for or about the politicians who will send them to war. That is wrong. It is a grave injustice and if Her Majesty's Government are so determined to fight burning injustices and build a country that works for everyone, this is their opportunity. It is our opportunity—let's embrace it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much; another superb speech. The final Back-Bench speech of this debate needs to come, if possible, from the East of England. I hope that there is someone from the East of England who wants to speak.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: There are several, and we will hear from the young woman at the end who is waving her piece of paper at me.

Imogen White (East of England): I am the MYP for Essex.

We cannot have a say in any of the other topics discussed today—the curriculum for life, transport, work experience hubs or LGBT+ rights—in such an influential way as we can through voting, and voting for the MP who we believe has our issues at heart.

An MP in my own area, Mr Bernard Jenkin, said last week in the debate on the votes at 16 Bill that young people do not have the same “political maturity” as those over the age of 18. This is clearly not true, Members of the Youth Parliament, as we can stand here today and debate with one another, respecting one another’s views, even if we do not share them. Unfortunately, that seems to be something that our Members of Parliament are unable to do at times. Surely this shows that we have the same political maturity as our MPs, and can join in and vote alongside them.

I may be mistaken, but when I wake up on my 18th birthday next year, I do not expect that I will suddenly develop what Mr Jenkin describes as “political maturity”, and that I will suddenly understand the nation I live in completely differently from before. Many would argue that people aged 18 and over who are currently included in our franchise do not have the maturity to engage in our political system.

So, Members of the Youth Parliament, we have to show that we still believe that our right to vote is important and something that we must vote for. This fight has been going on for 18 years; that is nine generations of 16 and 17-year-olds who want the right to vote. We must support this important cause, which will allow young people to have the greater influence in our society that they so desperately need, and become the 10th generation fighting for the right of 16 and 17-year-olds to vote.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for your speech. This has been another quite exceptional debate. To conclude it, please welcome, from London, Sean Sinanan. [*Applause.*]

Sean Sinanan (London): As we have heard from the Back-Bench speeches, votes at 16 is the UK Youth Parliament’s favourite issue for debate in the House of Commons. In the past four years, votes at 16 has been debated here three times, with a collective 408,241 votes for it since 2014, not to mention the fact that it was also last year’s national campaign. What does that show? Perhaps the fact that the subject has been debated so many times in this Chamber shows that we, as a Youth Parliament, have not been effective enough and that we need to campaign again. Or, on the flipside, have we campaigned enough already and do we keep repeatedly hitting the concrete obstacle of successive Governments’ opposition?

The Votes at 16 campaign is perfectly summed up for me by momentum—us, the young people, as the unstoppable force versus the immovable object of our

Government. The 2017 general election was a perfect example of how young people can truly be a powerful political force. The majority of political parties even had votes at 16 in their manifestos. We MYPs have to make a crucial decision: do we pull away from this strong momentum as people and politicians across the UK realise the significance of the campaign; or do we add to our momentum, putting pressure on the cracks and finally pushing through this immovable object?

Last week in this very Chamber, the votes at 16 Bill was debated. While many of our MPs supported it, we still heard stale, tasteless and quite ignorant comments about young people. It was concluded that young people were too immature to vote and that we had no political knowledge whatsoever—how surprising! I want to look into that. I want everyone in this Chamber to look your right and now to your left. You see, we all represent a constituency, and in that constituency we have local youth parliaments, each filled with tens or hundreds of young people. Just think how many people are involved in the Youth Parliament alone. We defeat the stereotype that young people are not politically educated, and we only represent the tip of the iceberg.

Politics is becoming a fashion and in this new era, we are brought up in a world of technology and social media. For example, we can learn about controversial current affairs from simple tweets, and we all know that those simple tweets can come from, well, even simpler Presidents—[*Applause.*] The point is that it finally feels like young people are surrounded by this world of politics. But what about those who genuinely have a lack of political education? How do we instruct votes at 16 nationally when schools cannot even instruct basic political knowledge? In our new era, how do we ensure that young people are not fooled by the fake news and dodgy statistics that they see online or, in some cases, brainwashed by extremist political views? Perhaps we should vote for topics such as the curriculum for life instead to prepare young people for the vote.

A year ago—reminisce with me, Mr Speaker—I stood here as a Back Bencher and said that the change to get votes at 16 could not happen without a sense of idealism. Each year we face new obstacles, but we also make new progressions. Having said that, if we all have this sense of idealism—from the young people to the MPs—in this generation or the next, we, the young people, will finally fulfil this role as the unstoppable force. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Sean. The enthusiasm and electricity in the Chamber are on a scale that I do not think I have previously witnessed. It is hugely to your credit, and I hope that pulsating through your veins is a great sense of excitement at, and pride in, the occasion. That is certainly what I feel. I am afraid you will hear more from me later, but I feel very excited and privileged to be sitting in this Chair listening to speeches of principle, integrity and passion. We have had two fantastic debates.

Work Experience Hubs: 11 to 18-year-olds

Mr Speaker: The Youth Parliament will now consider the last motion of the morning session. To move it, I call, from the North West of England, Elijah Walter-Othman.

12.27 pm

Elija Walter-Othman (North West): The motion is,

Knowing where to find work experience can be challenging. Government should create an online space to help young people with this.

The difference between dreams and reality is action. It appears that the very essence of youth is built on our passion to dream, our resolve to strive, and an everlasting effort to overcome our trials in a society that often tells us, “No, you can’t”. Work experience, by convention, is there to bridge the gap between education and the world of work. But what if I told you that that is only the echo of a convention broken by misguided opportunity, failed dreams and the lack of means to tell our young people never to look beyond the life they have been given? When 65% of employers believe work experience to be critical for employment but only 38% are willing to offer it, surely something has to change. In 2012, we as young people were told that the school you attend will have no obligation to offer work experience, and with those words an inequality of opportunity only persists. We should no longer have to say that we live in a time where our futures are defined by where we are from, by what our parents earn and especially by an education system that has failed the many undiscovered talents of the generations that came before us. In our actions today, we can break that cycle.

I am sorry, but I remember growing up with my friends where I am from—my home, Manchester. We dreamt that we could be doctors, lawyers and, for some, even astronauts. Yet through that critical phase of high school, aspirations wavered from a drive to achieve to the realisation that we live in a society that has little to no expectation of what we can go on to be. How can we expect the many young people beyond these four walls to maintain expectations for themselves? I was once told that a postcode should never dictate potential. With those words I stand before you today with a belief. I believe that a young person from Moss Side should have the exact same opportunity as a young person from Eton. I believe that the young person who feels isolated in the rural areas of this country—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: I think some water is needed. It can be very challenging to speak in this place. I am sorry that Elijah was temporarily struggling, but it is a testament to the passion that he felt and the brilliance that he showed. *[Applause.]* It was an absolutely outstanding speech. Thank you for reacting as you did. Please welcome Kulsum Hafeji from the east Midlands to oppose the motion.

Kulsum Hafeji (East Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thanks to Elijah. “Work experience changed my life” is a phrase that is not heard often, but is one we would love to hear. I am not here to campaign against

work experience, but to campaign for better work experience. Let’s be honest, work experience is pretty pathetic. Our current system of work experience is everything but what we want it to be. It comprises the menial labour of youth who, in reality, need to be inspired, challenged and to have their eyes opened up to a world full of possibilities. Sadly, as it stands work experience produces dissatisfied, disillusioned and disinterested youth who each come out with only negatives. I do not want to make tea and coffee ever again. Some may say, “I never ever want to work in retail.” Does that sound familiar? Providing quality experiences in the vast fields of sciences, arts and technology will inspire an entire generation. We, the youth of today, have big dreams and high aspirations, but are being let down by poor work experience and being coerced into being tea boys and tea girls, all under the big fat banner of work experience.

Here is something to think about. The Department for Education’s recent consultation commissioned from the Learning and Work Institute revealed that we still do not know what effective practice in work experience looks like. Neither does Ofsted. That prompts the question: who is to say whether our current work experience is actually beneficial?

Mr Speaker, MYPs and all who are listening today, we need to re-evaluate our outdated ideas of work experience and figure out our vision and what we want work experience to look like. This will take time and good quality research, and it requires the collaboration of many different organisations, but that research needs to be done. Only after that will we be able to say, “Yes, this work experience works.” Only after that will we be able to rally together and campaign for work experience that truly enhances our education and development.

Friends, we need to offer standardised work experience, in which youth rotate across various different disciplines and experience multiple professions. I am not arguing today that we should campaign against work experience. But before we rally up our constituents, let us take a moment to reflect on our practice. Let us take a moment to step back and improve the quality of work experience. Let us create a future in which we grow to be pioneers—a future that will allow us to say, “Work experience changed my life.”

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Kulsum, for that excellent speech. I would like to hear, if possible, a speaker from Scotland. Who have we got from Scotland? This young man was first. Let us hear you, sir.

Luca Delpippo (Scotland): I represent the region of Mid Scotland and Fife. MYPs, comrades, is it not the case that with the power to make and break Governments, all is possible, up to and including work experience hubs and a curriculum for life? On that note, a lot of points have been made about whether we are educated enough. As I am sure Mr Speaker would agree, mature voters are just as capable as the youth are of making uneducated decisions in elections and referendums. There has been cynicism about this. Just because we are filibustered out of debates, it does not mean that we are on the wrong side of history. We are on the right side of history. Did the suffragettes give up when they were laughed out of Parliament? Did the

working class give up when they were shot at in the streets of Hyde Park? They did not. We are on the right side of history; affirm yourself in that belief.

We need to unite as one Youth Parliament, one last time. Let us give it one more push for votes at 16. Let us see the change that we want to see in the world. Let us let the Government know that we are not a generation who will give in and accept their demands. Let us let the Government know that we are a generation who will not waver when making ours.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for speaking from head and heart alike. I am looking for speeches on work experience hubs, and, on this occasion, I am looking for a speaker from Wales. Who have we got from Wales? The young woman in the middle.

Tabitha Balogun (Wales): I am a Member of the Youth Parliament for Cardiff. We need to ensure that the youth of today enter the labour force as prepared individuals. To achieve that, work experience must be accessible for people from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Often, nowadays, the people with the best work experience are those with connections—those whose family members work for a large company, or whose family members are doctors—and we say that that should no longer be the case. Having the Government intervene and provide work experience hubs will ensure that those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have an equal opportunity to achieve their aims.

Two thirds of employers say that they want individuals with work experience for the benefit of their company. If the youth of today do not have work experience, how are we going to get hired for the jobs that we need? If only those from richer backgrounds have amazing work experience, there will be no equality. For equality and opportunity, I urge you all to support this motion and vote for the importance of work experience.

Mr Speaker: I mentioned earlier that we had been visited by the Clerk Assistant in the House, and we are now joined by the Clerk of the House—the most senior procedural official in the House of Commons—and Head of the Service, with whom I work very closely every day, and who has worked in this place for over four decades, and is hugely respected: David Natzler. *[Applause.]* Thank you, David, for your characteristic interest and support.

Let us hear now from a representative from Yorkshire and the Humber.

Scarlet Rowe (Yorkshire and the Humber): Currently, we can attend a school where we receive all the help in the world to get a good work experience placement or attend a school where we get no help whatsoever. In a country where we believe in equal opportunities for all, how can this be justified?

We cannot overestimate the importance of one good work experience placement. From one work experience placement a student could be more likely to get into a university, not because they are any more deserving than a student without that placement, but because they might have had more help to get there. I represent that student who did not get into their first choice

university because they did not have that work experience placement. I am here representing all those students whose voices need to be heard.

Work experience hubs will create a fairer society, where someone's background does not affect their ability to achieve in life. That is the United Kingdom I want to live in.

Mr Speaker: Who have we got from London?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: I call the gentleman from London who is in a state of uncontrollable excitement—although I am sure he will not need the telephone he is holding in order to make his oration. We look forward to hearing from him.

Lawand Omar (London): I am the Member for the London Borough of Ealing, and, first, I want to dedicate this speech to a close friend of mine called Mehmet Aksoy, who, sadly, died about a month ago.

When I campaigned to be MYP just a year ago, I received strong backing from a number of communities, especially the Kurdish community, and I met a lot of young people. One young person in particular stood out. He wanted to speak to me and told me that he was being bullied at school because he was Kurdish. A lot of Kurdish families in my constituency came here having fled from Saddam Hussein's Iraq and other countries. This young person was being targeted at school—bullied and attacked constantly, every single day.

I know the topic we are discussing means a lot to a lot of young people, but in my constituency this topic received the least votes in the Make Your Mark ballot. It is much more relevant for us to vote for a topic such as having the vote at 16, where we can cover a much broader spectrum of issues, which would help all young people.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for that contribution. I welcome, to enjoy and support our proceedings, my parliamentary colleague, Khalid Mahmood, Labour Member of Parliament for Birmingham, Perry Barr. *[Applause.]* Thank you, Khalid, for your interest and support.

I am keen to call somebody from the West Midlands—

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: It is very difficult to choose, as you are all so enthusiastic.

Mariam Sohail (West Midlands): I am from Walsall; a quick google will assure you that that is not important.

Through creating work experience hubs for 11 to 18-year-olds we would be bridging the gap between young people and the world of work. The current statistics show that 86% of young people who have had four or more encounters with employers are less likely to be unemployed later in life. Therefore, work experience should be integrated into a high quality careers education programme within all schools throughout the UK.

The current fragmented nature of careers education across the country is detrimental to the youth of today, as they do not have the practical skills to complement their educational skills. The Youth Parliament must therefore make this their priority issue for the upcoming year, as I firmly believe that we will then see a change in the next 12 months.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I am looking to call a Back-Bench speaker from Northern Ireland. Who do we have—anyone from Northern Ireland? Forgive me, but if you have already spoken—we have already heard a brilliant contribution from the young woman standing—we probably do not want to call you a second time, because some people do not get to speak at all.

Benjamin Sharkey (Northern Ireland): We only have three people.

Mr Speaker: Well, what about the third person, who has not spoken? Does that person wish to speak? No, not in this debate. Well, I said Northern Ireland; so be it. I know that you will want to keep this brief, but thank you; we appreciated your previous contribution.

Leah Quaille (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am representing Upper Bann. We have a system in Northern Ireland that is very much like this, and I am confident that it has helped most people, but there is an ongoing publicity problem. Some young people do not even know it exists. I know for a fact that it is beneficial to young people: it helps with advancements in their careers and dreams, gives them a taste of their future and gives them help with difficult upcoming decisions. I would love people in other parts of the UK to have the same opportunities as I will. I find it appalling that this has been overlooked in the crucial system that has stood by us from our early days. I can't help but feel that the young people of England have been let down by past Governments not providing a hub such as we have and the one that we propose today. Please make work experience one of your topics. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. What about the East of England? We have not heard from the East of England. I see a young gentleman holding up his sweater as a kind of fashion accessory and a demonstration of his interest. Let's hear from you, sir.

Harvey Luker (East of England): I am representing Norfolk. A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of doing work experience with the chief executive at my local council. If it was not for Norfolk's Takeover Day campaign, I would not have had that opportunity. In Norfolk, we also have something called Help You Choose, which is an online hub, like what we are suggesting today, to get young people to apply to sixth forms, colleges and for work experience and apprenticeships. We have all the information there. It changed my perspective on the workplace; it made me feel more involved in the workplace. It has allowed me to have the opportunities that I have today—to be speaking to you in the House of Commons.

However, it is important that we acknowledge that not everyone has that privilege. Not everyone has the opportunities that I have had to go into the local

council and work with the chief executive, sit in on meetings, vote, count ballots and stuff like that. We have not all had that experience.

Also, remember that this is a devolved campaign. We can still fight for votes at 16. We can still fight for LGBT+ rights. Just remember that this is something on the side. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Before I call a representative from the South East of England, please welcome a Member of Parliament from the south-east, the Conservative Member of Parliament for Beckenham, who is standing immediately to my right and waving ostentatiously to his adoring fans. I am referring to Bob Stewart. Bob has a very distinguished track record in the Army. He served in many theatres and at a very high level. He has had experiences that most of us, probably thankfully, will never have, but he has been a brave soldier for his country and is a principled Member of Parliament. Bob, it is a pleasure to have you with us; thank you for your support.

We are going to hear next from the South East of England. Two people have been gesticulating for a while, and I am going to call the young woman who had indicated at an earlier stage, I think.

Annabel Barker-Lomax (South East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am Annabel Barker-Lomax from Surrey. Today, we live in a society where 50% of people do not take the degrees that they spend so many years studying for on into the workplace; where young people often have little or no experience of what it is like to work in the areas that they will spend the rest of their lives working in; and where teens facing decisions about GCSEs and A-levels are stuck with no clue about what to choose, because they do not know where they want the subjects to take them. This is a society where a few are left unguided and uncertain in the decisions that will do so much to shape how they spend the rest of their lives.

I believe strongly that the Government have a duty to young people in this regard, just as they do in offering education, and that we have a duty to our young people, our constituents, to give them all the opportunity to explore the options, to test their passions, to find themselves and to find out how they want to go into their working years. For the sake of a more directed, more passionate, more prepared generation of young people, I urge you to vote for the motion. In turn, not only will we see more individuals from more backgrounds reap the rewards, but our economy will reap the rewards. The motion benefits the UK individually, societally and economically. Therefore, I urge you to stand for the motion. [*Applause*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you. In a moment, I am going to call a speaker from the North East of England. Ms Krajovska, you were trying to get in earlier. Prepare yourself for your oration, which we anticipate. I just want to welcome my parliamentary colleague, the Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead without interruption since 1979—38 years a Member of Parliament and widely recognised across the House and in many parts of our country as what people want an MP to be, which is a principled and fearless seeker after and speaker for truth: Frank Field. [*Applause*]

For decades, Frank has campaigned against low pay and child poverty. He is a specialist in social security and pension policies—he has forgotten more about pension policy than I have ever known. He is truly an outstanding representative. He has never been scared of anyone or anything. It is a standard that perhaps you should aspire to attain. Thank you, Frank, for your support for the Parliament.

I call our friend from the North East, who has now had plenty of time to prepare herself. We look forward to hearing what she has to say.

Rachel Krajovska (North East): I am representing Sunderland. The idea of work experience hubs seems ideal in bettering our journey of further education and work, but how can we possibly prioritise the motion if the basic foundations of our educational institutions are not yet built? Before we can work on the advancement of our education, we must ensure that every young person in the UK is guaranteed a basic, fair and unbiased curriculum to prepare us for life. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Who do we have from the North West? I call Tom Laing.

Tom Laing (North West): I am the MYP for Wirral. I know someone who had the opportunity to do work experience in the United Nations. That is an opportunity that many people do not even know exists. Also, one of my constituents wanted to do veterinary work, but they did not know where to get work experience on that. It is heart-breaking that people do not know where to get work experience. Imagine if people had the opportunity to organise work experience online. Someone could just say, “I want to do work experience in veterinary medicine” and find that opportunity. Would that not be equality of opportunity?

Mr Speaker: Thank you, and bless you, Frank, for coming along to the Chamber.

Who have we got from the East Midlands? I call Lawrence Felipe

Lawrence Felipe (East Midlands): I am from Derbyshire. The key term for the motion is “experience”—experience to learn in a different environment, to explore new ideas and to fail. That is why I have to come to the decision to go against the motion. We live in a world full of opportunities—the foundations that allow all people to have the chance to succeed.

As young people, we will be the future bankers, lawyers and leaders. However, it just seems that we have grown lazy and think that life will be easy, but it will not. Sylvester Stallone once said in the movie “Rocky Balboa” that

“nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain’t about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward.”

We are given the things to form the fabric of our lives and to shape our future to the way that we want it. Sure, it will be hard, it will be difficult, but that is good. We need to experience the fact that life is not always about sunshine and rainbows. It is only through failure that we can really call ourselves a success. Life is a teacher: it beats us down, but we learn from it. We learn from our mistakes. We educate ourselves to become a

better us. Work experience takes that away from us. We need to understand the tough realities of rejection and have the tenacity to get up, work hard and achieve. *[Applause.]*

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call a speaker from the South West.

Kirstie Stage (South West): It is a great honour to represent West Wiltshire from the South West.

I ask one question: why are we, at present, making little effort to network across the country to aid both young people and companies? With this motion, young people would be able to access applications for work experience easily and not do unnecessary research. That provides mutual benefits: raising the kudos of businesses, enabling us to interact with professionals, and encouraging apprenticeships. We must take into account the fact that this could offer life-changing opportunities for those who have never had the chance to develop key life skills, reaching not just young people from the cities, but rural constituents. Let us make a difference by supporting this motion and injecting a sense of energy and passion into what really matters the most. *[Applause.]*

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Very soon, I will call the concluding speaker from Northern Ireland, Jenni Iredale, to wind up the debate. However, before we get to that, we have Elijah, who made a superb speech, but did not actually finish. He is now restored to full vigour, and we are delighted about that—*[Applause.]* Elijah will now finish his speech. *[Applause.]* Let us hear the remainder of your speech.

Mr Elijah Walter-Othman (North West): I just shook the hand of Lawrence Felipe from the East Midlands, because what he said was very true: it is isn’t about how hard you hit; it’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. Thank you, for those words. *[Applause.]* As a courtesy, let me say: never have your tie or top button too tight. It is not a good thing.

Let me start again. The difference between dreams and reality is action. It appears that the very essence of youth is built on our passion to dream, our resolve to strive and an everlasting effort to overcome our trials, in a society that often tells us, “No, you can’t”. Work experience hubs, by convention, are there to bridge the gap between education and the world of work. But what if I told you that that is only the echo of a convention broken by misguided opportunity, failed dreams and the means to tell our young people never to look beyond the life they have been given? When 65% of employers believe work experience to be critical for employment and only 38% are willing to offer it, surely something has to change.

In 2012, young people were told that because of the school we attend there was no obligation to offer work experience. With those words, inequality of opportunity only persisted. We should no longer have to live in a society in which we are defined by where we live, by what our parents earn and, especially, by an

education system that has failed the many generations that came before us. With our actions today, we can break the cycle.

My home is Manchester, and I remember growing up with my friends and dreaming that we could be doctors or lawyers—there was even one who believed they could be an astronaut. However, it was during the critical phase of high school that aspirations wavered from a drive to achieve to a realisation that we live in a society that has little to no expectation of what young people can go on to be. How can we expect the many young people beyond these four walls to maintain that expectation themselves? I was once told that a postcode should never dictate potential so, with those words, I stand before you today with a belief: I believe that a young person on the streets of Moss Side deserves the exact same opportunities as a young person at Eton; I believe that a young person from the tower blocks of Lewisham deserves the exact same opportunities as a young person from Westminster; and I believe that the young person who feels isolated in the rural areas of this country deserves the exact same opportunities as a young person from Harrow.

Young people are told that we are the future, yet what value does that carry when a self-proclaimed title such as the United Kingdom has left the opportunities of so many young people divided? Allow me to say that once more: if we are a United Kingdom, why have we divided our young people by opportunity? [*Applause.*] Let us be remembered as the MYPs who showed this country that in the 21st century we should no longer have to be defined simply by where we are from. Looking into the eyes of each and every one of you, I say that we all have a future to aspire to. Let us be remembered as the MYPs who said, “We made our mark.” Most importantly, let us be remembered as the young people who voted for work experience hubs for the young people of this country.

Mr Speaker: Elijah, thank you for your sincerity, your eloquence, your passion and, indeed, your courage. You are the spirit of the UK Youth Parliament. To conclude the debate, I call Jenni Iredale from Northern Ireland.

Jenni Iredale (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank Kulsum and Elijah for their passionate arguments both for and against the motion on encouraging the implementation of work experience hubs for 11 to 18-year-olds. Elijah, I think I speak for everybody in the room when I say that you are amazing; we are all so proud of you.

Following the Government’s review of vocational education in 2012, the onus upon schools to arrange work placements for pupils aged 11 to 16 was removed. Instead, a higher focus was placed on 16 to 19-year-olds, for whom the Department for Education expects schools to offer appropriate work experience as part of their study programmes.

With regard to the arguments put forward by my hon. Friends, should opportunities be limited to higher-level placements, or is it more realistic to allow placements to cater for other roles? Whether you aspire to be a hairdresser, a builder or a surgeon, should not all roles be considered if we desire to be fully inclusive? Is the reality of entering the workplace being given immediate

autonomy and responsibility, or is it photocopying and shelf-stacking, with gradual progression? One could argue that photocopying and filing are extremely mundane and uninspiring, but they are sometimes necessary tasks, and they are the reality of so many workplaces.

The employer survey referred to by my colleague screams double standards regarding what employers want and what is available to young people. Employers desire soft skills like communication, initiative and teamwork—skills that are necessary for us to succeed in the modern workplace. You can learn and develop those life skills only when you are given the opportunity to grow by experiencing new challenges and new opportunities outside the school environment. Attempts have been made to address that. The Government have established education business partnerships, with over 173,000 businesses offering work placements, but there is still no direct access portal for young people.

Last summer, I was luckily accepted into a work placement with BBC Belfast, and without being cliché, it changed everything for me—my dreams, my path and my goals. My work experience worked, but, regrettably that is not the case for so many young people, so what is not working? We need to give young people a stepping stone, to bridge the wide gap between education and employment. We simply cannot ignore the fact that between April and June this year, over 790,000 young people were not in employment, training or education. In fact, 90% of those young people had had some form of work experience.

So many young people are leaving education completely disconnected from the reality of the world around them and the reality of the workplace. The motion seeks to improve accessibility, but is that the real problem, or is it instead that the quality of work experience is lacking? I think the figures speak for themselves. Although there have been positive steps, we still have many thousands of young people struggling to find placements.

Whether making the tea is, indeed, your cup of tea, or whether you wish to immerse yourself in a world of test tubes and electron microscopes, the question this House must address is: should the Government follow my home’s devolved Government in Northern Ireland and establish an easily accessible online employer hub that enables young people to search for work experience opportunities and apply directly? That, my hon. Friends, is your decision. Thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Jenni, for that first-class conclusion to our debate. That concludes the morning session of our sitting. The Youth Parliament will now adjourn until 1.45 pm. Friends and colleagues, I invite you all to return to Westminster Hall for lunch.

1.8 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.45 pm

Sitting resumed.

Mr Speaker: Members of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament, and all who are here to support and encourage you, I hope that you have had an enjoyable lunch and

[Mr Speaker]

that you are fortified and revitalised for this afternoon's proceedings. We have had a great morning, but we still have a considerable way to go.

The Youth Parliament will now consider the fourth motion of the day: Transport. The full motion is printed on the Order Paper. To move the motion, I call, from Yorkshire and Humber, Brandon Green.

Transport

1.46 pm

Brandon Green (Yorkshire and Humber): Accessibility, affordability, reliability—these are transport issues that young people care about. Transport has come up as a top issue five times since the UK Youth Parliament began sitting in this House, yet since 2011 little has been done to improve public transport for young people at a national level. This is something that we can change.

In these times of austerity, young people cannot afford to pay the continually rising prices of travelling by public transport. I think that we can all agree that it is disgraceful that some young people cannot afford to travel to their school, college or place of work. But, in having transport as our campaign, there is great potential in the idea of a national under-18s concessionary scheme, making public transport affordable for all our young people.

Currently, in the capital, only around one quarter of tube stations and half of overground stations are step-free, which means that young people with disabilities are excluded from travelling between some lines. That is the case across the country in many towns and cities. In rural areas, many young people struggle with lack of access to bus routes and train services. I am from Barnsley, where many bus routes do not run after a certain hour and some young people do not live within walking distance of their nearest bus stop or train station. We must be part of the process of deciding where and when buses and trains run, making public transport accessible for all our young people.

I waited and waited and waited at the bus stop. Who amongst us has not had that sinking feeling of knowing that you are going to be late for school? That is the common example of how unreliable public transport can be. However, young people should be able to take public transport and be on time for school or college, because every minute lost at school as a result of transport delays is a minute lost from valuable learning time. A method of contact must be put in place, through an app or by text, to inform and re-route young people who have had changes to their journey, thus making certain that our young people feel that they can rely on our public transport network.

I have here a copy of “Get In Gear: Accessibility of Public Transport For Young People”, a report produced by Rotherham Youth Cabinet. It is part of an excellent campaign that has already had success in South Yorkshire. As a result of the report, and the hard work of our area, 16 to 18-year-olds were finally given a concessionary fare equal to that of someone under the age of 16. This serves to prove that in this campaign we can set ourselves clear objectives and ensure that we achieve what we set out to achieve.

Members of the Youth Parliament, if something as basic as our public transport network fails us, how can we not expect to be failed on other issues? Thank you.
[Applause.]

Mr Speaker: Brandon, thank you for kicking off the afternoon's proceedings by moving the motion so effectively. To oppose the motion, I want you,

Members of the Youth Parliament, equally warmly to welcome, from the South East of England, Khadeejah Hullemath.

Khadeejah Hullemath (South East): Thank you, Mr Speaker—ignore my giggles.

Mr Speaker: Was my pronunciation flawed?

Khadeejah Hullemath: Do you know what? Efforts are always accepted. Thank you so much.

Mr Speaker: My apologies to you. It was a very poor best on my part. My apologies, and congratulations for reacting so magnificently.

Khadeejah Hullemath: Thank you. We are here to make a difference, make our mark and improve the lives of our young people. We have the honour of representing some of the most inspiring communities, and I for one am incredibly proud to do so.

Transport is an issue. I get what you are all thinking —“Khadeejah, you’re supposed to be speaking against the motion”—but it is. It is an issue for the 128,749 young people who voted for it to be debated, and it is an issue for the millions more who use it daily to get to school, work and college. But what exactly about transport is the issue? That, folks, is where things take a bit of a complicated turn. For those among us from more rural areas, I am sure there is nothing more heartbreaking than missing your school bus and knowing that the next one is more than an hour away, but for those of us from more urban areas, perhaps the issue is not your regular 10-minute bus service but having to fork out a small fortune for every journey.

We really only have to look at our own Youth Select Committee report to realise that the theme that keeps popping up is locality. By voting for this as our campaign, we would effectively be voting for a series of smaller campaigns—a series of divided campaigns—rather than working together in our regions or as the united Youth Parliament that we are. How could we even hope to measure our successes when a successful campaign in one part of the country would mean absolutely nothing to another? Why do we not follow the brilliant examples of the Surrey Heath Youth Council, the Rotherham Youth Cabinet and countless other groups by tackling local transport issues locally?

Friends, we have 12 months to deliver an effective campaign that works. Remember: transport will always be an issue on the UKYP manifesto. We can lobby, pressure and raise awareness among our MPs about the issues that we face in our regions, and fight to make a difference. Friends, if that is not what the UK Youth Parliament is about, I might as well leave this Chamber. Let us take this transport campaign in a different direction. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you for a great opposing speech. Now let us hear from the South West of England.

Cecilia George (South West): My name is Cecilia George and I proudly represent East Wiltshire.

Transport is a recurring issue that has been brought to this Chamber five times already. We represent people aged between 11 and 18. You can ride a moped at 16 and drive at 17, so, given the time and cost it takes to

learn, most of us will not experience the freedom of travel until we are 18. Having lived in a rural area where there are five buses a day and none on Sundays, I can sympathise with those who are left feeling isolated by a lack of adequate and affordable transport. This issue affects the majority of young people, and it is something that we, as the UK Youth Parliament, need to address. What is the point of keeping this motion on transport if it makes it to the Commons every year and falls? It is clearly important to young people and should it fall a fifth time we will clearly not be voting in the best interests of our constituents.

Mr Speaker: I think it is time we heard a voice from London.

Max Pietrangeli (London): I am the MYP for Richmond and a Chelsea fan—sorry.

Although I completely agree that transport is a big issue for young people, this topic is simply too big and without a vision. A work experience hub, on the other hand, is a specific and most importantly realistic goal that can be achieved in 12 months.

Members of the Youth Parliament, we need to think about what is feasible in 12 months. Transport is not a young people-specific issue; it affects us all. I urge you all to vote against this motion and, instead, in favour of the only truly realistic and feasible motion on offer, work experience hubs for 11 to 18-year-olds.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. What about Scotland? This young man here caught my eye.

Jack Campbell (Scotland): I am speaking on behalf of the young people of Central Scotland. Mr Speaker, Members of the Youth Parliament, there is a need for better transport systems provided according to the needs of our young people—a public service, not a private bandwagon. Our transport services must be run for people, not profit. These companies should be accountable to us, the people, and not to profit-driven shareholders.

As Adam Smith once said:

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”

We cannot expect shareholders to act in our interest rather than the interest of their own profits and their own bank accounts. MYPs, I urge you all to support the motion because we need to ensure that our services work for us, the people.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Now, I think we should hear from the North West of England, and I was looking for a chap with a blue suit, blue shirt, spiky hair and a chequered tie. I think he is the gentleman on the second row, and I think your name is Jacob, am I right?

Jacob Reid (Cumbria): I am Jacob, and I represent Eden and Carlisle in Cumbria.

Youth Parliament, I have a riddle. Bob, the 15-year-old school goer, pays £1,000 to access his free education. How is Bob’s education free? Any ideas? Kaitlyn? No? Elijah? No? Mr Speaker, do you have any ideas?

Mr Speaker: I am ignorant on this matter, but we are about to find out.

Jacob Reid: Actually, I have no idea either. Yet some young people in Carlisle and Eden are paying hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds a year on transport to their free education even before they are charged the adult rate at the age of 16. Some young people feel trapped and isolated in their villages because there is but one bus service a week and that runs during school time. Some young people in Eden are getting on buses which frankly are alive enough only to have the strength to die.

Our friends in London tell us that this would be too much of a campaign, and that it would be too hard. I agree. It will be very hard. But one thing I would like to say to our friends in London is that in Penrith we do not have free tube travel. More importantly, we have not campaigned on this issue since 2011, which means that for the past six years the voices of these young people have been literally drowned out by the sound of a bus struggling to make it up a hill. Youth Parliament, it is time that we campaigned on transport. Let's vote for transport. Let's make transport the national campaign. While you're at it, get back to me on the riddle. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Jacob, thank you for a wonderfully engaging and charismatic speech, which I certainly enjoyed; I think others did too.

Now I am looking to hear someone from the East Midlands. There was a young person from there who was struggling to stand early enough. I think it is Rosie. You are standing now, Rosie and we are delighted to see you.

Rosie Glossop (East Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. As a young person with mobility difficulties, I find public transport near impossible to use. Buses do not have step free access, and assistance on trains, which I pre-book, hardly ever arrives. Luckily, I can drive, but many of my disabled peers cannot, and they struggle to get around. Public transport should be encouraged. It should be subsidised; it is better for our environment. But everyone should be able to use it.

However, as a UK Youth Parliament, what can we actually change? We can change opinions, but I believe our time and effort could be better used elsewhere. More funding is required from Government, which is something we just cannot give.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Rosie. Who do we have from Wales?

Stacey Baker (Wales): As one of the previous speakers said, transport is a wide issue that is split into many different topics. One of the main issues is the environment. Buses are viewed as one of the cleanest modes of transport, but they are underused because people cannot access them, so they are much more environmentally harming than cars. Cars have to follow a Euro 6 regulation, which is one of the most recent, whereas buses and trains have to follow Euro 3, which is the standard of 16 years ago, when many of us were just born or were very young. Why is that standard not being improved every year to meet our environmental needs?

One of the most pressing issues right now is the environment. Global warming is becoming a massive issue. The standard for buses is 4.2 g of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide whereas for cars it is only 0.43. Per person, that makes buses much more environmentally friendly, but only if people can access them and afford them. We cannot address the pricing issues until people are using the buses so that companies can afford to run them. They have no money in the first place; they have funding, but their main income is fares. Fares are high because no one is able to access the bus service or afford it. It is sort of a double-ended stick. We cannot tackle one issue without tackling the other, but if one issue falls, the other issue has to be stopped. That is the thing we need to look at. It is such a big issue that we, just as MYPs, cannot solve it. It needs to be the entire UK. If we do not work on making the buses cheaper and deal with the fact that people are not using them, the buses will fail. There will be fewer buses, they will be less reliable and less accessible. We need to attack this as a country, not as young people.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Might we now have a speaker from the North East of England?

Rory McFarland (North East): Lower the prices—a consensus goal put across by those who advocate change in transport. Of course, for many this would be ideal, but it is not realistic as many of the bus or other transport companies are private so they seek to make profits. I believe that this Parliament should take transport on from a different angle. Let us look at how we can affect customer care on transport. Let us look at why some female teenagers feel unsafe on public transport late at night. Why is this happening? Why as a Parliament are we allowing this to happen? We should be looking to change that rather than focusing on price.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, we have here today only two representatives of Army Welfare, British forces in Germany. We have heard from one of them, and that person spoke very effectively, but I do not know whether the other one wants to contribute on this subject. If that person does, they should please say.

Colm Thomson (Army Welfare Service) *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: No, not on this particular subject. Okay, that is fair enough. In that case, I am minded now to take a contributor from Northern Ireland, preferably one who has not spoken already, but not if that person does not want to speak. No? Okay, not at this stage. Gosh, the person who has spoken might even get a third chance at this rate. In that case, at this point I will go to the West Midlands. I am looking for a speaker from the West Midlands. This gentleman was trying very earnestly earlier and was unsuccessful, so we will hear from you now and we look forward to it.

Joshua Murphy (West Midlands): Finally! Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am currently the United Kingdom Youth Parliament Member for Solihull. What brings me to this debate on transport, apart from trying to get into a debate, is the fact that it is really important from both a first-world perspective and a third-world perspective.

Let us focus on the third-world perspective first. We obviously hear about buses that run only five or six times a day, and that is not enough when it comes to these sort of standings. We need to encourage people to use buses more often so that it allows the buses to run more often, and so that people can have the best use of them.

If we look at it from a first-world perspective, why do we not have free bus travel for those on free school meals and for children living on benefits? Why do we not have free bus travel for those young children, so that they are able to go into school for free and not worry about the additional costs of buses or extra transport, as well as for parents who cannot drive or are disabled and children who are disabled and not financially supported? We need to look at all the facts and we need to have a serious conversation with the people who are in charge of the Government.

I am sorry; I am losing my train of thought. The thing is, we have to look at this and it has to be seriously addressed. If it is not addressed soon, it will get to the point where people become complacent with second-class or good services, and not with the excellent services that this country deserves. We deserve better people—go for it!

Mr Speaker: Well done. Thank you both for the quality of your speech and for persisting towards the end—I will likely come back to that point later. That was excellent, and I enjoyed experiencing it. I am looking for a female speaker from the South East. The South East should go absolutely ecstatic and enthusiastic.

Kathryn Brooks (South East): I am from Hampshire and I am going to echo some of what people have already said today about the fact that public transport is very expensive. I am sure that we can all agree on that. I am going to add that it is promoted as being socially active—meeting friends and going out. However, it is far too expensive, which limits the amount that young people can go out and spend time with their friends and family, especially those who live further away and do not have parents or relatives who can take them places.

Parents and families should not be relied upon to the point that you can get a car or can drive. Even when you get to that point, because of rising inflation and costs, it is still very expensive to learn to drive. It is not the case that as soon as you turn 18 you will be able to go out and no longer rely on public transport. People can simply no longer afford these increases, which are for train and bus tickets as well. It puts a strain on families to have to take young people places in this busy day and age. That is especially the case for those with single parents or those who cannot rely on their parents to take them places.

It is for those reasons that I believe we should work together as Members of the UK Youth Parliament. We will be able to encourage young people to go out and have the chance to go to new places with the use of trains, buses and accessible transport. I believe we can do that within these 12 months.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Now, what about the East of England? You were trying earlier and looked mildly disappointed not to be called, but your moment has arrived. Let us hear from you.

Rachel Ojo (East of England): I am a Member of the Youth Parliament from Essex. Transport is an issue not just for all the people we represent, but for everyone, regardless of their age. Prices are high and many people find that their opportunities are limited because they cannot afford the transport that they need. Personally, the price of my transport to school has risen year after year, and I am sure that many other people have experienced the same thing. I am aware that some areas have no problem with transport, but I strongly believe that transport is an important issue that we should definitely campaign on.

Mr Speaker: I am just going to try to establish, for the last time, whether anybody from Northern Ireland wants to speak in this debate. There is genuinely no pressure; I just do not want you to feel excluded. I have tried to ensure that in each of the debates, somebody from each part of the United Kingdom—constituent nation or region, as the case may be—has had the chance to speak. I say “constituent nation”, because one year the Scots got very annoyed when they thought they were being considered to be a region. I was simply considering them to be a part of the United Kingdom.

Nobody from Northern Ireland? No. In that case, I am looking for a speaker from Yorkshire and the Humber. The person who has been gesticulating at me most recently with some force is the woman here. I am sorry that I cannot call everybody.

Kitty Jackson (Yorkshire and Humber): I represent North Yorkshire. Another issue that needs to be addressed is accessibility for the disabled. My two sisters both have severe autism, and they claim mobility. However, when we were struck with the awful situation of not having a car, not only were they forced to take the bus and taxis when they were not being treated as they should have been, but, because we lived an outstanding 0.1 miles closer to their school than the pass allowed, they had no financial support. My parents had to pay £10 a day just to get my sisters to the only school that they could access. That is not right. I urge you to vote for transport so that we can help everybody and not let anyone go without their education.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. To conclude the debate, from Scotland please welcome Josh Kennedy.

Josh Kennedy (Scotland): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to inform you that your train has been delayed. I wonder how many of you heard that when travelling here today. Let us be honest: Britain is moving so fast, but our transport system is significantly slower. Prices are continuously on the rise, and incompetence in facilitating disabled individuals is increasing. But does the motion really encapsulate the big picture? Friends, whether you live in a rural or an urban area, transport is flawed across the board, so the question becomes: does the motion go far enough?

All of the problems lie within our transport system and how it is run. It is wrong to assume that the problems apply only to rural areas, as I learned two weeks ago when I used the London underground for the first time. That was not an enjoyable experience for a

Scottish lad who resides in what I describe as the suburbs of the suburbs of Glasgow, but it outlined the blatant lack of facilities for disabled individuals and the unreliability of the service.

We need to shine a light on the bigger issue. Our transport system as a whole is failing, and the cracks are beginning to show. Our councils have a duty to consult young people on transport, but councils that do so often have trouble getting from public transport companies the things that young people would like to see. That, friends, brings the feasibility of this motion into question. There are hundreds of different councils, along with hundreds of independent public transport companies, all with different business ethics. Can we afford to effectively waste our time? The sad truth is that if transport is not economically profitable, young people are left in the dust, which is too common in my local area. Something else that is too common is my pal complaining about the fact that he cannot get a chippie from the next town over, due to the bus not being reliable enough. This is a first-world problem, but it brings the need for the motion back into play.

It is madness that someone who still attends school and is not even given the vote would be charged an adult fare, but would we not be smarter if we selected a campaign that we could conduct as one bloc—one force—to take on the establishment and fight for change? Should we not be fighting for a better curriculum or work experience for young people, which are issues on which we, as a Youth Parliament, can have a united front? Friends, can we afford to waste our time? Some might say that the subject of transport is getting stale as it enters our debate for the fifth time. That might be true, but it highlights the fact that young people are still not getting adequate transport and something must be done.

We have been elected to serve our young people. It is time to get on the move and solve the big issue at hand, but surely we must first decide what that is. Is it not time that we bring our transport system back up to the pace of the rest of the country? That is for you to decide. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Josh, thank you for that excellent wind-up of another great debate.

A Curriculum to prepare us for Life

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, the Youth Parliament will now consider the fifth and final motion of the day. I call, and ask you enthusiastically to welcome, from the North East of England, Abigail Charlton. *[Applause.]*

2.16 pm

Abigail Charlton (North-East): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The motion says,

Schools should cover topics including finance, sex and relationships and politics in the curriculum.

Mr Speaker, “Healthy relationships are just basic knowledge,” “Finance is 21-year-old me’s problem,” and, “Politics? Isn’t that for old people?” Those are just some of the statements I have heard from one of my friends in year 11 but, credit where it is due, they are now aware that Gordon Brown is not the Prime Minister, so I guess we are making progress.

In all seriousness, these are some of the most basic foundations for our lives, and I think you will agree that they are not taught to us, and when they are, they are hidden in assemblies or PSHE lessons, where the bare minimum is seen as enough. I am sorry, but if I were to put minimal effort into my school work, I would have detentions every single night of the week—but it’s fine when it’s the other way around, right? Some 88% of young people and 97% of teachers believe that life skills are as important, if not more important, than academic qualifications, so is it really that outlandish to invest in life skills courses? A curriculum for life is a way of investing in us as young people, and a way to give us the tools we need to build ourselves up.

The education system is, to put it kindly, in organised chaos, but among all this uncertainty, one thing has remained constant: our persistence as young people—the young people who this year, last year, the year before that and the year before that voted for a curriculum for life. These young people are shouting with all their might, and do you know what? We have a duty to listen and act, because they are right. We deserve access to life skills just as much as we do to Shakespeare’s sonnets or Pythagoras’s theorem. We deserve a curriculum for life.

But I hear what you are all thinking: what is six months more going to achieve? What is one more year going to achieve where previous years have been unable? Well, as my dad says, “A battle isn’t won overnight,” and a curriculum for life will not be either. But as it is this year’s top-voted Make Your Mark priority, we have a duty to make more progress on it.

So I stand here today at this Dispatch Box, a simple Geordie girl, asking youse all to vote with me, 100,000 young people, our constituents, and my mate who now knows who the Prime Minister is, and to take a stand. Let’s make 2018 the year we achieve an accessible, comprehensive, equal and complete curriculum for life. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Abigail, thank you—that was a fantastic opening speech. To oppose the motion, please welcome, from the South West, Alizeh Abdul-Rahman. *[Applause.]*

Alizeh Abdul-Rahman (South West): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I must say that that is the most unique pronunciation of my name that I have heard so far.

Mr Speaker: Apologies.

Alizeh Abdul-Rahman: It's okay.

Education is my weapon to make a change. Words are my shield. Life is my mentor to make the right decision tonight. A great man once said:

“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.”

But a girl standing before you asks this: is the key with us or with power? It is power that has cut £2.8 billion from school budgets in this country and that denies our schools the resources they need, so is power really on our side? As I dwell on this question, my mind wrestles with the notion of an education system taking on so much, but gradually deflating due to a lack of funding. For four years, we have campaigned for a curriculum for life and for four years we have demanded statutory status for PSHE in this country, but the small steps that have been taken are just not enough. Only this year have the Government decided to make sex and relationship education a statutory part of the curriculum from 2019. Financial education is also compulsory in schools, yet that makes me question why the implementation of all this is perpetually invisible to many of us.

Standing in one of the greatest Chambers of change in the world, I say this: change is not making amendments to the statute book; change is witnessed, so are we truly witnessing change here? This is where we must open our eyes to the gargantuan scale of the project we demand. How can we demand that schools begin the evolutionary process towards a curriculum for life when they are crippled by cuts that threaten the curriculum that is already in place? How can we demand that teachers deliver effective sex and relationship education when we all know that that is the job of school nurses? Non-existent school nurses, that is, because there are hardly any left.

The dream of a curriculum for life that is strong, effective and delivered to the standard we all deserve is one that I share with you, but the reality is this. We cannot allow a curriculum for life that is half-hearted, acting as an additional strain on our education system, so I plead with you to vote against the motion, because that is where power is on our side, and the key to unlocking the golden door of freedom will one day be with us. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Alizeh, thank you. That was yet another incredibly powerful and thought-provoking speech, which is a huge tribute to you and respected by all who heard you.

We should now hear someone from London—*[Interruption.]* The excitement is just uncontrollable. I think the person I was going to call before and didn't quite was your good self, so you should have your chance.

Eunice Amankwah (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I represent the London borough of Enfield.

The ancient definition of education is to learn a lot from school or university, and to have a good level of knowledge. I feel that that definition is misled and outdated.

A great man once said that education is not preparation for life; education is life itself. If we want to be truly prepared for life, we therefore need to be educated. The Government say that our generation is more prepared for life now than ever, but I disagree. How many of us know basic financial management, how to pay taxes or what mortgages are? How many of us understand credit and student loans, the power of negotiation, the art of failing—the list goes on and on? I bet that even people who have been elected here still do not know what that means. The Government say that our education system prepares us for life more than ever, but I bet if I asked you about a quote from “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens, you could write me essays and essays about it.

Abraham Lincoln once said:

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

He saw that it was better to spend time preparing to cut down the tree than rushing into it ill-prepared. In other words, let us prepare for life today so that we do not go into life ill-prepared. In the famous words of Oliver Twist, please, MYPs, we want a curriculum to prepare us for life, so let us make it our national campaign.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: If you are still waiting to be called, I encourage you to persist. You may or may not be successful, but keep trying.

At this point I would like to hear from someone from the East Midlands.

Simran Sangherra (East Midlands): I am the MYP for Leicestershire.

Even the most high-performing schools lack the teaching of core life skills that will aid us in life beyond our education—life skills such as dealing with taxes, budgeting and paying off a mortgage. They are all key financial education skills that could not only have a positive impact on our economy, but smooth the bridge between childhood and adulthood.

In Leicestershire, we have been working with our healthy schools co-ordinator to help to implement a curriculum for life in the majority of our county's schools. We think that all local authorities should follow our example, and be motivated and supported to do the same as we make that a devolved campaign.

Mr Speaker: At this point, I am looking to call a male speaker. I am always keen on balance across the country and gender balance. I am looking for a male speaker from the North West of England. I call the gentleman with the blond hair, who was trying to catch my eye some hours ago and was unsuccessful. Your moment has arrived.

Thomas Kenning (North West): What do you call preparation for a pub quiz? The national curriculum. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: That was a very good start, but can you please tell us your name?

Thomas Kenning: I am Thomas Kenning.

In my constituency of Wigan, one in five children lives in poverty, so they do not need an education system that is some sort of upper middle-class Oxbridge fantasy, where apparently learning every detail about sedimentary rock is vital for your existence. I cannot remember a single thing I did in GCSE maths. I cannot even remember the names of most of the stuff. That is because I did not need it. Somewhere in this country, there is a great musician sitting a geography paper. There is the next amazing scientist writing about “A View from the Bridge” and it is not even that good. We need to step in.

We have already started to do some work. I know everyone in this Chamber has started to put good work in. We all need to complete that good work. We cannot let this system perpetuate all the things that are wrong with our society. We cannot let it continue the way it is. We need to keep pushing and going for it. We cannot just set this aside now after all we have done.

Mr Speaker: Can we hear a voice from Scotland? Who do we have?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: This is so difficult. It is ridiculous.

Emily Davies (Scotland): When I first became involved with the Scottish Youth Parliament for my constituency, I helped in the consultation for the Scottish Youth Parliament’s manifesto, *Lead the Way*. Some 79% of young people in Scotland who were consulted agreed that all pupils should have access to up-to-date and effective PSHE classes from primary age until they leave the educational sector, which backs up the notion that this should be our campaign. Being the deputy convenor for the educational lifelong learning committee within the Scottish Youth Parliament, I can say that having a curriculum that really expands life skills is at the forefront of our current work and will not only benefit those within schools, but teach valuable lessons that will stay with our young people for many years to come. That is why, MYPs, I urge you to support this motion.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I was just looking to see whether anyone was trying to contribute from Northern Ireland.

James Savage (Northern Ireland): I am from Strangford. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you, Mr Speaker, for your continued commitment to the Youth Parliament. It does not go unnoticed by the Members here in this Chamber, but it does go unnoticed by many people across the country who do not know what the position of Speaker is, never mind who the Speaker is. People across this country are not taught what they need to be taught in politics, they do not know how taxes work, and they do not even know how to use a cooker. There are vital life skills that go untaught by our schools. Just last week, in this very Chamber, I heard many Members of Parliament say that young people do not have the maturity, the political knowledge or the life skills needed to vote at the age of 16. I say to those MPs, if those people do not have the maturity or the political knowledge, it is up to the Department for Education to give them that knowledge,

to teach them and to prepare them for life so that they can vote, know how to go forward and get a job, and know how to work as members of our society.

This topic is particularly important in Northern Ireland, because, as you all know, we are a post-conflict society. We have had many years of racial and sectarian discrimination. People across the country still feel bitterness and hatred towards one another. That is because, in a diverse society, people do not know about other people’s races; they do not know about their culture; they do not know about the people who live next door to them—they think they are different—and they have many problems all across their community. We need to move forward from that bigotry and hatred. We need to move forward and gather everyone together. Everyone should know about each other’s cultures. They should know about the different ways of other people all across this country. I feel that we need a curriculum for life. It is a goal that we as a Youth Parliament can accomplish, and it is one that we should all support. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Well, colleagues, I thought that that was a wonderfully statesman-like speech delivered with great skill and composure and in terms both striking and reasonable. Well done to you, Sir. I am delighted that we heard from you. We will now—I hope—hear a contributor from Yorkshire and Humberside.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Wow. This is really very difficult. There is somebody waving something at me in a mildly eccentric manner. I do not know what they are waving, but let us hear from you.

Benjamin Waudby (Yorkshire and Humberside): I am MYP from Kingston-upon-Hull, UK City of Culture 2017.

Colleagues, we have heard about the importance of making life choices, from deciding who to vote for at 16 to which work experience placement we should apply for. Friends, we can only make those choices with education, and we all know that young people in the north receive less per head for education. I am sure that we can all agree that life exists outside the M25. [*Applause.*] It does not matter whether they are in Londonderry, Cardiff, Wolverhampton or a working-class constituency like Hull; young people everywhere deserve the same chances. The question is whether the curriculum meets the needs of the 21st century, and the answer is no. We need better financial education and better relationships education and, as people have said, we need better sex education not just for heterosexual young people, but for homosexual young people and people of minority sexual orientations. Let us change these exam factories into schools—places of meaningful lifelong learning—because talent is universal, but opportunity is not. I urge everyone to support this motion.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I would now like to hear a contributor from the West Midlands.

Millie Betteridge (West Midlands): I believe that a curriculum for life is crucial for all young people across the United Kingdom. By the time we leave school, we will all know what sibilance is, we will all know how to

factorise numbers, and some of us will even know what Boolean algebra is, but we do not know what to do when someone goes too far in a domestic relationship or how to get a mortgage. Some of us will not even know what tax is, which is crazy and should be frowned upon. Those things should be looked at in the education system. Countries that describe how you should treat other people have the best education systems in the world. As we leave the four walls of education, how can we be expected to know how to treat other people and how to express ourselves in our jobs if we are not taught that in school? How is that fair?

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I think we should at this point hear somebody from the South East.

Folu Ogunyeye (South East): I represent Milton Keynes. What is our purpose as Members of the Youth Parliament? Is it to sit around and drink tea or to take selfies in our beautiful suits and dresses? I am sure it is otherwise—do not worry, I am not naming names. [*Laughter.*] The fear of failure and a lack of understanding of taxes, housing and politics were the general themes in the feedback from my constituents concerning preparation for life. We are a democracy, and this subject was voted the most topical issue by young people. Is it not clear that we need to continue to represent them and that not enough is being done? Sure, small steps have been taken, and we have managed to get sex and relationships education as a statutory part of our national curriculum, but we need to do more. That is the whole point. We are taking small steps; we will not wake up to find a beautiful, vibrant curriculum being taught in every school. We have to do things step by step.

How can it be possible for an 18-year-old to leave education without a single lesson about how their country is ruled or how their future is determined and yet still be given the vote? It is outrageous. It is no wonder that the voting turnout among young people is generally considered to be low. This is a campaign that affects us all and one that links in some way to all the other campaigns. As a Youth Parliament, we must continue to support this campaign, so that the voices of all our constituents can be heard and so that young people have the power and confidence to make informed decisions about their future.

Mr Speaker: I think we should hear from the East of England.

Harry Dignum (East of England): I represent Central Bedfordshire.

We spend around 14 years in education, in which we are supposed to learn key things and knowledge to prepare us for life, but do we? We learn about maths, English and science, but not all of us have the opportunity to learn about key aspects of life such as paying the bills and finance. It is brilliant that sexual education has become compulsory in schools. That is merely the first step towards a better future for young people—a future with a curriculum for life. As the Youth Parliament, we can tackle this issue and make a difference to the lives of the young people we represent. That is why I urge you all to support the motion.

Mr Speaker: Now, who have we got from Wales.

Ushenka Rajapakse (Wales): My constituency is Vale of Glamorgan.

Last year, over 142,000 young people voted for a curriculum for life as the most important issue for them. What does that mean? It means that for the second time in a row, young people are screaming out for the education system to be changed. These young people voted to make us MYPs, and it is therefore our obligation to make their voices heard, to make a change and to challenge the corrupt system that fails the youth of this country every day by limiting their success and understanding of the real world. While students may be 20% of the population, they are 100% of our future. Let us attend to their needs, and there is no telling what we can achieve.

We, as the future, have an obligation to fight against the injustice of a system that tampers with our very futures. With such changes to society, we must be able to adapt the education system in order for our country to keep growing and to bring back passion into this system, for not only our generation but the ones to follow. If we can customise healthcare, cars and Facebook pages, it is our duty to do the same for education, and to change and upgrade it. Let us reach the core of every pupil's heart in every class so that they finally want to learn and understand how to use what they learn in class every day.

Our society is changing. As a country, we are going through dramatic changes that will inevitably shape our futures, and yet I have not had a single lesson on Brexit, injustices or even the refugee crisis. The education system chooses the solar system over the political system. Like typical citizens, my peers will be expected to vote at the age of 18 in a system they have never, ever been presented with. They will not know how to vote because they have never been taught how to vote. Instead, people devoted that time to defining isotopes. A basic lesson on first aid could practically save thousands—but it's fine, because now we know whether the number of unnecessary deaths caused by that choice was prime.

Why does school not teach us how to be morally correct? If we gave future generations moral teachings, as well as a knowledge of relevant topics, we would have a thriving country, have a sense of togetherness and be ready for the world of work. That system comes at a price: it needs time, effort and organisation, but is it not worth it?

We are too afraid to make changes, due to our fear of failing and not accomplishing our aims. As Nelson Mandela once said,

“The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

Mr Speaker: Now let us hear from the north-east of England.

Ben Carr (Yorkshire and Humber): I represent Middlesbrough.

I am one of the lucky few. In my school, I was taught how to choose my politics and how to vote, and I am also doing a qualification in finance. The feeling I get from that is one of confidence and preparedness. That is great, and it should be available to all. It is like

looking into the abyss and seeing opportunity and hope. Please give the motion all your support, because we need to enable young people to vote.

I will summarise, because I know I ramble. Overall, this is a great opportunity. I know we failed one year—well, we could have done better. A curriculum for life is the most important thing, because if we do not know what to do when we get to that point, what are we going to do?

Esther Joy Boadu (London): My name is Esther and I am from the London borough of Camden. It is quite upsetting to hear that a large number of young people do not understand how to take out a mortgage, how to pay their bills or even what a credit limit is. I myself am sadly part of that large number of young people. I mean, what is a credit limit, and why is it so important? Can someone please explain it to me? How are we as young people meant to feel comfortable, confident and prepared about moving out and starting a new life for ourselves? Thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Who have we got from the South West?

Matt Simpson (South West): I am Matt Simpson, an MYP for Bristol. Can I have a quick show of hands across the Chamber? Who here feels that they would be able to leave home now and live independently? That is not all of us. [*Applause.*] That should be all of us, which is why we need a curriculum for life to be our campaign for next year. The list that makes up the statutory curriculum for life needs to be expanded to include more topics to ensure that every young person is ready.

Relationships and sexuality education is currently one of the few statutory parts of PSHE, but even then parents can make their children opt out. Young people should not be able to opt out of RSE, because it is essential for their future, and it is unfair if they do not get the same level of education as someone at the other end of the country. Furthermore, those who have been victims of female genital mutilation or child sexual exploitation will be more likely to be opted out without expressing any opinion of their own.

What other parts of PSHE do I think need to be covered? We need to include employability skills. Careers change so regularly these days that employability skills will be needed throughout life. We must also include mental health. Mind, the mental health charity, claims that one in four young people experience a mental health problem each year. Young people need to be taught about healthy relationships and how to deal with stress and protect their mental wellbeing.

We must also include finance. I do not know how to take out a mortgage, buy a house or pay tax. I need to know these things, as does every other young person in this Chamber and in this country. And that is all without mentioning politics, first aid, drugs—the list goes on.

I urge everyone here to support having a curriculum for life as our campaign for next year, so that we can continue our push for all young people to be able to live independently. I urge all MYPs to continue their fight to ensure that our schools are appropriately funded so that they can deliver the high standard of education that we need in this country for every single young person. I urge the Government to increase the amount

on PSHE education, because it is simply unfair that all young people do not get the same standard of education, and it is a disgrace that some young people are leaving school feeling unready and unable to take the next step in life. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, inevitably we are reaching the conclusion of our proceedings. I do have to have some regard to the sheer size of some delegations—a number of them are very large—from which I would like to get a couple more speakers, if possible. Who have we got from the North West?

Jaya Patel (North West): I am Jaya Patel from Bolton. There are two places where young people develop into the adults they become: home and school. In our lives, that daytime split is pretty equal. We cannot control what we learn at home or what influences we come under, so every negative or example of miseducation can contribute to our development. What if we could influence a young person's life within school? That could create a platform on which they are educated in life, not just in subjects. They can then change as a person, as can the whole of society.

A curriculum for life would prepare every individual in the country for the challenges ahead, which school does not do right now. The focus is on exam preparation, which in itself is limited. If we do not prepare young people for life in school, they do not really have another opportunity. So many get lost along the way because they are not given important practical life skills, such as opening a bank account, managing their finances, preparing for children, dealing with anger issues and grief, and self-development—and there are so many more. Lacking a curriculum means that we are letting our young people down.

I simply say this: be aware that loads of successful people have many people and advisers behind them. No one is successful by chance. If you do not have those people in your life, who is going to teach you those things? I am an MYP, but that is not just because of me; I am the product of the hard work of so many people, including my teachers, my parents, my family, my friends and extracurricular groups that I have been part of. I believe that that is the case for everyone here; we have benefited from a lot of time and effort from the people behind us. Every young person should get the same opportunity, and a curriculum for life would help us to ensure that.

There is a saying that it takes an entire village to raise a child. It is up to us to ensure that every young person is given the skills and the time they need to be successful, which inevitably will make them happy within themselves. If that is done properly, it could change the entire country within a generation. I urge you all to support the motion. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: The North West is one of the largest regions represented, if not the largest. The South East is also very big, so we are going to take a final speaker from there. The young gentleman at the back, who looked sorely disappointed earlier, has shown great stoicism, patience and fortitude. Sir, your moment has arrived. Come on, welcome him! [*Applause.*]

Leo Buckley (South East): You flatter me, Mr Speaker; I am not Winston Churchill. I am Leo Buckley from Winchester in Hampshire.

I urge you all to support a curriculum for life—or, as I like to call it, a functioning education system. In the staffroom at my school, the teachers have a swear jar. Saying the G-word means that you have to put £5 in it. That word is “Gove”—Michael Gove. That honourable gentleman is not solely responsible for every problem, because the education system has not fundamentally changed in its contents since the Victorian era. We spend hundreds of hours learning things that can be done instantaneously on our telephones. Considering that 70% of jobs will be gone in 30 years’ time, what are we doing?

Do not take it from me; take it from statistics. The head of the OECD has said that education is the biggest priority for the United Kingdom. A smaller proportion of the population gets A-levels here than in Estonia, which is an ex-Soviet nation. If the facts are not enough for you, we are all here as elected representatives of the young people, and a curriculum to prepare us for life received more votes than any other motion.

The facts are simple. Your choice is simple. If you want a future—if you want a Britain that can survive—then you must vote for a curriculum to prepare us for life.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. To conclude the fifth and final debate, please welcome David Abadir from Wales.

David Abadir (Wales): Diolch yn fawr—thank you—Mr Speaker.

To finish this debate, I want to make some facts clear. I present them to both you, Mr Speaker, and my peers. First, the world outside the classroom is different from 100 years ago. Secondly, 130,000 young people voted for change to the status quo.

You see, Mr Speaker, in many respects the education system has failed us. How many young people can tell you what I mean by a budget surplus? How about the basics of the world of finance, such as taking out a loan—something you would surely want to know if you planned on one day living in a home? How will we ever learn to thrive in a world of social media when all we learn in school is the facts around academia? I would love to tell you what people like yourself mean, Mr Speaker, when you say “political ideology”, but all I learn in school is physics, chemistry and biology. How can we expect our generation to bloom from a curriculum constricted to the four walls of the classroom?

If this topic is going to be our campaign, we cannot afford just to sit here and complain. We will need to act. The question is, should we? Some months ago, in March 2017, the Government made amendments requiring the teaching of PSHE. The PSHE movement has been years in the making, with organisations providing guidance, ideas, resources and training. The point being, ladies and gentlemen, that time is precious, but let that not stop us being ambitious. I know that it is a rather common thing to say, but Rome was not built in a day—nor was it all built in the same way.

Issues such as this one and transport require loads of funding so our chances might seem limited because of cuts to public spending, but consider this. Back home in Cardiff, we realised that first aid is an important life tool, so we teamed up with the St John Ambulance and

the British Red Cross to teach it in local schools. Money is not the be all and end all. Why not team up with charities to teach of the dangers of drugs and alcohol?

In conclusion, the decision lies in our hands today. How will we represent those from Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland? Will we leave them with an education that makes them feel deprived or will we equip them with a curriculum to prepare them for the rest of their lives? [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: David, thank you. Thanks to all those who have spoken. Exceptionally this year, as you will all be aware, there are some further speeches to come in commemoration of the passage of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 and the 50th anniversary thereof, but the five debates are over. I am genuinely sorry for those people who did not get called. It is one of the most difficult features of this otherwise wonderful occasion that most people who are here want to speak but time simply does not allow the Chair to call everyone. If you lost out, I am very sorry. There was no agenda to exclude some people rather than others and I would like to call more, but we could only do that if we sat for longer. Thank you, because the debates have been of exceptional quality and spirit.

Colleagues, the Youth Parliament will now vote on which of the five subjects debated today it will select as its two national campaign issues for 2018. In the Lobby, you will be given two ballot papers: one white paper for the two reserved—that is, UK-wide—subjects and one green paper for the three devolved subjects, which for today’s purposes are England only. You should place a cross in the box next to the subject for which you would like to vote on each ballot paper and hand the completed ballot paper to the Doorkeepers in the Lobbies.

Afterwards, please return to your places in the Chamber. Those of you on my right should leave the Chamber by the door behind me and turn left into the Aye Lobby behind you. Those on my left should leave by the doors at the far end and turn left into the No Lobby behind you. Members of the House of Commons staff will be on hand to assist you. Members of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament, the Division Lobbies are now open.

2.59 pm

Division.

3.19 pm

Mr Speaker: MYPs, the results of the ballot are as follows.

On the green ballot paper, where you had three options from which to choose and two votes—one for a devolved/England only issue and one for a reserved issue—the results were: “Transport”, 46 votes; “Work Experience hubs for 11-18 year olds”, 64 votes; and “A curriculum to prepare us for life”, 148 votes. [*Applause.*] There were three spoiled papers. “A curriculum to prepare us for life” is the successful option, so that will be a campaign for the year ahead.

On the white ballot paper, where you were voting for a UK-wide issue on which you feel the UK Youth Parliament should campaign, the votes were as follows: “Protect LGBT+ People”, 80 votes; “Votes at 16”, 167 votes. [*Applause.*] So, as you can tell, “Votes at 16” has been selected as a campaign for the year.

[Mr Speaker]

So, to be absolutely clear, the two successful topics are “A curriculum to prepare us for life” and “Votes at 16”.

Thank you for taking part in that crucial democratic exercise. I hope you are pleased with the result, and in particular I hope you are pleased with the exercise of democracy in which you and all who took part in the Make Your Mark ballot have successfully participated.

Sexual Offences Act: 50th Anniversary

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, Members of the Youth Parliament will now make speeches on the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967. I call—please enthusiastically welcome—from the East Midlands, Callum Ellis. [*Applause.*]

3.19 pm

Callum Ellis (East Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Accepting, compassionate and tolerant—desirable attributes, but how do we demonstrate those qualities? Fifty years ago, society rejected the demonisation that saw 50,000 gay sex-related convictions, recognising that to persecute someone on the basis of their sexuality was indefensible. I am talking about the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK. Respecting individual liberties and welcoming progress are essential in repudiating bigotry and celebrating a person’s sexuality.

I would like to paraphrase William Pitt. Although this quote was not intended for this reason, it is still relevant: a man may in his house defy the Crown; the roof may shake, the rain may enter; but the King of England cannot enter. That highlights our freedoms. It has never been and never will be the state’s role to dictate what sexuality is acceptable. Approving same-sex marriage in England, Scotland and Wales in 2014 demonstrates that our acceptance is not a possession that we just bring out on special occasions. Acceptance is chiselled into our law.

However, it is illegal to engage in a same-sex relationship in 72 countries, eight of which sanction the death penalty. Hearing of the atrocities in Chechnya sickens me. We have pioneered such revolutionary concepts and inventions, yet still humanity ignores such callous acts. Please join me in condemning these acts. It is not just the state’s role to fight for the rights of this community. It is my role; it is your role; it is everyone’s role. MYPs, Mr Speaker, Members of the House of Commons, we cannot rewrite history, but we can still write the future. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Callum.

Sam O’Neill (East of England): Change is something that we all see in our everyday lives. It might be small things that we see change, such as the weather, or we might see colossal things change in our lifetimes, such as our leaving the EU, which will affect us both now and in the future. But what all these changes have in common is that, to a degree, we have no control over them.

I have seen a positive change in the mindset of the population regarding the LGBTQ community over the past 50 years. However, is that enough? No. According to the recently conducted ILGA-RIWI survey, 17% of Brits believe that homosexuality is an act that should be criminalised, purely for the way people are. Statistically, to put that in perspective, it means that 74 people sitting among us today believe that.

It is almost 2018 and we see change every single day. One person cannot alter the world’s perception of those who are different. However, if we all took a stand, a dreamworld of equal opportunities could very soon become reality. Yes, I get it: Rome wasn’t built in a day. But—excuse the cliché—we as young people are the

future, and it is our opinions and beliefs that will be passed down to generations to come. That is why I ask everyone in this Chamber today, and beyond, to come together, respect one another, speak out and take a stand against modern-day LGBTQ discrimination.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for a second outstanding and inspiring speech. Next, I call—and invite you enthusiastically to welcome—from London, Jai Patel. [*Applause.*]

Jai Patel (London): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker—love you. [*Laughter.*]

Mr Speaker: Did I manage to get your name right?

Jai Patel (London): Oh yeah, don't worry. And cheers to the best region in the country—London.

I stand here as someone who is not part of the LGBT+ community, and yet I am. To all those with raised eyebrows—lovely eyebrows—I say this: the fight for LGBT+ rights is not one for that community to fight alone. The responsibility lies with every one of us, regardless of sexual orientation, not because we are a 21st century progressive group of young people, because we simply should do it, or because we need to champion those rights out of fear of being criticised, but because this deals with something every one of us deserves and cherishes: equality.

The fight took us to 1967, when sex between two men was decriminalised, and to 2014, when gay marriage became legal. Now a young person can change a little F to an M on their passport, or take their vows with their partner without fear of punishment. They can hold hands on a park bench without having to look over their shoulder. Protecting LGBT+ young people made it through the ballot and into the House today, however, because many still suffer from isolation. Stonewall estimates that 45% of LGBT young people are still bullied and that nearly 10%—10% far too many—have tried to take their own life. Despite the equalities solidified in this very Chamber, by people who sat where you sit today, society still has deeply rooted prejudices. The fight is not over. Before another young person picks up a rope, a pill bottle or a knife, we will hold their hands and tell them they are not alone.

I am optimistic for change because our young people sit shoulder to shoulder with each other and our generations' efforts will be just that: shoulder to shoulder. The fight is not over. We can put aside the scepticism because there will indeed be a pot of golden equality at the end of the LGBT rainbow. The fight is most definitely not over. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Jai, thank you for that speech. It has made a deep and I think lasting impression on all who heard it.

Kate Palmer (North East): The Sexual Offences Act was introduced in 1967, but LGBT+ people existed before that, and they will carry on being a strong part of our society. That shows the strength and resilience that comes from a person who truly expresses who they are, which the LGBT+ community should be credited for.

The date of 20 June 1969 saw the iconic Stonewall riots, which showed a community fighting against a system that had fought against them for their whole

lives, and against those before them—strength and resilience. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were just two of the activists involved in kick-starting Stonewall. They continued to fight for their community and rights by advocating for those who could not speak for themselves—strength and resilience.

In the UK, the first Gay Pride was held in London in 1972, the first black gay and lesbian group was formed in 1980, and the first national gay and lesbian TV series was broadcast in 1983—continued strength and resilience. Then we look to the activists and what continues to take place today, whether in south Tyneside or Stockton. There is work in south Tyneside to create an LGBT+ inclusive checklist for all schools to follow to ensure that young people can truly express themselves, no matter what barriers they encounter.

Today is a day to celebrate the LGBT+ community, and all its strength and resilience.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Kate.

Dan Rimes (North West): Next year, I will have served the young people of Manchester for five years. I am thankful for the fact that not a second of that time has been affected by my sexuality. In those five years, I have experienced the good and the bad of being a young person in the 21st century. I have faced many obstacles, as I expected. I guarantee that, without the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, I would not have been able to do a lot of the things that I am proud to have done. The steps that came after the Act ensured that my identity would be protected if it faced harm or prejudice.

Earlier this year, when I stepped forward to represent the young people of Manchester in the wake of the Manchester Arena attack where 22 people lost their lives, a lot of them young people, no one considered my sexuality; they just considered the fact that I was a young person who was grieving. That is the same consideration and humanity that I would expect whether or not I face such an event again. When I spoke in front of a full council and in front of Prince Charles about the response that young people gave after the attack, they looked at me not as a homosexual, but as a young person. They looked at me knowing that I wanted what was best for everyone—for every young person who stood high and strong after that act of terror, no matter what we faced. That was what the Act allowed me and many other young people to do.

We are here not to push ourselves on you or to indoctrinate you, but to live. We are here to live and not just survive. It is one thing to survive, but another truly to live and to be a human being, gay or not. I am forever thankful to the people I have been surrounded by for the past 16 years of my life—to my mum and dad, my best friend, Charlie, who is like a sister to me, and my youth worker Joe, who has seen me through thick and thin. They are truly the most inspiring people you could ever meet.

I am also thankful to the young people who have allowed me to represent them for such a long time without prejudice or judgment. Regardless of my sexuality, I will always fight for the voice of those young people. Fifty or even 100 years on, being gay will always be a part of me, but that is not by choice. Working with young people who want to be heard and who want to

make change—that was the best choice I have ever made. It truly saved my life at a time when I thought that I would not live without shame or embarrassment, something that I do not and will not feel ever again. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Dan, a magnificent and thoroughly uplifting speech that everybody enjoyed and respected.

Clíodhna McCaffrey (Northern Ireland): Fifty years is a long time since the decriminalisation of a private sexual activity between two men over the age of 21. Since 1967, our society and its laws have changed dramatically. In Northern Ireland, however, it seems to take us just a bit longer to come up to speed with the rest of the UK. Decriminalisation did not happen here until 15 years later—in 1982. The same thing happened with the ban on gay men giving blood. It took our leaders five years longer than those in the rest of the UK to realise that, in fact, a gay man's blood was just as red and just as needed as that of a straight man. Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 prohibited the promotion of homosexuality. It was voted out in 2003, but the echoes of it are still felt in many schools.

When the Bill was introduced in the Lords, the debate about the ruling was interrupted by three lesbians abseiling into the Chamber from the Public Gallery. I don't know about you, but I think that the three queer ladies who disrupted parliamentary proceedings had a point. Are we really going to stand for this, or are we going to put up a fight?

Equal marriage has been voted on five times in the Northern Ireland Assembly. It was passed on the fifth attempt, but was blocked by the largest party using the petition of concern. Never mind the petition of concern, what concerns me is that it is so easy for our rights to be denied, for our marriages to be deemed unworthy, and for our lovers to be classed as invalid just because we so happen to love someone of the same gender.

However, I cannot complain too much as there are still 72 countries that completely outlaw homosexuality and six that impose the death penalty for falling in love. Unfortunately, I could not abseil into the Chamber today, as I do not think that Mr Speaker would have appreciated it too much, but I would like to take the example of those three women to show that we must continue to fight until we have full equality for everyone.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Clíodhna.

Erin Christie (Scotland): Although first enforced long before I or many of us here were born, the Sexual Offences Act 1967 has had an important impact on today's society and means that two consenting men aged 21 or over can legally take part in homosexual acts in England and Wales. At the time, this piece of vital legislation was not in place in Scotland, but it paved the way for the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980, which was of the same nature as the 1967 Act, and same-sex partnerships and marriages were legalised in 2014.

Some may view the topic as irrelevant to them or of little importance, but that could not be further from the truth. The 1967 Act marked the beginning of a continuing fight for the acceptance of LGBT+ people in the UK. I can love who I want, you can love who you want, and my older brother Dylan, who openly identifies as gay, can love who he wants. He can be himself without the

fear of criminal prosecution that our ancestors had 50 years ago. He can be happy with whoever he wants under the protection of the law.

The 1967 Act remains important in a world in which many seek to use our differences to divide us. It was the first action taken by our United Kingdom towards acceptance of the LGBT community, and it helps us to celebrate the different people in our society today, rather than shunning them. On Tuesday, the First Minister of Scotland apologised for the historical homophobic laws, and the criminal records of those prosecuted for being homosexual are being wiped. As a young Scot, I am proud to live in such an inclusive society.

Mr Speaker: Next, from the South East, please welcome Joe Davies.

Joe Davies (South East): Before I begin, I would like to quickly dedicate this speech to the Isle of Wight Pride team who, incredibly, have been selected to host the UK Pride next year, and we are absolutely buzzing. *[Applause.]*

When I was asked what the anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality meant to me, my answer was “not enough.” Because 50 years is not enough. Because a law telling us that it is okay to be gay is not enough. Because I should never have heard of Laramie, Wyoming—a small town with a population of 30,000 on the intersection of Interstate 80 and US Route 287—but I have, because just 19 years ago a young man called Matthew Shepard was taken into the wilderness and beaten to death because he was gay. Because six countries today still use the death penalty for homosexuality. Because the country that I love has sold £3.5 billion-worth of weapons to one of those six countries in the past two years. Because I have never felt anything but pride when walking through the streets holding hands with my girlfriend and I have never felt scared for my life, but the same is not true for my friends who identify as LGBTQ+.

This anniversary is something that must be celebrated. It is a huge step forward, but we can never lose sight of the fact that we have not come far enough.

Mr Speaker: Joe, thank you. That was heartfelt, and the reaction to you testifies to the view of the Youth Parliament on what you have had to say and on how you have said it.

From the South West, please welcome Luke Moynan.

Luke Moynan (South West): Thank you everyone for coming along today. It has been an absolutely fab day. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for hosting such an amazing event.

The year 1967 was the start of a new era for British society—one where people could be themselves, love who they want and be happy, without fear of being prosecuted. However, while laws may change, changing ignorance and discrimination is much, much more difficult. I was going to suggest that we all click our fingers and make instant change, but I do not think that that is going to work, and I can't do it anyway.

In the South West, we are looking for a new way to tackle this issue. Education is so important, so it is really good that we voted for a curriculum for life. In schools, LGBTQI+ relationships and identities are still

not given sufficient mention and nowhere near the same cover as more “normal” relationships. That really needs to change. Thank you to everyone here for putting this issue on the Make Your Mark ballot this year, and thank you to everybody who gave such an important issue so many votes.

However, where I come from in the South West it is still far behind other parts of the UK, and it is still harder than it should be to be a member of this community. Only a few months ago, a friend of mine who used to be at my school published an article in a local paper, speaking of how unsafe he felt not only in school but on the streets of our town and local area. He received verbal slurs and all sorts of horrible things because of who he was and how he identified. Until there is a better understanding of LGBT+ issues not just among young people but in the whole of society, that is not going to change.

We are taking really small steps, but even those small steps are in a positive direction—forwards. Until we have that understanding, it will never be easy for someone to come out or identify however they feel. Without the Sexual Offences Act 1967, I doubt that very many people would be doing it at all. We have come such a long way, and I am really proud to be in a country that can say it has come so far. Thank you very much for having me to speak.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed, Luke. We now come to our speaker from the West Midlands.

Samantha Smith (West Midlands): I would like to begin by asking you all a question: what does the year 1967 mean to you? If nothing comes to mind, please allow me to elaborate.

In 1967, the Sexual Offences Act decriminalises sexual interactions between two men in private, given that they are over the age of 21. That, however, did not extend to the merchant navy, armed forces, Scotland or Northern Ireland. In 1980, legislation to the same effect as the Sexual Offences Act is enforced in Scotland, and, in 1982, in Northern Ireland. In 1992, the World Health Organisation declassifies same-sex attraction as a mental illness. In 2013, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act is passed in England and Wales and, in 2014, in Scotland.

Those are some of the most historic legal milestones in the continuing struggle for LGBT+ acceptance in the United Kingdom. Without the momentous first step taken by our predecessors 50 years ago this year, on 27 July 1967, we might not be standing here today debating the issue of further LGBT support, because, if put in perspective, LGBT rights in our nation might never have become a reality.

This is the type of change that we, as Members of the Youth Parliament, should strive to influence—change that gives our brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren the freedom to be themselves and thrive in a world that accepts their right to love the person of their choosing, regardless of their gender. Those who took the first steps in bringing about justice for the disenfranchised and marginalised, and for the young people without a registered voice or any means of standing up for themselves, might never have realised the impact they would have on the 18,902,700 young people who have grown up since then. The change that they influenced in this

institution and within the very Chamber we sit in 50 years on from that historic date helped to instil the 5.9% of the UK’s youth population who openly identify as LGBT+ with the confidence and political support that they may not otherwise have had to be themselves and to love who they love.

I would like to ask you that question once more: what does the year 1967 mean to you? In fact, what does the year 1967 mean to your constituents? That is what we honour today. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I call the final speaker to conclude this debate. I ask you enthusiastically to welcome, from Yorkshire and Humber, Charlotte Williams.

Charlotte Williams (Yorkshire and Humber): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

“Have you ever loved the body of a woman?

Have you ever loved the body of a man?”

Do you not see that these are exactly the same to all in all nations and times all over the earth?”

That is from “I sing the body electric” by Walt Whitman, 1855.

Sexuality is brazen, and it is bold. But whilst it is like a statement piece, it should not define you. Who you love should not define you. If you go out wearing a pearl necklace, it does not let someone see you solely as one who wears a pearl necklace, and it does not make your dress any less of a dress, just as my sexuality does not make me any less of an artist, or a dancer, or a person.

So when I read the email asking me what 50 years of the Sexual Offences Act meant to me, it was simple: it means remembering those who fought not to be defined by who they love; those people who fought for us. We had people who knew not what it was like to live in freedom but in fear: artists, poets, activists and authors, all fighting for one cause. We had Simeon Solomon, an artist who painted two women in a passionate kiss in 1864. He was imprisoned twice for the intention to commit sodomy, was deserted by his friends, became ill with alcoholism and stopped painting altogether. A man born rich with talent died in the workhouse. We had Oscar Wilde, who wrote at length behind prison doors that willed him to stop. We had Edmund Dulac, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell—some names forgotten amongst Pride floats; some names living on to tell the tale of the fight for freedom of love.

For me, the Sexual Offences Act means a lot of things, but most of all it means freedom from some of the chains that once dragged us down. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Charlotte, thank you for winding up our proceedings magnificently. Colleagues, that concludes our main business for today. We will now move on to the closing statements.

I want first to welcome—in particular, I want you to welcome—as she comes to the Dispatch Box to deliver her closing statement, the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities. She is somebody I have known for long time, whose principles, public-spirited commitment and integrity I have always respected, and with whom I have always got on very well. She is a very

[Mr Speaker]

remarkable Member of the House of Commons, and indeed of the Government. She has also been honoured this year, and rightly so, by PinkNews as politician of the year. Please give a rapturous welcome to the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities, Justine Greening.

The Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening): Colleagues, it is fantastic to be able to play a role in what I think is a very special day for this Chamber, because it is the day when we get to see a bit of the future talent that will be joining us in the coming years. I want to respond very briefly to the debates that you have had by talking about what you have been debating, how I think we can change and why this matters so much to all of us.

On what you have been debating, all the issues matter to you, but they also matter to me and to all MPs in the House of Commons. The things that you have flagged up are vital. You so ably set out why ensuring that we have a curriculum for life matters incredibly to a new generation. That is one of the reasons why, for the first time in 17 years, we are going to update the guidance on sex and relationships education, complex though that may be. We know that what we currently have simply is not good enough for your generation, and that it needs to reflect better your voices and your priorities.

You debated work experience and careers, which is ever more important. It is vital for me that more companies engage with schools and young people to help you shape your choices. Education is about three things: knowledge and skills; having great experiences that develop you as young people; and getting the right advice at the right time. I never thought I would go into politics. No one in my family had ever even joined a political party. In fact, it caused a bit of a ripple when, as a person growing up in Rotherham, I in the end joined the Conservative party. You are in many respects ahead of the game compared with where I was—I did not get involved in politics until long after I had left university—but I know that it is critical for you to have access to people who can give you great advice, help you to understand what opportunities are out there for you and perhaps, through work placements and work experience, give you actual knowledge of what those work opportunities are like. As it turns out, we will be coming forward with a new careers strategy, which I hope will really ensure that your generation gets the support with making choices that you need and deserve.

I want to respond to the fantastic, inspiring speeches about the Sexual Offences Act. I actually got the chance earlier this year to meet some of the people who started that campaign 50 years ago. They did not expect or, indeed, plan to campaign to change the law; they got arrested. They suddenly found themselves flung into the public eye and things finally started to change around that. They show as much as anyone else that nothing changes in this world without one person somewhere deciding someday that they want things to be different and, from that moment, steadily building a coalition of people who can create change with them. The reason that the last debate matters so much is that this should be a country where there is equality of opportunity and where everyone can be at their best,

but you can only be at your best when you can be yourself. That is why building a more inclusive society is so important.

How are we going to do that? We have to work together. I know that politics can be very partisan, but no political party has a monopoly on good ideas or good intentions. The best politics and the best coalitions carry the mainstream of public and political opinion and really bring people together around a common ambition. Working together is perhaps one of the most important ways of achieving the ambitions that you may well come into this place with. That means working across Parliament, across communities and with business—I hope that we can forge new relationships between Parliament and business, and between business and communities—and making all the things that you have talked about real for everybody, wherever they are in our country. Too often, national policies work in some parts of our country but not others. It has never been more important to ensure that our national policy is tailored and works locally. We cannot have a country in which any communities are left behind and do not make the progress that we want.

Why does this matter? It matters, and the debate matters, because this country's greatest asset is its people. It is people who change things in the end, as I have said. We will only be the best version of Britain if every single person in this country can be the best version of themselves, if they can all reach their potential and have the satisfaction of knowing that they have done that—the sheer joy that comes from knowing that you have done something really good.

This is about more than just individuals. It is about communities feeling that they can be at their best, that they can be in control of their destiny and that they can shape their local services. It is about a country that can sit at ease with itself knowing that it is moving forward as a single team with a common ambition and is not leaving anyone behind. The debate and the democracy we have in our country are hugely important.

The role I had before my current one was in international development and it was a real eye opener. I got to travel to many countries, including some of the ones we just talked about, and I would not have preferred to be a citizen of any one of them rather than the one we are part of today. Our democracy is an incredibly precious, special thing. We often have heated debates in this place and, often, they are heated because we all really care. The day on which people don't care about issues or changing things is when we ought to get more worried.

If we can approach the debate with real respect for the fact that people have genuinely different views on the issues, even if we strongly disagree with them, what is key is working out better where our views diverge and to try to work back to find out where common ground can be reached. In my experience, if we can do that most of the time, if we focus on the 80% we agree on rather than the 20% we don't agree on—although it is important—the surprise is that we would probably end up in a better place as a country. I think that you as a generation understand that, so I hope that when you are finally elected to this place, as I am sure many of you will be, you will never forget that in politics, as in so many other places, success is about bringing people with you and, fundamentally, winning hearts and minds.

Critically, in this country you do that through the power of your debates and your arguments. That is what our democracy is all about.

I hope that you have had an amazing day. It has been a privilege to be in the Chamber for the last bit of it. The speeches you made were incredibly touching but also impressive. Good luck with the rest of your work and back in your constituencies, and I hope to see you all back again next year.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for what you have said, Justine, and for the warmth and encouragement you have offered to Members of the UK Youth Parliament.

The second of our closing statements comes from a colleague who I have got to know increasingly well since her election to the House a little over seven years ago, first excelling as an extremely persistent and articulate Back Bencher and in more recent times occupying the Opposition Front Bench with wit, insight and character. She has been a great parliamentarian over the past seven years and always the most wonderful support to me in the Chair, which I have hugely appreciated and still appreciate. Please give a fantastic welcome to the shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Valerie Vaz.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I cannot follow that, Mr Speaker, but thank you very much.

I thank everyone who has helped to make this day so amazing for you all. It has been an historic day that I am sure you will not forget. I thank the British Youth Council, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, your schools, your teachers, your families, your supporters. I thank Phil and all his team who, as you have seen, have been moving about seamlessly—that is what they do with us; they keep us together—and of course, I thank you Mr Speaker, for chairing the debate and for your amazing commitment to young people and democracy.

This is the 18th time that the Youth Parliament has sat as a youth parliament, but the ninth time that you have graced this Chamber. One of your number, who was a Member of the Youth Parliament—he is not here now, but he was here earlier—is the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle). He has made some great contributions. The Secretary of State said, “Be yourself”, and he is himself; he is a great character. That is why it is so easy for me to see that each and every one of you can be a parliamentarian, an elected representative of local government, a governor or a member of a committee.

Your mandate was absolutely huge. Nearly a million young people throughout the UK voted on your priorities. I do not know how you decided which ones to debate, but coincidentally they are the first two on my list, so I am pleased that I am in tune with you. A curriculum to prepare young people for life and relationships and sex education—the Secretary of State has announced that it will be on a statutory footing in September 2019. I would ask her—she is sitting here—to introduce it earlier. Could we have it immediately? It should be the same for reintroducing personal, social, health and economic education.

On votes at 16, Jade Calder brilliantly described the cold, town hall discussion that led to a private Member’s Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) did not have much luck. I was here for the debate last week. It is very sad; it was

effectively talked out. However, part of my job is to liaise with the Leader of the House and ensure that those important Bills are not lost, so we will be taking things to the Procedure Committee.

What about work experience hubs? They could be actioned almost immediately. With a decent careers service in school, it can be actioned now. So raise it with your school council, then maybe you can apply to Mr Speaker’s school councils award.

The debate on the protection of LGBT+ rights was one of the most moving that I have ever heard. You told us that everyone must be respected. Dami Salako reminded us that when we walk in someone else’s shoes or put on someone else’s skin we can see what discrimination really is like. That is why we must strive for true equality, as Sean Sinanan said when he closed the debate.

With transport, you highlighted the really important issue of productivity for our economy. Young people need to get around, get into education and enhance their skills, and transport should be free for you. So I have learned from you. We have learned from young people. After breakfast—Brexit—[*Applause.*] After breakfast and Brexit, you didn’t get mad, you got even, because you turned out in droves for the general election. The youth turnout was the highest in 25 years, as we learned from you about digital engagement. I can say that #register to vote amassed nearly 30,000 public posts on Instagram. After that there was a huge surge in young people registering to vote; 64% of registered voters between 18 and 24 are thought to have cast their vote in the election. That is going to be you in a few years. So, just as the Prime Minister this morning has sent her good wishes to you all, I too bring you a message from the Leader of the Opposition—whose name is? [MYPs: “Jeremy Corbyn.”]—[*Applause.*] I think you need to sing it. [MYPs: “Oh, Jeremy Corbyn.”]

Jeremy has put Cat Smith, the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood—I was trying to rap that too, but I couldn’t—in the shadow Cabinet as shadow Minister for voter engagement and youth affairs, so you have a spokesperson right at the heart of the shadow Cabinet. I have to say this because there have been three speakers from the Government side, but if we had won the election we would have abolished tuition fees, restored education maintenance allowance, established maintenance grants for university for students who need it and extended school-based counselling for all schools to improve children’s mental health.

Jeremy’s shadow Cabinet is diverse and our party has 45% of women in Parliament. I mention women because although this is a really important day for you being here, it is also Equal Pay Day. Because of women earning less than men, this is the day that women effectively stop earning relative to men. Take that home to your mums. Women are working for nothing from today. That must change; #paygappedge—remember that. My pledge was to challenge the idea that there are boy jobs and girl jobs: there are not. I have always tipped the Secretary of State for Education for Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Even if your motion did not win, you have to be persistent. We have to be persistent in our goals. You know the phrase, “You are knocked down seven times, you get up eight times.” That is what Mr Speaker has done. Mr Speaker, you have done a lot to reform Parliament. You are a great reforming Speaker. We

[Valerie Vaz]

could not speak before a maiden speech, but Mr Speaker changed that. So when I came in in 2010 I could ask a question, which gave me the confidence and ability to stand here and speak before my maiden speech. Mr Speaker changed that. There are urgent questions that we can now use to hold the Government to account. There are also loads of points of order. I have to tell you that in the past we had to wear a top hat to make a point of order, but now we can make one without—we can just stand up and do it. I think we slightly irritate you with all our points of order, don't we Mr Speaker? The education centre is an amazing example of what this reforming Speaker has put through. It has brought democracy and young people in all our schools right into the heart of our Parliament, so thank you for that Mr Speaker.

Your debate here can have a great effect on policy. You can influence whatever party you belong to. You can meet your MP, just as Oldham Youth Council did with Jim McMahon, and put through a private Member's Bill. You can use your digital skills. You can engage in #parliamentweek next week by going back to your schools and having the debate, showing the younger generation and the younger people in your schools that you can have the same debate here. It would be interesting to see if the result is the same.

As the hon. Member from Northern Ireland said, "Passion turns to action, which leads to change." Your voices today have rung out through this Chamber and beyond through live-streaming and our *Official Report*. Thank you all for your brilliant preparation and your contributions. You are showing us great hope for the future. I am sure that the Secretary of State, Mr Speaker and I will agree on that: there is great hope for the future. We can learn from you, because all voices on all sides of the argument have been heard, and they have been heard with respect. That is so important for our democracy, so let us work together both inside and outside Parliament to make our democracy remain strong.

Mr Speaker: Valerie, thank you for the warmth and generosity of your remarks. Thank you for your kind remarks to and about me; but more particularly, and far more importantly, thank you for what you have said in tribute to, and support of, the young people assembled here as Members of the UK Youth Parliament, and all those young activists around the country who have played their part in facilitating today, the important debates that we have had and the votes that have taken place, and who take part in political activity and public engagement day after day, week after week, month after month, throughout the year. You and Justine have very properly and fully paid tribute to young people.

Before I wrap up the proceedings, I want to emphasise that although you have voted and the results of your votes on the campaign themes for the year ahead are now known, you were also invited, of course, to vote in respect of the Paul Boskett memorial awards. I have been advised to remind you that those votes need to be passed to British Youth Council staff. I have been specifically exhorted to mention this. I hope that that has largely been done. If it has been, great, and if it has not, please return your votes.

I speak very often in Speaker's House, around the corner from here, where typically three or four times a week we play host to charitable institutions. Justine and I have often worked together, and Valerie and I have worked together, to mark and celebrate great causes in our local, national and global lives—institutions, not least from the voluntary and community sector, which, through their work, endeavour, imagination and idealism, are helping to transform lives and convert care from a word to a deed. On those occasions, I am particularly moved, time after time—to such an extent that it probably rather bores Justine and Valerie, but for which I make no apology—to say two words that I think we say too rarely and ought to say more often. Those words are: thank you.

Thanks have already and rightly been expressed to those who have facilitated today. You have thanked those who have helped you to be here: your support workers, your teachers and your families. Thanks have rightly been expressed as well to Phil Howse and his team of Doorkeepers. Phil is the Principal Doorkeeper. He has led the team, and the team have helped you; I think they have shown real care and concern for you. Thank you, Phil, for your professionalism and your commitment. I want to thank the Clerks at the Table, who, in the best traditions of the House of Commons, have gone about their work diligently, quietly and, oh, so effectively. They are shining stars in the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, a very important functioning department of this House. Please, my friends and colleagues, put your hands together in appreciation of what the Clerks do. [Applause.] Of course, I want to thank my team—the team in the Speaker's Office—specifically Peter Barratt, Speaker's Secretary, and Jim Davey. Both of them have helped me today, and thereby helped you, and they help the operation of the House of Commons extremely effectively on a day-to-day basis.

As has been mentioned a number of times, not least and most recently by Valerie, the UK Youth Parliament is sitting here for the ninth successive year to conduct its debates and to cast its vote on its preferred campaign themes for the year ahead. It has been my enormous and thirsted-for privilege to chair your debates in each and every one of those nine years, from start to finish. I voted, before I became Speaker, for the right of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament to hold its debates here.

When I became Speaker, I discovered, Members of the UK Youth Parliament, that the proceedings were due to be chaired by the then senior Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Ways of Means—a person of immense distinction and long experience, only recently retired from the House of Commons—Sir Alan Haselhurst. But I thought to myself, "No, I'm going to chair those proceedings," and I said to Alan, "Alan, you can have the day off, spend the day in your constituency of Saffron Walden or do as you please. Your willingness to sit in the Chair is appreciated, but I think I should be in that Chair."

The reason why I have chaired your proceedings in each of the past nine years—and with some passion—is twofold. First, I admit that, as will be immediately and abundantly obvious to you, I hugely enjoy the experience. Indeed, I own up to enjoying the role of Speaker; it would be a bit sad if I did not. I do enjoy the role and derive great satisfaction and fulfilment from it. However,

the second reason why I chair your proceedings is that you are the future of our democracy and of our country. I believe very strongly in this adage or principle: if we—if Justine, if I, if Valerie—want ever again to be respected by young people, we have to show respect for young people. [*Applause.*] Respect is not our automatic right so far as your overall attitude to us is concerned; it is an earned credit or entitlement—or, to put it another way, respect is a two-way street. I have always wanted to demonstrate and reiterate that basic principle and point.

I mentioned that it had been my privilege to chair your proceedings here every year. It has also been my enormous privilege, wherever it has taken place in the United Kingdom, to go to the UKYP annual meeting or conference. I have done that since 2009, from Canterbury to Belfast to Leeds, from Nottingham to Leeds again to Lancaster, from Exeter to York to Liverpool. I have always wanted to be with you on that occasion so that I can talk to, engage with, hear from, and gain the advice and experience of, the authentic voices of elected Members of the UKYP. I have always said that I will carry on coming to your annual conference, but I will not make a point of coming uninvited. I will not come if you do not want me to do so, but will come if you do want me to do so, and it is, frankly, one of the most keenly anticipated fixtures in my annual calendar.

Moreover, just so you know the esteem in which you are held, I must tell you UKYP Members something that probably Justine and Valerie know as well, as they will do it a lot themselves. I visit a lot of institutions around the country; although I am sure I do not visit anything like as many schools as Justine does, I visit quite a lot of schools around the country, apart from those that we all as constituency MPs visit in our constituencies. When I visit those schools and universities—I have visited the universities of Manchester, Wolverhampton, Leicester, Leeds and Queen Mary college London in the last six weeks—it is my normal practice at some point in my speech to students or in answers to questions to, when talking about public engagement, reference the UKYP, and I do so specifically saying how incredibly important it is, and what a progressive development it has proved to be to have this annual debate here, to have the Youth Select Committee, and to have participation by parliamentarians in the UKYP annual conference wherever it takes place.

As far as I am concerned, that is a hugely beneficial development, and it has all happened during my time, and Justine's time, and more recently Valerie's time, in the House of Commons. 'Twas not always the case, and when it was first agreed that you would be allowed to sit here, it was not on a rolling basis; it was just for a year.

It was then renewed. It was initially controversial. There was a senior Member, now long retired, who, puce of visage and inadvertently spitting at me while remonstrating with me about what a disaster it would prove and how bitterly he regretted that I had opted to chair the proceedings, said that at the very least chewing gum would be left all over the Chamber, and at worst—he said this with great insistence and absurdly—that penknives would be used, with damage inflicted on the Benches that he loved.

I am pleased to say that those attitudes are relics of history. On both sides of the House of Commons, as you have discovered today, and in all parties, there are enthusiastic champions of your rights. I believe that,

whatever the changes in the future—there will be different Secretaries of State for Education and Ministers for Women and Equalities, different shadow Leaders of the House and Leaders of the House, different Ministers for Sport and Civil Society, and, of course, different Speakers, with different priorities—the sense that you are a very important part of the democratic tapestry of the United Kingdom will remain firmly entrenched, and so it should. [*Applause.*]

My friends, I am nearly done, but I just want to say a very small number of other things. You have had the most wonderful debates. I shall not go through all of them; brilliant tributes to and reflections on them have already been offered by other colleagues. I admire your choices and wish you huge success with them. They are very important choices, valid choices and, crucially, your choices.

I just want to say this on the LGBT+ issue, which you debated with particular passion and which was referenced by Justine, Valerie and others. That was as moving a debate as I have heard, and I so admired it when I heard it said that it was a fight for all of you and for all of us. I have always felt that it is not just for women to speak up for the rights of women—it is for all of us. It is not just for people with disabilities to speak up for the rights of people with disabilities—it is for all of us. It is not just for members of the black and minority ethnic communities of our country to speak up for the rights of the BME communities of this country—it is for all of us. And it certainly is not just for LGBT+ people to speak up for the rights of LGBT+ people—it is for all of us.

I remember as keenly as if it was yesterday speaking on 10 February 2000, from the third Bench back on the Opposition side, in support of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill—the equalisation at 16 of the age of consent—which was a change of heart for me. I had been advised by a dear colleague, Tim Boswell, who is now in the House of Lords, that if I changed my mind, I should speak in the debate. I did, and I have always been grateful to Tim for his advice. I spoke for change. I explained that I had changed my mind and voted accordingly, as a straight ally to the LGBT cause.

Subsequently, I voted for the right of gay and unmarried couples jointly to adopt children. I voted that way and spoke that way, resigning from the shadow Cabinet to do so in November 2002. I voted for the repeal of section 28 in March 2003. I voted for the civil partnership legislation in, if memory serves me correctly, October 2004, and for so many other of those progressive reforms that I am pleased to say are not the property of a party, as they are now owned by Parliament as a whole. I have always said that it was a very proud day for me—it was the judgment of the House of Commons, but it was a very proud day for me—when I chaired the debates on the same-sex marriage legislation and announced the passage of that Act, which of course had massive cross-party support, but was the produced proposal before the House of Commons of the Cameron-Clegg coalition Government. That was a very proud moment for me.

In half a century, we have come from the criminalisation of a type of love to a situation of almost complete legal equality. That is a huge tribute not only to parliamentarians across the piece, but to hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of brave people across the country and around

[Mr Speaker]

the world, many of whom have had to suffer grievously not just for their beliefs, but for who they are and how they love.

As so many people have perceptively and challengingly pointed out, that battle continues. People often refer to the 70-plus jurisdictions where it remains illegal for gay people to be who they are and to love as they do. I am often saddened and ashamed that the problem is acute in many of the Commonwealth countries. Among our Commonwealth friends, there is still a big struggle to get them to update their attitudes, but it is not just there—it is in Europe, too. Someone rightly referred to Chechnya. I am ashamed that the record of the Russian Government and the Russian state is what it is in the egregious denial of the human rights—that is what they are—of LGBT+ people. Therefore, for giving a lead, taking a stand, showing your passion, underlining your commitment, displaying your principle, and not being shy or embarrassed to be a bit emotional about it—it is about not just the head but the heart—I salute you.

As was referenced by a number of colleagues, to succeed in politics, as in many other important and worthwhile walks of life, you need not only to have a good point, which must stack up against examination and be capable of withstanding scrutiny, but to remember quantity, persistence and, above all, repetition. You have to go at it again and again. Never say die. Do not give up. The possibility of permanent defeat simply does not arise. Churchill used to put it, with his family motto, rather bluntly: “KBO—Keep Buggering On.” At all times, no matter the odds, the adversity, the pressure, the disadvantage or the hurdles, you have to stick at your cause if you believe it to be right. That is true also if you want a career in politics: keep fighting, working and going at it.

Do not believe any longer that it is just privileged, advantaged, fortunate or well-heeled people who can end up in this place. If you have ability, show commitment and stick at it, you can get here. I do not want to embarrass them, but alongside Andrea Leadsom and Tracey Crouch, from whom you heard earlier, there are three MPs in this Chamber now who know from personal experience that that is true, because none of the three of us comes from a privileged background. Forget me, I do not come from a privileged background and I am fortunate to be here, but I reference in particular Justine, who talked about her background—not an advantaged, posh or privileged background, although I am sure a happy and proud one. She had ability and she went for it, and she is now a member of Her Majesty’s Government—a senior and respected member of the Cabinet—as well as a respected constituency MP. Valerie does not come from a privileged background. She is a respected MP for Walsall and the shadow Leader of the House of Commons. They have done it; you can do it.

You will be mightily relieved to know, my friends, that as this is the conclusion of my remarks—not before time—you are no longer to hear from me, but you will have the opportunity to hear from Danyaal Raja. [Applause.]

Danyaal Raja (Scotland): Members of Youth Parliament, although there are only 300 of us sat here in this glorious Chamber, there are many more voices echoing

around us—954,766 of them to be exact. Those voices, through us, have now been heard. The voices are those of young people from all walks of life, and from all corners of our country—from Aberdeen to Aberavon, and from Brighton to Belfast. We should all be extremely proud of what we have accomplished, and what we are still to accomplish.

It is only right that we now take the time to express our gratitude to the people who have made today happen. First, I ask you all to join me in showing our most heartfelt thanks to those who are often the unsung heroes—the people who enabled the Youth Parliament to sit in this House.

Our first thank you is to the staff of the House of Commons, without whom we would not have had the distinct privilege of sitting in this magnificent Chamber today. [Applause.] We must pay particular tribute to Phil Howse, the Principal Doorkeeper, for the kind welcome that he has given us. Furthermore, let us show thanks to the outreach and engagement team, and particularly George, without whom we would not be here today. [Applause.]

There are some others—some of our own—whom we must also take time to thank for the hard work that they have put into making today happen. Without the British Youth Council and its magnificent staff, this UK Youth Parliament would not be able to function. I thank Jo Hobbs and Zoe Cumberland, who make this Youth Parliament noticed, acknowledged, listened to and admired, and of course all the British Youth Council staff who work tirelessly to support us in our endeavours. [Applause.]

Today we have been joined by, and heard inspirational and thought-provoking speeches from, some of our Members of Parliament who represent the young people whom we also represent in this revered Chamber. I ask that we pay special tribute to: the right hon. Andrea Leadsom MP, the Leader of the House of Commons, whose support we appreciate and value immensely; the shadow Leader of the House, Valerie Vaz MP; the right hon. Justine Greening MP, the Secretary of State for Education; the Minister for Civil Society, Tracey Crouch MP; and all the other MPs who joined us today. [Applause.] Please all accept our wholehearted thanks both for being here and for being our champions.

We must now turn to thank the man who serves as a figure for us all to aspire to become, the man who never fails to amuse or to amaze, the man who knows more words than there are in the Oxford dictionary, and the man who is a true statesman to his core and a true inspiration: Mr Speaker. [Applause.] We in this Chamber thank you for chairing our debates today, for attending our annual sitting in Liverpool, and for being our greatest champion. Members of the Youth Parliament, please join me again in expressing our gratitude to Mr Speaker. [Applause.]

MYPs from across the four nations, let us now turn to thanking those closer to home. We all have people without whom we would not be here: local youth workers who always go above and beyond; teachers who always make us strive to be our best; or family members who have given us the confidence that we need to become who we are today. I would like to take a second to thank my parents and all my friends and youth workers at the Glasgow Youth Council and the Scottish Youth

Parliament, particularly Donald, Alan and Shona, for the help that they have given me in all my endeavours. Furthermore, I thank the teachers at Glasgow's Holyrood Secondary, particularly Miss Madden and Miss Leyden, for always going that extra mile for me. I am forever in your debt.

Members of the Youth Parliament, over the course of the past few years, we have collectively made leaps and bounds in our efforts to give voices to the young people of these islands, but we still have far to go. There will always be a place for us—a place through which we can strive to make life better for the millions of young

people we represent. Let us continue to work hard in our constituencies and to put everything into our new campaign. Let us make a difference. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Danyaal, thank you.

Friends and colleagues, I wish you well. Good luck with your continued work. Sadly, all good things come to an end, and this year's annual sitting has now done so. I hope to see you again ere long. Meanwhile, the words that I utter at the end of every sitting day: order, order. [*Applause.*]

Youth Parliament adjourned at 4.35 pm.

